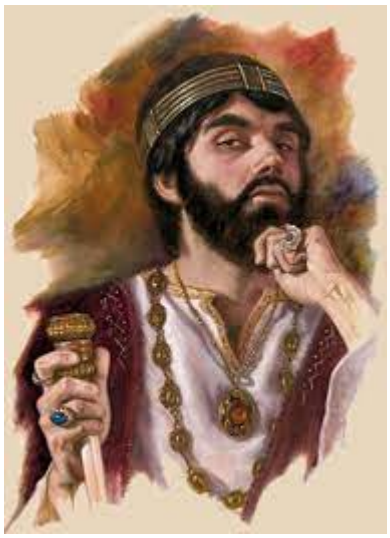
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Abijah King of Judah
First Kings 15:1-8 and Second Chronicles 13:1 to 14:1

Abijah king of Judah DIG: What kind of leader was Abijah? Why are the King's and Chronicle's accounts so different? Why was Abijah so confident in that battle? How does Abijah mock Isra'el's new non-gods? What would the covenant of salt mean to Abijah? Besides the battle, what did Jeroboam lose? What did Abijah gain? How was Abijah's leadership rewarded?

REFLECT: Many Bible stories tell that ADONAI routed enemies when His people were outnumbered. What do these stories say about God's strategy, opposed to human strategy? About risk taking? What worldly non-gods compete for people's adoration today? Why do they have such appeal? What worldly things tend to compete for your attention? What can you do?

Knowing godly ways, and choosing to act godly, are two different things.



The background of the king: It was in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat that Abijam began his reign over Judah. He ruled three years in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Ma'acah the daughter of Abishalom (First Kings 15:1-2; Second Chronicles 13:1-2a). The Hebrew text of **Kings** spells the name of this **king Abijam** (*My father is Yam, referring to the Western Semitic god of the sea*). Apparently, the writer of **Kings** had no problem with using that 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 YHVH*), referring to **the LORD** of **Isra'el**. I will be using **Abijah**.

The significance of his reign: He committed all the sins his father had committed before him; he was not wholehearted with ADONAI his God, as David his forefather had been. Unfortunately, this was a case of "like **father**, like **son**." Nevertheless, **for David's sake, ADONAI his God gave him a lamp burning in Jerusalem by establishing his son after him and making Jerusalem secure. For David had done what was right from ADONAI's perspective; he had not turned away from anything he had ordered him to do, as long as he lived, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite (First Kings 15:3-5). Kings** dismisses **Abijah** as evil and explain that **he reigned** only because of **God's** promise to **David.** And **the LORD** will continue to **David's** dynasty and protect **Jerusalem** because of **David's** faithfulness. Certainly, **David** sinned against **Bathsheba** and Uriah, yet he never turned to idols as **Solomon**, **Rehoboam**, and now **Abijah** did. **YHVH** keeps **His** promises even when **David's** descendants did not. **The Chronicler**, however, omitted this material in order to portray the positive side of **Abijah's reign. He** greatly expanded **First King 15:7b, "But there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam,"** into a full-scale account of **the battle** between **Abijah** and **Jeroboam**. In this **battle, Abijah** received a tremendous **victory** because of **his** faithfulness to **ADONAI**.[358]

> **The battle between Abijah and Jeroboam: There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. Abijah joined the battle with an army of valiant soldiers, 400,000 select troops; while Jeroboam took the field against him with 800,000 select troops who were valiant, strong men.** The story begins with a description of the number of men facing each other. These numbers are very large. The Hebrew word translated thousand may be a technical term referring to considerably less than **1,000**. If this were the case, **Abijah** may have had **40,000** and **Jeroboam 80,000**. This does not mitigate

against the historical fact that **Jeroboam** had twice as many **soldiers** as **Abijah**.[359]

Abijah's speech based on David's throne: This speech halts the battle narrative for nine verses and provides an indispensable theological analysis of the events about to take place. In the ancient world, it was not uncommon for a king, prophet, or priest to make a proclamation just before battle **(Deuteronomy 20:1-4; Second Chronicles 20:5-17)**. **Abijah, standing on Mount Zemaraim, in the hills of Ephraim, cried, "Jeroboam and all Isra'el! Listen to me!** The location of **Mount Zemariam** is not certain, but seems to be in the vicinity of **Bethel** near the border with Benjamin. First, **he** reminded **the northern tribes** that **God** made **a covenant of salt** with **David**. **Don't you know that ADONAI, the God of Isra'el, gave rulership over Isra'el to David forever, to him and his descendants, by a covenant of salt (Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19), which is unbreakable? Salt** was connected with the sealing of treaties and covenants in many cultures of the biblical world. Moreover, **salt** was an important element in the ancient world for preservation, and its use here would underscore **God's** commitment to preserve **the house of David (Second Chronicles 13:4-5)**.[360]

