

We are returning tonight to our series on the book of Chronicles, after a five month interlude.  
And so I would like to remind you of a few things as we proceed.

Jerome once wrote,

“The book of Chronicles, the epitome of the old dispensation, is of such importance  
that without it anyone who claims to have a knowledge of the Scriptures  
makes himself a fool.”

I believe that is true –

but I also concur with a more recent commentator, my sainted professor, Ray Dillard,  
who added a caveat:

“anyone who claims to know Chronicles  
without having a thorough knowledge of Scripture  
would be making an even bigger fool of himself,  
for least of all books of the Bible can it be studied in isolation.” (Dillard, ix)

The book of Chronicles starts with Adam – and then connects the entire history of the Bible  
in a genealogy of over 900 names.

The narrative picks up with a brief note on Saul,  
before spending 19 chapters on David  
(eleven of which are focused on preparations for the temple);  
and then devoting 9 chapters to Solomon  
(seven of which are focused on the building of the temple).

It is safe to say that the two central themes of the book of Chronicles  
are the house of David and the temple of Solomon.

And we saw how Chronicles portrays Solomon as the new Joshua,  
providing something of a chiasmic structure to the story of Israel:  
Moses builds the tabernacle;  
Joshua defeats Israel’s enemies and gives them peace;  
Israel fragments in the days of the Judges and of Saul  
David defeats Israel’s enemies and gives them peace;  
Solomon builds the temple.

You can see how all this fits together:

Israel was called to be the second Adam – (Israel is my son, my firstborn)  
the one who would succeed where the first Adam failed;  
but Israel failed – just like Adam!

Now the story comes full circle:

Solomon is the new Israel (he is the Son of God, adopted by the LORD).  
He is called to succeed where Israel failed – where Adam failed.

If Solomon and his sons are faithful and obey God's law,  
then God will bless Israel forever.

Remember where Chronicles starts:  
Adam is the first word of the book.

Solomon is the new Adam who will return to the garden (the most holy place).

So *worship* is at the heart of what Solomon is all about.  
Temple-building is not an end in itself.  
The reason why you build the temple is so that God might be worshiped.

As John Piper has said, mission exists because worship doesn't.  
The purpose of mission – the purpose of evangelism – the purpose of discipleship –  
is so that people would worship God.

Indeed, we will see that at least some of the sons of David understood this.  
It is not the existence of the temple,  
but what happens at the temple (or at least through the temple),  
that results in Jerusalem's salvation in our text tonight.

Because after the death of Solomon,  
Rehoboam did not act wisely.  
And Jeroboam took control of the northern 10 tribes.

We saw previously that it was the faithfulness of the remnant of Israel  
that preserved Rehoboam for the first three years.

But but then Shishak the king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem,  
and the Chronicler tells us that this happened  
“because they had been unfaithful to the LORD.”  
Rehoboam abandoned the law of the LORD and all Israel with him.  
And God sent Shemaiah the prophet  
and says, “Thus says the LORD,  
‘You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.’”

And so God handed them over to Shishak, as he said in 2 Chronicles 12:8,

<sup>8</sup> *Nevertheless, they shall be servants to him, that they may know my service and the service of  
the kingdoms of the countries.”*

The wages of sin is death.  
And when a nation sins, the wages of national sin is national death.

God had called Israel out of Egypt –

“Israel is my son, my firstborn, let my son go that he may worship/serve me”  
Israel was called to love and serve the LORD.

Jesus said it this way: no man can serve two masters.  
The Son of God cannot serve both Pharaoh and Yahweh.

And so God called his son out of Egypt and established him in the land.  
Israel was to serve Yahweh only.

But Israel didn't seem to like serving Yahweh only.  
They abandoned the law of the LORD – and were unfaithful to God.  
And so God says, “Okay, if you want to serve other gods,  
let me remind you what that is like!”

If you really want to go back to Egypt –  
if you really want to go back to slavery to sin and death,  
sometimes God will remind you what it looks like;

the believer will never face eternal death – the final wages of sin –  
but sometimes God will give us reminders of that misery in this life,  
as consequences for our sin.

When Israel came up out of Egypt,  
they had plundered the Egyptians  
taking much gold and silver,  
because after the ten plagues,  
the Egyptians were willing to pay *anything* to get rid of the Israelites!

