

Jeroboam Leads Israel Into Idolatry

Lesson Scope: [1 Kings 12:20-33](#) and [14:1-20](#)

Lesson Focus

When Solomon saw that Jeroboam was an industrious young man and "a mighty man of valour," he gave him extensive responsibilities.

Just outside Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah met Jeroboam and tore the new garment he was wearing into twelve pieces. Then he gave ten pieces to Jeroboam, signifying that God had chosen him to be king over ten tribes of Israel. This was a great opportunity. God promised to build him a sure house, as He had for David, if he would keep God's commandments and walk in His ways.

Upon hearing of this prophecy, Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but he fled to Egypt and remained there until Solomon died. When the elders of Israel met to anoint Rehoboam king, they sent for Jeroboam to come and help them negotiate favorable consideration from Rehoboam. Ten tribes rebelled against Rehoboam's harsh words and chose Jeroboam to be their king. Jeroboam did not take God's promises to heart; nor did he lead Israel to obey God's commandments. He established idolatry in Israel, leading the people on a wrong course and bringing judgment upon them.

One person's choice affects not only himself and his contemporaries but also many generations to come. As generations pass, one person's failure can multiply into a myriad of lost souls.

This lesson calls to our attention the fact that each of us exerts an influence, directly or indirectly, on all who have contact with us. Our influence is not neutral. We influence for right or for wrong by the way we live. While this lesson relates to Jeroboam's wrong influence on Israel, perhaps you could give a few positive examples of ways Jeroboam could have left a good influence if he had chosen rightly and think of some ways we can be the right kind of influence on those who are watching us. Not only do we want to avoid the consequences of leading others astray, but we want to establish right patterns of conduct that will lead others in the way of truth

Lesson Aim: To take warning from the consequences of influencing others to go astray.

Theme Verse: [1 Timothy 4:16](#). Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Lesson Text

A Fearful Heart

[1 Kings 12:20](#) ²⁰ And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.

[1 Kings 12:26-27](#) ²⁶ And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: ²⁷ If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

A Scheming Mind

[1 Kings 12:28-33](#) ²⁸ Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of* gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. ²⁹ And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. ³⁰ And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan. ³¹ And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. ³² And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that *is* in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. ³³ So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

A Judged Nation

1 Kings 14:1-2 ¹ At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. ² And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there *is* Ahijah the prophet, which told me that *I should be* king over this people.

1 Kings 14:5-15 ⁵ And the LORD said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son; for he *is* sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her: for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself *to be* another woman. ⁶ And it was *so*, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself *to be* another? for I *am* sent to thee *with heavy tidings*. ⁷ Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, ⁸ And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee: and *yet* thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do *that only which was* right in mine eyes; ⁹ But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: ¹⁰ Therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, *and* him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. ¹¹ Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken *it*. ¹² Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: *and* when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. ¹³ And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found *some* good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. ¹⁴ Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now. ¹⁵ For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger.

Questions for Study

A Fearful Heart

1. What fears motivated Jeroboam?
2. Were Jeroboam's fears valid? Explain.

A Scheming Mind

3. In what ways did Jeroboam's religious system deviate from God's pattern?
4. What are some worship practices of churches today that fail to honor God?
5. How can the appeal of easy religion affect us today? Why is partial obedience deceptive?

A Judged Nation

6. What incentives did Jeroboam have for telling his wife to disguise herself before going to the house of Ahijah?
7. How does God respond to those who live in disobedience and yet expect His help in their time of need?
8. What steps can we take to avoid the fate of Jeroboam?

Analyzing the Passage

When the ten tribes rebelled against the house of David, they forfeited the investment their fathers had made in the temple of Jerusalem and in the promises that God had made to David. Instead, they followed a man who was primarily concerned with his own popularity and who established a religious system to accomplish his purpose.

"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem" (12:28), Jeroboam told the people. He offered them an easy alternative, which he hoped would keep them loyal to him. He appointed priests who were not sons of Levi in an effort to neutralize the influence of the Levites living among them. He appointed an alternate feast day, thus intending to sever ties with the worship activities in Jerusalem.

Ironically, when Jeroboam's son became sick, he did not seek the priests he had appointed; nor did he ask counsel of the golden calves he had set up. Obviously the religion he had devised for his people could not meet his own need. Instead, Jeroboam sent his wife in disguise to Judah to the house of Ahijah, the prophet of God who had told him he would be king over Israel. Jeroboam could count on Ahijah to learn what would become of his son.

Jeroboam's wife received a heavy message of judgment. Only his ailing son, Abijah, would be buried. The rest would be eaten by dogs or consumed by birds. Such was the end for a man who sinned and who made Israel to sin.

Principles and Applications

A Fearful Heart

1. Selfish interests lead away from God (12:26, 27). Jeroboam's carnal thought patterns made him more concerned about his own position than about principle. He apparently did not believe God's promise to bless him and his kingdom if he would walk in God's ways. He did not care that the religious system he devised was of no benefit to his people.

2. Promoting an easy religion ends in adopting false worship (12:27, 28). How strange that the people had been going up to Jerusalem for years, never considering it to be too much for them. Now Jeroboam was offering a worship experience with less sacrifice.

The truth is that no distance is too great if it is necessary to maintain true faith and proper worship. Does the ease of living today cause us to shun sacrifice for the cause of Christ?

A Scheming Mind

3. To deviate from God-prescribed patterns of worship is sinful (12:29, 30). We should be concerned if our main reason for attending a public worship service is to hear a certain speaker or to visit with our friends. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Much of what is called contemporary worship is designed to please the people rather than God. Pleasing the senses and stiffing the emotions make people feel good without meeting their true spiritual needs.

