

Read chapter 10:1-11:4

Whose words matter to you?

Whose counsel carries weight with you?

Every time you open your mouth you are counseling!

Every time you speak, you are interpreting your world,  
and you are saying something about what others ought to believe and/or do.

If you say,

“what did you think about the game last night?!”

you are first suggesting that the game last night was important

(and it may have been – in its own way);

and you are suggesting that it matters (at least to you)

what the other person thought about the game last night!

Yesterday, on the way home from presbytery,

I listened to a fascinating discussion of “the self” –

not the “soul” – because no one really believes in the “soul” anymore,

(after all, if the soul is immaterial, then it is not susceptible to scientific examination!).

These scientists wanted to argue that what gives us our “identity” over time

is not an immaterial substance called the “soul” –

but a “narrative” – a story – that we have constructed

from our memories and experiences.

I don’t want to get into all the problems with that view

(e.g., it assumes that all of reality is subject to scientific observation;

it assumes a fundamentally materialistic view of the world).

Rather, I want to point out that they have understood *something* truly about us.

At the very heart of what it means to be human is the word.

And not just “words” – but *stories* – interpretations of the world (and of ourselves,  
and how we fit into the world).

The way that you think about yourself and your place in the universe

shapes what you say to others;

it shapes how you hear what others say to you..

For those who are in Christ,

the gospel – the *good news* – of what Jesus has done in history

has become the story of our life.

We have a new identity in Christ.  
We have a new story.  
We are no longer who we once were.

2 Chronicles 10-11 is all about retelling our story in a gospel-centered way.

2 Chronicles 10 is almost verbatim the same as 1 Kings 12.  
2 Chronicles 11 adds some new detail  
that should make us rethink our story.

### **1. Rehoboam: the Foolish Son (10:1-19)**

#### **a. The Challenge of Jeroboam (v1-5)**

*<sup>1</sup> Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. <sup>2</sup> And as soon as Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. <sup>3</sup> And they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all Israel came and said to Rehoboam, <sup>4</sup> “Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.” <sup>5</sup> He said to them, “Come to me again in three days.” So the people went away.*

In chapter 10, the Chronicler assumes that you know the story of Jeroboam.  
Kings tells us that Jeroboam was one of Solomon’s servants.

He had worked on the defenses of Jerusalem—  
and had really impressed Solomon with his diligence and reliability;  
and so Solomon gave him charge over the forced labor from the house of Joseph.  
In other words, he knew first hand what the labor conditions were like for the people.

But as Jeroboam was working on the defenses of Jerusalem –  
overseeing the forced labor –

the prophet Ahijah came along and tore his own robe into 12 pieces,  
and told Jeroboam to take 10 of the pieces.

In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul tore Samuel’s robe – trying to prevent him from leaving –  
and Samuel had replied by saying that God had torn the kingdom from Saul.

Now, Ahijah replays that episode,  
handing 10 of the 12 pieces of his robe to Jeroboam,  
and saying that the LORD was going to tear the kingdom from Solomon  
and give 10 tribes to Jeroboam.

When Solomon heard about this he sought to kill Jeroboam –  
and Jeroboam fled to Egypt!

Now, in 2 Chronicles 10, when Jeroboam heard that Rehoboam was going to be crowned king,

he returned from Egypt and the people called him, and he came to Shechem as well!

Notice that Jeroboam is placed at the head of the petitioners in verse 3 and again in verse 12.

This is a very defiant move on the part of the people.

They have called the one person whom Rehoboam most hates as their spokesman.

And they are saying to the crown prince,

“Lighten our yoke or else we will not serve you.”

This is plainly not a group of people who believe in the Divine Right of Kings.

You may be the son of David, but remember that we didn’t always follow David!

What makes you think that we will follow you!

Give us the wrong answer – and we’ll follow Jeroboam!

#### **b. The Counsel of the Old and the Counsel of the Young (v6-11)**

*<sup>6</sup> Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men,<sup>[a]</sup> who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, “How do you advise me to answer this people?” <sup>7</sup> And they said to him, “If you will be good to this people and please them and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.”*

First he turns to the old men—the elders who had advised his father.

They understand the situation very well.

