

Divided  
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1 Kings 12:1-19

I won't ask you to confess openly, but can you think of a time when you looked back and said, *"If only I had listened to that advice?"* We have all been there!

Jesus warned against this stubborn mindset. Multiple times in the gospels He would punctuate an important teaching with these words: *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

As a boy I recall saying to my mother once, *"I heard you!"* She replied, *"You heard me but you didn't heed me."* Often we don't have a hearing problem; we have a heeding problem. That was the trouble with Solomon's son who ascended to Israel's throne after his famous father died.

Here's the point: Failure to listen to wise counsel leads to conflict and division. All the wise counsel in the world won't help if we don't have "ears to hear."

**1 Kings 12:1–19 (NLT)** — **1** Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all Israel had gathered to make him king. **2** When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of this, he returned from Egypt, for he had fled to Egypt to escape from King Solomon. **3** The leaders of Israel summoned him, and Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel went to speak with Rehoboam. **4** "Your father was a hard master," they said. "Lighten the harsh labor demands and heavy taxes that your father imposed on us. Then we will be your loyal subjects." **5** Rehoboam replied, "Give me three days to think this over. Then come back for my answer." So the people went away. **6** Then King Rehoboam discussed the matter with the older men who had counseled his father, Solomon. "What is your advice?" he asked. "How should I answer these people?" **7** The older counselors replied, "If you are willing to be a servant to these people today and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your loyal subjects." **8** But Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older men and instead asked the opinion of the young men who had grown up with him and were now his advisers. **9** "What is your advice?" he asked them. "How should I answer these people who want me to lighten the burdens imposed by my father?" **10** The young men replied, "This is what you should tell those complainers who want a lighter burden: 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist! **11** Yes, my father laid heavy burdens on you, but I'm going to make them even heavier! My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!' " **12** Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to hear Rehoboam's decision, just as the king had ordered. **13** But Rehoboam spoke harshly to the people, for he rejected the advice of the older counselors **14** and followed the counsel of his younger advisers. He told the people, "My father laid heavy burdens on you, but I'm going to make them even heavier! My father beat you

with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!” **15** So the king paid no attention to the people. This turn of events was the will of the Lord, for it fulfilled the Lord’s message to Jeroboam son of Nebat through the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh. **16** When all Israel realized that the king had refused to listen to them, they responded, “Down with the dynasty of David! We have no interest in the son of Jesse. Back to your homes, O Israel! Look out for your own house, O David!” So the people of Israel returned home. **17** But Rehoboam continued to rule over the Israelites who lived in the towns of Judah. **18** King Rehoboam sent Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, to restore order, but the people of Israel stoned him to death. When this news reached King Rehoboam, he quickly jumped into his chariot and fled to Jerusalem. **19** And to this day the northern tribes of Israel have refused to be ruled by a descendant of David.

- What are some words that would describe this hardheaded young king?
- He could be described with a term we don’t often use: *“self-aggrandizing - acting or intended to enhance one’s power, wealth, position, or reputation”<sup>i</sup>*
- Verse 7: What leadership advice did the “older” advisors give?
- Verse 8: How long did Rehoboam consider their counsel?
- Why was Rehoboam more inclined to listen to this boyhood friends? What is the lesson for us when it comes to choosing wise counselors?
- Have you ever heard the expression, *“My mind is made up. Don’t confuse me with the facts?”<sup>ii</sup>* This appears to have been Rehoboam’s problem.
- Rehoboam told Jeroboam to come back in three days for an answer. What do we never see Rehoboam do in those three days?
- Truth: Arrogance never leads to discerning God’s will.
- If you can find scripture that proves me wrong I’d like to see it. I can show you lots of scripture that proves my point.
- One commentator writes: *“The words arrogance, arrogant, proud, and haughty are mentioned over 200 times in the NIV Bible. And in practically every occurrence, it is a behavior or attitude detested by God. The Bible tells us those who are arrogant and have a haughty heart are an abomination to Him: “Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.”<sup>iii</sup>*
- 1 Peter 5:5 tells us, *“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”<sup>iv</sup>*
- We might say, *“I’m not arrogant!”* If we make decisions without seeking godly wisdom --- WE’RE ARROGANT – we don’t have ears to hear.
- This episode happened after Solomon had died but he must have had some sense of the dangers of succession when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 2:18–20 (NLT): *18 I came to hate all my hard work here on earth, for I must leave to others everything I have earned. 19 And who can tell whether my successors will be wise or foolish? Yet they will control everything I have gained by my skill and hard work under the sun. How meaningless! 20 So I gave up in despair, questioning the value of all my hard work in this world.*

