

Sunday 14th August

True and Proper Worship

1 Kings 14:21-31

Rehoboam King of Judah

²¹ Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite.

²² Judah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than those who were before them had done. ²³ They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. ²⁴ There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.

²⁵ In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. ²⁶ He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. ²⁷ So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace. ²⁸ Whenever the king went to the LORD's temple, the guards bore the shields, and afterward they returned them to the guardroom.

²⁹ As for the other events of Rehoboam's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? ³⁰ There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. ³¹ And Rehoboam rested with his ancestors and was buried with them in the City of David. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. And Abijah his son succeeded him as king.

Romans 12:1-8

A Living Sacrifice

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Humble Service in the Body of Christ

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Sermon: True and Proper Worship

Context

[Slide 1-Jeroboam]



Last week – King Jeroboam in the Northern Kingdom did not worship God properly – in fact he **invented his own religion and **worshipped golden calves** – and **God judged him and the Northern Kingdom very severely** – with a **threefold judgment**:**

- i. Jeroboam's son Abijah died
- ii. Jeroboam's dynasty will come to an end (chapter 15)
- iii. The Northern Kingdom of Israel will be exiled – 200 years after Jeroboam – circa 722BC

[Slide 2 – Rehoboam]



Now, **this week** our attention turns to the **Southern Kingdom (aka Judah)**-and to **King Solomon's son – King Rehoboam** - and we **might expect things to be better – because Jerusalem is in the Southern Kingdom – Jerusalem** has the **Temple** – which is where **God's name dwells** – and the **temple is symbolic of God's presence**. And **Jerusalem is the worship centre of YHWH** – the true God of Israel

But– we see there is a **significant problem** – we see **improper worship in the Southern Kingdom of Judah...**

[Slide 3-Heading]

Improper Worship in Judah (1 Kings 14:21-31)

The **first hint of a problem** is in v21 – when we find out that **Rehoboam's mother, Naamah**, was an **Ammonite**.

The **Ammonites** were a **pagan people** (pagan being person holding religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions) who **worshipped false gods** (Milcom and Molech). **God** had **commanded** the Israelites **not to marry these pagans, because** intermarriage **would lead the Israelites to worship false gods**.

Rehoboam's father, **Solomon**, had **disobeyed God's command** and married **many foreign wives including Naamah here** – and **as God had warned, Solomon and now his son** – were **drawn into idolatry and worship** of false gods (1 Kings 11:1-8).

In case we gloss over v21 and this detail about Rehoboam's mother being an Ammonite – the **writer** of 1 Kings **tells us again in v31**. When things get **repeated in the Bible it's for a good reason** – to **highlight something important**.

If we remember, Rehoboam's father, Solomon, in fact had **700 wives and 300 concubines** – any many of these wives were foreign wives who worshipped foreign gods. This is why the Southern Kingdom had **descended into the worship of false gods and idols!**

[Slide 4a-false gods/idols]

If that's not bad enough – we find out in **v22** - that the people of the Southern Kingdom of **Judah** – **stirred up God's jealous anger** by sinning more than anyone had done before them.

Then in vv23-24 – we find out why these sins were so bad

V23 – Judah set up worship centres on **high places** with **sacred stones** and **Asherah poles**. These **Asherah poles** came from the **Canaanite religion** – *the Canaanites were the original occupants of the Promised Land who were kicked out of the land when the Israelites entered the Land* - and these **Asherah poles honoured** the **mother goddess Asherah** and her partner the **false god, Baal**.

Then V24 – Judah also engaged in **male (possibly female too) prostitution** at these shrines and worship centres. The way this worship worked out was:

The goddess Asherah was worshiped in various ways, including through ritual sex. Although she was believed to be Baal's mother, she was also his mistress. These pagans believed they could influence the gods' and goddesses' actions by performing the behaviour they wished the gods to demonstrate. They believed the sexual union of Baal and Asherah produced fertility, their worshipers engaged in immoral sex to cause the gods to join together, ensuring good harvests. This practice became the basis for religious prostitution (1 Kings 14:23-24). The priest or a male member of the community represented Baal. The priestess or female members of the community represented Asherah. In this way, God's incredible gift of sexuality was perverted to the most obscene public prostitution. No wonder God's anger burned against his people and their leaders.

So - v24 concludes that Judah was practicing the same religious activity of the Canaanites, who had been thrown out of the land, because of that very religious

activity! And we're meant to see that **Judah will be thrown out of the land for the same reason that the Canaanites were!**

[Slide 4b-detestable worship]

These actions can only be described as **detestable worship practices**

You just know **God is not going to stand for such blatant sin** against Him

And sure enough, **there are consequences** for Judah's sin!

