



We're in the interesting week of the year. It's the week where my home looks like a wrapping paper bomb went off in the living room and slowly made its way to each and every room in our home. It's the week where I've been assembling the Christmas toys my daughters received and have been wondering when I should start the task of taking the Christmas tree out of the house; I've been delaying it because I don't want to clean up all the dead needles it will leave in its wake. These aren't bad things; I'm not complaining about them; they are simply outcomes of our decision to celebrate Christmas as a family.

Another interesting aspect of this week is looking ahead. In the back of my mind I know our family tradition of going to California Pizza Kitchen on New Year's Eve is coming. As we order pizza and salad we'll begin talking, as a family, about our New Year goals. I'm guessing my wife will have some creative way for us to write down our goals and I know she will bring out the little orange bucket that we put our last years' goals in. We will read our goals and see if we accomplished what we had set out to conquer in 2014.

From Christmas trees to New Year goals, all of this boils down to decisions. Some of us made a decision to celebrate Christmas and therefore we get the opportunity to clean our homes for the next couple of weeks. Some of us made the decision to make New Year goals for 2014 and we need to evaluate if we accomplished what we set out to accomplish. Some of us are already thinking about what goals we will set for 2015 while others are throwing off the whole idea of setting goals. This morning we're going to look at decisions that altered the history of Israel, hurt lives, and lead people away from God. We're going to look at one story with two characters and see the power of decision.

Pride Comes Before the Fall

Turn to 1 Kings chapter 12. Have you ever heard the saying, "Pride comes before the fall"? I wonder if the saying started because of the story we're going to look at this morning. Let me quickly catch us up to where we are in the Bible. David passed the kingship on to his son Solomon. Solomon was the wisest man to ever walk the earth but at the end of his life his foreign wives turned his heart from God. When he passed away he passed leadership to his son Rehoboam. This is where we're going to pick up our story this morning, as the fourth king of Israel prepares to lead God's chosen people.

The story begins with Rehoboam going to Shechem, which may be the only wise decision we see him make in this whole story, to be anointed as the new king. Shechem is located about 40 miles north of Jerusalem. It was a good central location for such an important meeting of the people. While in Shechem we meet the second character in our story; Jeroboam. Let's see what he has to say.

So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: "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" (1 Kings 12:3–4).

All of Israel is prepared to serve the new king but only under certain criteria; the king must lighten the heavy load he has placed on all the people. The request doesn't seem too outlandish because the load Solomon had placed on the people was pretty heavy.

Rehoboam responds to Jeroboam by asking for three days to consult people who are smarter than he is. I don't think Rehoboam ever had any intent of lightening the load, I think he was delaying the inevitable. Rehoboam proceeds to talk to the elders. These are wise men who have served alongside his father, men his father consulted. This is a smart move to consult these men before making such a large decision. Rehoboam presents the question to the elders and the advice they give him in the decision is to lighten the load. They tell him if he lightens the load the people will always be his servants. If Rehoboam was to answer the people favorably he would be serving them and taking an interest in their needs.

They replied, "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" (v. 7).

Before he makes his final decision, he consults the young men he had grown up with. He brings the same question to a group of his peers and their response is the complete opposite from the elders. His peers encourage him to increase the load! They encourage him to tell the people that his little pinky finger is thicker than his father's waist! If his dad beat them with whips he would beat them with scorpions. Their response is harsh compared to the elders.

Rehoboam now has a decision to make. Will he be like his grandfather David who was loved by the people of Israel? Does he

have a caring compassionate heart like his grandfather David? Maybe he will rule with wisdom like his father Solomon. Has the young king Rehoboam learned the secret of leading a nation from his father and grandfather or will he respond in pride and arrogance? Before we look at his response I want give us a quick definition of wisdom. Wisdom is applying our gained knowledge we have to certain situations. Another way we could say this is: wisdom is the application of knowledge.

Three days later he returns to the people to deliver his response. Let's do a quick poll. By a raise of hands who thinks he's going to take the advice of the elders which we can sum up in "serve the people and they will serve you"? Who thinks he's going to take the advice of his friends who we can sum up in "increase the load, the people are here to serve you"? If you chose the advice of the young men you're right. Before we look at Rehoboam's response did you notice who Rehoboam **didn't** seek for advice? He doesn't seek the Lord for advice in the matter. He doesn't kneel before the Lord in prayer, with a humble heart, seeking an answer. Look what Theodore Epp says: "As we trust God to give us wisdom for today's decisions, He will lead us a step at a time into what He wants us to be doing in the future." He followed the advice of the young men and said,

"My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions." So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the Lord, to fulfill the word the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite" (verses 14–15).