Second, **Abijah** focused on **Isra'el's** initial rebellion against **Judah** (see **Dc – A House Divided**). **Yet Jeroboam, servant to Solomon the son of David, rose in rebellion against his master. 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** view that **the rebellion** of **the North** was, in some measure, justified. Nevertheless, **Abijah** qualified **his** reference to **Isra'el's** initial **rebellion** by commenting on **Rehoboam's** superior position to **Jeroboam** at the time of the crisis. In addition, **there rallied some worthless brutes around Rehoboam, and Jeroboam rebelled against Rehoboam son of Solomon when Rehoboam was young, inexperienced, and not strong enough to follow** the wise advice of **his fathers' elders (First Kings 12:6-7).**

Third, **Abijah's** appeal turned to the very day on which **he** spoke. **But now,** draws a 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 **ADONAI** by continuing to resist

Judah. **But now you expect to withstand the kingdom of ADONAI in the hands of the descendants of David.** 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 **YHVH Himself (Second Chronicles 13:6-8a)**.

Abijah's speech based on Temple service: The second part of **Abijah's** speech turned attention toward **the Jerusalem Temple** and the security **it** provided for **Judah**. First, **Abijah** acknowledged that **Jeroboam** had a vast army. **Yes, there are a great number of you, and you have with you the gold calves that Jeroboam made as gods for you. He** let **them** know that **he** was well aware that **their** hope for victory was in **their army** and **idols**.

Second, **Abijah** followed **his** acknowledgement with another accusation. As **Jeroboam** formed **his** counterfeit religion (see **Di – Rehoboam King of Judah**), **he drove out the priests of ADONAI, the descendants of Aaron, and the Levites** from **their** rightful place **and he made himself priests as do the peoples in other countries, so that anyone who comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams can become a priest of those non-gods.** In effect, **Abijah** warned **them** that **they** had violated **their** relationship with **God**. **They** had spurned divinely ordained leaders of worship and served dead **idols** instead of the living **God**. Therefore, **YHVH** wouldn't come to **their** aid in this battle.

Third, **Abijah** boldly contrasted **Judah** with **Isra'el**, in this regard. **But we are different, he** said**. ADONAI is our God, and we have not abandoned Him. Abijah** didn't claim that **Judah** had no failures. The reign of **his father** proved that point well. However, **we have priests performing the service for ADONAI, descendants of Aaron. With the Levites doing their work, they burn to ADONAI every morning and evening burnt offerings and sweet incense; they arrange the showbread on the pure table, and they prepare the gold menorah with its lamps to burn every evening. For we observe the order of ADONAI our God. But you have abandoned Him.** As a result, **Abijah** boldly announced: **So look here! God is with us, leading us and His priests with the battle trumpets to sound an alarm against you. People of Isra'el! Don't fight against ADONAI, the God of your ancestors; because you will not succeed (Second Chronicles 13:8b-12)!**

The attack: With **Abijah's** speech completed, **the Chronicler** moved back to the main action of **his** battle narrative. Perhaps, while **Abijah** was delivering **his** speech, **Jeroboam** attacked. **Jeroboam prepared to ambush them from behind, so that the main body of his troops were ahead of Judah, while the ambush was behind them. Thus, when Judah looked back, the battle had to be fought in front of them and behind them. Jeroboam** seemed to have a great battle plan and the victory well within **his** reach **(Second Chronicles 13:13).**[361]

Abijah's reaction and divine intervention: The turning point of this battle was **Abijah's** reaction to **God's** intervention. **The Chronicler** already supplied the framework in terms of how the story is to be interpreted. On the one hand, this divine intervention recalled the prayer of **Solomon** (see **Bn – Solomon's Prayer of Intercession**), and **Asa (2 Chron 14:11)** and **Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:6-12)** after **him**. **Abijah** depended upon the hopes of **Solomon** and received **God's** deliverance from **his** enemies through prayer. On the other hand, **Abijah's** preceding speech explained that **YHVH** would be faithful to **the covenant He** had made with **David** and **his descendants**. Therefore, **Judah cried out to ADONAI.**

