

## Learning the Hard Way – 2 Chronicles 12:1-12

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Ali & Frazier*

1. Muhammed Ali was set to fight Joe Frazier in 1971.
2. There was a lot of debate over who would win.
3. In an interview prior to the fight, Ali said,

There seems to be some confusion. We're gonna' clear this confusion up on March 8<sup>th</sup>. We're gonna' decide one and for all who's the king! There's not a man alive who can whup me.  
[half-dozen jabs at the air]

I'm too smart 9taps his head].

I'm too pretty [lifts head & strikes a profile, turning as a bust on a pedestal].

I AM the greatest. I Am the the king! I should be on a postage stamp—that's the only way I could get licked!

4. Ali lost to Frazier in a unanimous 15-round decision.

#### B. *Pride*

1. Muhammed Ali was a master showman who used bluff & bluster as a way to hype an event.
2. His arrogance was mostly for show. He knew it aggravated people but it sold tickets.
3. Ali knew the folk saying; "Pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick but the one who has it."

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4. Pride is also perilous because it goes so deeply into our soul.
    - a. In that sense, it's a bit like a dandelion.
    - b. I did a lot of weeding when I was young and hated dandelions because no matter how many times you picked them, they kept coming back up.
    - c. The trick was to get all the root which went *deep* into the ground.
    - d. If you left any of it behind, that weed would be back.
    - e. That's a great picture of pride; its roots go deep & unless you uproot it all, it'll be back.
    - f. Another thing about dandelions is that they thrive on good soil.
    - g. So pride often rises from the midst of that which is otherwise good.
    - h. Following some act of charity or kindness, we begin to congratulate ourselves on what fine people we are. It's not long before we deem ourselves better than others.

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5. Today's lesson highlights the importance of staying humble.

### II. TEXT

#### A. *Set the Scene*

1. Last week we looked at God's response to Solomon's prayer offered at the dedication of the temple.

2. Solomon had asked for God's *blessing* on the nation.
  - a. Looking into the future, he asked God to *forgive* the people when they repented for having turned from Him & He sent distress in different forms.
  - b. God appeared to Solomon later that night & told him when trouble came and the people humbled themselves & repented, He would indeed remove the distress & return His blessing.
3. Here we are, only about 35 years later, & the very thing Solomon had prayed about is coming to pass.

### **B. V. 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.**

1. Rehoboam was the son of Solomon & the next king to sit on David's throne.
2. Though Israel had risen to her absolute Zenith during his father's & grandfather's reigns, Rehoboam made a really foolish decision in his first days as king that split the nation into 2 much lesser kingdoms.
3. V. 1 here is *after* the turmoil that surrounded the split. Notice how Ezra words it –

**When Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself,**

- a. This stands in marked contrast with 1:1 where it says of Solomon at the beginning of *his* reign that he *was strengthened* in the kingdom.
  - b. Sol was strengthened; Rehoboam strengthened himself.
  - c. A crucial difference:
    - 1) Solomon looked to God to establish him.
    - 2) Rehoboam was self-sufficient & took matters into his own hands.
  4. You'll remember from our earlier studies that as soon as Solomon became king, he took the nation to the tabernacle at Gibeon for His inauguration.
    - a. There he offered a thousand sacrifices on the altar –
    - b. To let everyone know right at the outset of his reign that he would continue His father David's policy of keeping the worship of God at the center of national life.
  5. Rehoboam never did anything even close to that.
    - a. On the contrary, he sought counsel from everyone *except* the Lord.
    - b. When his foolishness resulted in the northern tribes breaking away to start their own kingdom, it ought to have been evidence to him he was messing up & had neglected God.
    - c. But Rehoboam failed to own his error; and went from bad to worse.
  6. So here he is now, 5 years into his reign, & it says he *forsook* the law of the Lord.
    - a. He made a conscious decision to do that which he clearly knew was contrary to God's will.
    - b. We learn what that was in 1 Kings 14 where it tells us that Rehoboam officially opened wide the doors to the worship of idols.
    - c. Much of this worship was hideously immoral; but it's what the people wanted to do, so Rehoboam saw it as the politically expedient thing to do.
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7. Don't think that Rehoboam was doing well with God, then all of a sudden one day decided to turn his back on God.
  - a. No—he came to **the point of forsaking** God because he'd long been drifting from Him for a long time, as the previous chapters make clear.
  - b. He slide so far, that it got to the point where when a challenge came, he said, "You know, I'm done with serving Yahweh."
8. This is the danger of **backsliding** – it's possible to slide so far back, you get to the point where you walk away altogether.
9. Many believers go thru a season of backsliding.
  - a. They're inattentive to God.
  - b. They make sloppy moral decisions and are lazy about maintaining their spiritual lives.
  - c. But the entire time they're backsliding, they at least know they aren't where they **ought** to be & feel some **guilt** for it.
  - d. It's that guilt that often drives them to avoid those things that remind them of where they ought to be.
10. The problem is, backslide long & hard enough, & you can get to the place where you realize you've come to a crisis form which there are only 2 choices; Repent and come back to the Lord, or reject Him outright.

