



January 10, 2016  
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## *The Story: A Kingdom Torn in Two* 1 Kings 12-17

Happy New Year! And welcome to Chapel Hill as we continue our journey through *The Story*. Last week, Ellis preached on the *King Who Had it All*. Who was that? Solomon! How many read chapter 13? Solomon was the wisest man ever to live. During his reign, Israel grew strong and wealthy. He built chariot cities, he grew his army and he accumulated so much wealth that he literally used gold to wallpaper his buildings. His crowning accomplishment was this: the Jerusalem temple. This was literally the Golden Age of Israel. Unfortunately, and tragically, everything is about to go off the rails!

I'm going to share a little secret with you: I'm a big Miss Universe fan. I enjoy watching the Masters and the Super Bowl. But for me, the media event of the year is the Miss Universe Pageant. Okay, not really... couldn't care less. But this year's Miss Universe pageant got my attention. Steve Harvey was the host and it was down to the final two contestants, Miss Columbia and Miss Philippines. Harvey steps up, and with typical fanfare announces that the new Miss Universe is... Miss Columbia! The crowd goes wild. Miss Columbia is crowned; she receives her sash; she waves and cries... and then watch what happens next. [video clip]

Isn't that awful? Who's supposed to get the crown? Who will reign as the next Miss Universe? It is embarrassing, and it is such a wonderful gift to a preacher, because this week in the Story, after Solomon dies, there is a power struggle between two men. Both want to wear the crown and the result? Israel is torn in two and never reunited. It would be like our Civil War ending with Massachusetts and Rhode Island on one side and all the rest of the states on the other. It was a permanent rending of the chosen people that God was going to use to bless the whole world. Remember the call of Abraham. So how did this embarrassing, tragic division occur?

Two words: bad advice. Three kings listen to bad advice, and all of God's people pay the price... and it started with Solomon. It was his fault! Solomon the Wise. Solomon the Powerful. Solomon the Rich. Well near the end of his life, he became Solomon the Stupid. And the whole nation suffered. Let's back up and review what happens when God's people listen to bad advice.

1 Kings 11:

<sup>1</sup>King Solomon loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—

Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. <sup>2</sup>They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.” Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. <sup>3</sup>He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

<sup>4</sup>As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. <sup>5</sup>He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup>So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done...

<sup>11</sup>So the LORD said to Solomon, “Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.

If ever there was an example of someone who started strong and stumbled at the finish line, it was Solomon. How is it possible that this wise man—this wealthy, powerful, God-blessed king who built Israel into a powerhouse—could he fail so epically when the finish line was in sight? Bad advice—Solomon’s downfall began when he started listening to his pagan wives. Solomon once wrote, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Proverbs 13:20 It is ironic that the man who wrote such things would be seduced by such awful advice.

There was a reason God warned his people not to intermarry with pagans. God knew how destructive it was to have the person next to you in bed whispering, “Why do you follow Yahweh? He’s so much less powerful than MY god! You don’t have to give Yahweh up. But what harm would there be in building a little temple to my god? If you really loved me, you’d do this for me.” Imagine hearing that 700 times from 700 different wives! The surrounding nations worshiped fertility gods. Their “temples” were places of prostitution. Their “idols”—like the Asherah poles—were graphic phallic symbols. And these idolatrous complexes were built on the high places (remember that phrase)—the hilltops—so that everywhere you turned, you could look up and see a reminder of false gods.

Verse 4 of our text is tragic: <sup>4</sup>As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God.” There is a reason Apostle Paul later warned Christians not to be unequally yoked. In other words, not to marry an unbeliever, not to date an unbeliever, not to go into business with an unbeliever. Why? Because unbelievers do not share your basic convictions about what it means to live for God. They come at life from a different perspective. They worship other things. The advice they give, the things they

whisper will not lead you toward a deeper devotion to Jesus. They will turn your heart and lead you into idolatry.

This is the bad advice of the unbeliever. If you can, avoid it or flee it. If you can't, pray that God will redeem that relationship—give you the courage to hear his voice, to seek godly counsel, to be the one doing the influencing—instead of the one being influenced toward ruin. But beware. Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, could not handle the pressure. He listened to the bad advice of unbelievers and in the end it destroyed him and his kingdom. But he wasn't the only one. Solomon taught his son how to listen to bad advice, too.

Rehoboam, we'll call him Reo. Solomon wanted Reo to take the throne, but God had someone else in mind: Jeroboam. (We'll call him Jerry.) Solomon tried to kill Jerry so he ran off to Egypt. But when Solomon died, everyone gathered at Shechem to crown Reo, but he faced some issues. Solomon's Golden Age was tarnished. He built his kingdom on the backs of the people. He taxed them brutally; he conscripted tens of thousands to forced labor. Solomon was powerful enough to hold it all together, but by the time he died, the people were exhausted and mad. So when it was Reo's turn, he had the chance to set things right—if only he would listen to good advice. He didn't. Listen:

<sup>1</sup>Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king. <sup>2</sup>When Jeroboam heard this, he returned from Egypt. <sup>3</sup>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."

