

## 1st Kings Chapter 12 – John Karmelich

1. My title is the question, "Would you rather be ruled under the authority of Jeroboam the rebel or under the authority of Rehoboam the jerk?" The first thing you might say is who are these guys or maybe, isn't there another option? If you are an Israelite living at that time, essentially those are your two choices. My goal is to explain the significance of these two kings and what we can learn about our own relationship with God based on the lives of these two neighboring kings.
  - a) To begin let's be honest, the names Rehoboam and Jeroboam rhyme and it is easy to forget who is who. The way to remember who is who is to recall that this was a time in Israel's history when neither leader was a very desirable choice. I use the concept of opposites in order to remember who is who. Rehoboam reigned from Jerusalem. Jeroboam reigned in the northern part of Israel. Again think opposites:
    - i) Associate Rehoboam with the word "jerk".
    - ii) Associate Jeroboam with the word "rebel".
    - iii) In other words associate the R with a J and the J with an R. That is why I consider this lesson the era of opposites.
  - b) Bear with me a little longer and then I'll get to the issue about why we should care about any of this stuff. Rehoboam is the son of Solomon and was the next king of the Southern Kingdom of Israel, called Judah. I call him a jerk, because he ignored the wise advice of his father's counselors. When he promised to raise everyone's taxes in Israel, most of the country rebelled against him. All of those Israelites that left formed their own kingdom called "Israel" and Jeroboam was their first king. That's why I call the two kings Jeroboam the rebel and Rehoboam the jerk. Again, associate the J with an R and an R with a J, and you should be fine for the rest of this lesson.
2. Before I get to my usual "why we should care about any of this speech", let me do a quick review of 1st Kings to date. We have finished 11 chapters on King Solomon. His death was noted at the end of the last chapter. Time will now move quicker through the rest of 1st and 2nd Kings. The life of Jeroboam and Rehoboam will only cover three chapters. Speaking of speeding up time, in effect the next several hundred years of Israel's history is going to come down to the rest of 1st Kings (11 chapters) and most of 2nd Kings (17 Chapters). If that seems like a waste of our time to study all of this, let's just say it's in the bible for a reason. We're going to learn a little about how prophecy works in the bible as well as lessons about how God wants and does not want us to live as Christians. With that warning given, let's get back to these two losers.
  - a) Jeroboam is the first of 20 kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In this chapter, we'll learn how and why he became the king and why he rebelled against God. We'll also read about the son of Solomon, Rehoboam and his reign. They both reigned roughly over the same time span. Both are the 1st of twenty kings of each kingdom although the Southern Kingdom lasts over hundred years longer than the Northern Kingdom.
  - b) The other good news is I don't want you to worry about all the names of all of these kings. I've been studying my bible for many years and I couldn't name you all of the kings and I don't think God expects us to memorize the list either. What God does desire of us, is that we learn to live the way God wants us to live as believers and that is the main lesson that this book teaches us. With that speech said, what's the deal with these two kings?
    - i) They each fear losing power. Once Jeroboam is set up as a king in this chapter, he soon forbids people to go worship God in Jerusalem. He has two golden calves set up in his territory and announces in effect, God got us here symbolically speaking to this land, so worship Him via these two calf statues and not travel to Jerusalem to which again is in the territory of the rival king Rehoboam.
    - ii) That's why I call him Jeroboam the rebel. God called Jeroboam to worship Him as a king. God never said to ignore Jerusalem as place for worship of this kingdom.

3. All of this talk about rebels and jerks (the two kings), leads me back to the main question of this lesson: which king should we choose to live under, one who rebels against God or one who is a jerk? To answer that question, I first need to talk about the son of Solomon, Rehoboam quickly.
  - a) To state the obvious, he grew up under the luxurious living of King Solomon. Rehoboam saw all of the wealth that his father had, as well as his fame and power. What's implied in this chapter is that Solomon worked the Israelites hard and made them live under a tough tax burden in order to support Solomon's lifestyle. When Rehoboam came into power he said in effect, "You think dad was hard on you, wait until you see what I'm going to make you do!" That's why I call him Rehoboam the jerk. He got most of Israel to rebel against him because he was a cruel leader, and well, a jerk.
