



Second Chronicles - Chapter Thirteen

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

The Chronicler's account of Abijah's reign is much longer than that given in 1 Kings 15:1-8 where he is called Abijam. It is, in fact, mainly the development of the statement in 1 Kings 15:7b that <<*There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam*>> through the detailed record of one incident, a battle between these kings in the hill country of Ephraim. In the estimation of 1 Kings 15:3b, Abijah, like his father Rehoboam, <<*was not true to the Lord his God, like the heart of his father David*>>. The Chronicler would probably agree, since it appears from 2 Chronicles 14:3-5, 15:8, and 15:16, that idolatrous worship was practiced throughout Judah during Abijah's reign, but he refrains from explicit comment on the king's own piety to concentrate instead on what God accomplished through his reign.

The Chronicler notes that in contrast to Jeroboam's kingdom and cult, the Davidic monarchy is the object of God's enduring promise; the Jerusalem priesthood is legitimate and faithful; and the men of Judah trust in God. It is for these reasons that the southern kingdom enjoys God's protection and blessing, even if Abijah himself, like his father, falls somewhat short of the ideal Davidic standard.

III.b 2 Chronicles 13:1-22 - Abijah Reigns over Judah

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah began to reign over Judah. ^{2a} He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Micaiah daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.

2 Chronicles 13:1-2a

In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam. This is the only description in Chronicles of the reign of a Judæan king that is synchronised with the reign of a contemporary king of Israel. Although the Books of 1 and 2 Kings told the story of both southern and northern kingdoms, the Chronicler focuses only on the southern kingdom of Judah. The connection in this verse is probably due to the fact that the events involve Israel as well as Judah.

He reigned for three years in Jerusalem between 915 and 912 BC. This son of Rehoboam named Abijah, who is called Abijam in First Kings, only had a short reign showing that God did not bless his reign as he might had he followed the ways of the Lord.

However, it should be noted that a long reign does not denote a good king although the good kings tended to have long reigns: David (40 years), Asa (41), Jehoshaphat (25), Hezekiah (29), and Josiah (31).

Micaiah is also spelled Maacah: <<After her he took Maacah daughter of Absalom, who bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith>> (2 Chronicles 11:20). As noted in Chapter 11 she was probably the granddaughter of Absalom and not his daughter. Skipping generations is quite common in Jewish genealogy.

^{2b} Now there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. ³ Abijah engaged in battle, having an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand picked men; and Jeroboam drew up his line of battle against him with eight hundred thousand picked mighty warriors.

2 Chronicles 13:2b-3

Now there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. To judge from Abijah's words in v.8, Jeroboam probably instigated this war, seeking to reunite the kingdom by force, as Rehoboam had tried to do in 2 Chronicles 11:1-4. Rehoboam had been forbidden from doing so by the Lord but there is no such reference with regard to Abijah. This does not, however, mean that this war was legitimate.

Abijah engaged in battle, having an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand picked men; and Jeroboam drew up his line of battle against him with eight hundred thousand picked mighty warriors. In this war between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel, there was a clear numerical advantage for the northern kingdom. On the size of the armies, refer to the comment made on 1 Chronicles 12:23-37. However the numbers should be understood, Judah is outnumbered two to one by Israel.

⁴ Then Abijah stood on the slope of Mount Zemaraim that is in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, 'Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel!

2 Chronicles 13:4

Mount Zemaraim is probably on the northern border of Benjamin, on the frontier between the two kingdoms; refer to Joshua 18:22. Abijah's speech is one of several royal addresses in Chronicles that serve to convey the author's concerns – in this case, his condemnation of the northern kingdom for its apostasy and continuing rebellion.



⁵ Do you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel for ever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt? ⁶ Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord; ⁷ and certain worthless scoundrels gathered round him and defied Rehoboam son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and irresolute and could not withstand them.

2 Chronicles 13:5-7

Abijah condemns Jeroboam and the northerners for opposing God's grant of perpetual kingship over Israel to David and his sons. Abijah's argument is that the dynasty of David is the only legitimate house to rule over the tribes of Israel, including these ten northern tribes that rebelled under Jeroboam.

