

**Message:**

Rehoboam has re-entered the scene. The past chapter and a half took our attention to Jeroboam. Back in 1 Kings 12, Rehoboam succeeded his father, Solomon, as the nation Israel's king. Rehoboam began his reign with the foolish decision to raise taxes and increase the work burden on his people. The result of his actions was the nation splitting into two kingdoms: Judah (two southern tribes, who remained loyal to Rehoboam) and Israel (ten northern tribes, who sided with Jeroboam).

Rehoboam doesn't begin his reign very well; his reign closes out even worse. The first thing that our passage does is to quickly introduce us to the extensive rise of idolatry during Rehoboam's reign: *"And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel"* (1 Kings 14:22-24).

Judah's extensive involvement in idolatry invoked the most intensive of responses from the Lord: *"and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed."* Judah had come to delight in what the Lord found intolerable. Judah went all in for the very practices that they Lord wanted completely removed from the land. For hundreds of years the Lord had been clear about His people's need to clean away all vestiges of false worship. As far back to Deuteronomy 12:2-4, Israel was told, *"You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way."* Judah's rejection of the Lord and devotion to idolatry was open defiance toward the Lord. Verse 22 reiterates the Lord's assessment: *"And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD."*

But Judah's rebellion against God during the Rehoboam was not always the case. We do not read much about it in the book of Kings, but the parallel passages in 2 Chronicles

give us an interesting twist. The Chronicler informs us that many of the priests of God fled the northern kingdom when Jeroboam began to use his rule to introduce false worship in Israel. The flood of priestly refugees from the north had a positive, albeit, short-term effect on Judah: they gave Rehoboam and Judah a measure of strength. 2 Chronicles 11:16-17 explains: *“And 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 secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon.”*

While the priests attempted to maintain loyalty to the Lord, 2 Chronicles 12:1-2 points out that, Rehoboam led the charge to turn 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. In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem.”* 2 Chronicles also informs us (something not explicitly recorded in 1 Kings) that the Lord sent in the prophets so that Rehoboam would know why the king of Egypt was attacking Jerusalem: *“Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says the LORD, ‘You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak’”* (2 Chronicles 12:5).

The prophet Shemaiah’s words were not without some effect: *“Then the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, “The LORD is righteous.” When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah: “They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless, they shall be servants to him, that they may know my service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.”* (2 Chronicles 12:6-8).

The Lord did not allow the king of Egypt to completely overrun Judah. Nevertheless, the King of Egypt did leave his mark: *“He took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made”* (1 Kings 14:26). Rehoboam was left as king, but now he reigned over a plundered nation. Rehoboam was a defeated and disgraced King.

However, it seems that he tried to keep up the appearances that everything was just fine. Weakened and substantially poorer, King Rehoboam dealt with the loss of his gold shields by making, *“in their place shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. And as often as the king went into the house of the LORD, the guard carried them and brought them back to the guardroom”* (1 Kings 14:27-28).

The glitter and glory that we saw, several chapters back, during the reign of Solomon, has begun to diminish. While the Lord spares Rehoboam (2 Chronicles tells us that this incident somewhat humbled him), the end of Judah has begun. The end won't come for another 300 years, and while there will be seasons of repentance during this time; nonetheless, Judah's failure to remove the detestable practices of idolatry from the land, will result in Judah's expulsion from the land. The Lord's land will be free of idolatry one way or the other for the Lord is purifying in His jealousy.

### **Implications:**

Idolatry and disgrace. Because of their idolatry, Judah lost the gold that Solomon had amassed. Rehoboam replaces the shields of gold with shields of bronze. Apparently, bronze shields with idols were preferred to gold shields with God. Judah continues to strut their stuff, but the truth is, they have already lost their grandeur. Their idolatry not only diminished their previous state of glory, it also set them down the road of enslavement, bondage, and grief. Notice once again the description of their idolatry: *“For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the LORD drove out before the people of Israel”* (1 Kings 14:22-24).

Doesn't lists and descriptions of Old Testament idolatry seem like idolatry is something that modern people have moved past? - (At least in the Western World). We associate idolatry with primitive people bowing down before statues. However, each culture has its shrines to bow before; they may not be relics of ancient religions, they are shrines nonetheless—glass and steel office towers, spas and gyms, political processes and promises, concert halls or stadiums—where sacrifices are offered in order to procure the

blessings of the good life. Sadly, idolatry is a universal human condition: everyone has, “*exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator*” (Romans 1:25).