  - b) Now let's go forward to the era of when Paul was a missionary, roughly 20-30 years after the death of Jesus. Paul preached while Nero was the emperor of Rome. To put it overly simple, Nero was not kind to Christians and had many of them put to death. Yet we read in Paul's letters that we need to pray for those in power in our civil governments, and for Paul that meant Emperor Nero. (See [Romans 13:1](#) as an example.) My point is if Paul can preach about Jesus living under a "true jerk" like Nero, I suppose we can be a witness for Jesus under a king like Rehoboam or whoever is in power that we may not be crazy about at the present time.
  - c) In summary, my point is, it is better to choose to live under a jerk than a rebel against God's will for our lives. King Jeroboam of the northern kingdom led those Israelites not to worship God, even though he was appointed by God to rule over those people. At the same time, King Rehoboam of the Southern Kingdom worked the people hard, but they were still encouraged to worship God the way He desires to be worshipped.
  - d) My point in conclusion, is that it is better to live under a jerk of a ruler that still allows us to be a good witness for Jesus than a rebel that wants us to turn away from Him. That in effect is the underlying lesson of this chapter. The rest they say, is the details. Speaking of which, it is time for us to go verse by verse through this chapter. With that said, let's start Verse 1 of Chapter 12 of 1st Kings.
4. Verse 1: Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king.
  - a) The first thing we read about in this chapter is the son of Solomon went to a place called Shechem to be crowned the next king of all of Israel. If you recall, the last chapter ended with the death of Solomon. We'll learn in Chapter 14 (Verse 21) that Rehoboam was forty one when he started his reign as king.
  - b) The natural question of this verse is, where is Shechem and why should I care? To say it another way, why wasn't Rehoboam crowned in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel? The most logical answer is, politics. Shechem was in the northern part of Israel. It did have some famous moments in the ancient history of Israel. It was picked in my opinion, because of the potential rebellion against Rehoboam as the next king.
  - c) Let me remind all of us of a few facts from the last lesson.
    - i) God told Solomon in effect he was in trouble for rebelling against Him.
    - ii) God raised up enemies to haunt Solomon. Among those enemies was a Jewish man named Jeroboam. A prophet told him he would be the king of North Israel.
    - iii) The last chapter implied that Solomon found out about this prophecy and made an effort to kill Jeroboam. That man fled to Egypt to get away from Solomon.
    - iv) Now we have this son of Solomon named Rehoboam. He grew up seeing all of the riches and power of Solomon. I'm speculating that Rehoboam was also told of this prophecy about Jeroboam as he was to be the next king over all of Israel.
    - v) All of that leads to the politics of this coronation. It was held in the territory of what was to become the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It is to announce in effect, I (Rehoboam) was to be the next king here, whether you like it or not. That is why all of Israel was gathered here for the big event at that time.

5. Verse 2: When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt.
- Verse 2 tells us that there was a time gap between when the coronation was announced and when it took place. Israel is roughly the size of New Jersey. It is not a huge empire. Still, without any of our modern technology, it would take time to spread the word that all of Israel was to gather in this northern town for this event.
  - That time gap included the time it would take to travel by an animal to Egypt in order to find Jeroboam and invite him to the event.
  - This means that someone living in Israel was aware of the prophecy that Jeroboam would be the next king of most of Israel and he took the initiative to go find this man and bring him back to Israel for the coronation. Maybe it was the prophet who first told Jeroboam the news in the last chapter. Whoever it was, it happened, and Jeroboam wanted to find out if he was going to be the next king, so out of curiosity, he came to the event.
  - The point for you and me is about seeking God and drawing to him to see what is his will for our lives. With that thought in mind, let's continue the story.
6. Verse 3: 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."
- The first thing to notice here is the word "they". In other words it was not just one man who went down to Egypt to go fetch Jeroboam. Word had spread around Israel that this man Jeroboam was anointed by a prophet of God to be the next king as predicted in the last chapter. What is implied here is that Rehoboam, the son of Solomon wasn't a popular man and many in Israel wanted Jeroboam on stand by in case most of Israel did choose to rebel against Rehoboam being king. Even though the actual rebellion has not happened yet, one can see the seeds being put in place just by the fact "they" sent for Jeroboam to be at this event.
  - At this event, the crowd gets to ask Rehoboam a question or at least make a point. That point is, "lower our taxes and we will happily make you our king!" Talk about the idea of nothing in life has changed in thousands of years! People were complaining then and now about the heavy burden of taxation. I assume that also includes giving free time in service to the king as well as money, but the point is the same.
