

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**II CHR. 13:3** And Abijah set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war, *even* four hundred thousand chosen men: Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, *being* mighty men of valour.

**4** And Abijah stood up upon mount Zemaraim, which *is* in mount Ephraim, and said, Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel;

5 Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, *even* to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?

**6** Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord.

7 And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them.

**8** And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David; and ye *be* a great multitude, and *there are* with you golden calves, which Jeroboam made you for gods.

9 Have ye not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of *other* lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bull-ock and seven rams, *the same* may be a priest of *them that are* no gods.

**10** But as for us, the LORD *is* our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests, which minister unto

the LORD, *are* the sons of Aaron, and the Levites *wait upon their* business:

11 And they burn unto the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also *set they in order* upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God; but ye have forsaken him.

**12** And, behold, God himself is with us for *our* captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.

13 But Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come about behind them: so they were before Judah, and the ambushment was behind them.

**14** And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the LORD, and the priests sounded with the trumpets.

15 Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass, that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.

**16** And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and God delivered them into their hand.

17 And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men.

**18** Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers.

# Abijah Challenges King Jeroboam

Lesson Text: II Chronicles 13:3-18

Related Scriptures: I Kings 15:1-2, 6-8;  
Numbers 10:8-10; Psalm 22:1-5

TIME: between 913-911 B.C.

PLACE: Ephraim

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests, which minister unto the Lord, are the sons of Aaron" (II Chronicles 13:10).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **A SHAMEFUL HISTORY RECOUNTED—II Chr. 13:3-9**

For this lesson we move forward in the Old Testament text but about sixty years backward in time. King Abijah (spelled Abijam in I Kings), the main subject of our text, was the grandson of Solomon and the son of Rehoboam. Solomon was the last king of the unified nation; the ten northern tribes rebelled against his son Rehoboam and set up their own kingdom, which became known as Israel, under a one-time fugitive named Jeroboam. Jeroboam was still king when Abijah came to the throne of Judah, and there was still conflict between the two kingdoms (II Chr. 13:2).

The account of Abijah's reign in I Kings is very brief, being summarized in only eight verses. We learn there that Abijah followed the sinful ways of his father, Rehoboam, and that "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God" like David's (15:3). A similar assessment had been leveled on Solomon himself in his time (11:6). We get a strik-

ingly different view of Abijah in our text for today. Balancing the two accounts is a challenging but profitable exercise.

Both accounts note that Abijah's reign was brief, lasting only three years (I Kgs. 15:2; II Chr. 13:2). While II Kings mentions war between Abijah and Jeroboam, II Chronicles makes this same observation the basis for the expanded account that follows.

**An uneven matchup (II Chr. 13:3).** The chronicler notes that Abijah went into battle with a force of four hundred thousand seasoned warriors; Jeroboam drew up against him with eight hundred thousand men. Abijah found himself outnumbered two to one.

**An attempt to negotiate (II Chr. 13:4-5).** Abijah took a position on Mount Zemaraim, an elevated spot from which he could be heard by all the men of the opposing army. He began with an appeal: "Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel" (vs. 4).

The king of Judah opened with an appeal to truth and to the two sides'

shared history. By way of a question, he reminded his opponents of the divine underpinnings of the Davidic monarchy. God had given the throne to David and promised an eternal kingdom for his household. This was a known fact, whether the northern tribes now cared to admit it or not.

Abijah fortified his statement by noting that the kingdom had been given to David and his descendants "by a covenant of salt" (vs. 5). By this, he was referring to the salt used in all sacrifices (cf. Lev. 2:13), including the sacrifice that would have sealed the covenant of David's kingship.

**A reminder of past wrongs (II Chr. 13:6-7).** Having reminded the Israelite forces of the divine legitimacy of the Davidic monarchy, Abijah turned to the primary case against its opponents.

Abijah reminded the men that Jeroboam had once been a servant of Solomon, yet he had risen up in rebellion against his master. So, the Israelites arrayed against Judah were serving a rebel, not a true leader. In verse 7, Abijah strengthened this thought by underscoring the treachery involved in Jeroboam's rebellion. He had gathered a gang of worthless scoundrels ("children of Belial") around him and defied a young and inexperienced Rehoboam, who was unable to resist.

These charges were quite true, although Abijah conveniently left out that Rehoboam's foolish intransigence and hard-line approach toward the northerners' grievances contributed mightily to their decision to break away (I Kgs. 12:1-16). Still, it was rebellion, and although God used it to punish corruption and sin in the kingdom, He never voided His promise to David's heirs.

**A reminder of present wrongs (II Chr. 13:8-9).** God's promise to David may have been in Abijah's mind when he posed a question to the Israelite forces: Did they really expect to prevail

against the Lord's kingdom as entrusted to David's heirs? As imperfect as the Davidic monarchy was, it had been specially chosen and anointed by God.

Abijah then contrasted this truth with the reality behind the breakaway monarchy. He acknowledged their vast numbers but pointed out that they had no God—all they had were the two golden calves Jeroboam had furnished them. He had set up these idols, at the northern and southern borders of his realm, precisely to prevent his people from traveling to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

As if this were not bad enough, the Israelites had driven away the Lord's priests and the Levites and set up their own priests after the pagan model. Abijah pointed out that the Israelites now allowed virtually anyone to become a priest.

