

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 11, Part 1, 1 Kings 12-13, Part 1

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Looking at 1st Kings chapter 12, verses 1 through 24. In our last study, we talked about the ways in which Solomon's kingdom was torn in two because of his failure to honor the Lord's name and his divided heart, which resulted in the end of his life. The lesson we saw there is there are no trophies given out for good beginnings.

The prize is for those who finish well and that was the tragedy of Solomon's life. Those first 11 chapters comprise the first section of the book. The second division begins here in chapter 12 and extends through chapter 16.

It covers the basically 50-55 years from Solomon's death, 930 we think, to 850 with the coming of Ahab. So, as I said, excuse me, I said 50 years, 870 with the coming of Ahab and his father Amri. So, we've had 11 chapters for 40 years and now we're going to have 5 chapters for some 70 years or thereabouts.

The story begins here with Solomon's son Rehoboam. Jeroboam, we were told in chapter 11, had been anointed by God to be the king of the northern tribes. Somehow Solomon had found out about that and like Saul with David, tried to kill Sir Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt.

I suggested last time that that may constitute the difference between Jeroboam and David. David only fled to the Philistines, and he continued his contact with the people of Judah even while he was ostensibly serving the Philistines. But Jeroboam went to Egypt, to the pagan country, and I can only wonder if, in fact, those years spent in Egypt influenced Jeroboam in one way or another.

But we're told that Jeroboam, hearing about Solomon's death and Rehoboam's being crowned king, came back. And that the people then, we're told in verse 3, sent for Jeroboam and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and made a request. You wonder if in fact again the northern tribes were already in calling Jeroboam to come, were already thinking in terms of the division.

One of the things that interests me in this chapter is the interplay between God's providence and human choices and actions. Again, as I've said to you numerous times, our brains are not big enough to hold together God's sovereignty. He is king, and he is going to accomplish his will and human free will.

We tend to be in one ditch or the other. Well, humans have free will; therefore, God's sovereignty is limited. Or God's sovereignty is absolute; therefore, humans don't have real free will.

It seems to me as we read the Bible, we see the interplay of those that you can't write off one or the other. You've got to keep them in tension with one another and we see that here. Was this thing a foregone conclusion? Well, yes.

Ahijah had made the prophecy to Jeroboam and said, it's a done deal. And yet, it's a done deal, but it's a done deal through human choices and human responsibility. So here, the tribes have called Jeroboam, Jeroboam who had been in charge of the forced labor, not the enslavement, that was for the Canaanites, but the forced labor of these northern tribes.

And evidently, he had been a good leader, and the northern tribes had responded to his leadership. So, the tribes put a condition on Jeroboam. Verse 4, your father put a heavy yoke on us; now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put upon us, and we'll serve you.

Once again, you have to wonder if Jeroboam had responded, would they, in fact, have served him? Again, what we see over and over again in the Bible is the creative ways in which God accomplishes his purposes through human choices. In spite of human choices, he's so creative that he is able to do his work, not manipulating us but working through us. So, we don't know; maybe they would have, maybe in fact, the kingdom would not have divided at this point, but down the road, we don't know. Now, clearly, if Jeroboam had accepted what they were asking, as they say in the handout, it's going to require some belt-tightening on his part.

If you remember, Solomon had the kingdom organized into 12 pieces, and each one of the 12 was responsible for supplying the court with tons of food and supplies every month. If we're going to tighten the load here, Jeroboam is going to have to tighten his belt. Is he willing to do that? So, it is for us, again and again, we have to make choices, and we can make choices that, in fact, will give us abundance, abundance we don't need, or maybe we need to tighten down a bit to better be able to serve God and God's people.

So, Jeroboam, excuse me, Rehoboam does a wise thing. He goes to his counselors and says, okay, guys, what do you think? Should I ease up on him? The old counselors say yes, that would be a good idea, but the young counselors say, oh no, no, no, no, you tell them you think my dad was tough, I'm going to be a lot tougher. Do you think he was a big man? You don't know anything about how big I am.

Now I wonder why would these two sets of counselors differ so radically? Well, I'm sorry, but I'm biased. I think the old guys were wise. I think they had lived long enough to know that, hey, as the saying says, you catch more bees with honey.

Yes, you could afford to do this. You could afford to make a concession to them, and they would go with you. Perhaps, perhaps, they'd already made up their minds, and this was just on the surface; why did the young guys go the other way? Well, there's a sense in which you better establish your leadership right at the outset, and if you don't do that, they're going to run away with you.

