

**1 Kings 12**  
**January 5, 2025**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What happens to communities of people when a leader rises to power without a heart to serve the people? [Let people engage]

**Refresher:** It's no surprise that there are leaders who are more interested in power and control over people than to serve the people. And when the people aren't served well, they aren't afraid to make their voices known. And we will see another case of this in today's chapter.

Chapter 12 marks a pivotal point in the history of the Israelites. The nation that God had founded and provided for was torn from King Solomon because he had angered God. For David's sake, God waited until Solomon's death to leave the line of David with the tribe of Judah and Benjamin.

Jerusalem was the seat of Israel's government at the time of Solomon's death. However, Rehoboam, Solomon's son, went about 35 miles north to Shechem to become king. Possibly, Rehoboam thought it would help rally the support of the northern tribes if he traveled north. (The lack of unity between the tribes began in the time of the judges and was especially noticeable between Judah and Ephraim.)

The northern tribes revolted against Rehoboam's reign and formed the kingdom of Israel. They elected Jeroboam as a king and established their capital as the city of Samaria. This was all done according to the prophecy delivered to Jeroboam by Ahijah the prophet.

Jeroboam had the potential to be the first of a great line of kings. God told him that he would build a house as he built for David "as long as he would follow his commandments." Unfortunately, Jeroboam did not follow God's commands! He was the first of 19 evil kings of Israel. He stained the kingdom and led the way for all kings after him, who "walked in the way of Jeroboam," and in his sin, he made Israel to sin. For over 200 years to follow, there was not a single good king in Israel. And eventually, Assyria conquers the kingdom and takes them into captivity.

Our story picks up with Rehoboam, who tries to establish himself as the new king over both Judah and Israel following Solomon's death. Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**Israel Rebels Against Rehoboam**

**12** Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king. <sup>2</sup> When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from (or remained in) Egypt. <sup>3</sup> So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: <sup>4</sup> "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."

<sup>5</sup> Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days and then come back to me.” So the people went away.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup> But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. <sup>9</sup> He asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, ‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us’?”

<sup>10</sup> The young men who had grown up with him replied, “Tell these people who have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter’—tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. <sup>11</sup> 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.’ ”

<sup>12</sup> Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, “Come back to me in three days.” <sup>13</sup> The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, <sup>14</sup> 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.” <sup>15</sup> So the king did not listen to the people, 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 Shilonite.

<sup>16</sup> When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king:

“What share do we have in David,  
what part in Jesse’s son?  
To your tents, O Israel!  
Look after your own house, O David!”

So the Israelites went home. <sup>17</sup> But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

<sup>18</sup> King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. <sup>19</sup> So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

<sup>20</sup> When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.

<sup>21</sup> When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered the whole house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin—a hundred and eighty thousand fighting men—to make war against the house of Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon.

<sup>22</sup> But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: <sup>23</sup> “Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to the whole house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, <sup>24</sup> ‘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.’ ” So they obeyed the word of the LORD and went home again, as the LORD had ordered.

### *Golden Calves at Bethel and Dan*

<sup>25</sup> Then Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel.

<sup>26</sup> Jeroboam thought to himself, “The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David.  
<sup>27</sup> If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.”

<sup>28</sup> After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” <sup>29</sup> One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. <sup>30</sup> And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there.

<sup>31</sup> Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. <sup>32</sup> He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. <sup>33</sup> On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

We should serve faithfully in the role God has given us, regardless of our level of influence. And when it comes to spiritual leaders, we should surround ourselves with wise counsel and lead people to worship God, not idols.

### **Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

***Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Kings 12-13:34). Victor Books.***

These chapters record “the beginning of the end.” With the death of Solomon, the nation’s glory begins to fade. First Kings covers about 125 years of history, 40 years of Solomon’s reign, and about 85 years for the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah. Only five kings reigned in Judah during that period, while eight kings reigned in Israel, and all of them were wicked. Second Kings then takes up the account of the Assyrian captivity of Israel (the northern tribes) and the Babylonian captivity of Judah (the southern tribes).

