

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

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The Reign of Rehoboam, part 3 (2 Chronicles 12:1-16)

Rehoboam's Later Sin, Humility, and Blessing (12:1-12)

Rehoboam lived with God's blessing for **three years** (11:17), but troubles began **in the fifth year of King Rehoboam** (12:2). The difficulties of the fifth year became an opportunity for the Chronicler to illustrate the basic pattern of disobedience, response to the prophetic word, and blessing for a second time.

Comparison of 12:1-12 with 1 Kgs 14:25-28

This passage displays one of the more creative uses the Chronicler made of materials found in Kings. The parallel of 1 Kgs 14:25-28 is merely a brief report. The Chronicler expanded these four verses into a full scale narrative of twelve verses. The following figure identifies the additions he made to Kings (see figure 29).

2 Chr	1 Kgs
12:1	-----
12:2a	14:25a
12:2b	-----
12:2c	14:25b
12:3-9a	-----
12:9b-11	14:26-28
12:12-13	-----

Comparison of 2 Chr 12:1-13 with 1 Kgs 14:25-28 (figure 29)

As this comparison illustrates, the account of Chronicles is greatly expanded beyond Kings. The writer of Kings simply noted that Shishak attacked Jerusalem in the fifth year of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:25a,b). He mentioned that Shishak took from the royal and temple treasuries including Solomon's gold shields (1 Kgs 14:26). He also reported Rehoboam's

substitution of bronze shields (1 Kgs 14:27) and the king's special attention to their safekeeping (1 Kgs 14:28).

The Chronicler included this material in Kings, but added much more information. He explained the background of these events (12:1) and the date of the attacks (12:2b). The heart of this material is added (12:3-9a) and a new ending appears in the Chronicler's version (12:12-13).

Structure of 12:1-12

The Chronicler's additions to Shishak's invasion formed his account into a full scale narrative with five symmetrical steps followed by an authorial comment (see figure 27). The story begins with Rehoboam's failure to remain faithful while he experienced God's blessing (12:1). It ends with his kingdom in a weakened condition, but secure and blessed (12:10-11). Shishak attacked Rehoboam (12:2-4), but Shishak's attack is balanced by his failure to gain a full victory (12:9). The turning point in this episode involves Shemaiah's prophecies and the humble response of Judah's leadership (12:5-8). An authorial comment also appears at the end of this passage (12:12).

This narrative presents both positive and negative motifs. The emotional tension displayed leaves the reader yearning for a resolution that does not occur. Rehoboam was **established** and **strong**, but he **abandoned the law of the Lord** (12:1). Shemaiah the prophet condemned Jerusalem to utter abandonment by God (12:5) only to mollify his threat (12:7). Rehoboam kept his throne, but he had to replace **the gold shields Solomon had made** with **bronze shields** (12:10). He feared for his life (12:11), but was **not totally destroyed** (12:12).

The ambivalence of Rehoboam's situation reveals the Chronicler's perspective on the event. The utter destruction that comes from turning away from the Law of God may be averted through humility, but severe and repeated infidelity will have lasting consequences. This message readily applied to the Chronicler's post-exilic readers as they faced similar complexities in their day.

Rehoboam's Strength Leading to Apostasy (12:1)

The Chronicler began this account with an additional scene. Rehoboam **was established** and **strong** (12:1). The Chronicler had already noted that Rehoboam's reign was **strengthened** by northern defectors (11:17). The terminology **established** indicates that no significant opposition to Rehoboam's kingship continued. (For the significance of this terminology see 1:1.) On the heels of the previous chapter, it seems at first glance that

Rehoboam had reached a time of positive blessings. Yet, the Chronicler quickly revealed that Rehoboam's reign was in trouble.

Rehoboam's prosperity led him to turn away from God. On a number of occasions, kings responded to God's blessing with infidelity. For the Chronicler's warning against permitting blessings to lead to infidelity see comments on 1 Chr 5:24. In this situation, the king and people **abandoned the law of the Lord** (12:1). The term **abandoned** ("forsake" [NAS, NRS, NKJ]) is one of the standard expressions the Chronicler used to describe flagrant violations of Israel's covenant relationship with God (see *Introduction: 22) Abandoning/Forsaking*). Moreover, the text adds that **all Israel** joined in the king's apostasy (12:1) to indicate how far the apostasy had spread (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

Shishak's Attack against Judah and Jerusalem (12:2-4)

Having established that Judah was in serious rebellion against the Lord, the narrative moves to the divine judgment that came upon the nation through the invasion of the Egyptian Shishak. As noted above, only 12:2a,c parallel the record of Kings (*//* 1 Kgs 14:25a,b). The rest of 12:2-4 comes from the Chronicler's hand. 1 Kgs 14:25 simply notes that the invasion took place in Rehoboam's fifth year.

