

“Do Not Fight Against the Lord”

2 Chronicles 13

This summer we are studying the good kings of Chronicles beginning with King Abijah in 2 Chron. 13. Abijah is the grandson of David, son of Absalom. He is the first king of the Southern Kingdom since the Kingdom of Israel split in the days of his father Rehoboam, Solomon's son. God told Solomon this would happen because of his sinfulness in worshipping idols. The king of Israel was supposed to be God's representative to make sure the nation stayed true to God. Because as the kings went so did the people. And we see that here in our own day. We have political leaders who have no moral compass that pass laws so anyone 'can do what is right in their own eyes' so to speak.

When the king of Israel was doing right before God then the people followed God's laws. And many times their life was summarized by either . . .

“He did evil in the eyes of the Lord”

OR

“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”

But why do we need to read their stories twice in the Bible? In Kings and then in Chronicles? The answer is quite simple when you understand the audience and the time. 2 Kings ends with Jerusalem destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC and how the last king to sit on Israel's throne, Jehoiachin, spends his final years in exile. 1-2 Kings gives you the history of why Israel split into two kingdoms and why they went into exile; the northern kingdom to Assyria and the southern kingdom to Babylon. So the kings were written to the exiles explaining how they got their due to their unfaithfulness to God. Some kings (only the Southern kings) tried to revive Israel but eventually they failed and exile ensued as predicted by God to Moses in Deuteronomy.

When you come to the end of 2 Chronicles you read about the edict of Cyrus, king of Persia who defeated the Babylonians and declared that Israel could return to their own land and rebuild their own temple. So then Chronicles was written for the next generation of Israelites, many of whom were born in Babylon and never saw Jerusalem or the temple or had a Son of David ruling over them. Now God says go back and rebuild and worship me in the temple again.

Most of these people never experienced that so the Chronicler retells Israel's history focusing on the kings of the south only – the line of David – and highlights the good things that the kings did and how the temple and the priesthood functioned.

So now it makes sense that when you read Chronicles it begins with Genealogies focusing on the line of David and the priestly line. Chronicles shows the returned exiles when things worked well for Israel so that they will follow the way of obedience and so exile won't happen again.

For you and me, we'll learn how to please God as His covenant people today by the way we worship Him and walk by His Word. Abijah is a great example of seeing both sides of what to do and what not to do as we compare the Chronicles' account and the Kings account.

Abijah's (sometimes called Abijam) account begins putting him in context with the Northern kingdom. It's around 913 BC, Jeroboam was the North's first king. As a young man he displayed good

leadership qualities and so Solomon put him in charge of all the labour force in Israel. When Solomon died and Rehoboam took over, Jeroboam approached Rehoboam and inquired as to how Rehoboam would treat the labor force. Under Solomon they were treated harshly. Rehoboam ignored the wise advice of his elders and instead listened to the bad advice of his peers and said he would make it even more difficult for the labour force. When the news travelled that Rehoboam was going to be worse than Solomon the nation rejected him as king and established Jeroboam as king. Ten tribes lined up with Jeroboam while the Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to Rehoboam, a son of David. In order to keep the 10 tribes loyal to him, Jeroboam established two places of worship, one in Bethel in the south and Dan in the north. Then he set up a golden calf in each place and said 'Here are your gods O Israel who brought you up out of Egypt' (1 Kings 12:28)! What was he thinking!!

Here Rehoboam is now dead and Jeroboam thinks now a good time to bring Israel all together again under his rule. So he seeks to overthrow Abijah. Abijah however is a true son of David, a grandson of Absalom. When Jeroboam threatens Abijah, Abijah stands on Mt. Zemarim – probably on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim and proclaims this to Jeroboam:

"Jeroboam and all Israel, listen to me! ⁵ Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt? ⁶ Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat, an official of Solomon son of David, rebelled against his master. ⁷ Some worthless scoundrels gathered around him and opposed Rehoboam son of Solomon when he was young and indecisive and not strong enough to resist them. ⁸ "And now you plan to resist the kingdom of the LORD, which is in the hands of David's descendants. You are indeed a vast army and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made to be your gods. ⁹ But didn't you drive out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and make priests of your own as the peoples of other lands do? Whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may become a priest of what are not gods. ¹⁰ "As for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him. The priests who serve the LORD are sons of Aaron, and the Levites assist them. ¹¹ Every morning and evening they present burnt offerings and fragrant incense to the LORD. They set out the bread on the ceremonially clean table and light the lamps on the gold lampstand every evening. We are observing the requirements of the LORD our God. But you have forsaken him. ¹² God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you. People of Israel, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your ancestors, for you will not succeed."

