

SUMMER 1 - A Kingdom Divided Against Itself

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] As we come to your word that you caused to be written for our training in righteousness, our rebuke and our correction, we pray that your Holy Spirit will speak through your words to us tonight, that our hearts may be purified and made clean before you, that we may hold fast to you unswervingly and love you with all our hearts, soul and mind. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

In some ways this is a slightly odd part of the scriptures to be looking at during this summer from chapter 11, the end of Solomon's reign through to chapter 16 just preceding Elijah.

I could pretend all sorts of divine inspiring reasons for choosing these chapters, but I'd be lying. There's an element of pragmatism in these chapters. At Holy Trinity in October I was preaching in the morning on the story of Solomon, just a four week sermon series, and so this is continuing on from it in effect. And some years ago I preached here the story of Elijah, so we're straddling the gap. So there's an element of pragmatism.

The other reason is that last year we did Mark's Gospel in summer, so it's time for something in the Old Testament. We sort of alternate each year. So here we are. That's why we're here. But nonetheless, God's word speaks to us, and in some ways these are passages that we probably hear preached very little, and they're quite intriguing. They're not easy. So I'm sure there's a lot of solid food for thought here for us all, I pray.

A couple of years ago you, if you're a Melburnian, will remember that Arthur's seat chairlift collapsed. Down near Dramana, that famous sort of tourist icon of the Mornington Peninsula, all of a sudden broke. And if I remember rightly, some people were injured. I don't think anybody died, if I remember correctly. And in a sense it was totally sudden. I mean, nobody expected it.

[2 : 09] We were all shocked when we read about it in the papers or heard about it on the news. But in effect it wasn't sudden. Because undetected, bit by bit, day by day, some rust was occurring or the bolts were loosening or whatever the actual problem was, it was becoming gradually destabilised. People didn't see that, of course. If they had, they would have corrected it before it collapsed. But in effect the actual collapse was a gradual event, not a sudden event. The final fall of the chairlift was very dramatic, but in a sense it had been gradually building up to it, underneath the surface, so to speak, undetected by tourists and the mechanics and whoever else looks after the place.

Now that's in a sense is how it was with Solomon. We see one of the great kings of Israel in the earlier chapters of 1 Kings. A man who began by loving God, we're told back in chapter 3, verse 3. A man who rightly asked for wisdom, but not wealth, or riches, or victory over his enemies, or long life. A man who ruled a vast expanse of Israelite territory. Indeed, through all of Israel's history, the territory ruled at the time of Solomon was greater than anybody else.

Well beyond the borders of what is modern day Israel and the West Bank, that's for sure. Building on the conquests of David, of course, his father and predecessor as king.

Moreover, Solomon built the grand temple, of course, David's plan, but Solomon actually built it on that threshing floor of Arana to the northern and higher end of the city of David in Jerusalem, where today still there is a temple mount there. He was the one during whose reign, it seems, that the promises of God to Abraham and David in the earlier parts of the scriptures came closest to their fulfilment. Remember way back to the beginning of the Bible when God promised to Abraham that he would give him numerous descendants, a land, a blessing, and a blessing for other nations through the descendants of Abraham. In effect, a promise package to which was later added a thousand years later to David, a dynasty from David to reign over Jerusalem, the capital in which was the temple, the chosen city of God. And so in Solomon's reign, in a sense, it climaxes in chapter 10 with the arrival of the Queen of Sheba, a pagan, foreign queen from another country, probably, they say, around where Yemen is today, although the Ethiopians like to claim a heritage

from the Queen of Sheba. And she came and paid tribute and honour not just to Solomon, but indeed to the God of Solomon, so that those who bless you I will bless, as Abraham was promised by God, is being fulfilled. So here we have a nation that is wealthy, populous, strong, it's got its land, it's secure in its land. Other nations, pagan nations, are being blessed and coming in some sense to the God of Israel during the reign of Solomon. The glory years of Israel indeed these are ruled by a king who loves God and is wise and yet, as we see tonight, does not love God and is foolish as well.

Because even through the earlier chapters of the reign of Solomon, through chapters 3 to 10, we find a person for all his good features, there are hints of compromise within him.

[5 : 58] So though he loved God, he was married to the daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt. And though he wanted wisdom, he acted foolishly at times. Though he built a grand palace, he built a grand temple, he built a grander palace for himself that took longer and was even greater and bigger and so on.

