

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver St.
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
www.fcfonline.org

THE PERIL OF PARTIAL OBEDIENCE

2 Chronicles 10-12

By

Steven J. Cole

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The Kings of Judah, Lesson 1

The Peril Of Partial Obedience
2 Chronicles 10-12 (Rehoboam)

Henry Ford is reputed to have scoffed, "History is bunk!" Unfortunately, many Christians tacitly agree, as shown by the fact that they seldom read and even less frequently meditate on and apply the many lessons from the historical books of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. But these things were written for our instruction (1 Cor. 10:11), and we suffer if we neglect studying them.

The books 1 & 2 Chronicles (in the Hebrew Bible they were one book) were written shortly before 400 B.C., either by Ezra or a scribe living around Ezra's time, to the remnant of Jews who had returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity. They wrap up the recorded history of the Old Testament period (they are placed at the end of the Hebrew Bible). While the history in 2 Chronicles often parallels events in 1 & 2 Kings, the authors have different purposes. The books of Kings show how the fall of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) occurred because of God's judgment because the two kingdoms forsook God and followed the idolatrous practices of the nations around them. The books of Chronicles were written to encourage the returned remnant and bring them back to the true worship of God by showing that His covenant with David still stands, and if the nation will obey Him, they will experience His blessing. (The above information gleaned primarily from Eugene Merrill, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* [Victor Books], pp. 432, 590-591.)

In our study over the next few weeks, I'm going to focus on the kings of Judah beginning with Rehoboam down to the Babylonian captivity, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 10-36 (the chronicler ignores the kings of the northern kingdom, except as they interact with the kings of Judah). We will skip a few of the minor kings. Keep in mind that this is not just a recounting of historical facts, but history with a punch line. It is selective history, written to make a spiritual point. This is not to say that it is fabricated or untrue history, but rather that the author has chosen and arranged his

material to move God's people to greater obedience. I pray that it will do the same for us.

The central lesson we learn from King Rehoboam, son of Solomon, grandson of David, is the peril of partial obedience. Rehoboam *sort of* obeyed the Lord, and he *sort of* experienced God's blessing. But as any parent knows, there is a vast difference between your children *sort of* obeying you and their complete obedience. There's a big difference between their *sort of* being home by ten o'clock and their being home by ten o'clock! And when it comes to obeying the Word of God, we all, due to our perverse fallen natures, are prone to *sort of* obey God, but also *sort of* do what we wanted to do anyway.

Partial obedience is a peril that plagues us all
and results in partial blessing.

Before we point our finger at Rehoboam, we need to realize that he inherited a number of problems beyond his control. Although his grandfather David was a godly man in many ways, he never dealt with his weakness for women. In disobedience to the Law of Moses, David multiplied wives for himself. As if all of his beautiful wives were not enough, he committed adultery with Bathsheba and, after murdering her husband, took her as another of his wives.

Although God forgave David when he repented, God did not remove the disastrous consequences. David's sin wreaked havoc in the lives of his adult children. Rehoboam's father, Solomon, multiplied wives more than David had ever dreamed of (300 wives and 700 concubines)! Rehoboam's mother was a foreigner, an Ammonitess (2 Chron. 12:13). Solomon's foreign wives led him into idolatry. As a result, God told Solomon that He would tear the kingdom from him and give it to Solomon's servant. But on account of David, God promised not to do it in Solomon's lifetime, but rather to tear the kingdom from his son (1 Kings 11:11-13). That's Rehoboam! When Rehoboam makes a stupid decision that results in the rebellion of the northern kingdom, the author points out that "it was a turn of events from the Lord," to establish His word (10:15).

You're probably thinking: If God sovereignly ordained this turn of events, then Rehoboam was playing against a stacked deck! He was a "victim" of his father's disobedience and of God's sovereignly ordained prophecy! Surely, God wouldn't hold him accountable for doing something that had been predestined to happen! And yet--don't stumble over this point--God held Rehoboam accountable for his disobedience!