Then **the priests sounded trumpets** that were specially constructed for military signaling in battle **(Numbers 10:1-9** and **31:1-6). Then the men of Judah gave forth a shout, and as they shouted, God** responded to the cry and **struck Jeroboam and all Isra'el before Abijah and Judah. The people of Isra'el fled before Judah, and God handed them over to them. Abijah and his army inflicted a great slaughter on them – 500,000 of Isra'el's select soldiers fell dead (Second Chronicles 13:14-17).** It was a decisive **victory** for **Abijah**. **The king'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** were loyal to the Davidic monarchy and relied on **the LORD** through prayers, in and toward the Temple, **ADONAI** would **fight** for **them** as well.

The aftermath of the battle: Thus, the people of Isra'el were subdued that time, and the people of Judah won the victory. And to make the point perfectly clear, **the Chronicler** added the comment . . . **because they relied on ADONAI, the God of their ancestors.** But the defeat in **battle** was only the beginning of **Jeroboam's** losses. **Abijah pursued Jeroboam, taking from him the towns of Bethel with its villages, Jeshanah with**

> **its villages and Ephron with its villages. Jeroboam did not recover his strength during the time of Abijah. The Chronicler** emphasized the final severity of **God's** judgment against **Jeroboam's** aggression by stating that **ADONAI struck him, and he died (Second Chronicles 13:18-20). Jeroboam** actually outlived **Abijah (First Kings 15:6-10)**, but from **the Chronicler's** point of view, nothing else significant ever happened in **Jeroboam's** life. Moreover, **he** made it clear **Jeroboam's death** was not from natural causes.[362]

The summary of his reign: **Abijah** had inherited **his father's** continued friction with **Jeroboam** and **the northern kingdom**, only now it took the form of open warfare between the two Hebrew states. Fortunately for **Judah**, **Abijah's** underlying faith rose to the surface during that time of crisis.[363] **But** the contrast between **Abijah** and **Jeroboam** could hardly have been 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.** Instead of losing territories, **he** expanded and consolidated **his kingdom**. Second, **he married fourteen wives and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. Other activities of Abijah and all his accomplishments and sayings are recorded in the commentary of the prophet 'Iddo and the Annals of the Kings of Judah (First Kings 15:6-7; Second Chronicles 13:21-22).** With these words, **the Chronicler** encouraged the post-exilic readers. **He** and **his** readers wanted to strengthen the nation and to receive more blessings from **ADONAI**. **The Chronicler** made their choices very clear. To be like **Jeroboam** meant loss and **death**, but to be like **Abijah** meant tremendous blessing.[364]

The death of the king: **Abijah slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the City of David. The king** was given the honor of being buried in the royal cemetery. **Then Asa his son became king in his place, during his time the Land was quiet for ten years (First Kings 15:8; Second Chronicles 14:1).** The backdrop of peace at this time frame began with **the victory ADONAI** gave **Abijah** over **Jeroboam** and the subsequent internal turmoil in **the northern kingdom. Asa** succeeded **his father Abijah** as ruler in **the southern kingdom** and enjoyed a season of peace and stability lasting around **one decade** of **his forty-one year reign**, while **the northern kingdom** continued to face internal and external turmoil.[365]

First Kings 15:3 gives **the background of the king** and says that **Abijah**

committed all the sins his father Rehoboam had committed before him (see **Di – Rehoboam King of Judah**) and **was not wholehearted with ADONAI his God, as David his forefather had been.** Consequently, like **his father, Abijah** is not considered **a** godly **king** (see **Dh – The Kings of Judah**). But when push-came-to-shove, **Abijah** had great faith in the battle with **Jeroboam**. Hopelessly outnumbered and facing certain death, **Abijah's** speech was a model of godly faith. That begs the question – who was the real **Abijah**? Was **he the** faithless **king who committed all the sins his father Rehoboam had committed before him**, or **the man** of faith who stared **death** in the face and declared: **So look here! God is with us, leading us and His priests with the battle trumpets to sound an alarm against you. People of Isra'el! Don't fight against ADONAI, the God of your ancestors; because you will not succeed (Second Chronicles 13:8b-12)**? It seems that for the vast majority of **his** life, **Abijah** chose to rebel against **YHVH**, but had one shining moment of faith during **the battle** against **his** nemesis from **the north, Jeroboam**. But overall, looking at **his** entire life, **Ha'Shem** viewed **him** as unfaithful. What can we learn from this? We are faced with a choice every day of our lives. No matter how faithful we have been in the past, we need to choose to act in godly ways today. Knowing what God desires, and choosing to act on it, are two different things. Do we choose to follow **Torah** and be blessed, or rebel against **God's Word** and suffer the consequences in our lives? **Torah** is our blueprint for living.

