

The Kingdom Divided

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Date: 13 October 2019

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[0 : 00] chapter 12, that passage that began on page 293 of your church Bibles. And it was a rather long passage we read, the first 24 verses.

The key verse really is verse 15, 1 Kings 12 verse 15. So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought out by the Lord that he might fulfill his word.

You know, in any good adventure story, you know, maybe a story written by someone like John Buchan, 39 Steps, a good adventure story, anything that's really a gripping narrative.

And you come to the point when you're literally reading and you come to the edge of your seat, as it were, and you want to know what happens next. You know, you're following the plot of the story, you come to a key moment in the story, you don't know which way the plot's going to turn, and you can't put the book down until you find out what happens next.

And that's really what we see here in this story of the events that happen at the end of Solomon's reign. Those of you who were here last week remember, Solomon had declined so rapidly in his morality, in his spirituality.

[1 : 21] He'd broken God's law and he'd broken it again and again. All these hundreds of wives that he'd married, he allowed them to bring in their false gods, their false worship into Israel.

Shrines were built for these gods. And we read that, you know, Solomon didn't wholly follow the Lord his God. At the start of his reign, we're told he loved the Lord.

At the end of his reign, we're told that he loved these other wives. So there's going to be a consequence of that foolishness in Solomon's life.

But the question is, what's going to happen next? How is God going to respond to the king that once loved him so fully and wholly, but at the end that love had so diminished?

What's going to happen next to Solomon? What's going to happen to his family? What's going to happen to Israel? And we're not left long to find out what does happen next.

[2 : 20] God, as we read in, last week we read in chapter 11, God's going to appear to Solomon. He's going to tell him that he's sinned greatly and his disobedience. He's not worshipped God as he ought.

And because of his sin, God's going to wrench the kingdom of Israel away from his family and give it to somebody else. It's not going to happen in Solomon's lifetime. Again, for the sake of Solomon's father, King David, God's going to do what he's promised after Solomon's day.

So for the sake of Solomon's father, David, the family's going to have one tribe, the tribe of Judah. And the tribe of Benjamin's going to be included in that tribe.

And the other ten tribes are going to go to somebody else. But then what happens next? Who's going to be the king, the ruler of these other ten tribes? Again, we're not left long to find out.

The prophet Ahijah meets this young star, this rising star in Jerusalem, this man Jeroboam. This man who's, we might say, risen in the ranks. And Ahijah stops Jeroboam.

[3 : 28] He takes off his new coat. He tears the coat into ten pieces and says, that's what you're going to get. You're going to get ten tribes. What happens next?

Solomon hears of this meeting. And Solomon tries to kill Jeroboam. Jeroboam flees to Egypt. And he's there until Solomon dies. And when Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam reigns in his father's place.

And he wants to find out what happens next. But you see, in all these what happens next scenarios, one thing has to be made clear. And that's God's sovereignty.

In other words, God in control. Even in the mistakes that Solomon makes in his life. Even us will see the mistakes that his son Rehoboam makes.

God's overruling in these events. God's overruling to bring about his great purposes. I mean, even the fact that one tribe had been promised to the royal family of King David.

[4 : 28] You might think, well, that's strange. Why not just the whole lot given away? But no. One tribe will remain in the family line of King David. And of course, we know from God's word, that's because the Lord Jesus came from that family line in his human nature, in his humanity.

He comes from that family line. God certainly is going to afflict the royal family of David. But not forever. And that really, if you like, that's the great what happens next.

You know, when you're reading the book, as we said, the adventure story, you want to see, you know, the full picture. You want to go right to the end of the story. And of course, that, if you like, is the end of the story as far as the tribe of Judah is concerned.

One will come who will reign forever. David, the son of David. The son of God, the Lord Jesus. So, God in his perfect timing, in his perfect planning, God overruling, even in these strange events there in Israel, events that seem so much turmoil.

A nation's going to be divided. But all happening under God's sovereign rule. God has a perfect plan for his people. And take that for yourself.

[5 : 46] Yes, we see the perfect plan in the history of salvation, the coming of the Lord Jesus. But you know, there's a principle here. For your comfort, for my comfort.

And that surely is this, the knowledge that God is sovereign. God is in control over every aspect of your life. He's the God of history. He's the God whose sovereign power can't be changed.

