

# CHAPTER 13

We have here a much fuller account of the reign of Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, than we had in the Kings. There we found that his character was no better than his father's — he “walked in the sins of his father, and his heart was not right with God,” 1 Kings 25:2, 3. But here we find him more brave and successful in war than his father was. He reigned but three years, and was chiefly famous for a glorious victory he obtained over the forces of Jeroboam. Here we have,

**I.** The armies brought into the field on both sides (v. 3). The remonstrance which Abijah made before the battle, setting forth the justice of his cause (v. 4-12).

**III.** The distress which Judah was brought into by the policy of Jeroboam (v. 13, 14).

**IV.** The victory they obtained notwithstanding, by the power of God (v. 15-20).

**V.** The conclusion of Abijah's reign (v. 21, 22).

## <4130>2 CHRONICLES 13:1-12

### ABIJAH'S REIGN OVER JUDAH

Abijah's mother was called *Maachah*, the daughter of Absalom, <4110>2 Chronicles 11:20; here she is called *Michaiah*, the daughter of Uriel. It is most probable that she was a grand-daughter of Absalom, by his daughter Tamar (<4047>2 Samuel 14:27), and that her immediate father was this Uriel. But we are here to attend Abijah into the field of battle with Jeroboam king of Israel.

**I.** God gave him leave to engage with Jeroboam, and owned him in the conflict, though he would not permit Rehoboam to do it, <4110>2 Chronicles 11:4.

**1.** Jeroboam, it is probable, was now the aggressor, and what Abijah did was in his own necessary defence. Jeroboam, it may be, happening to

survive Rehoboam, claimed the crown of Judah by survivorship, at least hoped to get it from this young king, upon his accession to the throne. Against these impudent pretensions it was brave in Abijah to take up arms, and God stood by him.

2. When Rehoboam attempted to recover his ten tribes Jeroboam was upon his good behaviour, and there must be some trial of him; but now that he had discovered what manner of man he was, by setting up the calves and casting off the priests, Abijah is allowed to chastise him, and it does not appear that he intended any more; whereas Rehoboam aimed at no less than the utter reduction of the ten tribes, which was contrary to the counsel of God.

II. Jeroboam's army was double in number to that of Abijah (v. 3), for he had ten tribes to raise an army out of, while Abijah had but two. Of the army on both sides it is said, they were *mighty men, chosen men, and valiant*; but the army of Judah consisted only of 400,000, while Jeroboam's army amounted to 800,000. The inferior number however proved victorious; for the battle is not always to the strong nor the cause to the majority.

III. Abijah, before he fought them, reasoned with them, to persuade them, though not to return to the house of David (that matter was settled by the divine determination and he acquiesced), yet to desist from fighting against the house of David. He would not have them *withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hands of the sons of David* (v. 8), but at least to be content with what they had. Note, It is good to try reason before we use force. If the point may be gained by dint of argument, better so than by dint of sword. We must never fly to violent methods till all the arts of persuasion have been tried in vain. War must be the *ultima ratio regum* — *the last resort of kings*. Fair reasoning may do a great deal of good and prevent a good deal of mischief. *How forcible are right words!* Abijah had got with his army into the heart of their country; for he made this speech upon a hill in Mount Ephraim, where he might be heard by Jeroboam and the principal officers, with whom it is probable he desired to have a treaty, to which they consented. It has been usual for great generals to make speeches to their soldiers to animate them, and this speech of Abijah had some tendency to do this, but was directed to Jeroboam and all Israel. Two things Abijah undertakes to make out, for the satisfaction of his own men and the conviction of the enemy: —

**1.** That he had right on his side, a *jus divinum* — a *divine right*: “You know, or ought to know, that *God gave the kingdom to David and his sons for ever*” (v. 5), not by common providence, his usual way of disposing of kingdoms, but by a covenant of salt, a lasting covenant, a covenant made by sacrifice, which was always salted; so bishop Patrick. All Israel had owned that David was a king of God's making, and that God had entailed the crown upon his family; so that Jeroboam's taking the crown of Israel at first was not justifiable: yet it is not certain that Abijah referred chiefly to that, for he knew that Jeroboam had a grant from God of the ten tribes. His attempt, however, to disturb the peace and possession of the king of Judah was by no means excusable; for when the ten tribes were given to him two were reserved for the house of David. Abijah shows,

**(1.)** That there was a great deal of dishonesty and disingenuousness in Jeroboam's first setting himself up: He *rebelled against his lord* (v. 6) who had preferred him (<sup><1118></sup>1 Kings 11:28), and basely took advantage of Rehoboam's weakness in a critical juncture, when, in gratitude to his old master and in justice to his title, he ought rather to have stood by him, and helped to secure the people in their allegiance to him, than to head a party against him and make a prey of him, which was unworthily done and what he could not expect to prosper in. Those that supported him are here called *vain men* (a character perhaps borrowed from <sup><0718></sup>Judges 11:3), men that did not act from any steady principle, but were given to change, and men of Belial, that were for shaking off the yoke of government and setting those over them that would do just as they would have them do.

