

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

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<h3>The Reign of Abijah (2 Chronicles 13:1–14:1)</h3>

The Reign of Abijah (13:1-14:1)

Abijah succeeded his father as king of Judah (913-911 B.C.). The record of his reign in Chronicles points to the blessings which result from faithfulness.

Comparison of 13:1-14:1 with 1 Kgs 15:1-8

The reign of Abijah appears in Kings as well as Chronicles. Portions of these records are similar, but the Chronicler also diverged from Kings in remarkable ways (see figure 30).

2 Chr		1 Kgs
13:1-2a	Opening of Abijah's Reign (closely parallel)	15:1-2
-----	Summary and Evaluation of Abijah (omitted)	15:3-6
13:2b-21	Abijah's War with Jeroboam (greatly expanded)	15:7b
13:22-14:1	Closure of Abijah's Reign (parallel)	15:7a-8

Comparison of 2 Chr 13:1-14:1 with 1 Kgs 15:1-8 (figure 30)

At least four variations should be noted. First, the Chronicler's version is approximately three times larger than Kings. He devoted 23 verses to Abijah, whereas the writer of Kings only gave 8 verses.

Second, only the opening and closing of this account depends on Kings. 13:1-2a stems from 1 Kgs 15:1-2 and 13:22-14:1 depends on 1 Kgs 15:7a,8. A few minor variations occur in these parallel materials.

Third, a striking contrast appears in the main body of Abijah's reign. Kings dismisses Abijah as evil and explains that he reigned only because of God's promise to David (1 Kgs 15:3-6). The Chronicler, however, omitted this material in order to portray the positive side of Abijah's reign. He greatly expanded 1 Kgs 15:7b into a full-scale account of a battle between Abijah and Jeroboam (13:2b-21). In this battle, Abijah received a tremendous victory because of his fidelity to God.

Fourth, it should be noted that the NIV obscures one difference between Kings and Chronicles. The Hebrew text of Kings spells the name of this king "Abijam" ("My father is Yam.") referring to the West Semitic god of the sea. Apparently, the writer of Kings had no problem with using the name because he viewed Abijah (Abijam) negatively. The Chronicler, however, focused on the positive side of the king's reign and therefore called him Abijah ("My father is Yah[weh]."), referring to the Lord of Israel.

Structure of 13:1-14:1

■ Opening of Abijah's Reign (13:1-2a)

Abijah's Victory Over Jeroboam (13:2b-21)

◆ Battle between Abijah and Jeroboam (13:2b-18)

● Abijah Faces Numerically Superior Jeroboam (13:2b-3)

[Abijah Delivers Speech to Jeroboam (13:4-12)]

[Introduction (13:4a)]

[Exhortation Based on David's Throne (13:4b-8a)]

[Exhortation Based on Temple Service (13:8b-12)]

● Abijah Attacked by Jeroboam (13:13)

● Abijah's Reaction and Divine Intervention (13:14-15)

● Abijah Defeats Jeroboam (13:16)

● Abijah Inflicts Great Losses on Jeroboam (13:17)

[Authorial Comment (13:18)]

◆ Aftermath of Abijah's Battle (13:19-21)

Jeroboam's Curses (13:19-20)

Abijah's Blessings (13:21).

■ Closure of Abijah's Reign (13:22-14:1)

Outline of 2 Chr 13:1-14:1 (figure 31)

The Chronicler's changes to the account of Kings resulted in a simple threefold pattern (see figure 31). This record of Abijah's reign focuses on one key event, a battle between Abijah and Jeroboam (13:2b-21). This central element is enclosed within an historical framework that opens (13:1-2a) and closes (13:22-14:1) the king's reign.

Opening of Abijah's Reign (13:1-2a)

The Chronicler began his account of Abijah's reign with a brief historical note largely taken from 1 Kgs 15:1-2. The Chronicler recognized the king's mother. He does the same many times in his history (see 15:16; 22:2; 24:1; 25:1; 26:3; 27:1; 29:1). Yet, from Manasseh until the end of his book, the Chronicler omitted all such references to the royal mother (see 33:1 // 2 Kgs 21:1; 33:21 // 2 Kgs 21:19; 34:1 // 2 Kgs 22:1; 36:2 // 2 Kgs 23:31; 36:5 // 2 Kgs 23:36; 36:9 // 2 Kgs 24:8; 36:11 // 2 Kgs 24:18).