Undetected almost, like the Arthur's seat chairlift, within the heart of Solomon was a man, in a sense, corrupting. And his fall was dramatic, really, as we see in tonight's passage of chapter 11 and the first part of chapter 10. Chapter 11 begins telling us, very bluntly now, after various hints in earlier chapters, King Solomon loved many foreign women.

Solomon, along with the daughter of Pharaoh, who was mentioned way back in chapter 3 as his wife, he also loved women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon and the Hittites.

From the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the Israelites, you shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods. Solomon clung to these in love.

Strong words, love and clinging to them. The very words that are used time and again in the book of Deuteronomy for how we are to respond to God. To love God with all our heart, to cleave or cling to God in our relationship with him.

[7 : 28] So he's moved from love of God in chapter 3 to the love of foreign wives, very explicitly, here in chapter 11. Now the issue is not so much the number of his wives, I mean 700 wives and 300 concubines, is a little bit difficult for a single person I guess, let alone most of you to quite comprehend and grasp.

There were large harems, let me say, in the ancient world. We should not think that this is sort of fiction or exaggeration. There were very large harems in other ancient nations and this would fit with that.

Rehoboam, who comes to the throne after him, his son, we're told later, has 18 wives and 60 concubines. David beforehand had 8 wives and 10 concubines.

In a sense they're just like the ancient world was at the time with a vast number. And given Solomon's wealth and prestige, we should not be surprised that he had such a vast number in his harem.

But the issue is that they're foreign, from pagan nations. And Solomon ought to have known better.

[8 : 40] For we know if we've been reading our Bibles up to this point, we're meant to be doing that. We're meant to be reading the book of 1 Kings in the light of the Pentateuch, especially Deuteronomy. And we know there back in Deuteronomy chapter 7, for example.

Let me read just verses 3 and 4. Do not intermarry with the women of other nations, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me to serve other gods.

Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly.

Deuteronomy 7, applying to any Israelite person, not least the king. And then later in Deuteronomy, there's one paragraph that is specifically a law regarding the future king, in Deuteronomy 17.

And in verse 17 of that chapter, amongst some other laws to do with the king, we read, And the king must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away.

Solomon is explicitly disobeying that law about the king, from Deuteronomy chapter 17. He's also disobeying God's own reminder to him back in chapter 3, verse 14, for example, 1 Kings chapter 3, verse 14, where God says to Solomon, If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.

[10 : 07] Now that instruction, which is very general, includes all of those laws I've just quoted from Deuteronomy 7 and 17, amongst many others as well, of course. And moreover, Solomon, in fact, hasn't even lived up to his own standards, because after that great, or at the end of that great

majestic prayer of the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings chapter 8, Solomon goes on to say in verse 58, that people are to incline their hearts to God and walk in all his ways to keep his commandments, statutes, and ordinances which he commanded.

Now all the time, it's clear here, it's made explicit here actually, in verses 2 and 3 and 4, that Solomon is disobeying God's word.

Sometimes in narrative writing, where we've got a historical account of events, we the reader are meant to detect when people do the right or the wrong thing. But here it's told to us explicitly. That means that it's emphatically the wrong thing. The writer does not want us to miss this sin of Solomon. This is very serious. And there are red lights flashing in these opening verses of chapter 11.

Now of course, what God requires of us, like Solomon, is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That great commandment, the Shema, which Solomon ought to have known well, ought to be reciting daily, according to the instructions of Deuteronomy 6, where it occurs.

[11 : 41] He's also broken, of course, the first commandment, about having other gods before Yahweh, the God of Israel, by worshipping the gods that his wives worshipped. The issue is not just an external one of marrying the wrong people.

It's not just an external one of building temples to these other gods and even going there. The problem is in the heart. If you like, the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

He's not loving God with all his heart. And in verses 2 to 4 of chapter 11, five times the word heart occurs. Again, to emphasise for us, that's where the problem derives from.

The heart of Solomon, his insides have gone astray. Undetected through chapters 3 to 10, by and large, with little hints of corruption.

But it's the inside that's the issue, the problem. And now, finally, in chapter 11, if you like, the insides have spilt outwards as the evidence of a corrupt heart, a compromised heart earlier.

[12 : 50] Now, a corrupt heart means that he's actually publicly involved in building pagan temples or shrines and the worship of those pagan gods. For some time leading up to that, publicly, people may not have seen the corruptness of his heart.

But now it's spilling out as it's taken root within him. See, there is a warning here all through the story of Solomon, because there are hints earlier on from the writer that Solomon was not all fantastic.

