

## ***Rehoboam – The King Who Took Bad Advice • 1 Kings 12***

When the Soviets began installing missiles in Cuba, just 90 miles off United States soil, advisors to President John Kennedy told him to threaten nuclear war and the Soviets would back down. Kennedy risked the entire world and it turned out to be good advice.

A few years later when the Democratic offices at the Watergate office building were broken into, advisors to President Richard Nixon told him it wasn't a big deal and not to worry. Just call it a second rate burglary and it would go away. But the problem escalated until Nixon was forced to resign his presidency. It was bad advice.

Political leaders often succeed or fail on the basis of the advice that they receive and what they do with that advice.

Advice is equally important to us all. At some point you might have been advised to invest money in Microsoft stock or a Yugo dealership. Which advice you took could have made you rich or bankrupt today. Counsel on who to marry, what career to follow, how many children to have or which religion to believe can shape the rest of life and maybe even eternal destiny.

The choice of counselors can make an enormous difference in life. Or, you can be your own advisor and choose not to take any outside advice at all. But, you know the old saying, "Any lawyer who defends himself has a fool for a client."

The biblical biography of Rehoboam is a classic case of conflicting counsel. Unlike his father Solomon, Rehoboam is comparatively unknown. His story begins in the Old Testament book of I Kings chapter 12 on the day Rehoboam was crowned the King of Israel.

Thousands of people from across the nation gathered at a place called Shechem for the coronation ceremony. They were excited and pleased that Rehoboam would be their new king. Unlike the monarchs who proceeded him there were no other significant contenders for the throne and there was no threat of civil war. When he was crowned Rehoboam inherited great wealth, po-

litical power and spiritual heritage. He was 41 years old.

On the same day Rehoboam was crowned he faced the greatest political crisis of his career. Masses of citizens of the kingdom of Israel approached the new king to ask what kind of king he intended to become. Their spokesperson was Jeroboam. He quickly came to the point: "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."

It was true that Solomon had ruled Israel with a heavy hand. The kingdom had prospered amazingly, but the price was high. Roads, palaces, armies and extravagant court life required burdensome taxes on the people. At first the construction projects were carried out by slave labor. But as his projects grew and his need for manpower increased he had to turn to the people of Israel themselves. He conscripted tens of thousands of men into his army and especially into his work projects. By the end of his reign Solomon and the capital kept getting richer but the ordinary people were getting poorer and were beginning to crumble under the government's heavy burden.

The Chinese have defined a crisis as a "dangerous opportunity" and that is exactly what Rehoboam faced on his coronation day. If he lowered taxes and lightened the load he might be perceived as a weak leader and lose control of the country. On the other

hand, if he raised taxes and ruled with a heavy hand as Solomon had before him he might be perceived as a dictator and drive people to insurrection. Rehoboam's first major decision as king would not only determine the future of his rule but the future of the entire kingdom of Israel.

The new king wisely asked for three days to make his decision. During that time he sought counsel on what to do. In this he was wise. He had learned a valuable lesson from his father Solomon. It is a lesson that we should remember

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as well. It is that most of the important decisions we make are not urgent; there is almost always time to seek counsel from others.

But, what should we look for in good counselors? Ideally, we should seek those who have experience. We should choose those who have a track record of giving good counsel. Another important quality would be godliness. We should be sure that those we seek counsel from share God's point-of-view. In addition to these qualities, wisdom—having practical insight into our situation—and truth—honestly telling it the way it is—must also be qualities found in good counselors.

Rehoboam sought the counsel of the elders who had served his father Solomon. They had experience; they were veterans; they were godly and wise and spoke the truth. These men told Rehoboam in I Kings 12:7, "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." In other words, be kind not harsh, and be a servant-leader.

But Rehoboam wasn't comfortable with their advice. He wanted another opinion. Maybe he had already made up his mind. He did what a lot of people do when they dislike the advice they receive—he found different advisors.

Rehoboam sought the counsel of his younger contemporary advisors, those with whom he had grown up. He knew them well, although they lacked experience, godliness, wisdom and truth. He asked them what to do and they answered:

"Tell these people who have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter'—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.' "

So Rehoboam returned to the people and announced his decision: higher taxes, stricter rules and more forced labor.

