

## The Sin of Jeroboam

**[Proposition: Idolatry leads to destruction, therefore we must humbly worship God and listen to his word.]**

Introduction:

Imagine your country has been completely overrun by foreign invaders. Most of the influential leaders have been killed. The most important political and religious buildings have been destroyed, and you—you've been carried off into a foreign land. Now imagine a pastor comes to you, and you ask him, "What happened?" or "What should we do now?" What do you think he would say?

That is basically the situation of the first readers of the book of Kings. They are captives in Babylon, Jerusalem is gone, the Temple is a pile of rubble. The author of Kings comes along with a provocative answer about both the failure and future of God's people. He says, "What matters most in life, is not where you are, or what you can do, but who you worship."

This is the central theme of the book of Kings and our passage. This story warns us that pride and idolatry lead to judgment and destruction, and it calls us to hear the word of God and return to worship him.

First, we see in the story of Jeroboam.

### **I. When we are proud we forget the LORD, which leads us to act foolishly.**

In order to worship God in truth, we must be humble. Pride is dangerous because it's self-worship, it tells us that everything ultimately depends on and revolves around us.

#### ***A. Jeroboam believes that the Kingdom depends, ultimately, on him.***

You can see Jeroboam's pride in verse 26-27. He is worried he will lose his kingdom if the people go down to Israel to worship, so he has to do something about it. He is also worried, if they do go down and worship in Judah, that they will kill him—so, again, he must do something about it.

At surface level, this seems wise: it's a smart political move to keep the unity of the nation of Israel, and use Israel's religion to strengthen the national identity. But what seems wise in the eyes of the world is foolishness, because it neglects the most significant factor in the equation: the LORD, the God of Israel.

You see, Jeroboam didn't scheme or conquer his way onto the throne.

#### ***B. Jeroboam's kingdom was given to him by the Sovereign LORD.***

Back in 1 Kings 11, Solomon committed the sin which has plagued the people of Israel thus far in the Story of God: He married women from the nations around Israel, who worship other gods and goddesses, and Solomon too is led into idolatry. He builds altars and high places for their worship. In light of this, God pronounces his judgment against Solomon that he will tear the kingdom from Solomon's son, though he will leave him the land of Judah. Meanwhile, the

prophet Ahijah meets the man Jeroboam on the road, and pronounces to him that God intends to give him the kingdom of the ten northern tribes of Israel.

Not only did God promise to give Jeroboam the kingdom,

***C. the LORD orchestrated the circumstances that led to Jeroboam being made king.***

After this promise, Jeroboam fled to Egypt because Solomon was looking to kill him, but when Solomon died Jeroboam returned. Solomon's son Rehoboam had taken the throne in Jerusalem, and was called up to Shechem (on the Northern border of Ephraim, so in Israel) because Israel meant to make him King over them (1 Kgs 12:1). Israel put forward Jeroboam as their spokesman, and he asked on behalf of Israel that Rehoboam promise to lighten their load, because Solomon had used forced labor for many of his building projects.

Rehoboam took counsel with the old men of Solomon's court, who advised him that if he would serve the people this day, and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever (12:7). But in the end Rehoboam listened to the young men, who counseled him to be a strong man: ignore their concerns, speak to them harshly, and arrogantly threaten them. He is presented as a fool, forgoing wisdom and humility, and unsurprisingly Israel did not want a leader like that. People like a strong man until he turns on them, the one who has ears let him here.

Most importantly, the author of Kings gives us the real scoop in v. 15:

*So the king [Rehoboam] did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.*

All of this happened because the LORD is a sovereign God and he working out his plan and fulfilling his promises. God made Jeroboam King. He is at work in the foolishness and arrogance of Rehoboam to fulfill his judgment on Solomon and promise to Jeroboam, divide the kingdom into Israel ruled by Jeroboam in the North and Judah ruled by Rehoboam in the South.

*Application:*

But once Jeroboam becomes king it's like he completely forgets all God has done. What ought to have produced praise for God's favor instead produced forgetful pride. He's motivated by fear and feels that the strength and unity of his kingdom falls to him—and as we're going to see he foolishly repeats the idolatry of Solomon. But God made Jeroboam king.

*Illustration:*

Maybe you sometimes think like Jeroboam. Like whatever you're facing, whatever you're called to, it all depends on you. You're afraid your business will fail, your kids won't turn out alright, your church isn't going to grow or be healthy.

