



Second Chronicles - Chapter Ten

Summary of Chapter Ten

The division of the kingdom was a complex matter, to which Solomon and Jeroboam both contributed through their disobedience, but here the focus is on Rehoboam's folly in alienating the northerners. At the same time, the author notes that this was a turn of affairs brought about by God, indicating that God remained in control of his kingdom and that the northerners' rebellion was understandable; it was, in fact, in accordance with the prophetic word, which presupposes the reader's knowledge of 1 Kings 11:29-39. It was the northerners' later idolatry that made their continuing rebellion reprehensible.

When Solomon's son Rehoboam arrived at Shechem for his coronation after his father's death, he refused to lighten his father's heavy tax burden on the people, and the ten northern tribes revolted and set up Jeroboam as their king. The northern kingdom would now be known as Israel and the southern kingdom as Judah. Five years later, King Shishak of Egypt, also called Sheshonq, invaded Judah and Israel and captured a number of towns. Rehoboam avoided Jerusalem's destruction by paying off Shishak with many of the treasures Solomon had placed in the temple.

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile

The post-Solomonic narrative in Chronicles deals almost exclusively with the kingdom of Judah, following the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam. In contrast to 1-2 Kings, the history of the northern kingdom is considered by the Chronicler only as it touches upon that of Judah, such as in war or in moves toward unity. The Chronicler never disputed that the northern tribes belonged to Israel but insisted that legitimacy and leadership lay with the Davidic monarchy and the tribe of Judah.

III.a 2 Chronicles 10:1-12:16 - Rehoboam

The reign of Rehoboam (931-915 BC) is dominated by the division of the kingdom and the consequences thereof. While Rehoboam is judged negatively for his failures as a leader, the Chronicler also uses his example to show how repentance and obedience may lead to the restoration of blessing.

III.a.i 2 Chronicles 10:1-19 - The Revolt against Rehoboam

Refer to the chapter summary above.



The Divided Kingdom circa 931 BC

¹ Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ² When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (for he was in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. ³ They sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 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.’ ⁵ He said to them, ‘Come to me again in three days.’ So the people went away.

2 Chronicles 10:1-5

Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. This was a logical continuation of the Davidic dynasty. Solomon succeeded David, and now Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was assumed to be the next king.

Rehoboam was the only son of Solomon that is known by name. Solomon had one thousand wives and concubines, yet only one son is referenced to continue his father’s name, and he was a fool. This demonstrates that sin is a bad way of building up a family. It is difficult to believe that Solomon had no other sons; yet it is a fact that Rehoboam is the only one mentioned: <<*The descendants of Solomon: Rehoboam, Abijah his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son*>> (1 Chronicles 3:10).

Shechem was a city with a rich history. Abraham worshipped there (Genesis 12:6); Jacob built an altar and purchased land there (Genesis 33:18-20); and Joseph was buried there (Joshua 24:32). It was also the geographical centre of the northern tribes. All in all, it showed that Rehoboam was in a position of weakness, having to meet the ten northern tribes on their territory, instead of demanding that their representatives should come to Jerusalem.

Shechem was also a place of covenant renewal in Joshua 24:1-27, and the place also where kingship first briefly intruded itself into the tribal life of Israel; refer to Judges Chapter 9. It is the ideal place for a prospective king to be invited and confronted with the question of how he is going to exercise his kingship.



View of Shechem

Shechem was the town that nestled between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, where the blessings and curses were read out to the people; refer to Joshua 8:30-33. The archaeological record demonstrates that the city of Shechem was an important centre of pagan worship in the Middle Bronze Age (2100-1550 BC). Extensive excavations at the mound known as Tell Balatah have revealed a large town surrounded by an elaborate fortification system. Several large and imposing 'courtyard temples' have been discovered there. It is likely that the covenant renewal under Joshua took place in the excavated Fortress Temple at Shechem. It was originally constructed in the 17th Century BC, and it is perhaps the worship centre called El-berith in Judges 9:46.

When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it. Although not previously included in any detail by the Chronicler, Jeroboam was mentioned previously in 1 Kings 11:26-40. God told him through the prophet Ahijah that he would rule over a portion of a divided Israel. Solomon had then sought to kill him and so he had fled to Egypt. Now that Solomon was dead he returned from Egypt. Naturally, Jeroboam was interested in Solomon's successor and what he had planned for the nation. He was specifically part of the group of elders that addressed Rehoboam.

Jeroboam and all Israel came and said to Rehoboam. Rather than simply make Rehoboam king, as he no doubt expected them to do, the tribal leaders wished to negotiate the terms of his kingship, including relief from the forced labour and particularly the high taxation imposed by Solomon.

