

Faith Pulpit

The Compromise of Jeroboam

Jeroboam was the new king of the ten northern tribes that had split from the two southern tribes. Because of Rehoboam's fool-hearty decision to oppress his people, the ten tribes crowned Jeroboam as their new king. From the beginning, this king compromised the commandments of God and plunged his nation into disobedience and spiritual apostasy.

I. The Decree by the Unnamed Prophet

Jeroboam wasted no time in violating the commandments of God. According to 1 Kings 12:25–33, the new king initiated four significant changes in the worship of God. First, he added golden calves as a symbol of worship (vs. 25–29). This was the very symbol that had caused Israel so much trouble in the wilderness when Aaron made one and led the nation into spiritual and moral apostasy (Exodus 32:4). Jeroboam even declared that these calves were to be the gods of the people (v. 28). Second, instead of Jerusalem, Jeroboam changed the center of worship to Dan and Bethel (v. 30). These two locations were the border cities on the North and South for the ten tribes. In essence, no matter where one was located in the north, he would have an easy time getting to a place of “worship.” Third, Jeroboam changed the leaders of worship. He placed individuals in the priestly office who were not from the Aaronic line (v. 31). Fourth, he changed the date of worship (vs. 32,33). Jeroboam established his own time of the feast that would compete with the Day of Atonement in Jerusalem. Jeroboam's motive for these changes was to keep the people from returning to Rehoboam. These actions plunged the nation into “near total apostasy” (John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, *A History of Israel*, 360).

God sent an unnamed prophet from Judah to condemn Jeroboam (13:1–3). The prophet declared that a king in Judah by the name of Josiah would one day desecrate the calf altar by burning on it the bones of the false priests (v. 2). Jeroboam was given two signs confirming that this man was sent from God. First, Jeroboam's hand withered when he ordered the man to be captured (v. 4). Second, the altar split

and ashes poured out (v. 5), which was what the prophet had said would happen (v. 3). When Jeroboam offered refreshment to the prophet (v. 7), the unnamed individual replied that he could not stay. He had been commanded by God to declare his message, leave at once, and return home another way (vs. 8–10).

II. The Disobedience of the Prophet

The prophet, however, did not continue to follow the commands of God. 1 Kings 13:11–14 describes how an older prophet searched for the younger one and found him resting. When the older prophet asked the younger one to return home with him, the younger prophet repeated what God had commanded him (vs. 15–17). The older man then lied by telling the younger prophet that he was commanded by an angel from God to bring the young prophet back home (v. 18). The young prophet was deceived by the lie and went to the older prophet's home (v. 19). This passage may have been on Paul's mind when he commanded the Galatians not to be deceived by false gospels (Galatians 1:8).

While the two men were eating, God's word came to the older prophet, and He announced God's judgment on the younger man. Because of the young prophet's disobedience, God was going to kill him and not allow him to be buried with his forefathers (vs. 20–22). Having received this terrible announcement, the young prophet set out on his journey of death.

III. The Death of the Prophet

While the unnamed prophet was on his way home, a lion attacked and killed him (vs. 23,24). This incident appears odd because the lion did not eat its prey, nor did the donkey flee in terror. Instead, both animals remained by the carcass as if to testify of the judgmental death of the man. As people traveled by the scene, they observed the corpse of the prophet and the two animals standing nearby (v. 25). When the older prophet heard of the incident, he traveled to the scene and observed what had taken place (vs. 26–28). The prophet collected the body and returned home to bury the man. He commanded his sons that when he died, they were to bury him with the unnamed prophet (vs. 29–32).

The final section of this narrative records Jeroboam's disregard for both the message of the prophet and the message in his death (vs. 33,34). Word of this strange incident must have reached Jeroboam because there were people traveling by and spreading the news (v. 25). The oddities involved must have conveyed to Jeroboam that this man's death was the result of the judgment of God. The lesson in this incident for Jeroboam was this: if God would kill a prophet for disobedience through the "small" sins of eating, drinking, and traveling, what would He do to Jeroboam for the "large" sins of idolatry and spiritual apostasy? This lesson, however, was lost on Jeroboam. He continued in his evil ways (vs. 33,34). Verse 34 records that "this thing became a sin unto the house of Jeroboam." According to Davis and Whitcomb, this sin is referred to twenty-one times in Scripture (Ibid.). Jeroboam's continual sin was "the ruin of the northern kingdom and the reason his name was to live in infamy" (R. D.

Patterson, “1, 2 Kings,” in Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 4:120). Second Kings 17:21–22 is especially significant because it lays the blame for Israel ‘s captivity at the feet of her first king, Jeroboam.

IV. Applications

What lessons does this narrative contain for us today? According to Thomas Constable, “This story clarifies the importance of consistent and complete obedience to the Word of God, the lesson God was seeking to impress on Jeroboam and His people at that time” (“1 Kings,” in Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, 515). “Consistent and complete obedience” relates to faithfulness to the Word of God, particularly in the area of worship. Jeroboam compromised the instructions of God regarding proper worship. The lesson here is that God disapproves of the compromising of His Word. Compromise takes place when the truth of God is mixed with error. Jeroboam was not just altering the ritual of worship; he was changing the commands of God. Compromise is tampering with the truth of God and His inspired revelation.

There is a lesson for believers today in the actions of the young prophet. When one first reads the text, he might wonder what is so important about not eating in the Northern Kingdom . One suggestion is that the prophet was to show complete obedience to God. There might be more, however, to this incident. I would suggest that God was sending Jeroboam a message through the young prophet that He had totally rejected the king’s grievous error. In essence, God may have been telling Jeroboam that He so disliked his actions that He would not even allow His prophet to remain in the country. God was sending Jeroboam a message of separation. Jeroboam’s actions and where those actions were taking the kingdom were not lost on many godly people. Second Chronicles 11:13–17 records that the priests, Levites, and those who “set their hearts to seek the LORD” (v. 16) left and moved to Judah . They were separating from apostasy. Although this passage is not teaching ecclesiastical separation in the technical sense (the church was not formed until Pentecost), it does communicate the principle. We must never underestimate the negative impact of theological compromise. We must not tolerate it. It must be kept out of our schools, colleges, seminaries, and churches. If we do not treat it with a firm hand, we will eventually follow in the footsteps of Jeroboam and run the path to spiritual and moral ruin. Here at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, we seek to glorify God through “consistent and complete obedience.”

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