

King Jeroboam: Rejects God's Word

EBC...morning service....Oct 3 2021

1 Kings 12;25-33

As I begin this morning...I want us to think about the times in our lives when we were faced with new challenges.....going off to college....getting married...a new job...starting a family.....even retirement ...these are exciting times...but can also be scary and unnerving...we wonder...will I be successful?....how will things turn out?....will I graduate from college and get a job?....will my marriage be happy...will I be a good parent....what about this new job promotion...will I be able to handle the added responsibilities.....well what if you were given a specific word from God that not only is God giving you this new beginning....God himself will guarantee your success?

Would you like that kind of assurance?...would you like to know right from the beginning that you will succeed?

What that is exactly what happened to a king that we will be looking at this morning.....in fact God not only gave this king his kingdom...but promised him a sure house...a dynasty.....I am not referring

to David, but Jeroboam...the first king of the northern Kingdom

Listen to the promise God makes to Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11:37-38 through the prophet Ahijah
.....”*And I (God) will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.*”

Jeroboam’s story begins with so much promise...so much hope....God is **giving** Jeroboam the kingdom of Israel.... but before the ink is even dry on the opening lines of his story we see that Jeroboam makes a terrible decision...a decision that will shape the future of Israel.

This is because Jeroboam finds himself in an unique positionhe is not only a new king....but he is the new king of a new kingdom...from the previous chapters we learn that the nation of Israel is now a divided kingdom...just as God prophesied it would be....the southern portion known as Judah was ruled by King Rehoboam..and Jeroboam will reign over the northern kingdom known as Israel

So Jeroboam is the first King of Israel.....Jeroboam has a clean slate....a fresh start....the legacy of the Northern Kingdom is yet to be written....Jeroboam the first.... has a tremendous opportunity to leave his mark....not only on the current generation of Israelites....but all future generations as well.

We see from this morning's account that Jeroboam failed miserablyas a king...as a leader....as someone who was given so much from God...his house proved to be built on sand as Christ described in Matt 7.

We see in verse 25 the agenda of a newly minted king....

V25) Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. And he went out from there and built Penuel.

Jeroboam fortifies Shechem which initially became the capital city of the north and Penuel...two strategic cities in the northern kingdom...this is a practical thing to do.. fortify your kingdom...

The next area of concern is in regards to his throne..who is a threat to my throne..who might overthrow my monarchy?...this is the thing about being king...being on top...there is nowhere to go

but down....kings often see other kings as threats....we see that in the story of king Herod...how he went on a murderous rampage when he found out a king of the Jews had been born.

In verses 26 and 27 we see Jeroboam's fear expressed.

V26) And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David.

V27) If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah"

Jeroboam's concern here is that the people of the north will defect...they will switch their allegiance back to Rehoboam...king of Judah...Jeroboam sees this as a threat to his throne and his life..

And note that Jeroboam sees worship of God as a problem...he says in v 27) *if this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem.....*

Jeroboam believes the trips made to Jerusalemand the people's identification with Judah as the place to worship Godthis will be

the **catalyst for this defection**....and if Judah and Israel re-unite...**he** will be the odd man out.

So was it important that the Jews worship at Jerusalem?....Yes....God **had identified Jerusalem** as the place to worship...many years earlier God told Moses in Deut 12:13,14...*Take care that you do not offer your burnt offering at any place that you see. But at the place that the Lord will chose, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you*....we know from scripture that God chose **Jerusalem** as the place that he would put His name. It was a central place of worship and sacrificean exclusive place...this was in stark contrast to the numerous temples and numerous gods of the pagan religions...I believe limiting the worship to one central location **reinforced the idea of monotheism**...one true place of worship...to worship the one true God....it also had a spiritually unifying effect on the people.

....so the proper worship of God has become a threat to his throne....he believes the pathway to secure his kingdom is to not only **politically** separate from Judah....but a **religious** separation must also be established.

This is where Jeroboam went off the rails.

The splitting of Israel into two nations **was** ordained by God....this is clear in 1 Kings 11...it was punishment for Solomon's idolatrybut what **also** is clear.... is that God never intended a **religious separation** to take place.

Remember Ahijah's prophecy in I Kings 11 tells us that Jeroboam success was **conditional** upon his obedience to God.... *And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes.*

Jeroboam was given the **authority to rule** the northern kingdom by God, but God never gave him **authority to change** how Israel would worship....this was a clear transgression of God's word.

In fact...this is consistent with all of scripture...God has never given man the authority to change how sin is to be atoned forand how God is to be worshiped.

V28) So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."

