

Rehoboam - Left with Cheap Imitations

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn this morning to 2 Chronicles chapter 12, looking at the whole passage, the whole of the chapter as we find it as a kind of a summary of the reign or the life of Rehoboam, who was a son of Solomon and therefore a grandson of King David.

Very often when you go into stately homes, homes that are grand or even castles, you very often find a room, at least one room maybe more, where there are lots of portraits.

And very often the portraits will be portraits of previous occupants or owners of these stately homes, especially where they have been owned or occupied by families one generation after another.

And you'll see all of these portraits and paintings up on the walls and usually little plaques about who they are and where they are in the possession or ownership of the homes.

And you'll find a variety, of course, of different kinds of paintings of people represented there. And you'll find something like that in this book of the Chronicles and the same of kings as well, first and second kings.

[1 : 17] Because by and large these are an account of the history of Israel and Judah and the things that happened under the reign of the various kings that are mentioned.

Now, for some people it might be somewhat boring to go through history, even if it's the history that's written in the Bible. And perhaps we tend maybe to neglect the books of kings and chronicles more than we should, simply because we think, well, it's just really historical narrative.

It's a bit about this king and that king and what happened in the reign. And because it's just history, we tend perhaps not to go there as often as we should. But that would be a mistake.

Because it's a gallery, really, of kings, if you like. As you go into the likes of 2 Chronicles, you're coming into a gallery with portraits of these kings all around you.

And as you look at this very varied gallery, because some of them are bad, some of them are good. But the portraits are all accurate. It gives you all the features that are necessary to know about what kind of person this was.

[2 : 25] What kind of reign did they have? What sort of things did they set in motion in the nation, whether Israel or Judah, during their reign? Did they lead the people astray or did they lead them to God or did they lead them back to God?

And today we're standing and looking up at the portrait of King Rehoboam. Rehoboam, son of Solomon, grandson of David.

He had a very famous ancestry. Very difficult reigns to follow. And he didn't begin very well.

Because if you go back to chapter 10, you'll see how at the beginning of his reign, he gathered together all the older people who were his counsellors.

And all the young men who were his own pals, you might say. And he took counsel of them as to what the best way ahead for him would be, what sort of reign he would have, what kind of policies he would have.

And the big mistake that he made was that he neglected the advice of the older men who told him, Your father Solomon actually ended up quite cruelly imposing heavy taxes on the people.

[3 : 34] And you should treat them more kindly. And he chose to ignore that. And he took the advice of his younger pals, his men of his own age. And the outcome of that was that he actually said to the people, Yes, my father laid heavy burdens and taxes upon you, but they're going to be a lot worse in my time.

My father, as he put it, chastised you with whips. I'm going to chastise you with scorpions. What happened? The kingdom split. Ten tribes left his kingship and followed another man, Jeroboam.

That's the man mentioned at the end of the chapter. Jeroboam, who set up a rival kingdom in the north that became the kingdom of Israel. With a rival capital and a rival religion to that in Jerusalem, which became Judah, the nation of Judah.

The two nations from then on existed separate, sometimes at peace, sometimes war between them. But that was the beginning of the split under the foolishness or due to the foolishness of Rehoboam.

There's a lesson, of course, in that itself. I'm not going to go into it, but it's important, especially for the young ones. Older people in the congregation here, in the church at large, they will learn from you.

[4 : 58] They will actually learn things from you that are done by you and your generation that perhaps they didn't do or didn't do exactly the same way in their generation. It's important that as older people, we listen to our young people, we listen to them and learn from them.

And to do that, we need to be together a lot. That's the great thing about the fellowship of the church. It's young and old together. But it's also true for you young people, and it's a good thing to see in the congregation here that it happens quite a lot, thankfully, that the younger people are concerned to be with the older ones.

Yes, they have their own meetings. They have their own times when they're by themselves, but they also have times when they're together with older people. Why? Because it's important to listen to their counsel.

Yes, things are different today to what they were 40 years ago, but young people must remember that the older people were young ones. They list, they came through the same things, essentially, even if it's in a different sort of way.

And it's important that we listen to their advice, that we learn from them and what they have to say. Because very often they do know better than we do ourselves.

[6 : 11] That's the mistake that Rehoboam made. He didn't listen to the counsel of his older advisors, and he ended up with a disaster on his hands. Well, that's the background.