#### **AN EARNEST WARNING GIVEN— II Chr. 13:10-12**

**Judah's loyalty to God (II Chr. 13:10-11).** Abijah then turned things around, contrasting Israel's state-sponsored idolatry with Judah's adherence to the Lord.

Abijah expanded on this truth in minute detail. The morning and evening sacrifices were offered without fail. The incense was burned as prescribed. The showbread was faithfully set out on the clean table in the temple, and the golden lampstand was maintained and kept burning. All this added up to one inexorable reality: Judah had kept "the charge of the Lord," but Israel had "forsaken him" (vs. 11).

**Abijah's urgent plea (II Chr. 13:12).** The king of Judah drew the inevitable conclusion: God was with Judah, not Israel. The Israelites had Jeroboam, a proven fighter indeed, to lead them, but Judah had God Himself as their Captain. Their soldiers were led into battle by His priests blowing their

trumpets. The imagery Abijah chose seems purposely designed to bring to mind the trumpets blown at Jericho and in other battles. They portended one thing: utter defeat for the enemies of God's people.

Abijah wove all these facts into a passionate warning to his opponents, addressing them fervently: "O children of Israel," He pleaded with them, "fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers"—for indeed, in fighting Judah they were fighting Him. And although they had forsaken Him, He was still the God of their fathers; it was a heritage they shared with the men of Judah.

If the shared heritage held no sway over them, the outcome of taking up arms against the Lord's people should have given them pause. Abijah warned them bluntly, "Ye shall not prosper."

## **A TREACHEROUS AMBUSH THWARTED—II Chr. 13:13-18**

**Tactics of deception (II Chr. 13:13-14).** If Abijah had thought his warning might have an effect, he was quickly disabused of such a notion. He had hardly finished speaking when Israelite treachery came to light. Jeroboam had set an ambush behind Abijah's army so that they were caught between two forces.

The men of Judah looked around them and found themselves being suddenly attacked in front and behind. This was obviously a frightening development, and they responded the only way they knew how: "They cried unto the Lord" (vs. 14). The priests joined the cry with their trumpets. The contrast again is unmistakable. Israel was relying on superior numbers and shrewd strategy; Judah was relying on God, their only hope.

**A spectacular turnabout (II Chr. 13:15-17).** In putting their hope in God's hands, however, the men of Judah did not cower in helpless pas-

sivity. They "gave a shout" (vs. 15); that is, they raised a battle cry.

The Lord responded to their battle cry by acting against their enemies. He "smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah." It was a rout.

The slaughter of the Israelite forces was horrific; they lost more than half their men.

**A trenchant summary (II Chr. 13:18).** The chronicler wrapped up this episode by repeating the main lesson to be learned. The men of Israel were defeated, and the men of Judah prevailed because they put their reliance, their trust, in the Lord, the God of their fathers. It was a simple lesson, and one that should not have been easy to forget.

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. How did the size of Abijah's army compare with the armies of his opponents?
2. Why did Abijah take his stand on an elevated spot?
3. What did Abijah remind his adversaries of with regard to David's kingdom?
4. What did he say about Jeroboam's rebellion?
5. What did he leave out?
6. What did Israel worship in place of God?
7. Why might Abijah have mentioned the priests and their trumpets?
8. What was Abijah's main plea to the soldiers of Israel?
9. What was his blunt warning?
10. Why did God give victory to Judah and overwhelm Israel?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Those who stand with the Lord can make God's appeal to their enemies with boldness and compassion (II Chr. 13:3-5).
2. Those who rebel against God's standards cannot expect His blessing (vss. 6-7).
3. Military might is no substitute for moral integrity and obedience to God (vss. 8-9).
4. God's people must conduct God's work by His standards—not by their own and not by the world's (vss. 10-12).
5. We must trust God for victory no matter how difficult—or even how easy—the battle appears (vss. 13-15).
6. Faith and obedience are key to seeing God work in our lives (vss. 16-18).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Scripture so often records battles where one side vastly outnumbers the other?
2. What was the significance of the "covenant of salt" (II Chr. 13:5; cf. Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19)?
3. What was the role of the priests in Israel? What did King Jeroboam's appointment of his own priests reveal about the condition of his heart and his attitude toward God?
4. How does the response of the army of Judah provide an example for believers who face unexpected attacks?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**"But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests, which minister unto the Lord, are the sons of Aaron" (II Chronicles 13:10).**

Abijah was not exactly a positive role model. He didn't live his personal life in accordance with God's commands. In fact, the account of his rule in I Kings says that he "walked in all the sins of his father" (I Kgs. 15:3). But he was part of the blessed royal family line of King David, who was known for being a man after God's own heart. As Abijah ruled, he maintained the essential features of the covenant and worship structure set up by the Lord, while Jeroboam completely dismantled it in Israel.

As Israel and Judah prepared to go to battle, Abijah stood before Jeroboam and the armies of Israel and spoke to them about the wrongs Jeroboam had done.

In II Chronicles 13:10-12, Abijah contrasted this behavior with the way the nation of Judah was holding fast to the Lord. Although Abijah's devotion to the Lord in his personal life was questionable, his reign in Judah showed submission to God's commands on a national level.

When Israel and Judah came head-to-head, the Lord came through for Judah. God blessed Abijah for his obedience and, most important, for David's sake (I Kgs. 15:4).

God kept His promises to David's family line and kept alive the hope of salvation through David's greatest descendant, Jesus Christ.

—Carissa Dobson.