

## “Abijah: The Hypocritical King”

*Who’s the Boss? – A series on the Kings*

*2 Chronicles 13; 1 Kings 15:1-8*

**Introduction:** Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Chronicles 13, 2 Chronicles chapter 13.

In our text this morning we are going to see what was happening in Judah, the two southern tribes, while Jeroboam was overseeing his wicked rule over Israel, the 10 northern tribes. The camera of the narrative will zoom out from Jeroboam, pan over to Jerusalem and Judah, and zoom in on what the kings in the south are doing. You will remember that Jeroboam had been the man that was one of Solomon’s most trusted workers whom God had appointed to set up a rival kingdom to the rule of the house of David as a means of judgment upon the idolatrous ways that Solomon had allowed into the lives of the people. God put Jeroboam in place as the king of the Northern Tribes known as Israel and promised him that if he would follow all of his ways and obey his commands that he would have a dynasty of many sons who would sit on that very same throne. But Jeroboam proved that he did not meet the conditions of that promise, but rather he led the 10 northern tribes into the worst idolatry the nation had ever seen. His wickedness became the legacy that he left, and this will be the refrain that we will hear throughout the telling of the kings who follow Jeroboam. But while Jeroboam was making golden bulls and setting up high places and appointing random people to be priests in his false religion, there was still something going on in Judah. Rehoboam had been king in Jerusalem over the southern two tribes of Judah and Benjamin since the beginning of Jeroboam’s rival kingdom. After 17 years of ruling Rehoboam died, and now his son Abijah is ruling in his place. There are two passages that tell us about this king and about how he reigned – 2 Chronicles 13 and 1 Kings 15. We will look at both this morning, but we will start in 2 Chronicles 13. As we approach the text this morning we are going to be considering four different aspects of the narrative. Let’s consider first Abijah’s pronounced faithfulness.

### I. Abijah’s Pronounced Faithfulness – vs. 1-12

- a. In verses 1-12 we see Abijah make this courageous speech on the precipice of yet another civil war between Israel and Judah. We have been told before in the text that there had been constant civil war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, and this pattern continues in the reign of Abijah. And on the verge of the signature battle between Abijah and Jeroboam we read of this courageous speech from the mouth of Abijah. Let’s read verses 1-12.
- b. It was courageous
  - i. What a courageous word from God’s king on the verge of yet another horrific conflict between God’s people. Abijah obviously sees the conflict between God’s people as being rooted in Israel’s unfaithfulness and Judah’s faithfulness. In other words, he is saying to them, we are here to fight today because you have been unfaithful and we have been faithful. Now, this is a pretty dangerous thing to say when your troops are outnumbered 2-1 by the opposing army. This is either courageous or foolish, but for Abijah’s sake we will say that it was courageous. If the result had been different then certainly it would have been foolish.
  - ii. But in true courage he stands on a hill so that all can hear and he decries the Israelites because of their rebellious ways and he exalts his kingdom as being the kingdom of the Lord because they have stayed faithful.

