Divided

Failure to listen to wise counsel contributes to conflict.

1 KINGS 12:6-19

Most of us have received advice we wish we had heeded. It may have come from a parent, teacher, or experienced mentor. We may not have understood their reasoning when we first received the advice, but over time we have come to see the wisdom in what was suggested. Had we known then what we know now, we may very well have listened. Rehoboam made a significant decision based on some advice that appealed to his ego, and it cost him.

Think of some advice you received and followed but later regretted. What made that advice so appealing at the time?
UNDERSTAND  THE CONTEXT


Solomon disobeyed God by worshipping the pagan gods of his many foreign wives and concubines. This was in spite of the Lord’s speaking to him twice and instructing him to walk in obedience (1 Kings 3:14; 9:4-9). God spoke a third time and said that, because of the king’s idolatrous practices, most of the kingdom would be given to Solomon’s servant upon his death. Solomon’s son would rule over just one of Israel’s tribal territories (1 Kings 11:11-13). This pronouncement was a reminder of God’s holiness and His call for obedience and devotion.

If Solomon’s son was to rule over only part of the kingdom, who would rule over the rest? Jeroboam was a young man whose building skills had caught the eye of Solomon (1 Kings 11:26-28). So impressed was the king that he put Jeroboam in charge of the entire labor force of the house of Joseph—a term that referred to the tribal allotment territories of Manasseh and Ephraim (v. 28). These regions were in the northern part of Israel, a factor that eventually proved significant.

At some point, Jeroboam met a prophet, Ahijah, outside of Jerusalem. The prophet removed his outer cloak and tore it into twelve pieces. He handed ten pieces to Jeroboam and explained that the Lord had said, “I will take ten tribes of the kingdom from his [Solomon’s] son and give them to you . . . and you will be king over Israel” (11:35,37). Still speaking through Ahijah, the Lord promised Jeroboam a lasting dynasty just as He had built for David—if Jeroboam would keep God’s statutes and commands (11:38).

Jeroboam, Solomon’s servant, did indeed rule the Northern Kingdom after Solomon died. This territory retained the name Israel. Solomon’s son Rehoboam ruled over the southern part of the kingdom, thereafter called Judah. Because of God’s promise to David (v. 36), Jerusalem would remain the capital city—not of Israel but of Judah.

Thus we know who the new leaders would be—Jeroboam and Rehoboam; we know where—the Northern and Southern Kingdoms; we know when—after Solomon died. But how would these men rule over their respective nations?
As you read 1 Kings 12:6-19, note the contrast in the advice Rehoboam received. How does the contrast in the advice reflect different values?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPERIENCE SPEAKS (1 KINGS 12:6-7)

6 Then King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon when he was alive, asking, “How do you advise me to respond to this people?” 7 They replied, “Today if you will be a servant to this people and serve them, and if you respond to them by speaking kind words to them, they will be your servants forever.”

VERSES 6-7

The Israelites gathered at Shechem for the coronation of Rehoboam, Solomon’s son and the heir apparent (12:1). With Jeroboam serving as spokesman, the people asked Rehoboam to lighten their workload and relieve them of the harsh conditions they endured under Solomon. If he would lighten their load, they promised, “we will serve you” (12:4). Rehoboam sent them away for three days, supposedly so he could ponder his decision.

Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon. The writer of 1 Kings mentioned Solomon’s elders being present at the temple dedication when the king brought the ark of the covenant into the most holy place, also called the holy of holies (1 Kings 8:1-6). Some whom Rehoboam consulted were likely present for that historic occasion. The writer of 1 Kings also included a list of the officials who had served with Solomon (1 Kings 4:1-6). Historically, kings would consult their elders when they needed to make important decisions during times of crisis (2 Sam. 17:1-4).

The Hebrew verb for consulted carries the idea of planning or devising. The word can also refer to deliberating. Rehoboam asked the elders how he should respond.
What role does experience play when making a wise decision?