Your father made our yoke heavy. Solomon was a great king in terms of the peace and prosperity of the nation and the building of the temple, but he took a lot from the people. The people of Israel wanted relief from the heavy taxation and forced service of Solomon's reign, and they offered allegiance to Rehoboam if he agreed to this. Solomon's regime in the latter years has been unduly harsh, particularly for non-Judahites and the Benjaminites who lived nearby. The Israelites are no longer a people living in freedom in the Promised Land; they have become once more a people under hard service, as they had been in Egypt; refer to Exodus 1:14 and 2:23. They toil as oxen would under a heavy yoke.

God had warned Israel about this in 1 Samuel 8:10-19 when, through Samuel, he spoke of what a king would take from Israel. Despite this warning, the people still wanted a human king, and now they knew what it was like to be ruled by a 'taking' king. Sadly, the elders of Israel made no spiritual demand or request on Rehoboam. Seemingly, the gross idolatry and apostasy of Solomon did not bother them at all.

What is also interesting is that Jeroboam had been offered the kingdom for himself if he obeyed the Lord and yet he seems willing to serve Rehoboam if the king reformed the system imposed by his father. History so often turns on seemingly small occasions such as these negotiations.

What is significant now is that the true King of all people offers a truly light yoke for those who choose to follow him: <<Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light>> (Matthew 11:28-30). Yet the majority of the people in the world still seem to want to go their own way. Even those who live in the poorest nations or under dictatorships could find a much easier life in Christ.

⁶ Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, ‘How do you advise me to answer this people?’ ⁷ They answered him, ‘If you will be kind to this people and please them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants for ever.’

2 Chronicles 10:6-7

Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the older men who had attended his father Solomon. Wisely, Rehoboam asked for the advice of these older, experienced men. They seemed to advise Solomon well, so it was fitting that Rehoboam asked for their advice.

If you will be kind to this people and please them, then they will be your servants for ever. The elders knew that Rehoboam was not Solomon, and that he could not expect the same from the people that Solomon had done. Rehoboam had to relate to the people based on who he was, not on who his father was. If he showed kindness and a servant’s heart to the people, they would love and serve him forever. This was good advice.

Jesus clearly taught on this principle for even he as King serves his people: <<For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many>> (Mark 10:45). He even went as far as to wash the feet of his disciples: <<After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet’>> (John 13:12-14). Solomon was not being asked to wash the feet of his people but to serve them as the servant king of God’s people.

And speak good words to them. This is probably a technical term for ‘make an agreement with them.’ Here was an opportunity for Rehoboam to say and do what was right. It did not require false promises or words of flattery, but sincere words that he would rule them in the way in which God had ordained a king should. If he had had the wisdom that his father had shown at the start of his reign, all the following trouble could have been avoided, as Solomon had once indicated: <<A

soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly>> (Proverbs 15:1-2).

⁸ But he rejected the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. ⁹ He said to them, ‘What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, “Lighten the yoke that your father put on us”?’ ¹⁰ The young men who had grown up with him said to him, ‘Thus should you speak to the people who said to you, “Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us”; tell them, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins. ¹¹ Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”’

2 Chronicles 10:8-11

But he rejected the advice that the older men gave him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and now attended him. Before Rehoboam ever consulted with the younger men he rejected the advice of the elders. This is a common phenomenon today - what some call advice shopping. The idea is that a person keeps asking different people for advice until they find someone who will tell them what they want to hear. This is an unwise and ungodly way to get counsel. It is better to have a few trusted counsellors to actually listen to even when they say what the person does not want to hear. These young men were much more likely to tell Rehoboam what he already thought. By turning to those likely to think just as he did, it shows that Rehoboam only asked for advice for the sake of appearances. Their unwise advice shows the wisdom of seeking counsel from those outside the immediate situation and context. Sometimes an outsider can see things more clearly than those who share the same experiences.

The prophet would later encapsulate Rehoboam’s attitude, even though it was in a different contextual setting: <<*For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘Do not see’; and to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel’*>> (Isaiah 30:9-11).

My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins. The foolish advice of the younger men to Rehoboam is literally in Hebrew ‘my little one is thicker than my father’s thighs,’ most likely a reference to his sexual organ rather than a literal finger. Power and sexual potency were very much connected in the ancient Near

East. The equally obscure 'scorpions' is probably a reference to a particularly vicious form of whip.

Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. In offering the opposite advice to the elders, the younger men suggested an adversarial approach, one that would make Rehoboam even harsher than Solomon was, ruling them through fear. In reacting in this way, Rehoboam is behaving exactly as Pharaoh had behaved before him, responding to the words of Moses by increasing the oppression; refer to Exodus 5:1-21.

Solomon asked a lot of Israel, in both taxes and service. Yet there is no impression that Israel followed Solomon out of fear, but out of a sense of shared vision and purpose. They believed in what Solomon wanted to do, and were willing to sacrifice to accomplish it. Rehoboam did not appeal to any sense of shared vision and purpose - he simply wanted the people to follow his orders out of the fear of a tyrant. With a dozen rash words, Rehoboam, the foolish dictator rather than the servant king, opened the door for four hundred years of strife, weakness, and, eventually, the destruction of the entire nation.