Friends, that is pride, it's self-worship. It was God who made you a business owner. God made you a Mom or Dad. God called you to that ministry. God is more invested in those things than you are, and he is working out his sovereign plan. You trying to take back the reigns will only cause you to act foolishly. So repent of that pride, remember him and worship him. That's what the Gospel teaches us—you

did nothing, God gave his Son to die for your sins and rise to reconcile you to him, so let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

If pride is self-worship, it's no wonder Jeroboam then turns to outright idolatry.

## **II. When we worship other gods, we forfeit the blessings of the kingdom and bring destruction into our lives.**

The story of the Bible is the story of the LORD, the God of Israel, the one and only God. He is gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love—and yet humans (even Israel his people) are guilty and unclean because of sin. So God, desiring to be with his people, gave Israel an elaborate set of sacrifices made for forgiveness, cleansing, and also worship. The sacrifices were performed by the priests, at the Tabernacle and then later the Temple of Solomon.

Worshipping the LORD, and taking seriously his commands about how to worship him are a huge deal in the OT. So, the utmost care was required when performing the sacrifices. All of this makes Jeroboam's next move all the more shocking.

### ***A. Jeroboam innovates Israelite religion.***

Some have suggested that Jeroboam was not intending to lead Israel to worship other gods, but the witness of Scripture and the attitude of Kings is that trying to worship "God" on your own terms is to not worship him at all. To ignore what God commands (No other gods, no graven images) is foolish and incredibly dangerous.

And yet, we watch in v. 28-31 as Jeroboam builds illegitimate temples at Bethel and Dan, calls his own priesthood, and institutes his own feast, and worst of all makes two Golden Calves. Calves are associated with various Canaanite deities and whatever Jeroboam's intention, the author of Kings clearly sees these as idolatrous innovations. Notice Jeroboam's essentially word for word quote of Aaron from the Golden Calf incident in Exodus 32 which incite the wrath of God against Israel:

*Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.*

Moreover, v. 32 says Jeroboam sacrificed *to* the calves he had made. Jeroboam's innovations are idolatrous, and he leads the people in the same idolatry. In fact he commands them to worship at either Bethel in the North or Dan in the south, and Israel follows her king into idolatry.

### ***B. Idolatry always leads to judgment and destruction.***

A little later in the story, Jeroboam's wife goes to inquire of the LORD about their son who is sick, and the LORD pronounces this judgment on Israel for the sin of Jeroboam in 14:15

*15 the Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger. 16*

*And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and made Israel to sin.”*

That phrase, “the sins of Jeroboam” or the “way of Jeroboam” becomes a shorthand indictment by God of Israel’s idolatrous religion. From now until the armies of Assyria carry Israel into captivity, the refrain will be that Israel, her kings, walk in the way of Jeroboam. In other words, the exile of Israel happened because of the wrath of God against Israel for its idolatry. Ultimately all idolatry falls under the judgment of God and leads to destruction.

***C. We often walk in the way of Jeroboam.***

Maybe we don’t set up idols of wood and stone, but we do look to persons and realities other than God to be our ultimate satisfaction and object of desire. We worship money, sex, power, country, family, and so on. However you would fill in these blanks is probably an idol.

If I have (blank), my life would be completely satisfying and sustaining.

or

If don’t have (blank) my life will be devastating.

This passage is saying to us, that way leads to destruction. Remember that Jeroboam set up the Golden Calves because he wanted to save his kingdom. You might even say that his outward idolatry was just a means to getting or keeping the real idol of his heart: his kingdom. But ironically, it was his pride and idolatry which led to the loss of thing he most wanted.

*Illustration:*

In the 2016 Time magazine article entitled “Porn and the Threat to Virility” Belinda Luscombe, tells how young men, “marinated in porn” as adolescents and young adults, are now unable to experience a sexual response with a real, live woman. They are only able to respond to pornography. One lifelong user is quoted saying:

When I think about it, I’ve wasted years of my life looking for a computer or mobile phone to provide something it is not capable of providing.

Greed is like that too, pushing us to get more and more but often in a way that causes us to risk foolishly, or act illegally or immorally and then end up much worse than we started. When we idolize our children we put undue pressures on them and drive them away from us by our unrealistic expectations.

All idolatry is like that, ultimately causing us to lose the very thing we think we need most.

When Jesus calls us to follow him, he echoes this same principle: the one who seeks to save his life will lose it, the one who loses his life for my sake will find it. So turn from your

idols and worship him (trust him), and he promises all we need to flourish in the life of faith he will give to us, but he must be the One who is all satisfying.