The elders offered Rehoboam two-fold advice. First, he should be a servant and serve. Second, he should respond with kind words. Likely, the elders had heard the desperation in the people’s request. Having served Solomon, they probably had heard these same concerns during the years Solomon used forced labor for his many building projects.

It is not insignificant that Rehoboam was in Shechem for his coronation and also there when he heard the people’s complaint and request. Shechem was north of Jerusalem and had been significant in Israel’s ancient history.

Some biblical scholars believe the people in the northern parts of Israel had grown weary of contributing to the forced labor that worked mainly in Jerusalem and Judah. They were tired of being taxed for the upkeep of the temple and royal court. The elders may have sensed the people up north were already feeling alienated and were experiencing “taxation without representation.” Hence, they advised Rehoboam to be a servant, to serve, and to speak kindly. The elders knew this would go a long way in building bridges with the people of the north.

The elders offered a timetable—if you will do this today, the people will serve you forever. These elders likely wanted to make sure Israel would retain its glory days and that servants would always be plenteous. The elders had seen the good things Solomon accomplished and wanted it to continue. So they advised, “If you will offer this kind of response, the splendor of Israel can continue indefinitely.” Thus, the elders encouraged Rehoboam to develop a servant-leader mentality. How, though, would Rehoboam respond?

How did the advice of the elders compare with what Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 20:26-27?
ARROGANCE REIGNS (1 KINGS 12:8-15)

8 But he rejected the advice of the elders who had advised him and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and attended him. 9 He asked them, “What message do you advise that we send back to this people who said to me, ‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us’?” 10 The young men who had grown up with him told him, “This is what you should say to this people who said to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you, make it lighter on us!’ This is what you should tell them: ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist! 11 Although my father burdened you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with barbed whips.’” 12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had ordered: “Return to me on the third day.” 13 Then the king answered the people harshly. He rejected the advice the elders had given him 14 and spoke to them according to the young men’s advice: “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with barbed whips.” 15 The king did not listen to the people, because this turn of events came from the LORD to carry out his word, which the LORD had spoken through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

VERSES 8-11

Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders had given. They clearly had not told him what he wanted to hear. He was unwilling to serve or to be a servant. Having spurned their counsel, Rehoboam consulted young men who knew him and had a history with the new king. The writer used a disparaging term: young men means “children.” He used this term in spite of the fact these men had grown up with Rehoboam, meaning they were about his same age. Rehoboam may have been immature, but he was certainly no child; he was forty-one when Solomon died (1 Kings 14:21).

These young men attended Rehoboam, indicating they had experienced life in the palace. They evidently wanted to maintain their status. Being raised with Rehoboam, they would have known what he wanted to hear. Thus, rather than encourage restraint or moderation, they instructed Rehoboam to show full bravado.
You can almost hear the young men mocking the people who had asked Rehoboam to make their yoke lighter. To say *this is what you should say to this people* reeks of contempt. The young advisors presented three word pictures. The first compared Rehoboam’s *little finger* to his *father’s waist*. The second involved making the people’s yoke, meaning the burden of their work, even heavier. The third was a threat to beat the complainers with *barbed whips* instead of regular *whips*. The young counselors reminded Rehoboam that Solomon had used whips when he *disciplined* people. Of the three word pictures, only the one involving the *heavy yoke* directly addressed the people’s request (v. 4).

Rehoboam’s elder advisors had encouraged the king to listen to the people and to respond with kindness. In contrast, Rehoboam’s contemporaries spoke from a place of self-serving entitlement and encouraged him to intimidate the complainers with threats of greater difficulty.

**What blinded Rehoboam to any potential pitfalls in the young men’s advice? How might arrogance have played into the advice that Rehoboam’s young consultants gave?**

**VERSES 12-15**

When the people returned on the *third day*, Rehoboam answered them *harshly*. Repeating the young men’s advice, he used a “my father . . . but I” formula. You are familiar with what my father did, but what I will do will be even worse.

By repeating *the young men’s advice*, Rehoboam revealed none of his own thoughts. Had he nothing to contribute to the situation? Maybe by strictly echoing their words, Rehoboam hoped to distance himself from any resultant catastrophe if the advice proved to be a disaster. He made plain he had sought the advice of the elders and of his contemporaries. The text gives no indication Rehoboam had sought the Lord’s counsel or guidance.

