

# ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

## Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

### **REHOBAM: A Burdensome Sovereign**

(1 Kings 12:1-24, 14:21-31; 2 Chron.10-12)

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At the end of Solomon's reign, a new day was dawning on Israel, a day that was rather dark. The reigns of David and Solomon brought great stability to Israel. The borders were extended to their farthest extent, and surrounding nations paid tribute to Israel. Enter Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. I struggle to think what it would be like to take over the throne from Solomon. How do you follow that? The people of Israel were wondering the same thing. Solomon's reign was glorious in so many ways, but it was also very burdensome. All the building projects, and all the huge requirements for the daily maintenance for the palace, were supported by the people via physical labor and taxes. They were tired from the years of bearing up under that load, and they wanted relief.

A gathering took place with all of the leaders of the various tribes, and they made a highly reasonable request. This is what they asked of and promised to Rehoboam: **"Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you."** That sounded like an invitation to a peaceful transition and reign, and it should have been. Rehoboam got some good advice from Solomon's older servants, who said, **"If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever."** Here is valuable wisdom for a new and inexperienced king. Sadly, Rehoboam decided to get more advice from some other counselors—his peers. They took a different slant. Instead of easing up on the people, they urged him to require more of them, which, unfortunately, Rehoboam did. Here is his response to the elders of Israel: **"My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions."** Rehoboam obviously didn't get his father's wisdom, because that decision was just plain dumb. It determined the breakup of the great nation that was handed to him on a golden platter, and all before he had really begun his reign. How sad for him and for his people!

The text says that this trouble came from Yahweh in order to bring about His promised judgment on the seed of Solomon because of Solomon's unfaithfulness, but that does not change Rehoboam's responsibility for the terrible decision he made. He let his arrogance and pride lead him instead of taking a posture of humble service. Chronicles describes Rehoboam this way in **2 Chronicles 12:14, "And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD."** A sad epitaph for a leader with such great potential.

What are some truths we can take away from this? First, choose your counselors wisely, and then be willing to receive their wisdom. Rehoboam did ask good counselors, but they did not give him the advice he wanted. Don't look for people who will simply sympathize with you or agree with you. That happens far too often, such as when a married couple is struggling to hold their marriage together, and each one of them looks for people who understand their struggle and the righteousness of their cause. These counselors will encourage their feelings of harm, their strategy for conflict, and their rights. With such advice, that marriage is sure to die, because the destructive paths each has chosen have been facilitated, not frustrated. Instead of enablers, each of these two need counselors who will give them the hard truth. They need people who will call them to repent instead of enabling them to stand in their self-righteousness. They need people to lead them towards servanthood, not victimhood. We all need honest, wise counselors, and often those are older saints who have seen more days. We also need humble hearts to not only receive hard words, but also to welcome and invite them.

Secondly, we see the polar opposite of Kingdom leadership. The people were there to serve Rehoboam, not the other way around. That is the way the fallen world works. Jesus alludes to it in **Luke 22:25-27**:

***The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.***

Jesus gives a completely different picture of what Kingdom leadership is to be. Instead of setting himself up as the lord, he is to come as a servant. The people were not there for Rehoboam. He was there for them. Remember, David cried out for the people when his actions brought them pain. Rehoboam shed no tears for anyone other than himself.

Rehoboam points us to Jesus through his negative example. He, the earthly king of God's people, put his burdens on the people, but that is not the way of the true King. Hear His words from **Matthew 11:28-30**: ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. "***

Our King has taken the burden from us and carries it Himself. He does not build His Kingdom on our backs; rather, He took the burden from our backs and put it on His own. We no longer have the burden to keep the Law to gain God's favor. Jesus kept it for us and, on the cross, gave us credit for His perfectly obedient, law-fulfilling life. We no longer have the burden to make life work on our own. He is working all things for our good. We no longer have the burden to defeat sin. He has defeated it once and for all through His death to pay for our sin, and He empowers us by His Spirit to stand in our new identity in Him. Knowing all of this, we can come to Him and, finally, find sweet rest.

We are now citizens of a glorious Kingdom where our King is the chief servant, a King who wins our affection through His lavish goodness instead of forcefully bringing about our submission. If Rehoboam had just thought twice about his decision and had sought out the true King whom his father had known, things would have turned out very differently. It is not too late for us to learn from and bow to the humble servant King who reigns over us.