And their answer reveals that they understood the proper function of the king.

The king is not first the *master* of the people,

the king is the *servant* of the people.

The people do not exist for the purpose of serving the king.

The king exists for the purpose of protecting and guarding the people.

If he would serve them for a day—

in other words, if he would hear them, love them, and heed their pleas—

then the people would serve him all their lives.

This is good advice.

The old men understand that kingship is all about servant leadership.

But Rehoboam does not.

And even before we hear that Rehoboam asked the young men,

we are told that he “abandoned” the counsel of the old men.

*<sup>8</sup> But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. <sup>9</sup> And he said to them, “What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, ‘Lighten the yoke that your father put on us’?”*

*<sup>10</sup> And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, “Thus shall you speak to the people who said to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us’; thus shall you say to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs. <sup>11</sup> And now, whereas my*

*father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’”*

Rehoboam does not see himself in the counsel of the old men.

He’s the king!

Why should he humble himself?!

The king does not exist for the people –  
the people exist to serve the king!

And so he turns to the “boys” – his childhood friends.

They urge him to threaten to make the burden heavier.

The old men understood the situation.

They knew that if Rehoboam humbles himself,  
the people will follow him.

But the young men think that humility is a sign of weakness.

They confuse servant leadership with wimpiness.

Humility is *not* wimpiness!

It takes courage and strength to be humble.

I should mention that there is no reference to Rehoboam’s “finger” in verse 10.

Literally it reads,

*My little thing is thicker than my father’s thighs.*

I think that should be sufficiently clear

to express what sort of advice they are giving him!

### **c. The Answer of Rehoboam (v12-15)**

<sup>12</sup> *So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, “Come to me again the third day.”* <sup>13</sup> *And the king answered them harshly; and forsaking the counsel of the old men,* <sup>14</sup> *King Rehoboam spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”* <sup>15</sup> *So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by God that the LORD might fulfill his word, which he spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.*

So, on the third day Jeroboam and all the people came back.

And on the third day, Rehoboam lost the inheritance of David.

On the third day, the son of David crashed and burned

as he said, “come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will crush you!”

Take my yoke upon you and serve me –

or I will beat you to a pulp!

Do you think Jesus had this in mind when he said,  
*Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,  
for I am gentle and humble of heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28-29)

Jesus is claiming to be wiser than Rehoboam!  
He is the faithful Son of David who rules his people with humility and gentleness.

#### **d. The Rebellion of Israel (v16-19)**

But when Israel realizes that Rehoboam is worse than his father,  
Israel walks out (read):

*<sup>16</sup> And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king,  
“What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each of you to  
your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David.” So all Israel went to their tents. <sup>17</sup>  
But Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah. <sup>18</sup> Then King  
Rehoboam sent Hadoram,<sup>[b]</sup> who was taskmaster over the forced labor, and the people of Israel  
stoned him to death with stones. And King Rehoboam quickly mounted his chariot to flee to  
Jerusalem. <sup>19</sup> So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.*

As we approach another presidential election this year,  
this is a really interesting lesson in the “consent of the governed.”

David was the LORD’s anointed.  
God had promised that David’s son would sit on his throne forever.  
You might think that this would bind Israel to the house of David forever!

But it doesn’t!  
Not even in God’s view.  
(After all, God was the one who sent Ahijah to tell Jeroboam  
that God would give him 10 tribes).

It’s true that scripture does *not* approve of people rebelling against lawful authority.  
But Rehoboam does not have lawful authority simply because he is the son of Solomon!  
If the people refuse to make him king – then he is not their king!

Rehoboam, on the other hand,  
is more inclined to a “divine right of kings” approach!  
He thinks that Israel is his inheritance – his birthright.  
And so he assembles the army of Judah and Benjamin to march against Israel.

He is still listening to the counsel of the young men –  
he is still thinking that brutal and bloody is the way of a man –  
the way of a king!

## 2. Rehoboam: The Wise (?) Son (11:1-23)

### a. They Listened to the Word of the LORD (v1-4)

<sup>1</sup> *When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, 180,000 chosen warriors, to fight against Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam.* <sup>2</sup> *But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God:* <sup>3</sup> *“Say to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin,* <sup>4</sup> *‘Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up or fight against your relatives. Return every man to his home, for this thing is from me.’”* So they listened to the word of the LORD and returned and did not go against Jeroboam.