He took counsel.....you will notice the absence of God in these verses.....there is not thought of seeking God's direction...no thought of praying about these plans.....no... Jeroboam does not want God's input...he wants mans' input...he took counsel...even bad ideas need good planning.

This is often where we get ourselves into trouble...we make important decisions without determining what God's word says....without praying...without seeking counsel from Godly people in our lives

So Jeroboam's think tank gets their heads together....**the problem**.....how can we eliminate the need for the people to worship God by going south to the temple in Jerusalem?.....**their solution**...let's give them a reason to stay here in the north....we will provide an acceptable alternative.....one that will please the people.

And that is the problem...Jeroboam wants to please the people...there is no concern as to whether **God** is pleased or not...just keep the **people** happy...keep them here in the north.

This is a religion whose very design is **motivated by politics**.....remember Jeroboam's primary concern is losing his throne.

This religion's is also **based on pragmatism**...how do we keep the people from going to Jerusalem.

These are Jeroboam's building blocks...politics and pragmatism.

The first thing this counsel decides is to make two golden calves.....this will be the centerpiece of their religion...no need to go to Jerusalem...God can be worshiped here.

Some commentators think that Jeroboam is introducing idolatry with these bull calves...his intent is to worship other gods...
...but I do not think he is asking Israel to worship other gods...remember the problem is geographical....he is trying to offer an **alternative place** for worshiping God...not a **replacement** of God.

I believe his intent was to worship Yahweh, but in a different way.....John MacCarthur says..*he did not want to abolish the worship of God, but merely redesign it to fit his own needs.*

..but even if this is the case...if he has created a symbol for God...the second commandment prohibited the making of any image, **even to represent God**. God cannot be captured or portrayed by an image...how can a part of creation

ever come close to representing the Creator?...the eternal, unchanging, incomparable God...God cannot be reduced to an image.

So Jeroboam's intent is to worship God with the use of these golden calves... but I think it is vital to realize this important truth....we may think our **intentions** are good...but what ultimately matters is what does God think.....listen to what God thinks of Jeroboam's intentions...this is from I kings 14:9 ...where God is pronouncing judgement on Jeroboam...."*but you have done evil above all who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back.....*it's not a far step to go from worshiping an **image of God** to outright idolatry.. even if Jeroboam's purpose is to worship God.....**ultimately this man made religion will become idolatry**...it is the obvious ultimate direction when man puts God behind his back.

How does Jeroboam introduce these calves?
"Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

Have you ever had the feeling that you heard or read something like that before...well here Jeroboam quotes Aaron in Exodus 32: verse 4 and 8...this may be a classic example of taking

scripture out of context...yes Aaron did say this...and yes Aaron made golden calves for worship....but what is left out is the ensuing disaster....God was so angry with the nation that he threatened to wipe them out ...Moses interceded, God relented but many still lost their lives....this is the mark of false religion...a **whole lot of error** wrapped in a **little bit of truth**.

One commentator I read said it is fitting the Jeroboam alludes to the exodus...because that is exactly what he is doing...leading the people in an exodus **away** from God.

So why does Jerobaom quote aaron here?...possibly because Jeroboam wants to **connect** what he was doing with Israel's past...why not **link** your new system of worship with Aaron...the first High Priest....why not **identify** with the Exodus....God's great deliverance of the nation.....every religion needs ties to traditions and history.

...but it does seem to be a bold move to refer to an event with a bad outcome.....maybe Jeroboam was hoping the people would not question him on this...that is another distinction of false religions...people may suspect something is not quite right but are afraid to question those in leadership.

V29) And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

One golden calf was placed at Bethel which was located near the **southern border** of Israel.... the other golden calf was placed at Dan...Dan was at the **northern border** of Israel....two places of worship...it was coast to coast cow worship.

I like what Warren Wiersbe says...*Jeroboam made it easy to sin.*

This is another sign of man-made religions....it is convenient...easy....comfortable...with no real concern of whether something is right or wrong.

V30) Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one.

V31) He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites.

He made temples on high places.....high places were false worship centers....the Canaanites used them to worship their gods... God specifically told the Israelites to destroy these high places as they entered the promised land.....but here Jeroboam is making temples on high places.

We also see in this verse another direct violation of what God had commanded...Jeroboam appoints priests who were from among the people....not of the tribe of Levi.....God had clearly told Moses that priests could only come from the tribe of Levi....not all Levites were priests...but **all priests** were from the tribe of **Levi**.

Is this a big deal?...just make your own order of priests....yes...it is a big deal

Do you ever wonder why so much of the Book of Exodus is dedicated construction?