### **I. The Division of the Kingdom (12:1–13:34)**

#### *A. Rehoboam’s folly (12:1–15).*

Solomon’s vast program of building and expansion had brought fame and glory to the nation, but the taxes were heavy upon the people, and they were hoping for some relief from the burden. In his later years, Solomon’s values had changed, and he was more interested in material wealth than spiritual blessing (see Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:26). Had his son Rehoboam listened to the wisdom of the older leaders, he would have won the hearts of the people; but he was unwilling to be a servant to the people. He listened to the younger men, who lacked experience and, as a consequence, made a foolish decision. The way to be a ruler is to be a servant (Mark 10:42–45).

#### *B. Jeroboam’s rebellion (12:16–13:34).*

God had already chosen Jeroboam to be the king of the ten tribes (11:26–40) because of Solomon’s sins (11:9–13). Sin is a great divider and destroyer. Only Judah and Benjamin were left to Rehoboam, and God did this for David’s sake. Alas, Jeroboam failed to live up to his opportunities, for he led the ten tribes into idolatry. He was afraid that the people of his kingdom would go up to Jerusalem for the annual feasts, and there revolt against him, so he made it “convenient” for them to worship in their own territory. He repeated Aaron’s sin (Ex. 32:1–6) and made calves of gold, putting one in Dan and the other in Bethel. He also consecrated places of worship and organized his own priesthood. It was a man-made religion, designed for the convenience of the people; therefore, it had nothing of the power of God or the blessing of God. Of course, God could not permit such apostasy to continue, so He sent a message of warning and judgment to the king (chap. 13). Note that the king was burning incense at the altar, acting like a priest. The mysterious man of God announced the birth of the future king Josiah (13:2, see 2 Kings 23:15–18), and also warned that the king’s man-made religion would be judged and destroyed. When Jeroboam tried to arrest the prophet, the king’s extended hand was dried up and the altar broke open, just as the prophet had predicted. The king begged to be healed, and the man prayed for him. The king then tried to trap the prophet by inviting him to the palace, but the man of God refused to fall for the trick. It is unfortunate that the man of God listened to the lies of a fellow prophet and lost his life. If there is one lesson to be learned from 13:11–34, it is this: don’t let other people determine the will of God for your life. Obey what God’s Word says to you, regardless of the cost.

**Constable, C.L. (1985). 1 Kings. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 510-514) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

A. *The division of the kingdom (12:1–24)*

The date when Israel passed from a united to a divided monarchy was 931 B.C.

1. REHOBOAM'S DILEMMA (12:1–5)

12:1. **Shechem** afforded a fitting site for the coronation of a **king** of Israel. At Shechem Yahweh first appeared to Abraham in the land and promised to give him all of Canaan (Gen. 12:6–7). Jacob later settled there (Gen. 33:18–20) and Joseph was buried there (Josh. 24:32). After they had entered the Promised Land the Israelites, at Shechem in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, dedicated themselves to keep the Mosaic Law (Josh. 24:1–27). This sacred spot now reminded **the Israelites** of their divinely revealed destiny as a nation and of God's faithfulness.

12:2–5. Evidently the heads of the Northern tribes under the leadership of the Ephraimites **sent for Jeroboam**, who apparently had just returned from exile in **Egypt** after Solomon's death (cf. 11:40). They wanted him to present their plea for lower taxes **to Rehoboam**. They did this sometime during the coronation festivities. Perhaps **Jeroboam** served as their spokesman. Jeroboam had, of course, been told by the Prophet Ahijah that the kingdom would be divided and that he would rule 10 of the tribes (11:31–39). But he seems to have decided to let events take their course rather than initiating an unprovoked revolution. By reducing the tax load and by lightening the **labor** conscription requirements on his people, King **Rehoboam** could have won the support of his petitioners. But he said that he wanted **three days** to think about their suggestion.

