

Judah During the Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:1 – 28:7)

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The Reign of Rehoboam, part 2 (2 Chronicles 11:1-23)

Rehoboam's Compliance with the Prophetic Word (11:1-4)

Rehoboam mounted an effort to subjugate the northern rebels. Yet, as he was about to move against his fellow Israelites, a prophet warned against the action and Rehoboam complied. This episode begins a reversal of fortunes for the king.

Comparison of 11:1-4 with 1 Kgs 12:21-24

Several minor stylistic changes exist between the parallel accounts of 11:1-4 and 1 Kgs 12:21-24, but most of these are of little significance. The only important variant occurs in 11:3 (// 1 Kgs 12:23). Kings reads "and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin," but the Chronicler shifted to **and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin**. This change emphasized the connection between the southern tribes and their northern kinsmen whom he called **all Israel** earlier in this chapter (see 10:1; see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*; see also *Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

Structure of 11:1-4

This episode consists of a three step symmetrical narrative (see figure 27). It begins with Rehoboam preparing to attack the North (11:1). The ending balances the opening with Rehoboam turning away from battle (11:4b). The turning point of the passage is a revelation given to Rehoboam through Shemaiah the prophet (11:2-4a).

Rehoboam Prepares for Battle (11:1)

Rehoboam planned to suppress the rebellion of the northern tribes with troops from **Judah and Benjamin** (11:1). A number of Benjamites remained loyal to the Jerusalem throne

during the Divided Kingdom (see 14:8; 15:2,9; 17:17). As we have seen, the Chronicler gave them special notice in his genealogies (see 1 Chr 7:6-12; 8:1-40). This passage also informs us that Rehoboam gathered **a hundred and eighty thousand** soldiers from these two tribes (11:1). These numbers appear rather large. As in other similar passages, several explanations are possible. For the Chronicler's use of large numbers, see comments on 1 Chr 12:24-37.

To display the blessing of God toward Judah during the early divided monarchy, the Chronicler noted that the number of soldiers increased over the first four reigns of the divided monarchy. Rehoboam had 180,000 soldiers (11:1); Abijah's army numbered 400,000 (13:3); Asa had 580,000 (14:8); Jehoshaphat mustered 1,160,000 men (17:14-19). Later in the history, Amaziah had 400,000 (25:5) and Uzziah counted 307,000 soldiers (26:11-15).

The purpose of the king's actions is stated explicitly. He prepared to **make war with Israel** (11:1). Rehoboam still acted imprudently. He continued to violate the model of David and Solomon who wisely kept the nation united. Nevertheless, the Chronicler called the meeting an **assembly** (11:1). This terminology focused on the religious nature of the meeting and set it alongside a number of other religious assemblies (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*). As the following verses explain, during this religious gathering the Lord spoke to Rehoboam.

Rehoboam Receives a Prophetic Word (11:2-4a)

As Rehoboam prepared for battle, the prophet Shemiah appeared and spoke to Rehoboam. Several elements combine in this verse to establish Shemaiah's authority. The text speaks first of his message as the **word of the Lord** (11:2; see also 11:4b). The prophet's perspective on these events was not his personal opinion; he spoke with divine authority. Moreover, the technical term **man of God** is attached to the prophet's name (11:2). This title also acknowledged the authority of the prophetic word (see 1 Chr 23:14; 2 Chr 8:14; 11:2; 25:7-9; 30:16; Dt 33:1; Josh 14:16; 1 Sam 2:27). Finally, Shemiah's own words reinforce the origin of his oracle. In a manner common to biblical prophets (see Isa 40:1; 1 Chr 17:4; 21:11; 2 Chr 34:23), he introduced his speech with a messenger formula which referred to the divine source of his speech (11:4). By repeatedly drawing attention to Shemiah's divine authority, the Chronicler eliminated any question about the authority of the prophetic perspective.

Shemaiah made explicit what the opening verse of this episode merely hinted. Rehoboam was wrong to attack the northern tribes. As noted above, the Chronicler varied the description of those whom Shemiah addressed from "the whole house of Judah and Benjamin" (1 Kgs 12:23) to **all the Israelites in Judah and Benjamin** (11:3). This shift drew attention to the heart of the matter. Rehoboam's attack involved Israelite against Israelite. Shemaiah told Rehoboam not to fight **"against [his] brothers"** (11:4; compare 19:10; 28:11; 28:15; 35:5,6). The familial ties that unified the tribes made it inappropriate for Rehoboam to attack.

Beyond this, Rehoboam was wrong to attack because the northern rebellion was from the hand of God (see 10:15). God affirmed, "**this is my doing**" (11:4; see *Divine Involvement in History*). In effect, the divine approval removed all support from those who looked despairingly on their northern neighbors for their initial rebellion. It also encouraged the Chronicler's readers to remember Judah's responsibility in the division (see *Introduction: 2 Northern Israel*).