There are 7 chapters in Exodus where God instructs Moses how to build the tabernacle...the ark of the covenant, the table of shewbread....the lampstand...the bronze altar...the courtyard...even the priests clothing...

then these same details are basically repeated again in another 6 chapters.... describing in great detail how these instructions were carried out....these chapters are long and detailed because they are just that details.....detailed blueprints...and they were to be followed exactly....why...they are a pattern of the heavenly...they point to Christ...our great high priest.....there is a divine purpose and plan behind it all

God is telling us how he is to **be worshiped...it is a big deal**....in Heb 8:5...*They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God , saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain”*.

If you read these chapters in Exodus...you will notice that God is telling man how He wants it built...each instruction is prefaced with *”you shall build”*....it is not up to man to alter...or remodel...or make improvements...it would be outright rebellion for Moses to even think of modifying the dimensions for the courtyard...or suggesting the priests wear a different color....no everything is prescribed by God...and God alone.

That is why Jeroboam’s decision to just set aside the Levites from acting as priests and set up his own order of priests is incredibly offensive to God. This is in complete defiance to what God has commanded.

So Levites are out....everyone else is in...here a priest...there a priest...everywhere a priest priest....anyone could be a priest....but this leads to another attribute of false religions...unqualified people are in leadership.....people not approved by God...are taking part in worship services.

As you read this passage this morning do you sense something is missing....are you not amazed that there is no backlash from the people of Israel.....this new way of worshiping Yahweh is clearly not what the Mosaic law told them..we see clear violation of one command after another....where is the questioning?....where is the protest?...where is the outrage?

We are told in 2 Chronicles 11 that there were some who left Israel...verse 14 tells us the Levites left because Jeroboam would no longer recognize them as priests...and verse 16 says this...*And those who set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came after them (along with the Levites) from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord, the God of their fathers.*

So some people*who set the hearts to seek the Lord...left...they saw the error of Jeroboam's false worship and they wanted to obey God....they set their hearts to seek the Lord.*

But the sad truth is many remained...this tells me many in the north liked this new worship of Yahweh...they no doubt liked it's convenience...perhaps they liked their independence from Judah...they may have reasoned like this..Okay...it may not be exactly like the way we used to worship....**but we are sincere**

and that is all that matters. In John 4:23 Jesus says...Those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.....sincere heartfelt worship is required...but it must also be accompanied by truth.

V 32) And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he made.

Why did Jeroboam need to appoint a new feast?...it is because his new religion had another issue to overcome.....Deut 16:16 commands the Jews to attend three annual feast....the Feast of Unleavened bread which included the Passover...Feast of Weeks also known as Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths...Jeroboam does not want his new religion to be lacking in any way...he needs a festival...so ...he makes one up.....**he devises one in his own heart.**

The feast mentioned here in this verse is probably the Feast of Tabernacles...which was held the 15th day of the **seventh** month...so Jeroboam plans his own feast the 15th day of the **eighth** month.

When we start down the road of compromise...where does it end?....one compromise leads to another...and in the end you have nothing that resembles what God commanded.

I like what Mark Dever says about compromise...*a small distance in trajectory makes for a big difference in destination.*

A little movement from the truth...and if it is allowed to go continue...in the end you are so far from where you started.

Do you notice this new way of worshiping God imitates the Mosaic laws.....it has a place of worship...it has priests...it has festivals...the outward appearance seems authentic...but it is all false....a counterfeit.

Jesus confronted the woman at the well in John 4 with false worship ideas...the woman at the well was a Samaritan and she remarked how they worshiped God on **another mountain** than Jerusalem...and what does Jesus say?....well at least you are sincere....no...*you worship what you do not know*...your worship is wrong...you have the wrong mountain.

Paul tells the Galatians that if you add works to the gospel you have no gospel at all...it is not a **better** gospel...it is not an **improved** gospel...it is **no**

gospel at all. The Judaizers were mixing faith in Christ with works...namely circumcision. We call it syncretism ..the blending of religions....that is exactly what Jeroboam is doing...mixing pagan idolatry with the pattern for worship laid out by God in the Mosaic law.

V33) He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings.

You will notice the phrase...*that he devised from his own heart*....again this verse drives home the point we cannot miss....this whole system is the creation of man...man's attempt to offer sacrifice and atone for sin...man's attempt to come and worship.

Take note how the phrase *he made* saturates this passage...

v28...he made two calves

v31..he made temples

v32....sacrificing to the calves he made..the high places that he made

v33 went up to the altar that he made....

Here is a man made religion...Jeroboam..is making...placing...appointing and devising...where is God in any of this?....

