

"Heavy Yoke"

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[0 : 00] In the mess that is the world that we live in today, will God really bring about His purposes?

! As we look around, we see that the world is a broken, fallen, and deeply unjust and unrighteous place. And we have in our hearts a longing for a better world. And we wonder, what is God up to? In the church, where people are broken, fallen, and sinful, will God bring about His redemptive purposes?

The church is not as it ought to be, globally or locally. Some of us, some of you, have experienced hurt from unrighteous churches and sinful leaders. Some of you have wandered from church because you've seen the sinful acts of others. Others of you have stayed, but you know that this church is not perfect, nor will any church be perfect. And you wonder, how can God work in a broken, fallen church?

Chronicles, surprisingly, has things to say to us about this. If you were not here last week, we are starting a series in the book of 2 Chronicles, and we are going to focus on the second part of 2 Chronicles, starting in chapter 10. And so, if you'd like to, and I would recommend this particularly this morning, pull out your Bibles and turn to 2 Chronicles 10. In the Pew Bibles, it's page 340. And if you have not had a chance to hear Pastor Nick's sermon from last week about 2 Chronicles, or the overview of actually 1 and 2 Chronicles, which was written as one book, I highly recommend it. It will give you lots of fodder and some framework. But remember that the book of Chronicles was written to remind the people of God that though there was great sin in the nation of Israel and the consequences of exile because of it, God was faithful.

[2 : 32] God was faithful to His purposes, faithful to His promises, and faithful to His people. As we've titled this series, it's an old story looking back for a new day. Now, some of us may be unfamiliar with the big arc of the Old Testament history. So, here it is in 30 seconds, right? Genesis chapter 12 is Abraham.

God calls one man and says, I'm going to make you the father of a great nation, right? So, his descendants then become a great nation. They end up in Egypt in slavery, and God raises up Moses in Exodus to deliver this people and to bring them to the brink of the promised land, Israel-Palestine, where they're meant to settle and to be God's people in this world. Now, there's a lot of stuff that happens between Moses and then this other guy named David. Basically, there's a lot of muddling around, and then finally the people ask for a king, and after a false start with a guy named Saul, then God raises up David to be the first anointed king of the nation of Israel. And David establishes the kingdom. He establishes worship of God. David is a flawed man, but God uses him to be the first king, and God makes a covenant with him, a promise, and he says, David, I'm going to make your throne be a throne that will last forever, and your descendants will sit on that throne forever. And so, then David gets to the end of his life, and his son Solomon takes the throne, and he even expands his kingdom. But Solomon, like David, is also flawed.

And where we get to at the narrative story in 1 and 2 Chronicles is the end of Solomon's reign, and what happens next. And so, in 2 Chronicles 9 31, it says, And Solomon slept with his fathers, was buried in the city of David his father, and Rehoboam his son reigned in his place. So, this is where we are in the sweep of history, and we're going to be looking at the reign of Rehoboam today. And like his fathers, he is flawed, and he sins spectacularly.

He is also a good king at times who seeks the Lord and does good and is blessed by him. What do we think of all of this? How do we read Rehoboam's story for profit for us today?

Well, here's the big idea for our sermon today. God's redemptive plan is certain despite the wavering hearts of his people. Okay, we're going to look at this in three movements. If you're a musician, here are the three movements. The first movement is Rehoboam's wandering heart. We're going to look at what Rehoboam actually did. Secondly, we're going to look at God and God's

redemptive, that God's redemption is certain even through the wavering. And then third, we're going to look at how this points us to Jesus, a sure redeemer king. So, there's your outline if you're an outline taker.

[5 : 50] And here we go. You ready? Buckle your seatbelts. Rehoboam was the king after Solomon in the nation of Israel. In chapter 10, here's the outline. We're not going to read the whole story. We'd be here till noon just reading the whole thing. So, we're going to give you some highlights. I'll read some verses.

They'll also be on the screens, but you can look through. In chapter 10, Rehoboam rises to the throne and the people gather to crown him as king. But what they say is, hey, Rehoboam, your father levied really high taxes and forced people into works for the building of the temple. Can you lighten the load? Can you make it a little bit easier? And Rehoboam takes counsel. First, he takes counsel with Solomon's advisors, the older men.

And then he takes counsels with the younger men. And he agrees with the younger men on their counsel. And so, he goes back to the people. And this is what he says, 2 Chronicles 10, 13 and 14. And the king answered them harshly. And forsaking the counsel of the old men, King Rehoboam spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions. Now, this does not mean he had a box of scorpions that he then like let loose on them. A scorpion was more like a flail or a flog, which would be a more severe whipping. Just so you're wondering why he uses that term.

