

3. The beginning of misery

May 29, 2014

We can not determine how the thing or person is going to finish by looking at the beginning of the process or person's birth. But the beginning is still very important. Because if you get to have a good start, you are ahead of the game over others.

Yes, I know that some who started awful can finish well; at the same time another person who had a great beginning can finish horribly.

We will meet two kings – king Rehoboam of the Southern Kingdom Judah and king Jeroboam of the Northern Kingdom Israel tonight. They both started their throne with a wrong way. Let's learn what not to do from these two kings.

A. ADVICE SHOPPING

2 Chronicles 10:4-15 "Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." 5 So he said to them, "Come back to me after three days." And the people departed. 6 Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, saying, "How do you advise me to answer these people?" 7 And they spoke to him, saying, "If you are kind to these people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever." 8 But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him. 9 And he said to them, "What advice do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us'?" 10 Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to the people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us'--thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! 11 And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!' " 12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had directed, saying, "Come back to me the third day." 13 Then the king answered them roughly. King Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders, 14 and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" 15 So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from God, that the Lord might fulfill His word, which He had spoken by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

The elders knew that Rehoboam was not the same caliber as Solomon and he didn't have what it took to lead the kingdom, nor did he have a vision and the way to communicate to his people. Rehoboam was nothing more than a spoiled rich brat who was born with a diamond spoon in his mouth since silver was considered nothing in Solomon's days.

And here he sure acted like a spoiled rich brat. He had already rejected the good advice from the elders before he even asked the same question to his peers. This is a common phenomenon today. It is "Advice Shopping." The idea is that you keep asking different people for advice until you find someone who will tell you what you want to hear. This is an unwise and ungodly way to get counsel. It is better to have

a few trusted godly counselors you will listen to even when they tell you what you don't want to hear.

Sometimes I and our church elders are approached by a wife or a husband alone regarding their marital issues. We always tell them to come together so that we can counsel them together since marriage requires two. Some people are not happy with that answer, because that was not what they wanted to hear. They wanted to hear, "Go and do whatever pleases you."

The young men to whom Rehoboam conferred with were probably some of Solomon's many sons. Think about it, these princes were used to their luxurious living and they were not about to give it up by reducing the taxes of the people.

When we seek the Lord for His counsel, we should not come to His presence thinking that we can convince Him to do the things we want Him to do. Rather, we should come to Him with an open mind to receive whatever He has for us.

In this case, Rehoboam clearly should have listened to his elders and the people. This is not to say that a leader should always lead by popular vote, but a leader needs the wisdom to know when what the people want is best for them.

Rehoboam was the foolish successor his father talked about:

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

God managed this whole series of events, but He didn't make Rehoboam take this foolish decision to divide the kingdom. He simply left Rehoboam alone and allowed him to make the critical errors his sinful heart wanted to make. This is a very important lesson for all of us to learn: Never to do the things that the Lord is not guiding us to do. It is a recipe for a disaster.

B. CHOOSING GOD OR DEMONS

2 Chronicles 11:13-16 And from all their territories the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel took their stand with him. 14 For the Levites left their common-lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the Lord. 15 Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and the calf idols which he had made. 16 And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers.

Per the Lord's command, the priests and the Levites were originally located throughout the kingdom previously so that they could help the people and worship the Lord properly. They had their own land to live in. As Jeroboam the king of the Northern Kingdom Israel departed from the Lord who allowed him to be a king, they saw the writing on the wall of his rejection of God. They didn't want to be a part of this ungodly kingdom.

After the Levites left the Northern Kingdom to migrate to the Southern Kingdom Judah, those who wanted to serve the true God also moved to Judah. It means that

Jeroboam had the entire kingdom full of ungodly people. It is no wonder we don't see anything godly from this kingdom with the exception of a few Godly prophets.

Look what Jeroboam did to help the ungodly people to do:

1 Kings 12:25-31 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built P enuel. 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: 27 If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the L ord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, R ehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to R ehoboam king of Judah." 28 Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" 29 And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. 31 He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.

He built a couple of competing temples with the idols in Bethel and Dan so that his people didn't have to go down to Jerusalem to worship the L ord. He did everything to make worship idol easy. Remember what I taught you guys? There is one thing that is worse than going to hell – "Taking someone with you." That is exactly what Jeroboam did.

Please note what kind of choices Jeroboam provided for the people in his kingdom – worshiping the demons and the golden calf idols. Your mind already is running to Exodus 32 where the Israelites demanded that Aaron make them gods that would lead them back to Egypt where they were miserable slaves which they conveniently forgot.

While they were in Egypt, they saw the Egyptians worshiping their golden calf idols. Instead of believing their true Jehovah God, the Israelites worshiped the same calf idols like the Egyptians. Even though these Israelites saw what their God could do against the mighty Egyptian army, they'd rather trust their future with this miserable idol. To them, it was their gods, something they could manage.

That was exactly what Jeroboam provided for them – the full-blown demon worship to please their demonic mindset or fleshly religion with a sprinkle of God concepts to tickle their conscience. How convenient for them!

There is no greater danger than for people to cast off all restraint and do whatever seems right in their own eyes. I am sure that you have noticed that nowadays every - thing and anything is a "GO." From injustice in the courtrooms to adultery of people's inner rooms, from the Capital Hills' back room dealings to the street crack house dealing, everybody is doing whatever please them.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

The desire of most people is for a religion that is convenient, not too costly , and close enough to the real Christian faith to be comfortable for the conscience. We live today in an age when "People's Choice religion" is popular, approved and accepted.

God still asks us if we would stand with Him. Those who stand with this world will perish with this world. But those who choose to stand with the Lord in spite of unpopularity, will have eternal life in heaven.

C. ANOTHER FOOLISH CHOICE

2 Chronicles 12:1-8 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."

Rehoboam walked away from the Lord when he was strong and secure. He trusted in God so long as he felt he needed Him; but he grew independent of God instead of more dependent on Him.

We now may say that Rehoboam was dumb to do this. But how many of us would do the similar kind of backsliding if we are financially and emotionally secure and independent? How many of us would actually still depend on the Lord for every move we make when we are in that bountiful condition?

There are more dangers in the midst of prosperity than in poverty, because during the times of need, life becomes simple and we have time and mindset to trust our Lord.

King Shishak of Egypt was the same one as Sheshonk in the Egyptian history. According to their history, he was the most energetic Pharaoh. The Lord used this pagan king to punish the backslidden followers of God.

Let's keep in mind what the Lord said to Rehoboam through the prophet Shemaiah:
You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak

This was a correction that matched the offense. If Judah insisted on forsaking God, they would find themselves forsaken in the day of their need. The great danger of telling God "Leave me alone" is that someday He may answer that prayer.

I like their response to the Lord's chastisement in v6: *"The Lord is righteous."* In other words, they not only acknowledged God's righteousness, but also their own unrighteousness and sinfulness and acknowledge that they should be punished because of their sins.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Never to do the things that the Lord is not guiding us to do. It is a recipe for a disaster.

2) Don't look for convenience in our spiritual walk. Look for obedience to the Lord.

Man-made worship is always more convenient and appealing than following the commandments of the Lord. But it is always a snare to the people who follow it.