And that all culminates in this chapter. We, if we are to love God with all our heart, are to guard our hearts. We are to watch our hearts above all.

Remembering, of course, that our hearts are deceptive, as Jeremiah says, as the scriptures make clear. See, it's not just a matter of an external obedience, keeping up the charade or the facade of piety, doing the right thing, being in church, reading our Bible, saying our prayers, being in a small group, doing this, doing that, helping out on rosters, and so on.

The problem often comes way before the public acts betray some compromise. A heart that's gone cold or a heart that's lost its love for God.

[14 : 13] A heart that's been corrupted by other desires or lusts. Falling into temptations. A heart that's longing after sinful practices. And unchecked, such a heart, as in the case of Solomon, will eventually be exposed in our actions and our words.

That may well be a dramatic fall, as indeed it was for Solomon. We're told in verse 5 onwards that Solomon followed Astarte, the goddess of the Sidonians, Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites.

You can't get a stronger word in the Old Testament for a sin than the word that's here translated abomination. It is something that is utterly detestable to God. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Again, strong language now being used. He's moved from being a compromised person to one who's down and out against God and did not completely follow the Lord as his father David had done.

Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Molech and the abomination of the Ammonites on the mountain east of Jerusalem. Something that is explicitly forbidden time and again in the book of Deuteronomy in particular, but not only there.

[15 : 31] Here is flagrant sin. Not because Solomon suddenly woke up one day and decided, I'm giving up on Yahweh, I'm going after these other gods. But because an unchecked heart was gradually becoming corrupted, led astray by his wives in his old age, and finally it issues forth in downright disobedience and idolatry.

The assessment of verse 6 is a sort of standard sort of assessment for the subsequent kings of Judah.

Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not completely follow the Lord as his father David had done. And by and large, with just a few exceptions, that's the assessment of all the kings who sit on Jerusalem's throne for the next nearly 400 years.

There are a few goodies in the mix. None perfect though in the rest of one kings and in two kings. Notice that Solomon falls in his old age.

We must never be complacent in our faith. We must never presume, in a sense, upon the grace of God. In a sense, it's a reminder that ministry to older people and amongst older people is just as important as ministry to other groups of people demographically as well.

[16 : 56] Even though people may well be mature and godly Christians in older age. Sometimes, of course we, who don't see people's hearts, see an exterior.

An exterior is often, don't fit the interior. Sometimes the exterior of a person may have been set up for many years. but the heart may be being corrupted within.

And in old age, sometimes I've known people who, perhaps like Solomon, actually just abandon it all in the end. It's a huge puzzle. They seem to be such upright Christian people.

And then all of a sudden, the facade just falls apart. Sometimes that's because in our older age, when we lack the physical, emotional energy and ability to, in a sense, keep up the pretense, if you like, we actually expose our heart more in our older age than we do in the prime of life, it seems.

So sometimes people who've got a grumpy heart become really grumpy people in their old age. On the other hand, some people who are actually really loving, they become even more loving in their older age as their heart becomes more open and obvious.

[18 : 08] We must be people who are guarding our heart. We've been pondering this today, thinking about how do we exercise Christian fellowship and Christian ministry that is heart-oriented when we don't really see people's hearts.

Sometimes we see glimpses of it in things people do or say. But when in public church life we're always putting on some form of uprightness and self-protection, how are we going to have relationships within the Christian faith communities that actually make sure that our hearts are held in check, that where our hearts are dying and going cold we have Christian brothers and sisters who will see or we will expose that to for the sake of our eternal destiny.

Very significant, I think. The primary responsibility is our own for our own heart. But within our Christian fellowship we do have mutual responsibility for each other as well.

You see, this story of Solomon begs the question of each one of us. What are we loving? What is our heart's desire? Is it the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Or is our heart losing its first love like that church in Ephesus in the book of Revelation? And yet people may not see that from the outside.

[19 : 37] Practically, there are reasons why Solomon would have married all these foreign women. There's a certain political expediency about it. You married Pharaoh's daughter, it'll keep Pharaoh slightly on side in your political alliances.

If you marry into the royal households of all your neighbours, then as a nation you can be fairly secure, fairly safe. That is, we can understand politically why Solomon did it.

But political expediency may often be spiritually dangerous. Human wisdom, you see, is often poles apart from godly wisdom. What looks to be wise in human eyes?

