

God's Sovereign Rule - 1 Kings 12v1-24

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Okay, 1 Kings chapter 12, beginning at verse 1. Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king.

When Jeroboam, son of Nebat, heard this, he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon, he returned from Egypt. So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him, Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lightened the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.

Rehoboam answered, Go away for three days and then come back to me. So the people went away. Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime.

How would you advise me to answer these people, he asked. They replied, If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.

But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. He asked them, What is your advice?

[1 : 18] How should we answer these people who say to me, Lighten the yoke your father put on us? 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. 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. 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 you with scorpions. So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the Lord.

[2 : 17] To fulfill the word, the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam, son of Nebat, to Ahijah the Shilonite. Thanks very much, Chris.

Let's keep our Bibles open as we continue in our studies, 1 Kings. If you've missed any along the way, you can find them all on the church website.

So they've all been recorded for the purposes if you're on Sunday school or creche or you've missed any. They are there for us to be able to follow along. So I encourage you to do that. Now let's pray.

Father, thank you that you are the Lord of heaven and earth.

the Lord who has written his word down for us, preserved it through the centuries so that we have it today in our language.

[3 : 26] We thank you for this wonderful privilege that you speak to us through your word today.

And we pray that it would have such a transforming and changing effect on our lives. That it would cause us to bow in wonder and worship at our great King.

So please help us today, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, who decides if Britain will leave or stay?

Who determines whether there will be a soft border or a hard border? Who's in charge? Somebody said something.

Who decides if you get married or move to another country? Who determines where you live and where you work?

[4 : 38] Who's in charge? Well, listen to this from Proverbs. In their hearts, humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

It's telling us that we are free to make all kinds of decisions, but every decision is under the direction of God.

Ultimately, it is God who is in control. Now, Proverbs 16, verse 9, that we have there on the screen, is a great summary of the text that was just read to us.

If you want a summary for what 1 Kings 12, 1 to 15 or 1 to 24 is all about, well, in their hearts, humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

We've reached a critical point in the story of the kingdom. Under Solomon, the kingdom was at its best. The people were blessed, living in their own land.

[5 : 47] They were happy and secure. But, if you remember from last week, have a quick look back at chapter 11, verse 4. Chapter 11, verse 4.

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.

And what follows is a sad decline of the kingdom. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, becomes king, and the kingdom divides.

Bad decisions and selfish choices have left the kingdom in a terrible mess. But, chapter 12 is written to remind us that God is the supreme king, ruling over the plans of man to fulfill his promises.

God is the supreme king, ruling over the plans of man to fulfill his promises. So, two big things that we're going to look at this morning, that I trust will be helpful for us.

[7 : 05] First, the plans of man serve the purposes of God. The plans of man serve the purposes of God. Let's pick it up in chapter 11, verse 42.

Chapter 11, verse 42. Solomon reigned in Jerusalem, over all Israel, that is the United Kingdom, for 40 years.

Then he rested with his ancestors and was buried in the city of David his father, and Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king. Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king.

Now, it seems a normal succession of power. They even go to a place called Shechem. That was where God spoke to Abraham and where Moses had gone to speak with God.

Yet, tragically, in chapter 12, there seems to be little listening to God. In fact, God is subtly ignored.

[8 : 13] The people see the change in king as an opportunity to change the way things are done.

So, look at verse 3. So, they sent for Jeroboam. We're going to get confused, but let's keep our focus. There's a Rehoboam. He's king. Jeroboam was a person who was under Solomon, but had begun to rebel against Solomon.

He didn't like what he was doing. So, the people sent for Jeroboam. And he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam, the king, 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. Rehoboam answered, Well, go away for three days, then come back to me, and I'll have a decision.

So, the people went away. Obviously, the king needs some advice. The last thing he needs at this point is an all-out rebellion. So, in verse 6, we're told that the king went off to his elders, asked them for their advice, What should I do?

[9 : 26] And they responded with great wisdom. Serve them well, Solomon, and they will always serve you. Be kind to them, and they'll always be in your pocket, as it were.

But Rehoboam doesn't seem to be in the mood for much listening. That seems a little weak and pathetic. Not a great way to start your reign as a king, giving in to your subjects.

So, Rehoboam turns to his old college buddies. What should we do about these complaints, he asks them. Well, they respond in verse 10.

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. In other words, you tell the people, You think my father was harsh?

[10 : 27] Well, I'm going to show you who's boss. Verse 11. 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. That is, whips with lumps of lead at the end of it. Well, that sounds more like the role of a king, doesn't it?

I like that, Rehoboam is thinking to himself. Time to show them who's king round here. I'm going to teach them a lesson about authority and power.

So just as Rehoboam had said three days later, he goes back to the people to give the answer. Have a look at verse 14.

He followed the advice of all the young men. In other words, he ignored the advice of the elders and said, My father made your yoke heavy.

[11:30] I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips. Well, I'm going to scourge you with scorpions. So tell me, who decided what to do with the people?

Who determined that the people should be treated harshly? Well, he took advice from some younger people but it certainly looks like Rehoboam is the one in charge.