4. Promoting heathen practices produces ungodly people (12:31). We become like what we worship. True worship will move us to reach out in faith and humility for the love and holiness of the God we adore. False worship leaves its adherents spiritually impoverished, morally degenerated, and deplorably deceived.

5. Partial obedience to God in worship practices is a mockery (12:32, 33). Jeroboam's feast was a substitute for the one God had commanded. It did not honor God.

We should beware of innovations that attempt to imitate Biblical pat-

terns but are a mockery of God. Giving a hug in place of the Christian greeting might seem harmless on the surface, but that practice inevitably leads to indiscriminate use with other people's partners and with nonbelievers.

A Judged Nation

6. Eventually, even deceivers wish for the true answers to life's issues (14:1-2). While he wanted his people to be content with the false worship he had established, Jeroboam knew in his heart that only the prophet of God would provide trustworthy answers to his questions.

Millions of dollars are spent today on research as scientists attempt to discover and explain origins, when God has already revealed those things in His Word. How foolish and wasteful!

7. God's judgment sweeps the deceiver's pretense completely away (14:5, 6). Pretense and hypocrisy are useless tactics when one is dealing with God. When God comes in judgment, He will deal with us as we truly are, not as we would like Him to view us.

8. The short-term personal gain of unholy desires pales before the tremendous cost of lost opportunity (14:7-9). That which Jeroboam gained by the establishment of calf worship was of short duration when compared to what he could have had if he had followed God. Let us not be satisfied with schemes that offer an immediate benefit but cost us greatly in the end.

9. Death and destruction is the fixed judgment for deceivers (14:11-12). Not only Jeroboam but also all Israel under his influence suffered the judgment of God. Judgment is most severe for those who use deception to lead others astray.

10. God will cut off those who sin and who cause others to sin (14:14-16). Jeroboam's house would be cut off by one whom God would raise up for that purpose. Instead of the sure house He had offered Jeroboam, God completely uprooted his house and scattered Israel into captivity in foreign lands.

Important Teachings

1. Selfish interests lead away from God (12:26, 27).
2. Promoting an easy religion ends in adopting false worship (12:27, 28).
3. To deviate from God-prescribed patterns of worship is sinful (12:29-

30).

4. Promoting heathen practices produces ungodly people (12:31).

5. Partial obedience to God in worship practices is a mockery (12:32, 33).

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6. God's judgment sweeps the deceiver's pretense completely away (14:5, 6).

7. The short-term personal gain of unholy desires pales before the tremendous cost of lost opportunity (14:7-9).

8. Death and destruction is the fixed judgment for deceivers (14:11, 12).

9. God will cut off those who sin and who cause others to sin (14:14-16).

Answers to Questions

1. What fears motivated Jeroboam?

Jeroboam feared the loss of his people's loyalty. He feared (perhaps mistakenly) that his life was in danger. He feared the loss of his position as king.

2. Were Jeroboam's fears valid? Explain.

No. Jeroboam did not believe God's promise through Ahijah to build Jeroboam a sure house as He had done for David (1 Kings 11:38).

3. In what ways did Jeroboam's religious system deviate from God's pattern?

Two calves became the objects of worship, replacing God. Bethel and Dan became the places for worship, replacing the temple at Jerusalem where God had chosen to put His Name. The date of the feast Jeroboam appointed was changed to the eighth month. It mimicked the Feast of Tabernacles God had appointed to be held in the seventh month.

4. What are some worship practices of churches today that fail to honor God?

Many churches today practice open Communion, in which anyone present may participate. They ordain women preachers, offer worldly forms of entertainment, and maintain a casual atmosphere in the assembly. These are just a few examples. Others that may come closer to us would be a failure to teach all the Scriptural commands, an accommodation to the erosion of practical applications, or an emphasis on the

philosophies of popular contemporary writers.

5. How can the appeal of easy religion affect us today? Why is partial obedience deceptive?

An easy lifestyle, with gadgets that can offer instant gratification, may condition us to desire a religion that is quick and easy. We might become bitter or dissatisfied with the disciplines God brings into our lives. We might shun sacrifice or refuse to be patient and wait for God's purposes to be accomplished.

Partial obedience lulls people into a state of complacency; they console themselves that they are at least partially obedient. They are blinded to the fact that partial obedience is disobedience. Using the words of Scripture and religious-sounding terminology, leaders like Jeroboam deceive and mislead their people to believe their religion is genuine.

6. What incentives did Jeroboam have for telling his wife to disguise herself before going to the house of Ahijah?

Jeroboam recognized the hypocrisy of bypassing the religious system he had set up, to seek for a word from the true prophet of God in Judah. He did not want his own people to learn about this; nor did he want Ahijah to learn his wife's identity.

7. How does God respond to those who live in disobedience and yet expect His help in their time of need?

Those who worship other gods and put their trust in them will find that God leaves them to the mercy of those gods and to their own devices. Those who live in disobedience cannot expect God's help unless they repent and turn from their disobedience.

8. What steps can we take to avoid the fate of Jeroboam?

We must live in obedience to God so that our lives provide a good example for others to follow. We should teach and encourage others to follow us as we follow Christ. We should consider how any sin on our part can confuse others and cause them to stumble.

Summarizing the Lesson

What a sad state of affairs! Jeroboam forsook God and His commandments to set up false gods and a worthless system of worship. He did wrong himself and caused the nation of Israel to do wrong.

Let us learn the lesson that is here for us. Wrongdoing will result in loss not only for us but also for the generations following us.

Research Guide

1. Read 1 Kings 15:25-30, where Ahijah's prophecy concerning Jeroboam was fulfilled.
2. Read 2 Chronicles 13 for some additional history about Jeroboam's conflict with Judah.