Now, several hundred years later,  
Egypt plunders Israel – taking back (with interest!) what they had given.

The basic principle here is that while repentance may deliver you from destruction,  
it does not necessarily deliver you from the consequences of your sin.

Rehoboam now surrenders all the gold of King Solomon  
in order to turn aside the threat of Shishak.

And then Rehoboam made bronze shields and put them in place of the golden shields.  
But precious metals are now so rare in Israel  
that Rehoboam cannot leave the shields in the house of the LORD!  
Where once it seemed as though the streets were paved with silver,  
now bronze is treated as a rare and precious commodity.

But while Rehoboam fell short –

<sup>12</sup> *And when he humbled himself the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to make a complete destruction. Moreover, conditions were good<sup>[a]</sup> in Judah.*

The Chronicler is setting up his overall theme for the rest of the book:  
Pride goes before destruction –  
but if you humble yourself, you will avoid destruction!

And *because* Rehoboam humbled himself,  
therefore “conditions were good.”

The Chronicler is not concerned with nuance and complexity.  
He wants you to see that sin leads to death and destruction –  
humility and repentance leads to life and good.

The Chronicler reminds us of Solomon’s sermon – and Solomon’s prayer:  
The LORD chose Jerusalem to be the city where he would put his name.  
The LORD chose David to be the king – and Solomon to build the temple.

If the Son of David sets his heart to seek the LORD, then all is well in the world!  
But if the Son of David does not set his heart to seek the LORD,  
then all is evil.

There is only one thing that God requires of us.  
You can say it a lot of different ways –  
but it is really just *one thing*.

Set your heart to seek the LORD.  
(the idea of “set your heart” has to do with “firmly establishing” your heart;  
this is the word used to describe how God has firmly established  
the heavens and the earth).

The point here is that this must be your fixed and determined purpose.

This is not something that you can “try” for a few weeks to see if it works.  
It must be your settled conviction – the one thing that drives you in everything else –

To seek the LORD.

You can say this in different ways:

Jesus said, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

Moses said, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength.”

Paul said, “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,  
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

John said, “And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ  
and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”

But all of this comes back to a single-minded focus on knowing and loving the LORD our God,  
and pursuing him relentlessly!

So with that in mind, let us turn to Rehoboam's son, Abijah.

**1. Abijah: God Is with Us, so Don't Mess with the House of David! (13:1-22)**  
**a. Jeroboam and His Scoundrels (v1-7)**

*13 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah began to reign over Judah. <sup>2</sup> He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Micaiah<sup>[a]</sup> the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.*

Is Abijah a good king or a bad king?

1 Kings 15 tells us that he “walked in all the sins of his fathers,”  
and that “his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God.” (15:3)  
But Chronicles portrays Abijah as a faithful king who remembered God's promises.

It's easy to see how both could be true.

After all, 1 Kings 15 only gives us 8 verses on the life of Abijah,  
with only a passing reference to the continuing war with Jeroboam.  
Chronicles gives us 22 verses,  
with the bulk of the chapter focused on Abijah's sermon in verses 4-12,  
framed by the account of the battle in verses 2-3 and 13-20.

In other words, Chronicles gives us *one* example of how Abijah was true to the LORD.  
Kings, on the other hand, has a gloomier picture,  
pointing out that “his heart was not wholly true to the LORD”  
because he walked in the sins of his fathers.

*Now there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. <sup>3</sup> Abijah went out to battle, having an army of valiant men of war, 400,000 chosen men. And Jeroboam drew up his line of battle against him with 800,000 chosen mighty warriors.*

Throughout Chronicles there are questions about the numbers – especially the size of armies.

It is not likely that Judah and Israel had massive armies,  
many times the size of any other ancient army.  
Some have suggested that the term “thousand” may simply refer to a company –  
so there would be 400 companies (or commanders)  
vs. 800 companies (or commanders).  
(Think of Roman centurion – the name means “hundred,”  
but he might have only 20 men).

The other option is that the Chronicler is using exaggeration to make a point.

He knows that no one will think that Judah could muster an army of 400,000 men –  
much less, an army of 400,000 valiant men of war! –  
(these are farmers and villagers, after all!)

