



“But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought with him, that stood before him,” II Chronicles 10:8.

A Nation Falls

Lesson Subject: To warn of the consequences of ignoring the counsel of the wise.

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It is sad to see a failure. Failure is always such a tragedy. You have known someone who failed in his personal life. You have known families that failed. You have read in history that nations fell. Today's study deals with the most tragic of all failures—the collapse of a nation.

This study aims “to warn of the consequences of ignoring the counsel of the wise.” It should teach each reader to be open for sound advice from his peers. No one has a “corner on the market” in wisdom. Each of us can learn from another. To be open for sound counsel is a sign of wisdom.

God has set out a rule by which nations live or die. The prophet Isaiah expressed it this way, **“If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured by the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,”** 1:19,20. Such a gracious promise, accompanied by such a solemn warning, should be heard and heeded by every wise person.

The date of the events of today's study was about 931 B. C. Solomon had ended his forty-year reign over the Hebrews. He was the third king since a monarchy was instituted among them—Saul, David, Solomon. Each of the three ruled for forty years. After 120 years, the united kingdom of the Hebrews came to an end. The circumstances which led to the division of the nation are our subject of study today. After the events in today's study there were two Hebrew nations: a northern kingdom of ten tribes called Israel and

a southern kingdom of two tribes called Judah. Through the study, watch for principles which apply to your life and nation.

I. EXTRAVAGANT GOVERNMENT

Much of the blame for the division of the Hebrews kingdom should be laid at the feet of King Solomon. His reign was marked by such extravagance that the nation was pushed to the brink of collapse before his death. Examine some of the excesses which made the nation ripe for division and turmoil.

The defense budget of Solomon's administration was excessive. David had subdued the nations round about Israel. Solomon's reign was one of peace and tranquility. There was no need for him to raise a great army or spend large sums of money on defense. Perhaps Solomon took pride in military affairs. At whatever cost, he built at least nine cities and made them citadels of defense for his nation. His cavalry alone included 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, I Kings 10:26. Those were stationed in chariot cities over the land. Many were quartered in Jerusalem to be near the king. It took no fewer than 4,000 stalls for the horses, plus quarters for the horsemen, II Chronicles 9:25. The Hebrews did not raise horses. They had to be imported from Egypt at a huge sum. The buildings to house them had to be provided plus the expense of feeding them daily. The military budget made a great demand upon Solomon's government.

The building enterprises of Solomon's administration were excessive. Solomon came to the throne under a solemn command from his father David to build a temple for God in Jerusalem. For many years David had been collecting gold, silver, iron, precious stones, and wood to use in the construction. It appears, however, that Solomon levied a special tax to pay for the temple construction (I Kings 9:15). He used the wealth accumulated by David to add to "the treasures of the house of the Lord," I Kings 7:51. That brought a great financial burden upon the nation. The temple of the Lord made lavish use of gold, silver, brass, and costly stones. David had accumulated many millions of dollars from spoils of war and dedicated them to the project. If they were not used, the burden must have been great.

There was another of Solomon's building projects which was very costly. It took seven years to build the temple, but it took thirteen years to build Solomon's palace! One house was called "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (probably because cedar from Lebanon was used in it). It was one hundred fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide. The roof was supported by forty-five pillars which were forty-five feet tall. The account of the house

makes three references to “costly stones” which were used in it, I Kings 7:1-12. Such building was excessive.

Luxury marked all of Solomon’s reign. He used 120,000 talents of gold to make targets and another 900 pounds of gold to make shields to hang on the walls of the house called “the house of the forest of Lebanon.” See I Kings 10:16-29. Besides that, Solomon imported horses and chariots from Egypt at a great cost. **“And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance,”** I Kings 10:27.

Sensual living also marked Solomon’s reign. He married no fewer than seven hundred wives and had three hundred concubines besides, I Kings 11:1-13. Those were pagan women from foreign countries. Their presence in Israel brought great trouble.

Solomon's trade policies were very costly, also. He built a navy and hired men of Tyre to man the ships just to engage in foreign commerce. He imported linen from Egypt at a very high cost. A chariot was bought for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse was purchased for one hundred fifty. His fourteen hundred chariots would have cost 840,000 shekels of silver. Twenty-eight hundred horses (two to the chariot) would have cost 420,000 more. Solomon probably had a serious deficit in his balance of trade.

Excessive demands were made upon the people to support such a government. The kingdom was divided into twelve districts. Each district was responsible for providing for the needs of the palace one month out of each year. One day's menu required thirty measures of fine flour, sixty measures of meal, ten fat oxen, twenty oxen from the pasture, one hundred sheep, plus harts, roebucks, fallow deer, and fatted fowl. Multiply that by thirty to see what a month's menu would require. Besides that, provision had to be made for the horses and camels of the king, I Kings 4:7, 22-23, 26-28.