If you're a returned exile back in the land of Israel, still under the thumb of the Medes and Persians and wanting to know if God is really with you, here's what you have to do:

Stand Up Against Those who Defy God's Word **(13:3-12)**

Abijah points out that Jeroboam has deliberately defiled the Word of God in two big ways; first, he's not the rightful king of Israel. He's not a son of David. God made a covenant with David that his household would not fail to have one on the throne of Israel. It was a covenant of salt, meaning that it was made with sacrifices in which salt was sprinkled to indicate a lasting, a preserving covenant.

Abijah is outnumbered by 400, 000 soldiers. He's a rookie king, Jeroboam's been around. He served Solomon. He's got 10 tribes behind him. From a human perspective Abijah's acting foolishly. But from God's perspective he's doing the right thing. He's standing up in public against a major leader who defied God's Word and denys

God's promised King (vv.3-8a)

Abijah's speech defends the authenticity of David's line as the true kingly line. He stands up for what God's Word says, a courageous and sometimes dangerous move. Because whenever God's people stand up against the godless laws and lies of a political leader it can be dangerous. When we hear people denying the deity of Jesus or diminishing Him as only a mere man who did good deeds, they are defying God's Word about who the true King of the World is, Jesus, the Son of David. Many Jews deny Jesus as their Messiah, the true Son of David. Many Muslims deny the deity of Jesus. World leaders don't give allegiance to Jesus and yet we who do and seek to stand up for the rules of His Kingdom risk at the very least humiliation, to possible arrest and even death in some places. Are we willing to be as bold as Abijah, knowing we are the minority opinion? We need to fight for the truth. Abijah challenges Jeroboam who resists the kingdom of the Lord. Jesus said His kingdom cannot be destroyed and His church will prevail against the gates of hell. We win. We are those who have chosen the true Son of David, Jesus as our king. We may be defeated occasionally but ultimately Jesus returns and establishes His rule. That should give us gracious boldness to speak out against godless leaders and laws.

In vv.8b-12 Abijah also boldly defends,

God's chosen way of worship (vv.8b-12)

God chose Jerusalem as the place Israel was to worship Him. He allowed Solomon to build the temple. He established laws and a sacrificial system in how to approach Him. Jeroboam had set up golden calves (just as Israel had done shortly after the exodus). Jeroboam removed all legitimate priests (sons of Aaron and Levi) and established his own form of priests. One of the reasons why 1 Chronicles lists chapters of genealogies was so that when Israel went back they would know who belonged to what tribe so they knew who was allowed to serve as priests.

Abijah boldly declares they had not forsaken God, and by listing the right sacrifices and the showbread and lampstand rituals it was a reminder to the returning Levites this was how it was done. Even v.12 he reminds Israel how in Num. 11 God established how the priests blew different trumpet signals to announce battles or solemn worship occasions.

We live surrounded by people who choose other ways to approach God or other gods. "Golden calves" still exist today in the form of religious leaders that people pray to or burn incense to as if they provided salvation. There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved; Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Jesus never sinned. Jesus rose from the dead. No human has ever done those things. Jesus is God's chosen way to come to Him in worship. He alone is the way, the truth and the life; no one can come to God but through Him.

This is something else we can identify with and should be bolder in declaring. But won't we offend people? Rather we are warning people that the golden calves they trust for their salvation will disappoint them and prove to mislead them down the wide path of destruction which leads to the burning lake of fire.

We need to ask God to give us more Holy Spirit-empowered boldness to stand up for Jesus when a colleague, work mate or classmate uses His name as a swear word. To graciously challenge people when they claim to trust the idols of luck or karma or positive thinking or they think that worshipping counter to what the Bible says is okay. People's lives are at stake. We need to present them graciously with the truth. Many of them simply don't know.

Did Jeroboam fall to his knees and repent? No. While Abijah was monologuing, Jeroboam did to an end 'round and surprised him from behind. So the priests did what they're supposed to do – blew

the trumpet signal for war – and the people raised the battle cry and God routed their enemy. The trumpet blast was God’s way to warn. It was their signal to call on God and to . . .

Trust God with Their Problems **(13:13-19)**

They were outnumbered 2-1 yet the north lost 500,000 soldiers. God gave them their victory. *“The Israelites fled before Judah and God delivered them into their hands” (v. 16).*
“The men of Judah were victorious because they relied on the Lord, the God of their fathers” (v.18)

That’s a reminder to look back and see how God’s people, when they trusted God with their problems, were delivered. That’s why it’s important for us to share with each other the ways God has worked in our life. It not only encourages us but strengthens us to keep trusting God for the present dilemmas and issues we face today.

