

“The Vanity of Mere Religion”
1 Kings 14:21-31; 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 13
(Preached at Trinity, March 28, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. After spending much time describing the situation in Israel under Jeroboam, the author now switches his attention to Judah and the Southern Kingdom. This will be the pattern throughout the rest of 1 & 2 Kings as he goes back and forth between the two kingdoms.
2. Jeroboam is dead in the Northern Kingdom and replaced by his son, Nadab. The author takes us back chronologically to the reign of Rehoboam. Jeroboam actually outlived Rehoboam by four years.
We are taken all the way back to the beginning:
1 Kings 14:21 NAU - "Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen from all the tribes of Israel to put His name there. And his mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess."
3. After reading of the terrible fall of Jeroboam, we hold out hope for Rehoboam. Perhaps his reign was a righteous rein. Perhaps he led his people to faithfully follow God. We are not left to wonder long:
 - A. Immediately, we are reminded that Rehoboam was the product of one of Solomon's pagan wives who had led Solomon's heart away from God – Naamah, the Ammonitess.
We aren't given much hope that this son had been raised to follow Yahweh in faithfulness.
 - B. And indeed he was not. We were already given a sneak preview of his foolishness in **Chapter 12**. After causing the fracture of Israel he led Judah to follow the same idolatry as Jeroboam.
1 Kings 14:22-24 NAU - "Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked Him to jealousy more than all that their fathers had done, with the sins which they committed. ²³ For they also built for themselves high places and *sacred* pillars and Asherim on every high hill and beneath every luxuriant tree. ²⁴ There were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel."
4. We are reminded of the great decline of the kingdom from the glory days of Solomon.
1 Kings 10:16-17 NAU - "King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten gold, using 600 *shekels of gold* on each large shield. ¹⁷ He made 300 shields of beaten gold, using three minas of gold on each shield, and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon."

Now Rehoboam boasts, not of gold but of bronze shields.

1 Kings 14:27-28 NAU - "So King Rehoboam made shields of bronze in their place, and committed them to the care of the commanders of the guard who guarded the doorway of the king's house. ²⁸ Then it happened as often as the king entered the house of the LORD, that the guards would carry them and would bring them back into the guards' room."

We must see this as the beginning of God's judgment upon a rebellious people.

5. Typical of 1 & 2 Kings, things move quickly. The author only gives us the highlights and then refers us to the Chronicles or public records of the kings if we are interested in knowing more. Unfortunately, these books no longer exist. But the information we *are* given provide us with the essential information and answers the essential question. Did they follow God in covenant faithfulness or did they follow in the sins of the wicked?
6. Rehoboam reigned over Judah for seventeen years and died, leaving behind a legacy of corruption- he built high places of worship, worshipped the pagan image of the Asherim, and even enlisted male prostitutes as a part of their worship.
Verse 31 records his death and we are reminded again that his mother was an Ammonite.
7. He was succeeded by his son, Abijam. He is referred to as Abijah in **2 Chronicles 13** but not to be confused with Abijah, the son of Jeroboam. It might also be good to note that Jeroboam the son of Nebat is not to be confused with Jeroboam II who came to the throne 128 years later.
8. The author of 1 Kings is extremely brief in his coverage of Abijam. He only reigned three years. His mother was Maacah, the daughter of Abishalom. If look at **Verse 10** it is recorded that she was also the mother of Asa. This is because the Hebrew terms daughter and father and mother do not necessarily refer to first generation decent but can mean granddaughter, grandmother, etc. Maacah was the mother of Abijam and grandmother of Asa. Some believe Asa was the product of an incestuous relationship between wicked Abijam and his mother, thus Abijam and his son shared the same mother.
9. We read in **Verse 3** that he walked in all the sins of his father, Rehoboam, and not like David. David will be the test of faithfulness for all of the kings of Judah – were they devoted to God as was David, except in the case of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah.
We are reminded that the hostility that began between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued.
10. The author reminds his readers that the rest of the acts of Abijam are written in the Chronicles of the Kings. Again, these books are lost. What the author wants us to know is that which is most important. Abijam was a wicked king and did not walk in covenant faithfulness before God.
11. There seems to be a conflict here. There is more written in 2 Chronicles that is in our Bibles. We don't know for certain the authors of either 1 & 2 Kings or 1 & 2 Chronicles, only that they are not the same. Some attribute 1 and 2 Kings to Jeremiah and the Chronicles to Ezra. What we read in 2 Chronicles is interesting. Abijam (called Abijah) is described as being pious. We read his high words spoken to Jeroboam and the army of Israel.