  - Think for a second what this crowd did not ask for. They didn't say, you obey God and we will obey you. They didn't say, go deal with the rebels that came back on the scene because your father turned against God and we'll honor you. They didn't say, you ease up on being obsessed with women, riches and fame like your old man, and then we'll be happy to have you as our king. What they said in effect is, your father's obsession with wanting it all, cost us dearly. We all know that God promised David that a descendant of his would rule forever, but we can't live under all of this heavy taxation and time burden, just so that you can live in ridiculous luxury like your father. Therefore, the battle cry at this time, was in effect, "Ease up on us, and we'll be happy to have you as our king".
  - If you think about it, the smart thing for a politician to say to an angry crowd is, "of course I'll ease up on your burden. I am the king". However, we will quickly discover, that this next king Rehoboam really was a jerk, which is a good summary of his life in one word.
7. Verse 5: Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away.
- Remember how I said that Israel is the size of New Jersey? That means the size of Israel was small enough that many of the residents could travel home and back in three days. Others found places to stay while the king thought about how to react to this question.
  - Know that this king seriously feared a rebellion. That is why the coronation took place in the northern part of Israel to begin with. The truth is he wanted the luxury and lifestyle of his father and not change things. He did what politicians do, and stalled for time.

8. Verse 6: 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."
- a) Either Rehoboam went back to Jerusalem to talk to his father's advisors or more likely the advisors also came to the town of Shechem for the coronation too. None of this happened in five minutes. Rehoboam knew that he wanted the status quo, but he needed to give an answer so that he would be accepted by the Israelites as their king
  - b) Have you ever been in a situation where a person already made up his or her mind what they wanted, but they just wanted someone else to validate their opinion? That's what we have here. Rehoboam was looking for "yes men" to validate what it is he wanted to say in the first place. Therefore Rehoboam started by consulting with people who worked with his father and asked them their advice.
  - c) The advice of Solomon's advisors was in effect, "throw them a bone". Say that you will be nice to them and somehow ease up on their burdens and then the crowd will accept you as the next king. That seems like a wise and logical thing to say and something that most politicians would say in this situation. However, like I said, this is "Rehoboam the jerk", which means he rejected that advice.
  - d) Therefore, Rehoboam next turns to some buddies of his who grew up with him in the king's palace. Their response is the next set of verses.
9. Verse 8: 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.' "
- a) Remember that Rehoboam was looking for "yes men" to give him the answer that he wanted to hear. The point is if Rehoboam was going to be a jerk here, he is going to go all out in that attitude. Their advice was essentially, "You think my father was tough on you, you haven't seen anything yet! Watch me and I'll show you heavy taxation!"
  - b) Rehoboam's attitude was essentially, God told my grandfather David that a descendant of his would be the king forever, therefore you are all stuck with me until whoever that man is does come on the scene. Therefore, I can be as tough as you as I want, deal with it. Like I said, "Rehoboam the jerk" is my perfect title for this man.
  - c) In fact, the original Hebrew maybe more graphic than, "My little finger is thicker than my father's waist" as translated in Verse 10. Let me put this delicately: "My sexual organ is stronger than my father's thigh, so go deal with what I have to say to you."
  - d) Like I have been stating for a page or so, I'm convinced Rehoboam already knew what it was he was going to do. He was just looking for "yes men" to validate his thoughts.
  - e) This leads back to my opening lesson question: Would you rather live under a king who acted like this and made our lives difficult, or live under Jeroboam who we will soon find out rebelled against God? The sad reality is even though we would rather say neither, it is better to live in a place that allows the religious freedom to worship God and deal with the heavy burden of an oppressive leader than it is to deal with a leader that tells us to go worship other gods as Jeroboam will do later in this chapter.
  - f) With that happy thought stated, we are ready to continue this chapter. Keep in mind that Rehoboam had three full days to think about this. It wasn't a rash statement that this king just blurted out. He thought hard about how he should react and came to the conclusion that it is better to have the appearance of being rough and tough as a king who will lead the people than one who gives in to what the people wanted.

10. Verse 12: 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.
- a) Notice the king did have enough tact to not actually repeat the line that can be translated "my sexual organ is more powerful than my father's thigh". Instead he just sticks to being a jerk here and says essentially, "My father was tough on you, but I'll be tougher. Dad did whip you in shape, but my whips will have scorpions on them."
  - b) Again we have a technical term here. There were common whips that were used to hurt the backs of those who didn't cooperate. There were also "tougher whips" where the ends of the whips had hooks on them to tear the flesh. That's the type of beating that Jesus had to deal with by the Romans, to give an example.