Rehoboam's response reveals the pride and arrogance in his heart. We see he's not a servant leader like his grandfather David, nor did he learn the way of wisdom from his father Solomon when he said: *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"* (Proverbs 15:1). Rehoboam's response tears the nation of Israel in two kingdoms. Obviously the nation of Israel was fragile if this one decision could break them.

After his response the Northern tribes leave. Rehoboam remains king of the south but the ten northern tribes take matters into their own hands and make Jeroboam their king.

When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David (v. 20).

The Bible is full of stories about decisions that have positive and negative impacts on history. Unfortunately, in our lives, we see the pain of negative decisions all the time. When we're disobedient it doesn't only hurt us, it has the potential to hurt those around us also. The decision Rehoboam made was prideful and arrogant; it tore the nation of Israel in two. If Rehoboam would have obeyed the wise counsel of the

elders it would have saved him. We've seen how one of our character's decisions impacted Israel; let's stay in the same story and see what happens with Jeroboam.

How Quickly We Turn (bad)

The first thing Jeroboam does is to fortify two important cities in what we're now calling the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It's not shocking that Israel is torn in two. While king Jeroboam was serving under Solomon the prophet Ahijah told him this would happen and he would become king. The one thing Jeroboam was instructed to do was to keep Israel worshipping the Lord. After establishing politics and power he fails in the one thing he was supposed to do; he turns from the Lord. Maybe all the years he had spent in Egypt, fleeing from king Solomon, wore on his relationship with the Lord. Maybe he became foggy in his thinking and adopted the practices of the foreign nations. We don't know what happened to his personal relationship with God but we do know what he did next was to preserve his role as king.

Jeroboam thought to himself, "The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam."

After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (verses 26–28).

There are a few problems here we need to address. The first problem we see in Jeroboam's decision is fear. Jeroboam feared Israel reverting back to the house of David. The problem with this fear is that it's based on human emotion. Jeroboam viewed the people as there to support him and not the other way around. This is exactly what we saw in Rehoboam. If Jeroboam would have taken on the mindset of trusting God and knowing he was there to serve the people I think the outcome would have been different.

The second problem we find is selfishness; Jeroboam thought the people may one day kill him. The second problem has a direct connection to the first problem. His thinking was logical. This had happened before when a nation split and someone assumed leadership but then the leadership went back to the original party. When this happens the new leader is killed. I'm not saying this is a healthy leadership style; this was a problem. The problem is Jeroboam's decision was based on self preservation. He is making a decision to save **his** life.

The final problem we see in the Northern Kingdom was how quickly they turned to idol worship. The decision, rooted in fear, was to set up two golden calves that the people began to worship. Some scholars don't think it was Jeroboam's original intent for the people to worship these golden calves but I have a hard

time believing that. If you think back to Moses and Aaron we've already seen this behavior. When Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments from the Lord Aaron made a golden calf for the people to worship. He aided in the people turning from the Lord. Aaron wasn't the only leader to do such a thing. We saw this happen time and time again in the era of the Judges after the passing of Joshua.

This isn't the first time we've seen Israel turn from the Lord their God. In fact, it's almost like Jeroboam plays off Israel's tendency to turn from the Lord. I think Jeroboam exploited Israel's tendency to worship false idols. He may have told the people the golden calves were there as reminders of God but deep inside he knew how weak-willed Israel was. He must have known that in the book of Deuteronomy Israel was commanded to go to the Temple to worship God. The Lord required all Israelite males to go to the Temple three times a year and worship the Lord in Jerusalem. By Jeroboam setting up these calves he was hindering them from the worshipping the Lord. He robbed the Lord of being worshipped.

The decision based in fear and selfishness turned Israel from the Lord. Think about this. Jeroboam wanted to make their worship convenient. He invoked the lazy nature of mankind, played to their intellect and convinced them it was too far to travel to Jerusalem. How come no one stood up and quoted the Law of Moses? Did they already forget the first commandment God gave to Moses that we should have no other gods before God. *"You shall have no other gods before me"* (Ex. 20:3)? After looking at both of these leaders we find the same lesson we can learn: Wise decisions can save us from a lot of pain. Both Rehoboam and Jeroboam made bad decisions and in both cases it resulted in pain for them and Israel.