I want you to think about the region geographically.

The whole region of Judah is about 1300 square miles –  
half of which is desert (the Negeb),  
and much of which is mountainous.  
St. Joseph County is about one-third the size of Judah.  
And if you add LaPorte County,  
which is about 600 square miles,  
you have nearly 1100 square miles.  
So St. Joseph and LaPorte counties together are slightly smaller than Judah  
(though a whole lot greener!!)

St. Joe and LaPorte Counties are mostly rural, with one major city  
(South Bend),  
several medium sized cities,  
(Mishawaka, Granger, LaPorte and Michigan City)  
and a number of small towns and villages.  
The entire population of the two counties is 377,000,  
which is right about 300 people per square mile.

So to get 400,000 people into the 1300 square miles of Judah,  
you would need to have over 300 people per square mile.

But of course, to get 400,000 *warriors*,  
even assuming that every adult male between the ages of 20-50  
was considered a “valiant man of war” –  
you would have a total population of over 2 million,  
which means the entire region of Judah  
would have to have the same population density as the *city* of LaPorte!

The Chronicler is writing to people who live in Judah.  
They know full well that Judah could never have an army of 400,000 men.  
(It’s like saying, “a land flowing with milk and honey” –  
no one expects literal rivers of milk and honey!)

The point, however, should be clear!  
Judah had a big army.

The other point should be even clearer:  
Israel had a bigger army than Judah!  
And so, as Abijah stood up on Mt Zemaraim in the hill country of Ephraim,  
he spoke to the army of Israel and warned them not to mess with the house of David!

*<sup>4</sup> Then Abijah stood up on Mount Zemaraim that is in the hill country of Ephraim and said,  
“Hear me, O Jeroboam and all Israel! <sup>5</sup> Ought you not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave  
the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt? <sup>6</sup> Yet Jeroboam the  
son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord, <sup>7</sup> and  
certain worthless scoundrels gathered about him and defied Rehoboam the son of Solomon,*

when Rehoboam was young and irresolute<sup>[b]</sup> and could not withstand them.

Abijah's sermon follows the typical pattern of many Old Testament sermons:

he starts by setting out the main points of the historical context:

“you ought to know that Yahweh gave the kingship over Israel to the house of David.”

But Jeroboam rebelled against his lord,

and “certain worthless scoundrels” encouraged him to defy Rehoboam,  
and Rehoboam was too inexperienced, so he could not withstand them.

This is a somewhat different twist on the story than we are used to!

In Kings we are told that God sent his *prophet* to offer the kingship of Israel to Jeroboam.

Even 2 Chronicles 11:4 says that God *forbade* Rehoboam to attack Jeroboam,  
saying “this thing is from me.”

But Abijah takes the view that the entire thing is a matter of rebellion.

The kingship of Israel belongs to the house of David by a covenant of salt.

The term “covenant of salt” is never explained in the Old Testament,

but it seems to refer to how eating salt together was a sign of friendship,  
and so God had commanded that all grain offerings

should be seasoned with salt (Lev. 2:13).

A covenant of salt, then, is a covenant of friendship.

God has committed himself to defend David, his friend.

And so Abijah goes into battle with great confidence!

#### **b. The LORD Is with Us Because of the Priests and Temple – and Because We Have Not Forsaken the LORD (v8-12)**

<sup>8</sup> “And now you think to 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 you for gods. <sup>9</sup> Have you not driven out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made priests for yourselves like the peoples of other lands? Whoever comes for ordination<sup>[c]</sup> with a young bull or seven rams becomes a priest of what are no gods. <sup>10</sup> But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him. We have priests ministering to the LORD who are sons of Aaron, and Levites for their service. <sup>11</sup> They offer to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt offerings and incense of sweet spices, set out the showbread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand that its lamps may burn every evening. For we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken him.

In verses 8-11, then, Abijah contrasts Israel and Judah.

In doing this he follows the “two ways” approach of the wisdom tradition,  
focusing on the “two ways” of worship.

He starts with the “way” of Jeroboam (v8-9):

you have a multitude;

you have the golden calves – gods that are no gods;

you have driven out the Aaronic priests and Levites,

and you have a self-appointed priesthood.