13:1 includes **in the eighteenth year ... of Jeroboam** from 1 Kgs 15:1 to synchronize the history of Judah and northern Israel. Coordinating northern and southern kings occurs frequently in Kings, but this is the only time the Chronicler included such a note in his history (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*). This exception probably resulted from the fact that this entire record focuses on a battle between Abijah and the northern army of Jeroboam.

Abijah's Victory Over Jeroboam (13:2b-21)

The central concern of the Chronicler's record is Abijah's battle with Jeroboam. This battle illustrates several principles that govern the Chronicler's assessments of the Divided Kingdom.

Structure of 13:2b-18

The account of this battle divides into two episodes (see figure 31). The first segment deals with a battle between Abijah and Jeroboam (13:2b-18). The second segment focuses on the twofold aftermath of the battle (13:19-21).

Battle between Abijah and Jeroboam (13:2b-18)

The Chronicler's account of battle between Abijah and Jeroboam is a complex narrative in which the Chronicler's interests stand out on a number of occasions.

Structure of 13:2b-21

This material is comprised of a basic story line to which the Chronicler added some special features. The basic story line forms a symmetrical presentation (see figure 31). The action begins with Abijah facing an Israelite army twice his size (13:2b-3); it closes with Abijah reducing Israel's army to fewer men than his own (13:17). Jeroboam's attack from the front and rear (13:13) balances with Jeroboam fleeing from Abijah (13:16). The turning point of the story is Abijah's cry to God and God's intervention on his behalf (13:14-15).

The Chronicler added two features to the basic framework of this story that serve as interpretive focal points. On the one hand, he included a lengthy speech by Abijah (13:4-12). This speech halts the main action of the story long enough to provide Abijah's (and the Chronicler's) theological assessment of the events. On the other hand, an authorial comment appears at the end of the story which explains the outcome of the battle (13:18).

Abijah Faces Numerically Superior Jeroboam (13:2b-3)

The story of battle begins with a description of the numbers of men facing each other. The opening words of 13:2b derive from 1 Kgs 15:6. In Kings this information summarizes the reign of Abijah. In Chronicles, however, it serves as a title for this episode. Abijah's forces numbered **four hundred thousand** and Jeroboam's army included **eight hundred thousand** men (13:3). These numbers appear very high; a number of explanations are possible. For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 1 Chr 12:24-37. Even so, Abijah was blessed with an army greater than Rehoboam. As he did on a number of other occasions, the Chronicler noted that Jeroboam had twice as many soldiers as Abijah (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). This detail insured that the Chronicler's readers would recognize the miraculous character of the victory that followed.

Abijah Delivers Speech to Jeroboam (13:4-12)

Facing an army twice the size of his own, Abijah made a speech. This speech halts the battle narrative for nine verses and provides an indispensable theological analysis of the events about to take place.

Structure of 13:4-12

Abijah's speech divides into an introduction followed by two main segments (see figure 31). It begins and ends with direct addresses to the Israelite recipients: **Jeroboam and all Israel** (13:4b) and **men of Israel** (13:12b). These addresses frame the speech. The

concentration of related terms reveals that the speech divides into two parts. The first half focuses on the monarchy in Jerusalem: **kingship** (13:5), **David and his descendants** (13:5), **Solomon son of David** (13:6), **Rehoboam son of Solomon** (13:7), **kingdom** (13:8a), and **David's descendants** (13:8a). The second half concentrates on the temple in Jerusalem: **gods** (13:8b,10), **priests** (13:9,10,12), **sons of Aaron** (13:9,10), and **Levites** (13:9,10). This twofold concentration reflects the Chronicler's concern with the institutions of monarch and temple in his own day (see *Introduction: 4-9) King and Temple*).

Introduction to the Speech (13:4a)

Abijah stood on **Mount Zemaraim**, a site identified elsewhere with Benjamin (see Josh 18:22), but here with **Ephraim**. The precise location is not known, but it seems most likely that these events took place somewhere along the northern border of Benjamin adjacent to the territories claimed by the northern tribes.