**(2.)** That there was a great deal of impiety in his present attempt; for, in fighting against the house of David, he fought *against the kingdom of the Lord*. Those who oppose right oppose the righteous God who sits in the throne judging right, and cannot promise themselves success in so doing. Right may indeed go by the worst for a time, but it will prevail at last.

**2.** That he had God on his side. This he insisted much upon, that the religion of Jeroboam and his army was false and idolatrous, but that he and his people, the men of Judah, had the pure worship of the true and living God among them. It appears from the character given of Abijah (<sup><1158></sup>1 Kings 15:3) that he was not himself in this war chiefly from the religion of his kingdom. For,

(1.) Whatever he was otherwise, it should seem that he was no idolator, or, if he connived at the high places and images (<sup><144B></sup>2 Chronicles 14:3, 5), yet he constantly kept up the temple-service.

(2.) Whatever corruptions there were in the kingdom of Judah, the state of religion among them was better than in the kingdom of Israel, with which they were now contending.

(3.) It is common for those that deny the power of godliness to boast of the form of it.

(4.) It was the cause of his kingdom that he was pleading; and, though he was not himself so good as he should have been, yet he hoped that, for the sake of the good men and good things that were in Judah, God would now appear for them. Many that have little religion themselves yet have so much sense and grace as to value it in others. See how he describes,

[1.] The apostasy of Israel from God. “*You are a great multitude,*” said he, “far superior to us in number; but we need not fear you, for you have that among yourselves which is enough to ruin you. For,” *First*, “You have calves for your gods (v. 8), that are unable to protect and help you and will certainly cause the true and living God to oppose you. Those will be Achans, troublers of your camp.” *Secondly*, “You have base men for your priests, v. 9. You have cast off the tribes of Levi, and the house of Aaron, whom God appointed to minister in holy things; and, in conformity to the custom of the idolatrous nations, make any man a priest that has a mind to the office and will be at the charge of the consecration, though ever so much a scandal to the office.” Yet such, though very unfit to be priests, were fittest of all to be *their* priests; for what more agreeable to gods that were no gods than priests that were no priests? Like to like, both pretenders and usurpers.

[2.] The adherence of Judah to God: “*But as for us* (v. 10) *we have not forsaken God.* Jehovah is our God, the God of our fathers, the God of Israel, who is able to protect us, and give us success. He is with us, for we are with him.” *First*, “At home in his temple: *We keep his charge,* v. 10, 11. We worship no images, have no priests but what he has ordained, no rites of worship but what he has prescribed. Both the temple service and the temple furniture are of his appointing. His appointment we abide by, and neither add nor diminish. These we have the comfort of, these we now stand up in the defence of: so that upon a religious as well as a civil

account we have the better cause. *Secondly*, Here in the camp; he is our captain, and we may therefore be sure that he is with us, because we are with him, v. 12. And, as a token of his presence, we have here with us his priests, sounding his trumpets according to the law, as a testimony against you, and an assurance to us that in the day of battle we shall be *remembered before the Lord our God and saved from our enemies;*” for so this sacred signal is explained, <sup><41313></sup>Numbers 10:9. Nothing is more effectual to embolden men, and put spirit into them, than to be sure that God is with them and fights for them. He concludes with fair warning to his enemies. “*Fight not against the God of your fathers.* It is folly to fight against the God of almighty power; but it is treachery and base ingratitude to fight against your fathers' God, and you cannot expect to prosper.”

## <sup><41313></sup>2 CHRONICLES 13:13-22

### JEROBOAM DEFEATED BY ABIJAH

We do not find that Jeroboam offered to make any answer at all to Abijah's speech. Though it was much to the purpose, he resolved not to heed it, and therefore he heard it as though he heard it not. He came to fight, not to dispute. The longest sword, he thought, would determine the matter, not the better cause. Let us therefore see the issue, whether right and religion carried the day or no.

