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WHICH ADVICE SHOULD YOU HEED?

Today's Text: 1 Kings 12: 1-33

Extracts:

“And Rehoboam [the son of Solomon] went to Shechem; for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. Jeroboam [the fugitive servant of Solomon who had just returned from exile in Egypt] and all the congregation of Israel came and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous; now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke lighter and we will serve thee. King Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, *How do you advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him. And the king answered the people roughly. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, to your tents, O Israel; now see to thine own house David. So, all Israel departed unto their tents” [1 Kgs 12: 1,3,4, 6-8, 16]*

*As an old pastor lay dying, his concern was that his only child, Matthew, had not given his life to Christ, in spite of the pastor's persistent prayers and fasting. Just before he died, he called Matthew and gave him his treasured zipped bible, saying, “Son, before you decide what to become in life, please, make sure that you open this book first.” Matthew left the book in his father's study and walked out without opening the book as advised by his father. One day, after wasting his life on drugs and in jail, he tuned to a television channel where the preacher was speaking on “father-son relationships.” The preacher made reference to **Psalm 37: 25** [“I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread”]. Matthew could not believe that and he was anxious to prove that the preacher quoted the verse wrongly. He reached for his father's bible that he had not touched in twenty years, zipped it open, and behold, a heavy envelope fell off. When he opened it and counted, it contained five thousand dollars!*

Why did Matthew not heed his father's advice twenty years earlier and save himself all the hardships? We all face similar circumstances each new day. We have decisions to make concerning our health and happiness, career, family and friends, etc. Since we are not all knowing, we need to talk to those who know better to seek their opinions or advice. Even if we go to God in prayer, He may reply us through prophecy or wise counsel from people. Sometimes, we accept their advice to our gain or pain. Sometimes we reject advice, again to our pain or gain. What influences our choices? In today's lesson, we shall use the story of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, to study this important subject.

1. Background

Following the death of his father, Solomon, it was the turn of Rehoboam to be sworn in as king of *all Israel*. His father was reputed as the wisest man of all times and he reigned for forty years. Therefore, it was to be expected that members of his court would be wise and knowledgeable people. As a condition for accepting him as their king, the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel came to him to demand that he make lighter the state burden on the people than they had borne during his father's reign. He told them to give him three days to think about the matter [**1 Kgs 12: 1-5**].

Rehoboam consulted with the old men who had advised his father, saying, "How do ye advise that I may answer this people?" Wisely, they advised him to show humility and let the people know that he was going to work for their good and the good of Israel. He turned to young people like himself and asked also for their advice. They advised him as follows [**vv. 8-11**]:

Thus shalt thou speak unto this people... My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions

When the elders returned on the third day, the king replied them as the young men had advised him. The people became furious and forsook him. They rallied round Jeroboam, the servant of Solomon who had fled into Egypt during the reign of Solomon, and made him king over all Israel, except the tribe of Judah [**vv. 12-20**]. Thus, Rehoboam lost 92% of his territory by following wrong advice.

2. Why do we seek advice and from whom?

Every now and then, we face a decision situation. Yet, we do not have adequate information. That is why "the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge" [**Prov. 18: 15**]. Opinion leaders or some of us who claim to be inner-directed may not consult others, except, perhaps God. Even those who go to God in prayer may still listen to human advice because they do not know how God may answer their prayers. For example, God spoke with Moses "mouth to mouth, even apparently and not in dark speeches" [**Num.12: 8**], yet, it was on the basis of his father-in-law's advice that Moses was able to learn and apply the principle of delegation [**Ex. 18: 1-27**]. Therefore, we all seek advice in order to obtain enough information to make sound decisions.

Another reason that we seek advice is to spread the risk of failure, for as the saying goes, success has a hundred fathers but failure is an orphan! When we act on the basis of other people's advice and it fails, we can feel much better that we did not fail alone. Our advisors have also failed! Rehoboam could now call on the

young people to fight for him since their advice had led to the people's rebellion against him.

In social psychology, there is what is referred to as the *risky shift phenomenon*. It states that people take more risky decisions when they are in a group than when they take decisions alone. Therefore, the more risky a decision that we want to take, the more advisors that we consult. Rehoboam consulted both the elders and the young people before deciding what to reply his people. He went with the more risky advice of the youths since he was closer to them than to the elders.

That raises the second question: how do we determine which advisor to heed? If we examine the list of people from whom we seek advice everyday, it includes parents and siblings, teachers, ministers and mentors, and peers. Our ultimate advisor is God Himself [Ps. 16:7]. *Credibility* is a major factor that influences our choice. For example, we would look at the advisor's track record. If s(he) has never failed you with past advice, the likelihood is that you will believe this one. However, this principle cannot be applied to the case of Rehoboam. The elders had been with his father for forty years. Therefore, they had a better track record than the young people. Yet, he rejected the advice of the elders and heeded that of the youths. That suggests that there is much more to the matter than meets the eye.

3. Is there good or bad advice?

Ordinarily, good advice is the one that helps us to solve our problems or to get superior results. In the two cases of Matthew and Rehoboam above, we have seen people reject *obviously* good advice. Children have been known to reject good advice just to spite their parents. Sometimes, we have also seen people get good outcomes even when they thought that they had followed bad advice. When my wife completed high school, she desperately wanted to work. In the job interviews that she had attended in two different organizations, she was adjudged the best candidate. Yet, they refused to give her the job. In each case, she was advised to further her education. She thought that they were wicked people! She heeded their advice (bad from her own perspective!) and later wound up with an MBA. At her 50th birthday party recently, she paid glowing tribute to those two people who had made a difference in her life!