That's the way in which Rehoboam began his reign. But this chapter is really a summary. And the first thing you learn as you look at this portrait, one of the main features that you see in the portrait is a turning away from God.

As you look at this portrait of Rehoboam in this chapter that summarizes his life and his reign, one of the things that immediately catches your eye is the way the chapter begins.

This feature of turning away from the Lord. When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the Lord and all Israel with him.

This turning away from the Lord, there are three things that interest us, that you see built into this portrait. When did it happen? Well, it happened in this fifth, in this, when he was strong and abandoned the law of the Lord, it happened in the fourth year of his reign.

[7 : 24] Now, we can calculate that because Shishak, the king of Egypt, came in the fifth year of his reign. And earlier on, we're told that Rehoboam, for three years, actually, strengthened himself and strengthened his reign.

So, for three years, Rehoboam was building himself up and building the people up and building the kind of society and the kind of reign, the kind of policies that he wanted to put in place.

For three years, he was doing that. And then in the fourth year, because he was now strong, because he was now well established, he took a very bad decision.

He abandoned the law of the Lord and all Israel did it with him. When did it happen? When he was strong.

Isn't that interesting? Not when he was weak. Not when he was trying to build things up. Not when he was trying to establish himself and establish the kingdom under him. When he was strong.

[8 : 31] When things had really been established and confirmed. He abandoned the law of the Lord and all Israel with him. The nation followed him into that departure from the law of the Lord and from God.

Why is that important? Well, it's important because it's saying this to us. The real test for you and for me, as it was for Rehoboam, is not what we do in a crisis.

But what we do when things are going well. There are plenty of people that in a crisis think about God. And that during a crisis think more seriously about spiritual matters and moral matters.

And about God and about God's word and about God's law. But when the crisis is over, the thoughts recede back to what they were. And Rehoboam, for three years, needed God. Let's put the needed in inverted commas. He needed God so he was true to God outwardly at least. But when he was built up himself and strong and when he had established the kingdom, he didn't need God anymore.

[9 : 39] Or so he thought. So he abandoned the law of the Lord. And the people followed him in that. And that's true of human life in every generation.

It holds true in our own generation too. When you go to Africa and you meet people from Africa, as I've done at ICRC recently in Wales.

You find churches there. I'm not talking about the more charismatic Pentecostal churches that of course are also growing. But churches that are reformed in their outlook.

That don't have excesses of emotion and stuff like that. Churches like ourselves that are seeking to be true to the Bible. But they're living in poverty. They're living with so little of the things that you and I have in abundance.

But they are true to God. And they're determined to remain true to God. And to keep witnessing to God. And to seek growing for God. But by and large in our western world, we don't need God.

[10 : 47] We're too well off. We've been established and we're strong. At least we think we are. Economically. Politically. All these structures that have been in place for generations.

They'll see us through. Yes, we'll have a crisis from time to time. But it's not really severe enough to actually call upon God. Or to turn back to God. Or to the law of God. We'll work our way through it. We'll work our way through it by our own policies. By our human ingenuity. And here's a verse that tells us that's what happened with Rehoboam.

And that led to disaster as well. So remember, here's the first point. It happened when he was strong and established. And there's a test for us today.

When you have, by and large, everything you need. Materially. Financially. In terms of our circumstances outwardly in life.

[11 : 46] We're not persecuted for our faith. We have freedoms. Although these things are changing too. But the test is, where is God in our life now? Where is the law of God in my life?

What are the, what is the basis for my life morally and spiritually? Second point. What did this involve? Well, it involved, as we see, turning away or abandoning the law of the Lord and Israel with him.

But if you actually compare verse 5, you can see how God put it through the prophet Shemaiah. Thus says the Lord, you have abandoned me. So I have abandoned you.

Now you notice the connection. There's a connection between the first verse, you abandoned the law of the Lord. And what God says in verse 5, you have abandoned me. In other words, when you abandon the law of God.

When you take the law of God and you put it aside and say, we don't need that anymore. We actually have things that are better than that nowadays. When you take the law of God and you put it aside or you abandon it.

[12 : 47] And you're no longer seen as relevant in a society's life or in a person's life. You are putting God aside along with it. You cannot actually say, when you're putting the law of God to one side, that you're still left with the basis for which society, on which society can be built.

The standards of God, the law of God, the principles, the precepts of God. As he has outlined these and specified these in his law. These really are foundational to any society.