Rehoboam Turns Back from Battle (11:4b)

At last, Rehoboam acted with prudence. He **obeyed the words of the Lord** and returned home (11:4b). As the following verses reveal, Rehoboam received many blessings for this response to Shemaiah.

Obedience to the prophetic word is the source of blessing on a number of occasions in Chronicles (see 1 Chr 12:1-8; 21:19; 2 Chr 14:4; 31:21; see *Introduction: 15 Prophets*). This motif was important for the Chronicler and his readers because a number of prophets appeared at different times during the post-exilic period. These prophets revealed the word of God to the post-exilic community and their response to him should be like that of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam's Blessings for Compliance (11:5-23)

An emphasis on the consequences of sin and obedience comes into play at this point (see *Introduction: 10-28 Divine Blessing and Judgment*). In chapter 10 Rehoboam reaped the results of his foolishness. In 11:1-4, however, the king listened to God's word and received blessings (11:5-23).

Comparison of 11:5-23 with Kings

11:5-23 has no parallel in Kings. Some features of this passage suggest that the Chronicler depended on official court records. Whatever the case, the Chronicler added this material to illustrate the grand benefits which submission to God's prophets can bring.

Structure of 11:5-23

This material divides into three reports which are joined together by the common thread of divine blessing toward the king (see figure 27). Rehoboam built fortifications (11:5-12), received many defectors from the North (11:13-17), and saw his family enlarged (11:18-23).

Rehoboam's Successful Fortifications (11:5-12)

In this passage, the Chronicler reported how Rehoboam **built up cities for defense** (11:5). As a result of his actions, **Judah and Benjamin were his** (11:12). Rehoboam secured his control over these territories.

To understand the significance of this report, we must remember that ancient Near Eastern royal propaganda in the cultures surrounding Israel often demonstrated the success of kings by enumerating their building projects. These building projects usually included temple construction (as in the case of Solomon), as well as fortifications of cities (as in this passage). This motif was so common in the ancient world that the Chronicler felt no need to state the implication that Rehoboam's fortifications demonstrated the blessing of God (see *Introduction: 24) Building and Destruction*).

It is not possible to settle precisely when these fortifications occurred. The list of cities does not focus on Rehoboam's northern border and may therefore reflect a time early in his reign before troubles with the north began again (see 1 Kgs 14:30). Even so, it is possible that these fortifications took place throughout Rehoboam's reign. The last portion of this section (11:18-23) certainly covers events throughout Rehoboam's life. In all events, the proximity of this report to Rehoboam's reaction to the prophetic word (11:1-4) indicates that the Chronicler attributed the king's successful fortifications to his submission to Shemaiah.

This report certainly would have piqued the interest of the Chronicler's post-exilic readers. Their military vulnerability must have led many to wonder how they could find security in their day. The example of Rehoboam made this path plain. Fortification of Judah will come if they submit to the prophetic word.

Rehoboam's Support from Faithful Northerners (11:13-17)

The second illustration of God's blessing for Rehoboam's response to the prophet is the support he received from northern defectors. On several occasions the Chronicler reported that faithful northern Israelites gave their support to the kings of Jerusalem (see 13:8-11; 15:9; 20:10-20). The political division of the nation did not utterly destroy connections between the South and North. As these examples demonstrate, religious affections of many Northerners led them to shift their political loyalties as well.

Structure of 11:13-17

This passage divides into three parts (see figure 27). The defection of Northerners

began with priests and Levites (11:3-15), but their example quickly led others to join Rehoboam (11:16). These defections resulted in tremendous benefits for Rehoboam (11:17).

Rehoboam's Support from Priests and Levites (11:13-15)

The Chronicler did not estimate the numbers of **priests and Levites** that **sided with** Rehoboam, but he mentioned that they came from **all their districts throughout Israel** (11:13). The NIV obscures the Hebrew of this verse. The original language reads, "priests and Levites *in all Israel*" sided with Rehoboam (see NAS, NRS, NKJ). The Chronicler used the term "all Israel" to convey that these Levitical defectors represented all the northern tribes (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). From Mosaic times, the Levitical families lived without a distinct tribal territory, but they received portions of land throughout the tribes. The Chronicler noted the level of commitment from these defectors by mentioning that they **even abandoned their pasture lands and property** to join with Rehoboam (11:14). It was at great cost that these priests and Levites moved to Jerusalem. (For the Chronicler's interest in Levitical lands see comments on 1 Chr 6:64.)

The reason for this defection is also noted. The priests and Levites were displaced from their services in the North when **Jeroboam and his sons rejected them as priests** (11:14). Jeroboam had **appointed his own priests** (11:15). The Chronicler omitted the portion of Kings that reports Jeroboam's worship centers in Dan and Bethel. As 1 Kgs 12:26-27 explains, Jeroboam feared that permitting his people to worship in Jerusalem would eventually lead to a political reunification of the nation.