Well, there's some wisdom there as well. I remember an elementary school teacher who said you have to establish your authority on the first day. If you let them get away with something on the first day, you're not going to get them back for the rest of the year.

So, we can't simply say that was stupid. But on the other hand, the wisdom of the years says to treat people kindly, give them some room, and they'll respond with kindness. Well, whatever, Rehoboam said, no way.

I think perhaps he liked that idea. He didn't like the idea of making a concession, backing off, and that's human, isn't it? That's us. We don't like to bend.

We don't like to appear as though we might be weak. It takes a very strong man, a strong woman to be able to bend, to be able to give away something that maybe you don't really want to give. But that's the grace of God.

That's the grace of God that allows us, number one, the security in ourselves to know that God loves us and we lose nothing by giving something away. But also, a sense of generosity, as God has been generous to us, so we can be generous to others. But Rehoboam says, no, not me.

Now, as I said, Rehoboam, I think, wanted to appear as a strong man. And I think we see his lack of wisdom in what he does when the northern tribes pull back, when the northern tribes say, okay, okay, if that's your attitude, we're out of here, to your tents, oh, Israel, which is pretty clearly a common phrase for pulling out in those days. So, what happens? In verse 13, the king answered the people harshly, rejecting the advice given to him by the elders.

He followed the advice of the young men. Verse 15, 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. Oh, well, Rehoboam didn't really have a choice.

Again, this is what I said at the outset here. Seems to me the Bible is in a very, very skillful way dealing with these things. Did Rehoboam have a real choice? I think there's no question that he did.

He was not just a puppet; God was pulling his strings. On the other hand, what he did was a fulfillment of what God was at work producing in the kingdom. So again, we have this tension between human choices and divine sovereignty, and we've always got to keep those, as I say, in tension.

When you have a choice to make, God has a will in this, and you ought to be asking Him, what is your will? What do you want to accomplish through me in this decision? On the other hand, if you can't get a clear word, and sometimes that happens, then make your choice in the confidence that God is going to work through that and He's going to accomplish His good purposes. We don't have to live tentatively. As long as our hearts are centered on doing what our Father wants, then we can know that He's going to accomplish His good purposes through our choices, in spite of our choices.

But what I like about this is this sense of our cooperation with the God of the universe. He wants to use you and me to accomplish His good purposes. Why? He doesn't need us.

Ah, but He does need us. He needs our fellowship. He needs our joining with Him.

He loves us so much that He says, come on, come help me. Be part of this. Wow.

So, did Jeroboam have a real choice? I'm sure he did. But the fact that he made what I think was a bad choice, in fact, worked right into what God had intended to accomplish through all of this. So, the people say, look after your own house.

What share do we have in David? What part in Jesse's sons? To your tents, Israel, look after your own house, David. As I look at that passage, I cannot escape the sense that the northern tribes are very consciously saying we're not going to have a part in what God is seeking to do through the house of David. The repeated references to David and the repeated references to the house say that to me, they know what they're doing.

They're saying, okay, okay, maybe God has promised David a house through all the centuries. Maybe God has promised David an enduring dynasty. Well, good for him, but we're not going to be part of it.

Oh, friends, oh, friends, what a dangerous stance to take. No, I won't participate with God in what he's seeking to do in my family, in my church, in my home, in my business. No, no, I'm going to do what I want to do.

I'm going to do what I think is best. Now, again, you see, we can say, well, wait a minute. No, no, God had determined that those tribes were going to separate and go another way.

And in fact, God had said to Jeroboam, I'm going to give you an enduring house if you will obey me and walk as David walked. And I'm saying again, yes, but they had a choice. They did not have to do what they did.

They did not have to make the choices they made, but they made them and were responsible for them. What we see in the rest of the books of Kings, first and second Kings, is the result of that choice.

And as I say, looking at the text here, I think they're very conscious of what they're doing. We're not going to be part of the fulfillment of God's promise to the house of David. Let God fulfill that on his own.

We're not going to be part of it. Oh, friends, don't do that. Don't do that.

Find out what God is doing and choose to be part of it. Find out where he's leading and say, yes, it may not be pleasant, maybe difficult, but I want to be on God's side and not on the other side. John, in his book, 1 John, says we have a choice.

We can be in God's kingdom or we can be in the other kingdom. And he puts it that bluntly. So I want to say, I want to be in the kingdom of God and I want to be participating in what God wants to do in the world.

Don't you?