

The Wise Among Us

1 Kings 12:1-33

Introduction

Today, we're going to begin a 3-part series on Revelation. This is not a series on the book of Revelation, but rather a series on how God reveals Himself to us in our world. God reveals himself to us in a number of ways, including nature, and His Word. Today, we're going to talk about how God reveals Himself to us through one another in the form of wise counsel. Before Christ, God revealed Himself through many prophets. Even though we likely don't have prophets today, we have one another, and God uses us to speak truth into one another's lives.

Today, we'll read a story from 1 Kings about a missed opportunity to seek wise counsel, and all of the calamity that this missed opportunity would lead to. This will serve as a cautionary tale for us to be careful to listen to the wise counsel of other Christians in our lives. It will also serve as a cautionary tale about being careful whom we seek counsel from.

We're going to read through all of 1 Kings 12 today, piece by piece. We'll see a monumental collapse due to poor judgement that led to irreparable damage to the nation of Israel. Before we delve into the story, we need to define its two major characters, Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

1. Rehoboam was King Solomon's son. Rehoboam succeeded Solomon as king when he died.
2. Jeroboam was one of King Solomon's servants. He would later become the first king of the northern kingdoms when the kingdom of Israel would divide, as we will see in this story.

Beginning now in 1 Kings 12:1, we'll read.

1 Kings 12:1-4 – Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.”

King Solomon had worked and taxed the Israelite people hard, because he was building the temple for the Lord. Solomon, though often heralded as wise, had also been harsh to the people. Like any of us, he was not perfect by any standard. The Israelites now sought some rest and relief from Solomon’s harsh rule. Rehoboam had a chance to endear himself to the people, or continue his father’s harsh ways. The story continues.

1 Kings 12:5-7 - Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days and then come back to me.” So the people went away. Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. “How would you advise me to answer these people?” he asked. They replied, “If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.”

Rehoboam began the process of making this decision strong, as he went to the elders that had served his father. These elders were wise and seasoned leaders, and they advised Rehoboam towards an attitude of mercy, advising him to be a servant to them today so that they might be servants to him for life. He now faces a choice. Will he humble himself to the advice of his elders, or will he choose another path. The story continues on.

1 Kings 12:8-11 – But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. He asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, ‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us?’” The young men who had grown up with him replied, “These people have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.’ Now tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.’”

Instead of heeding the wise counsel of the seasoned elders, Rehoboam instead sought the council of young men who had grown up with him. These young

men were neither experienced nor wise. They demonstrate impetuosity and childishness in their response. The comment, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist,” is simply a youthful flex of strength that has no place in the attitude of a benevolent and good king.

1 Kings 12:12-15 – Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, “Come back to me in three days.” The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, he followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the Lord, to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

The king answered the people harshly, and he did not listen to them. The word of the Lord spoken to Jeroboam by Ahijah occurred in 1 Kings 11, where this was said.

1 Kings 11:29-31 – About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, “Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes.’”

God chose to divide the kingdom because they had come to worship many other false gods. King Solomon had intermarried with many wives of foreign countries, and allowed the hearts of the Israelites, as well as his own, to be led astray. He had not remained faithful like his father David had. The story in 1 Kings 12 continues on.

1 Kings 12:16-17 – When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: “What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse’s son? To your tents, Israel! Look after your own house, David!” So the Israelites went home. But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

This would signify the division of the kingdom of Israel. It would never again be reunited. The divided kingdom would signify a weaker kingdom in the

future to come, and eventually, both kingdoms would fall into captivity by opposing forces. All of this, we keep in mind, because of the ignoring of wise counsel, thought the worst would be yet to come.

1 Kings 12:18-19 – King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

King Rehoboam sends out his chief of forced labor in an attempt to force the fleeing Israelites to return, but this chief is instead killed. There is now a death on the books as a result of what has transpired. Rehoboam barely escapes with his own life intact.

1 Kings 12:20-24 – When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David. When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin—a hundred and eighty thousand able young men—to go to war against Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon. But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: “Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to all Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, ‘This is what the Lord says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.’” So they obeyed the word of the Lord and went home again, as the Lord had ordered.

An all-out civil war was only narrowly avoided. Thankfully, though Rehoboam failed to listen to wise counsel in the first place, he this time did listen to the counsel of Shemaiah, who had the very words of the Lord in his mouth. Nevertheless, this last minute ceasefire solidified the division within the kingdom. Let us again be reminded that all of this could have been avoided if only Rehoboam had listened to the wise counsel of the elders in the first place.

With the kingdom firmly divided, we turn our attention now to Jeroboam and the newly succeeded northern kingdom. How would he fare as a king who had fled tyranny to start a better life?