Getting a politically secure nation. After all, it's God's nation, so why shouldn't Solomon marry into other nations to protect God's people? He could almost say that the end justifies the means.

But it never does in scriptures. Godly wisdom is often far from human wisdom and this man who asked for wisdom ends up being a great fool at the end of his life, sadly.

[20 : 39] Now in response from verse 9, the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord the God of Israel who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this matter that he should not follow other gods but he did not observe what the Lord commanded.

And for those of us who are Bible readers, we're not surprised to hear this. The language of the Lord getting angry at somebody who is sinful is common through the scriptures because there are plenty of people who commit sin who are part of the people of God.

We ought to expect it having read the Pentateuch making it very clear what God's response will be to those who commit sin even in the earlier chapters of 1 Kings as well.

The Lord's anger is there pledged, if you like, for those who walk astray, who do not do what God requires, who do evil in his eyes and so on.

So we ought not to be surprised when we read here that the Lord was angry with Solomon for his sin. But if we're not Bible readers, if we're the secularists of our nation, our world in which we live, then we probably would find this rather affronting, rather offensive in some way.

[21 : 54] I think we've seen that in the last week in the way the secular society in which we live has responded to the way some Christians have, in my opinion, rightly interpreted or helped us understand something of this disaster around the Indian Ocean.

A foreshadowing of the judgment of God is one aspect, I think, a biblical and necessary aspect for understanding this event. The Bible tells us that these are the sorts of events that will come and they will foreshadow the final judgment day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But our secular world is up in arms at that sort of statement as you may have heard in the media in recent days, in the debates and the letters to the editor and so on in the age.

You see, our secular world ridicules a God that is moral, a God that will judge. It mocks the idea that this tsunami is some form of foreshadowing of the judgment of God.

They think in their ignorant way that such a belief portrays a God who is just vindictive and harsh and cruel.

[23 : 05] of course, they're refusing to believe the truth. The scriptures make it very clear, not just in the Old Testament which sometimes even Christians think is full of judgment and want to toss out, but in the New as much as in the Old, from the lips of Jesus as much as the lips of anyone else.

God will judge the world on the day that he's appointed through his Son. and so what we find here ought not surprise us but should alert us that sin stemming from our heart leads to the anger of God.

And anger because sin offends God personally. It's not just as though he's a remote judge in a court who hears a case brought against this person's a sinner and he's sort of impersonally indifferent to it but will bring down a just sentence.

It's not at all. Sin consistently is an offence against God personally and not least the sin of idolatry that Solomon's committing. The worst sin of all.

The breaking of the first commandment. The breaking of the great commandment to love God with all your heart and soul. The anger of the Lord is explained in verse 11.

[24 : 18] That is, there's a reason given for the judgment that is coming against Solomon. Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I've commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant.

Your servant, not your son. Notice. But, having stated the reason and stated the judgment itself, tearing the kingdom from you, that judgment is tempered by mercy in two ways.

Firstly, in verse 12, not now, and then in verse 13, not all of it. That is, there is a deferral of the tearing away of the kingdom from Solomon, so that it will not happen in Solomon's lifetime, but will happen at the point of his son becoming king.

And not all of it will be torn away and given to a servant. That is, one tribe, the tribe of Judah, will be preserved under a Davidic dynasty. The reason for the mercy is not because of anything good in Solomon, note.

Indeed, in one sense it's not because of anything good in David either. It is really because of God's promise to David, as the end of verse 13 makes clear.

[25 : 36] I'll give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen. Which I have chosen, I take to refer to David and Jerusalem, not just the Jerusalem.

God chose David, God chose Jerusalem and for the sake of God's choice he will preserve one tribe to the son of Solomon as it turns out to be the tribe of Judah.

That is, mercy is in a sense completely from the heart of God. There is nothing in David, nothing in Solomon, nothing in anybody else that warrants God's mercy, otherwise it wouldn't be mercy, it

would be deserved.

Mercy is never deserved by any of us, no matter how good we are. And so God's mercy is freely given, in a sense unprovoked by anything external to God, but purely from a heart of mercy. And because God is being faithful to his promise, so that even the sin of Solomon does not destroy the promise of God to David of an eternal dynasty on the throne of Jerusalem.

[26 : 42] Notice that judgment is foretold before it happens. That is so common in the scriptures, we often overlook that fact. But it's making it clear that when it happens it is God's judgment, not just a natural event.