[Slide 4c-consequences]

First consequence – in vv25-26 – in 5th year of Rehoboam's reign - **God allowed** - **Shishak** the Pharaoh **of Egypt to attack Jerusalem** – and take all the **treasure** from the **Temple** and from the **royal palace** – including the **gold shields** that King Solomon made (200 large shields worth \$602,000 dollars each and 300 small shields worth \$148,000 each – see 1 Kings 10)

These shields were ceremonial and not able to be used in battle – as gold is too soft!

Second consequence – v30 – there will be **continual warfare** **-between Rehoboam (in the South) and Jeroboam (in the North)**

Application: For us – we can expect consequences whenever we sin and break God's commands!

(pause)

[Slide 4-Problem]

The Problem

We could summarise Rehoboam and Judah's **problem** as **conforming to the pattern of this world**. In other words - **Judah conformed to what the surrounding nations did** – and **worshipped other false gods** - rather than **remaining faithful to the Lord God**.

But that was **nearly 3000 years ago** – it's not **relevant to us today** – is it?

(pause)

Well - let's consider our nation of Australia – **do we conform to the pattern of the world around us** – or do we conform to what God would like us to be?

To answer this question – let's just have a **brief look** at the **10 commandments** – and see how well we conform to them in Australia today

1st commandment – which says – *do not have any other gods except the one true God* - but we do have other gods - don't we – besides false gods like Buddha and Hindu gods – we have the gods of **ourselves, sex, entertainment, sport, family etc.**

Focusing on the worship of ourselves for a moment – when we worship ourselves – **we're saying we know better than God** – and we're also saying our agenda is more important than anyone else's!

2nd commandment – which says – *do not make idols to worship* – but we do have idols – don't we – like our **job, status, phones and technology, children, fame, sports stars and celebrities.**

3rd commandment – which says – *don't misuse God's name* – but we do – don't we – we only have to turn on the tv or walk down the street – and we'll hear someone say – **OMG or JC**

4th commandment – which says – *remember the Sabbath and keep it holy* – but most of our nation doesn't rest on Sunday [remember how shops and businesses used to close on Sundays) and most of our nation doesn't worship and keep the Sabbath holy either – even Christians are **half-hearted in attending worship services** – some only attending at **Easter and Christmas**

5th commandment – which says – *honour your father and mother* – but we see a **breakdown in the family unit** – and often very **little respect for parents** – and if parents try to discipline their children – that's **frowned upon** – and so **children's behaviour**

creeps out of control. Some grown-up children don't even talk to their elderly parents or visit them!

6th commandment – which says – **do not murder** – **221 murders in Australia in 2020 – and in America 24,389 murders in 2020** – that might have something to do with the gun laws!

7th commandment – which says – **do not commit adultery** – but we see **marriage breakdowns** are **on the increase** – **marriage vows** are **abandoned** – some don't even get married – they **just live together – or even sleep around!**

8th commandment – which says – **do not steal** – but the news tells us constantly of **shop and bank robberies and corporate fraud** – and that's not counting **tax evasion** – and **insurance frauds** – and not declaring all our earnings!

9th commandment – which says – **don't tell lies** – which is just great in a world of **fake news and alternative truth** – and in a world where each person has their **own version of the truth** – not to mention – the **slander and lies on social media**

10th commandment – which says – **don't want things that belong to someone else** – but many people want the latest technology now – the latest fastest car – their first home has to be 4 bedrooms with a triple garage with a pool, and a 4wd just to drive to Lake Haven shops – as well as 50K wedding – and overseas holidays twice a year – people strive for more and more – and are rarely satisfied.

So – how are we doing with the 10 commandments?

(pause)

Are we in danger of conforming to the pattern of the world around us?

Are we as a nation – here in Australia – and as individuals - any better than King Rehoboam and Judah?

When King Rehoboam got ransacked by Shishak of Egypt – and Solomon’s valuable **gold** shields were taken – he tried to **paper over the cracks** in vv27-28 by replacing them with **bronze** shields.

It’s symbolic of the Southern **Kingdom failing and fading** – **gold** has faded to **bronze** – like **Judah’s worship** has faded from the **true worship of the one and only God** (who is pure gold) and gone after the false worship of the cheap bronze gods.

And we read in **v28** – King **Rehoboam** took the bronze shields with him whenever he went to the Temple – it’s like he’s **keeping up appearances** – that everything is okay with Judah’s relationship with God – but it’s **fake** – he pulls out the bronze shields turns up at the temple – then hides the shields afterwards – because they’re too embarrassing to have on display!

But that was 3000 years ago – it doesn’t apply to us now – does it?

(pause)

Well - maybe we’re papering over the cracks too?

We don’t keep the commandments as we’ve just seen – and we **turn up at church as though we are all pious and holy** – and yet we’ve had a **week** where **we’ve blasphemed or lied or been jealous** – or we’ve not been to Sunday **worship for 4 weeks** – because one of those idols of ours was really really important – and – after all - **God will understand** – won’t He?