God's purposes aren't going to be thwarted by our sins. The God who sent his one and only Son to fulfill his purposes is the same God who rules and reigns over your life.

You see that in the pages of Scripture. You see it revealed in the very life of all. Trust him at all times.

Even in these times, as we see here, that seem confused and broken and even difficult to understand. God is sovereign.

[6 : 51] Now, that's my way of introduction to all that we're going to see here in chapter 12. But, you know, we still have to ask, what's going to happen next? What's going to happen under God's sovereign purposes?

Solomon's died. Jeroboam's been in hiding in Egypt. There's a new king in the throne of Israel. Solomon's son. What's going to happen to fulfill the words that God had spoken through the prophet Ahijah about this division in the kingdom?

What's going to happen? What do we see? First of all, we see the so-called wisdom of fools.

Because when we start at chapter 12, there's a turning point that happens.

It's the next stage, if you like. King Rehoboam, he goes to the traditional place where kings would be crowned, there in Shechem. He goes to the north of Israel.

And Jeroboam comes back from Egypt. He's going to be there along with the rest of the people of Israel. And the people in Jeroboam, they plead with Rehoboam, make our lives easier.

[7 : 54] We've been heavily taxed under Solomon. We've been, you know, put under hard labour. And so please, lighten our load. Lighten the burden.

And King Rehoboam says, okay, I'll listen to what you say and I'll come back after three days. What does Rehoboam do first of all? He meets with the older advisors, these old men who tell him, listen to the people.

Listen to their complaints and listen favourably to what they're saying. But then Rehoboam speaks to the younger advisors, his contemporaries. And they tell him, disregard what these old men say and actually make the lives of the people harder.

Now, there's several things here I think sometimes we can so miss out in that passage. And the first thing really concerns the people of Israel.

I mean, what were they not asking? I mean, you know, you can see how far they've fallen in true spirituality. I mean, they're complaining about social and economic conditions. Now, there's absolutely nothing wrong with wanting justice, social justice, economic justice.

[9 : 02] Absolutely nothing wrong with that. Of course not. But you see, their priorities were wrong. There was nothing of any, you know, suggestion here that the people were saying, look, get us back in track spiritually.

You know, there's nothing here to indicate that the people of Israel were saying, get rid of all these foreign gods that these foreign wives of Solomon had brought into the kingdom. All they're

complaining about were their social conditions.

You see, the people had declined so far spiritually. They couldn't see that the problems in Israel, first and foremost, were spiritual and not social or economic.

Isn't that a lesson, you know, in our own perception of where our priorities lie, even as a nation, even as a church, even as individuals.

We know, we see it every day. Look at the political upheaval in our land or even the financial difficulties, even the social unrest in so many forms, in so much of the breakdown of our society.

[10:09] What's at the root of these problems? The root is spiritual. The root is our turning our back in God. We want to remove God from our homes and our workplace, our schools, our government.

The so-called progress of secular values at every turn, you know, excluding the Christian ethos from our land. That so-called progress is actually a regress, a going back, a turning back.

And it's a curse on our land and our people and ourselves. One old minister said this, The only sure foundations of a nation are the fear of the Lord and obedience to His will.

If politics have not a religious basis, the Lord will blow upon them and there'll be a stubble. See, just as we were singing, I mean, the problems of our land are not going to be solved ultimately by man-centered politics.

No, we're to turn to our Lord, our God, our Saviour, to look to the Lord Jesus, follow Him, seek His way, seek His will. Love God, love our neighbour, us ourselves.

[11:22] Do what God's Word demands of us and serve us and sacrifice and upholding the Gospel in every walk of life. And as I say, there's got to be a place for social justice and sound economic management.

But above all, the Lord, our God and Saviour has to have first place in the hearts of His people, yes, in the heart of our nation.

We'll continue to see division and turmoil and ruin. You see, the people here in Israel couldn't see that. They couldn't see that their predicament ultimately was spiritually based.

And that's, if you like, the first evidence of a society whose self-perceived wisdom is actually self-generated foolishness.

But there's something else, probably that's more clear here in the passage. The attitude of the king and these young advisors when they apply their so-called wisdom to the demands of the people.

[12:28] Look at the young advisors. What do we see? We see foolish pride. We see arrogance.

They reckon that the stronger that the king was, that the more power he would have, the more hold he'd have on the people.