  - c) The king wanted to show that he was no wimp and show he was in charge. We're about to discover that this approach didn't work.
  - d) Verse 15 reminds us that all of this was God ordained. Does that mean that God turned Rehoboam into this much of a jerk? The way I view that is that God gives people what it is they want in life. It would be like warning someone, "Don't go down that path in life, because once you start, it will be harder to turn back." As one pastor I heard put it, God likes to grease the road leading to destruction when people choose to rebel against Him.
    - i) That is how and why God hardened the heart of Pharaoh back in the story of the Exodus and that is how I view God's relationship with Rehoboam here.
    - ii) The other related tough question to ask, is why did God ordain Jeroboam to be the first of twenty bad kings of the Northern Kingdom? As we go through the history of that kingdom, not one of those twenty kings ever turned to God. If God knows all things, why did he pick this guy to start that chain? First, it was God's intent to show that even though there were to be two separate kingdoms, both should have honored God as God and worship Him at Jerusalem. The fear of losing power is what caused Jeroboam to tell his people not to go worship at Jerusalem, but I'm getting ahead of the story here.
    - iii) My point to bring out here is simply that even though Rehoboam is a jerk, we'll discover that Jeroboam is no better (and in fact worse) because he chooses to rebel against the God that brought the Israelites there in the first place. With that said, it is time to get back to the story itself.
11. Verse 16: 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.
- a) Remember that all of Israel was gathered at this location called Shechem in the northern part of Israel. Here is where the actual rebellion happened. If you are familiar with your bible, there was a rebellion against King David himself that occurred back in 2nd Samuel Chapter 20. My point is the choice of words used by the Israelites to rebel here against the grandson of David are almost the exact same set of words used against David.
    - i) However, David was a man after God's own heart. God allowed David to stop the rebellion against him. Because Rehoboam was a jerk, God ordained this split in the country to occur at this point in history.
  - b) Now comes the important part: God wants his people to be united in their worship of Him. Jesus himself said that, "How often have I wanted to gather you together as a fowl gathers her children under her wings, but you refused." (Matthew 23:37).

- i) My point here is that God did not want Israel split into two countries. He wanted them united to wait for "the" son of David to come on the scene. The problem is the Israelites did not want to live under the "jerk" and who could blame them?
  - ii) Therefore most of Israel choose to live under the rebel which is symbolic of the desire to rebel against God's will for our lives. Yes the Israelites did desire to not want to be taxed too heavy. That isn't the issue. The issue is willfully choosing to rebel against what God desires for our lives and we'll see in this chapter just how quickly most of Israel as a nation chooses that path. That is the important lesson of this chapter, desiring Gods' will even though it can be a difficult path in life and even if our political leaders, are well, jerks.
  - iii) To put all of this another way, is it better to rule in hell or serve in heaven? The answer to learn from history is it is better to serve in heaven as we will discover over the remaining history of the kingdoms of Israel what is the cost of rebellion.
  - iv) Meanwhile it is time to get back to the story itself.
12. Verse 18: 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.
- a) In case you have forgotten, all of the Israelites are still gathered in Shechem for this big coronation ceremony. Just to prove even more that Rehoboam was a jerk, he now sends out to the crowd the chief tax collector to make his point. Imagine a crowd yelling out to its leader to relieve our tax burden. Then that leader sends out the top tax collector to this crowd. What happens is what one expects to happen when a mob has gathered. The mob needs to take out its anger on someone, so they stone to death that tax collector.
  - b) If you are familiar with the geography of Israel, stones are everywhere. Therefore for the crowd to pick up stones to kill this man was no problem.
  - c) The king witnessed all of this, and was now scared for his own life. Therefore, the king got on his chariot and hurried back to Jerusalem.
  - d) The end of Verse 19 says "this day". That just simply means that the majority of Israelites choose to rebel against Rehoboam at this point in history.
  - e) In the meantime, it is time to talk about Jeroboam who was amongst this crowd.
13. Verse 20: 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.
- a) Apparently, the prophecy that Jeroboam was to be the first king of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel had gotten around. It is as if the crowd has said, "Well, we just kicked out the old king, so who will be the new king instead? Since God ordained this man, let's find him and make him our king."
  - b) Therefore, as God ordained, Jeroboam went from being a servant of Solomon, to one who ran for his life to Egypt, who was called back to come to this ceremony, to one who is just crowned the next king of Israel as predicted. I'm pretty sure Jeroboam was as shocked by this whole chain of events as Rehoboam was who just fled the scene.