And in a sense that though in some respects there are plenty of events in our world which we might find hard to interpret from what's God doing in these events, he does foretell very clearly through the words of Jesus in the gospels, earthquakes will be a feature of the time before Jesus returns. We're told in advance, in a sense an interpretive grid for it. So that when the event happens we're not left completely in the dark thinking is this God or is it just a natural event.

And here this judgment against Solomon is clearly foretold in very specific detail. We also should remember a good point that no matter what our sin the promises of God are not annulled by it.

God is faithful though we may be faithless and the sin of Solomon does not destroy the promise given to David that there will always be a son of David on the throne of Jerusalem for eternity.

[27 : 56] Well now having foretold that judgment God now in a sense orchestrates it in the events that are described in the remainder of the chapter.

We're told in verse 14 that the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon called Hadad the Edomite we're told in verse 23 that God raised up another adversary against Solomon res on the son of Eliadah.

God raised them up. Again it's words that Bible readers may well skip over we're so used to that sort of thing. These aren't adversaries that just came along for political expediency they're God raising them up deliberately and not just right now but probably actually in the earlier years.

It's these words of God in a sense his judgment against Solomon already being prepared in the raising up of these people. Now Hadad of Edom, Edom was an area to the south, south east I guess of Israel in the sort of desertish area around the south end of the Dead Sea in effect.

Egypt. And there's elements of this brief story of Hadad, I'm not going to read it all again for us, that echo the story of Joseph going to Egypt in the book of Genesis and the story of Moses leading the people out of Egypt.

[29 : 17] And I think they're deliberate echoes. They're in a sense perverse deliberate echoes because they're showing us now what God has done through Joseph and Moses ultimately leading to the people of God coming out from Egypt.

Now in a sense perversely he's working against the people of God. So Hadad goes down for refuge to Egypt, he finds favour in the court of Pharaoh, he marries into Pharaoh's court, interestingly therefore he'll be related to Solomon by marriage somehow.

He's married the sister-in-law of Pharaoh, if it's the same Pharaoh he's married the sister-in-law of the daughter who Solomon's married for. It may be slightly different Pharaohs in between times but there's some relationship there, it just shows the sort of folly if you like of marrying into a royal household for all of those who are jealous about Mary of Tasmania and all that sort of stuff.

Don't think necessarily that Denmark will come to Tasmania's rescue when the mainland conquers it one day. And Hadad wants and pleads in verses 21 and 22 with Pharaoh at the end of 21, let me depart that I may go to my own country.

It echoes Moses' words to Pharaoh, let us go out to worship God and so on and out to our own country back in the book of Exodus. Well Hadad is raised up by God as an adversary.

[30 : 35] David had earlier conquered Edom as we were told in this passage, that's back in 2 Samuel chapter 8, virtually obliterated it by killing through his army commander Joab virtually all the males of the land.

But now through God's superintendence Edom has in Hadad and presumably a few others with him some remnant preserved to be an adversary and thereafter they are.

They're often at enmity with Israel in the years following Solomon. So much so that they actually assist Babylon when Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar conquers and destroys Jerusalem in 587 BC. So much so are they enemies that the book of Obadiah is a prophecy against Edom and we find prophecies against Edom in Amos and others of the prophets as well. So much so that in that

psalm that's so gripping from the exile by the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept Psalm 137 Edom also is mentioned with Babylon there as in enmity against God's people.

Here in a sense comes part of the origin of that. The consequences of judgment are long felt in the Old Testament. God raising up Hadad and indeed we could go even beyond Old Testament times to Herod the Great the king over Judea and Samaria at the time of Jesus' birth and over Galilee for that matter as well who was an Idumean that is a person from Edom ultimately which is why the Jews were so much at unrest because he was a person of mixed heritage looking or claiming to be the king of the Jews at the time of the Roman well after the Roman invasion of 63 BC.

[32 : 15] Rezon of Damascus we're told about more briefly in verses 23 to 25. He gathered followers in verse 24 around him became leader of the marauding band after the slaughter by David and they went to Damascus and settled there.

David had conquered Damascus also in 2 Samuel 8 we read that and now though they're a band of marauders and ultimately it seems they claim independence of Damascus from Israel from Solomon David's son and in subsequent times that capital Damascus became the capital of a nation called Aram from which we get the language Aramaic and became also one of the long-term enemies for much of Israel's history at times in an alliance with the north but often at enmity until they were conquered by the Assyrians at about the time that the northern kingdom also was conquered by the Assyrians.

