

2 Chronicles 12

¹ Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel along with him.

² And it happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, ³ with twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and people without number who came with him out of Egypt—the Lubim and the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. ⁴ And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came to Jerusalem.

⁵ Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah, who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says the LORD: ‘You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak.’”

⁶ So the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, “The LORD is righteous.”

⁷ Now when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, “They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. ⁸ Nevertheless they will be his servants, that they may distinguish My service from the service of the kingdoms of the nations.”

⁹ So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king’s house; he took everything. He also carried away the gold shields which Solomon had made. ¹⁰ Then King Rehoboam made bronze shields in their place, and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard, who guarded the doorway of the king’s house. ¹¹ And whenever the king entered the house of the LORD, the guard would go and bring them out; then they would take them back into the guardroom. ¹² When he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely; and things also went well in Judah.

¹³ Thus King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem and reigned. Now Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king; and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother’s name was Naamah, an Ammonitess. ¹⁴ And he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD.

PREPARE YOUR HEART preached at Mt. Zion on 8/14/11 by Rocky Coffin

I came across the last verse of this chapter while studying for a message on seeking the Lord this spring, and it struck me as a profound warning:

He did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the LORD.

This is the tragedy of Rehoboam's life, this summation: he did evil. This is the judgment he receives in scripture. While we see from this incident in the fifth year of his reign, that he did humble himself and get some favor from the Lord, the overall story of his life was that “he did evil.”

And what was his evil? Why did he do evil? Because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. He did not have a heart like his grandfather David, who had a “heart after the Lord.” He did not seek the Lord, therefore he sought other things. This is the danger: when you do not seek the Lord, if you are not actively after Him, then you will not find Him. You will find other things, and those other things will be judged under the heading: evil.

We might not call Rehoboam an evil man. (We wouldn't dare, he was the king, after all!) Arrogant, maybe, especially in his youth. But we would more likely think of him as a decent man, a good fellow, a law abiding citizen, probably intelligent and witty among his friends, respected in the community. Evil? He wasn't a robber, thief, drug pusher, rapist, or serial killer. He just didn't take God too seriously.

Remember Who it is that defines good and evil.

Take a closer look at Rehoboam's story here:

- The backstory: In punishment for Solomon's sin of idolatry, God allowed the ten northern tribes of Israel to rebel against Rehoboam and follow their own king, Jeroboam. This left Rehoboam with Judah and Benjamin. Rehoboam was going to attack the separatist tribes and bring them back by force; God said NO, leave them alone.
- Rehoboam and Judah followed the Lord for three years and fortified Judah. So far so good.
- Levites and faithful Israelites moved down from the north, because Jeroboam was worshipping idols and choosing his own priests.
- In the fourth year, apparently, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and strengthened himself, he forsook the law – and not just him personally, but *all Israel with him*. His influence as king extended to the whole nation, including the separated tribes.

What they saw the king doing, they either felt they had permission to do, or felt obligated to do, too. We often think of peer pressure in terms of a crowd of people influencing one person, but it can work the other way, too: one person exerting influence on many others by their force of personality, position of power, or popularity.

We see it in our own society, the way an entertainment or sports celebrity has influence on masses of people way out of proportion to their actual position in those peoples' lives. They're not a parent or educator or close friend in all those people's lives, yet those people in truth actually *worship* that celebrity. They bow down to the celebrity and allow the celebrity's views, the celebrity's politics, the celebrity's fashions, etc. to dictate their own views and choices.

- Rehoboam not only established the nation, he strengthened himself. He wasn't just serving the people, he was looking out for number one: himself. In Hebrew, the word for “established” and the word for “strengthened” is *kuwn* – the same word used when it says “prepare” your heart to seek the Lord. We'll look more at that word in a few minutes. Just take note of this for now: In Rehoboam's world, Rehoboam was more important than God. What he ought to have been doing towards God, he was doing towards himself. Building himself up, strengthening his own position and importance, exerting his own influence to get people to follow him, not the Lord.
- He *forsook* the Law. He didn't just get careless and forget about it for a day or two. He made a conscious decision. He left it, abandoned it, neglected it, departed from it. The Law went one way, and he went the other. By choice.
- Punishment from God was swift and decisive. God didn't mess around. In the fifth year, He allowed Shishak and a horded of enemies to come up and conquer Judah and take all their treasures. Now we know that God is often patient and may delay consequences for decades, waiting for His people to repent. But never confuse patience with tolerance. God does not tolerate or condone sin. In this case, He let Rehoboam know right away, this direction you're going, is NOT acceptable.
- In our day in America, it's very politically incorrect to connect sin with disaster. God would never punish us for our multitude of sins, even if the Bible does call them “abominations” and promises those who do such things will NEVER inherit the kingdom of God. But who wrote the Bible? Was it written by a bunch of theologians who are entitled to revise their thinking whenever society changes its code of morality? Or was it written by a holy God who never ever changes in even the least shadow of His being?
- To Rehoboam's minor credit, in the crisis, though it doesn't change the overall evaluation of his life, he did humble himself. And when the leaders and the people humbled themselves, things went well again.