And what God is telling us by this is, when any society takes or any individual takes God's law and puts it aside or does away with it. And doesn't seek to have it anymore in the reckoning.

They're putting God aside as well. In other words, if you say about the law of God, I don't need that anymore. And think, but I can be a Christian without that. You're wrong. Or we can be a Christian nation or a Christian society without paying any respect to the law of God.

We're actually mistaken. You cannot detach God from his law. You cannot detach the being of God or the service of God from the law of God.

[14 : 03] What Rehoboam did in putting aside or abandoning the law of God, he was actually displacing God as well. By doing that. And whatever things were still in place in an outward religion, God actually wasn't significantly in it.

Because his law had been displaced. And that's clear in our own cases of people, isn't it? More and more, what you see in our society, in Western society too, other places in the world as well. But particularly with ourselves. That bit by bit, the law of God is being put aside. One aspect of it for this year, maybe another aspect next year.

And bit by bit, you're seeing the law of God displaced from what is foundational in our society. The moral fabric of our society is disintegrating because the law of God is being put aside.

You know, that's not changed. And the seriousness of that is not changed. Just because people say, Ach, yes, but we don't believe in God anymore. We don't see God as the God, especially the God of the Old Testament.

[15:17] We'll give some reference to Jesus, perhaps, and to the teachings of Jesus. But God, the God of the Old Testament, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we can put that aside.

That's no longer relevant. Well, it doesn't matter what we say. But what the Bible teaches holds true.

We can say we don't believe in God anymore. It's still the case that when you put his law aside, you're heading for disaster. And you're putting him aside. And you've not got anything meaningful left, even if you think you're left with the structures of Christ's teaching.

So what happened then, when he was established and strong, it involved putting the law of God aside. And by that, he was putting God away as well. And thirdly, in turning away from God, you can see what it resulted in.

It resulted in two things. First of all, it resulted in subjection. Becoming a vassal, or a slave, really, of Shishak, the king of Egypt.

[16:28] And notice he came in the fifth year of King Rehoboam. He came because they had been unfaithful to the Lord. In other words, three years of building up, one year of unfaithfulness to God, and then comes King Shishak as God's instrument.

God sending him in his providence, quite clearly specified there, because they had been unfaithful to the Lord. God sent this king of Egypt against them.

And you notice in what it says here about the numbers that came with him. In verse 4, he took the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. And if you go back to chapter 11, you can see how the policy of Rehoboam was to build up the strong places of Judah, the fortified cities there.

In verse 11, he made the fortresses strong, put commanders in them. He put shields and spears in all the cities and made them very strong. That was part of Rehoboam's policy.

And that's built up deliberately there in verse 11, so that you'll see now how useless they were.

When King Shishak came against them, he overran all of these cities.

[17:58] No problem. Why? Because when you put the law of God aside, and therefore put God aside, you're vulnerable.

Your defenses are broken down. You've no protection against the Shishaks that came against Rehoboam.

That's really a representation of the forces of darkness and of immorality and of evil that come to enter into a society or into a personal life.

When you actually put the law of God aside and you put God out of the picture, you might think that you're still well defended by things which are of human composition and creation. But what this is telling us is, put God aside and you've no defense left.

What seems to be so strong, God will actually show up in some way or other actually to be pretty useless. And because the defenses had fallen down, and because they'd done this with the law of God, their defenses, they might as well not have had them there at all.

[19:06] King Shishak found no problem in overcoming them. And that's how it is too, when we ourselves put God's law aside and God's standard.

We might think that what we ourselves think are good ideas as to how people should live. What we put in the place of God's standards, God's laws, might seem to be a far more secure structure than anything that was invented in the Old Testament, if people think of it.

Well, just look at the picture. Is there a decrease in immorality, in immoral lifestyles, in immoral relationships, even in some sexually transmitted diseases?

No. They're on the increase. Why are they on the increase? Because our spiritual and moral defenses are being dismantled. The connection is there in Scripture between disobedience against God and the consequences of all that then floods in, in place, of a life that's obedient to God. That's how it is with King Shishak. He came and overran all these defenses that were in place because the people and their king had abandoned the law of God.

[20 : 36] And secondly, as well as subjection to Shishak, he was left really with very cheap imitations of what he at once had and come into the possession of.

And that's what you find in verses 9 to 12 there. As Shishak came, he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, that's the temple, and the treasures of the king's house.