2. REHOBOAM'S COUNSELORS (12:6–11)

12:6–7. The king asked two groups of counselors for their advice. **The elders** were probably about the same age as **his father Solomon**, having **served** as the former king's official advisers; they were elders both by reason of years and by their office in the government. This group's counsel was wise—to lighten the tax and workload, as the people asked. If taken, this advice would have resulted in peace, at least for a time.

12:8–11. Perhaps to appear in control **Rehoboam rejected** this good **advice** and turned to his contemporaries for their opinions. The younger men's counsel was the opposite from what **the elders** had given, but just what Rehoboam wanted to hear. The king was no child at this time; he was 41 years old (14:21). Nor was his decision made on the spur of the moment; he had three days to think it over (12:5). It was a deliberate choice possibly based on what he believed was needed most in the nation at that time.

The wording of Rehoboam's reply to his petitioners, as suggested by his younger advisers, seems almost designed to provoke hostility: he would be far more harsh than his **father**, for his **little finger** was **thicker than his father's waist** (an obvious hyperbole intended to express his greater power) and he would **scourge ... with scorpions** not with his father's **whips**. Perhaps the king and his counselors thought intimidation would send the potential rebels scurrying for cover

and would drive any ideas of insurrection far from their minds. “Scorpions” refers to a particularly cruel kind of whip used in that day, with sharp pieces of metal.

### 3. REHOBOAM’S DECISION (12:12–15)

12:12–15. **The king** followed through with his decision and delivered his insulting threat to his petitioners (vv. 13–14; cf. vv. 10–11). Rather than listening **to the people** Rehoboam put his own interests first. **This turn of events**, the writer noted, **was from the LORD** (v. 15) in fulfillment of His prophecy through Ahijah (11:31–39). God’s judgment because of Solomon’s apostasy was being carried out (11:11–13).

### 4. ISRAEL’S REBELLION (12:16–20)

12:16–17. Rehoboam’s insensitivity to the Israelites’ hardships extinguished any hope they may have entertained of economic recovery. His dictatorial threat alienated his suffering subjects. Then and there they seceded and broke the union of the 12 tribes. Only Rehoboam’s closest countrymen from **Judah** did not abandon him. The reply of the Israelites (v. 16) evidently had become a battle cry; it was used years earlier by Sheba who rebelled against David (2 Sam. 20:1).

12:18–19. What could have motivated **Rehoboam** to send **Adoniram** (a variant spelling of the Heb. Adoram; cf. NIV), the personification of oppression, (the foreman **of forced labor**), to meet with the rebels at that crucial moment? Perhaps Adoniram was the best-qualified ambassador. Whatever the reason, Rehoboam’s “wisdom” proved foolish again. Adoniram died as the target of the rebels’ wrath. And **Rehoboam** barely escaped with his own life. What should have been a glorious national celebration (v. 1) turned into a humiliating rout for Judah’s new king who fled his own coronation to **escape** assassination by his infuriated subjects. The writer noted that the Israelites were really rebelling **against the house of David**, God’s appointed dynasty, which they did **to this day** (i.e., the time this section of the book was written).

12:20. Rehoboam’s coronation turned into Jeroboam’s coronation. The people brought **Jeroboam** forward and **made him king** then and there. This action suggests that plotting had been involved in the rebellion. **Only ... Judah** (and Benjamin, v. 21) **remained loyal to the ruler from David’s house** (dynasty).

### 5. REHOBOAM’S REPRISAL (12:21–24)

12:21. Having failed to preserve unity through diplomacy **Rehoboam** sought to restore it by force. **The tribe of Benjamin** was Judah’s immediate neighbor to the north. The capital city of **Jerusalem** lay almost on the Judah-Benjamin border. Probably for the sake of their close neighbors and the capital, the Benjamites sided with **Judah**. Together these tribes called up **180,000** soldiers to fight their brothers in the 10 tribes to the north.

12:22–24. Rehoboam’s battle plans were interrupted by a prophet of Yahweh, **Shemaiah**. **The man of God** made a public announcement that civil war was definitely not God’s will and he convinced **Rehoboam** and **the people to go back home**. To his credit Rehoboam **obeyed the word of the LORD** and did not proceed into battle. Again, the writer pointed out the overruling hand of **God** in these affairs (**as the LORD had ordered**, v. 24; cf. v. 15).

