

“The Foolish Son”  
1 Kings 12:1-15  
(Preached at Trinity, February 7, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 11** ended with the death of Solomon. He had reigned over Israel for 40 years. It was an excellent reign. Israel had become wealthy beyond measure and the people enjoyed the benefits of peace.
  - A. But as the years wore on, there were signs of decline. Solomon's love and faithfulness to God were in decline. In the end, the text tells us Solomon departed from God. **11:4-6**
  - B. As time passed in Solomon's kingdom his ambitious building projects required more and more from the people of Israel.
  - C. Solomon's work force originally only consisted of foreign labor  
**1 Kings 9:20-23 NAU** - "As for all the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, who were not of the sons of Israel, <sup>21</sup> their descendants who were left after them in the land whom the sons of Israel were unable to destroy utterly, from them Solomon levied forced laborers, even to this day. <sup>22</sup> But Solomon did not make slaves of the sons of Israel; for they were men of war, his servants, his princes, his captains, his chariot commanders, and his horsemen. <sup>23</sup> These were the chief officers who were over Solomon's work, five hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people doing the work."
  - D. At some point, however, Solomon included Israelites in his labor force.  
**1 Kings 5:13-16 NAU** - "Now King Solomon levied forced laborers from all Israel; and the forced laborers numbered 30,000 men. <sup>14</sup> He sent them to Lebanon, 10,000 a month in relays; they were in Lebanon a month and two months at home. And Adoniram was over the forced laborers. <sup>15</sup> Now Solomon had 70,000 transporters, and 80,000 hewers of stone in the mountains, <sup>16</sup> besides Solomon's 3,300 chief deputies who were over the project and who ruled over the people who were doing the work."
  - E. Taxation may have also increased. Whatever was Solomon's policies, Israel felt it oppressive.  
**1 Kings 12:4 NAU** - "Your father made our yoke hard"
2. After the death of Solomon his son Rehoboam reigned in his place. Rehoboam was Solomon's heir to the throne, but he did not inherit his father's wisdom.
  - A. Solomon came to the throne at a very young age, and yet he humbled himself before God and sought to have a discerning heart. God blessed him with great wisdom.

- B. Rehoboam came to the throne at the age of 41 but was foolish. Wisdom does not automatically come with age. He wasn't interested in wisdom. He had no regard for the wisdom of those more mature than he. He rejected the wisdom of the elders. Instead, the text tells us he looked for answers from the young men he grew up with. The word for "young men" can be translated boys or children. They may have been in their 30's and 40's but they were silly little boys. It reminds us of many in our day who remain in perpetual adolescence.
3. After the death of Solomon Rehoboam went to Shechem to consolidate his power. **Verse 1** tells us all Israel had arrived to coronate Rehoboam as their king. But there was an immediate problem. They had sent for Jeroboam and he arrived with them. Solomon had sought to kill Jeroboam and he fled to Egypt where he waited until Solomon died. Now he arrives in Shechem to claim what was rightfully his. God promised him that he would reign over the ten tribes of Israel. This tells us conflict is now inevitable.
4. Israel immediately set their complaints before Rehoboam. They brought accusations against Solomon.
- A. Some say the accusations were false, mere political propaganda. If this were true, we wouldn't have expected Rehoboam's response. He didn't deny the accusations.
- B. We should not miss the nature of Israel's complaints. Their problem was not with Solomon's sexual immorality or his horrid idolatry or his and departure from following after God. They were more concerned about their personal comforts. Under the leadership of Solomon, the entire nation had also departed from God.
- C. We should also understand that they actually had nothing to complain about. Their complaints were precisely what Samuel told them to expect from earthly kings? This made their complaints completely unjustified.
5. Rehoboam didn't quite know how to answer them so he seeks three days to deliberate. Since he didn't know how to respond he decided to seek counsel. This was a wise course. Perhaps he learned it from his father, Solomon. **Proverbs 15:22 NAU** - "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed."
- Proverbs 24:6 NAU** - "For by wise guidance you will wage war, And in abundance of counselors there is victory."
6. We shouldn't miss Rehoboam's spiritual condition. He faced this major hurdle at the very beginning of his reign. He needed wisdom. What will he answer the people?
- A. In this serious situation we find nothing about him seeking God. Solomon's spiritual decline impacted not only his own life and the spiritual vitality of the nation God had given him to rule, it also had a negative impact upon his family.
- B. He needed wisdom from God but we do not see him turning to the priests or God's prophet. He immediately turned to men.
- We must seek wise counsel from Godly men, but not until we have gone before God seeking His will through His Word.