In the ancient world, it was not uncommon for a king, prophet, or priest to make a proclamation just before battle (see Deut 20:1-4; 2 Chr 20:5-17). Abijah's purpose was twofold. He discouraged the North from attacking, but he also assured the Judahites of victory.

Exhortation Based on David's Throne (13:4b-8a)

Abijah first exhorted Jeroboam not to attack Judah because of God's choice of the Davidic line. He addressed the northern tribes as **all Israel** (13:4b). Through this terminology Abijah extended a hand of peace to the tribes of the North (*Introduction: 1) All Israel*).

Abijah's argument regarding David's throne divided into three parts. First, he reminded the northern Israelites that God had made a **covenant of salt** with **David and his descendants** (13:5). The precise meaning of the expression **covenant of salt** is not certain; it appears nowhere else in association with David. A close parallel appears in Nu 18:19 where Levites receive assurance that their share of sacrifices is "an everlasting covenant of salt" (see also Lev 2:13). The association with salt spoke of the enduring quality of David's covenant, perhaps because salt was widely used as a preservative. The covenant God made with David was of vital importance to the Chronicler (see 2 Sam 7; Ps 89; 132). It assured the family of David a permanent right to the dynasty of Israel even in the post-exilic period (see *Introduction: 13) Covenant*).

Second, Abijah focused on Israel's initial rebellion against Judah. **Jeroboam ... rebelled against his master** (13:6). Rehoboam was rightly Jeroboam's **master**, one against whom rebellion should not take place lightly.

If this statement were all that Abijah said, then we might think his words contradict the Chronicler's perspective that the rebellion of the North was in some measure justified (see 10:1-19). Nevertheless, Abijah qualified his reference to Israel's initial rebellion by commenting on Rehoboam's condition at the time of the crisis (13:7).

Much controversy surrounds this passage because of an ambiguity in the clause "**worthless scoundrels gathered around him**" (13:7). The question is whether the word **him** refers to Jeroboam or Rehoboam. At least two observations point in favor of Rehoboam. 1) The Chronicler recorded men counseling Rehoboam foolishly; nothing of this sort is reported about Jeroboam (see 10:2-4). 2) The Chronicler never condemned the North for its initial rebellion against Rehoboam because it was appropriate in the light of Rehoboam's foolish response. For these reasons, it seems best to understand Rehoboam as the antecedent of **him** in 13:7d. If this view is correct, the verse would read in this manner: "Some worthless scoundrels gathered around him (Rehoboam) and he (Jeroboam) rebelled against Rehoboam son of Solomon when he (Rehoboam) was young and indecisive and not strong enough to resist them." Abijah's point was that Jeroboam resisted the throne of Judah when it was understandable for him to do so. Rehoboam was **young and indecisive** at the time (13:7) and did not follow the advice of the elders.

Third, Abijah's exhortation turned to the very day on which he spoke. The opening phrase **and now** (13:8) may be translated "but now," drawing the contrast between the initial succession of the North and current events. Although Jeroboam's initial rebellion was understandable, the northern tribes were violating the will of God by continuing to resist Judah (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Abijah proclaimed his view forcefully. This war is an attack on **the kingdom of the Lord ... in the hands of David's descendants** (13:8). David and his sons were nothing less than vice regents of God. On several occasions the Chronicler described the throne of Jerusalem as the throne of God (see *Introduction: 8) Divine Kingship*). In his view, the kingdom of David and his sons was an earthly expression of the divine heavenly reign. Therefore, to continue resisting David's house was to resist God Himself.

Exhortation Based on Temple Service (13:8b-12)

The second portion of Abijah's speech turned attention toward the Jerusalem temple and the security it provided for Judah. This material divides into three steps. First, Abijah acknowledged the reasons why the northern tribes had confidence as they entered battle. He noted that Jeroboam had **a vast army** (13:8b see 13:3). Moreover, he remarked on his **golden calves** (13:8b). The Chronicler had already mentioned the idols at the northern worship centers in Dan and Bethel (see 11:15). Perhaps the army had brought some of these idols with them into the battle. In all events, Abijah cleverly took up the perspective of his northern

opponents. He let them know that he is aware that their hope for victory was in their army and their idols.