Chapter 11, verses 1-4 is crucial because of its focus on the prophetic Word.

Think about the language of yokes and burdens.

Israel had been slaves in Egypt.

And Moses led them to freedom from oppression.

Now, Jeroboam leads an exodus, of sorts, out of the house of David.

Rehoboam is cast as a sort of Pharaoh–

oppressing the Israelites with his taskmasters.

And like Pharaoh,

he plans to pursue Israel and subjugate them:

he gathers his 180,000 chosen warriors–

but then stops at the last minute.

Why?

Because *the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God:*

*‘Thus says the LORD,*

*You shall not go up or fight against your relatives.*

*Return every man to his home, for this thing is from me.’*

Shemaiah’s name means

“Listen to Yahweh”

And, remarkably! *They listened to the word of the LORD and returned, and did not go against Jeroboam.*

Notice the pronouns.

“They listened to the word of the LORD.”

Did Rehoboam listen to the word of the LORD?

Maybe – maybe not.

But *they* did.

Israel – particularly, Israel in Judah and Benjamin – listened.

The army heard the word of the LORD and returned to their homes.

This is the familiar story of Rehoboam.  
This is the beginning of the “decline narrative” that “everyone knows.”

In the book of Kings, Solomon’s folly begins the decline –  
and Rehoboam signals the beginning of the end  
(an end that takes a long time, but takes on a relentless, mournful sound –  
as everyone knows that Israel is going to die...)

But in chapter 11, the Chronicler deviates from the familiar narrative.  
There’s more to this story.  
Rehoboam may have been foolish in some ways –  
when he listened to bad advice –

but it’s more complicated than Kings had said!

As we went through the narrative of David and Solomon,  
it appeared that the Chronicler was “leaving things out”  
in order to simplify the story.

But as we see here, the Chronicler is not just trying to simplify the story.  
He wants us to see something *more* about Rehoboam.

Or at least, something more about the early years of Rehoboam’s reign.

As I read chapter 11,  
listen to the pronouns - listen for how the Chronicler portrays Rehoboam –  
and how the Chronicler portrays the faithful remnant.

[read chapter 11:5-23]

**b. (Building) He Built Cities (v5-12)**

<sup>5</sup> *Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem, and he built cities for defense in Judah.* <sup>6</sup> *He built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa,* <sup>7</sup> *Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam,* <sup>8</sup> *Gath, Mareshah, Ziph,* <sup>9</sup> *Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah,* <sup>10</sup> *Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron, fortified cities that are in Judah and in Benjamin.* <sup>11</sup> *He made the fortresses strong, and put commanders in them, and stores of food, oil, and wine.* <sup>12</sup> *And he put shields and spears in all the cities and made them very strong. So he held Judah and Benjamin.*

We saw that Solomon’s reign can be described as BW-3  
Buildings, Worship, Wealth, and Wisdom.

And so in chapter 11, the Chronicler reports on *Rehoboam’s* BW-3!  
And in many ways he looks a lot like Solomon.  
As a builder he built up the defenses in Judah.  
Solomon had built the northern defenses of Israel against their enemies –  
but Solomon hadn’t worried about internal defenses,  
because Israel and Judah were one!

Now, Rehoboam fortifies Judah and Benjamin against the danger of an attack from Jeroboam.

So, yes, in one sense Rehoboam is like his father.

He's a builder.

But his building is much smaller –  
much more constricted –  
with a much narrower vision.

Rather than a temple-centered vision of building and extending the kingdom of God;  
Rehoboam is all about protecting his little world.

And you see this in the pronouns in verses 13-17.

**c. (Worship) They Set Their Hearts to Seek the LORD (v13-17)**

*<sup>13</sup> And the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to him from all places where they lived. <sup>14</sup> For the Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the LORD, <sup>15</sup> and he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat idols and for the calves that he had made. <sup>16</sup> And those who had set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers. <sup>17</sup> They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon.*

Verses 13-17 then turns to the topic of worship.

David and Solomon both had been oriented towards the worship of Yahweh.

