

Choose Wisely | Rehoboam: Heed Wisdom | 1 Kings 12:1-19

July 16, 2023 | Matthew McNutt

[Title Slide] We've probably all been told, or said, the phrase "make good choices," right? The standard response is an eye roll. Why? Because none of us want to admit we regularly make bad choices. *Some of you are getting tense right now; "speak for yourself, McNutt!" Some of you are thinking, the person next to me really needs to hear this sermon. Go ahead and elbow them and say, "McNutt's talking to you today." All of you that just did that? Not a good choice! Have fun on your car ride home!*

That's why we are working our way through first and second Kings this summer in a series called "**Choose Wisely.**" We're turning to Kings because in this ancient record of the history of the Israelite kings, each king's life is summed up with a simple phrase: they did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, or, they did evil in the Lord's sight. The pattern repeats throughout 1-2 Kings because, ultimately, that is what truly matters.

Here's how I know we all make bad choices: raise your hand if you have ever looked back on something and thought to yourself, "what was I thinking?" We've all made choices that we look back on and wonder how we could have been so off. Twenty years ago, I decided to try snowboarding on a student winter retreat. There were some middle school dudes that wanted to learn and needed an adult to be with them. I was like, I can do this, it will be easy. Turns out, I could NOT do this. I hurt myself in so many different ways I literally could hardly walk or move for days after. The worst part was, part of the reason I thought I would be okay was because I was really, really good at the **SSX Tricky snowboarding video game**. I was like, "I understand how it works."

[Title Slide] Bad choices. Sometimes we can laugh about them. Sometimes, they cause pain and disruption for days, months, years, or even lifetimes.

Last week we looked at how idols turned Solomon away from God and considered what idols may be luring us away today. Towards the end of Solomon's reign, God sent his prophet Ahijah to deliver a devastating message. Because of Solomon's bad choices, the Israelite nation would fracture into two after his death. In fact, the only reason Solomon's son would still reign at all, over the smaller portion, was in honor of Solomon's father, David.

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, models another kind of decision we need to be aware of.

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.

Rehoboam may have been a bit nervous when he went to Shechem; transitions were a time of instability and vulnerability.¹ Each of the previous Israelite successions had significant conflict and bloodshed; from Saul to David saw a civil war, and from David to Solomon saw a number of rivals that were killed. It was a dangerous time.

Further complicating this tension is the arrival of Jeroboam. Cue the ominous music. He had been Solomon's labor administrator but ultimately became a leader of a rebellion. 1 Kings 11 introduced him, his rebellion, and the shocking news that the prophet Ahijah told him he would become king over ten of Israel's twelve tribes. Solomon tried to have him killed but he fled to Egypt to escape. And now he's back, with the leaders of the nation, coming to talk to 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.

Solomon had essentially enslaved many of his own people, requiring forced labor for his many projects.² He really did not finish well. Jeroboam's offer is a good one, especially given the prophecy he had received.

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."

Man, this is some solid advice. And it made sense to listen to them. It was a standard thing in ancient empires for a king to have elders; elders played an important role for each king in Israel over the generations because of their experience, combined wisdom, and expected leadership.

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!'"

¹ David T. Lamb, *1-2 Kings (The Story of God Bible Commentary)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 167.

² *Ibid*, 168.

Scorpions were nail barbed whips.³ The author calls them young, but they were probably around the same age as Rehoboam who was 41 years old.⁴ Their age didn't match their advice, though, did it? It was juvenile. How should I put this? The Hebrew word translated "waist" here actually means "loins." Their "little finger" comment? It's a euphemism.⁵ Classy.

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.

The northern ten tribes made Jeroboam their king, leaving only the two southern tribes to Rehoboam and the descendants of David. It all went downhill from there. Here's part of the summary of Rehoboam's reign from chapter 14:

1 Kings 14:21-24 (NLT) ²¹ Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen from among all the tribes of Israel as the place to honor his name. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah, an Ammonite woman.

²² During Rehoboam's reign, the people of Judah did what was evil in the Lord's sight, provoking his anger with their sin, for it was even worse than that of their ancestors.

²³ For they also built for themselves pagan shrines and set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

²⁴ *There were even male and female shrine prostitutes throughout the land. The people imitated the detestable practices of the pagan nations the Lord had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites.*

There aren't many happily ever after's in 1-2 Kings. But that can be true of life, can't it? Rehoboam made bad choices and reaped the consequences of them. The kicker is, he asked for advice – which is good – but choose to listen to the wrong people.