It appears that a better way to understand the subject is through God's perspective because He sees our hearts, and He sends messengers according to His purposes. For example, we are told in today's case study that "the king hearkened not unto the people, *for the cause was from the Lord, that He might perform His saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat*" [1 Kgs 12: 15]. In other words, we heed or reject advice, not because they are good or bad but in accordance with what God wants! In the chart below, I have shown a framework that will enable us to understand various aspects of the subject.

		BENEFIT OF ADVICE TO US	
		Good	Bad
OUR CHOICE	Heed	✓ <i>Advice to Moses by father-in-law [Ex. 18:1-27]</i> ✓ <i>Mary's advice to the servants at the wedding in Canaan [Jn 2: 5]</i>	✓ <i>Youths' advice to Rehoboam [1 Kgs 12: 9-15]</i> ✓ <i>Absalom's pursuit of David [2 Sam. 17: 1-23]</i> ✓ <i>Abram's marriage to Hagar [Gen. 16: 1-3]</i>
	Reject	✓ <i>Elders' advice to Rehoboam [1 Kgs 12: 6-8]</i> ✓ <i>Magicians' advice to Pharaoh [Ex. 8: 18-19]</i>	✓ <i>Peter's advice to Jesus [Matt. 16: 21-23]</i> ✓ <i>Shemaiah's advice to Nehemiah [Neh. 6: 10-14]</i>

a) *In general, we should heed good advice and reject bad advice*

Once we have ascertained that the advice that we are seeking is good for us and is in accordance with the will of God, we should not hesitate to accept it. After God had spoken to Jehosaphat through a prophet that his battle against the Ammonites and Moabites was the Lord's, Jehosaphat "consulted with the people" and on the basis of their advice, "he appointed singers unto the Lord" who led the troops into battle [2 Chron. 20: 1-21]. Moses did not hesitate to accept his father-in-law, Jethro's advice on how to effectively delegate responsibilities to others so as to devote his time to the exceptional cases. That gave him more time for his family and other matters [Ex. 18: 1-27]. In like manner, when Mary, the mother of Jesus, told the servants at the marriage in Canaan, "Whatsoever He (Jesus) saith unto you, do it," they did not hesitate to heed her [Jn 2:5].

On the other hand, we should not hesitate to reject any advice that we consider not helpful to dealing with our problems. When Peter advised Jesus not to go to Jerusalem where death awaited Him, Jesus knew that that advice was bad for the purpose of His coming in human form. So, He told Peter, "Get behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto Me; *for thou*

savourerest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” [Matt. 16: 21-22].

b) *Here comes the hard part: when we reject good advice or accept bad advice!*

Let us begin with examples from the bible before we make the point here. We have seen the case of Rehoboam rejecting the good advice of the elders to treat his subjects with respect and sense of service, while accepting the advice of the youths to treat them with disdain. His choice was influenced by God’s earlier judgment on Solomon’s idolatry. God had said then that He would rend the kingdom of Israel out of the hands of Solomon’s son and “I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son *for David My servant’s sake, and for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen*” [1 Kgs 11: 12-13]. In like manner, Pharaoh did not heed the advice of his magicians to let the children of Israel go because “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and he hearkened not unto them *as the Lord had said*” [Ex. 8: 18-19].

Let us take one more example. Following Absalom’s rebellion against his father, David went into exile. The rebel purposed to pursue his weakened father and kill him so that he could consolidate his hold on the kingdom. He sought the advice of two of his father’s leading captains, Ahitophel and Hushai. The former advised him to authorize him to choose 12,000 men and to pursue David *that night* [2 Sam. 17: 1-3]. The advice pleased Absalom very well. Nevertheless, he sought Hushai’s views. He warned the rebel to be careful because his father was a very mighty man surrounded by valiant fighters. Interestingly, “Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai ... is better than the counsel of Ahitophel. *For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahitophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom*” [vv. 7-14].

It is clear from all the above cases that God has a hand in our decision to accept or reject any advice. When we are not right with Him, He leads us to accept bad advice or to reject good advice. Therefore, the advice that we heed is the one that we deserve for “an evil man seeketh only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him” [Prov. 17:11].

4. Conclusion

The conclusion from this study looks frightening: *the advice that we heed is the one that we deserve, not necessarily the one that we desire.* If we are led by sight, such as Abraham’s acceptance of Sarah’s advice for him to marry her maid, Hagar, we wind up with a dead end because “there is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death” [Prov. 16:25]. Today, the Arabs who are the descendants of Hagar’s son, Ishmael, are locked in mortal

combat with the Jews, the descendants of Abraham's child of promise, Isaac. If, on the other hand, we follow God's way, we are well placed to accept good advice like Moses or reject bad advice like Nehemiah [**Neh. 6: 10-14**], for "a man's heart deviseth his way but the Lord directeth his steps" [**Prov. 16:9**].

So, to ensure that the advice you heed is also the one that you desire, do the following:

- i. Get right with God. Make sure that His "word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart" [**Rom. 10: 8**].
- ii. Walk not "in the counsel of the ungodly" but rather delight yourself in the law of God on which you should meditate day and night [**Ps. 1: 1-6**].
- iii. Jesus is your ultimate Counsellor [**Is. 9: 6**], and "whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. *If ye ask anything in My name, I will do it*" [**Jn 14: 13-14**]. Ask His advice on any decisions you want to make!

Only God knows what advice is good or bad for you when you obey Him. If you can listen to Him *at all times*, you can *never* be misled. However, if you choose otherwise and are misled by human advice, don't blame God. It may be the one you deserve!