He gave the decree and after all, he's the king. Now we could be asking the same kind of questions about our country.

Who's decided that Fine Gael is in power? I mean, we had a vote, didn't we? Who determines what laws are passed and how and when abortions should be carried out?

Well, it's the people, isn't it? Because we all voted at the recent referendum. And what about our church? Right now we're in the process of appointing deacons.

[12:49] Who decides who is a deacon? Is it the elders? Who determines what role and how they should serve?

Or does the church decide that? Or is it the person themselves? And think about your own life. Who decides what college course you take and where you end up working in your life?

I mean, we've all got the freedom to choose, don't we? And who determines how you use your money? And what you spend it on?

And where you go at the weekends? I mean, it belongs to us and it's us who pays the money over at the end of the day. You see, we've all got freedom to make our choices.

We can all make our plans. But, the purposes of God. Rehoboam has determined and decreed.

[13:57] After all, he's the king, right? Well, let's look at verse 15. So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the Lord to fulfill what the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam, son of Nebat, through Ahijah, the Shilonites.

So again, let's ask the question, who made the decision not to listen to the people and treat them badly? Well, look closely at verse 15.

So the king did not listen to the people, for or because this turn of events was from the Lord.

Yes, Rehoboam sought advice. Yes, he made his choice. But God determined what should happen. You say, how can that be? Well, let's read on in verse 15. 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 Shilonites.

[15:14] Well, what had God said? Well, have a look back to chapter 11 and verse 29. Because there it's recorded for us what God had said through the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam.

We'll pick it up in verse 29. Solomon is still king at this point. Jeroboam had got sick and fed up with the latter reign of Solomon and the way he began treating the people and he had rebelled.

So, verse 29. About that time, Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem and Ahijah, the prophet of Shiloh, met him on the way wearing a new cloak.

He'd obviously been to Debenhams to buy himself a nice new suit. So, the two of them were alone out in the country and Ahijah took hold of his nice new cloak he was wearing and he tore it into twelve pieces.

Then he said to Jeroboam, take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes but for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem which I have chosen out of all of the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe.

[16:39] So, it's crystal clear, isn't it? God had said that the kingdom would be divided, taken out of Solomon's hands. We're not told how that was going to happen but simply that it would happen.

And God's purpose was that Jeroboam would have ten tribes and Rehoboam, Solomon's son, would only have one tribe. So, now as we begin to read chapter 12, we can see God's purposes being worked out.

Rehoboam is completely unaware of what God had said to Jeroboam. He plans to crush the people but in crushing the people it leads to rebellion and the rebellion leads to division.

You see, through Rehoboam's choice, God's purposes prevail. The plans of man always serve the purposes of God.

Now, our government and the leaders of the world make choices and decisions all the time. But what I want us to be clear about is that they are only serving the greater purposes of God.

[18:04] It's not saying that every decision they make is good or right. Rehoboam's plans were clearly wrong in the way he treated the people and he will be held accountable just as every leader of this world will be held accountable.

Just because they serve God's purposes doesn't mean to say they're off the hook. God's sovereignty never violates human responsibility.

responsibility. We will all have to answer to God for the way we live the choices we make and our decisions. But this account in chapter 12 is simply there to remind us that we are free to make decisions and our decisions whether they are right or wrong are always always determined by God. One author Dale Ralph Davis has put it so well. He says this, human choice never catches God by surprise.

Contrary to our fears human decision making is not running loose but is on the leash of God's sovereignty. That means that nothing happens in this world and nothing happens in our lives without God's say so.

[19:34] More than that, every decision of a nation, every choice of an individual is ultimately decreed and determined by God for our good and for God's glory.

The plans of man always serve the purposes of God. So, the plans of man serve the purposes of God.

The second big thing we're going to look at, the plots of man surrender to the promises of God. You see, we must remember that verse 15 is like inserted into the history.

This is the author's interpretation. It's written for us, the reader, so that we can get the big picture of what's going on. It's history from God's perspective.

For Rehoboam, he obviously didn't have one kings to read and he certainly doesn't know about verse 15, so he just continues to plan and to plot. Not surprisingly, verse 16, when all the people saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king, what share do we have in David?

[20:56] What part in Jesse's son? To your tents, Israel, let's get out of here, we don't want this king anymore. Look after your own house, David. So the Israelites went home.

they're rebelling, they don't want this king. And as far as Rehoboam is concerned, this rebellion needs to be squashed and quickly.

So, verse 18, King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of the forced labour. Here is the one to implement the king's decree, to restore order, to fling those whips and get those people in line.

But, verse 18, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem.

He wasn't going to hang around for any questioning. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day, to the time that it was written.

[22:02] So the kingdom divided just as God had said. Jeroboam takes off with ten tribes, and Rehoboam was left with only one tribe.

But Rehoboam is not happy. He wants it all. This is his kingdom. So he begins to plot, verse 21. When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin.

So Judah and Benjamin, when it's written, is always formed as one tribe or speaks as one tribe, the tribe of Judah. So he gathers together 180,000 able young men to go to war against Israel and regain the kingdom for Rehoboam, son of Solomon.