He took away also the shields of gold that King Solomon had made. And King Rehobo made in their place shields of bronze and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard.

He was left with cheap replicas instead of the shields of gold that King Solomon had made. You'll find that in 1 Kings 10, verse 16, where Solomon had all of this gold that he had brought into the country through his expansion of the kingdom under him.

And part of that gold, 600 shekels of gold for each of these shields, if I remember rightly, but a lot of gold to make these shields.

[21 : 41] They were an indication of his prestige. He was the most important king in the world at the time. And here they're all taken by Shishak back to Egypt.

And instead of them, King Rehobo makes shields of bronze. Well, what's bronze compared to gold? It's a cheap replica, an imitation.

And that's really what we've got left. When we abandon God, when we turn our back on God, when we put aside the law of God, yes, we might think what we've got is just as good.

It may look to our eyes just as effective, just as good. But it's not gold. When you give away your God and his standards, you're giving away the gold.

And you're left with cheap imitation bronze. And it's interesting, isn't it, the details that are given there about how King Rehoboam, when he would go up to the temple, he would take the guards, his own personal guards probably it was, the guards of the palace, he would have them take these bronze shields out of the storehouse where they were kept secure.

[22 : 59] And they would go before him as he made his way in procession and pumped up to the temple, to the house of God. And then when he was finished, they would go back into the guardhouse again. You see, he's still keeping up this sense of importance, this sense of pomp and style, as if things haven't really changed at all.

He's got these shields of bronze. And these shields of bronze are just as good, surely, in procession as the shields of gold. And he's come to believe that things are not really all that different, when in fact all he's got left are cheap replicas of the real thing.

You can draw your own conclusions from that. Because we can come, when we put the law of God aside and get used to that, we can come to think that what we have instead of it is really just as good.

We can put the gold of God's law and God's standard and God's righteousness, we can put all of that aside. Yes, we've got that choice.

We can do that. And we can imagine that instead of that, we can create our own standards, our own laws, our own precepts for human society in the place of them.

[24 : 18] And to our own eyes, they might look just as good. In fact, they might even be better in our own eyes. We can come to be convinced that bronze is actually better than gold. Because better qualities, it's longer lasting.

You see that? So it's come to be with Rehoboam. He's convinced that what he's got left, actually, is just as good as what he's lost. And don't let that happen in your life.

Let's not let it happen as far as we can in the life of our nation as well. You put away what God is saying is important as a basis for your life.

And replace it with something that you devise yourself. However good it looks in your eyes, God is saying, you've given away the gold.

And what you've got left is a cheap replica. And it simply won't do. Let's try and get that message across to our people and to our nation as well.

[25 : 26] Because we're giving away the gold. And we're giving away the standards of God. And whatever we put in its place is not going to be more than a cheap replica.

A counterfeit. Something that's really just third rate at best.

A turning away from God. When he was strong and established, it involved the law of God specifically. And it led to subjection.

He became a servant of King Shishak. And it led to being left with cheap imitations of the real thing. The gold was gone.

Nothing in its place but bronze. Secondly, the turning here to God. I'm just going to deal with this very briefly. A turning to God. Because God raised up this prophet Shemaiah.

[26 : 29] And isn't it interesting that at times of crisis in the Bible how God will always have someone to convey his word. And it's the same in our own generation as well. God has not left himself without a witness.

And that's what we're seeking to be as a people who believe in the Bible. Who believe in the values of the Bible. In the law of God. We're seeking to speak for God in the name of God.

Not just preachers of the gospel. But you yourselves who believe in these values. And who value them and make them so important in your own life. And want to see them as important in the well-being of our land.

God here has a man who speaks up for him. Shemaiah. And what Shemaiah conveys is the message of God. He first of all gives an explanation.

You notice in verse 5 there how God sent this message. Thus says the Lord. You abandoned me. So I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.

[27 : 30] You have a similar thing in chapter 15 about Asa. Where Azariah went out to meet him. And at the beginning of chapter 15 you see there the Lord is with you while you are with him.

If you seek him he will be found by you. If you forsake him he will forsake you. God has made specific connections in the teaching of his word these connections are so important.

A connection between our obedience to God and enjoying the blessing of God. A connection between our disobedience and the taking away of the blessing of God.

And these connections are so important you have to maintain them as important. That's what this man Shemaiah said to Rehoboam Thus says the Lord You abandoned me so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.

