

Divided Kingdom
Sermon Title: "Stars Fallen From the Sky"
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Scripture Passage: 1 Kings 12:1-15

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United as the Beatles, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr became the most influential rock band of their era. In Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell tells us that this group played 40 hours a week for 5 years in the streets of Germany before they ever hit their first number one song. They were so tight, so united, so together that in six years they accomplished what no other band has ever accomplished—20 #1s songs in 6 years. But after those 6 years of conquering the world of rock and roll, the band was torn apart... Paul McCartney struggled with LSD, George Harrison sought meaning in a life of meditation and transcendence, Ringo Starr went from one mood swing to another, and John Lennon obsessed over Yoko Ono. Despite pleas from fans all over the world to get back together, the band never got back together. And for the two surviving band members, Paul and Ringo, they still refuse to share a stage together. They knew how to sing, "We can work it out," Life is very short, and there's no time, For fussing and fighting, my friend I have always thought that it's a crime, So I will ask you once again
Try to see it my way, Only time will tell if I am right or I am wrong
While you see it your way, There's a chance that we may fall apart before too long
We can work it out, We can work it out

but they couldn't pull it off. And as John, George, Ringo and Paul found their own destinies, they became like the stars fallen from the sky. The greatest band was torn apart. Relational unity is a gift given to us by God, but it requires a lot of work to maintain it. Unity is powerful; we've seen it during the reign of King David and Solomon. But unity is also fragile; we've seen it during the reign of King David and Solomon.

As we enter chapter 14 of the story we discover that God's desire is always to bless Israel. And God gives specific instructions on how to receive these blessings. The only problem is that they keep messing it up every single time. God's desire for Israel is not division. God's desire for Israel is not to tear it apart. But division happens because Solomon did not keep the covenant, "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. ¹² Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³ Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen." (1 Kings 11:11-13)

Can you hear the agony in the character of God? God is not having "fun" tearing the kingdom away from Solomon. In fact, there is a layering in his response, I will most

certainly tear the kingdom away from you, to the next layer: I will tear it out of the hand of your son. To the final layer: I will not tear the whole kingdom from him. And if you were searching for a compassionate God of the Old Testament... here He is. Constantly asserting his faithfulness to His people despite of their unfaithfulness, God always leaves a remnant, an undying hope for restoration and reconciliation; but God is always mindful of our freedom.

The kingdom being torn apart was not something that God wills or caused and we shouldn't be hung up because God didn't prevent it from happening. I know there are some children and teens in this room that have become quite angry and apathetic towards God because God did not answer their prayers for unity within their families. And I'm going to pause here and turn to my children and youth who may be listening: divorce at 100% of time can not be blamed on you or God. You are not the cause of any divorce, and it is absolutely ok for you to feel personally hurt, sad, and broken. This is exactly how God feels towards divorce as well, even if this was the best of two options. So don't focus your energy in finding someone to blame for the break up. Don't get confused, first and foremost, division occurs because we step away from God's advice, and have allowed work, success, entertainment, selfishness or lust to become our idols. We do not listen nor follow God's advice and so we fail to maintain unity and we are torn. This is on a national level and on a family level.

In the story, we see this on the national level: Solomon breaks the very first commandment and starts to worship other gods. And through Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh, Jeroboam (one of Solomon's commanders) is privy of the division that is about to happen in Israel: "The two of them were alone out in the country, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: 'See I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes.'" (1 Kings 11:30-31). The prophet once again, reiterates, the reason for this division, the worship of other gods... the fact that Solomon did not walk in God's ways nor done what is right in God's eyes, nor kept the statutes or laws that were clearly delineated and modeled by David, his father... these are the reasons for the division. The brand new cloak of the prophet is torn—this cloak that symbolizes commitment is torn into twelve pieces, and this breaks our Heavenly Father's heart.