Just as verse 8 began with Rehoboam’s rejecting the counsel of his elders, this section adds: *the king did not listen to the people.*
The writer explained that this fulfilled the prophecy •Ahijah had spoken to Jeroboam. (See 1 Kings 11:29-37.)

**KEY DOCTRINE: The Christian and Social Order**

In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice. (See Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:43-48.)

**DIVISION ENSUES** [1 KINGS 12:16-19]

16 When all Israel saw that the king had not listened to them, the people answered him: What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Israel, return to your tents; David, now look after your own house! So Israel went to their tents, but Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites living in the cities of Judah. Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam managed to get into the chariot and flee to Jerusalem.

19 Israel is still in rebellion against the house of David today.

**VERSES 16-19**

Verse 16 repeats the indictment against Rehoboam; he had not listened to the people. The Israelites realized their voices had not been heard. They made sure, though, that their voices were about to be heard; they answered him: **What portion do we have in David?**

Decades earlier, a rift occurred between the northern and southern parts of Israel. Sheba, a man from the northern territory of Benjamin helped lead a rebellion against King David. Rallying the ten tribal territories of Israel against the king, Sheba shouted, “We have no portion in David, no inheritance in Jesse’s son. Each man to his tent, Israel!” (2 Sam. 20:1). Sheba’s words were the response that the people at Shechem gave to Rehoboam. To Sheba’s cry, they added, **David, now look after your own house!**

What had happened when Sheba rallied the people in his day? “So all the men of Israel deserted David and followed Sheba” (2 Sam. 20:2). What happened after the people gave their answer to Rehoboam? **So Israel went to their tents** (1 Kings 12:16).
Rehoboam destroyed in a matter of days what Saul, David, and Solomon had taken 120 years to build. Although he had wanted to rule over the glorious kingdom he inherited, Rehoboam ruled over only those who lived **in the cities of Judah**.

Rehoboam was not content to leave the situation as it was. He sent **Adoram** (also spelled “Adoniram”) to talk to the people who had broken away. Adoram had overseen the forced labor for Solomon (1 Kings 4:6; 5:14). Whether Rehoboam was attempting reconciliation or merely continuing as if nothing had changed, sending Adoram proved tragic. The Israelites stoned him to death. Sensing danger himself, Rehoboam mounted his chariot and fled to Jerusalem.

The once-thriving kingdom was divided. Jeroboam became king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Rehoboam ruled Judah (1 Kings 12:20). The two kings were at war throughout their reigns (1 Kings 14:30). Neither kingdom ever achieved the glory or strength that Israel had in Solomon’s day.

Although Rehoboam did experience some success (2 Chron. 12:12), his reputation remained tarnished. The final analysis was that “Rehoboam did what was evil, because he did not determine in his heart to seek the LORD” (2 Chron. 12:14).

**What are the differences between Rehoboam and Jeroboam? How did their actions contribute to the division that occurred?**

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**BIBLE SKILL: Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.**

In 1 Kings 12:6-19, we find several phrases repeated. Review the passage and identify the different phrases you find that are repeated. What is the significance of each repeated phrase? How do the repeated phrases relate to each other? How do the repeated phrases stress the magnitude of the advice given and decision made?
APPLY THE TEXT

• Wise leaders seek the counsel of experienced advisors before making important decisions.
• Arrogant counsel leads to self-serving decisions.
• Self-serving decisions cause painful divisions.

List the names of people you can turn to when needing wise counsel. What actions do you need to take to foster relationships with people who can offer you wise counsel in the future?

Discuss as a group the role the group plays in providing wise counsel. How can the group be a source of wise counsel to others within the group and people outside the group?

Evaluate the decisions you make over the next week, looking for self-serving attitudes that may have been expressed through each decision. Ask God to help you identify prideful actions and to humbly respond. How can you demonstrate humility and wisdom in the decisions you make this week?

PRAYER NEEDS