You put my law aside you put the law that was meant to be a yoke and of course that's a word in the Old Testament used for yoking oxen together and very often the law was spoken of as the yoke of the law.

[28 : 46] And it wasn't meant to be burdensome grievous really harsh and hard it was meant to be yes disciplinary it shows you what was right and wrong it showed you what path to go on and not stray out of is that bad?

Is that something that's detrimental to human well-being? No says God I'm giving you this law for your good it's the yoke of my law and if you take the yoke of my law and you take it off your neck and you put it aside and you abandon it I'll give you another yoke instead of it and it won't be an easy one I'm giving you the yoke of King Shishak he's going to be your master and Rehoboam you're going to find out God is saying that it was far easier for you and far better for you when you were under my yoke and my law and my service than you will be under the service of King Shishak that's a principle that follows into our own life still that connection is still there we may think it's far better to be without God's law but what God brings about in its place the breakdown of moral life of family life of relationships as they should be all of these breakdowns in a society are they really better than obedience to God and what it brings that's what it says to us it's not and we still to learn that or to admit that in our society as well by and large turning to God but there was also along with the explanation there was this humbling when the princes of Israel verse 6 and the king when they heard that they humbled themselves and said the Lord is righteous and you think great they've got the message they've turned back to the

Lord surely things are now going to be good surely God is going to reestablish them well yes and no because it's a kind of mixed turning and indeed you see that from the way that God said no I'm not going to destroy Jerusalem but I'm not going to take away the whole of my response or my reaction to their disobedience in other words this was not really a true deep proper repentance they came to humble themselves and say the Lord is righteous that's all there is to it there's something really missing there isn't there because true repentance is not just coming to make a confession it's also along with the confession making a commitment and there is no commitment on the part of Rehoboam and the people to actually turn back again to full obedience to the Lord you remember

your shorter catechism catechism 87 what is repentance and as it goes to tell you a definition of repentance it has turning from sin with grief and hatred of it turning from it to God then there's something else with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience have we repented you can answer the question very clearly by another one have I committed myself to new obedience to the Lord and if not then I haven't repented and if I haven't repented God still has something against me it's not enough to come to acknowledge that we've done wrong we've got to commit ourselves to doing what's right and that's what Rehoboam failed to do and that's what Israel failed to do yes they came to confess the Lord is righteous to humble themselves but God's response shows how their repentance was not really full and deep the way it should have been because God said I will grant some deliverance and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem nevertheless they shall be servants to him that they may no my service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries now that is really important

God specified this when he said this through Shemaiah to the king and to the people they were going to be left under the service of Shishak so that they would come to make a comparison a comparison between the service of God and the service of Shishak the service of the kingdoms of the countries as it's put which today is our own choice our own preference is it serving God wholeheartedly or is it something else do we think that partial repentance or saving of God is sufficient well here is a passage that tells us along with other parts of the Bible that's not enough in God's eyes we need to have full purpose and endeavour after new obedience as well as a turning from sin unto

[34 : 32] God so today that's for you and for me too to look at ourselves and ask have I indeed done that am I persuading myself that I'm a Christian but I haven't really repented we'll look tonight at a passage from Luke where Jesus teaches repentance and what it's about and how that repentance is in fact as he describes it something that we must not be at all deluded about because in fact it's something without which as the confessional faith puts it repentance is not to be trusted in or rested in as any satisfaction for sin nevertheless it is of such importance to every sinner to all sinners that none may rightly expect pardon without it take away repentance you can't reach you can't reach forgiveness you can't reach what is central to a proper relationship with God that's what God has done us a favor today in telling us about

Rehoboam giving us this portrait as we've seen in the gallery of kings we're a turning away from God and a turning to God as all of these features along with them so that you and I will make sure that our life is not one that turns away from God nor is it one that turns partially to God but willingly and wholeheartedly turns to God to live obediently and therefore expect his blessing let's pray Lord our God we give thanks that your word so clearly teaches us so many important connections between the way in which your law and your standards exist and how life must be lived in relation to them we ask

Lord your blessing today for this passage of your word to be laid upon our hearts and we pray that we may learn from looking at this portrait of this king of long ago the lessons that are relevant to our own age and to our own life particularly receive our thanks we pray continue with us and bless us for Jesus sake Amen our to our one oh we see you