The most serious of the excesses in Solomon’s reign was the excess in sin. The king’s pagan wives turned his heart away from the Lord God. He built altars for the gods of his wives, burning incense and sacrificing to them. God was angered by Solomon’s sin. He announced, **“I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servants,”** I Kings 11:11.

II. DIVIDED CITIZENSHIP

There was already serious division among the citizens of Israel before the rash act of Rehoboam. The young king had an opportunity to restore unity to the nation. Instead, he widened the breach even more.

Conscripted labor for Solomon's building enterprises seems to have been a divisive factor in the nation. Just as our young men have been drafted into military service through past years, so Solomon drafted men to do manual labor not related to military service. He raised a levy of thirty thousand men from Israel. They were sent to Lebanon to work in the forest, preparing timber for Solomon's buildings in Palestine. They would work one month in Lebanon and be at home two months. Such a schedule kept them from being productive citizens at home because in two months they would be returning to Lebanon.

It was in that situation that a clever labor leader arose. His name was Jeroboam. He was an industrious young man. His very zeal at work brought him to King Solomon's attention. Solomon appointed Jeroboam as ruler over all of the workmen from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh—"the house of Joseph," I Kings 11:26-28. A little authority went to Jeroboam's head. He set as his goal to advance in the government to a position where he would reign over Israel. His ambition came to the king's attention about the time that the prophet denounced Solomon's sins. Jehovah said that he would deliver the nation to his servant. Solomon understood the reference of the prophet was to Jeroboam. The king sought to kill the young labor leader, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt. He remained there until Solomon died.

All the while, the people were chaffing under the excessive tax burden which they were required to carry. They afterward said to Rehoboam, son of Solomon, **"Thy father made our yoke grievous; now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee,"** II Chronicles 10:4. Indeed, their situation was hard. Their complaint was justified. They were bearing an almost intolerable burden.

At such a time, the political situation suddenly changed. King Solomon died. His son, Rehoboam, stood heir to the throne of Israel. If the nation hoped for relief, the time had come to seek it. With the change in political administration, the division in the citizenship became obvious.

III. RASH LEADERSHIP

All the nation gathered at Shechem for the coronation of Rehoboam. There was no plan to divide the kingdom. The oppressed citizens did intend to ask for relief from their burden of taxation. A wise answer would have

united the nation under Rehoboam as it had been under Saul, David, and Solomon.

It was at that point that Jeroboam came back on the scene. Hearing that Solomon was dead, and having been told by a prophet that he would become ruler of part of Israel (I Kings 11:26-39), Jeroboam returned from Egypt and became spokesman for those who sought a redress of grievances from the new king, I Kings 12:3. Thus Jeroboam became the champion of the people in their appeal to the king.

The request of the people was, "Take away some of the burden we have borne under Solomon." Their promise was, "We will serve you." Rehoboam sought counsel from his advisors. The older men counseled him to hear the voice of the people and show kindness by granting their request, ". . . then they will be thy servants for ever." The younger men advised the new king to exercise his authority, to consider no complaints, and to bluff the people with threats. Taking the latter advice, the king said, **"My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions,"** I Kings 12:11. The rash act brought an end to the united kingdom of Israel.

Leaders of the ten northern tribes announced publicly that they no longer confessed allegiance to the house of David (meaning, to David's descendant, Rehoboam). Instead, they held another coronation ceremony and made Jeroboam king of the ten northern tribes. The United Kingdom was no more. How tragic to see a nation fall, but that is the eventual end to a life marked by the excesses of sin. So it was in Israel. So it will be in every other nation.

The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes declared that he was Solomon, wisest and richest of the Hebrew kings. After listing all the accomplishments of his reign, he said, **"Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?"**

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19. Yes, Solomon left his kingdom to a fool who broke it asunder as God's judgment upon Solomon's sins.

This lesson speaks a solemn word to our nation. A spend-thrift government will always work harm to a nation. A divided citizenship always undermines the stability of a nation. Rash and unwise leaders can bring havoc to a nation. Christians should undergird their nation with prayer and a spirit of fervent patriotism. They should elect national leaders who are wise and mature. They should make sure that their nation is faithful to God. May God give us Christian citizens in our nation.

Questions

1. How does Isaiah 1:19-20 relate to today's study?
2. What was Solomon's great mistake in governing Israel?
3. Why is excessive taxation harmful to a nation?
4. Why is excessive luxury dangerous?
5. Why is union with unbelievers so dangerous?
6. What divided the citizens of Israel?
7. Why did God divide the kingdom of Israel?

8. Why should citizens have a right to a redress of grievances?
9. How can you help undergird your nation?
10. How has this study helped you?