## B. Jeroboam's evil reign in Israel (12:25–14:20)

Jeroboam could have been an instrument of blessing for Israel. He was divinely chosen and given promises that his dynasty would continue and prosper if he obeyed the Lord (11:38–39). But Jeroboam did not trust or obey the Lord; he committed many serious sins that resulted in the Israelites turning *from* God rather than *to* Him. He planted seeds that bore bitter fruit for Israel as long as it continued as a nation. Twenty kings ruled the Northern Kingdom and not one of them turned the people back to the Lord. Instead of one stable dynasty, Israel experienced several dynasties (see the chart “Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets”).

### 1. JEROBOAM'S IDOLATRY (12:25–33)

12:25. **Jeroboam** chose **Shechem** (where Rehoboam had been crowned, v. 1) as his capital and began at once to fortify it as his stronghold. During its history the Northern Kingdom had three capitals: Shechem, Tirzah (14:17; 15:33), and Samaria (16:23–24). (See the map “Solomon's 12 Districts and Surrounding Nations,” near 4:17–19.) Jeroboam also **built up Peniel** (see the map) as a fortress east of the Jordan River, probably to protect Israel from invasion from the east by the Gileadites, who had been consistently loyal to David.

12:26–27. Jeroboam's musings reveal an evil heart of unbelief. Rather than believing God's promise to establish his dynasty (cf. 11:31, 37–38), the king sought security by turning the people away from God. His fears that the **people** might **revert to the house** (dynasty) **of David**, that is, to **Rehoboam**, were understandable, but God had told him that He would keep Israel for the house of **Jeroboam**. Fear for his personal safety crept in when he stopped trusting God.

12:28. The king's “reforms” all involved religious apostasy. This is why he was such an evil influence in **Israel**. His changes struck at the heart of Israel's strength, her relationship with God. They polluted Israel for generations. Jeroboam researched his ideas; he sought **advice** about how to maintain the secession effectively.

The first change involved new religious symbols. To prevent the Israelites from returning to their magnificent temple and the ark in **Jerusalem** (cf. v. 27) Jeroboam offered substitute objects: **two golden calves** or bulls. Perhaps he actually intended the people to turn from worshiping Yahweh to worshiping his golden idols. His words, **Here are your gods ... who delivered you from Egypt**, suggest this.

It is probable, however, that the king may have set up these calves as aids to the worship of Yahweh (W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*. Rev. ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957, p. 299). This suggestion has the support of ancient Near Eastern tradition which conceived of an image as a support or pedestal for one's god. Jeroboam's decision may have been influenced by what he had seen in Egypt where a bull was commonly used to represent or support a god. Or perhaps more likely, his action was influenced by the Canaanites' similar practice regarding Baal. He seems to have been poorly informed concerning Israel's history, however, since a former golden calf had brought God's wrath down on the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. 32). Whatever their original purpose these calves became the objects of Israel's worship (cf. Hosea 8:5–6; 13:2–3).

12:29–30. New sanctuaries were also built to house these calves to replace the temple that contained the ark with its golden cherubim. These were located in the towns of **Dan** in far northern Israel and **Bethel** just north of the Judean border in southern Israel (see the map “Solomon's 12 Districts and Surrounding Nations,” near 4:17–19). **The people** were told to conduct pilgrimages to these places rather than traveling to Jerusalem. Thus the Israelites could

find a sense of fulfillment in going through similar forms of **worship** (rituals) though they were being disobedient to God.

12:31. New **priests** were **appointed ... from all sorts of people.... not** from the Levites as God had directed. Jeroboam dismissed the Levitical priests who then migrated to Judah (2 Chron. 11:14). The new priests conducted religious rites for the people at **shrines** Jeroboam **built** at various **high places** convenient to them. This accommodation again gave the people a feeling that they could worship as much as they pleased so they felt less longing for their former ways of worship.