There in the north Edom's in the south I think we're meant to see that Solomon's peaceful and vast kingdom is beginning to crumble at the edges north and south for that matter but it's a more serious problem and that's a problem from within.

It's the same pattern that you see in the book of Judges where the problems in the book of Judges come from the outskirts or the nations round about different ones for different judges but then the last four or five chapters of the book of Judges are problems within and through the book of Judges you see then a decline in the quality and the state of the people of God.

They're fighting external threats before in a sense internally they're all imploding. In a sense with Solomon in this little description the same sort of pattern. External threats now rising up against them but even more seriously an internal threat that will actually cripple the nation.

[34 : 00] It will never recover the glory of Solomon's day. Jeroboam is the person. He was a very capable industrious person, hard working, competent.

Solomon saw his ability and we're told in chapter 11 verse 28 that the man Jeroboam was very able and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charge over all the forced labour of the house of Joseph.

Now earlier on there is forced labour of Canaanites of other nations that Solomon employed in the building of the temple back in chapter 5 and also in chapter 9 but in chapter 9 it seems the forced labour also now includes Israelites in forced labour.

That is Solomon the king has it seems virtually enslaved some of his own people. Now this is a major flaw in Solomon's life and his government.

For all the wealth of the nation he has enslaved some of his own brother Israelites and presumably in effect their families with them.

[35 : 11] That is he's treated fellow Israelites as no better than the Canaanites and the pagans as he had earlier done in chapter 5. Now we're told in verse 27 that the reason that Jeroboam rebelled against the king Solomon built the Melo and closed up the gap in the wall of the city of his father David.

Now that in a sense doesn't quite tell us enough. There's perhaps nothing wrong with building the Melo and closing up the gap in the wall of Jerusalem that is the city of David the smaller Jerusalem as it was then.

The issue really is the forced labour. No one's quite sure what the Melo is. That's why you've got it here as Melo. It's such a rare word. There has been a lot of debate a lot of scholarly articles over here trying to work out what it is.

Is it some form of tower? Is it some form of shaft or duct or system through which people could get into the city? No one's really quite sure. This closing up the gap in the wall was a security measure not a bad thing.

But the problem is that referring back to chapter 9 where those two things amongst others are mentioned the fortification of other cities like Huxor and so on it's forced labour.

[36 : 26] That's the problem. Solomon is treating his fellow Israelites as slaves. And that's the issue that actually leads to the fracture of the nation through the rest of this chapter and into chapter 12 as we heard read before.

Jeroboam for all his competence there's no evidence of faith in him in anything really. He's just very competent, very industrious and very able. And in a sense though he's selected out of it not just by Solomon to look over those works but he's also selected by God.

Inexplicably God's choice is as I've said in effect never really determined by the competence of a person. God's choice is free. And very often in fact in these early books like Samuel and Kings when someone rises up to be king and they've got all the ability and the strength and the capacity you can bet your bottom dollar that they're probably going to be bad.

It's the unlikely people whom God chooses, the weak people whom God chooses often who are the ones most after his heart. So in verses 29 to 31 Jeroboam is leaving Jerusalem and the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road.

Ahijah had clothed himself with a new garment. The two of them were alone in the open country when Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that he was wearing and he tore it into 12 pieces. He then said to Jeroboam take for yourself 10 pieces and then he explains it in the verses that follow.

[37 : 57] Now if you've been reading the earlier book of Samuel before reading Kings you'd be thinking oh hasn't this sort of thing happened already because back in 1 Samuel chapter 15 Saul having failed yet again as king is confronted by Samuel and the cloak is torn not into 10 pieces that time but when it's torn the word of God through the prophet Samuel is the kingdom will be torn from you.

So this little episode here is very striking. Solomon son of David is being compared to Saul clearly bad king.

It's a very striking association being implied by the double tearing of a cloak with a prophet confronting a person. Verses 32 to 34 reiterate the judgment that we've already seen why it's happening that it's happening the mercy that is tempering it as well.

Ahijah is clearly under the word of God and clearly speaking the word of God rightly in this case. He explains the 10 bits in verse 35. I will take the kingdom away from his son that is Solomon's son Rehoboam and give it to you that is the servant the person who is over the forced labour to an extent that is Jeroboam that is the 10 tribes verse 35 says.

Yet to his son verse 36 I'll give one tribe. Now you don't need to be competent at maths to think that there's a problem here. 10 tribes go to Jeroboam.