The term covenant of salt denotes a permanent provision: <<*All the holy offerings that the Israelites present to the Lord I have given to you, together with your sons and daughters, as a perpetual due; it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord for you and your descendants as well*>> (Numbers 18:19). Jeroboam's kingship is dismissed as rebellion against his master, Solomon, while the Davidic kingdom is nothing less than <<*the kingdom of the Lord*>> (v.8).

This promise God made to David was called a covenant of salt, which meant a serious covenant because it was sealed by sacrifice - sacrifices always included salt: <<*You shall not omit from your grain-offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt*>> (Leviticus 2:13). A covenant of salt also had the following associations:

- A pure covenant - salt stays pure as a chemical compound.
- An enduring covenant - salt makes things preserve and endure.
- A valuable covenant - salt was expensive.

Jesus taught: <<*Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another*>> (Mark 9:50). Salty Christians are those who add savour to those they meet, serve, converse with and proclaim the Gospel to. Salt is a preservative; a cure for worldliness and corruption. This is the NT equivalent of a covenant of salt. Those who give up on the commitment they made to Jesus by faith, and subsequently return to worldly desires, not only become of no use to others, but can actually damage those who might otherwise have sought God!

Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. Here, King Abijah presents a rather selective view of history. It was true that Jeroboam rebelled, but it is also true that Rehoboam was a fool who provoked the northern tribes to rebellion. Abijah may well have known of the prophecy given to Jeroboam by the Lord, which makes his rebellion legitimate and he is the only Lord that counts.

⁸ 'And now you think that you can withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hand of the sons of David, because you are a great multitude and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made as gods for you.

⁹ Have you not driven out the priests of the Lord, the descendants of Aaron, and the Levites, and made priests for yourselves like the peoples of other lands? Whoever comes to be consecrated with a young bull or seven rams becomes a priest of what are no gods. ¹⁰ But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not abandoned him. We have priests ministering to the Lord who are descendants of Aaron, and Levites for their service. ¹¹ They offer to the Lord every morning and

every evening burnt-offerings and fragrant incense, set out the rows of bread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand so that its lamps may burn every evening; for we keep the charge of the Lord our God, but you have abandoned him. ¹² See, God is with us at our head, and his priests have their battle trumpets to sound the call to battle against you. O Israelites, do not fight against the Lord, the God of your ancestors; for you cannot succeed.'

2 Chronicles 13:8-12

For we keep the charge of the Lord our God, but you have abandoned him. Abijah contrasted the rejection of God on behalf of Jeroboam and the people of the northern tribes with the comparative faithfulness of the king and people of Judah. Abijah condemns the northerners for their religious unfaithfulness in making golden calf idols: <<*For it is from Israel, an artisan made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces*>> (Hosea 8:6), and driving out the priests descended from Aaron and Levites in favour of their own appointees. Judah, by contrast, has the legitimate priesthood and temple worship, so Israel should not fight against the Lord. For the Chronicler's own audience, Abijah's speech may have functioned as a sermonic appeal to the different tribes to be united around the temple, under the leadership of the Davidic family.

For you cannot succeed. Abijah brought his sermon to a dramatic finish by challenging the king and people of the northern tribes to recognise that they were really fighting against the Lord God of their ancestors.

What is interesting in this whole account of civil war is that there is no record of either king seeking the Lord as to whether they should go into battle in the first place. Therefore, both sides are guilty in the eyes of the Lord.

¹³ Jeroboam had sent an ambush around to come on them from behind; thus his troops were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. ¹⁴ When Judah turned, the battle was in front of them and behind them. They cried out to the Lord, and the priests blew the trumpets. ¹⁵ Then the people of Judah raised the battle shout. And when the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. ¹⁶ The Israelites fled before Judah, and God gave them into their hands. ¹⁷ Abijah and his army defeated them with great slaughter; five hundred thousand picked men of Israel fell slain. ¹⁸ Thus the Israelites were subdued at that time, and the people of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord, the God of their ancestors. ¹⁹ Abijah pursued Jeroboam, and took cities from him:

Bethel with its villages and Jeshanah with its villages and Ephron with its villages.