¹² So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had said, 'Come to me again the third day.' ¹³ The king answered them harshly. King Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older men; ¹⁴ he spoke to them in accordance with the advice of the young men, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.' ¹⁵ So the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by God so that the Lord might fulfil his word, which he had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

2 Chronicles 10:12-15

Come to me again the third day. Jesus could just as easily said these words on the Cross for on the third day he rose from death. However, what he chose to say was: <<*It is finished*>> (John 19:30b). In the case of Jesus it was the work of redemption that he had completed according to his Father's will; in the case of Rehoboam what he finished was any chance of Israel ever being a truly united kingdom until the Cross! However, even the Cross was not intended for full reunification because God knows the hearts of all people: <<*Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against*

her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law’>> (Luke 12:51-53). What the Cross did was to bring a choice to all people, just as Moses said that the people of Israel had a choice: <<I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob>> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

So the king did not listen to the people. In this case, Rehoboam clearly should have listened to the people. This is not to say that a leader should always lead by popular vote, but a leader needs the wisdom to know when what the people want is actually best for them and when it is not. Rehoboam was a fool. Ironically, his father Solomon worried about losing all he had worked for under a foolish successor: <<I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me – and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity>> (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19).

My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions. Rehoboam’s threats made no difference to the people. They would not be cowed by him for they knew they were being treated unfairly by a king that was commissioned to care for his people not abuse them.

It was a turn of affairs brought about by God so that the Lord might fulfil his word. God managed this whole series of events, but he did not make Rehoboam take this unwise and sinful action. God simply left Rehoboam alone and allowed him to make the critical errors his sinful heart wanted to make. Amid all the human decisions, God’s decision is being carried through, as was the case with the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart: <<And the Lord said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go’>> (Exodus 4:21).

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Notice also, dear friends, that God is in events which are produced by the sin and the stupidity of men. This breaking up of the kingdom of Solomon into two parts was the result of Solomon’s sin and Rehoboam’s folly; yet God was in it: This thing is from me, saith the Lord. God had nothing to do with the sin or the folly, but in some way which we can never explain, in a mysterious way in which we are to believe without hesitation, God was in it all.”

¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king,

‘What share do we have in David?

We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.

Each of you to your tents, O Israel!

Look now to your own house, O David.’

So all Israel departed to their tents.¹⁷ But Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who were living in the cities of Judah.

2 Chronicles 10:16-17

What share do we have in David? Rehoboam’s foolishness made Israel reject not only Rehoboam, but also the entire dynasty of David. They rejected the descendants of Israel’s greatest king. Kingship cannot be imposed on the people but must have their consent, so they take upon their lips a cry that is similar to that of Sheba in 2 Samuel 20:1, and they leave for their tents, i.e. the go home.

This poetic fragment announcing rejection of the house of David contrasts pointedly with the poetic declaration of loyalty in 1 Chronicles 12:18. It was apparently the rallying cry of the northern tribes against Judah.

Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who were living in the cities of Judah. This signals the division of the twelve tribes into two kingdoms; a northern kingdom made up of ten tribes and a southern kingdom made up of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and Levites who remained faithful to the Lord and continued their service in the temple..

¹⁸ When King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labour, the people of Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem.¹⁹ So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

2 Chronicles 10:18-19

When King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labour, the people of Israel stoned him to death. Apparently, Rehoboam did not take the rebellions seriously until this happened. When his chief tax collector was murdered, he knew that the ten tribes were serious about their rebellion. Hadoram, also known as Adoram, was the wrong man for Rehoboam to send. He was famous for his harsh policy of forced labour; refer to 1 Kings 4:6 and 5:14. Rehoboam probably sent Hadoram because he wanted to make good on his promise to punish those who opposed him. He came not to reimpose conditions of forced labour on Israel, since Israel has not yet been under such conditions, but to initiate them; refer to 1 Kings 9:15-23. If the Israelites thought their experience under Solomon was the ‘hard service’ of Egypt, they were to discover now that this was

as nothing compared to life under the proposed new regime. This regime will regard them as if they were Canaanites.

So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. From this point on in the history of Israel, the name Israel referred to the ten northern tribes and the name Judah referred to the southern tribes of Benjamin and Judah. There was a long-standing tension between the ten northern tribes and the combined group of Judah and Benjamin. There were two earlier rebellions along this line of potential division, in the days after Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 19:40-43), which developed into the rebellion of Sheba (2 Samuel 20:1-2).

To this day. This is a phrase used frequently by the Chronicler and was probably taken from the pre-exilic source used by him in the compilation of his account.