[39 : 32] One tribe Judah goes to the son of Solomon. I always thought there were 12 tribes. And no matter how I do my maths 10 and 1 doesn't quite get to 12. Now it is a puzzle.

The simplest answer seems to be that the tribe of Benjamin has been more or less subsumed under Judah although it is mentioned by name later on. But there are other possibilities as well that the Levites are deliberately left out because they're sort of in both.

So it's the territorial tribes that are left although the tribe of Joseph was really two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh so you still have 12 territorial ones and the Levites in addition.

So to be honest there's no simple answer to this question and in the end you can choose which you prefer to work out a resolution to that problem.

To Jeroboam this servant not of divine descent the same command is given to him as was given to Solomon himself in verse 38 here.

[40 : 36] If you will listen to all that I command you walk in my ways and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments as David my servant did I'll be with you and will build you an enduring house as I built for David and will give Israel to you.

That's a very astonishing promise to someone not descended from David. It's conditional on his obedience and there's been no hint of his own faith where he stands with God up to this point whatsoever.

There is a glimmer of hope. Verse 39 for this reason I will punish the descendants of David but not forever. That is there will come an end to the punishment to David at some point in the future which may indeed qualify the promise that is given to Jeroboam about his own kingdom over ten tribes.

Solomon when he hears all this doesn't repent, doesn't turn back in sackcloth and ashes to God but actually even worse seeks to kill Jeroboam.

It shows how far down a path of sin he's gone. Jeroboam flees of course to Egypt to get another refugee finding a country that is open to refugees and there he goes and the end of the chapter Solomon himself dies.

[41 : 48] So this flawed and compromised son of David is dead. In the light of the promise made to David I think we're meant to look for a greater son of David.

And as the Old Testament scriptures begin to unfold further that expectation of a greater son of David grows. And of course in the providence of mercy of God such a greater son of David came. One who was in effect wisdom incarnate. One who was builder of an eternal temple. Not of stone or gold or wood, a seeder but a people.

A fully obedient, fully faithful, pure hearted son of David who was king not by harsh force but a king who in fact served.

Well after Solomon's death we come now to the actual division. Rehoboam son of Solomon goes in fact to Shechem not to Jerusalem, the capital. Now I've been to Shechem a couple of times actually.

[43 : 02] First time I went it was the only time I've been to the actual archaeological site of Shechem, Tal El Blata it's called in modern Nablus, a town that's been wrapped with quite a deal of division and strife in the Palestinian and Israeli conflict over recent years.

It's one reason why most or many tour groups don't actually get there if it's not particularly safe. In the time I went there were just three or four of us on a day off of a tour in 1995 and we arrived at Joseph's tomb at Shechem and we were going to then just walk down the little hill to the archaeological site and this person at Joseph's tomb said I'll come with you, just wait a minute and he came back with his submachine gun over his shoulder.

He said it's much safer if I escort you with my submachine gun and all of a sudden we felt a little bit nervous. But we came to the site of Shechem. Now for many people we, you know, you may read this place and not think much about it.

Now the tape's being changed at this point. Into the land it is at Shechem that they will have a ceremony in effect of a rival in the land.

The ceremony occurs in Joshua 24, it's anticipated in Deuteronomy 11 and 27. So maybe it's because of that reason that Rehoboam goes to Shechem to claim the crown after the death of his father.

[44 : 21] Maybe he goes there because the seeds of division are already happening and Shechem's not in the tribal area of Judah. In fact, Jerusalem's not quite in Judah either. But it may be more central. Well, it is more central in the land.

But it's to Shechem that he goes at the beginning of chapter 12 to claim the crown. From Egypt, Jeroboam is summoned. He hears about it and he comes from Egypt. Solomon is dead.

His life may now be safe. So off he comes to Shechem as well, it seems. And now a confrontation occurs. Jeroboam and the people by and large, supporting him as their leader, confront the son of Solomon, Rehoboam.

And they make a demand to him in verse 4. Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore, lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us and we will serve you.

The issue is the forced labour. He said to them, go away for three days and come again to me. Seems innocent enough. So while they go away, Rehoboam, son of Solomon, he says to take advice.

[45 : 32] Now it's very easy to moralise the next couple of paragraphs. Take the advice of elders and don't listen to young people, they don't have any wisdom. Very easy to moralise it.

It's not what it's about. He goes to the elders, maybe a formal group of leaders, lay people perhaps, and their advice to him in verse 7 is if you will be a servant to this people today and serve them and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they'll be your servants forever.