Several important additions occur in Chronicles. In the first place, this record inserts the reason for Shishak's attack. It was **because they had been unfaithful to the Lord** (12:2a). Here the Chronicler used another of his usual terms for serious rebellion against God. To be **unfaithful** was much worse than falling into day to day peccadilloes; it meant to violate the fundamental loyalty required in covenant with God (see *Introduction: 21) Unfaithfulness*). By adding this clause, the text eliminates any question as to why this misfortune had come on Judah.

In the second place, the Chronicler elaborated further on Shishak's invasion to increase the dramatic tension (12:3-5). Although 1 Kgs 14:25b (*//* 12:2c) simply states that the attack took place, this account makes it clear that divine judgment against Judah was severe. A description of the force under the Egyptian's command appears. Rehoboam faced **twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen** (12:3). Moreover, **innumerable troops** from other nations also fought for Shishak (12:3). On a number of occasions, the superiority of Judah's enemies is noted to stress that divine power was the source of victory (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). As we will see, Rehoboam's ability to withstand Shishak to some measure was the result of God's intervention.

The Chronicler also added that Shishak's enormous army **captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem** (12:4). Rehoboam's earlier reinforcement of fortified cities in Judah was a sign of God's blessing (see 11:5-12), but now the king's sin had caused a direct reversal. His fortified cities had been conquered and Jerusalem stood alone.

Rehoboam's Response to the Prophetic Warning (12:5-8)

As the destruction of Jerusalem seemed imminent, **the prophet Shemaiah** spoke once again to **Rehoboam and to the leaders of Judah** (12:5 see 11:2-4). At first the prophet announced, "**You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you to Shishak**" (12:5). The word **abandoned** (see *Introduction: 22) Abandoning/Forsaking*) alludes to the opening scene in this episode (12:1). The impending judgment against Jerusalem was recompense for Judah's abandonment of the Law of God. For God to **abandon** his people was tantamount to placing them under the covenant curses (see Deut 31:17; 2 Chr 15:2; 24:20; Isa 54:7; see also Jer 12:7; 25:38; Ezek 8:12; 9:9). Judah was now the object of divine wrath.

Although Shemaiah did not explicitly offer any hope of reprieve, **the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves** (12:6). Their response indicated that prophecies of judgment were not utter condemnations, but threats that could be averted by repentance and humility. A tacit condition was to be assumed with this prophecy as with most others (see Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:1-16; Jer 18:1-10). The leaders of Judah did not resign themselves to destruction; instead, they humbly sought God's favor. As the following verses indicate, Rehoboam's response to the prophetic word was paradigmatic for the Chronicler's readers. As they heard the prophetic word, they should react as Rehoboam and his nobles reacted (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*).

Rehoboam and the leaders were **humble** before the Lord (12:6 see also 12:7). This state of affairs connected this passage with God's promise to Solomon in 7:14 where blessings are promised to those who humble themselves. Humility is an attitude of submission and utter dependence on God (see *Introduction: 18) Humility*). The king and leaders expressed their humility in a simple prayer, "**The Lord is just**" (12:6). These words acknowledged God's justice in his judgment and cast the fate of the nation solely on the mercies of God (see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*). Other prayers during and after the exile follow a similar pattern (see Dan 9:4-19; Ezr 9:5-15).

This expression of humility led to a positive end (12:7-8). A change of divine disposition resulted **when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves** (12:7). The prophet announced that God **will not destroy them, but will soon give them deliverance** (12:7).

Nevertheless, God did not completely reverse his previous threat. Rehoboam and his leaders needed a vivid demonstration that their violations were serious. As a result, the prophet declared that Judah would still **become subject** to Shishak (12:8). Judah would become a vassal of Egypt, subject to taxation and other mistreatments. The purpose of this subjection was to teach Rehoboam and Judah **the difference between serving [God] and serving the kings of other lands** (12:8). Here God spoke as Israel's great Emperor whose benevolence had been ignored. Now perhaps the nation would see how much better it was to have God as their King rather than foreign human oppressors. However restrictive the Law of

God may have seemed to Judah (see 12:1), they would soon understand that its burden was light compared to the yoke of foreign dominion. The Chronicler's readers also faced the temptation to turn from God's Law. Yet, the experience of exile had taught them the lesson Rehoboam was about to learn.

Shishak's Limited Victory over Jerusalem (12:9)

Shishak **attacked Jerusalem** and won the victory (12:9). It is likely that Rehoboam sued for terms of peace, agreeing to pay a heavy tribute for **the king of Egypt ... carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord and the royal palace** (12:9). The Chronicler had drawn attention earlier to the wealth David and Solomon collected in the temple treasuries (see 1 Chr 29:1-9; 2 Chr 2:1-5:1); he also mentioned the wealth of the royal treasuries (see 2 Chr 9:13-28). The riches obtained by David and Solomon were important aspects of the Chronicler's ideal portrait of these kings. Now that glory of Israel had been taken by a foreign king. The Chronicler summarized the extent of the harm by adding that Shishak **took everything**, even the **gold shields of Solomon** (12:9; see 9:16).