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11. Rehoboam made the conscious decision to turn away from God.
12. What makes it worse is that it says the majority **followed** his example!

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13. There's an important lesson to be gleaned from that for this presidential election cycle.
  - a. What facilitated Rehoboam forsaking God was his awareness of the people's desire to worship idols.
  - b. God gave them the ruler they **wanted**; one who out of a desire for political power gave them what they lusted after.
  - c. Then, **because** of the spiritual influence God gives to leaders as part of their office, Rehoboam's apostasy opened a floodgate of sin that brought ruin.
  - d. You can read for yourself what kind of things were practiced & allowed in 1 Kings 14.
  - e. It's shocking but highly enlightening in light of what we see happening in our nation today.

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14. When the people forsook God, they turned to idols.
  - a. Humans are **incorrigible worshipers**; we have to worship something, even if it's self.
  - b. The call to holiness that's part & parcel of Israel's covenant with God no longer interested them.
  - c. Ah – but the idols they turned to satisfied their flesh, their base desires.
  - d. It was simply more fun worshiping idols because they got to do what their sinful passions lusted for.
  - e. And how much better to be able to lump it all under the guise & label of religion?
15. But the man or woman who worships self has a fool for his god.

### **C. Vs. 2-4**

### **And it happened**

1. **Because** of v. 1 . . .

**in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, with 1200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and people without number who came with him out of Egypt; the Lubim and the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came to Jerusalem.**

1. Under David & Solomon, Israel achieved her Golden Age & rose to be the premier kingdom.
  2. A scant 5 years after Solomon's death & it a;; begins to come apart.
  3. You see, God over rules in the affairs of Earth and He had been at work in the nations around Israel for decades, setting things up so Israel could rise into her glory days.
  4. But God knew the sad course Rehoboam would take, so well ahead of time He had been at work down in Egypt, the once great empire.
    - a. The turmoil that had weakened her for years was now over and a new dynasty, the 22<sup>nd</sup> has risen to power.
    - b. It's first Pharaoh was Shishak I, a dynamic leader determined to reclaim Egypt's former grandeur.
    - c. He made allies out of one time enemies then led them north on a campaign of conquest.
  5. While Shishak had his own agenda, he was in fact, the agent of God, raised up to chasten the people of God, just as Solomon had prayed 35 years before.
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6. The invaders easily overcame the several fortresses Solomon had built & staffed with chariots, cavalry & arms.
  7. Then they marched on the capital of Jerusalem.

**D. Vs. 5-8**

**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.'"**

1. The leaders were gathered together, trying to figure out what to do.
2. It never occurred to them to repent. They never stopped to consider the **WHY** behind the invasion.
3. They'd forsaken God; expunged & scrubbed Him from their thinking, their counsel. God was a non-factor in life.
4. All they were interested in now was a solution to the problem of the Egyptians.
5. This is so typical of people who reject God.
  - a. They are forever looking for **solutions** because they never stop to consider **causes**.
  - b. They are only interested in the **how**, never the **why**.
6. Since God is the great center of all being, to leaven Him out is to be cast adrift on a sea of uncertainty & futility.
7. leave God out & life makes no sense; there's no direction or purpose.
8. Without God, one opinion is as good as any other because there's no objective reality to evaluate them by.