- iii. Now, I have never been on the verge of a real life battle where I was moments away from the horrific realities of war, but I can imagine that in those moments there is a deep gut check going on in the heart of every soldier. There must be in those moments a mental review of why this war is necessary and of why your side will most certainly win. In fact, I would imagine that hardly a warrior has ever been willing to fight without having a deep confidence that his side would win. And so in a stroke of genius Abijah points out what the Israelites are trusting in and what the nation of Judah is trusting in. He does this to point out the reality of who is more likely to win the battle based on what they are trusting in.
  - iv. He says in verse 8 that the Israelites think they can win because they are a great multitude, and because they have brought out the golden bulls with them, and because they have established a whole new worship that no longer depends upon Jerusalem and the Temple and the priesthood. In other words, the Israelites were ready to fight because they had completely separated themselves from being dependent upon the worship of Yahweh God as it took place at the Temple in Jerusalem. They were also confident in the fight because they had double the troops and because they brought out their good-luck charm gods to guarantee their victory.
  - v. But not so fast, says Abijah. He reminds them of their treacherous rebellion and of their abandonment of true worship of Yahweh God. He reminds them of how the nation of Judah has stayed faithful to the sacred worship of God in the public setting in that they have kept up with the charge of the Lord to offer daily sacrifices and to keep the Temple services going through the ministry of the sons of Aaron and Levi. “Unlike you,” says Abijah, “we have not forsaken the Lord.” “Unlike you, we are not depending upon idols to win the battle for us, but rather Yahweh God is at our head and his priests are leading us into battle.” In other words he is saying to everyone who will listen – we will win because we have not forsaken the Lord, and you will lose because you have forsaken the Lord.
  - vi. The crescendo of Abijah’s sermon is seen in his statement in verse 12: “O sons of Israel, do not fight against the Lord, the God of your fathers, for you cannot succeed. From the history of the children of Israel they know this to be true. They can simply think back to David & Goliath, the Israelites stunning defeat of the Philistines under the leadership of Samuel, the conquest of the Promised Land, and the exodus from under Egyptian slavery. All of these were marked with the clear message that you wanted to be on Yahweh God’s side, because no matter the odds or the obstacle, God was going to win. Whether it was a 9 and ½ foot tall giant, or an angry and powerful pharaoh, or a wall around a city that was impenetrable – God was going to win! So, Abijah reminds all who will listen – don’t fight against the Lord because you will not win. This was certainly a courageous pronouncement of faithfulness in the face of 800,000 angry and unfaithful enemies.
- c. It was true
- i. What Abijah said here is true. Judah had kept the clear command of the Lord in that they had indeed continued with the public sacrifices at the Temple. The sons of Aaron and Levi had continued to minister in the Temple as they were instructed and all the forms of public worship at the Temple had remained.
  - ii. In this sense the nation of Judah had maintained loyalty to the God of Heaven. They had not abandoned the clear commands of how they were to worship, they had not setup a rival place with a rival god with rival priests and rival feasts. No, they had been faithful.

- d. It was clouded
  - i. But this pronounced faithfulness that comes from the lips of Judah's king is a clouded faithfulness. Sure, they had kept the Temple services going along with the Temple personnel and all the feasts, but there is more to the story than this. As is often true with us, Abijah tells the part of the story that best helps his cause and that shines a positive light on his kingdom. Unlike Jeroboam he had not led his nation to abandon the commanded forms of worship as given by God himself. However, like Jeroboam he still did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord because he allowed for and participated in the idolatrous practices that included high places, shrines, Asherim poles, and cult prostitutes. This is far from fidelity to the Lord God of Heaven for Abijah. Though he courageously declares his own covenant faithfulness to the one True God, and though this is partially true, it is a clouded and murky faithfulness that is actually filled with a mixture of obedience and disobedience, fidelity and idolatry.

## II. Judah's Victorious Trust – vs. 13-21

- a. And yet in verses 13-21 we see that this murky and clouded faithfulness was indeed met with God's powerful victory. *Read vs. 13-21*
- b. Instead of heeding Abijah's sermon of warning, Jeroboam seeks the full demise of Judah through the means of an ambush. Jeroboam had long ago abandoned Yahweh God, so why in the world would he have time for a courageous warning from a rival king. He had set his mind on rebellion and no puny king from the south was going to change his direction, even if he had the truth.
- c. So, there is Judah, the troops of Jeroboam in front of them lined up for battle and the ambush behind them. There is no escape. It is time to put up or shut up. Will Abijah and his people really trust the Lord and look to him for the victory, or were those just courageous words spoken by an over-zealous leader? Well, they cast their trust on the one true God. They cried to the Lord and they shouted the battle shout to invoke his help and then they saw God do what they had heard of God doing so many other times – give His people and impossible victory. And they did not just win, but they stomped them. Over half of Jeroboam's troops were killed in the battle and he lost three of his southernmost towns as Judah took the fight to Israel. Abijah increased in strength and Jeroboam and his power were decreased and his reign began to fall apart as eventually he died because the Lord struck him down. This was a mighty victory in an impossible situation. Yet, how did it happen.
- d. Verse 18 makes it clear how it happened. The men of Judah prevailed because the men of Judah relied upon the Lord. In other words, they put their hope and their trust and their reliance upon the Lord, the God of their fathers. Hence the battle was won because they relied upon God. Not their vast numbers, because they didn't have them, and not upon their good luck charm gods because they didn't bring them, but rather upon the God of Heaven. And because of this they won the victory.
- e. This word for reliance in verse 18 is a word that is coupled with trust in Proverbs 3:5. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and do not lean on your own understanding." Reliance upon God, the kind of reliance that brings the victory no matter the odds is a leaning upon and trusting in kind of reliance. Rather than leaning upon and supporting ourselves by our own understanding and our own surmising and tinkering, we must trust in the Lord. The object lesson for both of these is found in the text. Jeroboam leaned upon his own understanding and rejected Yahweh God and lost the battle. Abijah, and the men of Judah, cried out to the Lord and leaned upon him and won the battle. God had promised to judge Jeroboam for his vile and wicked ways, and the