It seems so obvious to us what he did wrong, right? He kept asking people what to do until he got the answer he wanted, not needed. I think there are a few big takeaways for us today as we consider **How to Make Good Decisions**:

Go to God

James 1:5 (NLT) If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

Too often God is an afterthought, isn't He? Too often we have already made our decision long before we go to God and when we finally do, we're hoping He will confirm what we already decided. This is one of my favorite verses in scripture; God wants us to have His wisdom. He doesn't look down on us, reject us, or rebuke us for asking – He wants us to ask! The first step in any decision should be to go to God. Sometimes that may mean being able to set aside some time and go somewhere quiet for focused prayer. More often it may mean in the heat of the moment taking a breath and silently calling out to God. Before you respond to that angry person, before you make a commitment, before you jump into whatever it is in front of you, pausing to ask God for wisdom, to ask yourself, ***am I making the wise choice?***

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NLT) Never stop praying.

Going to God should be a constant practice. When Paul writes “never stop praying,” he's not talking about literally walking with your eyes closed, speaking to God. He's talking about approaching life with an attitude that constantly turns to God. We live this passage out when we're able to naturally go to God throughout the day on big and small issues. This prayer for wisdom? It should be a reoccurring request throughout the day – not just something we ask periodically. “Lord, give me wisdom with this coworker.” “Lord, give me wisdom with this difficult teammate or classmate.” “Lord, give me wisdom with my child.” “Lord, give me wisdom with my parent.”

The next take away in how to make good decisions?

Seek Wise Advice

Rehoboam was right to ask for advice. Remember, we all make bad decisions. We all make mistakes. It's never our intent – hopefully – but it is a reality. I know I can think of

moments in my life where I wish I had asked someone wiser and more experienced for some advice before just jumping to a decision. I'm reminded of a Proverb:

Proverbs 12:15 (NLT) Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others.

It is foolish to just assume I am right. When I'm making decisions about work, relationships, how to handle conflict, where I receive teaching, financial investments, how to handle a difficult class, coach, or teacher, the wise thing to do before making a decision is to listen to someone else.

Proverbs 19:20 (NLT) Get all the advice and instruction you can, so you will be wise the rest of your life.

Looking for advice is not weakness, it shows wisdom! It shows that you recognize you are an imperfect, fallen person who recognizes there is strength in going to others. It is recognizing that you do not have the tools needed for every scenario – so you go to people who do. God wants you to get all the advice you can get, God wants you to be wise and to make wise decisions!

The last take away I want to highlight in how to make good decisions is this:

Accept Wise Advice

This is the real kicker, isn't it? This is where the rubber meets the road. Paul describes it well to Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:3 (NLT) For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.

This is the trap that is so easy for all of us to fall into; I know what I want, but I'm also vaguely aware it's not the best decision. So, I keep asking people for advice until someone says what I want to hear. We rationalize, justify, manipulate so we can make the choice we want to make instead of the choice we should make.

Rehoboam liked the advice that made him look powerful and strong in his mind. His pride did not want to backtrack on the mistakes of his father. So, he found people that told him what he wanted to hear. In his case, the consequences were massive.

We can't just keep looking around until we get the answer we want; we need to have the wisdom to choose the right answer even if it's hard.

Proverbs 27:6 (NLT) Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

When a friend tells us a painful truth it's because they have our best interests at heart. When God directs us to wise counsel it's because He wants what's best for us. Any

time we are listening to advice we should be asking ourselves the question, “does this person genuinely have my best interest at heart? Or do they benefit from telling me what I want to hear?” They may benefit simply by avoiding conflict, maybe your mistake helps them, maybe they just don’t care and it’s easier to agree with you. Whatever the case may be, if someone tells you the answer you’re hoping for 100% of the time, they probably aren’t sharing wisdom – because we already know you – and I – are not right 100% of the time.

Here’s what I want you to do right now as a practice round. Take out a piece of paper, open up the notes app on your phone, grab something you can write this on.

Answer the question, **What decision am I facing?** Write down the decision. Now write down these questions (and answer them):

Have I gone to God about this?

Who can I go to for wise advice?

How can I be better at accepting wise advice?

I want you to tackle these questions this week. If you wrote down a name that you can go to, actually go to them. I’d recommend going to a couple different Godly people. If their advice lines up, ask yourself what you need to do to accept that advice, even if it’s difficult, and then follow through. **THIS WEEK.**

Let’s pray.