So now it seems we're faced with two competing forces. We have Rehoboam's plot to take back all the tribes for himself and to have the kingdom to himself.

And then we also have on the other side God's promise that well Jeroboam would have ten tribes and he would only have one. So what's going to happen?

[23:22] Well, not only are there the plots of man, there is the promise of God. You see as Rehoboam begins his plotting and his scheming, God's word rules.

Verse 22, but this word of God came to Shemaiah, the man of God, this is another prophet, 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.

You see, God is now letting Rehoboam in on the big picture, isn't he? What we've known all the way along, because God's word had decreed it and God's word had said, Rehoboam now begins to see what God is decreeing and what God wants.

This is my doing, says God. This is my plan. I ultimately decide and decree what will happen. I promised that Rehoboam would get these ten tribes and that you would only get one.

I mean, let's think about it. If Rehoboam did go up and fight against Rehoboam, there was only ever going to be one winner, wasn't there? Do the maths. Ten tribes versus one tribe.

[24 : 54] Who's going to win? If Rehoboam went off to fight, he would have ended up with no kingdom. But you see, God had promised, God had promised Rehoboam's grandfather David, that there would always be one tribe, one people, that God would preserve because from that one tribe of Judah would come God's promised king, Jesus Christ.

So God ensures that his promise remains. The plots of man always surrender to the promises of God. Now how does Rehoboam respond to what God has decreed?

Well look at the end of verse 24. So they obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again as the Lord had ordered. Rehoboam surrenders to God's word.

After all his planning and plotting, he submits. It may come a surprise to us because that's not how we started out, but it's a reminder of how we should all respond.

We can fight God all we like, but we will not win. God will see that his word is fulfilled, because the plots of man always surrender to the promises of God.

[26 : 33] Of course it's true that men and women have always planned and plotted to do their own thing, haven't we? We ignore God and we live as if we're the king.

This is my world, my life, my money. I will decide what I will do. In fact, if there's any threat to our sovereignty, any threat to our self-rule, we will fight it.

Nobody will tell me what to do. Isn't that what happened when God's king, Jesus Christ, came? Turn with me please to Acts chapter 2.

Acts chapter 2 in the New Testament. So, Acts chapter 2 is, well, Jesus has already died, he is risen again, he has poured out his Holy Spirit and Peter is preaching to all the people who have gathered.

And he gets to the heart of his message in verse 22. So, Peter is preaching, fellow Israelites, listen to this, Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him as you yourselves know.

[28 : 04] All these miracles that Jesus did, all the signs, proves that Jesus is God's King, the one with absolute power and supreme authority.

The problem is people don't like that. It's a threat to their self rule, so what do they do? Verse 23, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge and you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

So, who killed Jesus? Jesus? Who planned and decided that Jesus would die? Well, this verse is telling us that, well, they chose to kill Jesus.

They wanted rid of him. But look what it says at the beginning of verse 23, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge.

God's marriage. You see, their plans to kill Jesus only served the greater purposes of God. Let's read on, verse 24, but God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

[29 : 19] You see, we can't fight God. We will never defeat him. His purpose to bring salvation through his death and his promise to give life through his resurrection will prevail.

No one can stand against God's promises and God's purposes. Verse 36, as he gets to the conclusion of his sermon, Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

Jesus is the risen victorious king, who rules over every decision, who determines every act. This is the king who planned his own death and plots his own resurrection from before time began.

The king whose purposes will not be foiled, and whose promises will never, ever fail. And how are we to respond to such a king as this?

Verse 38, Peter replied, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 44] The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord, the God, will call. Surrender to the king who died for you.

Submit to the king who's defeated death for you. Do not fight this king, but let us live under his sovereign word.

Of course, people still fight against God's king. They will not recognize his rule, and they will fight against you if you are his people. Have a look at Acts chapter 4.

Not long after this sermon, Peter is thrown in prison for preaching. It seems that those who were against Jesus are also against his people.

But Peter is released, and we pick it up in verse 23. On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them, they had said, stop talking about this Jesus, we don't want you to do it anymore.

[32 : 00] When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. Let's look how they prayed. Sovereign Lord, they said, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

Verse 27, indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in the city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

You see, nothing can stand in the way of God's purposes in God's plans. And what about these people who are now threatened? Well, they cry out to the sovereign God who is Lord over every ruler and they remind themselves that even the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus is all part of God's wonderful plan.

Verse 29, now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand and heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

And after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

[33 : 33] You see, nothing was ever going to hinder the preaching of God's word. He's in control. You just need to read through Acts. The word spread, the word spread, the kingdom expanded as people came to the Lord Jesus.

So do not fear. Do not fear the outcome of Brexit. Do not fret when our government introduces new laws.

Do not worry when circumstances in your life change. Jesus is in charge. Cry out to him as our sovereign Lord and ask him, Lord, I do not know what is going on, but I trust that you are in control. Enable us to keep speaking your word. Perform your wondrous deeds, because God takes every choice that we make and the decisions that others make, whether good or bad, and he uses it all to serve his purposes and his promises, all for our good and all for his glory.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.