In some ways Rehoboam didn't really decide for himself. He simply chose who would make his decision for him.

There is no record that Rehoboam prayed. He could have. He had time. He didn't ask God for help or advice. He had 72 hours to go to God for

the most important decision of his life and he never bothered to consult God.

Learn from him! When deciding about a career or looking for a job. When planning a marriage, making a major business decision or any other really major decision in life—take time and seek God!

The consequences for Rehoboam were severe. Ten-twelfths of the nation left the kingdom that day. Rehoboam was left with only 1/6 of the territory and people that he had inherited only three days earlier.

A new Northern Kingdom was established with Jeroboam as their king. They took the name "Israel". They set up altars, temples and their own pagan religion with priests and sacrifices.

The remaining southern kingdom was called Judah. Politically and militarily it was a weak kingdom. Egypt and other nations attacked it. They seized towns. They captured people. Solomon's hoards of gold were stolen. Constant war and growing poverty replaced the peace and prosperity that had been theirs under Solomon's rule.

And the consequences continued. Both parts of the once united kingdom were eventually conquered and their citizens were carried off into captivity. Eventually the ten northern provinces disappeared and the people became known as the "ten lost tribes of Israel". By contrast, the southern kingdom of Judah became the Jews of later history who were without a nation until the modern state of Israel was established in 1948.

One man's decision brought 3,000 years of consequences! Let us never underestimate the impact of the choices that we make or of leaving God out.

There are some leadership lessons we can all learn from Rehoboam. We learn from him that effective leadership seeks the consent of followers. The "consent of the governed" is more than an American idea. It applies to every culture, every country, every business, every family, every church and every group. It is possible to control people with guns, money or threats. But to truly lead people always requires the consent and support of followers. Good leaders serve their followers and those followers know the leader has the people's best interest at heart.

Rehoboam wanted to be a public master but

not a public servant and it did him in.

A second lesson for us to learn is that every generation is different. Rehoboam and his younger advisors failed to recognize and understand the change of generations. They assumed that a younger generation would behave in exactly the same way as the older generation. They failed to listen.

This is a lesson for today. We have an unusual mix of generations in today's American society. We refer to those who were born pre-World War II as Builders; Boomers are those who were part of the baby boom of 1946-1964; Busters are part of the baby bust that came after 1964. These different generations approach life in different ways. Sometimes those differences are bad; usually they are just different.

We see it in families when parents say to their children, "When I was your age . . ." as if things are the same now as they were twenty or thirty or more years ago. A lot has changed in thirty years.

Sometimes alternate generations have similarities. Perhaps you've seen the bumper sticker that says: "The reason that grandparents and grandchildren get along so well is because they have a common enemy."

A third lesson from Rehoboam is that wise leaders depend on wise counsel. There must have been thousands of times when Rehoboam wished he had listened to the wise counsel of the elders. If only he could go back.

There is an old political adage that says that a president cannot get close advisors after his inauguration. The idea is that once a president has taken office he does not have time to figure out whose advice he can trust. He needs to know in advance, so his closest advisors must be people that he has learned to trust before he has been seated in the oval office.

The principle here for us is to pick advisors before they are needed. If possible, don't wait until a crisis to decide on the people you can trust. Try to select in advance those who have experience, godliness, wisdom and truth. If you were to face one of the most important decisions of your life this week, do you know who you would ask to pray for you? Who would you call for coun-

sel? You see, wise leaders depend on wise counsel.

A fourth and final lesson learned from Rehoboam is that different circumstances call for different approaches. Rehoboam failed to recognize that his father's strong hand might have been appropriate when the nation was divided and the kingdom needed to be consolidated. But new circumstances called for a kind and gentle leadership style.

That is an important principle in business.

Good leaders are flexible. New employees may need different supervision than veterans.

The same is true with parenting. Every

child is different and must be parented in a way that specially fits that child's personality and situation.

Rehoboam learned flexibility too late.

Let's finish with the personal more than the political. What is the most important decision you are currently facing? Who are your advisors? Are they experienced, godly, wise, truthful and trustworthy? Have you prayed about your decision? What does God say?

With God's help, may your decisions be wise and good!

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