Chronicles simply mentions that Jeroboam had erected **goat and calf idols** and that this idolatry was unacceptable to the priests and Levites who defected (11:15). The book of Kings reports the golden calves erected at Dan and Bethel (see 1 Kgs 12:28-29) and the similarity to Israel's severe apostasy in the wilderness is apparent (see Exod 32:1-33:6). The imagery of strong bulls representing divinity was common in the cultures surrounding Israel. It was an image of distinction and honor. Even so, the Chronicler associated Jeroboam's calves with **goats** (11:15). It is possible to translate this portion of 11:15, "goats, even calf idols." If this translation is correct, it suggests that the Chronicler disparaged Jeroboam's golden calves by equating them with the "goat idols" so strongly condemned in Lev 17:7.

In all events, it is clear that those who defected to Rehoboam did so for religious, not political reasons. As we have seen, in many respects the northern tribes were justified in their rebellion against Rehoboam's tyranny (see 10:1-19; see also *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*). They were not free, however, to turn from the true worship of God at the temple in Jerusalem. Like the post-exilic readers of Chronicles, they were obligated to proper worship despite their circumstances.

Rehoboam's Support from Other Northerners (11:16)

The Chronicler broadened his view for a moment and mentioned that the priests and Levites were not alone. People **from every tribe of Israel** followed their example and came **to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices** (11:16). As in 11:13, the NIV obscures the Chronicler's special terminology. These people came from "all the tribes of Israel" (NAS, NRS, NKJ); like the priests and Levites before them, these worshippers represented "all Israel" (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

To highlight the character of these defectors the Chronicler mentioned that they came to worship **the Lord, the God of their fathers** (11:16). This traditional terminology (see 1 Chr 29:20; 2 Chr 7:22; 11:16; 13:12,18; 14:4; 15:12; 19:4; 21:10; 24:18,24; 28:6,9,25; 29:5; 30:7,19,22; 34:33; 36:15; Dt 6:3; 26:7; 29:25; Ex 3:15; Ezra 10:11; Josh 18:3) characterized their worship as true and acceptable in contrast with the false worship begun by Jeroboam (see 13:8-11). Moreover, the Chronicler noted that these people had **set their hearts on seeking the Lord** (11:16). In the Chronicler's vocabulary "seeking" God meant eagerly to search for his blessing. The programmatic promise to Solomon (7:14) established seeking God as the proper way to respond to trouble (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). Moreover, the Chronicler's focus on the **hearts** of these defectors made it plain that their actions were sincere (see *Introduction: 16) Motivations*). These defectors were the faithful Israelites whose hearts were devoted to pursuing the worship of God as he had ordained it.

Rehoboam's Benefits (11:17)

The Chronicler closed with an explicit statement of his main purpose in this section. He first noted that the defectors **strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam** (11:17). The event was a great blessing to all of Judah. This historical fact certainly encouraged the post-exilic readers to reflect on what benefits would come to them as they responded appropriately to the prophetic word and welcomed the faithful from the North in their day (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

The defectors benefited Rehoboam **for three years** so long as he was **walking in the ways of David and Solomon** (11:17). In 12:1 Rehoboam's situation will change for the worse. At this time, however, Rehoboam imitated the ideal kings David and Solomon and tasted widespread national support similar to that of the United Kingdom.

The lesson for the readers was plain enough. David and Solomon served as ideals for his readers to follow (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*). If the leaders of God's people imitated the ideal practices of David and Solomon, as Rehoboam did, the nation would receive the blessing of political stability and strength.

Rehoboam's Enlarged Family (11:18-23)

The Chronicler added yet a third illustration of the blessings Rehoboam received because of his submission to the prophet. At this point, he focused on the increase of Rehoboam's family. Two of Rehoboam's wives are mentioned by name: **Mahalath** (11:18) and **Maacha** ... the one **Rehoboam loved more** (11:20-21). Their sons are named as well (11:18-21). Then the Chronicler computed sums. Rehoboam had **eighteen wives** ... **sixty concubines** ... **twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters** (11:23). These large numbers of children were signs of God's favor toward Rehoboam. The Chronicler frequently depicted large progeny as divine blessing (see *Introduction: 25) Increase and Decline of Progeny*).

To close off this section (11:22-23), Chronicles also adds the note that Rehoboam **acted wisely** with regard to his sons (11:23). In contrast to the opening episode of the king's reign, he is now characterized as a wise king (see 10:8). His wisdom is illustrated in his appointment of **Abijah** as successor to the throne (11:22) and the distribution of territories to his other sons (11:23). By making these arrangements Rehoboam spared the next generation from the turmoil often associated with the transfer of power.

The increase of Rehoboam's family and the security he provided the next generation spoke directly to the needs of the post-exilic readers. They lived in a day of many uncertainties. If the nation would adhere to prophetic instruction, it would enjoy the kind of prosperity and security that Rehoboam experienced at this time.