Second, Abijah followed his acknowledgment with another accusation. As Jeroboam formed his distinctive religious practices, he removed **the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites** from their rightful places of duty (13:9). The legitimate leaders of Israel's worship were replaced with "**priests of your own ... like other people of other lands**" (13:9 see 1 Kgs 12:31; 2 Chr 11:14-15). These new priests were not ordained by God. They bought their way into service, and serve idols which **are not gods** (13:9; see Hos 8:6).

In effect, Abijah warned the northern Israelites that they had violated their relationship with God. The northern tribes had spurned divinely ordained leaders of worship and served idols instead of the living God. Therefore, God would not come to their aid in this battle.

Third, Abijah boldly contrasted Judah with Israel in this regard (13:10-12a). He began with the declaration, "**the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him**" (13:10). Abijah did not claim that Judah had no failures; the reign of his father Rehoboam proved otherwise (see 2 Chr 12:1-12). Instead, he insisted that Judah had temple personnel in order and services took place according to **the requirements of the Lord** (13:11). The northern Israelites, however, had **forsaken him** (13:11). The term "forsake" appears frequently in the Chronicler's history to denote a serious violation of the covenant relationship (see *Introduction: 22) Abandoning/Forsaking*). In the Chronicler's vocabulary, when God's people forsake him, God forsakes them.

As a result, Abijah boldly announced, "**God is with us; he is our leader**" (13:12). With these words, Abijah explained that the presence of God with his people ("God with us") meant that God would lead them into battle. Similar meaning applies to other uses of the expression throughout the Old Testament (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*).

Abijah elaborated on this concept by describing the rituals of battle: [God's] **priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against** northern Israel (13:12). Following the Mosaic instructions for the placement of priests in battle (see Nu 10:8-9), Abijah's army was to be led by the music of the priesthood (see 1 Chr 25:1; 2 Chr; 20:22;13:14). Elsewhere in the Old Testament the appearance of God as Israel's divine Warrior occurred at the blast of trumpets. The priests' trumpets announced that Israel fought with the help of her God. (For a discussion of music in warfare see comments on 20:21; see also *Introduction: 8) Music*).

This royal speech closes as it began with a direct address to the northern army. He began his speech to **Jeroboam and all Israel** (13:4b). Now he turned to the people themselves, **men of Israel** (13:12b). Abijah warned northern Israel not to fight because they would be fighting **against the Lord, the God of your fathers** (13:12b). God was with Judah and the Israelite army would be opposing him in their battle. The expression **God of your fathers** represented a final challenge to the confidence of the northern tribes. Twice the king referred to the Lord as **our** (Judah's) **God** (13:10,11), a designation that no longer applied to

the northern tribes. The Lord was only the God of their **fathers** (13:12b). Now that they had become the enemies of God, Abijah warned them that they would **not succeed** (13:12b).

Abijah Attacked by Jeroboam (13:13)

With Abijah's speech completed, the Chronicler moved back to the main action of his battle narrative. Perhaps while Abijah delivered his speech, Jeroboam attacked. Jeroboam divided his men and surrounded the Judahite army. His plan was to attack from the front and drive Abijah into a rear ambush. With twice as many soldiers at his command (see 13:3), Jeroboam seemed to have victory well in hand.

Abijah's Reaction and Divine Intervention (13:14-15)

The turning point of this episode is Abijah's reaction and God's intervention. These verses involve a series of rapid actions. The Judahite army realized they were surrounded **front and rear** (13:14a); **they cried out to the Lord** (13:14b); the **priests blew the trumpets** (13:15a); the soldiers **raised the battle cry** (13:15a). God then responded to the cry of Judah and **routed Jeroboam and all Israel** (13:15b).

The Chronicler already supplied the theological framework in terms of which these events were to be understood. On the one hand, this divine intervention recalled the prayer of Solomon (see 6:34-35; see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*). Like Rehoboam before him (12:6), and Asa and Jehoshaphat after him (14:11; 20:6-12), Abijah depended on Solomonic hopes and received God's deliverance from his enemies through prayer (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). On the other hand, Abijah's preceding speech explained what happened. Abijah claimed that the Lord would help Judah (see 13:12). The reference to the **trumpets** of the priests and the **battle cry** (13:14) directly corresponds to Abijah's prediction of victory (see 13:12; For a discussion of music in warfare see comments on 20:21.). God's intervention on Abijah's behalf illustrated the kind of response to be expected by those who faithfully relied on God and called on him (see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*).