<sup>5</sup>Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away. <sup>6</sup>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."

<sup>8</sup>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?... <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.'"

From that day forward, Israel was divided in two: Judah and little Bethlehem to the south (called Judah, from which we get the word "Jews") and the other ten tribes to the north called "Israel." God's chosen people, torn in two, because of bad advice!

What a missed opportunity! If Reo had only listened to the wisdom of his seasoned counselors: "Rehoboam, these people want to love you; they want to serve you. If you will just back off a little—give some tax relief, just love and serve them—they will serve you forever." What great advice! But it didn't suit Reo, so he went looking for advice that did suit him. Where'd he find it? From his high school skateboarding buddies. He asked them, "Should I follow the advice of those geezers who tell me to be merciful to my people?" Their response: "No way, dude. Double down! This is your moment. You've got the power. You're the king. Show them who's boss!" Solomon was derailed by bad advice from the unbelieving. Reo was derailed by bad advice from the inexperienced.

It is a shame our culture does not value the wisdom of elders. One of our daughter's seminary friends, a young woman from India, was invited to interview with a church for a mentorship, something she really wanted. But the interview went badly and she didn't know what to do. My wife Cyndi happened to visit Rachel and ended up talking with this woman. Cyndi pointed out that the supposed mentor hadn't spoken to her once in the meeting. She asked probing questions and suggested that this might be more slave labor than internship. After Cyndi left, the Indian woman decided to withdraw her application. Rachel said, "Mom, we told her the same things you did, but because you were older, she respected your opinion more than ours."

That is the culture of the Far East. It is not our culture. We are the culture of Rehoboam that dismisses the elderly and chases after the young and trendy. What a waste! When I think of all I have learned from so many of you over our years together... my life and ministry has been enriched and sustained by your wisdom. As a church, we must buck this trend and pass on wisdom to the next generation. And it is happening. The fastest growing demographic in our church is young families. As Cyndi and I work with this group, we hear the same cry from them: we want mentoring! In fact, we will be meeting today with a group of empty-nest couples. Our vision is to pair up mentor couples with younger couples to provide encouragement, friendship and the experience that only years of walking the journey can produce.

Bad advice from the unbelieving... bad advice from the inexperienced... there is one last example of bad advice in this chapter of the Story—the advice given to the king of the new northern nation of Israel, Jereboam. Jerry... remember him? Listen:

I Kings 12

<sup>26</sup>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."

<sup>28</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites.

Jeroboam had a problem. Although ten tribes wanted to follow him, he lacked one important thing: Solomon's temple. And he got nervous. "What if my people miss the temple? They might make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, visit the temple and decide to go back to King Rehoboam. They might even assassinate me!"

Then we read these words: "After seeking advice..." We don't know who gave him this piece of advice...but it was a doozy: "Distract them from the temple. You need to make a golden calf. In fact, make two of them! Franchise! You can have the Golden Arches...err...the golden calf in the north. And the golden calf in the south. Satellite campuses. Make it really convenient for them to worship... something."

If Solomon received the advice of the unbelieving and Reo of the inexperienced, Jerry listened to the Counterfeit. It wasn't convenient to worship Yahweh at the temple. So why not provide a counterfeit god that is more convenient... more accessible Does this sound at all familiar? Do you remember another time when someone suggested that making and worshiping a golden calf might be a good idea? Mt. Sinai... Moses. And do you remember the result? 3,000 of them died that day, and God sent a plague on the rest of them!

Tell me, is there any counterfeit advice in our culture—any voices inviting us to worship a different god, a more convenient god, a more palatable god, a less demanding god? I was in the Christian section of bookstore the other day and saw a book written by an American preacher titled, *The Power of I Am!* I got excited. "I Am" is the English translation of Yahweh, the holy name of God. I thought, "This will be great. A book focused on the power of Yahweh unleashed in our lives"—until I turned to the back cover and discovered that this was a book about me... about the power that comes from bragging on myself: "I am talented, I am blessed, I am healthy, I am strong..." Some of you who might like this book get mad at me for saying this, but the theology that ascribes power to my own self-affirmation is counterfeit. It is bad advice!

There's more. The counterfeit voice that says, "You don't need church. You can worship by listening to Christian CDs in your car on the way to... wherever." The counterfeit voice that says, "This disciple-making focus is too hard. It asks too much of you." The counterfeit voice that says, "You deserve to be happy. This marriage isn't making you happy. Find another one." We are surrounded by counterfeit voices that tell us our worship of God should be convenient, our lives should always be happy and our discipleship should be undemanding. And yet we

serve a Jesus who said, "If anyone would be my disciple he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me!"

Three kings, three pieces of bad advice, one common, catastrophic outcome. Every person here needs the counsel of Spirit-filled, seasoned, followers of Jesus. It is one of the reasons that community, church and LifeGroups are essential. The ones who walk alone, or who pick and choose only the advice they want to hear, are headed for disaster.

Let me end this message with a quote from Solomon... in his better days:  
"Where there is no guidance the people fall. But in abundance of counselors, there is victory." Proverbs 11:14