[7 : 27] So, Rehoboam, right out of the start, what does he do? He says, I'm going to be a harsher king than my father to you. And he doesn't listen to wise counsel. And so, you see in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 10, And the response, when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, What portion have we with David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each of you to your own tents, Israel. Look now to your own house, David. So, all of Israel went to the tents, but Rehoboam reigned over the people of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah.

The outcome of this was the divided kingdom, right? The failure of the king to be a wise leader and a gracious and thoughtful ruler to provide for his people ended up with the kingdom of David and Solomon divided into two. The northern kingdom, which was ruled by a guy named Jeroboam. And this is not the focus of Chronicles. So, you'll see his name, but you won't read his story. You can go to Kings, lots about Jeroboam in the books of Kings. But the northern kingdom was made up of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel who were the descendants of, if you remember, their 12 sons of Jacob. And they created, basically, it's a little tricky, but they created the 12 tribes of Israel. 10 of them were in the northern kingdom and rebelled against Rehoboam and created their own kingdom with their own worship.

And then the southern kingdom just had two tribes, the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of Judah, and the place Jerusalem where God had made the center of the city. And this is the focus of the book of Chronicles is that line through the southern kingdom and the line of David. Now, okay, I've got to do this excursus now. I'm sorry. We're going, we're giving you a lot of background information right up front.

When the Bible says the word Israel, what is it talking about? Well, it's confusing, particularly in this period. Usually Israel broadly will talk about all of the descendants of Abraham, those who believe in the God Yahweh who revealed himself to Moses and to Abraham and to David, and all of this. But when you get to these, you see that it actually has, it's used in different times in different ways. Sometimes it is used, Israel, to describe only the northern kingdom as opposed to, and they use the phrase, Judah for the southern kingdom. This is particularly true in Kings where you see this pattern much more clearly. In Chronicles though, it's not so clear. So if you look in verse 17 of chapter 10, you will see that it says, it refers to Israel as the southern kingdom tribes, the people under Rehoboam. But if you go to chapter 11, verse 1, you'll see that Israel describes only the northern kingdom, those who followed Jeroboam, not Rehoboam. I know it's confusing.

Hang with me. You're going to get this over time. And so, and sometimes the writer of Chronicles will use the term all of Israel because he's, one of the themes that he has is that even though the kingdom is going to be divided from here on out, there is still a sense where the people of God are one and that God's purposes are going to be ultimately inclusive of people from all 12 tribes. And when we get to Jesus, all peoples of the earth. So, when you read Israel, you have to ask yourself, what Israel is it being talked about here? And usually context will help you. And a study Bible can be

helpful if context doesn't. Okay. That's chapter 10. We still got two chapters to go. Good heavens. How are we ever going to get through this? I'm going to keep going. Chapters 11 and 12, we see Rehoboam as a king. He has good and bad actions. There are times when he listens to the prophets.

[11:40] His first thought after the people rebel is, well, I'm going to go get them back. So, I'm going to make, raise an army and conquer them and bring them back in forcibly. And God sends a prophet and says, don't do this. Don't go to war against your own people. Don't initiate this and try to control this.

And so, we see that Rehoboam listens to the prophet and he doesn't go to war and this blesses him. And so, they have some peace. And during this peace, he does good things. He builds fortified cities.

The Levites, who were the people who serve in the temple, come to him, not just from the southern kingdoms where they would normally be expected, but those who were a part of the northern kingdom tribes, Levites who had lived among them, are coming out of that northern kingdom, forsaking even their land and their privilege to come to Jerusalem so that they can maintain their role in the proper worship of God. What a blessing. It's amazing what God does. And so, you see in verse... in chapter 11, verse 16 and 17, it says this, and those who had set their hearts... these are the Levites... those who had set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord, the God of their fathers. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and for three years they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon. So, there's a cost to this foolishness, to this abandonment because they become basically like a vassal state of Egypt for a while. Yet still,

God preserves Jerusalem and he preserves the line of Rehoboam. And so, you get in chapter 12, verses 12 through 16, this... and when he humbled himself, the wrath of God turned from him, so as not to make complete destruction. Moreover, conditions were good in Judah. So, King Rehoboam grew strong in Jerusalem and reigned. And then it goes on and gives some more information. And it says, it's not all peachy keen at the end. There was continual warfare between the north and south.

