

Lesson 2 11 August 2013

Israel's Decline and Confusion

Lesson Scope: [1 Kings 15:25-16:34](#)

Lesson Focus

Israel's Golden Age was over. The nation was divided—Jeroboam in the north with ten tribes and Rehoboam in the south with two tribes. The crumbling of Israel's morale and vitality had begun with Solomon's preoccupation with his materialistic and sensual pursuits. Jeroboam's sin that led Israel to sin produced a steady decline until the days of King Ahab, who did worse than any before him. Apostasy always takes people further into sin than they originally intend to go. Spiritual decline and confusion are the inevitable results of departure from God.

The darkness only deepens the farther one moves from God. There is no darkness blacker than spiritual darkness. With her leaders deliberately bent on turning away from the true God to gods made of gold, Israel was headed into the abyss of drunkenness, sensuality, and violence that would ultimately bring her destruction.

It is easier to see apostasy in others than in ourselves; however, anyone who has been in a right relationship with God has the potential to be an apostate. This lesson ought to be a warning to each of us of what could happen to us as individuals or as a church group if we choose to begin, even in small ways, to depart from God's Word.

We all tend to think we are doing things about right. We must continually compare ourselves with the written Word of God and the understanding of spiritual brethren to see if we are where God intends us to be.

The legacy of faithfulness must be maintained in each generation. The erosion of faithfulness draws individuals into a vortex of turmoil and departure from truth.

Lesson Aim: To see the degenerating effects of apostasy.

Theme Verse: [2 Timothy 3:13](#). But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

Lesson Text

"In the Way of Jeroboam

1 Kings 15:25-27 ²⁵ And Nadab the son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. ²⁶ And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin. ²⁷ And Bashar the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon.

1 Kings 16:1-3 ¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, ² Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; ³ Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

1 Kings 16:8-10 ⁸ In the twenty and sixth year of Asa king of Judah began Elah the son of Baasha to reign over Israel in Tirzah, two years. ⁹ And his servant Zimri, captain of half *his* chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza steward of *his* house in Tirzah. ¹⁰ And Zimri went in and smote him, and killed him, in the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his stead.

1 Kings 16:15-18 ¹⁵ In the twenty and seventh year of Asa king of Judah did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah. And the people *were* encamped against Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines. ¹⁶ And the people *that were* encamped heard say Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp. ¹⁷ And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. ¹⁸ And it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died,

"Worse Than All ... Before Him"

1 Kings 16:21 ²¹ Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri.

1 Kings 16:23 ²³ In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah.

1 Kings 16:25²⁵ But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that *were* before him.

1 Kings 16:28²⁸ So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria; and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.

1 Kings 16:31-33³¹ And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.³² And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.³³ And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

Questions for Study

"In the Way of Jeroboam"

1. What were the initial steps in Israel's history that led to the spiritual climate in this lesson?
2. Why do contention and evil always accompany apostasy?
3. In what ways might we reveal a disdain for God? for human life?
4. With all its distasteful results, what makes a course of apostasy attractive to so many?

"Worse Than All ... Before Him"

5. From these verses, list the degenerating steps of Israel's spiritual decline.
6. Contrast the experience of spiritual faithfulness with apostasy.
7. In what ways is apostasy like a whirlpool?
8. How can we personally and collectively guard against our slipping into apostasy?

Analyzing the Passage

The relationship between Judah and Israel for the roughly two-hundred and ten-year period that they lived side by side can be summed up in the following way. The first eighty years was marked by continuous warfare. The next eighty years was a time of relative peace; it was followed by fifty years of sporadic warfare. At the close of this period, Assyria took Israel captive.

Rejecting the authority of law always leads to anarchy, mayhem, and murder. Jeroboam's dynasty ended with the murder of his son Nadab (1 Kings 15:27). His murderer and successor, Baasha, annihilated the descendants of Jeroboam, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Ahijah.

This cycle was repeated by Zimri, whose seven-day reign ended in his own

fiery suicide (1 Kings 16:18). At this point Israel was divided in a power struggle between Omri and Tibni (1 Kings 16:21), which lasted for four years. Omri's party prevailed. He built Samaria and moved his capital there (1 Kings 16:24), established ties with Phoenicia, and became the most wicked king of Israel up to his time (16:25). Then his son Ahab outdid him in wickedness (1 Kings 16:33), marrying a Phoenician named Jezebel. Under her influence he adopted Baal worship.