judgment was beginning through the victorious trust of the men of Judah. Because they believed the Lord and leaned upon Him as their help and their strength, they found victory in the face of what must have looked like certain defeat. In this they are wonderful examples to us, and yet this isn't the whole story. There is more going on in the land of Judah during the reign of Abijah than this pronounced faithfulness and this victorious trust in Yahweh God. Turn with me to 1 Kings 15.

### III. Abijah's Problematic Heart – 1 Kings 15:3

- a. The narrator in the book of Kings is going to give us a vastly different picture of Abijah, and in fact he is going to call him a different name and he is going to spell his mother's name differently and assign a different grandfather to him. So, in verses 1-2 we read . . .
- b. These differences are not textual variants, nor are they mistakes. The author of Kings calls this king Abijah. Maybe this was another pronunciation of his name, or maybe the author tweaked his name because Abijah means, "son of Yah", or son of the Lord. Maybe, through inspiration of the Spirit, God did not want this name associated with the evil acts of Abijah that we are going to read about in the next few verses. Honestly, we don't know why his name is spelled differently here than in Chronicles. The fact that his mother's name is spelled differently may have similar explanations. The fact that he is assigned a different grandfather here than in Chronicles is due to the fact that the Israelites thought of being the son of someone or the father of someone as being an ancestor of someone. So, in the Jewish mind it was totally right and proper to say that someone was the son of their great-great grandfather. And so here, Maacah is said to be the daughter of Abishalom, which is a variant of the name Absalom, and in reality she is the granddaughter of Absalom.
- c. The bigger discrepancy in the text is what it says next about Abijah. *Read verses 3-8.*
- d. There is no mention here of the mighty victory over Jeroboam. Nor is there any press given to the great oration of Abijah given on Mt. Zemaraim. Nor do we find out about the deep trust in the Lord that led to the victory. Nope, what we get here is – Abijah walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. But we were just told in 2 Chronicles by Abijah himself that they had maintained the Temple worship and the priesthood and the sacrifices. But what Abijah didn't tell us is that while Judah maintained the formal worship of Jehovah at the Temple that was not all that they maintained. Under Abijah's rule the breaking of the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments was a common reality among God's people. In fact, as we will see next week, Abijah's son Asa will clean up the country from its idolatrous practices and in so doing he will remove high places and put away male cult prostitutes and remove idols and cut down Asherim poles and even remove the Queen mother from her position because of her idolatrous ways. So the nation of Judah under the leadership of Abijah still had a major problem with idolatry. And the text is clear here that this problem was a heart problem. Abijah's heart was not wholly true to the Lord. In other words, he didn't maintain a singular worship of the only God of Heaven, and so therefore he was not wholly true to the Lord in his heart.
- e. But why do the accounts vary so much? Why is Chronicles basically positive and Kings basically negative? Well, as you can imagine there are many explanations out there for this. Some would say that this proves that the historical record of these books is suspect and inaccurate, but we know that this is not true because this is the inspired Word of God and He would not have made a mistake in giving us the account. Some would say that the details given are suited to the purpose of the narrator. The author of the Kings account is writing to those in exile for the

purpose of showing them that the sin of their kings and the sin of the people have put them in exile, but there is a coming Kingdom of David's true Son that will restore them to their land and Israel to her glory. The author of the Chronicles is most likely someone like Ezra who is writing to the people as they try to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and so he is giving them details of past accounts where trust in the Lord proved to be the only hope for success. The answer most definitely has something to do with that, but what I think is important to notice is that neither author actually disagrees with the other. In Chronicles the author gives the account of Abijah's victory over Jeroboam and details the trust that he and the men of Judah placed in the Lord that led to the victory, but he also tells in the very next chapter of how his son Asa had to come in and clean the country out of the all of her idolatrous practices. So the Chronicler is certainly not trying to whitewash Abijah in any way, he just focuses in on the account of the victory over Jeroboam.