12:32–33. Jeroboam **instituted a new festival ... like the festival held in Judah**, a carefully designed counterfeit of the Day of Atonement. Israel's festival was held **in Bethel** and in **the eighth month** (October–November) exactly one month later than Judah's, **a month of Jeroboam's own choosing. Priests ... sacrifices**, and an **altar** were all provided to make Israel's festival just as good as if not "better" than Judah's. But Israel's feast was designed by Jeroboam whereas Judah's feasts had been decreed by God. Jeroboam set the example for his people; he personally **went up to the altar** at Bethel **to make offerings**.

*Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 139). Broadman & Holman Publishers.*

**Golden Calves (12:1–33).** This chapter treats the watershed event in 1 Kings. King Rehoboam's refusal to rescind the oppressive forced labor and tax measures of his father, Solomon, split the kingdom. The ten tribes of Israel under Jeroboam seceded from Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophecy of Ahijah (see 11:29–39). Rehoboam attempted to reclaim his kingdom, but the prophetic word from Shemaiah prohibited him. Rehoboam's greatly reduced kingdom became known as Judah. Rehoboam's name means *one who enlarges the people*, but ironically he divided the people.

King Jeroboam built his military command at Shechem, an important religious and political site in Israel's history (Josh. 24). He knew that his political fortunes were tied to the religious life of the nation. He set up two golden calves at Dan and Bethel (see Hos. 8:4–6; 10:5; Amos 7:8–13). He encouraged local high places and authorized a non-Levitical priesthood. He initiated an annual feast at Bethel in the eighth month to rival the Feast of Tabernacles traditionally celebrated in the seventh month (1 Kgs. 12:25–33; see Leviticus 23:33–43). Jeroboam cried out, "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt" (1 Kgs. 12:28). These gods were patterned after the sacred bull of Egypt (see Exod. 32:4) and the calf worshiped by the Canaanites. Yet Jeroboam tied the worship of these calves to the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. If Jeroboam intended to continue the worship of the Lord, the calves were meant only as pedestals for Israel's invisible God. From the sacred writer's viewpoint these calves were signs of pagan idolatry.

*Tatum, S. L. (1972). 1 Kings. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 199-200). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.*

### **Jeroboam's Revolt Against Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1–33)**

*The passage*—David had managed to hold Israel together, though they maintained their tribal identity. Solomon reigned over them with a strong hand, but he became king not by their choice but by decree from David. When Rehoboam followed Solomon, the kingdom became divided,



and there follows a confused history of many kings in both parts of the divided nation. From this point on, there is a greater emphasis on the prophets and less and less emphasis on the kings except as they relate to the ministry of the prophets.

Rehoboam was foolish to listen to young advisors rather than the wisdom of well-trained older men. When Israel gathered at Shechem to make him king, Jeroboam and the assembly asked for tax relief and a more compassionate government. The older men advised him to lighten the load. The young men advised him to increase the load. They had been reared in prosperity and ease with the young prince and did not know the mind of the nation. Rehoboam told Israel that his little finger would be thicker than his father's thigh. Thereupon the ten Northern tribes of Israel went away from Rehoboam. The kingdom was divided. Jeroboam was made king of the Northern tribes.

Jeroboam knew that many of his people would want to go back to Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple. He therefore established a new religion for them and made two golden calves for them to worship. He placed one at Bethel and the other at Dan. He established his palace at Shechem.

*Special points*—Though Solomon had many wives and concubines, we do not have record of any other sons that might have been eligible to succeed him but Rehoboam.

*Truth for today*—Rehoboam was the son of the wisest man that ever lived, but wisdom is not inherited. Each generation must develop wisdom. It can profit from the experience of the past or suffer the consequences. Someone has said that neither wisdom nor grace runs in the blood.

Resentment usually boils over into strife. The ten Northern tribes were loyal to David and Solomon, but their resentment was building up all the time. When they got no relief under Rehoboam they finally rebelled. This should be a lesson for governments of the world today.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Kings 12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**