- I. First, Rehoboam sought wisdom from the elders
- A. These were older men who had served Solomon
1. More than anyone else they would have known Solomon's policies that were being questioned and how he governed the people.
  2. And they were advanced in years. We would expect their counsel to be wise
  3. Age does not always result in wisdom, but age should always demand respect.  
**Leviticus 19:32 NAU** - "You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD."  
**Proverbs 16:31 NAU** - "A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness."
  4. We seek wise counsel from those who will bring us a word from God. Today, we want to hear from those who are well versed in the Scriptures. This is what we mean by wise counsel.
  5. Their counsel was for Rehoboam to be gracious, to be a humble and listening king.
    - a. These wise elders would have known Solomon's teaching:  
**Proverbs 15:1 NAU** - "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."
    - b. They counseled Rehoboam to speak gently with the people. He could have won their hearts.  
 But Rehoboam was too proud for this. He wanted to flex his muscle.
    - c. The elders counseled Rehoboam to be a servant king. If he would be willing to do this, they would gladly follow him forever.
- B. Humble servitude is not the pattern for most people.
1. It surely wasn't the pattern for Rehoboam. It demands the heart of a servant.
  2. Even leaders must see themselves as servants. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands, but husbands are expected to give them servant leadership. This is the model of Christ who laid down His life for His bride.
  3. The NT places the church under the leadership of the elders, but wise elders seek the will of the church.
  4. The NT model is to serve one another  
**Matthew 20:26-28 NAU** - "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

II. Then Rehoboam seeks counsel from the young men

- A. These were men he grew up with
1. Again, the word for “young men” literally refers to a boy or a child. But if Rehoboam was 41 years old these would have also been around that age. They were grown men but acted like immature boys.
  2. There was a certain familiarity with them. Notice the pronoun – “What counsel do you give that we may answer this people.”
    - a. Rehoboam identified with these men – “What do you think we should do?”
    - b. We can compare this with Rehoboam’s brief enquiry with the elders “How do you counsel me to answer this people.”
  3. Their counsel was vain and void of wisdom. With his mind already made up it was counsel Rehoboam wanted to hear.  
Paul warned Timothy of those who desired to surround themselves with teachers who will tell them what they want to hear.  
**2 Timothy 4:3-4 NAU** - "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."
  4. Their counsel was to return a harsh, threatening, sarcastic reply to their request. It was foolish counsel from the mouths of fools.
  5. Too often young people give greater ear to the foolish counsel of their friends than to the sound teaching of their elders.
  6. Young people are sometimes far more influenced by their peers than by the counsel of their parents. Moral and sexual purity seems old-fashioned and out of touch. They see the counsel of delayed gratification as unreasonable and a terrible detriment to their happiness.
- B. The counsel of the young men was to ignore and withstand the concerns and desires of the people
1. In Rehoboam’s mind, the chief matter was his own position and authority. As the king he thought he was entitled to have people serve him. The counsel of the young fools was opposite of the elders. The elders said humble yourself and serve. The young men told Rehoboam to press his power and position and demand that they serve you. His plan was to beat Jeroboam into submission.
  2. The counsel was doomed to disaster  
**Proverbs 13:20 NAU** - "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm."

III. While the text describes the actions of a foolish king counselled by his foolish fellows, the chief focus is upon the One who moves all of the decisions of this world. We'll look at this in greater detail next week.

**1 Kings 12:15 NAU** - "So the king did not listen to the people; for it was a turn of *events* from the LORD, that He might establish His word, which the LORD spoke through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat."

A. This truth must govern our worldview

1. The tendency for most is to look at the behavior of those in power and become frustrated and angry.

This is what drives many of the talk-radio shows and the modern media. Too many Christians are drawn into this mindset. All attention is placed upon the narrow immediate situation.

"On my goodness, they are demanding that we wear masks!"

2. The Biblical worldview sees God seated upon His throne directing all of the affairs of this world.

God is fulfilling His purpose and being faithful to His Word

3. Our mindset must always be, how can I be faithful to God and faithful to advancing His Kingdom.

B. God's sovereignty works secretly in the background

1. All we see are the actions of men.

a. Men are busy working out their schemes, carrying out their plans—but it is God who determines every decision.

**Psalms 33:10-11 NAU** - "The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. <sup>11</sup> The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation."

**Proverbs 16:9 NAU** - "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."

b. God does it in a manner that does not violate the human will. Rehoboam and the people of Israel and Jeroboam were all doing what they wanted to do.

c. Because the actions of men can have huge consequences we can focus all of our attention upon their actions and be blinded to the purposes of God.

2. The knowledge of God's sovereignty must bring us comfort.

Conclusion:

1. As we ponder God's sovereignty we must not forget that we are responsible for our decisions and our actions.
  - A. Rehoboam made his decision: **V.15** - "So the king did not listen to the people" He listened to the counsel of his foolish friends.  
Our decisions have consequences. Sometimes the consequences are devastating. The consequences of Rehoboam's decision would last for centuries.
  - B. We must weigh our decisions carefully. We must seek God's counsel first and foremost. This must happen before anything else.  
**Proverbs 3:5-6 NAU** - "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."
  - C. Then we must seek Godly counsel, counsel from wise and mature Christians who have minds that have been shaped by the Word of God. It is too easy to seek counsel from those who will tell us what we want to hear.
  - D. Finally, we must be willing to receive wise counsel. Far too many times I have had individuals come to me for counsel on a decision that they have already decided. They are not interested in hearing any counsel that is in conflict with their predetermined plans.
2. There is another important lesson we need to learn from Rehoboam.
  - A. All of us have to make a decision regarding how we will interact with people. We will follow one of two courses. Either we will demand that others serve us, or we will be willing to humble ourselves and serve others. Will we follow the advice of Solomon's wise elders, or will we follow the counsel offered by the friends of Solomon's foolish son?
  - B. What an impact this would have upon our nation if our politicians learned the virtue of service. Politicians used to refer to themselves as "public servants." Now they are only interested in shoring up their position and power. They want to be served.
  - C. And this is good counsel for church leadership. What a virtue it is to lead by serving.