- f. And the author of Kings does not give us the details of Abijah's victory over Jeroboam, but he does say in verses 4-5 that for the sake of David his descendent Abijah was set up and established as king and Jerusalem itself was established as well. He also tells us that there was war between Jeroboam and Abijah, but he doesn't give us the details like the Chronicler does. So the accounts are different but they are not incompatible. They each have their unique focus, but they do not contradict.
- g. So putting both accounts together we see that Abijah led the nation into a courageous act of trust and reliance upon the Lord even though he had a major heart problem. Why in the world did the God of Heaven use Abijah in this way? If he had a major heart problem in that he was not wholly true to the Lord, why did God ever bless Abijah and allow Judah to win the victory over Jeroboam? Doesn't God require faithfulness? Doesn't God demand singular worship? Doesn't God punish severely those who are not wholly true? Yes, Yes, and Yes. But God is also full of mercy. And in fact, this explanation of the mercy of God in verses 4-5 give the story behind the story of 2 Chronicles 13. Abijah was able to successfully lead the nation to victory against Jeroboam because of God's Nevertheless mercy.

#### IV. God's Nevertheless Mercy – 1 Kings 15:4-5

- a. In light of Abijah's untrue heart, nevertheless. That is quite the English word isn't it? Three words combined into one to communicate an important adversative conjunction. Nevertheless. Considering all of this, still something remains. Taking into account the untrue heart of Abijah, the mercy of God is never the less. In spite of his unfaithfulness, God's mercy does not change. This is God's nevertheless mercy. It is all over the Scriptures, and it is all over our own lives. This is our God. He is a God filled with nevertheless mercy.
- b. In Abijah's case, this mercy that was shown him was for the sake of David, his great-grandfather. God had made an eternal covenant with David, and he was going to keep it. In fact, in the wording of the covenant itself God acknowledged that his sons would not always walk in all the ways that David had walked, but for David's sake the covenant would remain. Does this mean that the Lord is blessing David's descendants because of David's covenant faithfulness, or does this mean that the Lord is blessing David's descendants because of the covenant he has made with David? Well, the answer is yes. Both things are acknowledged in this text and in others. That phrase "for the sake of David" takes into account the covenant that the Lord established with him, and God is being faithful to His word as he establishes Abijah especially through this signature win over Jeroboam. But then we also see that verse 5 tells us that David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that the Lord commanded him all the days of his life and so because of this David's descendant, Abijah, is a recipient of this

blessing of obedience by his great-grandfather. So, the Lord's nevertheless mercy is at work in Abijah's life because of the covenant promises of God and because of the covenant faithfulness of David.

- c. What a different legacy David has from that of Jeroboam. David's descendants are blessed and established as kings over God's people because of his obedience to the Lord, and Jeroboam's descendants are cut off, not just from the throne but from life, because of the wickedness of Jeroboam. Fidelity to the one true God matters. Not just in your life, but in the life of those who follow you. Certainly it is no guarantee of their faithfulness, as we see with David's descendants, but there is a continued blessing from the Lord upon the descendants of those who faithfully obey.
- d. But this is not the main point of this verse. Verse 5 points to the faithful obedience of David with one major exception. So, the nevertheless mercy of God upon Abijah was a result of David's covenant obedience, but more than that it was a product of God's faithfulness to His own word. I say this because the text says this. Why else would the author include here the exception clause for David? He is pointing us to the reality that David was obedient and faithful and singularly worshiped the God of Heaven and maintained a wholly true heart, except for the matter of Uriah the Hittite, and by this the author means to remind us of the whole situation with Bathsheeba and David. God's covenant promise was not entirely dependent upon David's obedience, but rather it rested entirely upon God's nevertheless mercy.
- e. So, in a very real sense the Kingdom of the Lord was advanced because of the faithfulness and obedience of King David, and in another very real sense the Kingdom of the Lord was established because of the nevertheless mercy of God. The Kingdom was advanced by David, but it was not dependent upon David. The descendants of David basked in the glow of his obedience, but their rule was established based on the nevertheless mercy of God.
- f. We all have an exception clause. Though we may think that we have been faithful to the Lord, and though like Abijah we may pronounce that faithfulness to others, we all have an exception clause. Which simply means that our hearts should rejoice to read a passage like this in the Scriptures. Our hearts should leap with joy to know that clouded faithfulness is undergirded by the nevertheless mercy of God. Impure obedience is met by nevertheless mercy! We don't get what we deserve when we are recipients of this mercy of God!

