

Now the terrible consequences of Solomon's idolatry will begin to unfold for the entire people of Israel. Rehoboam goes to Shechem for his coronation. Prior to the coronation, however, the people of Israel had called Jeroboam back from Egypt, intending to make him their spokesman. Solomon's great building plans had required heavy taxes and forced labor, though some of the people were becoming wealthy through the trading empire Solomon had built (1 Samuel 8:11-18; 1 Kings 4:7; 1 Kings 9:15). With the accession of a new king, the people sought relief from the taxation.

That this was a well-orchestrated effort at taxation reform is indicated by the people's united activity and their selection of Jeroboam as spokesman. It also indicates that the house of Ephraim was likely the main force behind the united effort. Israel's kings were limited, constitutional monarchs, Samuel having set down in a written document the rights and responsibilities of the king according to God's law (1 Samuel 10:25; compare Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Absolute monarchs, by contrast, have no such limits.

Rehoboam proved himself to be a stubborn and foolish young man, which his father had worried over (see Ecclesiastes 2:18-19). His insensitivity to the request of his own people, and his apparent unawareness of the well-ordered petition brought by an Ephraimite in the land of Ephraim, showed him to be of dull discernment and unfeeling heart. That Shechem was the place where Israel had formerly bound themselves to God as their sole Sovereign (Joshua 24:23-25) also seems to have eluded the young heir to the throne. Rehoboam also seemed oblivious to the fact that all of Solomon's counselors, who were older and more mature than his less-experienced friends, advised him to reduce the heavy taxation—an indication that they too recognized the excesses of Solomon. Rehoboam was unable to recognize sound counsel when he heard it.

Indeed, the young man's judgment fell far short of the wisdom his father counseled in the book of Proverbs—and this despite the book's many appeals to "My son," i.e., to Rehoboam primarily. Yet really that should come as no surprise—since Solomon set such a bad example of not following it all himself. It may even be that Solomon was too distracted with his thousand wives and the administration of his kingdom to properly train Rehoboam for his future responsibility—so that the young man lacked a sound foundation for rulership. Furthermore, "the turn of events was from the Lord"—to bring about the divine punishment of Solomon that his heirs were to suffer (1 Kings 12:15).

The rebellion at Shechem was quickly followed by the anointing of Jeroboam as king of Israel. Rehoboam marshaled his troops, from Judah and Benjamin, to crush the rebellion, but a message from God forbade the contemplated assault, and Rehoboam relented.