1 Kings 12:25-30 – Then Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel. Jeroboam thought to himself, “The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.” After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people came to worship the one at Bethel and went as far as Dan to worship the other.

And now Jeroboam is not faring any better than the king that he fled. He begins by fortifying two cities. That is, he prepared the cities for war. Hostilities continue to abound in the hearts of both kings. Further, Jeroboam knew that simply because they had succeeded from King Rehoboam’s tyrannical rule, it did not excuse the Israelites from important duties they would have in Jerusalem. They would still be required to go and offer sacrifices at the temple. And, governed by fear, Jeroboam apparently found some unwise counsel of his own. He built two idols, ironically, golden calves, just as the Israelites had done in their impatience in the book of Exodus, and claimed them to be the gods who had brought the Israelites out of Egypt. The people were immediately led astray by their new king. The story wraps up as follows:

1 Kings 12:31-33 – Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.

He built shrines on the high-places, something forbidden by God, and appointed priests from all sorts of people though they were not Levites. He offered sacrifices to the golden calves and made a festival on a day and month of his own choosing, not on a day ordained by God. Essentially, what has Jeroboam made?

He has made a false religion.

All of this was resultant of the failure to heed wise counsel. As a brief recap, Rehoboam's poor choice in advisors led to the following:

1. Alienation of his own people.
2. The division of the Kingdom of Israel.
3. The death of one of his officials.
4. A narrowly avoided civil war.
5. The establishment of a false religion.

Such a downward spiral, and again, let this be a cautionary tale to accept the advice of the wise, and avoid the advice of the foolish. We must indeed pick our counsel carefully. I want to spend the rest of our time talking about the positive side of wise counsel. Proverbs 13:20 says...

Proverbs 13:20 – Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

We certainly saw that in the case of King Rehoboam, as well as with King Jeroboam. Fools aside, we need to pay attention to the wise counsel in our lives. God speaks to us in many ways, including through prayer, as we learned before Easter, and through His Word, which we'll talk about in the next couple of weeks. He can also, however, use each of us to speak to those around us. I want to look at 3 important tips to receiving wise counsel from God. Here they are.

1. Don't Isolate Yourself – This is an important one. It's easy for us to get busy about our own lives and not surround ourselves with fellow believers and trusted friends. How often do we see one another outside of church? For some, the answer may be often. For others, the answer may be never. The first key to accessing wise counsel may be to make sure that wise counsel has the ability to access you. If you have cut yourself off from other Christians, you won't be able to receive wise counsel from them. The author of the book of Hebrews reminds us.

Hebrews 10:24-25 – And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We are meant to urge one another on, and we are meant to meet together. This verse is one of my primary verses for small groups, and a small group is great not only for accountability, but also for wise counsel. If you'd like to be a part of a small group, or even better, to lead a small group, please speak to me about it in the near future. We are looking to ramp up small group membership at Tri-County. I believe I've said before, that you cannot experience the full depth and breadth of what the process of discipleship has to offer if you are not participating in a small group environment.

Whatever the case, again, don't isolate yourself. Don't find yourself alone without fellow Christians surrounding you.

2. When Christians talk to you, Listen – Friends, I'll tell you this. When a Christian starts talking with me, especially about my own life, I tune in and listen carefully. Understand clearly that God uses us to speak to one another. What a fellow Christian says to me may or may not seem applicable to whatever situation I may be facing, but whatever is said to me is worth thought and prayer. In fact, God may use another Christian to provide an answer to a prayer for me. We need to keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open when fellow members of the faith begin to speak into our lives. I like the ESV version of Proverbs 19:20-21. It says...

Proverbs 19:20-21 – Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future. Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Remember that the same Holy Spirit that guides you also guides every Christian. They are one of your best sources for wise counsel.

3. Listen Carefully for the Holy Spirit – Speaking of the Holy Spirit, we cannot forget the greatest Counselor of them all. God. There will be no more wiser counsel than what we can correctly and directly discern from the leadings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. John 14:26 says.

John 14:26 – But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Remember what God has said to us by his Word, the Bible. If you read it and put it into your hearts, the Holy Spirit will help you to recall it.

Conclusion

We saw from the example of King Rehoboam and King Jeroboam that failure to listen to wise counsel can be disastrous. Listening to poor counsel can lead to a downward spiral, the results of which are often irreparable. Instead, surround yourselves with fellow Christians, making sure not to isolate yourself. Remember that God uses us to speak into the lives of other believers around us, so be careful to listen when a fellow brother or sister speaks truth into your life. Finally, we must not forget that the greatest counselor of all, the Holy Spirit, speaks into our hearts regularly. Be sensitive through the process of prayer to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your lives. Please stand with me for the invitation.

Invitation