

Introduction:

- A. The other day a Christian friend said to me, “*I’ve decided that I need to work on getting small.*” That’s what he wanted me to pray for. Anyone else?
- B. Turn to **2 Chronicles**. King Solomon reigned for 40 years. The first 20 were the glory years of Israel—rich and influential, like when the queen of Sheba came to visit. The last 20 years were a slide into sin as the wisest man on earth succumbed to lust and the worship of other gods to keep his wives happy, and as his people followed him into idolatry. Solomon oppressed his people—*God’s* people—with heavy taxes and conscripted labor. He made enemies, notably Jeroboam, a gifted political firebrand who escaped to Egypt to hide out and bide his time.

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam succeeded him. The Israelites pleaded with him to lighten the load of forced labor and taxes that Solomon had put upon them but Rehoboam “*did not listen to the people,*” and only oppressed Israel more. When he sent out his supervisor of forced labor the people killed him. The glory days were over!

When Rehoboam came to power, Jeroboam came out of exile and led ten of Israel’s twelve tribes in a rebellion, tearing the kingdom apart. Reh (that’s what all his buddies called him)... After the civil war settled down, Reh showed his father’s skill as a builder. **2 Chr 11:5** says he “*built up towns for defense in Judah... He strengthened their defenses and put commanders in them with supplies... shields and spears, and made them very strong.*”
Strengthened. Made them very strong.

When Jeroboam (his friends call him Jerry) established the northern kingdom he introduced appointed his own priests and started his own religion so the priests and Levites loyal to the LORD left their homes and went to live in and around Jerusalem. Look at **11:16-17...** [“*They strengthened the kingdom of Judah... following the ways of David and Solomon...*”]

C. And that brings us to our passage for today: **2 Chron 12** which begins, “*After Rehoboam’s position as king was established and **he had become strong**, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the LORD.” Strengthened... very strong... strengthened... strong... he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the Lord. If you had no more than that, you’d know that they weren’t strong enough.*

I. FOR GOD’S PEOPLE, STRENGTH CAN BE DANGEROUS (12:1-4)

A. Moses had warned Israel about the dangers of even God-given success in **Deut 8:12-14**, “*When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, **then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God**, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” A proud heart doesn’t have to strut like a peacock. A proud heart is simply self-sufficient. We live as though God’s not in the room. We forget about the Lord because it doesn’t seem we need him. If we didn’t really love him in the first place, but just *used* him, well, we’ll do just what they did: “*abandoned the law of the Lord.*”*

B. In their case things got very ugly very quickly. The parallel passage to this in **1 Kgs 14:22-24** says, “*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. They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. 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.*” Some of these people had seen “*the glory of the Lord fill the temple.*” They had all grown up offering sacrifices to the Lord and now they’re making religion out of sexual perversions.

When Israel abandoned obeying the LORD they abandoned the LORD himself. His prophet says as much in

v.5, “*You have abandoned me.*” God’s people aren’t just religious. They don’t just have a moral code. We are in a relationship with the Lord, more akin to marriage than anything else. We obey him because we love and trust him. The LORD describes himself as the husband of his people. Therefore, **idolatry = adultery**. When his people abandon him and are unfaithful to him with other gods, the LORD takes it personally.

- C. So just as he had promised he would, God sent a disaster to Israel: vv.2-4... This story is clunking with irony. These are Egyptians! Shishak is a Pharaoh! This is the nation God conquered to deliver his people 500 years before. And now *they’re* the Red Sea swallowing up Israel. And another thing: all those *strong* fortresses we read about are now sacked and looted. There’s not a soul in Israel that feels strong any more.

Carved into the walls of the Karnak Temple in Egypt is this particular picture of Shishak smiting his prisoners. Near it is a list of 150 towns he conquered, including several of Rehoboam’s “fortified cities.” When Shishak and his hordes came against Jerusalem, there was no escape. But then: **V.5...** If they didn’t know before why all this had happened, they knew now. This wasn’t just a big country invading a little country. **This was God’s love jealously reclaiming his people.**

- D. Illus.: A woman going through a tragedy said to me, “I must have done something awful to deserve this.” Maybe you’ve wondered sometimes if what you’re facing is God’s punishment. Listen: if God is disciplining you for sin, you’ll know it. No good parent would ever punish a child without the child knowing why. God spoke directly to Reh and his people, through the prophet Shemaiah. No one had any difficulty connecting the dots. (You might call it the Shishak redemption.) When God uses trouble or pain to discipline us, he will use the confrontation of Scripture, or the inward conviction of the Holy Spirit, your conscience, or the challenge of someone at church. But you can be sure you’ll know when trouble is because of your sin.