- Shishak was not the agent of God's wrath, but of God's correction. We need the agents of God's correction, in fact, we should welcome them. But we should fear God's wrath, and hope we never put ourselves in the position to experience it. Let us hope and pray America can still be “corrected,” however severe the correction may seem for the moment.
- Things did not immediately return to the way they were. God forgives sin, we don't go to hell, but often consequences remain. Judah had to serve Shishak for a few years, because God wanted them to learn firsthand, know by experience, the difference between serving the kingdoms of the nations and serving Him. Sometimes God lets us go through things to learn lessons the hard way. You can get mad at God and blame Him for your troubles, you can plead for deliverance, but you still have to go through it, because it's the only way you're going to learn. Better to learn it quick, and get it over with – humble yourself, any other attitude will only prolong the lesson.
- When they humbled themselves, God granted them some deliverance – note the word *some*, He didn't want them getting too full of themselves again, He let them experience some consequences for their choices. The bronze shields that replaced the gold shields, of themselves were doubtless shiny and impressive, *if you never saw the originals they were replacing!* A constant reminder they lost some of the former glory.

All this could have been avoided if Rehoboam had sought the Lord. But he didn't, he forsook the Lord, and suffered the consequences. *He did EVIL*. This is a law of the human condition. If you do not set yourself to seek God, you will do evil.

If you are not seeking the Lord, you are forsaking the Lord. You are moving in one direction or the other. There is no standing still or sitting on the fence.

So, to the all-important question: What does it mean to *prepare your heart* to seek the Lord?

“prepare” = Heb. *kuwn* – to be firm, stable, established, fixed, secure, steadfast, prepared, arranged, ordered, settled, ready, furnished, provided for, restored. *Get things set in order; established properly!* To be firmed up, stabilized – the image that comes to my mind is of a rudder on a ship that is tied up, fixed, secured so as to go in only one direction, not flop around or wobble or be influenced by every wave and current.

This was Paul's desire for the Church in **Ephesians 4:** ¹⁴ *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,* ¹⁵ *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—*

Nowadays big ships are steered by electronics and computers. The course is programmed in. Just like you program your microwave to heat for so many minutes at such and such a temperature, or you program your washing machine to run through a certain cycle. We need to program our hearts to follow the Lord.

So how do we fix our hearts to go in one direction, to seek the Lord, when our hearts are so finicky, *desperately wicked and deceitful* according to scripture? Especially these days when society is so immoral and relativistic, always blowing about with fads and fashions, and the church is guilty of watering down the gospel and compromising God's standards. How can we be constant, fixed, unswerving in our devotion, not taken off the path?

First we need a new heart and a new spirit. These are the gifts of salvation. If you're not born again, if you haven't experienced an internal transformation by faith in Jesus Christ, you need to make that decision. And it is a decision: to not decide FOR Jesus, is to decide AGAINST Jesus. You can't be neutral or undecided. Rehoboam decided against the Lord and for himself, he forsook the Law and decided to rule his own life according to his own desires.

Then when we've made a decision, we need to follow it up with appropriate actions. Create habits that constantly reaffirm our original decision. And reassess regularly to make sure we're going in the right direction. Just like when you're sailing, you rig everything up right, then you use your compass and other navigation instruments to steer your course and make adjustments. Or, today, insert the right program commands.

Lots of people make “decisions” for the Lord. Not everyone follows through. We need a plan of action. What did the first Christians do? Here's the program they followed:

Acts 2:42 – *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

We probably won't go wrong with that formula. The Word, prayer, fellowship, breaking bread together. The basic disciplines or practices of the Christian life, that we learn about early on, as newborn Christians we spent countless hours, and it was no chore – why did we ever stop being that way? Why should we ever stop? How did we lose that focus, that “first love” as Jesus rebuked the church in Ephesus for losing, and urged them to repent and return to.

“Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee,” Psalm 119:11. David DELIGHTED in God's word, thought about it day and night. How much of God's word is hidden in our hearts? Not just memorized, but INTERNALIZED. Meditated on deeply, prayed over, sought the Lord, until it becomes part of us, a way of life.

Rehoboam had to learn to distinguish, evaluate, realize what's valuable, what's worthwhile, what's true, so as not to be moved by all the winds and waves of temptation. If we don't listen to God, how will we ever learn?

There's a family (Rechabites) that is mentioned, and commended, in **Jeremiah 35**, because their forefather Jonadab commanded them to live in tents, never settle into houses in cities (then as now, big city life = temptation and danger), and never drink strong drink (then as now, alcohol is dangerous to those who can't control their desires, so teetotaling is a safer bet than attempting moderation and finding out your tendency is alcoholism). And generations later, they were still living that way. When invited to drink wine, by Jeremiah the prophet, no less, they declined the offer, they stuck with what they knew to be good and right. There was no gray area for them, no relativism, it was black and white. Our father said so, and we're staying so.

How would the church measure up in our day and age? Have we kept the faith that was once delivered to our forefathers? If the apostles came to check up on us today, would they recognize what we call “church” and “worship” and “preaching”?

We need a long term mentality. Following the Lord isn't just for three days or three years, as Rehoboam managed, but a lifetime pursuit.

And it can never be dependent on what other people are doing. *Though none go with me, still I will follow...*

A wise mentor told me, “Even if I fall away, you still have to follow.” All those people who became bitter or disillusioned because of Jim Bakker or Jimmy Swaggart or the pedophile priests or whatever scandal, they didn't get it. This is a battle, you're a soldier. If the guy next to you goes down, what do you do? Throw your gun down and run away? You keep fighting, otherwise you've lost for sure.

How do you prepare for a long journey? Just step out the door, take any road? No, you study the map, gas up your car, pack your suitcase, pack up some snacks, put new tires on the car, get a tune-up, whatever you need. Then follow the map and follow the signs and go where you need to go until you get there. No stopping till you reach your destination!

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. In the Greek it means, *Seek first and keep on seeking first and always be seeking first*. Not seek first for a little while and then move on to something else.

Explorers in the Arctic or Antarctic have to keep going. To stop is to die. We want to live, we want to reach the destination. Let's program our hearts to get there.