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Rehoboam's reign. Let us go outside the camp.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Chronicles 12. 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 with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen.

And the people were without number who came with him from Egypt, Libyans, Succaeans, and Ethiopians. And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as 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.

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.

So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. 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 the shields of gold that Solomon had made. And King Rehoboam made 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 came and carried them and brought them back to the guardroom.

And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord 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.

Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite, and he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord. Now the Acts of Rehoboam from first to last, are they not written in the Chronicles of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer? There were continual wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

And Rehoboam slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. And Abijah his son reigned in his place. Second Chronicles chapter 12 covers much the same ground as 1 Kings chapter 14 verses 21-31, although the story has a more positive outcome.

As Peter Lighthouse has observed, the passage follows a there and back again, or a bookended, or a chiasmic structure. It begins in verse 1 with Rehoboam becoming strong and forsaking the law. In verses 12-13 Rehoboam grows in strength again.

In verses 2-4 Shishak invades and comes up to Jerusalem. In verses 9-11 Shishak plunders Jerusalem. In verse 5 we have the first prophecy of Shemaiah, and in verses 7-8 we have the second prophecy of Shemaiah.

In the very middle of this section then is Rehoboam and the leaders humbling themselves before the word of the Lord and repenting. This functions as a turning point in the narrative. In many respects Rehoboam did not have as bad a start as he might have done.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 11 verses 13-17 we read, And the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to him from all places where they lived. For the Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the Lord. And he

appointed his own priests for the high places, and for the goat idols and for the calves that he had made.

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. Rehoboam had the benefit of the presence of the temple and its worship in his capital, and the nearer alignment of the interests of his kingdom with true worship.

While the true worship of the Lord was always a political threat to Jeroboam, as the temple of the Lord was situated in his rival's territory, it was not the same for Rehoboam. Nevertheless Rehoboam still abandoned the way of the Lord in many respects, and when he did Egypt came up against him. In many ways when Egypt came up against Israel they came in the form of a false Israel.

They came with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen, which is twelve thousand times five. On the one hand this might remind us of the six hundred chariots of Egypt in Exodus chapter 14 verse 7. It might also remind us of the six hundred thousand of Israel that left Egypt when they came out at the Exodus. There is a sort of a reverse Exodus here.

The Egyptians now come up like Israel once came up from Egypt. They are surrounded by a people without number and with a great mixed multitude. They engage in a great conquest of the land, taking the fortified cities of Judah and coming even as far as Jerusalem which was the climax of Israel's conquest of the land.

Shemaiah the prophet brings a message to Rehoboam and the princes of Judah. He informs them that as they have abandoned the Lord, the Lord has abandoned them. Yet surprisingly they respond appropriately to the message of the Lord and the Lord relents from the severity of his judgement upon Rehoboam.

Rehoboam and Judah will still be judged but now in a much more tempered manner. There is no promise that there will be any change in God's mind as a result of their repentance but they repent nonetheless. They acknowledged the justice of the Lord in the matter and put themselves in the hands of his mercy.

They will still be judged by Shishak but in a far less severe manner. And there is a sort of a reverse exodus here. The Egyptians now come up like Israel once came up.

They plundered the gold of Judah as Israel once plundered their gold but Jerusalem is ultimately spared from being destroyed by them. As a result of Shishak's invasion, the glory of Judah is much diminished. In many ways we see consequences of the sins of Solomon here.

He made a marriage covenant with Egypt and got embroiled with Egypt in many ways. And now Egypt has come up against his people and has destroyed many of their cities and almost taken over their capital. Rehoboam is the son of an Ammonite woman.

Solomon had taken many wives from the surrounding nations and now Rehoboam, the son of an Ammonite woman, ends up re-establishing many of the ways of the surrounding nations in Judah. Solomon had built up great armies of chariots and horsemen and yet they failed to save him from the chariots and horsemen of Egypt. And all the gold that he amassed and accumulated, that he used to build the shields of gold for the house of the Lord and for his own house, is now taken from him by Shishak.

Israel ends up using its gold to build golden calves. Not only is it a tragic reversal, we also discover that all of the gains that Solomon seemingly won through his failure to observe the law of the king in Deuteronomy chapter 17 ended up coming to nothing. It all proved tragically futile.

