

## The Ungodly Deeds of Jeroboam I

### 1 Kings 12:25-33

1 Kings 12:25-33 – *“Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom may return to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.”*

*Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.*

*Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.”*

### Background Notes

The history of the divided kingdom begins in 1 Kings 12. The United Monarchy under Kings Saul, David and Solomon was over. Now there were two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Jeroboam I was the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel. In the old Testament, the northern kingdom is sometimes known as “Ephraim,” because Ephraim was the largest tribe in the north. Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, was the first king of the southern kingdom of Judah.

Nineteen kings would come to the throne in the north, and all of them were bad kings. Twenty kings would reign over the southern kingdom of Judah. Eight of them were good kings, but most of them were bad kings.

1 Kings 12:25-33 is the record of some of the sins of wicked King Jeroboam I as he began his reign. Jeroboam sinfully set up a new system of worship in the northern kingdom. He had two golden calf idols constructed. He placed one in the far north at Dan and the other one he set up at Bethel, near the border with the kingdom of Judah. He set up shrines on the high places (v31), and established a priesthood of men who were not of the tribe of Levi, in direct violation of God’s Law. Furthermore, he ordained a religious feast that God had not ordained.

Jeroboam strategically placed the golden calf shrine at Bethel so the people of the northern kingdom would not have to take the long journey past Bethel to the Temple in Jerusalem. Rather they could just stop and worship at Bethel.

Jeroboam was afraid that the people of the north would change their allegiance if they went to Jerusalem, which was in the southern kingdom of Judah: *“If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.”*

Jeroboam’s fears were realized when a number of the godly people from the northern kingdom not only continued to go up to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship the Lord, but they actually moved south to the kingdom of Judah. 2 Chronicles 11:14 says, *“For the Levites left their common-lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD...”* And verse 16 says, *“And after the Levites left, those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers.”*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Leaders of God’s people must be measured by Scripture.

Was King Jeroboam a good king or a bad king? According to Scripture, he was a **bad** king. In fact, over and over again in both 1 and 2 Kings we read that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, was “the king who made Israel sin.” The people of Israel were God’s people, but Jeroboam led them into sin. What a terrible testimony!

Now, if you were to analyze Jeroboam’s reign only from a political point of view, you might conclude that he wasn’t such a bad king. After all, he successfully rallied ten tribes in Israel, and started the northern kingdom. He reigned for 21 years, and founded a kingdom that lasted for 200 years. He selected Shechem, a secure location in the mountains of Ephraim (v25), for his capital city. He built the fortified city of Penuel on the east side of the Jordan to protect the eastern flank of his kingdom.

I’m sure the secular press of the day considered Jeroboam a pretty good king. But the voices of the secular media don’t have the last word - then or today. **God has the last word!** And good leaders are determined by how they measure up to Scripture!

When measured by Scripture, Jeroboam was a terrible king. He sponsored and condoned idolatry. He made golden calf idols and enshrined them in Dan and Bethel. He persuaded the people of his kingdom not to go up to the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. By the way – where did he get the idea of golden calf idols? Maybe Exodus 32, where Aaron sinned in molding a golden calf? Jeroboam was an evil king when measured by Scripture.

What about the leaders of God's people today? Many people who have big churches and large followings are considered good leaders - but how do they measure up to Scripture? Are they preaching the gospel, and making disciples for our Lord Jesus Christ? Are they carrying out discipline for sin in their churches or ministries? Are they above reproach when it comes to their sexual conduct? Are they free from the love of money and the sin of materialism? The leaders of the people of God must be measured by Scripture.

## **2. Changes in the worship of God must be monitored by Scripture.**

If Scripture had monitored the changes in worship that Jeroboam initiated, these changes never would have continued. The shrines would have been closed down because no one would have come to worship the golden calves. They were "graven images," or molded images, and were expressly forbidden by Scripture (Exodus 20). No sacrifices would have been made on any altar in the northern kingdom because, according to Scripture, sacrifices were to be made only at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Jeroboam ordained a new feast, apparently to replace the Feast of Tabernacles, which would not have been celebrated because it was not prescribed in Scripture. The shrine priests would have been thrown out of office because they were not from the tribe of Levi, and therefore unscriptural. Unfortunately, all Jeroboam's changes in worship were unscriptural, and the northern kingdom continued on their downward road of departure from the Lord.

What about our worship of the Lord today? What about changes? The Bible is not against change as long as it's within the bounds and limits of Scripture.

Worship can be defined as thanking and praising God for who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. We can worship God with songs and prayers, and readings and meditations from Scripture. Our Christian service can also be worship, because whatever we do that acknowledges God and gives Him glory is worship. There is individual worship and corporate worship. There can be structured worship services and unstructured worship. Obviously, worship services can become boxed in by tradition, and once tradition is established, there will be always be well-meaning believers who don't want to see *any* change! Do you know any folks like that?

A Christian lady once told me that she didn't want to see any changes in the form and structure of the worship in her church because 2 Thessalonians 2:15 says, "*Therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions that you were taught.*" I explained the importance of recognizing context to her. In the context of 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul was not discussing the form of the worship service at her church, but rather cautioning the Thessalonian believers to continue in the doctrine that they had been taught. Note the verse from the very careful Darby translation: "*So then, brethren, stand firm and hold fast to the instructions which you have been taught, whether by word or our letter.*"

Now, there's nothing wrong with keeping traditional worship services if they are in line with Scripture, and if they bring glory to God. However, there's nothing wrong with bringing in some changes either - as long as the changes are Scriptural! There can be changes in time and length of service. There can be changes in individual and corporate participation. There can be changes as to the amount and type of music, and the amount of prayer, and the amount of sharing, preaching or testimony.

Music, of course, is a hot topic these days in reference to worship, and there are bound to be changes in this area. Musical instruments that are used in worship services today may be somewhat different from the musical instruments used for worship in Bible days, as are the tunes and melodies used for hymns of worship. There have been changes over the years, but these changes are generally within the bounds of Scripture. However, in some "churches" songs of praise are being sung to "The Earth, Our Mother." That is idolatry! The Creator alone is to be worshiped. And churches that hold worship services to celebrate homosexual relationships are way outside the boundaries set by Scripture. These are extreme examples, but Scripture should guide all aspects of the worship of God.

Remember - idolatry is not only the worship of false gods, but it also can be the ***unscriptural worship of the true God***. Any changes in the worship of God must be monitored by Scripture.

## **Practical Application**

### **Watch out for incremental departure from the Lord!**

When Jeroboam I set up the golden calf shrines at Dan and Bethel, he probably did not issue a command that all worship of the Lord should cease. In fact, it may be that the shrines were first introduced as "aids to worship," or the calf idols were seen as local gods who helped and supported the one true supreme God of Israel. But worship at the golden calf shrines was a serious step of departure from the Lord.

The same was true of the shrines that Jeroboam made on the high places. At first people sacrificed to the Lord on these high places, but that was wrong because sacrifice was only to be made at the Temple in Jerusalem. Little by little, their downward slide continued.

Do you see the obvious practical application? Departure from the Lord usually doesn't happen all in one big step. It happens little by little. It may start by not having a quiet time with the Lord each day. Then you begin to miss your regular time of meeting with other believers. You move from joyfully serving the Lord to occasional token service, and then to no service.

Where are you now in your walk with the Lord? Watch out for incremental departure from the Lord!