9. Without God there's no real basis for law, for morality, for ethics.
  10. Without God anything goes & might makes right.
  11. The Golden Rule becomes the one with the gold makes the rules.
  12. The parallels from this passage to our times ought to be obvious.
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13. So there they were having their brainless storming session, when in walks the Prophet Shemaiah & tells them what's up.
  14. The Egyptians are there **BECAUSE** Israel has forsaken God.
    - a. Shemaiah uses a word here that becomes a major theme in the rest of the story.
    - b. It's the word **awzab**; translated here as "forsaken."
      - 1) We find it in neither Samuel nor Kings, but often in Chronicles,
      - 2) Because it tells us why the nation was finally led away into captivity in Babylon.
    - c. Awzab means to abandon & was used primarily in the context of marriage.
    - d. Awzab is when a husband leaves his wife, or a wife forsakes her marriage by turning to other men.
  15. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Shemaiah uses this word to **shock** Rehoboam & the other leaders.
    - a. Israel was Yahweh's wife, but they'd abandoned their marriage covenant to dally with false lovers = idols.
    - b. The Egyptians were now encamped around Jerusalem as the evidence that God was displeased with Israel's cheating on Him.
    - c. Hey, if Rehoboam had come to his sense months before about how foolish it was to worship idols and had repented then, the Egyptians never would have been needed.
    - d. But sometimes, it takes trouble to wake us up.
  16. The problem is, trouble hadn't awakened the leaders – that's why Shemaiah had to go & tell them.
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17. As I said last week, I'm concerned the troubles besetting our nation are the chastening of God.
  18. But our leaders aren't getting it. Sadly, it doesn't seem like God's people are either.
  19. The Church today needs to pattern itself after the example of Shemaiah here.
    - a. Our task is **prophetic**, not **political**.
    - b. Our calling is to stand for the Lord and speak His Word,
    - c. Not to get co-opted by a political party and made a part of their agenda.
    - d. Friends it doesn't matter how good & right society might be, it is **ever** the Church's task to stand **outside** culture as salt & light, urging the lost to be saved.
  20. **Vote, certainly!** But never put your **hope** in the White House, Congress, Court, a party, candidate, or proposition.
  21. Our hope & help is the Lord alone.
- 6So the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, "The LORD is righteous."**
22. This is marvelous—They **admitted** their error!
  23. In light of all that's come before this, it's not what we'd expect.

24. What we might expect is that they arrested Shemaiah and had him beaten.
25. In fact, that's what later kings do with later prophets.
26. But here they repent, admitting their distress is due to their own error, & that all God's done is right.

**<sup>7</sup>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.**

27. God knew their repentance was genuine, even if for the moment, & halted the distress.
28. Jerusalem would *not* be conquered, but things *couldn't* go back to the way they were before.
29. There were consequences for their sin, as there always are.
30. There have to be consequences or we'd never learn.

**<sup>8</sup>"Nevertheless they will be his servants, that they may distinguish My service from the service of the kingdoms of the nations."**

31. When they abandoned to serve idols, they offered themselves as servants to another master
32. Here then is the *consequence* of their sin; they *will* serve another master – Shishak.
33. And they will quickly learn that the service of God is the sweetest liberty, while serving self leads to the cruelest bondage.

#### **E. Vs. 9-12**

**<sup>9</sup> 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.**

1. There was a huge amount of gold & silver treasure kept in the 3 levels of storerooms around the outside of the temple.
2. Shishak took it all.
  - a. The only thing he didn't take was the furnishing used in the service & worship of God.
  - b. He left the temple, the altar, the laver, the lampstands, tables & all the main furnishings.
  - c. But he confiscated everything else.
3. It's only 5 years after Israel's Golden Age, & already the gold is departing.
4. All because they abandoned God.

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5. While Shishak looted all the treasure, Ezra tells us about one particular item he took because it sets up the next part of the story –
6. The Egyptians took the 500 ceremonial gold shields Solomon had made.
  - a. These weren't real battle-ready pieces of armor; they were too heavy & soft for that.
  - b. They were used by the ceremonial royal bodyguard during special events in Jerusalem.

- c. When not in use they were hung on the wall of a special hall used for state dinners where Solomon entertained important guests.
- 7. Ezra tells us these 500 gold shields were part of the loot because of what comes next.