But we (v10-11) have sons of Aaron serving at the altar.

We follow the prescribed rituals of the altar and the temple every day.

In conclusion, “We keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken him.”

Therefore,

*<sup>12</sup> Behold, God is with us at our head, and his priests with their battle trumpets to sound the call to battle against you. O sons of Israel, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you cannot succeed.”*

This is a fascinating sermon,

because it would have made many of the prophets cringe!

We have the temple, we have the priests, we have the proper liturgy,  
therefore God is on our side!

Jeremiah will warn, “do not say ‘the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD’” –  
and Ezekiel will see a vision of the Spirit of God departing from the temple!

But of course, the reason for that is because Judah and Jerusalem had turned to idolatry!

So long as it was true that Jerusalem and the sons of David were faithful to God himself,  
then it is also true that God had promised to protect and defend them.

Abijah simply believed God’s promise that he had made to Solomon  
that if the LORD’s anointed cried out to him – towards his holy temple –  
then he would deliver his anointed!

You do realize, of course,

that we depend upon the same promise?

We depend on the idea that God will always hear Jesus when he intercedes for us!

The Son of David – the anointed king –  
cries out to the Father on our behalf,  
just like Abijah cried out for Judah.

We are outnumbered, outmanned, outgunned –  
the world, the flesh and the devil have us outflanked –

but because our king appeals to God  
on the basis of the temple, the sacrifices, and the priest (namely, himself!) –  
therefore we have confidence to go into battle everyday  
proclaiming the glorious triumph of Jesus!

Now, we are not told what Jeroboam was thinking.

We know from Kings that God had warned him *not* to attack Judah,  
because God would not give Judah into his hand.

But if Jeroboam did not listen to God,  
why should he listen to Abijah?

**c. Judah Prevailed, Because They Relied on the LORD (v13-22)**

<sup>13</sup> Jeroboam had sent an ambush around to come upon them from behind. Thus his troops<sup>[d]</sup> were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. <sup>14</sup> And when Judah looked, behold, the battle was in front of and behind them. And they cried to the LORD, and the priests blew the trumpets. <sup>15</sup> Then the men of Judah raised the battle shout. And when the men of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. <sup>16</sup> The men of Israel fled before Judah, and God gave them into their hand. <sup>17</sup> Abijah and his people struck them with great force, so there fell slain of Israel 500,000 chosen men. <sup>18</sup> Thus the men of Israel were subdued at that time, and the men of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD, the God of their fathers.

So Jeroboam attacked –

Judah cried out to the LORD –  
the priests blew the trumpets,  
and the men of Judah raised the battle shout.  
And when the men of Judah shouted (in other words,  
because they believed God and cried out to him),  
God defeated Israel before Judah.

Against overwhelming odds, Judah prevailed.

Why?

“Because they relied on the LORD, the God of their fathers”!

Behind the sermon of Abijah, you need to hear the sermon of the Chronicler!  
You may not see how God will provide for you.  
You may face overwhelming odds.  
But you need to rely on the LORD, the God of your fathers.  
He will not leave you or forsake you.  
(Of course, in the Chronicler’s day, the son of David is not on the throne!  
Chronicles resolutely looks forward  
to the eschatological restoration of the house of David!)

<sup>19</sup> And Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took cities from him, Bethel with its villages and Jeshanah with its villages and Ephron<sup>[e]</sup> with its villages. <sup>20</sup> Jeroboam did not recover his power in the days of Abijah. And the LORD struck him down, and he died. <sup>21</sup> But Abijah grew mighty. And he took fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. <sup>22</sup> The rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways and his sayings, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.

Abijah only reigned for three years –  
but the Chronicler says “he grew mighty.”

This is a common phrase in Chronicles.  
It carries the idea of “strengthened his grip on the kingship” –  
and can include the idea of eliminating rivals!  
Here Abijah recaptured some of the border villages from Jeroboam.  
And he had lots of children.

It is particularly significant that he captured Bethel.

Bethel was where one of the two golden calves was kept.

(We know from Kings that Bethel was soon restored to the northern kingdom,  
but Abijah's might is displayed in his ability to capture Bethel).

People have sometimes said that the Chronicler views long life as a sign of God's blessing.