The temple and its liturgy was at the heart of the reigns of David and Solomon.

Now, as Jeroboam establishes the worship of the golden calf at Bethel and Dan,  
the priests and the Levites – “and those who had set their hearts to seek the LORD”  
come from all Israel to Judah and Jerusalem.

Notice how important Rehoboam is to verses 13-17!

Oh, wait – he's almost irrelevant to verses 13-17!

I say *almost* irrelevant because the *one* mention of Rehoboam in these verses  
highlights the fact that these faithful Yahweh-worshippers  
were the reason why Rehoboam was secure in his kingdom!

In the days of David and Solomon it was because the *king* was faithful  
that the people flourished.

Now it is because of the faithfulness of the remnant of Israel  
that the king is secure.

The Chronicler is trying to rehabilitate Rehoboam (to some extent) –  
but he doesn't have much to work with!



All he can say is that the influx of Yahweh-worshippers into Judah gave Rehoboam a three-year respite!

**d. (Wisdom & Wealth) He Took 18 Wives and 60 Concubines – and Dealt Wisely with His Sons (v18-23)**

<sup>18</sup> *Rehoboam took as wife Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David, and of Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse,* <sup>19</sup> *and she bore him sons, Jeush, Shemariah, and Zaham.*

<sup>20</sup> *After her he took Maacah the daughter of Absalom, who bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith.* <sup>21</sup> *Rehoboam loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and concubines (he took eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters).* <sup>22</sup> *And Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah as chief prince among his brothers, for he intended to make him king.* <sup>23</sup> *And he dealt wisely and distributed some of his sons through all the districts of Judah and Benjamin, in all the fortified cities, and he gave them abundant provisions and procured wives for them.*

Verses 18-23 then turn to Rehoboam's family – his wisdom and his wealth.

His two named wives were both relatives:

Mahalath was a first cousin on her father's side,  
and a second cousin once removed on her mother's side;  
Maacah was first cousin as well.

But he had 16 other wives – and 60 concubines – and had 88 children!  
This section is designed to show Rehoboam's "worldly wisdom."

He has 28 sons.

He wants Ahijah – who is by no means the oldest son –  
to be king after him.

So he prudently distributes his sons throughout Judah and Benjamin,  
gave them abundant provisions and procured wives for them –

essentially saying, "here, I'll give you all this stuff –  
just don't make trouble for your brother!"

Is Rehoboam wise or foolish?

For three years he appears to be wise.

But the Chronicler points out that it was *they* (the faithful remnant from Israel)  
that made Rehoboam secure,  
for *they* walked faithfully for three years in the way of David and Solomon.

When your focus is on maintaining *your* power and *your* kingdom,  
then you wind up with an itty-bitty little kingdom.

When your story is a story that places *you* at the center –  
then your story isn't really all that interesting!

But in Christ, your story is being retold in him.  
As Paul says in Galatians 2,  
    “I have been crucified with Christ.”  
Just as Jesus died on the cross,  
    I have been united with him in his death.  
“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

My identity – the story I tell that defines who I am –  
has been retold in Christ.

Of course, the difference between the Christian and the postmodern version of this  
is that we believe that there is something beyond material reality.

When we say “Christ lives in me” –  
we are talking about something more than mere “story” that lives in me!  
We are talking about the resurrected Christ –  
we are talking about the living *Word* who brings all stories to life!

“And the life I now live in the flesh (in my outward bodily existence)  
I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20)

It’s not merely that I am now telling new stories about myself.  
It is that Jesus Christ himself has drawn me into his story.

And this is why it really matters whose counsel you listen to!  
Rehoboam’s friends told him a story that put Rehoboam at the center of the universe.  
It’s all about you!  
What matters is your desires – your pleasures (after all, you’re the king!)

The old men said, no, you need to humble yourself –  
because the only way to glory is the way of humility – in speech and in behavior;  
and the faithful remnant that came to Jerusalem to worship at the temple said, no,  
you must leave everything to follow the LORD.

It may sound counter-intuitive –  
but as Jesus said,  
    whoever would save his life will lose it –  
    but whoever loses his life – for my sake, and the gospel’s –  
    will save it.