Principles and Applications

"In the Way of Jeroboam"

1. Apostates influence others in the path of sin (1 Kings 15:25-26). Jeroboam's poor example reproduced itself in his son. "Like father, like son," while not a Bible quote, has a counterpart in Ezekiel 16:44: "as is the mother, so is her daughter." One generation influences the next; and if not deliberately influenced for the good, the next generation will grow worse because of the native human tendency toward evil.

2. Apostasy produces a life of contention and evil actions (1 Kings 15:27). When God reigns within, He brings peace, rest, and power to do right. Logically, when God is dethroned, these virtues disintegrate. The baser elements of fallen humanity display themselves when God is rejected. Disunity, immorality, and violence are sure to follow godlessness.

3. Apostasy removes people from God's blessing (1 Kings 16:1-3). Baasha should have remembered the goodness of God in exalting him from the dust. However, as we all are prone to do, he chose to take his own selfish way. In doing so he angered God and brought upon himself and his family certain destruction. God's blessing is conditional. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

4. Apostasy leads to a self-pleasing and degrading lifestyle (1 Kings 16:8-10). We all are candidates for moral failure. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Turning away from God and His prescribed safeguards leaves one wide open to sins that he would at one time have regarded with utter contempt. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble" (Proverbs 4:18, 19). The way of the wicked is full of treachery and tragedy. To take this course is the height of folly. Yet many are doing it, because it feels good and seems right.

5. Apostasy produces a disdain for the sacredness of human life (1 Kings 6:15-18). Turning from the Creator and Giver of life is turning toward the destroyer of life. We shudder at the gruesomeness of Hitler's Holocaust. However, our society, in taking a humanistic, secularist course, has become guilty of a greater holocaust: Abortion has destroyed nearly four times as many lives in the past four decades as Hitler's Holocaust did. In barring God from her institutions, our society is reaping unprecedented immorality, confusion, and violence. We may think we are above murder, but it is a sobering fact that we have within our own hearts the same fallen nature as the worst of sinners. It is within all of us to stoop to the lowest possible sin. We all desperately need God to keep us from destroying ourselves.

"Worse Than All ... Before Him"

6. Apostasy leads to disunity and disloyalty (1 Kings 16:21). The common ground of God and His purposes was lost to a people that were bent on having its own way. They were looking for some "new" way, not God's. Today there are many new methods of worship, new traditions, new and "better" ways of reaching the lost. People want to be entertained, not preached at. The result is a whole catalog of "worship" practices to choose from. You can take whatever seems to fit your taste and supposedly enjoy yourself, while in reality your soul is famished for lack of real spiritual support from God's Word.

7. Apostasy is a downward course away from God's law (1 Kings 16:23-28).

The course away from God ultimately becomes extremely narrow and limiting. One becomes all wrapped up in his own base desires, till that is all he can see. On the other hand, the narrow way opens into an abundant entrance (2 Peter 1:11). To take God's way is to find perpetual blessings. There are always new heights of spiritual progress to gain.

8. Apostates take deliberate steps to promote sinful practices (1 Kings 16:31). Ahab began life with a clean slate like everyone else; but continued, purposeful rebellion against God hardened him to the point that marrying Jezebel and worshiping her god was no big thing anymore. Being an Israelite, did he not know better? He could have and he should have, but by this time he was so spiritually cold and blind that God's way no longer mattered. When a person deliberately takes his own way, he trivializes God's way. God's Word becomes nil to him, and whatever he is inclined to do, he does.

9. Apostates use ungodly worship practices to further the course of sin

(16:32). Many churches in our time have become mere entertainment centers. Weddings have become fashion shows. Funerals have become celebrations of the departed person's life. In the Sunday morning service, now the time is used for drama, dance, and movies instead of Bible study and preaching. Is there any wonder that there is a spiritual dearth within even professing Christianity today?

10. Apostasy invokes the wrath of God (1 Kings 16:33). God does not take lightly His being ignored and trampled upon. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and rightful Owner of every life and is rightfully provoked and angered by His rejection. Why would He not be? "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). For God to share His glory with another would be to acknowledge another as His equal, and God has no equal.

Answers to Questions

1. What were the initial steps in Israel's history that led to the spiritual climate in this lesson?

Solomon's intense search for pleasure and his other earthly pursuits, coupled with his neglect of God's law, surely must have had a devastating effect on his people. By the end of his reign, the people wanted some alternative.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel received Jeroboam as king. He set the stage for idolatry in future generations. His example in setting up the golden calves for worship influenced the next generation. What is accepted in one generation is usually accelerated in the next.