Abijah was up and down with **his** faithfulness to **ADONAI**. But we can't base our salvation on a "sometime" **king**. We need **a King** that we can count on. And we have one in **Yeshua Messiah** who has a three-fold designation that describes **Him** as **prophet, priest** and **king**. First**, He is the faithful witness** and a prophet **(1:5a).** Standing before the Roman governor, Pilate said to **Him**, "**You are a king, then!" Yeshua** responded by saying: **You are right in saying I am a King. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify**, or bear **witness**, **to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me (John 18:37).** This is how **He** describes **Himself to the church in Laodicea,** saying: **These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness** proclaiming **God's truth (3:14).** The English word for **witness** here comes from the Greek word meaning *martyr.* **He** proved that **He** was a **faithful witness** in **His** earthly life, being obedient to **ADONAI** even to the point of death, and that would have had a particularly great significance to those first century believers who were also facing a martyr's death. **Jesus** is the model of how to stand firm and never compromise the truth of **God**. So first, **He** is **a prophet**.

Secondly, **He is a priest**. **He** is called **the firstborn from the dead (1:5b)**, literally ***the dead*** *ones***.** The Greek word *prototokos* **(Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15** and **18; Hebrews 1:6)**, has a two-fold meaning. Here, the Greek word **first** has to do with *first in time or first of its kind.* The Bible tells us that **Messiah was with God in the beginning (John 1:2)**, and Rabbi Sha'ul tells us **He** is **the firstfruits** of many other believers to come after **Him (First Corinthians 15:23)**. But secondly, *prototokos* also has to do with *eminence* or first in *importance,* or a *supreme authority* over **the dead (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15** and **18; Hebrews 1:6).** The concept that **Christ** is **the firstborn from *the dead*** *ones*, always refers to the priesthood **in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15-17** and **23-25).** The hope of the resurrection is always the background behind **His priesthood**. To those first century churches that lived under the threat of death, the fact that **Jesus** was **able to save** them **completely** would have been tremendously encouraging. We should be no less encouraged.

And thirdly, **He is the ruler of the kings of the earth**, **His** defeated enemies **(1:5c)**. **He** is the ruler *now* and **He** will be the ruler *when* ***He*** *returns* **(19:11-18). Christ** is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of this world, to which **He** holds the title deed **(5:5). He is the Prince of princes**, **He is the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16)**, **He is Lord**, having **the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9b).** In fact, **Christ's** ultimate authority is a theme that runs through the book of **Revelation**. It speaks of the sovereignty of **ADONAI**. When **He** returns **He** will be the only one ruling the whole world. **Yeshua** was even **the ruler** over Domitian. This reference to **Jesus Christ** gives way to the first of many doxologies in **Revelation**.

Therefore, the message of **the revelation** is about **Jesus**. **He** reminds us at the beginning of the book that everything **He** is going to say in the entire prophecy can be counted on because **He is a prophet**. Secondly, **He is a priest**, this is our hope and security. **He** is alive and risen from the dead. That means that you and I do not have to face the horror of the coming Great Tribulation because we have **One** who has lived forever and makes intercession for us. Thirdly, **He is a King** and **He** promises that we will share in **His Kingdom**.

To Him who loves us and has freed us, and bought **us** back **from our sins by His blood (1:5d), and has made us to be a kingdom of priests** (**Exodus 19:5-6; First Peter 2:9**, also see **5:10**) **to serve His God and Father – to Him be glory and power for ever and ever,** literally, *to the ages of the ages****!*** **Amen (1:6).** When those first century believers were staring martyrdom in the face, I am

sure they didn’t feel like they were **a kingdom** of **priests**, but **John** confronted them with their true spiritual reality. And there are many times that *we* don’t feel like *we* are a **kingdom** of **priests.** But we need to remember these words and see ourselves through our **Father’s** eyes. This is **God’s** love message to you.