The Kingdom Splits (Old Testament Figures)

Why God dismantled his own kingdom, and what he actually wanted instead

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 20, 2022
PASSAGES	1 Kings 11:4-13; 1 Kings 10:1-9; 1 Kings 11:28-38; 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 12:1; Isaiah 19:23-25; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Deuteronomy 6:5; Romans 12:1
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:15:39 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

At the height of everything — temple finished, treasury full, borders quiet — God takes the kingdom he built with his own hands and tears it in two. The charge against Solomon is never that he governed badly. It is that his heart turned away, and a people broadcasting a confused message about God are worse than no kingdom at all. What God wanted was faithfulness, and the one Son of David who gave it to him is the one we stand in.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- God's indictment of Solomon says nothing about prosperity, territory or competence. It says his heart turned away — twice after God had appeared to him in person.
- Israel existed to make God known to the nations. The queen of Sheba shows the design working; twenty years later she would have gone home confused.
- Faithfulness is the fulcrum of every story about the kings. Omri was successful by every earthly measure and the Bible barely mentions him.
- The split was God's own doing — and Rehoboam's freedom to choose badly was entirely intact while he walked into it.

- Jeroboam was handed a covenant most rulers would kill for: be faithful, and God himself fights your battles and builds your house.
- The interpretive lens for the Old Testament is not rooting for Israel. The home team is God, and his aim reaches past Israel to Egypt and Assyria.
- Matt's own working rule: when the right thing is unclear, err on the side of loyalty rather than on your own read of what love requires.
- We are called to faithfulness and we will botch it. That is why the faithfulness we stand on is Christ's, not ours — which frees us to give ours away as worship rather than as a load-bearing wall.

▶ 1:15:39

Before the sermon, Matt spent a while on small groups, on the *Seek God for the City* prayer guide, and on how Hope handles prophetic words — share it honestly as "I feel like God said this," then weigh it against what Scripture says about God's character. "The fact that we weigh it is not dismissive," he said. "It's actually how we welcome it." Then he turned to a genuinely dramatic stretch of Israel's story.

1. The high point, and what it was for

▶ 1:23:07

Last week the room had stood at the peak: the temple dedicated and decorated, the ark inside it, the glory of the Lord filling the place. David's wars had bought peace, Solomon ruled a large and wealthy nation, and if you have read the Old Testament you know the feeling that comes next — a kind of home-team loyalty. You celebrate.

And there is something to celebrate, because at this moment the point of Israel is briefly visible.

> "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions… Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness."
>
> 1 KINGS 10:1–9 ↗

A foreign monarch arrives, inspects everything, and leaves blessing the Lord by name. That is the call to be a kingdom of priests working exactly as designed — and it is the answer to Solomon's own prayer at the dedication, that the foreigner from a far country would come and pray toward this house "so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you." The reputation of God is emanating out of the place. One chapter later, a woman shows up embodying it.

2. "His heart was not wholly true"

▶ 1:27:47

> "For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father... So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done."
>
> 1 KINGS 11:4–6 ↗

Matt stopped on the comparison, because it is astounding on its face: David — of all people — is the standard of a whole heart. "That meant the world to God," he said. "It's as if David's wholehearted affection and loyalty to God was speaking God's love language." Which makes the verdict on Solomon brutal rather than merely disappointing.

▶ 1:30:48

The people, Matt guessed, were probably delighted with the era. Big kingdom, gold everywhere, a king in fine clothes with an entourage — exactly what they had asked for when they wanted a king like the other nations. Saul had been out plowing a field. Now they had made the big leagues. But God's reaction runs the other way.

> "And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods... 'Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.'"
>
> 1 KINGS 11:9–11 ↗

Not because the land was unsuccessful. Not because the people were impoverished. And that phrase *who had appeared to him twice* stings on purpose — once at Gibeon, where Solomon asked for wisdom,

and again after the dedication, where the terms were spelled out: my eyes and my heart will always be here, but as for you, walk before me with integrity of heart as David your father did. Matt refused to play that for laughs. “I don’t put myself as a class better than Solomon.” The text blames the wives for turning his heart — and, he noted, there is only so much anyone else can coerce you without your willingness to go along.

3. Jeroboam, and the deal of a lifetime

▶ 1:34:41

Jeroboam is not a villain lurking in the shadows. He was one of Solomon’s own officials:
“The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charg
Matt heard an echo: a capable young man, industrious, the sort you want running your affairs — and he ends up over the house of Joseph. That Joseph flavor reads to him like God’s favor resting on Jeroboam.

