

The King Who Had a Big Mouth

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We have a tendency to think of Solomon, David's son, as a wise king. And for much of his life, he was. But during the time when he was king, he married many women—it was a common part of politics in the ancient world, when kings made agreements with each other—and most of Solomon's wives didn't worship the Lord. So, as he got older, he stopped worshipping God as he did when he was younger.

Needless to say, this caused both him and his family to make a lot of unwise decisions that eventually caused God to punish them. In fact, one of Solomon's children made a very bad choice that shaped Israel's history for centuries.

Today's story is about him, and it comes from 1 Kings 11:1-12:24 and 14:21-31.

Despite being married to Pharaoh's daughter,
Solomon also took wives from the nations around him.
He married women from Moab and Ammon,
Edom and Sidon,
even as far away as the land of the Hittites.
Despite God's command to avoid doing so
because such marriages would lead him into idol worship,
Solomon took more and more foreign wives.
Eventually he had nearly a thousand of them!
I can't imagine how he found enough time to be with them all—
but he was with them enough that God's word came true
and Solomon stopped worshipping God.
To keep his wives happy, he built temples and shrines for their false gods,
even the ones God hated the most,
like Ashtoreth and Molech,
to whom children were sacrificed.

Because of his disobedience, God punished Solomon.
Solomon was used to being at peace with the nations around him,
so God caused enemies to rise against him.
No matter how Solomon tried,
he was unable to kill them or even catch them.
Still, even after all this,
Solomon refused to turn back to God and worship only Him.

So God decided to take his kingdom away from him.
But because He had promised David, through the prophet Nathan,
that He would give David an everlasting kingdom
and that his descendants would always rule—
a promise that will ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus—
because of that promise
God also decided not to take the kingdom while Solomon was king
(who was, at that time, David's only son).
Instead, He would take the kingdom away from Solomon's son.

And yet, even as He did so, because of His promise to David,
God let Solomon's son remain a king—
but He made sure his kingdom was a small one.

Solomon's son was named Rehoboam.
His mother was Naamah, an Ammonite woman,
and he didn't worship the Lord either.

After Solomon died,
Rehoboam went to the town of Shechem
and all of the tribes of Israel met him there,
intending to make him their new king.
The tribal leaders said to Rehoboam,
"Your father was a hard taskmaster.
If you won't force us to do as much hard work as he did,
and if you won't demand such high taxes from us,
we will gladly be your loyal subjects."

Rehoboam said,
"Give me three days to think about it and I will give you my answer."

So he went in to Solomon's advisors,
older men with a knowledge of politics,
and asked their advice. They said,
"If you are willing to compromise and give them some of what they want,
you will be a very popular king and the people will love you."

But Rehoboam didn't listen to them.
Instead, he went to the young men he grew up with
and asked if he should lighten the people's burdens. They said,
"Why should complainers like them tell a king what to do?
Tell them that your little finger is thicker than your father's waist!
Tell them your father went too easy on them.
Tell them that where your father used a whip, you will use scorpions!"

So after three days, Rehoboam met with the tribal leaders
and told them exactly what his young friends told him to say
and ignored all the leaders' attempts to reason with him.
This was God's doing, of course. This was His punishment for Solomon's sin.

So the people of Israel did just what you would expect. They said,
"Down with David and his dynasty!
We want nothing to do with you, Rehoboam!
We'll find someone else to rule over us!"

On that day all of the tribes of Israel deserted him
except the people of Judah—where Rehoboam's capital, Jerusalem, was.
Only they remained as his subjects.

Of course Rehoboam had no intention of letting the people just walk away.
He sent Adoniram, the head of his labor force,
after them to restore order.

But the Israelites stoned Adoniram to death
and it frightened Rehoboam so badly
that he ran back to safety in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the Israelites learned that
Solomon's enemy Jeroboam had returned from exile—
so they made *him* their king.

And from that point on, there were two separate kingdoms,
the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel.

And the two kingdoms didn't get along at all.

Rehoboam became king of Judah at 41 years old
and he reigned for 17 years.
While he was king, the people of Judah didn't obey God;
they worshipped idols and they lived in constant fear of their enemies.
It was very different from when young King Solomon followed God.

When the Bible says that reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom,
it isn't just an old proverb.
When you don't worship God, you can't have true wisdom.
Without true wisdom, people make bad—sometimes fatal—mistakes.

King Rehoboam learned that the hard way.