
Jeroboam

by: Ronald L. Dart

“Never take council of your fears.” It is said that Andrew Jackson is the one who said that, but it may have come earlier than that. He also plainly read his Bible. It’s fascinating how often fear strips a man of victories already won.

This was the case of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. After the death of Solomon, God handed him the largest portion of Israel, 10 out of the 12 tribes of Israel. He was a good man, an energetic leader, but he was afraid that after having made the break with Solomon’s son Rehoboam, the people would eventually return to the unity of the Temple and indeed it was not an unreasonable fear.

Year after year the commandment of God said, "Three times in a year shall all your males come to appear before God in the place that he shall choose" (Deuteronomy 16:16). And it lays out God's annual Holy Days they had to observe, and of course that Place, was Jerusalem, at the Temple that Solomon built.

Jeroboam thought this over and he thought, "Every year, come Feast of Tabernacles time, these people are going to get nostalgic for Jerusalem, and they are going to wander back down to Jerusalem and that nostalgia will cause them eventually to return to the rulership of Rehoboam. Then they’ll want to kill me, and I’ll lose the kingdom." Now never mind that God had given him the kingdom and stood surety for it. This was God's promise and He would have stood by him come what may, but he was afraid, and his fear led him to a decision with disastrous long-term consequences.

The Story of Jeroboam

You’ll find this story of Jeroboam in 1st Kings Chapter 12 beginning in Verse 28. "The king took advice from his counselors and made two calves of gold, and he said to the people, "It’s too much for you to go up to Jerusalem, this is just too big a deal, behold your gods O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt." {29} And he set one of them in Bethel in the southern end of his kingdom, and the other he put in Dan in the north. {30} This thing became a sin, the people went to worship before the one in Bethel, and before the other as far as Dan," and they even went all the way up there, if they had to, rather than go to Jerusalem.

This incident is uncannily similar to what Aaron did while Moses was upon the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. He made a golden calf (Deuteronomy 9:16) of a god and he

said, "These will be your gods, O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt." It's astonishing, Jeroboam had to know that, and yet he still did it.

The seduction to idolatry in that world must have been extremely powerful, and since a lot of it was based on sex, that probably had something to do with it as well.

Now what Jeroboam did here was to substitute a political religion for the real thing.

The Sins of David and Solomon

The lesson, learned from David and Solomon, is so easily lost. If you have read the story of David's life, you would know that David was a sinful man and he did a lot of things bad. He made a lot of serious moral errors. He committed adultery with another man's wife then had the man killed in combat (2 Samuel 11). All these things he did that were wrong, but he never ever went to another god. There is no taint of idolatry in David's kingdom or the history thereof.

Now when Solomon comes on the scene, he marries 700 wives, some of them from pagan societies (1 Kings 11). He begins to build shrines to these other gods and the Israelites, the Judean people, began to worship these gods. It cost his son, Rehoboam, the kingdom.

Now Jeroboam is about to make the same mistake. Now the important thing to understand from this is that in spite of all the errors that David did, the fact that he never went after an idol, left the way back to God open to him. He always had an avenue to repent. But once you leave God, once you go after an idol, once you begin to worship a false god, the way back is gone, it's lost.

The Temple and its rights were designed to centralize the worship of Jehovah. It was the major unifying symbol to the nation. It was more than that, it also pointed the way back to God anytime anyone became lost.

Well Jeroboam went further, he made a house of the high places and he made priests of the lowest of the people (1 Kings 12:31), who were not of the sons of Levi. He didn't want strong people in the priestly office because he knew, well enough, the priestly office was an office of power and he didn't want any conflicting power.

Verse 32, "Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. He did it in Bethel. He sacrificed to the calves that he had made, He placed in Bethel the priests of the high places he had made and {33} He offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. He had devised these things out of his own heart and he ordained a feast to the children of Israel and he offered upon the altar and burnt incense."

Now he did this out of his own heart without any authority to do so. God had given him a kingdom, not a new priestly authority. This whole story is a series of bad decisions by people who had every reason to know better.

Jeroboam had every reason to know better than what he had done, and he did it anyway. Of course, one lesson is, whenever you feel, when you really feel God has told you something, it's a good idea to trust Him enough to do as you are told. There are some of us who operate our lives on a different rule, when all else fails, then do as you are told. But first we have to find out for ourselves and sometimes we find out at a great cost to ourselves and to the people we love.