What happened next actually comes as a surprise. V.6, “*The leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, ‘The Lord is just.’*” **They did??!!** That doesn’t always happen. It probably wouldn’t have happened here except that just about every town in their country had been sacked and Egyptian hordes were banging on their gates. So they were highly motivated. Still, God had said in **2 Chr. 7:14**, “*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*” The word *humble* is repeated four times in this story. It is the Chronicler’s case study.

II. GOD PROMISES TO DELIVER HIS FAITHLESS PEOPLE WHEN WE HUMBLE OURSELVES BEFORE HIM (12:6-11)

- A. Look at the middle of **v.7**. God says, “*Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance. My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak.*” When his people humble themselves God responds with forgiveness and deliverance. Remember, humbling ourselves doesn’t make us good. It just means we’re finally honest. **It means getting small.** Humility is nothing but knowing how poor and little your heart is. Yet God is so gracious he forgives us.
- B. But God is nobody’s sucker, either. He knows that those humble people today may well be back to their proud ways tomorrow. So in his love he institutes a program of humility building. Notice two things here:
1. Even though God promised to deliver them, Shishak actually came into Jerusalem and looted the glorious, golden temple of Solomon. And while that huge army tromped up and down their streets the Jews had to cling to God’s promise that they would not be destroyed. It was a faith builder. **God will use the pressure we’re under to build our faith in his promises.**
 2. Look at **v.8**: “*They will, however, become subject to him, so that they may learn the difference between serving me and serving the kings of other lands.*” That wasn’t sour grapes on God’s part. That was love. I bet

there have been times when you've had to live with the consequences of your pride even after God has forgiven you, and it was good for you because you "*learned the difference.*" **God's goal is not simply to forgive us. He wants us to learn how to be his faithful, humble, trusting people even when things go well.**

- C. When my study buddies and I read **vv.9-11** we said, "*What's with the shields?*" [**vv.9-11...**] Those gold shields weren't for battle. (The Bible says elsewhere that they weighed 15 lbs each. You'd break your arm carrying 15 lb. gold shields into battle!) **They were shining symbols of Israel's glory and strength.** They were for parading Israel's glory. Illus.: Imagine a crack Marine drill squad, with those polished guns, snapping this way and that, flying through the air, and then pointed to the sky. Boom! Now imagine they come marching out, all spit and polish, but they're carrying old BB guns they found at Goodwill. Not really adult-sized. Some with cracked handles, and they all have that little orange plug in the end to show they're not real. And when they aim for the heavens and pull the trigger there's a little *pop*. That's kind of like what happened in Jerusalem. The color guard would march out with the king to his palace or the temple, but they carried those dull, bronze shields and everyone who saw them would be reminded of Israel's golden age, squandered because of sin.

I've got a few bronze shields, God's gracious and good reminders of what I've squandered so that I might learn to be humble.

V.12... So was Rehoboam a good king because he humbled himself or a bad king because he abandoned the Lord? The writer wants us to see some more irony. Look carefully at **vv.13a,b...** Remember how God's glory filled temple in Jerusalem and the priests couldn't even stay in the building? How queens and kings came to see the goodness of God? God's presence remained in Jerusalem, in the temple, all the days of Rehoboam. Right where Rehoboam lived! That's the same temple he went up to with the

guards carrying bronze shields. It's as if the Bible is saying, *A king living there should practically have a halo!*

On the other hand, there was his mother: v.13c... She was one of Solomon's wives. He married her to make an alliance with Ammon, who were a wicked people that Israel was supposed to have wiped out. Solomon eventually worshipped her gods. **2 Kgs 11:5** says he even worshipped "*Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites.*" That's the god to whom people sometimes sacrificed their children in the fire. **There's a reason why God's people should not marry unbelievers.** As Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 6:14-16, "*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.*"

Despite his pedigree as Solomon's son, and God's promise to bless Solomon's house, the verdict is handed down in **v.14**, "*He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord.*" There it is: the bottom line of Rehoboam's life, "*He had not set his heart on seeking the Lord.*"

III. YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON THE DIRECTION OF YOUR HEART SO SET YOUR HEART ON SEEKING THE LORD (12:14)

- A. There's one more great irony here. Rehoboam was Solomon's son. Solomon who wrote in **Prov. 1**, "*My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them.*" **Prov. 3:1-6...** But the most important of his sons paid him no mind. **Our behavior follows our hearts so set your heart on seeking the Lord.** As your heart goes, so goes your life.
- B. When you have abandoned the Lord and trouble finally arrests your attention, the point of this passage is simple: **humble yourself.** Jesus died to forgive your sin. You don't need to live in bondage to other kingdoms. You can't make up for what you've done nor even promise it will never happen again. But what we *can* do—what we *must* do—is humble ourselves and pray, and seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways, and God *will* hear from heaven and bring healing to our lives.