What matters most in life, is not what you can do, but who you worship.

Finally,

### **III. When we reject the Word of God, we miss his warnings which bring us back to receive his blessings (Deut 17)**

Sometimes we get entangled in idolatry, stuck in our sin. But mercifully, God calls us through his word to repent and return to him. Again you can see Jeroboam doing the opposite:

#### ***A. Jeroboam rejects the Word of God contained in the Law.***

The kings of Israel were supposed to be not just rulers, but leaders. Specifically, to lead the people of Israel in walking in the ways of God. In fact, Deuteronomy 17:18-20 says that the king should write for himself a copy of the Law, read it all his days, that he might learn to fear the LORD, keep God's words, and not be proud.

But Jeroboam doesn't listen to the word of God, he is the inverse of the king God wants.

Even when God personally sends a prophet to speak to him

#### ***B. Jeroboam also rejects the Word of God delivered to him by the Prophet.<sup>1</sup>***

But God, in his mercy sends a prophet to warn Jeroboam of the coming judgment. Chapter 13:1-2 says:

*And behold, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the LORD to Bethel. Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make offerings. <sup>2</sup> And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD...*

This unnamed prophet pronounces judgment and warning, and even performs a miraculous sign to confirm his message was from God, but (13:33):

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<sup>1</sup> The written word of God and the prophetic word of God always agree. When the prophet comes to speak to Jeroboam the word he speaks is in harmony with what stands written. The prophet doesn't come along and say, "Society has advanced enough now that we know God actually doesn't care if you worship him in a way other than what he commanded, or that you worship other Gods." God is consistent so when he speaks, through the Spirit inspired word or the Spirit inspired prophet—there is perfect harmony.

It is true that worship for the church is very different than worship for the Israelites—but the law and the sacrifices are no longer necessary because Jesus's death on the cross is the greater reality the sacrifices and priesthood pointed to. The Law of God is not set aside, but fulfilled in Jesus, and written on the hearts of his people so that they too fulfill the heart of the law: Love the LORD your God and love your neighbor as yourself.

The OT is not set aside because humanity has progressed and our society now knows better, the law of God is fulfilled in Christ and actually transposed into a higher key, infused with more significance. We can't set aside the Word's witness on sexuality, the sanctity of life, nor the need for Christians to actually obey God's commands to care for the poor—they cannot be set aside by "enlightened" people—that's Jeroboam thinking.

*33 After this thing Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people. Any who would, he ordained to be priests of the high places. 34 And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.*

When your proud, God's word becomes just one voice among many. If it lines up with what you already think, you follow it and call yourself righteous. But the way you'll know if you are really humble before God, and if you're really setting out to worship God, is when he speaks something inconvenient or that contradicts what your instincts say—only then can you humbly submit yourself to the LORD.

*Illustration:*

As you might imagine in our home with seven kids, conflict is not uncommon. Our youngest daughter Eva is in that phase right now where when you call her she not only ignores you but like goes the opposite direction. She'll run out of the room, or she like moonwalks away from you. I consistently tell her when she ignores me she is making the situation worse not better, and that she's probably going to get in more trouble for ignoring me than for whatever was going on. I can't count how many times I've told her that when I call her it's because I want to help.

When God speaks to you through the Bible, or through the preaching of his Word, don't be foolish and ignore or run from him—return to him. Pride and idolatry always lead to destruction, and God wants to save you from that and give himself and all his blessings to you through the Gospel – the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**Conclusion:**

Jeroboam didn't listen. Neither did the majority of the people of Israel and Judah, and in 722 BC Israel was carried to Assyria. In 586 BC Judah was carried to Babylon. The kingdom was finished and it was as if the story of Israel from Exodus to David just came unraveled and the people of God again sat in captivity in a foreign land.

They needed a deeper deliverance, not from physical but spiritual bondage a cleansing from idolatry, and they needed a King who would lead them to worship the LORD and walk in God's ways.

This is who Jesus claimed to be—the LORD bringing a “new exodus” from sin, taking the judgment his people deserve, and offering his life on the cross as a perfect sacrifice of worship, pleasing to God.

To whoever believes in him he gives forgiveness and the Spirit and brings us into his own kingdom. Hebrews 12:28-29 exhorts us:

*28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.*

What matters most in that kingdom is not where you are or what you can do, but who your worship.  
So come, worship Jesus our Savior and King. Amen.