

Introduction:

- A. A war started when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. It was a war of aggression and Adam and Eve were the first captives. All their descendants ever since—but for one—have been captives as well. When God drove them out of the garden of God’s presence they became subjects in Satan’s realm of pain and weeds and warring sons. Then and there, Satan laid claim to this world.
- B. Most of you have given your lives to Jesus Christ. He is our King. We are his glad subjects. He rescued us from the kingdom of darkness by dying for our sins and rising from the dead. We must do battle with Satan’s “*principalities and powers*” but “*Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.*” Now Christ is leading us heavenward through this life in a great triumphal procession.

But the prince of this world wants us back. Not that he cares about us in the least, nor would we give him some advantage. He just doesn’t want the Lord to reign over anything or anyone. He is so infernally proud he wants to take over God’s throne and be the king of the universe.

He doesn’t make every bad thing happen but he works ceaselessly to use temptation and trouble of every kind to tear us from Jesus, to cause us question God’s goodness, strength or life. He uses every means to tear us from Christ.

- C. To help us trust Jesus, God takes us back to the story of a forgettable king in Jerusalem named Abijah. He was the grandson of Solomon, the son of Rehoboam, and truth be told, he didn’t amount to much. **1 Kgs 15:3** says, “*He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been.*” But this weak king and his equally weak people of Judah had one shining moment when they saw the jealous love of their God for their king and for them. Five hundred years later the Chronicler found this story to help the Jews after the exile to remember where their strength comes from. And Scripture holds it out to us as well to bolster our faith.

D. The reigns of David and Solomon were the glory days of Israel. But as soon as Solomon died, the twelve tribes of Israel were torn apart. Jeroboam, a rebel, won the loyalty of the 10 northern tribes, while Rehoboam, Solomon's weak and selfish son, retained the two tribes in and around Jerusalem. Rehoboam reigned for 17 years and Jeroboam was constantly sniping at him. When Abijah became king Jeroboam saw an opportunity. He mustered a great army and arrayed his men along the border.

Abijah's army was half the size, but they marched out, too. Then this story gets interesting, because King Abijah, the great-grandson of David, climbed to the top of the nearest small mountain, and shouted across to his enemies. For a man "*not fully devoted to the LORD his God,*" it is a remarkable speech. What it boils down to is this: **We are God's people, led by God's king, faithful in our worship, and this is your final warning not to mess with us.** The Bible doesn't say how Jeroboam and his vast army reacted, but I'm guessing they smirked and mocked and rattled their swords. Let's look at what happened. Turn to **2 Chron. 13:1-3...** When it comes to these numbers, something has definitely been lost in translation. To put it in perspective, the Allies had less than 160,000 troops invading Germany on D-Day. **But this much is clear. Abijah was outnumbered two to one, and he had nothing up his sleeve but his theology.**

E. We are too weak to take on the enemy's attack. He is stronger than us and we are often weakened by our own half-hearted devotion to God. Still, it all comes down to who our king is: **vv.4-5...**

I. **WE ARE STRONG WHEN STAND WITH OUR GOD-GIVEN KING (13:4-5)**

A. Abijah's point was not that he was the better man or better king, but that he was the descendant of David, and the LORD God of Israel had decreed to reign through David's descendants. Jeroboam was not qualified by God to reign over his people. God's covenant extended *forever*. Scholars

- figure that the mention of the covenant of salt suggests an enduring preservative. God will keep this dynasty fresh.
- B. What Jeroboam wanted most in this fight was bragging rights. He wanted to be king over all of the Jews. It wasn't primarily about land or resources or a bigger army. He wanted to reign over God's people. But he had no God-given authority to do so.
 - C. Every time you are tempted and pressured, every time Christians are persecuted, the prince of this dark world is trying to lay claim to you so that he might usurp the reign of Christ, who died to redeem you out of the grip of sin, Satan, and death. When the pressure comes, stand by your King, Jesus Christ, because he is God's King of kings.
 - D. But, of course, across the valley, the army of Jeroboam just shook their heads, rolled their eyes, and sharpened their swords. Because there were twice as many of them.

Vv.6-9.... [...*son of Nebat not* of David. "*an official*" **not** a son; a traitor, in fact.... *Resist* – you're here because Rehoboam couldn't *resist* worthless scoundrels. Now you'll find out that you can't *resist* this kingdom.]

II. DESPITE ALL HIS THREATS, OUR ENEMY HAS NO REAL AUTHORITY (13:6-9)

- A. Like Jeroboam, Satan and all who serve him are usurpers; pretenders. They've taken authority that isn't theirs. God let Jeroboam take power because Solomon's last years were so sinful, and God even offered Jeroboam a lasting dynasty *if* he would worship and serve the Lord, but he wanted more. Satan was once an archangel serving in the presence of God. But he always wants more. He wants the glory only Christ is entitled to have.
- B. To keep up the pretense, he uses impotent gods and mail-order priests. 1 Kgs 12 tells how Jeroboam made these two golden calves because he knew he couldn't have his people going to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Never mind that ill-fated incident with another golden calf in the wilderness after God delivered Israel from Egypt. But Jeroboam made these two golden calves and then said, "*Here are your*

gods, O Israel.” He wanted them to think that some divine power stood behind those images but they were nothing more than statues, backed by the demonic powers of Satan.