Yet...if you were to ask Jeroboam or any of the people in Israel...are you worshiping the true God in spirit and in truth? ...they would answer with a resounding ..yes.

So what does God think ...God has been silent thus far through these verses.....is God impressed with this new way of worshiping Him?....no....not at all....In the next chapter God sends a prophet to tell Jeroboam exactly what he thinks of this his fake worship service.

As we conclude this morning....

How much of the Northern Kingdom's demise can be directly attributed to Jeroboam?....well we cannot blame it all on him....but I think it is safe to say that if the foundation begins will a huge crack in it....not much good will follow.

Jeroboam not only set the standard but **became** the standard by which future kings of Israel were evaluated by God.... after Jeroboam the northern kingdom would go on to have another 18 or 19 kings...according to God's word all of them did evil in God's sight...and when God evaluates their reign the recurring phrase is this....*They followed*

in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.

Like a broken record...*they followed in the sins of Jeroboam.* King after kingJeroboam was the ungodly benchmark.

If we fast forward to 2 kings 17 this summary statement concerning Israel is given....*When He (God) had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam, the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them commit great sin. The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as He had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.*

Jeroboam set Israel off in the wrong direction and they as a people never righted the ship... God eventually sent the entire nation into exile.

What a promise given to Jeroboam....what an opportunity wasted.

Where did Jeroboam go wrong?...where was it that he made such a horrible turn....I believe it is found in verse 26....**And Jeroboam said in his heart**.....this is the genesis of it all....maybe I am overstating this idea...but I believe the entire

northern kingdom can trace it's demise back to this one key phrase....Jeroboam said in his heart....the foundation of the Northern Kingdom was laid by a man who rejected God's word.

How do we Jeroboam rejected God 's word?....because the remainder of verses 26 and 27 tell us **what** he was thinking....in essence he is saying....if I allow this people to worship God at Jerusalem...I will lose my kingdom.

This shows the foolish heart of a man who rejects God's word.....because what Jeroboam is thinking is not true...in fact, it is completely opposite to what God told him. God said through the prophet Ahijah...walk in my ways and keep my commandments and I will give you a sure house

Jeroboam **thinks** obedience to God will **cost** him the kingdom...
but God **says**....obey me and I will **give** you the kingdom.

Jeroboam set aside what God said...and is relying on his own ingenuity...his own intuition...his own understanding

Proverbs 3:4,5 come to mind... *Trust in the lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own*

understanding...in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your steps.

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This is a wonderful promise isn't it...but I do not think Jeroboam had this verse on his fridge....in fact he was doing the exact opposite ...he was **not** trusting God...but leaning to his **own understanding**

You can almost hear Jeroboam say...*thank you for the kingdom ...God.....but I can take it from here.*

Jeroboam foolishly thought he could successfully reign independent of God.

It is ironic the very course of action that Jeroboam pursued...the actions he thought would **secure** his kingdom...is the very course of action that **sealed his doom.**

Jeroboam sought to **establish** his kingdom on idolatry.....the same idolatry Solomon **lost** his kingdom.

What about you this morning....what are you saying in your heart...what do you meditate on....what are you filling your mind with?...is it the word of God?...or is it your own thoughts?...this is a crucial question...because what we think will ultimately determine how we live...our thoughts dictate our actions...once

Jeroboam made the decision to not worship God at Jerusalem...I believe it became all the more easier to disobey other commands of God....like I said earlier....when we start down the road of compromise ...where does it end?....Spurgeon referred to it as a slippery slope....once you stray from the influence of God's word you may not even realize how far you have drifted from God.

The past 2 years have been difficult and unusual to say the least....but all the more reasons to be in the Word....studying and meditating on it...so when we think in our heartwe are thinking God's thoughts.

So Jeroboam had nothing to fear...if...if he trusted God's word...if he believed what God said....is this not where all fear and worry come from...we stop believing God and trusting His word.

The first 4 verses of Psalm 119 read like this...

Blessed are those whose way is blameless,

Who walk in the law of the Lord!

Blessed are those who keep His testimonies

Who seek Him with their whole heart

Who also do no wrong, but walk in His ways

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.

Let's close in prayer...

Heavenly Father.....thank you for this narrative from your word this morning...a clear account of Jeroboam rejecting the promise You gave to him....and the resulting consequences of setting aside Your truth....it was the source of all his problems...his worry...fear....doubts....his bad choices.... oh how we need to **know** your word...how we need to **obey** your word...how we need to **trust** your word.

Stir our hearts with these truths we pray. Amen.