  - c) With that said, I need to interrupt this story of palace intrigue, murder and plotting to talk a little about the 12 tribes of Israel. This country was founded based on twelve sons of one man. Each group lived in a separate territory. One of those groups became so small, that it (the tribe of Benjamin) became part of a larger group (tribe of Judah). I state that here so you know why 10 of the 12 tribes left and when it says only the tribe of Judah stayed loyal to Rehoboam, it technically included the tribe of Benjamin. I state that bit of trivia here to explain when it says "Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal", it was actually two of those tribes that were loyal, but those two tribes were in effect one section of Israel.
  - d) I state all of this here, because we are soon getting to a point in the history of Israel where those people no longer lived in the territory of their ancient tribes. OK, back to the story.

14. Verse 21: 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.
- a) Now we are back to Rehoboam the jerk. The next thing we read about this king is that he decides to raise an army to go attack the other ten tribes of Israel. His attitude was if those other ten tribes won't do as I say, I will force them to obey me by raising an army.
  - b) The text implies that the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin (as I just explained) did agree to be a part of this army and 180,000 men were within a short time, ready for war in order to "save the union". Therefore, when you think of the American Civil War, know it was nothing new in terms of that type of idea.
  - c) By the way, by the time we get to Rehoboam's son being in charge, these two tribes raise an army of 400,000 men. (From 2nd Chronicles 13:3). My point here is I don't think the size of the Southern Kingdom grew that much in one generation. The reason the army got so much larger a generation later, is once the King of the North turned from worshipping God to worshipping false gods, the bible says those Israelites who still wanted to worship God moved to the Southern Kingdom (See 2nd Chronicles 11:13-16). What is implied is that the "party animals" who didn't care about God probably moved north.
    - i) The point here is just to show that as the kingdom split, so did the concept of all of the Israelites living within their tribal territory. The split in the kingdom caused those who wanted to worship God move south and what is implied is that those who didn't care about God, moved north. The evidence is the size of the army that was raised by Rehoboam versus the size of the army raised by his son a generation later. I state all of this for two reasons: First is to show that there never were any "lost tribes of Israel" as they left their territorial boundaries around this time.
    - ii) More importantly it shows my key point of this lesson, that it's better to live under the reign of "Rehoboam the jerk" that allowed the worship of God than to desire to live in the land of "Jerusalem the rebel" who choose to rebel against God, as we'll read coming up in this chapter.
    - iii) Now think about what Jesus said about the path to eternal life: "But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." From Matthew 7:14. Now think of "Rehoboam the jerk" making that pathway difficult but still being the right path. Now think of "Jeroboam the rebel" as being symbolic of Jesus related comment in Matthew 7:13 that the "highway to hell is broad and many choose that way". One has to admit there is a similarity to Jesus' thought vs. choosing which country to live in at this point in history for the Israelites.
  - d) Meanwhile while I was making the point about which country we should choose to live under, we left Rehoboam, the king of the Southern Kingdom about to start a war with the king of the north by raising an army of 180,000 men. At this point in the story we will get introduced to a new character, a prophet of God who will speak to Rehoboam.
15. Verse 22: 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.
- a) The one good thing you can say about Rehoboam is that he may have been a jerk, but he still had fear of the true God and was willing to listen to this prophet speak.
  - b) As to this prophet named Shemaiah, we don't know much about his background. What is implied is that he already had a reputation as a prophet or I'm sure Rehoboam wouldn't have made the time to see what this guy has to say.
  - c) If nothing else, you have to give Shemaiah credit for the bravery to tell the king to tell the army to stand down as it is not God's will to have this army fight at this time.

- d) So why did God interfere at this point and have a messenger (prophet) speak to the king? In effect he is letting Rehoboam know that the prophecy made to Jeroboam is true. If you recall from the last lesson God had another prophet tell King Jeroboam back when he was a nobody, that he would be the king over 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel. In essence this new prophet was given King Rehoboam the same message.
  - e) I was thinking about this from the perspective of the average Israelite soldier. I'm willing to bet that they didn't want to have to go to war, especially against other Israelites. With this messenger who had a reputation as a prophet say to all of them through the king that they didn't have to fight was probably a good thing. They also had to digest the idea that the entire of Nation of Israel was now two separate kingdoms. The good news is the king said something like, "Stand down, go home and put away all of our soldier equipment as this prophet of God said no war at this time." So everyone went home in peace.