**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. <sup>11</sup> 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.**

- 8. Bronze isn't gold by a long shot – but when burnished, it's the closest they could get to what the gold shields looked like.
  - 9. This replacing of the shields proves the humility revealed in their repentance in v. 6 didn't last long, at least for Rehoboam.
  - 10. The despoiling of the treasure was meant to be a constant reminder to them of the consequences of turning from God.
  - 11. By making bronze shields, Rehoboam tried to cover over the past.
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- 12. This reminds me of Adam & Eve after the Fall.
    - a. Ancient Jewish tradition says that before they sinned they were clothed with a glorious garment of light.
    - b. Sounds reasonable since they bore the unmarred image of God who dwells in unapproachable light.
    - c. But when they sinned, the light went out, and they realized their nakedness.
    - d. So what did they do? They covered themselves with leaves.
    - e. It was a sad substitute for their prior glory.
    - f. It was shame & their wounded pride that moved them to replace the light with leaves.
  - 13. Those leaves are a great picture of *false religion* – man's proud attempt to replace what sin has stolen.
  - 14. But the leaves weren't sufficient. God came to replace them with skins, showing that there's only one way to deal with sin, something, *someone* must die!

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- 15. It was pride that got Rehoboam into trouble in the first place.
  - 16. When he humbled himself & repented, God forgave and restored.
  - 17. But Rehoboam's pride resurfaced & he made new shields in an attempt to pretend everything was okay.
  - 18. But it wasn't. God saw his heart.
  - 19. So Ezra says in summary -

**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.**

**b. He also carried away the gold shields which Solomon had made:** 1 Kings 10:16-17 mentions these 500 shields, 200 large and 300 small. These shields made beautiful displays in the House of the Forest of Lebanon, but they were of no use in battle. Gold was too heavy and too soft to be used as a metal for effective shields. This was an example of the emphasis of *image* over *substance* that

began in the days of Solomon and worsened in the days of Rehoboam.

i. “Rehoboam made in their stead shields of bronze, and with these pathetically tried to keep up former appearances. It is like souls, who, when despoiled of their freshness and power by the enemy, laboriously endeavor to keep up an outward appearance of spiritual prosperity; or, like a fallen church, shorn of its strength, and robbed of its purity, seeking to hide its helplessness, and cover its nakedness, with the tinsel of ritualism, spurious revivalism, union, and anything that promises to give them some appearance.”

(Knapp)

ii. According to Dilday, each large shield was worth about \$120,000. The smaller shields were worth \$30,000. \$33 million was invested in gold ceremonial shields - and now in the hands of the Egyptians.

c. **King Rehoboam made bronze shields in their place:** The replacement of gold with bronze is a perfect picture of the decline under the days of Rehoboam. The dynasty of David went from gold to bronze in five years.

i. “They wished to emphasize how far Rehoboam fell in a mere few years. He had inherited an empire; five years later, master of a small state, he could protect his capital itself only by denuding his palace of its treasures. Solomon’s court had despised silver; his son’s court had to be content with bronze!” (Payne)

ii. “The picture of Rehoboam’s substitution of brass for gold is unutterably pathetic. Yet how often do the people of Jehovah masquerade amid imitations because they have lost the things of pure gold through unfaithfulness and sin.”  
(Morgan)

d. **And committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard:** In the days of Solomon, the gold shields hung on display in the House of the House of the Forest of Lebanon (1 Kings 10:16-17). Under Rehoboam, the replacement bronze shields were kept in a protected guardroom until they were specifically needed for state occasions.

e. **When he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely:** This great humbling of Rehoboam came *after* he had humbled himself as described in 2 Chronicles 12:6. It shows that God knew there was more humbling to do even after Rehoboam did it himself. Even so, this was God’s *favor* and *mercy* to him because both Rehoboam and Judah *deserved* far worse. By the measure of justice alone God had the right **to destroy him completely**.

i. “If God could show favour to a man such as Rehoboam, who typified the attitude which resulted in Judah’s eventual



collapse, there was always hope for those who humbled themselves before God. Indeed, the interest in the people was surely a direct encouragement to the Chronicler's contemporaries to seek God for themselves." (Selman)  
ii. Many in sin humble themselves before God hoping that He will not humble them further. Nevertheless, God knows just how much humbling someone needs and if more is necessary, God will certainly bring it.

f. **Things also went well in Judah:** According to Poole this is literally, "There were *good things*." The idea is either that despite their corruption there was still a remnant of good in Judah and for that reason God held back judgment; or, that despite the terrible loss to the Egyptians there was still a remnant of prosperity in Judah.

Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall."

Where pride is, ruin is soon to follow