▶ 1:35:48

> “Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes… because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight.’”
>
> 1 KINGS 11:30–33 ↗

Again the charge is specific. Nothing about underperformance, insufficient gold, thinner territory, fewer soldiers. Fast-forward a couple of generations to Omri in the north — relative peace, good crops, a big name — and Scripture barely bothers with him. “Faithfulness is like a fulcrum for these stories,” Matt said. “The things that God cares about and the things that we care about are not always the same.”

▶ 1:37:53

Then come Jeroboam’s terms, and they are familiar ones:
“If you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes… I will be wi
One tribe stays with David’s line so that David would always have a lamp in Jerusalem. Everything else hinges on the same condition every generation has been handed. “What ally could ever say that to you?” Matt asked. “God is basically saying: I will fight your battles, I will build where you’re weak, I will protect you where you’re vulnerable. Just be faithful to me.”

4. A train wreck, brought about by the Lord

▶ 1:40:11

Solomon dies, Rehoboam goes to Shechem, and Jeroboam — back from hiding in Egypt — joins all Israel in asking the new king to lighten his father's heavy yoke (1 Kings 12:1–4). Matt found that remarkable. Jeroboam has already been promised ten tribes by a prophet. He could have said: forget this man, Ahijah already made me king, let's go home. Instead he says *we will serve you*. "That feels like an expression of faith to me," Matt said — leaving it open-handed, letting God be the one who does it.

▶ 1:42:18

Rehoboam asks the old men who served his father, and gets advice that costs nothing but ego: serve these people and speak good words to them, and they will be your servants forever (1 Kings 12:6–7). Then he asks the men he grew up with, and goes with their line instead —
"my little finger is thicker than my father's thighs… my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you w
A mic-drop meant to sound strong, answering an implied threat with a bigger one.

▶ 1:44:02

> "So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat."
>
> 1 KINGS 12:15 ↗

Matt was careful here. You could moralize the chapter into "listen to your elders" — and he does think we should listen to our elders — but that is not the main point. The main point is that this is God at work. And the mind-bender sitting next to it is that Rehoboam's ability to make free and independent choices appears entirely unharmed. He listened to bad advice, he spoke harshly, he walked straight into the disaster God had already announced.

▶ 1:45:46

It escalates fast: the taskmaster over forced labor is stoned to death, Rehoboam has to hurry into his chariot, and he musters everyone who can hold a sword to make his own kinsmen obey him. Then the word comes: "You shall not go up or fight against your relatives… for this thing is from me." They listened, and went home. And the south does not stay clean either —
"when the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, and all Israel w

5. Why God would want this

▶ 1:47:12

Most of us read this devastated. The kingdom was so big, the temple was finally built, the other nations were finally paying attention. And yet, in a sense, this turn of events is what God wanted — not the idolatry, obviously, but the dismantling of what the idolatry had corrupted. Matt ran the thought experiment that makes it land. Suppose the queen of Sheba had come twenty years later. She sees the temple to Yahweh, and an Asherah pole, and a high place for Chemosh, and concludes: *oh, I see, you have several gods here; the more the better.* She goes home with a confused message.

And then God is just a department. One god for giants, another for infertility, another for rain — go to whoever can do something for you. "What a disaster that would be," Matt said. If the people who carry his name also carry the name of Chemosh and Ashtoreth, why would he prosper that? His primary objective was never that the home team do well financially. It was to reveal himself to the nations — "the most altruistic thing he could want, by the way, because the best thing that could ever happen to you is knowing God."

▶ 1:50:50

He also put the united monarchy in proportion. Against the whole sweep of the judges, the wilderness, the battles and revivals and anti-revivals, it is a short little thing — Saul, David, Absalom, David again, Solomon, Rehoboam for about a week. And the monarchy was not God's idea in the first place; Samuel rebuked the people for asking, with thunder out of a cloudless season, and still told them God loved them and would forgive them (1 Samuel 12:16–20). "An interpretive lens for reading the Bible should not be that we're always rooting for Israel," Matt said. "We should be rooting for God. The home team is God."

6. Err on the side of loyalty

▶ 1:52:09

So how do we respond? First, by accepting that God's priorities differ from ours: he would rather we be faithful and clear in our messaging than successful. Matt named the itch that makes this hard — the insecurity among Christians about how many of us there are, how many churches, how big, where our influence stands. Wanting more people to know and love Jesus is good. Taking the temperature on Christian power and prestige is a different thing wearing the same clothes. "The real devastation wasn't that God didn't come through for them. The real devastation was the idolatry."