And then there were his priests. All Israel’s real priests of the LORD had left the ten tribes to be near God’s temple. What Israel was left with were the equivalent of spiritual mercenaries, who bought their book of prayers and vestments. So as Abijah points out, they had priests who weren’t really priests representing gods who weren’t really gods.

- C. Bottom line: You have no authority over us. Which is what we say when our safety and community in Christ is threatened by Satan. *You’re not our king. Your gods are fakes. And your priests bought their empty jobs.* **Col. 2:15** says that Christ *disarmed the powers and authorities, making a public spectacle of them* [i.e., showing them to be the imposters they are], *triumphing over them by the cross.*”
- D. And across the valley, Jeroboam and his soldiers shrugged their shoulders. *“So what? We’re bigger than you, and smarter than you, too.* But God, who said, *“You shall have no other gods before me,”* bided his time.

Abijah has challenged Jeroboam and Co.’s authority. Next he tells them just how strong he and his people actually are. **Vv.10a....** Remember, Abijah and his people aren’t paragons of godliness but they have this: *“As for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him.”*

III. DESPITE ALL OUR FAULTS AND WEAKNESS, WE STILL RELY ON THE LORD (13:10-12)

- A. Abijah focused on the service of the priests in the temple – v.10b.... . His point being the complete contrast with the fake priests on Jeroboam’s payroll. This applies to us because all believers in Christ are priests of God. **1 Pet 2** says we are both the temple of God and a holy, royal priesthood. **Rev. 1:6** says Jesus Christ *“has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.”* So what

Abijah's priests did, day in and day out, in the temple are symbols of what we all do now.

1. Like them, we are appointed by God to be his priests, as you just heard from Scripture. We didn't buy our way into this priesthood. God saved us and then gave us what Paul called, "*the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God.*" [Rom 15:16]
 2. Every morning and evening they "presented burnt offerings." We come again and again to lay hold of God's forgiveness in Christ. We bring our thanksgiving like offerings for God to enjoy.
 3. Twice daily they presented "fragrant incense to the LORD." Incense symbolizes prayer. Our prayers have a beautiful aroma to God and when he touches them and hurls them back earthward they become incendiary.
 4. "They set out bread on the ceremonially clean table". We set the table for Christ to dine with us, as symbolized in Communion. We fellowship every day with the Lord, as family at his table.
 5. "They light the lamps on the gold lampstand every evening." Each time we pick up our Bibles the lamp of truth flares bright, alive with the Spirit of God.
- B. All that means, "We are observing the requirements of the LORD our God. But you have forsaken him." It is a strange kind of saber-rattling, isn't it. A strange way to try to unnerve the enemy. But these day-in and day-out priestly practices have changed us and are what hold us close to the covenant love of God. It was those daily relationship routines that gave confidence to even the half-hearted king Abijah. **V.12:** "*God is with us; he is our leader.*" He is at the head of this army. "**His** priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you." Priests as buglers, just like when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down!
- C. Abijah even turns evangelist in v.13....
- D. But across the valley the fake priests offered incantations, and Jeroboam's army moved quietly behind the hills to lay their trap. I wonder if they chuckled at the idea of priestly buglers, at the crazy notion it would do any good.

Vv.13-15... The one thing that the outnumbered, outfoxed army of Judah did *not* do was run. I'm not sure they had anywhere *to* run if they had wanted to, but what they did was "*they cried out to the LORD.*" *O Lord, save us!* Then the priests blew their trumpets. *Aa-oooo! Aa-ooo!* And then that outnumbered, outfoxed army of God's not-so-great king "*raised the battle cry.*" **Charge!** And God heard their cries, God heard their trumpets, and when he heard their battle cry, God "*routed*" the enemy. **Vv.16-17....**

IV. DESPITE OUR ENEMY'S DEADLY SCHEMES GOD WILL DELIVER HIS PEOPLE (13:13-18)

- A. **V.18...** The word "*subdued*" is the same as "*humbled.*" Last week we saw how God rescued his sinful people when they humbled themselves. Now here, when God's enemies would *not* humble themselves, *he* humbles them, and they get none of the blessings they could have had. God will humble his enemies. And he often does it through our weakness. Count on it. Pray for it.
- B. God's people were not victorious because they were so good, nor brave, nor smart. They were victorious for one reason: "**they relied on the LORD, the God of their ancestors.**" This doesn't mean, of course, that God will not let anything bad happen to us. **It means that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Jesus said of us, his people, "*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand*" [Jn 10:29]. No matter what happens, you are safe. **Rom. 8:38-39** says, "*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" **It is well with our souls.**

Let me pray for you what David prayed for his people in **Ps. 20**, a prayer which God answered that day for Abijah and the people of Judah.