#### V. Therefore:

- a. So what does this all mean for us today? Let me close with three points of application to real life.
- b. In spite of your perceived faithfulness let God evaluate your heart.
  - i. Abijah pronounced in courageous fashion his own perceived faithfulness, while in reality his life was filled with the product of an untrue heart. None of us thinks that we are being unfaithful. We don't set out to be unfaithful. We don't plan on failure and disobedience. In fact, this is part of the extreme danger of sin. We often don't realize that we are in it. So, I ask you – are you aware of any point in your life this morning where you are being unfaithful to the Lord, where you have a mixed worship and a clouded loyalty?
  - ii. If you can answer with a specific area then praise God that he has softened your heart and that he is already at work in you to grow you and change you in this area. But I am guessing that for the majority of us we probably cannot think immediately of an area where we are not being faithful and obedient. From Abijah's life I caution you to not assume that this means that you are being completely faithful, but rather to assume that

this means that you need God to evaluate your life and show you the truth about your own faithfulness. Don't think your faithful just because you think you are faithful.

- c. In light of your present battle rely on the Lord (in word & deed).
  - i. Also from Abijah's life we must learn that reliance upon the Lord is the only sure path to victory. So in light of your present battle rely upon the Lord. Most certainly that is one of the key lessons from 2 Chronicles 13 – rely on the Lord.
  - ii. This reliance is not just a proclamation however. These men of Judah declared their trust, but they were still in the battle between the army of Jeroboam and the ambush. They couldn't just say it with their mouths, but they had to prove with their actions that they trusted the Lord. They couldn't just huddle together on the hillside and keep declaring their trust while the enemy approached with sword and spear. No, they had to fight. So, with us, we must not only trust in our hearts but we must also trust in our actions. Reliance upon the Lord is not just found in your heart, but it is also found in how you live your life. In other words, you could say that you are trusting in the Lord to meet your financial needs, but if you are not living according to God's commandments when it comes to your money, then you are actually not living in trust in the Lord. Trust goes farther than words, it determines action.
- d. In light of your own heart problem cast yourself on God's nevertheless mercy.
  - i. But we know that this action will never be perfect. We will always have a heart problem that will ambush and derail our obedience. And so we must cast ourselves upon the nevertheless mercy of God.
  - ii. Abijah was a recipient of this mercy because he had a faithful and obedient great-grandfather who went before him and secured this covenant faithfulness of God for his family. Not all of us have this in our families. Not all of us are descendants of those who knew the one true God and worshiped him singularly and faithfully. Not all of us bask in the glow of our ancestor's obedience.
  - iii. But there has come a Son of David who can secure this nevertheless mercy of God for all of eternity for us. This Son of David was Jesus, the Christ. He came in human flesh and lived in perfect obedience so that he could stand between us and God and represent us to Him. Jesus is God, but He is also our advocate before God.
    - 1. <sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Heb. 5:7-10)
  - iv. Do you know this eternal salvation? We all have an exception clause, just like David. But this Son of David has no exception clause. He was completely obedient, and therefore he is our only hope of having this everlasting salvation. Are you basking in the glow of this Jesus? Do you know the forgiveness of your sins through Him? Are you relying totally and completely upon His sacrifice for you to save you from your just punishment in the Eternal Lake of Fire?

**Conclusion:** God has made a way for you to be a forever recipient of this nevertheless mercy. And this way is Jesus! For those of us who already know this mercy may we be reminded that this mercy is not necessary just for our salvation but also for our daily walk! May we be reminded that we need his mercy as much today as we

needed it on the day of our salvation. In light of our own heart problem we must cast ourselves upon the nevertheless mercy of God! Let's pray.

**Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21**