Now the scene is set for the first steps in the tragedy to begin to unfold.

The Man of God

In first Kings Chapter 13: "There came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel, and Jeroboam was standing right there by the altar to burn incense."

Now here is the king violating the priestly office, burning incense to an Egyptian god, and here comes this Judean prophet down the road from Judah whom God spoke to saying, "Here's what I want you to do, you go up there and you tell Jeroboam this," and so he came up there and {2} "He cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar." He didn't speak to Jeroboam. He said, "Thus saith the LORD, behold, a child shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, upon you shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon you, and men's bones shall be burnt upon you,"

The time would come, when king Josiah would defile this altar totally and put an end to this.

{3} "He gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the LORD has spoken, behold the altar shall be rent and the ashes on it shall be poured out."

Now what happened at this point, if you can visualize the scene, here's the king who had taken upon himself priestly garb, I suppose, standing before an altar carrying out a right of his own devising at a time of his own devising.

Then this Jewish man of God comes up and tells him; "No, no, this altar is going to be destroyed and be defiled."

Verse 4, "Jeroboam turns, sticks out his arm and points at the man and says, "Lay hold on that man," and his hand which he put forth against him, dried up like a stick so he couldn't pull it in again."

Now here's the king, in a fit of anger, with his arm outstretched, frozen solid where he can't move and at that moment, {5} "The altar tore in the middle and the ashes poured out of the altar according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD."

Well by this time Jeroboam's attention had been attained, {6} "The king answered and said to the man of God. "Oh, Please, Please, entreat now the face of the Lord your God and pray for me so that my hand may be restored to me again." And the man of God besought the LORD and the king's hand was restored to him again and became just like it was before. {7} And the king said to the man of God; "Come home with me and refresh yourself and I will give you a reward."

Now this is interesting because one-minute Jeroboam was ready to arrest the man and take off his head and now he wants him to come home with him and he wants to pay him for having restored his arm to him.

The Man of God Rebukes Jeroboam

What follows is interesting, the man of God said to the king, continuing in 1 Kings 13 verse 8, "If you would give me half your house, I will not go in with you, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place. {9} For so it was charged to me by the word of the LORD, saying, "Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the way that you came.""

This kingdom has become so vile, that this man of God was told, don't you stay there, don't stay overnight, don't sit and eat a meal nor drink any water while you're there. You go in one way and you come out another way. Which in itself is a testimony to the fact, that things were becoming more and more violent in this new kingdom. Go in, get your job done, and get out.

The Tragic Story of the Prophet Who Didn't Obey God

So, the Judean Prophet went another way, and did not return by the way that he came to Bethel. 1 Kings 13 verse 11, "Now there was an old prophet in Bethel, his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel. The words he'd spoken to the king, they told their father, {12} And their father asked, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him which road the man of God from Judah had taken. {13} So he said to his sons, "Saddle me an animal, "So they saddled him his animal and he rode thereon {14} He went after the man of God, and he found him sitting under an oak tree and he said to him, "Are you the man of God that came from Judah?" He said, "I am." {15} Then he said, "Come home with me and eat bread." {16} He said, "I am sorry, I can't go with you, I can't eat bread or drink water in this place, {17} Because God told me, "Don't do that and don't go back by way you came." {18} But then the old prophet said this, "I'm a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, "Bring him back with you into your house, that he may eat bread and drink water." But he lied to him."

Why would he do this? It's hard to say, loneliness, because a man like him probably didn't have that many people he could really talk to. He was a prophet and to find another prophet that he could sit down and eat bread with was a rare thing. The man of God made a fatal mistake, he went back with him, ate bread in his house and drank water. What follows is a sobering lesson and one we must not miss.

As you read this story, you have this impending sense that something bad is about to happen and it's hard to initially understand why or what's going on here.

Verse 20, "Well it came to pass, as they were sitting at the table eating, that the word of the LORD came to the old prophet that had brought back the man of God. {21} And he cried to the man of God that came from Judah saying, "Oh no, for as much as you have disobeyed the mouth of the LORD and have not kept the commandment which he gave you, {22} But you came back and you ate bread and drank water in this place, in which the LORD had said to you, "Don't do that." Your carcass shall not come to the sepulcher of your fathers." You will never go home."