2 Chronicles 13:10-12 NAU - "But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the sons of Aaron are ministering to the LORD as priests, and the Levites attend to their work. ¹¹ "Every morning and evening they burn to the LORD burnt offerings and fragrant incense, and the showbread is set on the clean table, and the golden lampstand with its lamps is ready to light every evening; for we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him. ¹² "Now behold, God is with us at our head and His priests with the signal trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O sons of Israel, do not fight against the LORD God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."

12. Is this true? Was he unfaithful like his father Rehoboam, or was he faithful to his covenant obligations as he claims in this passage? There are a couple hints for us.
- A. After the death of Abijam his son, Asa, becomes king. Asa was faithful and set his heart on honoring God.
- 1 Kings 15:11-13 NAU** - "Asa did what was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father. ¹² He also put away the male cult prostitutes from the land and removed all the idols which his fathers had made. ¹³ He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image and burned it at the brook Kidron."
- B. This affirms that Abijam continued the perverted practices of Rehoboam. Even his mother was wicked and engaged in pagan idolatry.
- 2 Chronicles tells us that the entire of Judah nation was given to idolatry during the reign of Abijam.
- 2 Chronicles 14:2-4 NAU** - "Asa did good and right in the sight of the LORD his God, ³ for he removed the foreign altars and high places, tore down the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherim, ⁴ and commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment."
13. I want to argue that Abijam was not nearly as pious as he claimed before Jeroboam. Yes, he won the battle and yes, God gave him the victory, but it was more for the sake of David and His purpose to raise up Asa than an indication of His favor upon Abijam.
14. Abijam is in a dangerous situation. Once again, the two kingdoms are at war but the strength of the two armies are grossly lopsided. Abijam's army is half the size of Jeroboam.
- A. Facing these insurmountable odds, he climbs to an elevated perch and delivers a speech. It was a powerful sermon, and it was full of words of truth, declaring God's covenant promises to David and of the true worship God established in Jerusalem. He was right to assert that Jeroboam's attack upon Judah was an attack upon the Kingdom of God.
- B. But it was also full of hypocrisy and false piety. It was a good sermon preached from the lips of a wicked king. This still happens today. Good sermons can be preached by sinful preachers.
15. King Abijam was guilty of a false piety. We can see several characteristics of false piety in this passage.

I. False piety tends to be very proud of their religious affiliation.

A. Abijam rehearsed his credentials

1. He claimed his covenant promises and privileges
2 Chronicles 13:4-5 NAU - "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel:
⁵ "Do you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the rule over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?"
2. He boasted of his superior behavior
2 Chronicles 13:11 NAU - "we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him."
3. He was right to claim the covenant promises of God. He was right to claim these promises infallible and the only right way to worship. But being a part of Israel was not the same as trusting the God of Israel.
 - a. The truth was, God was not well-pleased with Judah.
1 Kings 14:22 NAU - "Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked Him to jealousy more than all that their fathers had done, with the sins which they committed."
 - b. This would be the problem of the religious leaders in the days of Christ. They thought God was well-pleased with them because they were the sons of Abraham.