  - f) Meanwhile up north, King Jeroboam had to focus on the practical aspect of how do I set up my own kingdom? We'll read about that beginning in the next verse.
16. Verse 25: Then Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel.
- a) Now that Israel is two separate countries, one has to think about such things as protection from enemies, where is the capital, and forming a government. In the history of Northern Israel, there were three different capitals, all about seven miles apart. The first one is in a place called Shechem and then apparently it was moved to a place called Peniel.
    - i) In Chapter 16 we will read the capital moves to a place called "Samaria". You may know that in the gospel stories the Pharisee's insulted Jesus by comparing him to Samaritans. That's a reference to the Israelites who lived in this northern kingdom. The reason it was such an insult is because this group gets into idolatry and it will eventually become a mixture of Jews and non-Jewish people.
  - b) All of that background will become helpful as we work our way through the rest of this chapter and the rest of "Kings". Speaking of idolatry, its time to talk about the next verse.
17. Verse 26: 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."
- a) Part of my title for this lesson was "Jeroboam the rebel". It's time to talk about why I gave him that nickname. Here in these verses we read about Jeroboam's fears. He feared that if the Israelites that lived in his northern kingdom traveled to the southern kingdom for the holidays they would abandon him as the king and want Rehoboam as king there.
  - b) Here is the important part: God told Jeroboam in the last chapter that if he would obey the law that God would set up a dynasty for Jeroboam like he did for David. My point is it was not long after that prophecy that already Jeroboam is in fear of losing what he has and is making plans to turn away from God in order to not lose his kingdom.
    - i) I would like you to consider at this point the importance and relevance of getting a direct message from God. Have you ever prayed something like, "I wish that God would give my friend a direct message of His existence?" We wrongly think that if someone got a direct message from God, they would turn toward him. Here is an Israelite who got that message from God, went from being a nobody to becoming a king because of that message and now he is turning from God.
    - ii) My point to learn is that obedience to God does not come from a special revelation of God to us. There has to be a desire on our part to want to worship Him. I'm not saying direct revelations are a bad thing. I believe I have had a few in my own life. My point is if we don't have a heart for God in the first place, all the messages in the world from Him won't make us change. So why did God pick this guy if He knew Jeroboam would rebel? Probably to show us the cost of rebellion.



18. Verse 28: 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.
- a) You know you have gone down the wrong path in life when you start to think, what is it I can do to compromise with what God wants for me? Jeroboam commanded two calves of gold to be made. Most likely, they were made of wood and covered with gold. The king placed one of them in Bethel, which is the most southern point of the northern kingdom and the other one he placed in Dan, which is the most northern point of that kingdom.
  - b) If you are somewhat familiar with your bible, you may know the story from the book of Exodus about when Moses was gone for a long time (40 days) to be with God, Aaron who was Moses' brother led the Israelites into idolatry and made two golden calves. (That is from Exodus Chapter 32.) My point is that if Jeroboam went to "Sunday school", as a kid he should have known that story and not made these two golden calves.
  - c) Let us think about this from the perspective of the average Israelite living in the Northern Kingdom. Why would they worship these golden calves? Yes one can talk about the fact that a common pagan religion of that time involved worship of an ox as a sacred animal. More likely it was to falsely symbolize the idea that just as God lead the Israelites through the wilderness from Egypt to Israel, so these calves were symbolic of God leading them to where they got to today. What King Jeroboam was saying was don't travel all the way to Jerusalem for the holidays. We can just worship God where the golden calves are located.
    - i) From the perspective of the average Israelite living there, they probably thought that this is more convenient than having to travel all the way to Jerusalem. All we have to do is worship God just where we are. After all, God is everywhere, and it is a big hassle to travel to Jerusalem several times a year for holiday celebrations. Besides we are no longer part of that kingdom, so we might as well stay here.
  - d) I'm sure some of you can see where I'm going with this, but let me explain it to make it clear. I recently heard a famous pastor (John MacArthur) give a sermon about something called "Sheilaism". That was about a woman named Sheila who didn't go to any church. She said she believes in God but she made up her own rules about what she could do and could not do in order to be pleasing to God. In effect, the Israelites living in the Northern kingdom of Israel have just started their own version of "Sheilaism". They thought we can worship God any old way we want to and we don't have to obey what He commanded us to do through the bible. A good sign one is in trouble with God is when we think we can worship Him any old way we want to.