A Long List of Failures

What Rehoboam and Jeroboam did was set a new foundation for Israel. Their decisions turned the hearts of the people away from the Lord and this became the new norm in Israel. Their failure to obey wise counsel caused more painful decisions than we have time to look at this morning. I would like to quickly mention how we see these painful decisions of Rehoboam and Jeroboam change the path of history. The next six kings in Israel all fail to obey the Lord. Instead of walking by faith in the Lord they chose to walk by sight and gratify their own desires.

The priests still carried on the Temple ministry in Judah, but during the 345 years from Rehoboam to the final king in Jerusalem only 8 of the 19 were classified as good. This is less than half! As for Israel, they had 20 different kings and none of them were called good, they were all classified as "evil." The actions of two characters, in one story, radically alter the trajectory of Israel. The nation that was once characterized as set apart for the Lord is now essentially godless. At this point in the book

of 1 Kings, the attention and focus will turn to the Northern Kingdom. Next week we'll find ourselves in the era of king Ahab who married Jezebel and was a horrible influence on Israel.

It's All About Decisions

What we've learned really boils down to the fact that it's all about decisions. The problem is we quickly forget and return to our old ways. There is hope though. Even though Israel gave up on God, God never gave up on them. God sent the greatest leader the world has ever known in His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came as a servant leader and pointed our wayward hearts back to God. With the New Year right around the corner I have three ways we can apply what we learned from Rehoboam and Jeroboam to our lives.

Knowing wise decisions can save us from a lot of pain, the first thing we need to do is obey wise counsel. The book of Proverbs tell us: *"Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord"* (Proverbs 16:20). When I first arrived at CPC our Elders told me not to make any changes for a year. They wanted me to have time to learn the history of CPC and the culture. At first it sounded great, but after I had been here for a few months there were things that I saw that I wanted to change and that really did need to change. Now I could have pressed ahead and made these changes but I chose to obey our Elders. And you know what? They were right! It was good for me to obey them and wait to make any changes.

The first point is more of a "how" wise decisions can save us from a lot of the pain, the next two are more "what" we can do. We can decide to serve others just like Jesus modeled to us. *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). One way we can show our love to others is by serving them. Serving is a peculiar thing though. Some people have lots of time to give to serving while others have very little time. Some know exactly where to serve while others are trying to find their place. I don't always have a chance to do this so if you are already serving I want to thank you. Thank you for serving our church, thank you for serving our Campus, thank you for serving Jesus this last year.

It's not just about serving in the church. A couple of months ago I had a woman approach me in our courtyard. She had seen a need in the local paper and wanted to do something about it. She didn't know what to do so we prayed. Later that week she contacted this ministry in our community and asked if she could learn more. Over the next couple of weeks she kept me in the loop on what was going on and then one day she scheduled a lunch so we could see if CPC could help out.

After having lunch we really felt like this was a ministry she could be involved in and she kept serving. She found out this ministry wasn't going to have a Thanksgiving so she brought the whole turkey meal. Then she found out she could help at Christmas, so

she did. Every time I hear about what she is doing, in person or email, I smile. You should also see the smile on her face because she has discovered the secret that life is not about being served but serving others and there is huge joy in making the decision to serve others.

Another way we can obey the wise counsel of Jesus is worship God. One day Jesus was teaching in the Temple and the religious leaders tried to trap Him with a question. They wanted to know what He considered to be the greatest commandment. Look at how he responds. ***“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”*** (Matthew 22:37-39). This is the area where Jeroboam failed. Jeroboam failed to lead Israel in worshipping God. We don’t have to make the same mistake; we can make a decision to worship God.

The first thing Jesus says is to love God with all your heart. Another way we could say this would be to worship God with all you have. This coming year, as you think about the decisions you will make, will you make a consequence decision to worship

God? Let me give some examples that apply to everyone here. We can worship God in church like we just did in our singing. We can worship God in our home, at school, while walking or working. We can sing Him praises in our mind or out loud. We can focus on Him and make Him our desire. We can long to spend time with Him and dedicate our life to worshipping Him.

We started out this morning talking about how our decisions impact our life. We looked at Rehoboam and his inability to listen to the wise counsel of the elders and how much pain it caused Israel. Then we saw how Jeroboam lead the people astray. We saw how both of these men set a new pattern for the kings of Israel turning their back on God. We were able to take their failures and learn from them. We learned we need to obey wise counsel, serve others and worship God. Let’s make a decision to obey wise counsel, to serve others, and worship God knowing wise decisions like these can save us from a lot of pain!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.