Here's the mystery--that nothing, not even the rebellion of Satan or of sinful people can thwart God's sovereign plan (see Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). He works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). And yet, God holds each person accountable for his disobedience. You may be coming from a terrible background. Maybe your parents, like Rehoboam's, were hypocrites who claimed to be believers, but their lives didn't match up. Maybe your life was scarred because of your father's terrible sin. You may have every excuse in the book as to why you don't obey the Lord. But God still expects you to obey and you and those around you will suffer if you don't! The first lesson we learn from Rehoboam is that ...

1. Partial obedience is a peril for us all.

We'll see this clearly if we examine Rehoboam's partial obedience and spell out what it means.

A. Partial obedience means hearing what we want to hear, not what God says.

Rehoboam was wise in that when Jeroboam's delegation presented their request to lighten the load, Rehoboam didn't shoot off his mouth on the spot. He asked for three days to think about it. He was also wise to seek out counselors. But where he blew it was to listen to counselors who told him what he wanted to hear, not what he needed to hear. The older counselors who had served Solomon urged a gentle approach. It's doubtful whether their advice would have totally prevented a revolution, since Jeroboam and company seemed determined to grab power one way or another. But at least it could have forestalled the revolt and it would have deprived them of a pretext for revolution. But his macho reply in line with the younger counselors was like tossing a match on a powder keg.

Rehoboam knew better. His father wrote the book of Proverbs to him. It's filled with exhortations to heed the counsel of elders and not to be hot-headed and impetuous. But he probably felt uneasy in his new leadership role and mistakenly thought that asserting his authority was the way to establish his power. So he took the counsel he wanted to hear, not what he needed to hear.

Have you ever had that problem? You read the Bible looking for a verse to support what you want to do, even if you have to ignore ten verses that confront you! Or, you shop around for someone to tell you what you want to hear and ignore the many who tell you what you need to hear. You're falling into the peril of partial obedience.

- B. Partial obedience means acting before you seek the Lord's mind, not after.

Rehoboam sent Hadoram (NIV = Adoniram), who was over the forced labor, but the people stoned him (10:18). Rehoboam hopped into his chariot and took off for Jerusalem. When he got back, he started putting together an army to quell this rebellion. He had a good case: He was the king descended from David! These rebels had killed his man. Let's go get them!

There was only one problem. He hadn't bothered to ask the Lord about it. The Lord sent a prophet who said, "Don't do it!" Whether from obedience or practicality, Rehoboam had enough sense at that point to obey. But it was only partial obedience because he hadn't sought the Lord first.

Do you ever do that--plan first and pray second? A lot of churches operate that way. Their plans are in line with what God would seem to want (why would God want a divided kingdom?). But there's a big difference between formulating all of our great plans for God and bringing them to Him for His rubber stamp of approval versus seeking Him first and then doing as He directs.

- C. Partial obedience means living in line with custom, not in submission to God's Word.

Note 11:21: He took 18 wives and 60 concubines. Where did he get that idea? From his father and grandfather, who got it from the other kings in that day. It was the thing for kings to do. It showed how powerful and wealthy you were. Talk about feeding a

man's pride, to have dozens of beautiful women at your disposal! There was only one slight problem. Deuteronomy 17:17 specifically commanded that the king should not multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away from God.

Why didn't David and Solomon and Rehoboam obey that commandment? It wasn't in line with the custom. Nobody did that! A king who didn't have a large harem would have been the laughingstock of the Middle East!

There are a lot of things the Christian world does today because they're the custom. Oh, sure, there are Bible verses to the contrary. But everybody's doing it these days. So the church slips into partial obedience.

Let me single out just one--the matter of divorce. Thirty years ago in our nation, divorce was taboo. A divorced man had a stigma against him if he tried to run for political office. Today nobody gives that a second thought. It really doesn't matter. Thirty years ago, very few Christians got divorced. In our day, many Christian leaders get divorced and keep right on going without missing a beat. The custom of our day is, if you're not happy, then do whatever you need to get happiness.