2 Chronicles 13:13-19

Jeroboam had sent an ambush around to come on them from behind. This was a dishonourable tactic because Jeroboam tried to ambush Judah while they were still negotiating before the battle.

Thus his troops were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. This makes a good analogy for the people of God in that, although enemies may have them surrounded, the link to God is always open and he can save his people in all situations according to his will.

They cried out to the Lord. When the battle lines unexpectedly changed, the army of Judah knew that a surprise attack from an army twice as large left them in a very dangerous place. The only thing they could do was cry out to the Lord.

The priests blew the trumpets. The priests often led the way in battle blowing trumpets as first seen in the Promised Land at Jericho: <<**And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout! For the Lord has given you the city'**>> (Joshua 6:16). The trumpet was a ram's horn or *shofar*.



A typical Shofar

And when the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. They added the shout of faith to their cry unto the Lord and God struck the army of Israel. The Chronicler does not state just how God struck them, but he certainly defended his trusting people when they could not defend themselves, even if they were led by a bad king. God routed Jeroboam, although whether this was through direct supernatural intervention, or through the

courage of his embattled people as they saw themselves surrounded by the enemy, is not stated.

Abijah and his army defeated them with great slaughter. This battle report echoes other OT narratives in which God fights for and with his people such as at Jericho in Joshua 6:20. Judah's reliance on God is the key factor in its success.

The people of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord, the God of their ancestors. The Chronicler wanted the point to be clear. The reason why Judah defeated Israel, even though they were surprised and outnumbered, was because Judah relied on the Lord.

Bethel was one of the locations of Jeroboam's calf cult; refer to 1 Kings 12:28-29. The people perhaps should have found it ironic that their idol could not save their town. It should have been a pointer for them to return to the correct worship of the Lord.

Having said this, it should also be noted that the presence of the temple in Jerusalem would not save that city either. Such emblems of God, no matter how sacred they may be, are not lucky charms. It is the Lord that people should seek and trust in. He will then protect them in whatever way his will determines.

²⁰ Jeroboam did not recover his power in the days of Abijah; the Lord struck him down, and he died. ²¹ But Abijah grew strong. He took fourteen wives, and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. ²² The rest of the acts of Abijah, his behaviour and his deeds, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.

2 Chronicles 13:20-22

Jeroboam did not recover his power in the days of Abijah. This ended the ongoing threat from Israel against Judah. Jeroboam was not left strong enough to launch an attack and stayed weak until the Lord struck him and he died in 909 BC, about a year after the death of Abijah.

But Abijah grew strong. The profile of Abijah in 1 Kings Chapter 15 is overwhelmingly negative. There, it clearly states: <<**He committed all the sins that his father did before him; his heart was not true to the Lord his God, like the heart of his father David**>> (1 Kings 15:3). Yet the Chronicler says nothing good or bad about the overall reign of Abijah. This was because the Chronicler wanted to emphasise the good that happened under the reign of Abijah; namely, the great deliverance that came when Judah relied on God, who supported Abijah <<**for David's sake**>> (1 Kings 15:4a). The Chronicler assumes the reader knows the material about Abijah in First Kings; yet he wanted to show that even a bad man can be shown grace when he relies on the Lord. This would be a great

encouragement to the returned exiles to whom the Chronicler first wrote. Yet from a more complete understanding of Abijah's life, another lesson can be learned: that one great spiritual victory does not make an entire life before God. One should never trust in a past spiritual accomplishment or season of victory.

He took fourteen wives, and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. Large families are a conventional sign in Chronicles of God's blessing on those who rely on him; refer to 1 Chronicles 28:5 and 2 Chronicles 11:18-21.

The story of the prophet Iddo. Elsewhere it is written: <<*The rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam*>> (1 Kings 15:7), which is a general reference to historic records that the authors of Kings and Chronicles had access to but are now lost to history. Here, Ezra refers specifically to records kept by Iddo, whose records he also clearly referred to in compiling his own records.