A question to consider. Rehoboam's son, like the son that Jeroboam loses, is called Abijah. Relating the son of Rehoboam to the sons of Jeroboam, what might we learn? Hebrews chapter 13 Let brotherly love continue.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though imprisoned with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me? Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods which have not benefited those devoted to them.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat, for the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp, and bear the reproach he endured, for here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit

of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good, and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy, and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this, in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I appeal to you brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

Grace be with all of you. In Hebrews 13, the final chapter of the book, there are concluding exhortations and the author sums up the message of the book. It begins with four pairs of exhortations, with reasons attached to the first, third and fourth.

The first pair is, let brotherly love continue, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, and the reason attached, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. The second, remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, followed by the other part of the pair, and those who are mistreated, since you are also in the body. The third pair, let marriage be held in honour among all, and the second part of that pair, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, the attached reason, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

The final pair is, keep your life free from love of money, the second part being, and be content with what you have, with the reason attached, for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. These exhortations largely expand the opening exhortation, let brotherly love continue. He is exhorting them to continue in behaviours of brotherly love, and to refrain from behaviours against brotherly love.

It's interesting to consider that these are the fitting responses to the message of the book. Much of it gives attention to the life of the community of the people of God. We are members of the same household.

If we have the same father, we should treat each other as brothers and sisters. This is not just about individual ethics. Continued love towards brothers must be accompanied by love towards strangers, in the form of hospitality.

The author of Hebrews plays upon the word love for brothers with the word that he uses for love for strangers. It could be very easy to love the brothers and do so in a way that ignores strangers. He observes that some of those who have exercised such hospitality towards strangers have entertained angels unawares.

This might naturally be seen as a reference to Genesis chapter 18 and 19, as the angels that go to inspect Sodom are entertained first by Abraham and then later by Lot. We might also think of Matthew chapter 25 where Jesus speaks of a sort of test of hospitality as persons later described as his brethren are ministered to and served by various others and on the basis of their welcome of his brothers, they are blessed. Christ identifies with his brothers.

He comes incognito in the poor, the person who needs a drink, the person who needs to be visited in prison. The love that should be shown to people of the household of faith needs to overflow to those outside and Christ coming incognito in his servants presents a sort of judgment that comes unawares upon a people. Sodom, like the villages and towns of Israel later in the story of Christ, is tested with a secret test.

They do not know the time of their visitation and yet they are judged according to their treatment of those who came to them when they were unawares. They are called to associate with those in prison or being tortured, particularly those who are suffering for their faith. Marriage is to be held in a special honour.

This is a more general, cultural and social commitment to the institution of marriage. It's not just for the married but for everyone. Marriage is particularly important to uphold.

It requires an honouring of the commitment to marriage, a restriction of sexual relations to the marriage bed, the ordinary expectation that people will get married. While there is no sin per se in not getting married and the marriage should not be seen as above the unmarried, there is a special honour in the institution of marriage and that meaning of marriage must be guarded and protected and celebrated. It is not just to be a private commitment for married persons.

It is not just about affirming the married as individuals. It is about a social value that all of us must maintain. And the positive exhortation here is followed by a negative exhortation.

In the commandment concerning marriage, now there is a negative exhortation followed by a positive counterpart concerning greed. Greed is extremely dangerous and contentment is necessary. If the reason given for avoiding defiling the marriage bed was God's judgement upon adulterers and the sexually immoral, here the reason given for contentment is God's blessing of his continued presence.

There is probably an allusion here to statements given by Moses to Joshua in

Deuteronomy chapter 31 verse 8 and it's followed by a quotation from Psalm 118 verse 6. The fact that the New Testament so often and so consistently focuses upon these two particular sins, upon sexual immorality and greed, probably has a lot to say to our particular age. Verses 7 and 17 contain exhortations about leaders. They must learn from past leaders and learn from present leaders.

The author here also sums up the key thrust of the book to persevere. It really is important to have examples to look to and people with whom to associate. A very great deal of this book is devoted to the presentation of positive and negative examples.

