

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The people go to Shechem to make Rehoboam king, and send for Jeroboam out of Egypt, who with the heads of the tribes, requests relief from the heavy burdens laid on them by Solomon, 1 Kings 12:1-4. He requires three days to consider their petition, 1 Kings 12:5. He rejects the counsel of the elders, who served his father, and follows that of young men, and returns the people a provoking answer, 1 Kings 12:6-15. The people therefore renounce the family of David, stone to death Adoram, who came to receive their tribute, and make Jeroboam king; none cleaving to Rehoboam but the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, 1 Kings 12:16-20. Rehoboam comes to Jerusalem, and assembles all the fighting men of Judah and Benjamin, and finds the number to be one hundred and eighty thousand; and with these he purposes to reduce the men of Israel to his allegiance, but is forbidden by the Prophet Shemaiah, 1 Kings 12:21-24. Jeroboam builds Shechem in Mount Ephraim and Penuel, 1 Kings 12:25. And lest the people should be drawn away from their allegiance to him by going up to Jerusalem to worship, he makes two golden calves, and sets them up, one in Dan, the other in Beth-el, and the people worship them, 1 Kings 12:26-30. He makes priests of the lowest of the people, and establishes the fifteenth day of the eighth month as a feast to his new gods; makes offerings, and burns incense, 1 Kings 12:31-33.

Verse 1

Rehoboam went to Shechem - Rehoboam was probably the only son of Solomon; for although he had a thousand wives, he had not the blessing of a numerous offspring; and although he was the wisest of men himself, his son was a poor, unprincipled fool. Had Solomon kept himself within reasonable bounds in matrimonial affairs, he would probably have had more children; and such as would have had common sense enough to discern the delicacy of their situation, and rule according to reason and religion.

Verse 4

The grievous service - and - heavy yoke - They seem here to complain of two things - excessively laborious service, and a heavy taxation. At first it is supposed Solomon employed no Israelite in drudgery: afterwards, when he forsook the God of compassion, he seems to have used them as slaves, and to have revived the Egyptian bondage.

Verse 7

If thou wilt be a servant unto this people - This is a constitutional idea of a king: he is the servant, but not the slave of his people; every regal act of a just king is an act of service to the state. The king is not only the fountain of law and justice; but as he has the appointment of all officers and judges, consequently he is the executor of the laws; and all justice is administered in his name. Properly speaking, a good and constitutional king is the servant of his people; and in being such he is their father and their king.

They will be thy servants for ever - The way to insure the obedience of the people is to hold the reins of empire with a steady and impartial hand; let the people see that the king lives for them, and not for himself; and they will obey, love, and defend him. The state is maintained on the part of the ruler and the ruled by mutual acts of service and benevolence. A good king has no self-interest; and such a king will ever have obedient and loving subjects. The haughty, proud tyrant will have a suspicious and jealous people, hourly ripening for revolt. The king is made for the people, not the people for the king. Let every potentate wisely consider this; and let every subject know that the heaviest cares rest on the heart, and the heaviest responsibility rests on the head, of the king. Let them therefore, under his government, fashion themselves as obedient children; acknowledge him their head; and duly consider whose authority he has; that they may love, honor and obey him. Happy are the people who have such a king; safe is the king who has such a people.

Verse 10

And the young men that were grown up with him - It was a custom in different countries to educate with the heir to the throne young noblemen of nearly the same age. This, as Calmet observes, answered two great and important ends: -

1.It excited the prince to emulation; that he might, as far as possible, surpass in all manly exercises, and in all acts of prudence and virtue, those whom one day he was to surpass in the elevation and dignity of his station.

2.That he might acquire a correct knowledge of the disposition and views of those who were likely to be, under him, the highest officers of the state; and consequently, know the better how to trust and employ them. The old counsellors Rehoboam did not know; with the young nobility he had been familiar.

My little finger shall be thicker - A proverbial mode of expression: “My little finger is thicker than my father’s thigh.” As much as the thigh surpasses the little finger in thickness, so much does my power exceed that of my father; and the use that I shall make of it, to employ and tax you, shall be in proportion.

Verse 11

Chastise you with scorpions - Should you rebel, or become disaffected, my father’s whip shall be a scorpion in my hand. His was chastisement, mine shall be punishment. St. Isidore, and after him Calmet and others, assert that the scorpion was a sort of severe whip, the lashes of which were armed with iron points, that sunk into and tore the flesh. We know that the scorpion was a military engine among the Romans for shooting arrows, which, being poisoned, were likened to the scorpion’s sting, and the wound it inflicted.