Abijah Defeats Jeroboam (13:16)

In direct contrast with Jeroboam's earlier aggression (13:13), he and his army **fled before Judah** (13:16). The presence of God in battle had been predicted (see 13:12) and the Chronicler noted that **God delivered them into their hands** (13:16).

Abijah Inflicts Great Losses on Jeroboam (13:17)

The main action of this battle narrative closes with a description of Judah's victory over Israel. The Chronicler focused on the number of losses inflicted on the northern army to balance the numerical notices at the beginning of the story (see 13:3). While Jeroboam began with 800,000 compared to Judah's 400,000, the battle reduced Jeroboam's army to 300,000. These numbers revealed that the battle was a decisive victory for Judah.

Authorial Comment (13:18)

In order to make his assessment of this event perfectly clear, the Chronicler added an authorial comment. Judah won the battle **because they relied on the Lord, the God of their fathers** (13:18). The Chronicler used the term "rely" on several occasions to describe trust and conscious dependence on God (see 14:11; 16:7,8). Abijah's reliance and trust in God were demonstrated in his courageous speech (see 13:4-12) and in his prayer (see 13:14).

Abijah's victory illustrated a vital principle for the Chronicler's readers. If they hoped to have victory in the conflicts they faced, they must follow Abijah's example. If they joined commitment to the Davidic monarchy and temple to reliance on God through prayers in and toward the temple, God would fight for them as well (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

Aftermath of Abijah's Battle (13:19-21)

In the preceding authorial comment the Chronicler described the fate of both Israel and Judah. These verses contain reports which elaborate on this distinction.

Structure of 13:19-21

The aftermath of battle divides into two parts (see figure 31). The Chronicler first summarized what came of Jeroboam (13:19-20) and then reported Abijah's contrasting experience (13:21).

Jeroboam's Curses (13:19-20)

In a word, Jeroboam's defeat in battle was only the beginning of his losses. Abijah did not refrain from pursuing Jeroboam until he **took from him** a number of cities, including

Bethel (13:19). These cities remained under Judahite control **during the time of Abijah** (13:20).

The Chronicler emphasized the final severity of God's judgment against Jeroboam's aggression by stating that **the Lord struck him down and he died** (13:20). Jeroboam actually outlived Abijah (see 1 Kgs 15:6-10), but from the Chronicler's point of view, nothing else significant happened in Jeroboam's reign. Moreover, he made it clear that Jeroboam's death was not from natural causes. The language of "striking down" demonstrates that it was by divine intervention (see 1 Sam 4:3; 25:38; 26:10; 2 Sam 12:15; 2 Chr 13:15; 14:12; 21:14,18). 1 Kgs 14:19-20 does not characterize Jeroboam's death as an act of God. The Chronicler, however, saw it as an extension of the divine judgment begun at his defeat before Abijah (see 13:4-18).

Abijah's Blessings (13:21)

The contrast between Abijah and Jeroboam could hardly be greater. Jeroboam lost territories and died by God's hand, but Abijah enjoyed God's blessings. The Chronicler mentioned two great blessings. First, Abijah **grew in strength** (13:21). This terminology indicated that Abijah defeated his foes and enjoyed relative peace and prosperity. Instead of losing territories, Abijah expanded and consolidated his kingdom.

Second, in contrast with Jeroboam who died under God's curse, Abijah had **fourteen wives, twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters** (13:21). As he did on several occasions the Chronicler reported numerous progeny as a demonstration of divine blessing (see *Introduction: 25) Increase and Decline of Progeny*).

The Chronicler ended his expansion of the reign of Abijah with these contrasts between Jeroboam and Abijah to encourage his post-exilic readers. He and his readers wanted to strengthen the nation and to receive more blessings from God. The Chronicler made their choices very clear. To be like Jeroboam meant loss and death, but to be like Abijah meant tremendous blessing.

Closure of Abijah's Reign (13:22-14:1a)

The Chronicler returned to Kings to close out the reign of Abijah (13:22-14:1 // 1 Kgs 15:7-8). His record differs, however, by mentioning his source of **the story of the prophet Iddo** (13:22). This source appears two other times (see 9:29; 12:15). The Chronicler's repeated references indicate the influence of this prophet on his theology (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*).