B. This is the curse of our religious world

1. Everyone claims the superiority of their religion. Muslims are convinced that Islam is the only way, and that Allah is the only God with Muhammad as his prophet.
2. People knock on your door to convince you that they have the true religion
3. There are people raised in Baptist churches that find great comfort in their affiliation.
 Roman Catholics are convinced that they have the only way. Salvation is only through the Catholic Church. It used to be a sin for a Roman Catholic to even visit a Protestant church.
4. Abijam claimed to be a child of the Covenant but did not follow the faithfulness of David. It isn't enough just to claim you are a follower of Christ. Are you resting in Him and following Him?

II. False piety tends to look critically upon others

A. Abijah was quick to condemn Jeroboam.

2 Chronicles 13:6-9 NAU - "Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his master, ⁷ and worthless men gathered about him, scoundrels, who proved too strong for Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, when he was young and timid and could not hold his own against them. ⁸ "So now you intend to resist the kingdom of the LORD through the sons of David, being a great multitude and *having* with you the golden calves which Jeroboam made for gods for you. ⁹ "Have you not driven out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests like the peoples of *other* lands? Whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams, even he may become a priest of *what are* no gods."

1. No doubt, he was correct in his appraisal of Jeroboam. He did indeed reject the worship established in Jerusalem. He did indeed fashion golden calves, and he did raise up counterfeit priests.

2. Abijam's problem was he failed to see his own sin. Asa would tear down the idols consecrated in Judah.
1 Kings 15:3 NAU - "He walked in all the sins of his father which he had committed before him; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, like the heart of his father David."
- B. One of the great dangers of mere religion is it masks the depravity of the heart
1. Individuals in Fundamentalist churches find great comfort in the conformity of their dress, their abstaining from dancing and other external observances without giving serious attention to the matter of the heart.
 2. Mere religion is just another form of idolatry to comfort the human heart in sin.
 3. It is far too easy to condemn the sins of others while pretending we are righteous.
- III. False piety presumes the blessings of God's favor
- A. Abijam was convinced that God was on his side
1. He proudly proclaimed, "God is with us!"
2 Chronicles 13:12 NAU - "Now behold, God is with us at *our* head and His priests with the signal trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O sons of Israel, do not fight against the LORD God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."
 2. He was correct in announcing God's judgment upon Israel.
 But was Judah's victory a signal of God's favor upon Abijam?
- B. Outward blessings are no sure sign of God's favor
1. There are many wealthy people in this world who despise God and His Law. And they presume their comforts must be a sure sign of God's favor.
Matthew 19:23-24 NAU - "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
 2. There are many mega-churches scattered across the landscape of our nation. Is the size of a congregation a sign of God's approval? What about material blessings, beautiful buildings?
 To the Church of Laodicea Jesus pronounced:
Revelation 3:17-18 NAU - "Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see."

Conclusion:

1. God did indeed deliver Jeroboam into the hands of Abijah. Judah was victorious in the battle and there is no doubt it was by Divine intervention. A half million Israelites died. The Chronicler declares the utter defeat of Jeroboam:
2 Chronicles 13:20 NAU - "Jeroboam did not again recover strength in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him and he died."
2. Abijah claims the benefits of victory and we read that his life fared well. He became powerful and had many children.
2 Chronicles 13:21 NAU - "But Abijah became powerful; and took fourteen wives to himself, and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters." (Of course 1 Kings 15 tells us he only reigned 3 years.)
3. But outward success and achievement are no clear signs of God's favor. We cannot dismiss the account of 1 Kings.
 We are told it was for David's sake that God showed him favor.
1 Kings 15:4 NAU - "But for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, to raise up his son after him and to establish Jerusalem;"
4. It isn't religion that we need. We need a true relationship with God's Son, the only Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.
5. One more point to note.
 - A. The writer of 1 Kings compares Abijah to David. By comparison he doesn't do well. Of course, even David's life was flawed. We are reminded of Bathsheba and Urijah.
 - B. The writer of 2 Chronicles compares Abijah to Jeroboam and he fares somewhat better. For one sinner to outdo the other offers us little comfort.
 - C. Whose life is your standard? Are you hoping to outdo other men in an effort to pave your way into heaven?
 Or is your standard Christ and His righteousness?