- It's amazing that in just three generations the throne of Israel passed from "a man after God's own heart" (David), to the "wisest man in the world" (Solomon), to a king without "ears to hear" wise counsel (Rehoboam).
- Where did the royal family legacy get off track? What went wrong?
- Warren Wiersbe writes, "...so often it's the third generation that starts to tear down what the previous generations have built up...I've seen this same phenomenon in businesses and local churches. The founders worked hard and sacrificed much to start the business or the church, and the second generation was faithful to the examples and beliefs of the founders. But when the third generation arrived, they inherited everything without working for it or paying for it, and they tore down what others had worked so hard to build up. Of course, if the second generation doesn't teach the third generation the way of the Lord, or if they won't receive the teaching, it's no wonder the new generation goes astray (Deut. 11:18–21; 32:46; Eph. 6:4).
- It's easy for wealth, fame, and power to "water down" wise leadership.
- David stopped listening to God and fell into sin. Thankfully, he repented, but he and his family still suffered the consequences.
- Solomon stopped listening and became distracted by wealth, power, and pleasure. He never repented and God vowed to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:35): "For the sake of my servant David, the one whom I chose and who obeyed my commands and decrees, I will keep Solomon as leader for the rest of his life. <sup>35</sup> But I will take the kingdom away from his son and give ten of the tribes to you. (Jeroboam)<sup>v</sup>
- By the time Rehoboam ascended to the throne, the sins of his father left him with no ears to hear. He was the polar opposite of a servant leader.
- What does servant leadership look like? Here's a summary:
  - Serve those you lead and they will serve you. (See 12:7)
  - Lead with the best interests of those you lead in mind and they will follow you. (Also 12:7)
  - Lead them with wisdom and there will be both unity and blessing.
  - Wisdom begins with listening.
  - Supernatural wisdom comes from listening for wisdom from God.
  - Wise leadership brings unity; self-serving rule brings division.
- Warning: Beware of a leader who is more obsessed with building their own "kingdom" (power, fame, wealth) than leading their people to accomplish the mission. That applies in government, the Church, businesses, and family. Don't BE that leader. Don't FOLLOW that kind!
- Here's the real tragedy. Rehoboam's father Solomon wrote Proverbs 16. If only the son had read and LISTENED to some of those verses:
- **Proverbs 16 (NLT) — 1** *We can make our own plans, but the Lord gives the right answer. 2* *People may be pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their motives. 3* *Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed. 5* *The Lord detests the proud; they will surely be punished. 7* *When people's lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them. 9* *We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.*

**10** *The king speaks with divine wisdom; he must never judge unfairly.* **12** *A king detests wrongdoing, for his rule is built on justice.* **16** *How much better to get wisdom than gold, and good judgment than silver!* **17** *The path of the virtuous leads away from evil; whoever follows that path is safe.* **20** *Those who listen to instruction will prosper; those who trust the Lord will be joyful.* **25** *There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.*

- Rehoboam desperately needed to hear (and heed) verse 18: *“Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.”*
- The young king had all the instruction he needed but in his self-centered arrogance he didn’t have “ears to hear.”

#### So What’s the Takeaway?

- Failure to listen to wise counsel leads to conflict, division, and destruction.
- We may not be kings but we all need wise counsel to lead our lives.
- Rehoboam had direct access to the wisdom of his father and grandfather and yet he failed miserably as a leader.
- We have God’s word filled with God’s wisdom, but all the wise counsel in the world won’t help if we don’t have “ears to hear.”
- When we need to make important decisions, one of Satan’s favorite lies is *“You don’t need advice! You’re smart enough to decide!”*
- When that thought crosses our minds it’s a warning light that we are developing a hearing and heeding problem.
- Lord, help us to have “ears to hear” and hearts to seek Your wisdom.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-aggrandizing>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/02/13/confuse-me/>

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<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-arrogance.html>

<sup>iv</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (1 Pe 5:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>v</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (1 Ki 11:34–35). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.