Rehoboam's Resulting Weakness (12:10-11)

The mention of Solomon's golden shields in 12:9 opens the way for a wonderfully symbolic scene. Rehoboam made **bronze shields to replace** the shields of gold (12:10). The exchange of bronze for gold nicely symbolized the changes in Rehoboam's kingdom. He had not lost everything, but he had lost the glory inherited from Solomon.

Along with his economic reduction, Rehoboam no longer felt secure. He put **the commanders of the guard ... at the entrance to the royal palace** in charge of the bronze shields (12:10). The shields were given over to the best of Rehoboam's soldiers. More than this, when Rehoboam left his palace to go **to the Lord's temple** (12:11) his **guards went with him, bearing the shields** (12:11). Apparently, Rehoboam wanted to keep what little he had close by. When he returned to the palace, the shields were safely locked away in **the guardroom** (12:11). This scene of timidity stands in sharp contrast with the opening of this story. The record of Rehoboam began with him **established and strong** (11:1); at this point he barely held onto his kingdom.

Authorial Comment (12:12)

The Chronicler added a comment to the end of this narrative to explain his understanding of the Shishak invasion. **Rehoboam** escaped total destruction from **the anger of the Lord ... because he humbled himself**. The king's sincere contrition averted a horrible

fate. **He was not totally destroyed.** In fact, **some good** could be found **in Judah** despite the Egyptian victory. The Chronicler was deeply concerned that his readers take to heart the effect of Rehoboam's humble response to the prophetic word. Humility before God and his prophet led to forgiveness and blessing.

Moreover, Shishak's invasion pointed the Chronicler's readers in at least two other directions. On the one hand, it explained why the post-exilic community still had not fully recovered from the exile. They still needed to learn the difference between serving God and human kings (see 12:1-2,5). On the other hand, this passage warned them not to permit their experiences of success and blessing to lead them astray. The consequences of such rebellion against God could last for a very long time.

Closure of Rehoboam's Reign (12:13-16)

The Chronicler closed his record of Rehoboam's reign with a summary and notice of the king's death. He left his readers with a few final thoughts about the king and his significance for their lives.

In addition to a few stylistic variations, the Chronicler made a number of additions to Kings. First, the Chronicler summarized the content of 1 Kgs 14:21-24 in 12:13-14. These verses give a summary evaluation of Rehoboam's reign which emphasizes some central theological concerns.

Second, the Chronicler cited his source for his additional information about Shemaiah's encounter with Rehoboam during the Shishak invasion (see *Introduction: Historical and Theological Purposes*). He replaced "the annals of the kings of Judah" (1 Kgs 14:29) with **the records of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer** (12:15).

Several other details are also added. First, **Rehoboam established himself firmly and reigned seventeen years** (12:13 // 1 Kgs 14:21). Rehoboam's submission to the prophetic word (12:5-8,12), eventually led to a measure of security and success. On the whole, the Chronicler left his readers with a positive assessment.

The description of Jerusalem as **the city the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name** (12:13) points out that Rehoboam's ability to seek and find the mercy of God was due to having the temple as the place of the **Name**. Here he reminded his readers that Rehoboam's life, especially the episode with Shishak, exemplified the role which prayer in and toward the temple was to have in national life. The accessible divine presence dwelling in the temple was the only hope for relief from hardship caused by sin (see 6:1-7; see also *Introduction: 11) Name of God*). If the power of the invocable **Name** did so much for Rehoboam, surely the post-exilic readers of this book could see how much they needed to attend to the temple and its services in their day.

The Chronicler then closed with an evaluation that served as a subtle warning to his readers. Rehoboam fell into **evil** that brought much trouble to the nation **because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord** (12:14). In contrast to those who defected to Rehoboam (see 11:17), Rehoboam failed to serve God sincerely from his **heart** (12:14; see *Introduction: 16) Motivations*) and was not **seeking the Lord** (12:14;). Once again, the text alludes to God's programmatic response to Solomon's prayer (see 7:14 see also *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). The way for the post-exilic readers to avoid Rehoboam's trials was to avoid his failure to seek God from his heart.

For the most part, 12:15-16 are derived from 1 Kgs 14:29-16. For some unknown reason, the Chronicler transferred the reference to **Naamah** to 12:15 (// 1 Kgs 14:31). He also added a reference to the **records of Shemaiah ... and Iddo** (12:15) to indicate where he found some of the earlier information he added to Rehoboam's reign. Once again his keen interest in the prophetic office for his post-exilic readers led him to mention these sources (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*).

It is interesting to note that Rehoboam **rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David** (12:16). Despite his obvious and serious failures, Rehoboam found the way of forgiveness and blessing. These final words extended hope to the original readers. Whatever failures or problems they continued to experience, the reign of Rehoboam exemplified the way to find the honor of God's blessing.