2. Why do contention and evil always accompany apostasy?

Order, kindness, selflessness, right thinking, and right living are all good and come only from God. To leave God is to leave the source from which these virtues spring. When self-rules in hearts, there can be no true unity, because each person is serving his own interests. When God is ruling in each heart, true unity can be a reality. Good and evil do not coexist on the throne of one's heart. It is one or the other. Every day we each have the solemn responsibility of choosing which it will be.

3. In what ways might we reveal a disdain for God? for human life?

Holding to our own way when it conflicts with God's way, refusing to take seriously a brother's word of challenge, smiling in derision at the church's position on any issue that we think is too narrow or too demanding, and reserving a bit of self that no one else may touch are all ways that we may hold God in disdain.

We may hold human life in disdain by carelessness in our driving on the road or by taking chances around dangerous equipment—removing shields, not heeding warnings, and so forth. We might not refer to another person as a fool (Matthew 5:22), but an attitude of contempt for anyone, regardless of what he has done to us, is disdainful. Christ's attitude toward His crucifiers was not one of derision and disdain. It was one of pity and mercy. We are called to be of the same mind as He was (Philippians 2:5).

4. With all its distasteful results, what makes a course of apostasy attractive to so many?

There is a blindness that always goes along with taking one's own way. Apostasy is a heart issue that works its way out into practice.

When one chooses the path of apostasy, he has already been blinded to its consequences.

Because apostasy does not call for the radical cutting off of our old nature, it is an easier life in the short run. Those who follow apostasy are much too shortsighted. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 16:25). When man becomes the measure of all things, feelings become more important than the cold, hard facts of life. Eternal absolutes are replaced by situation ethics.

5. From these verses, list the degenerating steps of Israel's spiritual decline. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was fragmented. Two opposing groups were vying for power at the expense of the other. Both Tibni and Omri were godless and spiritually destitute themselves. Omri gained the upper hand and excelled in doing evil above all those before him. But his son Ahab outdid even his father in evil. He married a Baal worshiper, became a Baal worshiper himself, and promoted this worship in Israel. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

6. Contrast the experience of spiritual faithfulness with apostasy.

God's way is the only way that leads to spiritual growth and vitality. Our own way is extremely limiting and decaying to our moral fiber.

God's way is the way of spiritual rest and composure. Our own way, while promising freedom and fulfillment, is tumultuous and empty and will ultimately end in profound disappointment.

God's way, although it may seem slow to us at times, if it is steadily and perseveringly followed, leads us upward to more Godlikeness. Our own way leads only downward, making us more and more into the image of the father of our old nature, the devil. This course too may begin slowly; but in most cases, because of our natural tendency to gravitate toward the baser

things of life, it quickly speeds up. With the eternal absolutes removed, all becomes relative, and one is soon spiraling out of control into things he considered unthinkable before.

7. In what ways is apostasy like a whirlpool?

A whirlpool is a whirling mass of water that draws anything in its path into itself with tremendous suctioning power. It becomes increasingly irresistible as it takes its victim deeper. So it is with apostasy. It at first may draw ever so gently; but if followed to its logical conclusion, it becomes a force so great and so disorienting that its victims no longer have the desire or the power to be released from its grip. It ends in certain death.

8. How can we personally and collectively guard against our slipping into apostasy?

We must stay close to God by carefully seeking His will and living up to the light that we already have. A sincere seeker who is ready to stop at nothing less than complete obedience to the written Word of God will not be disappointed or misled. "And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:7).

Important Teachings

1. Apostates influence others in the path of sin (15:25, 26).
2. Apostasy produces a life of contention and evil actions (15:27).
3. Apostasy removes people from God's blessing (16:1-3).
4. Apostasy leads to a self-pleasing and degrading lifestyle (16:8-10).
5. Apostasy produces a disdain for the sacredness of human life (16:15-18).
6. Apostasy leads to disunity and disloyalty (16:21).
7. Apostasy is a downward course away from God's law (16:23-28).
8. Apostates take deliberate steps to promote sinful practices (16:31).
9. Apostates use ungodly worship practices to further the course of sin (16:32).
10. Apostasy invokes the wrath of God (16:33).

Summarizing the Lesson

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:12-14).

Research Guide

1. The Book of Judges records numerous cycles of apostasy and revival. Reviewing these accounts will provide insights into the causes and cure for apostasy.
2. The message to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) is God's voice against apostasy.
3. Eastern Mennonite Testimony articles: "God's People Using Philistine Methods" by Merle Ruth (August, 1970) and "Processes of Conditioning" by David G. Burkholder (January, 1974).