{23} "And it came to pass after eating bread and drinking, he saddled him the donkey for the prophet that he'd brought back, {24} And when he was gone a lion met him by the way and killed him. His carcass was cast down onto the road and the donkey stood by it and the lion also stood by it."

So, you have a body, a lion, and a donkey, which normally would have fled in great fear from the lion, standing still next to this body. A remarkable occurrence.

Verse 25, "Some men passed by and they saw the body and they saw the lion and they came and told this in the city where the old prophet had lived, and {26} When he heard it, he said, "I know who that is, it's the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the LORD and the LORD has delivered him to the lion which has torn him and slain him according to the word of the LORD that he spoke to him."

You know it's interesting as you read through this, you have to realize, that this has to be established, that this is not just an accident or that he just went to the wrong place and got caught by accident. The way that this is done, the lion kills him and then stands by the carcass and the animal he was riding on stands there too. This is something that never would have happened if there were not some form of divine intervention.

Verse 27, "So the old prophet told his sons, "Saddle me the mule," and they saddled him {28} And he went and found the body and the animal and the lion standing by the carcass. The lion had not eaten the carcass nor torn the donkey, {29} so the old prophet took up the carcass of the man of God, he laid it upon the donkey, and brought it back, and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn and bury him. {30} He laid his carcass in his own grave and they mourned over him saying, "Alas, my brother." {31} It came to pass, after he had buried him, he said to his sons, "When I am dead, bury me in the sepulcher where the man of God is buried, lay my bones beside his bones, for the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places in the cities of Samaria, it shall all come to pass."

God Is Not Capricious

Now the story of this strange incident is here for a reason. One lesson to take from it is that God is not capricious. God is not impulsive, unpredictable or fickle minded. God doesn't tell you one thing today and another thing tomorrow. The man of God from Judah should have known that. When the prophet lied to him and told him; "Oh, I had a vision since your vision, and my vision is that you're supposed to come home and eat bread with me." Why did he go? Why didn't he know better? The answer is, he did know better, but he was tired, he was hungry, he was thirsty, and he grasped at the false message because it gave him something he wanted. He should have known God does not tell you one thing today and something else tomorrow.

Progressive Revelation

I've heard of preachers speak of something called, progressive revelation, that is, God reveals new things to subsequent generations that were not revealed before this time. Well, God might

just do that but there's one thing we must never forget, God doesn't change, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and no subsequent revelation from God will ever contradict what has gone before.

Take the prophet Mohammad as a case in point. His earliest motivation was to put an end to the ramped idolatry in Arabia at the time. He saw visions of getting rid of all the idols but in the process of time he claimed revelations that were in clear contradiction of both the Old Testament and the New Testament and the message of Jesus. To whatever extent the Koran is inconsistent with the revelation of Old and New Testaments is false.

The book of Mormon has to be given the same test. Is it consistent with what came before? God does reveal things progressively over time, but He doesn't lie, and He doesn't contradict Himself and He doesn't give one prophet a message that contradicts the message of another prophet. And this man of God who was sent to cry against Jeroboam's altar may in the end have undermined his mission that he was sent there.

Jeroboam Ignores the Prophecy and Returned to His Evil Ways

No doubt Jeroboam heard what happen to the man of God and somehow in Jeroboam's mind, the death of the old prophet must have made his prophecy of no value to Jeroboam, because it tells us right at the end of Chapter 13 of 1st Kings verse 33, "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. {34} And this thing became a sin to the house of Jeroboam even to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth."

What a shame and what a terrible loss. All that Jeroboam had to do was just listen to God, trust God and be faithful to the commission he had been given. Take care of his people and take care of the nation, govern justly and insist that all the people remain in their loyalty to Almighty God and his kingdom would have been established, for God only knows how long.

But Jeroboam just couldn't do it. Why? It can't be just the matter of desire for power, he had the power. God handed him the power. The only thing that I can conclude that came about is, it was a result of fear; he just couldn't bring himself to trust God. The results for himself, for his family and for the 200 some odd year history of the 10 northern tribes of Israel is a story of tragedy.

Now I know how easy it is for you to sit there and say to yourself. "Well, if God had spoken to me and told me what to do, I would have done it." You know, I think Jeroboam would have said the same thing. I think the old Judean prophet would have said the same thing, then why didn't they? Well, in the case of Jeroboam, it was fear. He took council of his fears and tried to take his own steps to protect his own hide. In the case of the Judean prophet that came to testify against Jeroboam's altar, it might have been fatigue and he was just worn out. He was hungry, he was thirsty, he was tired of the road and he grasp at the lie of the other prophet for his own comfort sake. These are some lessons that are worth carrying with you.