  - e) OK you might say at this point, I don't do "Sheilaism". I go to a local church and I believe that Jesus died for my sins. John you are preaching to the choir here. Yes we get the fact that the Israelites living in this Northern Kingdom were turning from God, but how does that affect my life? The reason to preach against "Sheilaism" which is essentially the idea of worshipping God any old way we want to, is the constant danger of thinking that "I am an exception to the rule. I can compromise with God's rules a little. After all, I know that I am forgiven of all the sins I commit no matter what I do." While that is true, it does not excuse a lack of obedience. If I had to pick one word to describe what living the Christian life is all about, I would chose the word "slavery". It is about doing what God desires we do at any moment and not doing our will. To live that way requires regular time in both prayer and His word to discern what it is He desires of us today. As I like to say, once we do commit to living that way and pray for His will, then we do what we want, assuming it is not sinful. We trust that He is guiding us and we seek His glory in all that we do.
    - i) To put it simply, all of us have a limited time to live on earth. None of us know how long that is or when it will end. Now ask how can we use that time for His glory. The rest is up to Him to guide us and provide the power to do His will.

- f) OK, while I was lecturing each of us about focusing the most valuable asset we have, our time in service for Him, the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom were now starting their own version of "Sheilatism". Yes, that would have been a good alternative title for my lesson, but it doesn't describe life in the Southern Kingdom, just the rebellion of both the king of the North and the Northern kingdom at this point in history.
- i) The point is the Israelites living up there started to look to these golden calves as being symbolic of God in their lives. They started worshipping the calves.
  - ii) As to what specific sin did they commit, one of the Ten Commandments is to not make any sort of physical image or idol out of God. (See Exodus 20:4 and 20:23.) Why is that one of the commandments? The short version is people will start to look at that idol for blessings as opposed to looking up to heaven for God to help us through our lives. A modern equivalent might be a person who keeps a statue of the Virgin Mary on their car dashboard or a cross hanging from their rear view mirror of that car. Having some sort of symbol to remind us to keep our focus on God is a good thing. Trusting in that symbol for good luck is the problem.
- g) To finish this thought, why was it so important for God to have all of the Israelites travel to Jerusalem every year for a set of holidays? The same way God want us to gather as a church body regularly. Christianity is never meant to be a "billion solo efforts for God". He desires teamwork. He desires accountability to each other. He desires that we go and encourage each other to stick to our commitment to Him. He desires that we spend time with other believers to learn about Him, what He is currently doing in our community and our world and remind each other of His presence in our lives. So does this mean I'm in trouble if I miss church this Sunday? As of the date I'm writing this, I'm going to be out of town this weekend for a wedding. The issue is about whether or not we are committed to gather together with other believers and worship Him the way He desires. It is about being with other believers again to learn, be accountable to others and encourage others to draw close to Him.
- i) Know that I consider the most important time at church is the ten minutes before and after a service. That's when I can spend a few moments encouraging other believers. Sometimes even a friendly hello to someone we don't know may help them get through their own week. I like to pray before I go to church that I could be helpful to someone some way today at that service. It has been amazing how God has answered that prayer through the years.
- h) While I was explaining how we can be of service for others, the Israelites living under King Jeroboam were still in rebellion. Let's read onward:
19. Verse 31: Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites.
- a) The short version here is that if setting up the two golden calves was not bad enough in defiance of what God wanted all the Israelites to do, the king also set up places of worship in "high places". Think of it traveling up to a local hilltop to worship God. In effect, this is "Sheilatism" as people are worshipping God any way they want to.
  - b) But if Jeroboam is the king, wasn't it then a crime to go travel to the Southern Kingdom to go worship God as He desired and go live under "Rehoboam the jerk?" Yes it was. That's why my opening point in this lesson that it is better to live under the rule of a jerk than it is to live under the rule of a rebel against God's desire for our lives.
  - c) Speaking of moving, let me talk about the Levites here. When God set up the territory for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, God made an exception for the tribe of Levites. God said to them in effect, "You are to be my priests for all the Israelites" and therefore, I want you to scatter all through Israel and be my witnesses to all of them. Think of the Levites as being part of our role as Christians as we teach others about Him and help others to grow in our trust in Him. The point here is Jeroboam picked non-Levites to be the priests.