Verse 15

The cause was from the Lord - God left him to himself, and did not incline his heart to follow the counsel of the wise men. This is making the best of our present version; but if we come to inquire into the meaning of the Cause of all this confusion and anarchy, we shall find it was Rehoboam’s folly, cruelty, and despotic tyranny: and was this from the Lord? But does the text speak this bad doctrine? No: it says *סִבְבָּה* (sibbah), the Revolution, was from the Lord. This is consistent with all the declarations which went before. God stirred up the people to revolt from a man who had neither skill nor humanity to govern them. We had such a *סִבְבָּה* revolution in these nations in 1688; and, thank God, we have never since needed another. None of our ancient translations understood the word as our present version does: they have it either the Turning Away was from the Lord, or it was the Lord’s Ordinance; viz., that they should turn away from this foolish king.

Verse 16

So Israel departed unto their tents - That is, the ten tribes withdrew their allegiance from Rehoboam; only Judah and Benjamin, frequently reckoned one tribe, remaining with him.

Verse 18

King Rehoboam sent Adoram - As this was the person who was superintendent over the tribute, he was probably sent to collect the ordinary taxes; but the people, indignant at the master who had given them such a brutish answer, stoned the servant to death. The sending of Adoram to collect the taxes, when the public mind was in such a state of fermentation, was another proof of Rehoboam’s folly and incapacity to govern.

Verse 20

Made him king over all Israel - What is called Israel here, was ten-twelfths of the whole nation; and had they a right to call another person to the throne? They had not, - they had neither legal nor constitutional right. Jeroboam was not of the blood royal; he had no affinity to the kingdom. Nothing could justify this act, but the just judgment of God. God thus punished a disobedient and gainsaying people; and especially Solomon’s family, whose sins against the Lord were of no ordinary magnitude.

Verse 24

For this thing is from me - That is, the separation of the ten tribes from the house of David.

They - returned to depart - This was great deference, both in Rehoboam and his officers, to relinquish, at the demand of the prophet, a war which they thought they had good grounds to undertake. The remnant of the people heard the Divine command gratefully, for the mass of mankind are averse from war. No nations would ever rise up against each other, were they not instigated to it or compelled by the rulers.

Verse 27

And they shall kill me - He found he had little cause to trust this fickle people; though they had declared for him it was more from caprice, desire of change, and novelty, than from any regular and praiseworthy principle.

Verse 28

Made two calves of gold - He invented a political religion, instituted feasts in his own times different from those appointed by the Lord, gave the people certain objects of devotion, and pretended to think it would be both inconvenient and oppressive to them to have to go up to Jerusalem to worship. This was not the last time that religion was made a state engine to serve political purposes. It is strange that in pointing out his calves to the people, he should use the same words that Aaron used when he made the golden calf in the wilderness, when they must have heard what terrible judgments fell upon their forefathers for this idolatry.

Verse 29

One in Beth-el, and the other - in Dan - One at the southern and the other at the northern extremity of the land.

Solomon's idolatry had prepared the people for Jeroboam's abominations!

Verse 31

A house of high places - A temple of temples; he had many high places in the land, and to imitate the temple at Jerusalem, he made one chief over all the rest, where he established a priesthood of his own ordination. Probably a place of separate appointment, where different idols were set up and worshipped; so it was a sort of pantheon.

Made priests of the lowest of the people - He took the people indifferently as they came, and made them priests, till he had enough, without troubling himself whether they were of the family of Aaron or the house of Levi, or not. Any priests would do well enough for such gods. But those whom he took seem to have been worthless, good-for-nothing fellows, who had neither piety nor good sense. Probably the sons of Levi had grace enough to refuse to sanction this new priesthood and idolatrous worship.

Verse 32

Ordained a feast - The Jews held their feast of tabernacles on the fifteenth day of the seventh month; Jeroboam, who would meet the prejudices of the people as far as he could, appointed a similar feast on the fifteenth of the eighth month; thus appearing to hold the thing while he subverted the ordinance.

Verse 33

He offered upon the altar - Jeroboam probably performed the functions of high priest himself, that he might in his own person condense the civil and ecclesiastical power.