

A House Divided
1 Kings 12, 13:33-34
Small Group Guide

Opening Icebreaker Question:

- How do you make big decisions? Any tips for ensuring a good one?

INTRODUCTION: We're coming back into our sermon series, "The Big Story," after taking two weeks off for the holidays. We left off 3 weeks ago with Solomon, who by external measures of the day, seemed to be the perfect king, but who ultimately led his people away from God. The events that we're looking at today in 1 Kings are here to answer a very important question: *How is it that a nation with such promise, the chosen people of God, ended up divided and on a path toward destruction?*

When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, is about to be "inaugurated," trouble emerges. A delegation of leaders from all the tribes of Israel comes to him, and they say, in 12:4, "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."

Before you get into 1 Kings 12, read Jeremiah 23:1-4.

1. Based on these words, what were God's expectations of the kings of Israel? What metaphor was to determine their approach to their people? (Answer: shepherds).
2. Jeremiah is writing a couple hundred years after today's story. How would you summarize his assessment of how well the kings did at being shepherd-kings?

TAKE TURNS READING 1 Kings 12:5-24 to see Rehoboam's decision and its consequences.

1. What is the essence of the elder advisors' advice? How would you summarize it?
2. What is the essence of his peers' advice? How would you summarize it?
3. So, where did Rehoboam go wrong? What motivation do you think lies behind his decision to take this course of action toward his people?
4. Rehoboam's consequence for his poor decision was to lose 11/12ths of his nation. However, when he decides to fight, he is told not to do so because God is in these consequences.
 - a. How would you feel if you were Rehoboam at this point?
 - b. For us, how can we discern when life events are God's ordained consequences for our decisions rather than undeserved trials?

Enter Jeroboam. Jeroboam was not in any royal bloodline. Before Solomon died (Ch. 11), God had sent a prophet named Ahijah to Jeroboam with a message. He said, "Because Solomon has encouraged idol worship, I'm going to tear the nation away from his descendants and give them to you. Because I made a promise to David, I'll let his grandson keep one tribe, Judah. But you're going to be king of the rest of the nation." **Read God's words to Jeroboam, in 1 Kings 11:37-38.**

5. Describe the expectations God has for Jeroboam.
6. How important is the Bible (which consists of God's decrees) to you? How do you go about knowing it and living by it? Discuss.
7. What are all the promises God provides Jeroboam here? Why do you think God offers these extravagant blessings to Jeroboam?

Now, TAKE TURNS READING 1 Kings 12:25-33; 13:33-34.

8. Where did Jeroboam go wrong? What motivation do you think is behind his bad decision?
9. Pastor Josh said that both kings “**were out to make a name for themselves, rather than trusting in God’s promises.**” Both sought to build up their own identity rather than accept the identity and rewards that God had promised them.
 - a. Other than God, where else are you tempted to find your identity (Josh mentioned a romantic partner, attempts to control our own life, power, beauty, money, etc.)?
 - b. How might the practices of Bible reading/study, prayer, and small group fellowship find our identities in what God says?
10. What allusions do you see in this story to the events in Exodus 32? Do you think that this story was intentionally framed in this way? If so, why?
 - a. The Exodus 32 incident culminates with God’s revelation of his character to Moses, in Exodus 34:5-7. How do you see God’s character, as described there, showing up here in Kings?
11. Josh noted that both kings in this story heeded bad advice. What people in your life have the most influence over you? Where do you turn for your advice?
 - a. How do you find people who provide good advice and/or how do you avoid bad advice givers?
 - b. How do we go about being godly advice-givers in our relationships?
12. The kings were supposed to be God’s Shepherds of his people. God promised, through Ezekiel (37:24) to send a climactic, good shepherd to rule over his people. **Read** Jesus’ words in John 10:11 in light of this promise.
 - a. Knowing the history of Israel, what is the full weight of Jesus’ claim here?
 - b. What sets apart Jesus from the previous “shepherds?”
 - c. How does Jesus offer us a status and identity that free us from having to make a name for ourselves? If you need a reminder, **read** Ephesians 1:1-14.
 - d. How does the “motivational structure of our hearts” change when we trust in Jesus instead of our own devices? How does this motivation apply to our decisions and struggles?
13. **Share and Pray:** Among our prayer requests, let’s pray that God will reveal misaligned motivations and identities. Let’s also pray that through faithful prayer, Bible reading, and humble seeking of wise advice we will be mindful of the status he gives us.