- d) So what happened to the Levites themselves? Most likely they moved south to go live in the Southern Kingdom. As I explained earlier in the lesson, this is the point in history that not all the Israelites lived in the territory assigned to their tribes. Most likely the Levites moved south along with other Israelites who wanted to worship God. That's stated in 2nd Chronicles Chapter 11, Verses 13-16. My point is to show that there were no "lost tribes of Israel" as Israelites abandoned their tribal lands in order to worship God as He desired.
- i) As I stated in this lesson earlier, I also suspect that Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom who didn't want to deal with the high taxes of King Rehoboam the jerk, moved to the Northern Kingdom where they could pay less tax and worship God any old way they wanted to. Since I've beaten that point to death, we can now go and finish this lesson.
20. Verse 32: 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.
- a) I stated earlier that God required all of the Jewish people to travel to Jerusalem several times per year for specific holidays. One of those holidays was every fall. We know that set of holidays today as "Tabernacles and the Day of Atonement". Even if you don't know anything about Judaism, just know they consider the most important holiday of the year to be the "Day of Atonement" the same way a Christian might think of Easter Sunday as being the most important holiday of the year. Personally, I think of every Sunday as a time to remember the resurrection, but I'm getting off topic.
- b) The point here is the fall is when the Israelites think of traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate a set of holidays that ran together. The King of the Northern Kingdom thought, hey this is when everyone around here thinks of traveling. Therefore, let me set up my own set of rituals that has a lot of similarity to the rituals performed in Jerusalem and that way the people will not miss traveling there every year.
- c) The bottom line is the king set up his own set of priests, his own set of rituals and desired his people worship to the two golden calves. If you want to know why I refer to this king as "Jeroboam the rebel" against God, one can see that just from reading this paragraph.
- d) Oh, let me explain the "15th of the month". The Jewish calendar is based on a lunar cycle. The one night of that cycle where there is no moonlight is the first day of the cycle. That means the half way point of the cycle is a full moon. The way people knew it was time to go to this ritual was the first full moon of this month. Remember that people didn't have wall calendars to mark time. They knew it was fall by the weather. They knew when the 15th day of the lunar cycle came by the full moon. That is how the Israelites living there at that time knew when it was time to go perform this ritual.
- e) A quick note about the "Samaritans". When you read in the gospels about the Samaritans, think of those who lived in this northern kingdom. Their believe in God became a mixture of things the bible taught with traditions that started at the time of King Jeroboam. That is why the Samaritans were hated by the Jewish people living in Jerusalem when Jesus was there. The Samaritans were considered "half breeds" and not loyal to God's desires. The fact that Jesus and the apostles reached out to this group was a sign of the power of God taking over our lives being greater than rituals and traditions passed on by others.
- f) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. However, we're not living in Israel several thousand years ago. Assume we go to church pretty regularly and we do desire that God rules over our lives. Why should I care about any of this ancient history? What I would like us to ponder as we finish this lesson is how are we like "Jeroboam the rebel?" What aspects of our lives are still rebelling against God's desire for us?

- g) I could go on from there, but I think that is enough guilt for one lesson. The main point to get out of this lesson is that it is better to live under "Rehoboam the jerk" who allows us to use our lives to make a difference for God than to live under "Jeroboam the rebel" who wants us to worship God any old way we feel like it. To say all of this another way, God desires obedience and not "Sheilaism" for our lives as believers.
  - h) Before I finish, let me address those who don't have the option of choosing whether or not to live under a rebel or under a jerk? Suppose we are living in a place that does not allow the open worship of Jesus and we can't leave? Realize that more Christians have died for their faith in the last hundred years than any time in human history. My point is that for many people, they don't get this choice and have to do the best they can living under the situation they are stuck in. As I remind my children we can't always change our situation, but we are always in control of our attitude over our situation. That means we should ask God to give us the strength and the power to deal with our situation whether we are stuck with a jerk and/or a rebel in our lives for the moment. The God that loves us cares for us and wants us to use our lives to make a difference for him no matter what the situation we have to face in our lives. That's what is to be taken away from this story of two kings of which neither is very desirable. With that said, it's time for the closing prayer.
21. Father, give us the strength and power to be a good witness for You no matter what it is we have to deal with in our lives. Help us to remember for our fellow believers who are forced to live in a situation where they are living under the rule of a "jerk or a rebel". Help us to remember that the most valuable thing we own is our time and may we use it for Your glory in all that we do. Also, help us not to be a "jerk or a rebel" to others around us so that again, we can be a good witness for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.