Rehoboam, the rightful heir to Israel's kingdom, goes to Shechem, "for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king" (1 Kings 12:1). Shechem is no ordinary place. This is the first place Abraham visited when he left Haram to follow God and built an altar to the Lord, it was his first glimpse of the beginning of the fulfillment of the blessing he received from God, "your descendants will be as numerous as the stars of the sky". It is here that Israel had its birth. It is also here that they returned from captivity and under Joshua's leadership renewed their covenant to God as a united confederacy. Shechem is a reminder that God's people were as numerous as the stars in the sky. And yet, it is in this very special place that the narrator leaves out any notion of the anointing of a new king. Unlike the anointing of Saul, David and Solomon, the spirit of the Lord does not descend on Rehoboam. And it is here that we get the foreshadowing that Israel's stars

have fallen from the sky. There is no anointing ceremony. Instead, the people have a simple request: “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.”

The elders who counseled the wisest king, Solomon, had good advice for Rehoboam, “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.” But Rehoboam rejected this good advice.

People say that if you study a person’s question carefully you discover that person’s intention, or the real question behind the question being asked. So when Rehoboam calls on his buddies, his question is really not seeking advice but a platform to declare his power and his rules, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, ‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us?’” He has his buddies who are feeling pretty good after the victory ceremony. The people came to enthrone him. There were no challengers. And now he has the platform to exert his power, to show off more than his father, that there is a new, stronger, meaner, and heavier king than before! He forgets all about following God’s rule, and he is ready to set up his own set of rules.

Division happens because we do not listen to good advice, instead we are set on our own agendas and we want to play by our own rules. We’ve made the decision and have put on our blinders. Marriage is supposed to be about supporting one another and loving one another—it has become boring so I must be out of love. A family is supposed to be a mom, dad and children so if one of those components is absent then we just can’t be a complete family. A king is supposed to be powerful and rule over its people, there is no such thing as a servant leader. We come in with our presuppositions and our own agendas and our attempt to seek advice really is just a reassurance of our own decisions. And so division happens—we cry we can work it out, but really what we want to emphasize is why can’t you see it my way? Why can’t our unity be based on my set of rules? Is it any wonder that the people responded to Rehoboam with a simple answer, “To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!” and so the divided kingdom begins. Ten tribes on the north become Israel. And two tribes in the South become known as Judah.

Ultimately division happens because there is no repentance so there is no room for forgiveness. Ella and I read the kids version of the story each week. At the end of each chapter there is a discussion question. For chapter 14 one of the questions was which of God’s rule is especially easy or hard for you to keep? Without hesitation Hard=to honor mom and dad. Easy=do not murder. Yeah, I wouldn’t do that.

And the Bible tells us that King David broke the easiest commandment to keep. He murdered. And yet he is held up as the greatest king that Israel had. Throughout the story we will meet Northern and Southern kings. And for each King of Judah they are compared to David. David, the imperfect king, is the standard that God is looking for: so either kings are described as “his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been.” Or, “The king did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done.” David had plenty of personal issues—he had

problems with having lots of different women perhaps not as much as Solomon but certainly enough for a not so happy marriage. Yet David, unlike all the other kings, practiced repentance. And it is in this act of repentance that David worships God. It is in this act of repentance that we remove all the other gods that occupy our hearts (be that the god of money, lust, drugs, or even awesomely good things like the god of family, self-care, the need to fix others). It is in the act of repentance that we can worship to One True God. Repentance protects us from worshipping or making idols. This is the good news of repentance. For even if all the stars in Israel fall from the sky, there is still one star in Bethlehem that points to the perfect King—Jesus—who came to forgive all of us who fall short, who can't make it work. God's forgiveness is abundant. For those of you who are divorced or have been divorced—there is plenty of room at Jesus' table for you.

God desires unity so much that this was Jesus' last prayer for his disciples, "father protect them by the power of your name... so that they may be one" John 17: 11. When we seek God's advice, when we seek good advice, we follow God's rule to the best of our ability, and even when we fail, God gives us eternal chances. Maintain the unity of that relationship. It's hard work, but it is so worth it, it is God's gift to you, carefully maintain it. Listen to God's advice. It is the ultimate good advice. Practice repenting and forgiving—they never get old, it's a classic, more so than the Beatles. For this is God's rule, and if we follow it, God will work everything out for us.

I want to end this sermon with an exercise. Your significant relationship person has to introduce you to an audience. How would your spouse introduce you? How would your child introduce you? Or your parent? Or your closest friend? Or the person who knows you best... how would they introduce you?