Abijah reigned only three years –

and since his father, Rehoboam, died at the age of 58,

it is unlikely that Abijah was more than 40 when he died.

But then again, the Chronicler never *says* that Abijah was a good king!

## **2. Asa: the LORD Delivers His Anointed One Who Cries to Him (14:1-15)**

### **a. A King Like Solomon – Worship and Building – a King Who Gives Rest (v1-7)**

*14 <sup>[a]</sup> Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land had rest for ten years. <sup>2</sup> <sup>[b]</sup> And Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.*

On the other hand, Kings and Chronicles both agree that Abijah's son, Asa,

“did what is right in the eyes of the LORD,

as David his father had done.” (1 Kings 15:11)

But whereas Kings only spends 15 verses on Asa –

Chronicles gives him 48 verses.

Tonight we will only introduce Asa in comparison with his father,

because it helps us see that Chronicles distinguishes between them.

The Chronicler has a generally positive view of Abijah,

but he positively glows about Asa!

Why?

Because Asa

*<sup>3</sup> He took away the foreign altars and the high places and broke down the pillars and cut down the Asherim <sup>4</sup> and commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law and the commandment. <sup>5</sup> He also took out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him. <sup>6</sup> He built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for the LORD gave him peace. <sup>7</sup> And he said to Judah, “Let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the LORD our God. We have sought him, and he has given us peace on every side.” So they built and prospered.*

Now, what is curious about this is that Kings says that Asa *did not* take away the high places!

We'll see next time that the Chronicler says that Asa

removed the high places from Judah,

but *did not remove* all the high places from the captured territory of Israel.

Kings gives a simplified version –  
the point being that Asa was good, but not good enough.

Chronicles takes more time to flesh out the story:

Asa started out *really good!*

Indeed, Asa brings *rest* to his people for the first decade of his reign –  
“for the LORD gave him peace.”

In Asa, there are echoes of his great-grandfather Solomon.

He worships like Solomon.

He builds like Solomon.

And Judah has peace, like it did in the days of Solomon.

But the key theme in the reign of Asa, is that of *seeking* the LORD.

The phrase appears nine times in three chapters.

First in v4 – where Asa commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers,  
and then twice more in his speech in v7, where Asa reminds the people  
that the land is still theirs because they have sought the LORD.

Again – the point that the Chronicler is making to Israel *after the exile* is clear:  
make sure that you keep seeking the Lord!

If you turn aside, and seek anything else –  
you will surely perish.

So we shouldn't be surprised to hear a son of David say,

“seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” –  
and God will take care of everything else.

#### **b. The Prayer of Asa – the Fear of the LORD – the Triumph of the Son of David (v8-15)**

<sup>8</sup> And Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 men from Benjamin that carried shields and drew bows. All these were mighty men of valor. <sup>9</sup> Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. <sup>10</sup> And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. <sup>11</sup> And Asa cried to the LORD his God, “O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you.” <sup>12</sup> So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. <sup>13</sup> Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until none remained alive, for they were broken before the LORD and his army. The men of Judah<sup>[c]</sup> carried away very much spoil. <sup>14</sup> And they attacked all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the LORD was upon them. They plundered all the cities, for there was much plunder in them. <sup>15</sup> And they struck down the tents of those who had livestock and carried away sheep in abundance and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

In the case of Asa, the “everything else” included a million man army from Ethiopia.

Again, we shouldn't expect the numbers to be literal.

The point is simply that a huge Ethiopian army attacked.

And when they attacked,

*And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you."*

Like his father, Asa believed God's promise to Solomon.

God had promised that he would hear the cry of his anointed king.

And when the anointed king cries out to the LORD in faith,

God hears and rescues and delivers his people.

David's throne and Solomon's temple are at the very heart of the Chronicler's message.

Life and salvation will come to Israel only if Israel is ruled by the Son of David  
and worships at Solomon's temple.

When the Davidic king and his people seek the LORD together,  
then all is right with the world.

Yes, for three years the faithfulness of the people sustained Rehoboam, an unfaithful king.

But God is neither a Democrat, nor a Republican.

He is a resolute Monarchist!

It is only when the *king* is faithful –

it is only when the LORD's anointed is faithful forever –  
that God's blessing rests forever on his people!