An idol doesn't have to be something external that we bow before; it can be a desire. Ezekiel 14:3 states, “*Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces*” (Ezekiel 14:3). Our hearts, in turning from the Lord, take material things, relational needs or conceptual desires and attempt to center our lives around them as those they were ultimate things. We can take the thought of a successful career, a material possession, or even a family relationship and begin to think that having those things is what meets our needs, grants us security, and offers us joy and fulfillment. An idol is anything that we deem more important to us than God, anything that absorbs our heart devotion more than God, and anything that we seek to give us what only God can give.

Concerning idols, Pastor Tim Keller says:

[An idol] is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources on it without a second thought. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving “face” and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in the Christian ministry. An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.” There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship.

If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol.

Wondering if you are affected by idolatry? We can just track our emotions: When are we angry, sad, worried, frustrated, loathsome, happy, furious, peaceful, bitter, hopeful, envious, pride-filled, weak, etc.? We can learn a lot about our idol struggles by noticing what’s going on with our emotions. Idols always distort our feelings.

In addition to discerning what our emotions are attached to? What do we daydream or fanaticize about? What do you sacrifice to spend your money on? How do we respond when our prayers are not answered the way we want them to be answered?

Israel's idolatries never fulfilled what they promised, they only enslaved and disgraced. Our idolatries will always follow the same suit; it's all they have the capability of doing. Idols only and always break the human heart.

Idolatry and jealousy. How do you respond to the term jealousy? What was your thought about God when we read back in verse 22: "*and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed?*" Most of us are apt to flinch when we see the notion of jealousy to linked God. Our first response is to wonder why the Bible would link the notion of jealousy to the being like God who is so holy and loving? Ironically, the fact that God is so holy and loving is why the Bible does so deeply connect jealousy to God.

We might have a hard time seeing notions of jealousy with God because we have come to define jealousy purely on the basis of human attitudes and actions. Most of the type of jealousy that humans display is contaminated by sin and therefore often unwarranted and usually expressed in ungodly extremes. Nevertheless, there is an important place for jealousy with God. God's very first commandments to mankind are, "*You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth*" (Exodus 20:3-4). The Lord further explains: "*You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments*" (Exodus 20:5-6).

God's jealousy is essentially a positive characteristic that is anchored, not only to His attributes of holiness and love, but also to the expression of those attributes in relationship to His chosen people. God is jealous precisely because He is holy and loving in relationship to His people. A holy and loving God will not be passively indifferent to either the intimacy He desires with His people nor the waywardness of His people. Jealousy is not to be

thought of as an embarrassing primitive reaction of an insecure God. When we speak of God we must speak of Him as a jealous God for He has spoken of Himself as a jealous God. God is the highest and greatest of beings; He is the One being that every other being needs for life and joy and security and rest. God's jealousy is the innate character that responds to anything other than Himself being upheld as the source of life, joy, security, and rest. He responds with jealousy in these instances, not because He is insecure, but because He hates lies and in loving His people, he moves to protect His people from being harms by lies.

Our only hope lies in God being jealous for His people. If God were indifferent toward His people's propensity to be enticed away from Him through believing lies, then we would find ourselves swept far away beyond the point of recovery. But God is jealous; He is jealous to be seen by His people for all that He is: life, joy, security, and rest. He wants to be seen to be these things, not because he is petty and vulnerable, but because He is morally perfect and absolutely loving.

How does the jealousy of God rescue us? Specifically, how does the jealousy of God factor into the redemption of an unfaithful and idolatrous people? It's simple: God pursues us like a jealous husband or father would protect his wife or daughter from harm and disgrace. The arrival of Jesus Christ in the flesh was birthed out of a godly jealousy to rescue a wayward people. The work of Jesus Christ accomplishes not only a pardon of a wayward people, but also the recreation of a wayward people who are instilled with new hearts-hearts that will seek the Lord-because they are indwelt by the Spirit of God. The Lord did not say about a wayward people, "Let em go;" instead, He marked out our path of rescue and reconciliation.

Is there a way that we are to imitate a godly jealousy in regard to each other as members of the same church? I think there is, for the Apostle Paul was one jealous Christian. In 2 Corinthians 11:1-3, *"I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."* Paul was jealous: not a petty, selfish jealous. Paul possessed the same jealousy that characterizes God: a jealousy that is ordered by His protective love and informed by His moral compass.

Paul's jealousy, which was both compassionate and passionate, propelled him into the lives of his brothers and sisters in Christ lest they be led astray from their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our relations in church should be consistent with a godly jealousy that is not passive toward each other's spiritual condition but which actively engages each other for the purpose of bolstering each other's devotion to Christ.