Abijah, the Son of Jeroboam

1st Kings Chapter 14: "At that time Abijah who was the son of Jeroboam fell sick, {2} And Jeroboam said to his wife, "Get up and disguise yourself so that you won't be known to be my wife, go to Shiloh. Ahijah the prophet is there. He told me that I should be king over this people. {3} Take some presents, take ten loaves of cakes (perhaps perforated like matzo or cakes with seeds) and a cruse of honey and go to him and he will tell you what shall become of the child."

This woman had to go right past Bethel; she had to keep right on trucking south to Shiloh because Shiloh's not very far north of Jerusalem.

{4} "So she did what Jeroboam said and arose and went to Shiloh and came to the house of Ahijah. Now poor old Ahijah could no longer see." He was as blind as a bat, "His eyes were set by reason of his age. {5} And the LORD said to Ahijah, "The wife of Jeroboam is coming to ask a thing of you for her son, for he is sick. What I want you to tell her is, it shall be when she comes in, she's going to pretend to be a different woman, now I want you to tell her something." {6} Now it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet coming in at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam, why are you pretending to be someone else? For I'm sent to you with heavy tidings of bad news."

The poor woman must have stood there in shock.

"Go tell Jeroboam," verse 7, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, "I exalted you from among the people, and I made you a prince over my people Israel, {8} I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and I gave it to you, and yet you have not been like David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all of his heart, to do only what was right in my eyes."" (See also Acts 13:22).

Now I will remind you, it wasn't that David didn't do some stupid things, some sins and made some serious mistakes. The point was, he never went after another god and so he always repented, and he was always forgiven.

You didn't do that, the LORD said, {9} "You have done evil above all that was before you, you have gone and made other gods, molten images to provoke me to anger and have cast me behind your back. {10} Therefore I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, I will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisses against the wall, him that is shut up and left in Israel and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam like a man takes away dung until it's all gone. {11} Him that dies of Jeroboam in the city the dogs will eat, him that dies in the field the fowls in the air will eat, the LORD has spoken it. {12} So arise, wife of Jeroboam, get on back to your house, and when your feet enter into the city, the child shall die."

What a thing to tell a mother and what an agony it must have been in her heart, and she might even have wandered all over the landscape not wanting to go home because when she went home the child would die.

He went on to say, {13} "All of Israel shall mourn for him and bury him for he is going to be the only descendent of Jeroboam that comes to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam."

That child is the only good thing there, we'll bury him and that will be the end of the people of Jeroboam who get an honorable burial.

"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 like a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land he gave to their fathers and he shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves and have provoked the LORD to anger. {16} And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam who did sin and who made all Israel to sin."

You might remember that phrase, because we will hit it again and again through this history. "Jeroboam who did sin and who made all Israel to sin."

{17} "And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came home, and when she came to the threshold of the door the child died. {18} And they buried him, and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by the hand of his servant, Ahijah the prophet. {19} And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold they are written in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. {20} And the days which Jeroboam reigned were twenty-two years and he slept with his fathers and Nadab his son reined in his stead."

The Most Important Lesson

The most important lesson that we in the modern world can take away from this is, the warning about how Jeroboam had caused Israel to cast God behind their backs. I look around me today in our society and I find our leadership in this country, who seem absolutely bound and determined to get God behind us, and when we do, where will we be then?

The time of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam lasted about the time of the history of our country, the United States of America.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you ever wonder why Israel was so quick to start worshipping two golden calves when Jeroboam decreed for them to do so?
2. Has fear ever made you not worship God in the way you knew you should?
3. Have you ever allowed fear to stop you from doing the right thing?
4. What are your thoughts in regards to the prophet who disobeyed?
5. Have you ever heard someone teach some 'new revelation from God' that really didn't go with the Bible?
6. Have you ever been tempted by a false doctrine or idea because it was something that you really wanted to hear, even though, deep down you knew it probably wasn't correct?
7. Do you read some of the stories in the Old Testament and think "Well I wouldn't have made that mistake"?
8. Or do you read them and examine your life to make sure that you aren't making the same mistakes?
9. What is the most important lesson to you that we can learn from Jeroboam?
10. Are there similarities of his time with our time today?