**I.** Jeroboam, who trusted to his politics, was beaten. He was so far from fair reasoning that he was not for fair fighting. We may suppose that he felt a sovereign contempt for Abijah's harangue. “One stratagem,” thinks he, “is worth twenty such speeches; we will soon give him an answer to all his arguments; he shall soon find himself overpowered with numbers, surrounded on every side with the instruments of death, and then let him boast of his religion and his title to the crown.” A parley, it is probable, was agreed on, yet Jeroboam basely takes the advantage of it, and, while he was treating, *laid his ambushment behind Judah*, against all the laws of arms. What honour could be expected in a *servant when he reigned?* Abijah was *for peace*, but, *when he spoke, they were for war*, <sup><41317></sup>Psalms 120:7.

**II.** Abijah and his people, who trusted in their God, came off conquerors, notwithstanding the disproportion of their strength and numbers.

**1.** They were brought into a great strait, put into a great fright, for *the battle was before and behind*. A good cause, and one which is designed to be victorious, may for a season be involved in embarrassment and distress. It was David's case. *They compassed me about like bees,* <sup><4980></sup> Psalm 118:10-12.

**2.** In their distress, when danger was on every side, which way should they look but upwards for deliverance? It is an unspeakable comfort that no enemy (not the most powerful or politic), no stratagem or ambushment, can cut off our communication with heaven; our way thitherward is always open.

**(1.)** *They cried unto the Lord,* v. 14. We hope they did this before they engaged in this war, but the distress they were in made them renew their prayers and quickened them to be importunate. God brings his people into straits, that he may teach them to *cry unto him*. Earnest praying is crying.

**(2.)** They *relied on the God of their fathers*, depended upon his power to help them and committed themselves to him, v. 18. The prayer of faith is the prevailing prayer, and this is that by which we overcome the world, *even our faith,* <sup><5111></sup> 1 John 5:4.

**(3.)** The *priests sounded the trumpets* to animate them by giving them an assurance of God's presence with them. It was not only a martial but a sacred sound, and put life into their faith.

**(4.)** They shouted in confidence of victory: "The day is our own, for God is with us." To the cry of the prayer they added the shout of faith, and so became more than conquerors.

**3.** Thus they obtained a complete victory: *As the men of Judah shouted for joy in God's salvation, God smote Jeroboam and his army with such terror and amazement that they could not strike a stroke, but fled with the greatest precipitation imaginable, and the conquerors gave no quarter, so that they put to the sword 500,000 chosen men (v. 17), more, it is said, than ever we read of in any history to have been killed in one battle; but the battle was the Lord's, who would thus chastise the idolatry of Israel and own the house of David. But see the sad effect of division: it was the blood of Israelites that was thus shed like water by Israelites, while the heathen,*

their neighbours, to whom the name of Israel had formerly been a terror, cried, *Aha! so would we have it.*

**4.** The consequence of this was that the children of Israel, though they were not brought back to the house of David (which by so great a blow surely they would have been had not the determinate counsel of God been otherwise), yet, for that time, were *brought under*, v. 18. Many cities were taken, and remained in the possession of the kings of Judah; as Bethel particularly, v. 19. What became of the golden calf there, when it came into the hands of the king of Judah, we are not told; perhaps it was removed to some place of greater safety, and at length to Samaria (~~2Kings~~ Hosea 8:5); yet in Jehu's time we find it at Bethel, ~~2Kings~~ 2 Kings 10:29. Perhaps Abijah, when it was in his power to demolish it, suffered it to stand, for *his heart was not perfect* with God; and, not improving what he had got for the honour of God, he soon lost it all again.

*Lastly*, The death of both of the conquered and of the conqueror, not long after.

**1.** Jeroboam never looked up after this defeat, though he survived it two or three years. He could not recover *strength again*, v. 20. The Lord struck him either with some bodily disease, of which he languished, or with melancholy and trouble of mind; his heart was broken, and vexation at his loss brought his head, probably by this time a hoary head, with sorrow to the grave. He escaped the sword of Abijah, but God struck him: and there is no escaping his sword.

**2.** Abijah waxed mighty upon it. What number of wives and children he had before does not appear; but now he multiplied his wives to fourteen in all, by whom he had thirty-eight children, v. 21. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of those arrows. It seems, he had ways peculiar to himself, and sayings of his own, which were recorded with his acts in the history of those times, v. 22. But the number of his months was cut off in the midst, and, soon after his triumphs, death conquered the conqueror. Perhaps he was too much lifted up with his victories, and therefore God would not let him live long to enjoy the honour of them.