▶ 1:53:18

God never needed any of it. Not the kingdom — he was their king. Not the troops; the lesson was already taught with Gideon, where the problem was always *too many men*, and there were battles where the soldiers barely fought (Judges 7:2–7). Not the gold. "God never needed any of this stuff — and we cry when it leaves."

What he does want, Matt said reading it for himself, is us. Which is why the invitation to be a living sacrifice is the sensible response: what else is there to give? Then came the turn that he warned might grate.

> *"When I'm confused, I would rather err on the side of loyalty."*

▶ 1:55:00

Most of us, he suspects, would default to erring on the side of love or kindness. His objection is not to love. It is to his own instincts about it: "Why would I, as a guiding principle, err on the side of love and kindness when I cannot be trusted to even know what that is?" He has just spent weeks in generation after generation of people doing what was right in their own eyes and going badly off track. The command is "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" — not an injunction to succeed in all your endeavors. And the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth to show his strength on behalf of those whose hearts are whole toward him. Same silver-platter deal Jeroboam got.

7. Not a home team — all the peoples

▶ 1:56:20

> "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.'"
>
> ISAIAH 19:23–25 ↗

God is not running a franchise he wants to see win. He is after all the peoples — and that happens by his name going out, not by a team taking the trophy. Which answers the obvious protest, *there's so much work to do*: not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit. He can raise an army where there was none.

He can supply wealth if wealth is what is needed. None of it is meaningless to him; it is just inexpensive to him.

▶ 1:59:14

So when you are stuck and desperate for a win, the thing to do is not to cut corners or buy a deeper bench. Matt's example: Paul could have teamed up with the circumcision group and gained allies, and would rather have a clear message than a deep bench (Galatians 2:4–5). "If there's an impossibility before you, perhaps the Lord is poised to show his great power. What do you have that God won't take? Faithfulness. He can supply the rest."

8. The Son of David who was faithful

▶ 2:00:44

Which brings the whole thing to Jesus, because faithfulness is precisely the thing we are not good at. Recent weeks had given the room two sons of David: Solomon, associated with deliverance and the power of God's name, and Solomon the intercessor at the temple, praying a way open for his people. Both fall short here. So you keep reading — maybe Chronicles — looking for a son of David who is faithful to the end, because God promised a lamp in Judah for David's sake. The Old Testament closes with that longing unresolved and vague: will there be such a son, and could the kingdom be something after all?

▶ 2:02:27

"We have found faithfulness in the Son of David, Jesus, in whom we stand," Matt said. "He is our obedience to the Father. He is unquestionably faithful — and as a consequence his kingdom is secure. His obedience is ours, and his rewards are shared with us." The call to faithfulness stands, and so does the honest admission underneath it: "I'm calling you to faithfulness knowing that it's going to be a botched job. Yeah. I already know that."

▶ 2:04:43

And the conclusion is not that our faithfulness therefore does not matter. It is that it is not a supporting beam of the house. We can give it everything and lean on none of it — "that's like a crown you throw at his feet, a spiritual act of worship, offering yourself as a living sacrifice." He closed asking God to woo the room into greater intimacy and to help them walk faithfully, then called the prayer ministry forward.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 1 Kings 10:1–9
- 1 Kings 8:41–43
- 1 Kings 11:4–6
- 1 Kings 11:9–11
- 1 Kings 3:5–14
- 1 Kings 9:4–5
- 1 Kings 11:28
- 1 Kings 11:30–33
- 1 Kings 11:38
- 1 Kings 12:1–4
- 1 Kings 12:6–7
- 1 Kings 12:10–11
- 1 Kings 12:15
- 1 Kings 12:24
- 2 Chronicles 12:1
- 1 Samuel 12:16–20
- Judges 7:2–7
- Romans 12:1
- Deuteronomy 6:5
- 2 Chronicles 16:9
- Isaiah 19:23–25
- Zechariah 4:6
- Galatians 2:4–5

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. God's complaint about Solomon says nothing about results. If God assessed your last year the way he assessed that reign, what would he be looking at?
2. Matt imagined the queen of Sheba arriving twenty years later and leaving confused. What does someone watching your life conclude about what God is like?
3. Jeroboam was handed the kingdom by a prophet and still said "we will serve you." Where is God asking you to hold a promise open-handedly instead of seizing it?
4. Matt would rather err on the side of loyalty than on his own read of what love requires, because he does not trust himself to know. Does that sit well with you, or grate — and why?
5. Name one place this week where you are tempted to cut a corner or buy a deeper bench to get a win. What would faithfulness there look like instead?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Hu_6ymwMZY&t=4539s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.