And it doesn't explain that. It just says, oh, by the way, that continues. And then... and then Rehoboam dies. And so, what are we to make of this guy? What are we to think about it? One of the approaches we might want to have is, well, how is Rehoboam an example for us? Right? And so, we might think that he's an example because he... because in his example, either his good or bad, we learn some things like it's good to listen to wise counsel, particularly of older people.

[14:33] There it is. The Bible said so. Proverbs will confirm that. So, think about that. Be careful when you prosper not to abandon God. Make God's words through the prophets in his day, through the Bible in ours, the defining rule for how we act and how we live. We should prioritize the right worship of God to make central in our lives. These are good biblical principles. And we can look at the story of Rehoboam and say, oh, well, we should be more like that. We see these patterns of blessing for obedience and consequences for sin that, again, continue throughout. And at the heart of it, we think, when Rehoboam sought God with all of his heart, things went well. And when he abandoned God, things didn't. But is this really the point? I think it's part of it. I think these are worthwhile lessons. And because they're corroborated from other parts of Scripture, it's worthwhile. But I think that because of his mixed record, we're not meant to see him as a hero or a villain. The outworking of

God's people and God's purposes is messy. It's in the mix of this king who does bad and good that God is doing his things. And remember that the audience of the book of 1 and 2 Chronicles are people after the exile where they've seen the worst of the consequences for sin. And they're wondering, how could God... what is God doing now? As they've come back to Jerusalem, they built this puny little temple that had nothing to look like Solomon's. And they're wondering, is God still at work here?

And that's the message that I think is here, is that God is doing this through flawed people. Just like David was a flawed man who sinned recklessly and heinously, and yet God used him to establish the kingdom. The same thing is true of Rehoboam. And friends, today in our era, we need to see God is still working through his church, even when it still sometimes sins recklessly and heinously. Now, let me... hear me right. The church should never ever excuse its sin. We should never say, well, God can use anybody, so I can do whatever I want and it doesn't matter. As church leaders,

we are accountable to God. And we were meant... called to display him rightly by the way that we as leaders. And then by way... we as a church, how we represent God to the world. And we are always called to, as we saw in the Sermon on the Mount, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. But we also need to recognize that the Bible tells us that we will never achieve that perfection, and that though we should strive for it and hold one another to it, there is also a principle of grace at work, that God works through imperfect people. Think about this. He raised up David. Jesus called 12 disciples, one of whom abandoned him before the end of his life, right? In the church, should we be surprised by this?

No. We must be careful that we don't demand a kind of perfection that God doesn't in the church. While he still calls us to be a light of the world, those who represent truth and love and justice and righteousness in the world. God is at work through the messiness of the church. And our job is to keep seeking God and to set a heart on him and trust that he will continue to refine and use even imperfect people through us.

[18:42] Now, I have said this, but it's very clear in the text that this is what the chronicler wanted us to see as well. There are a few key verses that show us that God's redemptive plan is still certain despite Rehoboam's ups and downs. So, for instance, 2 Chronicles chapter 10 verse 15 says this, So, the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by God that the Lord might fulfill his word which he spoke by Abijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Now, there's history here. If you went back to 1 Kings chapter 11, you would see that this guy, Ahijah, is called by God and he goes to this man Jeroboam before he's anything and he says, and he takes a piece of cloth and he tears it up into 12 pieces. And he says, this is what God is going to do to the kingdom of Solomon, the kingdom of David. And he said, and to you will be given 10 of these and to the other guy he'll get 2. And so, this is something that God predicted would happen through his prophets. He said it would happen. And when it does happen, it is in the phrase, a turn of affairs brought about by God. Now, Rehoboam acted foolishly and he reaped consequences for it.

And yet, God was at work in the middle of it. The divided kingdom was a part of God's sovereign plan and mercy. Now, Rehoboam should never pat himself on the back and say, oh, do you see how God used my sin? How wonderful is that? But we should see God at work in the middle of it. Why do we think God did this? I don't know. We'll keep wrestling through this as we wrestle with 2 Chronicles. But I think maybe part of it is that it's presenting from the very start that the king and the kingdom that we really wanted was never going to come fully through David. It was never going to come through Solomon.

But it might come through a son of David. And we'll get to that in just a minute. Right? Now, we see in other places, in 2 Chronicles chapter 11, verses 3 and 4, we see a similar thing where, again, this is where Rehoboam wanted to take his army up to invade the northern kingdom.

And God sends another prophet, a different guy, who says, say to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, thus says the Lord, you shall not go up or fight against your relatives. Return every man to his home, for this thing is from me.