(pause)

But realistically it’s **improper worship** just like Rehoboam and Judah.

So, what’s the **solution**?

(pause)

The Solution

Repentance is the **solution**

[Slide 4b-Repentance]

In the **parallel story** of 1 Kings 14 in **2 Chronicles 12**

We read in 2 Chronicles 12:6

The leaders of Israel and king Rehoboam humbled themselves and said, “The LORD is just.”

They realized they deserved to be punished and ransacked by Pharaoh Shishak.

And in v12

Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the LORD’s anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah.

Because Rehoboam and Judah repented – **God showed grace** – He saw some good in Judah – and **He relented**.

This meant that even though ultimately the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon (in 587BC) – **God also preserved a remnant of faithful people** – who were allowed to return to Jerusalem – 70 years after their exile. And because of that faithful remnant of Judah – a **descendant from Judah** – would one day come – and **save the world** – that is – of course - Jesus.

Just like Rehoboam and Judah -- we need to **humble ourselves** – and repent – and come to the only one who can fix us –that’s **Jesus**

Once we acknowledge our sin and rebellion – and **come to Jesus and repent** - we’re then in a position to offer proper worship

Which is where our NT passage comes in – please turn to Romans 12:1-3

[Slide 5-Heading]

Proper Worship (Romans 12:1-8)

Here - the Apostle Paul teaches that we must respond to God’s mercy (he says “in view of God’s mercy”)

What is God's mercy?

God's mercy is that He allowed Jesus to take our punishment for our sins on a cruel cross – and because of His death we are forgiven of our sins and made right with God; and because of Jesus' resurrection 3 days after his death - we have the gift of eternal life.

In view of that mercy through Jesus, Paul says we have a response to make...

The response he describes - as true and proper worship (v2)

We are **to present our body** (our whole being – including heart and soul) – give our whole self to God – like an animal being sacrificed for sins - on the Old Testament altar. But we're a **living sacrifice** - not dead like the animals sacrificed on the altar.

What that true and proper worship looks like is in **verses 2 and 3**

[Slide 5a]

- I. We are not to **conform to the pattern of the world** (non-Christians) – instead we are to **take God's commandments seriously** –and take them into our HEART

[Slide 5b]

- II. **We are to be transformed – Our minds are to be renewed and rewired** - i.e., **think like a Christian (WWJD)** – we are not to be **controlled by our feelings and emotions** – but by our minds. The renewal of our minds comes through God's Word applied to our lives and through the help of the Holy Spirit. This renewed mind then helps us to know what God's will for our lives is. All this engages our **HEAD**

[Slide 5c]

- III. And Paul says we are to **be humble** – not have tickets on ourselves and think ourselves better than we are! We need to remember we are saved by the gift of God in sending Jesus – and not by anything in ourselves – and so there's nothing

to be patting ourselves on the back for and we're not to be taking the credit for what we've done – it's all Jesus' work, not ours! **Then being humble will lead us to humble service** — which engages the **HANDS**

Proper worship – means our faith – needs to involve our heart, head and hands – in **humble service**.

Paul tells us what humble service looks like in verses 4 to 8:

- *Prophesying according to our faith [& as long as it agrees with God's Word]*
- *Serving – each other and our community [hospitality & rosters at church]*
- *Teaching – in groups and as individuals [Bible study; Jaffa, SRE, evangelism]*
- *Encouraging – one another [pastoral care, conversations calls & visits]*
- *Giving generously – to ministries here and missions*
- *Leading diligently [elders, COM, pastoral care, ministry group leaders]*
- *Showing mercy cheerfully (not begrudgingly) [P.A.T. and pastoral care]*

Can we see all these things are other-person centred – and not about us?

This is because Paul says we are members of the body of Christ – with these God-given gifts working together – **gifts** we are **meant to use in humble service** – for the benefit of others – because Jesus says when we do the least of these things for someone else – it's like we're doing it for Him – **and that's our way of saying thank you for His grace and mercy in saving us.**

Conclusion

Let me **finish** with these **words from the Apostle Paul** from 1 Cor 6:19-20:

[Slide 6-Temple]

Do you not know that your
bodies are temples of the Holy
Spirit, who is in you, whom you
have received from God? You are
not your own; you were bought
at a price. Therefore honor God
with your bodies.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, just like the people of Israel and Judah, we have to admit our worship is sometimes flawed and half-hearted. Please forgive us anew this morning. Help us not to conform to the pattern of this world – and instead take your commandments seriously; help us to renew our minds through your Word, through the Holy Spirit and through prayer; help us to humble ourselves before you and serve you and others in humble service; remembering that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit – bought with the price of your Son's life. Help us to honour you in thought, word and deed. In Jesus name. Amen.