That is authority from service is their advice. It's good advice. It actually foreshadows the model of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. But he disregarded them.

And so he goes to the younger men. He asked them in verse 9, what do you say? And they, the young men, say to him in verse 10, your father made our yoke heavy, sorry, thus you should say to these people who spoke to you, your father made our yoke heavy but you must lighten it for us.

Thus you should say to them, my little finger is thicker than my father's loins. Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke.

[46 : 48] It almost sounds like Pharaoh at the beginning of the book of Exodus. What a horrible thought. How far Israel has fallen. My father disciplined you with whips but I'll discipline you with scorpions.

Particularly nasty, although some say that the word scorpion here perhaps means a whip which has got nails and stones embedded in it so it's actually a harsher, a crueller whip for forcing labor and slave labor.

A friend of mine who's a minister in central London is part of a group of peers who meet together from time to time, a couple of times a year for mutual encouragement and they always invite a senior clergyman along to share some insights about a sort of long life of ministry.

It's not a bad thing to do really. I'm always intrigued that his group is called the Rehoboam group because Rehoboam admittedly did seek the advice of the elders but as I said to this friend he didn't heed it.

Why do you call yourself Rehoboam? When I tried to set up a group here the last name I wanted to call it was Rehoboam group. It seems to be set on failure if you call it such a name.

[48 : 00] Well Rehoboam the fool doesn't heed the elders' advice. He heeds the younger people's advice. It's not a moralistic story. We're actually made that explicit because verse 15 tells us the king did not listen to the people because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfil his word which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shalomite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

God not only predicts but he orchestrates so that his word is fulfilled time and again and yet human responsibility is never diminished.

Rehoboam is guilty of foolishness at least. He's culpable. He's not exonerated because this was the plan of God. The end does not justify the means.

Well the ten tribes reject his statement back to them that he's going to be harsher than Solomon. They walk out in effect of Davidic descent. In a sense they're actually cutting themselves off from the promises of God when they say in verse 16 what share do we have in David?

We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents O Israel look now to your own house O David. One level we might well understand their rejection of this cruel king that's coming to the throne.

[49 : 15] But on the other hand they're not looking to the promises of God either. There is guilt on both sides here. And Rehoboam the fool tries to unify the nation.

He tries it by diplomacy. He sends Adoram or Adoniram as he's called elsewhere to be a diplomat in verse 18. But what a stupid choice of a person because the very man he sends has been the taskmaster over the forced labour.

And so they stone him to death. And so Rehoboam then decides that he'll use force. So verse 22 to the end or 21 to the end of the section 21 to 24 he masses a troop 180,000 troops.

That's a vast army to go and sort of reunify and subdue the rebellious northern tribes. But that comes to naught because a prophet called Shemaiah stops it.

One man against that vast army. And the biggest surprise is that Rehoboam heeds the prophet's word and they don't fight yet. That comes in chapter 14.

[50 : 22] A nation that was once strong and unified is now divided and virtually at war with itself. And even the greatest of heroes fail. That's one warning for us. So often we hear sermons that use the heroes of the Bible as examples for us.

A very dangerous exercise it seems to me because all the heroes of scripture are fallible other than Jesus of course. And even Solomon who's brought up by a very good king, a good father on the whole, brought up with wealth and education, everything that you can imagine, there's no guarantee of his own faith and success.

There's no guarantee for that for the next generation or for any person. Now the books of kings are about more than kings and we've seen glimpses of that here tonight. They show us in fact the power of the word of God.

We'll see that even more clearly next week. Time and again the prophets intervene and what they say happens. It invariably occurs. See what guides history are not powerful kings, are not Machiavellian machinations of the royal house.

What guides history is God's word. Even through the messy things, the bad looking things, God is sovereign. Not only over events but over hearts as well.

[51 : 45] Let me pray and then we'll sing. God our Father through these sad events of 1 Kings 11 and 12 where we see one of your great kings falling so badly, the kingdom dividing, promises slipping through hands like sand, close to fulfilment but by the middle of chapter 12 so far from fulfilment, a land now ridiculed and mocked rather than praised and your name honoured.

Though sad, we recognise in there a clear reflection of human nature, clear reflection of our own nature. We know our own hearts to be compromised, Lord God.

As much as we desire to love you, we know that there are times when we love other things that we ought not. Teach us, we pray. Write your law, your word on our hearts so that our hearts may be pure and that we may love you with all our heart.

For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen. Amen.