A very familiar verse of Scripture says,

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.
Acknowledge the Lord in all His ways and He will direct your paths.” (Prov. 3:5-6)*

We often fail because we are using our own understanding to solve our problems. Or we are wishy washy- one second, “Yup I’m going to leave this with God and do it His way” but then trying it on our own again or impatiently not willing to wait on Him. There must be a consistent acknowledgement of God and His promises in His Word that He is able to solve our problems so we’ll trust Him. It’s not that God isn’t capable of leading us on straight paths; it’s usually our own attempt to solve our problems that makes our path crooked.

Abijah gets the victory and then we read,

²⁰*Jeroboam did not regain power during the time of Abijah. And the LORD struck him down and he died.*

²¹*But Abijah grew in strength. He married fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.*

Jeroboam was never a threat to Judah anymore. And God strengthened Abijah because . . .

God Strengthens Those Who Trust Him **(13:20-21)**

The description that he grew in strength can be understood in a few ways. His victory strengthened him politically over the north. While the south was smaller they were a legitimate threat. He also was strengthened because he was faithful to God at this point. God rewards faithfulness. While Abijah followed David and Solomon’s pattern of marrying more than enough wives, it did enlarge his family. Which ensured more descendants for the throne. While we’ll discuss his shortcomings in a moment we have to trust God’s assessment in his Word at this time.

God strengthens and grows and blesses His people when we obey Him. When we stand up for the truth and defend His Word and His King, Jesus Christ. God grows us when we learn to trust him more for the problems we encounter. It was typical for Jewish kings to look to Egypt to help fight their battles. Abijah chose to trust God. When you trust God to solve your problems, God gets the glory.

Not our brains or our friends or our bank accounts, but God. God loves to strengthen us when that happens.

But what about the other events of Abijah's life and what he did? The Chronicler chooses to focus on the good things the kings of the south did to help the nations stay focused on God. But here's something else we need to be reminded of when it comes to Abijah:

A (or a Few) Spiritual Victory is Not a Guarantee of a Faithful Life **(13:1-3, 22; 1 Kings 15:1-7)**

The author of Kings made no mention of Abijah's one victory. Actually he says very little of Abijah only that,

In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijah became king of Judah, ² and he reigned in Jerusalem three years. His mother's name was Maakah daughter of Absalom. ³ He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been. ⁴ Nevertheless, for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and by making Jerusalem strong. ⁵ For David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the LORD's commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite. ⁶ There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam throughout Abijah's lifetime. ⁷ As for the other events of Abijah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. ⁸ And Abijah rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. And Asa his son succeeded him as king.

The Chronicler focuses on the one event in Abijah's life where he stood against the idolatry of the north and stood with the Word of God. The writer of kings is giving an overview of Abijah, whose life generally revealed he didn't . . .

Love God with his whole heart (15:3)

When we read of a king who didn't serve God with his whole heart it usually means he wavered back and forth. And it is telling that his reign was unusually short – 3 years. While Abijah had one great spiritual moment for sure (and hopefully others) it didn't describe his life. The other thing that the writer of Kings notes is he writes more about Abijah's link to David than he does about Abijah. Abijah knew he was a true son of David, having Absalom as his grandfather. But maybe that was part of his spiritual problem; why he didn't devote his whole heart to God. He relied on his spiritual heritage. God warns His people many times . . .

Don't rely on your spiritual heritage (15:4-5)

Many times the prophets or Jesus rebukes the Jews who think just because they are Jews – Abraham's and David's descendants – that they are good with God. No, each person must decide for themselves whether they will choose Jesus as their Saviour, whether they will walk with God because they love God, not because mom and dad did or grandparents did. Parents and grandparents 'can't put in a good word for us' when our life ends and we stand before God. The only way you and I get into God's presence is whether we chose to follow Jesus with our life, not what our parents chose.

And here's another thought for us. The Chronicler highlights Abijah's spiritual qualities to encourage the next generation of God's people to follow suit. He knows Abijah wasn't the most

spiritual king in Israel's history but his purpose is to stimulate spiritual growth in a new generation. I wonder if we focused more on the spiritual qualities of each other, rather than point out the sins and flaws of each other (and we know they are there too) if we would see more spiritual growth and wholehearted devotion to God in ourselves and in one another?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net