[21:39] So they listened to the word of the Lord and returned and did not go up, did not go against Jeroboam. Again, we see that God intervenes and says, this division is of me. Right? And how unlikely would it be? Because we think this is David's kingdom. This is the pinnacle. This is the high point of the the whole Old Testament is the establishment of the glory of the kingdom of David and Solomon.

And yet, now God is rending it apart. Why would that be? It doesn't make any sense to us. How could God's glory be seen in a divided kingdom? How could his people worship rightly when they're divided?

Now, remember that the writer of 2 Chronicles was writing to a post-exilic. They weren't writing at the time of Rehoboam's sin and thinking, how do we get this back together? They had seen the whole history that we'll look at in the next couple of months. They will see the whole sordid decline of God's people and their faithfulness to the point where God says, I'm going to send you into exile and tear down the temple and destroy Jerusalem. The people who are hearing this word are coming back from that.

And God is reminding them, even in the sin, even in the division, I still have my plans. And he's saying to the people in the post-exilic time, I have my plans for you. I am not done with you.

So we see this in a number of places in this text where it's very explicit where God says, I am in this, even though it doesn't make sense. And the final place where we see God saying, I am in this, is in the final summary explanation of what are we to think of Rehoboam, right? Because you get to the end and it says, Rehoboam did not seek after the Lord. He did evil in the sight of God.

[23 : 47] So in the good king, bad king's channel that we have sometimes, he lands in the bad king channel, right? That's the ultimate. And yet, when you look at verse 17, I lost it in my notes. I'm just going to look at it. It says, and Rehoboam slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David, and Abijah, his son, reigned in his place. And we might think about that, okay, so they just buried him in Jerusalem, big deal. But no, this is a reminder. The promise to David is the key to understanding this. And the line of David is the key to understanding this. And Rehoboam, though he failed spectacularly, God preserved his line.

If you look at the history of the northern kingdom, the kingdoms don't, their lines don't last more than three or four generations. They're broken over and over again. But in the southern kingdom, the line of David continues all the way down to the exile and beyond. The line of David continues. And the writer of Chronicles wanted us to see that because Rehoboam was buried in the city of David, and his son reigned on the throne.

God had not abandoned his people. God was still at work. He was still faithful to his promises. You know, it's fascinating to think, if you read a Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is the last book of the Bible. It is actually, the way they arrange it is different than we do it in our English Bibles, because we put this at the end of the historical books. But it actually is put typically at the end of the Hebrew Bible, because it sets up how is God going to go forward from the post-exilic area? What is God up to from there? And friends, if you read our English Bibles, and you turn to the next page, you know what it would be? It would be the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. And it would be a genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

And God put this together for us so that we could see how faithful He is, that God is our Redeemer King, in that Jesus is our Redeemer King, the Sure One, the One who would never fail, the One who never wavered.

[26 : 18] In Jesus, God made a way for sinful, wavering people like us to be His people forever. We who have hearts like Jeroboam, who don't always seek the Lord, we who bear the heavy yoke of slavery, not just of human oppression, but of our own sinfulness. We who have abandoned God so easily when things are good. Jesus comes to redeem us. He is the King who always set His heart to seek the Lord, who said, I have come to do your will, O God, according to the book of Hebrews, and who said in the Garden of Gethsemane, not my will, but your will be done. He is a King who takes on the yoke of oppression of our sin when He goes to the cross. He bears the punishment and the wrath of God against our sin in His own body when He dies. He is the King who was abandoned by God and who cried out from the cross, my God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He was abandoned so that we who abandoned God so easily could be brought back, that we could be forgiven. Friend, this is the King.

This is the one that 2 Chronicles 10 through 12 points us to when we ask the question, what is God up to?

And just like Chronicles looked back to the earlier history to say, what is God up to to help us now? So we as the church do the same thing. We look back to the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we know who are we and what are we supposed to be doing now? And where is this going? Because we do live in a fallen world. And Lord have mercy on us. The church needs His refining work. And yet God is still at work redeeming people for His praise through His King, the perfect King, Jesus. Let's pray together.

Lord, we do as we look at this passage, we recognize, Lord, how confusing it can be to understand Your will and Your ways.

[29 : 07] But things become clear as well. Lord, have mercy on us because we are a wandering, a wayward, a sinful, rebellious people. And Lord, we need Your grace and Your power and Your redemption and Your Spirit Lord, to turn our hearts from all the selfish things that we do to set our heart on You.

Oh, Lord, will You help us today to do that, to repent of our sin and to turn to You and to find in Jesus the great King and Savior, the redemption beyond all redemptions that we most long for and most need. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.