Yeah, I mean, even if the problems of the people were real, you know, caving into them would actually weaken, this was the argument, weaken their rule. Better to show oppressive power. Keep the people crushed.

Don't give in to their demands. You see that verse, it's a strange language, I suppose, to our ears, verse 1 to 11. But the whole idea that they are saying, you know, King Solomon might have appeared strong.

He might have appeared powerful. But that power will be as nothing compared to the power of Rehoboam. The arrogance of self-confidence in man.

The advice of fools, don't seek the good of others, but seek the glory of self. It's that heart of sin that doesn't seek grace, but seeks self-glory.

[13:37] That mindset that removes God from our thinking. That seeks to replace God with man. Because we see it in the reality of the history of the nations.

I mean, you know, self-arrogant pride. Whether it's seen in dictatorships, Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany. God removed and replaced by the terror of a man-centred, man-glorifying tyrant.

But, you know, you don't even need to look to these regimes. To see the reality of self-confident pride in the affairs of man. Think of the arrogance of all who seek to replace God with so-called man-centred wisdom.

That actually is not wisdom at all. The arrogance of all who reject the old paths of truth and right. For the so-called modern freedoms that are no freedoms at all.

Whether it's in our own day, whether it's in Old Testament times. It's the same mindset. You go to Jeremiah. Jeremiah's day. Some sort of 300 years after these events that you read here.

[14 : 47] And the people of Israel and Judah, they declined so, so much spiritually. They were rejecting the ways of God. And they were rejecting the worship that God had given them. And God spoke to the people.

He spoke through Jeremiah. And He said this. Stand by the roads and look and ask for the ancient paths. Where the good way is. Walk in it.

And find rest for your souls. But they said, we will not walk in it. Don't we so often fail to learn from God's call to walk in these ancient paths?

The good way. In other words, the truth of God's Word. The truth of God's breathed out Word that directs us how to know Him. How to love Him. How to serve Him.

How to know our great salvation in and through the Lord Jesus. And so often we prefer the new ways. The post-Christian thinking that rejects God's Word is irrelevant because the argument is, it's old.

[15 : 53] It's a chronological snobbery that says forget everything in the past and just focus on what's new. God's Word isn't irrelevant. Yes, God's Word was written millennia ago.

But it's as relevant now as when it was first written down all these years ago. Why? Because God is eternal. His Word is eternal. And there's nothing irrelevant or out of date in God's Word. This is God's up-to-date Word because God is up-to-date.

He's relevant. He's eternal. And man's pride in self tries to cast aside the ancient paths, the old ways as it were. Just as these young advisors were trying to cast aside the advice of these older men.

You see, any rejection of the old ways inevitably leads to disasters. Spiritual disaster, moral disaster, national disaster, personal disaster.

Just as we see here what happens in Israel. Where we see in verses 15 to 24, we see the Word of the Lord fulfilled. The stubborn pride of Rehoboam.

[17 : 01] He's not going to listen to the people. And that's going to result in the people rebelling against him and choosing another man to be king. So the kingdom is going to be divided.

There's going to be centuries of distrust and division to follow. But as we've read on a few occasions already this morning, verse 15 tells us, this turn of affairs was brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill his word.

God had promised that the kingdom was going to be divided because of Solomon's sin. That division is going to come about, yes, because of the pride and arrogance of Solomon's son. Human responsibility has been acted out. God's given man freedom to choose. But at the same time, God's sovereign will has been fulfilled.

Somebody wrote this. Someone wrote this. Rehoboam's folly and arrogance worked out the ordained judgment of God, but they were folly and arrogant still. And, you know, without over-repeating again and again what we see in Scripture, there is this great mystery.

[18 : 11] The freedom of human decisions under the sovereign purposes of God. I mean, it's reality. It's reality. Think of your salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

How was that made possible? It was made possible by the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Yes, God's sovereign will. But how did Jesus go to the cross? It was the will and decision of wicked men.

Who ordained that Jesus must die for sinners on the cross? It was God's eternal decree. It was his eternal wisdom. Man meant Jesus' death to remove the presence of Jesus and his word forever. Man meant to kill Jesus, to remove his teaching and an example. But God meant Jesus' death for the good of those for whom Jesus came to give his life.

And if that is true, and it is true as we find in Scripture, of that reality of human responsibility under divine sovereignty, well, it's seen in the death of the Lord Jesus.

