

Coach House Church BEACONS

MY PLAN OR YOURS

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How much time do we spend making plans? Places to go, people to see, things to buy, decorating, garden improvements, cooking, parties, and many more. Of course none of these things are bad in themselves, in fact planning ahead is an important part of life. If you don't plan to put your alarm clock on or get things ready for the morning you risk being late for what ever you should have been doing. You can't just turn up at the airport and pick a holiday. Going to the supermarket with a list both helps you to remember everything you need and also reduces the risk of buying things you don't really need.

But what about the bigger picture? Who will you work with to achieve something? What will you sacrifice to reach a goal? Are you benefiting yourself at the expense of others? Where is God in all these plans.

The Bible has many examples of people who tried to do things their own way. All manner of different schemes for all manner of reasons. One such story is about one of the Kings of Judah, Jehoshaphat.

So to set the scene for this story we need to remember that Gods people, the Jews, had split into two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Both kingdoms were guilty of forgetting about God but from time to time one of the kings of Judah would turn to God and seek Him. These kings are described in the bible as good but despite this they all displayed some sort of character flaw. Lets read a bit about Jehoshaphat from the book of 1 Kings, chapter 22.

"Jehoshaphat son of Asa began to rule over Judah in the fourth year of King Ahab's reign in Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty five years. Jehoshaphat was a good king, following the example of his father, Asa. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight. During his reign, however, he failed to remove all of the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there. Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel"

This is almost all that the writer of the book of Kings wrote about Jehoshaphat other than mentioning one specific indiscretion. He writes "Jehoshaphat also built a fleet of trading ships to sail to Ophir for gold. But the ships never set sail, for they met with disaster in their home port of Ezion-geber. At one time Ahaziah, son of Ahab, had proposed to Jehoshaphat 'Let my men sail with your men in the ships' But Jehoshaphat refused the request"

So here we see that Jehoshaphat had made a plan to enrich himself. And to do this he was prepared to make an alliance first with Ahab and later with Ahaziah, both of whom are described in the bible as "doing what was evil in the Lord's sight" The writer of the book of Chronicles writes considerably more about Jehoshaphat so we can put things into a bit more context.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 18 it says "Jehoshaphat enjoyed great riches and high esteem and he made an alliance with Ahab of Israel by having his son marry Ahab's daughter" This was Jehoshaphat's first mistake which, in time, led directly to two more. Perhaps Jehoshaphat was thinking that he could re-unite the two kingdoms, perhaps he thought it was a good way of keeping the peace. Either way he hadn't consulted God, or even used a bit of common sense. No good was ever going to come from allying himself to such a blatant sinner. As a result of this alliance King Ahab suggested that the two kings should go to war against a common enemy. This time Jehoshaphat shows wisdom and insists on consulting the Lord. King Ahab's prophets agreed that victory over the Arameans was assured but Jehoshaphat recognised that these were false prophets and asked if there was another prophet. There was one and he told them that Ahab would die. Now at this point I would have expected Jehoshaphat to pack up and go home but inexplicably the two kings set off for war. As had been prophesied the battle went badly, Ahab did indeed die but Jehoshaphat escaped. Now at this point the bible tells us that God was angry with Jehoshaphat but also that he was committed to seeking God. Jehoshaphat travelled around the hill country of Ephraim encouraging people to return to the Lord. He reformed the legal system to make it fair and honest, encouraging judges to "act in fear of the Lord with faithfulness and an undivided heart" But then came a problem. An army from Edom approached and Jehoshaphat was afraid. Now he gets everything right, he arranges for all the people to fast and he himself begged the Lord for guidance. In short the result was that as the people went out singing "Give thanks to the Lord, his faithful love endures forever" the enemies started fighting amongst themselves. Jehoshaphat's army didn't even need to fight. God himself ensured the victory. It would appear from this that Jehoshaphat had put his earlier indiscretion behind him and was in a much better place now. Unfortunately some sins have a habit of catching up with us, which leads us back to the incident with the fleet of ships. The chronicler

continues "Some time later King Jehoshaphat made an alliance with King Ahaziah of Israel, who was very wicked. Together they built a fleet of trading ships at the port of Ezion-geber. Then Eliezer son of Dodavhu, prophesied against Jehoshaphat. He said `because you have allied yourself with King Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy your work`. So the ships met with disaster and never put out to sea" By the time this incident happened Jehoshaphat was almost 60 years old and was approaching the end of his reign. Given what happened with King Ahab he probably should have known better. Even after all that had happened he was still trying to enrich himself, or perhaps worse, was he seeking fame and recognition for himself by trying to repeat the successes of King Solomon's trading missions to Ophir?

Sometimes we have to admit or recognise that our plans are not the ones that God had prepared for us. We need to ditch those plans because there is nothing to fear in God's plans.

Jeremiah 29:11 says "For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days, when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me"

When Jehoshaphat sought the Lord before facing the Edomites everything went right and glorified God, when he tried to glorify himself with a fleet of ships it all went wrong.

We should all take care to plan our lives according to God's ways and not our own.

The words of Jesus sum this up for us,

He said "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" Amen



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