And so when you find yourself in a difficult spot in your marriage, what will you do? Will you stay and pay the price of commitment, hard work, and change to please the Lord, or will you bail out and move on to the next partner? Custom says, "Nobody stays in a lousy marriage. Your happiness is the thing." Full obedience to God says, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:6).

Thus partial obedience means hearing what you want to hear, not what God says; acting before you seek the Lord's mind, not after; and, living in accordance with custom, not God's Word.

D. Partial obedience means diluting the worship of the one true God with cultural religion.

Note 12:1: "It took place when the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong that he and all Israel with him forsook the law of the Lord." By forsaking the law of the Lord, the author does not mean that they cast it off completely. Just a few verses later (v. 11) we read that the king used to enter the house of the

Lord. In verse 12 we read that “there was some good in Judah” (NIV), which Keil and Delitzsch interpret as “there were some proofs of piety and some fear of God.” So it wasn’t total apostasy.

What did Rehoboam do? First Kings 14:22-24 says that they added to Israel’s worship all the abominations of the Canaanite nations which the Lord had dispossessed. Keil and Delitzsch (*Commentary on the Old Testament* [Eerdmans] 1 Kings, pp. 213-14) argue that at first these were not pagan idols, but rather were human inventions of worship copied from the pagan idols. At first they were associated with the worship of the Lord, but they quickly polluted the purity of worship prescribed in the Scriptures.

Now you may be thinking, “Well at least we don’t have any problem in this area. We don’t worship idols in America. We don’t have pagan religious customs mingled in with our Christianity.” The late Francis Schaeffer argued that the American idols are personal peace and affluence. In other words, as long as God makes us feel good (peace) and gives us what we want (affluence), we’ll “follow” Him. But we’re really not following God; we’re using God for personal gain. Our real god is self. If the true God calls us to go through hardship or sacrifice or if He confronts our sin, forget it! We shop around for something that makes us feel good.

Listen, we live in a leisure-oriented, laid-back, low commitment, licentious, luxurious culture. You can’t tell me that our culture hasn’t affected our Christianity. We’ll attend church as long as it’s convenient. We’ll even give to the church, as long as it doesn’t pinch our lifestyle too much. But to be committed to serve every week? To give sacrificially off the top every paycheck, so that we have to give up some new toy or some leisure activity? But if you only serve Christ when it’s convenient and give when it doesn’t pinch you too much, you’re into partial obedience.

- E. Partial obedience means following God when you’re in need, but forsaking Him when you’re doing well.

Note 12:1: When Jeroboam was threatening Rehoboam from the north and Egypt from the south, he sought the Lord. But as soon as the pressure eased off and he was strong, he forgot about God. It’s called foxhole faith: you cry out to God when you’re in a jam, but forget Him when things are going well.

The church at Laodicea was there. Their evaluation of themselves was, "We're rich and wealthy and have need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17). As a result, they were lukewarm and God threatened to spit them out of His mouth. God's evaluation of them was slightly different: "You are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." In other words, our true condition before God is that we are always needy. If we lose sight of that, we'll grow lukewarm and lapse into partial obedience.

2. Partial obedience results in partial blessing.

The fact that God blesses us at all when we only partially obey Him reveals the magnitude of His grace. But He did give Rehoboam and the nation a measure of blessing (12:7, 12). But they also missed out on so much more that God would have done for them if they had obeyed Him completely. Note three results of partial obedience:

A. Partial obedience results in weakened national, religious, and family life.

Nationally, the nation was divided and never recovered the influence it had under David and Solomon. With the weakened nation went a weakened testimony for the Lord God of Israel. Our nation suffers because of the partial obedience of the church.