[19 : 20] That's the highest example, if you like. Well, surely we can say this. That that same reality exists in your life and my life. God in his grace overrules in your sins and in my sins.

Yes, you've been given that freedom to make decisions in so many areas of your life. You're not robots. We've been created with minds. You've been given a mind to think and decide and choose. And of course, sin has blighted your mind. We make decisions so often that are contrary to God's word and God's law. But God will and does overrule in these sins.

And so we give praise and thanks to God that God's purposes aren't frustrated by our sinful hearts and sinful decisions. We worship the sovereign God who rules and reigns because he's Lord,

because he's God.

And God's word, God's ways will prevail without my wayward pride, without your wayward pride. So we see in verses 16 to 24, so we'll look at very briefly.

[20 : 29] The people turn against Rehoboam. The northern tribes are going to put Jeroboam and install Jeroboam as king. The southern people are going to remain in Judah under King Rehoboam with their capital still in Jerusalem.

So Israel's now divided, but all under God's sovereign will. And that's a displaced king. He thinks, you know, this should be my kingdom.

He's going to want revenge. He's going to muster 180,000 troops. He's going to fight against the northern kingdom. He's going to restore what he believes is rightfully his.

But God intervenes. And a prophet speaks with Rehoboam. And the prophet gives King Rehoboam the word of God. Don't fight against those who are your relatives. Return home.

Verse 24. Because this thing is from me. This thing is from God. And you read that the king and his people, they listen to the word of God and they obey his word. It's not perhaps what we might have expected.

[21 : 31] You know, when we read that the king muster 180,000 men. But God's word prevails.

Yes, you go into chapter 14, you read that there would be war later between Israel and Judah.

But the people at this point in time, at least they're showing their willingness to listen to the word of God. They're not absolutely depraved, you know, as to totally disregard God's word.

And so, as we close on this passage, what does this bring us to do? Surely, to examine our hearts.

To look at our minds. And, you know, in relation to all that we've seen here this morning. To remember that God is sovereign. That God's will prevails in all things.

And that you and I, we've got a responsibility to do His will. To listen to what He speaks to us through His word. You see, when the people listened to the voice of God there, even towards the end of the passage we read when they, you know, they turned back from fighting Israel.

[22 : 37] When that happened, when the people listened to God's voice, there was peace. But when they disregarded God's voice, there was division. And again, all under God's sovereign purposes.

And so we pray that God will have mercy on us as a nation. As a church. As a people. Even as a congregation. That God's will be done for the glory of His name.

And that, you know, when we're tempted by foolish pride, contrary to God's word, that we run from our pride, from the idol of our pride. And follow the Lord Jesus in His wisdom.

That wisdom that directs your life and my life. To know that peace that passes understanding.

Because it's for you and for me to follow the Lord Jesus. Jesus came to heal divisions.

He came to heal that division between God and man. He came to reconcile God and man. Sin that had brought division.

[23 : 42] Jesus came to heal. To bring that healing. To restore sinner man to God by his day. And so, may you know that healing in your life.

And may you know that humbling before our Lord and Savior. Because He is the Lord of Lords.

He's the King of Kings. He's the one to follow. He's the one to give your life to.

And to serve for all your days. Amen. Let us pray. Lord our God, teach us, we pray, to know that You are God.

That You are Lord. That You are sovereign. And that all things do work together for good. For those who love You. For those who are called according to Your purpose. Forgive us, Lord, for the times when we've followed our own wills.

When we have sought our own ways that have been contrary to Your will. Lord, we thank You that You are the God who forgives. You are the God who heals. You are the God who restores.

[24 : 44] You are the God who rules. You are the God who overrules. Help us then to follow You with all our heart, our mind, our strength. With all that we are.

That we will do so gladly. We will do so with thanksgiving and praise. Hear us, Lord, as we close our service now with the words that You've given us to sing.

And may You have the glory in all things. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 146 on page 191.

And we're going to sing from the beginning down to verse 6. The tune is Stuttgart. Praise the Lord. My soul will praise Him. I'll extol Him all my days. While I live to God my Saviour.

From my heart I will sing praise. Do not put your trust in princes. Mortal men who cannot save. Their plans will come to nothing when they perish in the grave.
[25 : 45] 1-6 Psalm 146. The gospel. It's still an 1-5 Psalm 137.