The negative examples of the wilderness generation and characters like Esau and the positive examples of the heroes of the faith and most particularly Christ himself. Now the founding leaders of the community are presented as further examples. They must pay attention to the outcome of their faith, to the fruit that they bore and to the impact that they made upon their community.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. He is the eternal Son. He is faithful in all times and in all generations.

He does not change. He is the same one to whom people looked in times past and the same one that people will look to in the future. He is a fitting guarantee of all of God's promises and the definitive and enduring Word of God.

This message about the eternity of Christ has been throughout the book of Hebrews. There is however the danger of novel teaching leading people astray from Christ. The alternative to being led away is for the heart to be strengthened.

Foods like the rituals of the tabernacle were utterly powerless to deal with the core issue of the heart. We have an altar, a table to participate in, perhaps something symbolized by the Eucharist. Ongoing participation in the once for all sacrifice of Christ is necessary.

We should contrast this with those who remain in the way of the old covenant after Christ has come. There is a danger of giving up the riches received in Christ by continuing to go back to something that has no life in it, no future in it. The sin offering, which was most particularly associated with the day of atonement, the day that anticipated the eschatological passage into the new age, had more specific regulations for its sacrifices.

The bodies of the animals had to be disposed of very carefully after their blood had been used. Leviticus chapter 16 verse 27. And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be carried outside the camp.

Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. The animals whose blood accomplished the movement from the first section to the inner section of the tent

were burned outside of the camp. Christ also suffered outside of the gate according to this same pattern.

It's the place of rejection, of exclusion, and of shame. And there was no meal for that particular sin offering. In chapter 10 of Leviticus, the priests ate the sin offerings of the people.

In some respect, they bore the sin of Israel in doing this. Leviticus chapter 10 verses 16 to 18. Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold it was burned up.

And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamah, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy, and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord? Behold, its blood was not brought in to the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded. That sacrifice involved going outside of the camp to burn up the animal in a clean place.

In Leviticus chapter 6 verse 30, sin offerings whose blood was brought into the holy places had their flesh prohibited for eating. The fact that we can eat the sin offering of Christ, that we can eat the sacrifice on that particular altar, suggests that we have a far holier status than we ever did before, a far holier status than the priests even did in the old covenant. They could eat some of the sacrifices for the sin offering that were offered by the people, but they could not eat any of the sin offerings whose blood was brought into the holy places.

However, in Christ we can. This suggests that we have a far higher status. There is a new form of sacrificial worship.

It involves a sacrifice of praise, with the fruit of lips offered up to the Lord. Animal and vegetable sacrifices symbolise continuing human sacrifices, the ways that we offer our bodies and our lives and our lips. The sacrificial service of good deeds and charity is also mentioned here.

The person who gives to the poor lends to the Lord. It is a form of sacrificial worship that God truly desires. In verse 17 he speaks of the importance of obeying and submitting to leaders.

They keep watch over our souls and they must give an account to God, and it is important to give them joy by being responsive to their service. The mutual benefit of good leaders and responsive people under their leadership must be recognised. Leadership is a collaborative task.

We must be those who are able to be led, and we must be those who have good leaders

over us. Although the book has more of the character of a sermon, it ends in a similar manner to other letters. There is a request for prayer, there is a blessing, exhortation, travel plans and final greetings.

In verse 20 we might hear an allusion to Isaiah chapter 63 verses 11 to 14. In this allusion once again he sets up Jesus and Moses alongside each other. Jesus is the one who brought up his people from the dead through his resurrection.

He is the new shepherd of the sheep. If Moses was like a shepherd of the sheep, he is the one who led the flock to Mount Sinai in the first occasion and then later the flock of Israel to Mount Sinai. And now, much as Moses led the flock of Israel through the wilderness, opening up the passage of the seas so that they could travel through and bringing them to Mount Sinai, Christ has brought us to a better mountain.

Christ has torn open the abyss of death so that we might walk through on dry ground. We must have the courage of faith to go out to him, being prepared to face the rejection and exclusion that we'll suffer as we are associated with Christ, and bearing his reproach to look towards a better country, to be those who despise the shame because of the glory that is set before us. We don't know for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews, but the reference to Timothy suggests that it may have been, if not Paul, someone of his party.

A question to consider, what might the author of Hebrews mean by the expression, by the blood of the eternal covenant?