Religiously, the glory of Solomon's temple was gone forever (12:9). Shishak stripped the gold and Rehoboam replaced it with bronze, a cheap substitute (the symbol of God's judgment). In our day, partial obedience means an anemic church where the glory of God's presence is seldom experienced.

Family-wise, partial obedience means weakened family life. If you don't think that Rehoboam's family life was weak, think about this: How would you like to grow up as one of 28 sons or 60 daughters born to one of the 18 wives and 60 concubines? No doubt they had all the material comforts they needed (11:23), but time with dad (who had a favorite wife and son) was rare. Partial obedience to God's Word, especially mingling worldly psychology with what the Bible says about the family and how to deal with relational and emotional problems, is greatly limiting God's blessing on American Christian homes.

- B. Partial obedience results in the service of a more difficult master.

Note 12:8: They thought it was tough serving God, so He said, "All right, let's let them serve the world for a while!" We sometimes think that it's tough serving Christ. Have you ever tried serving the world? The world is a far more exacting master than the Lord. As Proverbs 13:15 (KJV) puts it, "The way of the transgressor is hard."

God loves you; the world couldn't care less about you. God seeks to build you as a person; the world tears you down. God gives your life purpose by fitting into His eternal plan; the world has no purpose except trying to make yourself happy for a few years before you die. Would you rather serve the Lord or the world?

- C. Partial obedience results in continual hassles.

Note 12:15: "And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually." "Continual wars" means little border skirmishes and continual hostility. There wasn't an all-out battle until the reign of Rehoboam's son Abijah (13:2ff). But Rehoboam never had rest or peace.

Do you have continual hassles in your life? Sometimes such things are not due to any specific sin, but rather God's means of making us more like Jesus. But quite often we experience continual hassles because of partial obedience on our part. At least such hassles should make us stop and examine ourselves to see if there is some area where we're only "sort of" obeying the Lord. We ought to experience His rest and peace.

Conclusion

What's the solution for partial obedience? First, *we need to see the foolishness of trying to dodge God*. He is the absolute sovereign of the universe. He even used the Egyptian king to do His will, and that only as far as God allowed (12:2, 5, 8). If we try to dodge God and get our own way, we only hurt ourselves and miss out on His full blessing.

Second, *humble yourself and acknowledge God's righteousness in disciplining you through trials* (12:6). So often when trials come we think,

"I'm following God and He then allows this to happen. It's not fair! I don't deserve this!" And so we resist God's righteous dealings with us. Never forget: If God dealt fairly with you, He would send you straight to hell! Even the righteous Job had no claim against God. He is righteous in all His ways, including His discipline of us through trials. We need to repent and submit.

Third, *set your heart to seek God*. The priests who defected from Jeroboam to Rehoboam had done this (11:16), but Rehoboam had not (12:14). "Setting your heart" implies a deliberate, sustained focus. You don't accidentally or casually fall into seeking the Lord. You have to make a fixed resolution to seek God through His Word and prayer and to obey His commands.

One of the most difficult patients for any doctor to treat is the one who doesn't follow orders. The patient takes half the prescription and seems to feel better, so he stops even though the doctor emphasized the need to take the whole dose. The patient sort of follows the diet the doctor prescribed, except for here and there where his little violations cancel any benefits of the prescribed course. The patient more or less stays off the sore foot as the doctor prescribed, except for when he absolutely couldn't avoid it, which was precisely when the doctor told him to keep off it. Partial obedience!

Even though we experience poor health, we don't obey the doctor completely because to do so would mean changing our habits or schedules, and that's too inconvenient! And even though we miss out on God's full blessing, we only sort of obey Him because change is just too difficult. Don't fall into the peril of partial obedience. Obey God no matter how tough and you'll experience His abundant blessing.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some American customs which threaten to undermine our total obedience to God's Word? How has our culture affected our Christianity?
2. Some obey God and yet suffer terribly. Do we have distorted views of what His blessing means?
3. How can we guard against partial obedience?

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