

The Legacy of Jeroboam I

“Legacy,” by **Merriam-Webster**, is defined as “something transmitted by or received from a predecessor.” Legacies can be few or many; they may be positive or negative in nature. Legacies can be in the form of money, or they may reflect the mark one makes in another person’s life. In this article we are discussing “the Legacy of Jeroboam I.”

Jeroboam was of the tribe of Ephraim; he surfaced during the reign of King Solomon, at which time he was described as “*a mighty man of valor*,” who was “*industrious*,” one who was made “*the officer of all the labor force of the house of Joseph*,” I Kings 11:28. However, after the prophet Ahijah informed Jeroboam that he would ultimately reign over “*ten*” of the tribes of Israel, Solomon tried to kill him, so he “*fled to Egypt until the death of Solomon*,” I Kings 11:35-40. After Solomon died his son, Rehoboam, began to reign in his place. At this time some of the Israelites sent for Jeroboam; he returned and, along with the “*whole assembly of Israel*,” he pleaded with Rehoboam to “*lighten the burdensome service*” his father had imposed upon the people, I Kings 12:4. Rehoboam “*consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon*,” and they advised him to heed the people’s request. He then sought the counsel of the “*young men who had grown up with him*,” and they advised him to make matters even more difficult! Rehoboam rejected the advise of “*the elders*,” he heeded the advise of his younger counterparts, so the people rebelled, making **Jeroboam** King over ten of the tribes, and leaving Rehoboam over the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, I Kings 12:6-23.

However, it is one thing to be put in a position of power and something else to maintain that position. Hence, Jeroboam began to take steps to protect his position. He did not consult the will of God. Rather he “*said in his heart, ‘Now if these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah,’*” I Kings 12:26-27. He then made “*two calves of gold and said to the people, ‘it is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt,’*” I Kings 12:28. He put one of the golden calves in Bethel, and the other in Dan, the southern and northern extremities of the land. He also “*made shrines of the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi*,” and “*ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month*,” and “*made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel*,” in keeping with what he had “*devised in his own heart*,” I Kings 12:29-33. Later “*Ahijah the prophet*” informed Jeroboam that God ultimately would “*give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and made Israel sin*,” I Kings 14:16. Jeroboam reigned 22 years as king (roughly from 922 to 901 B.C.) and was succeeded by “*Nadab his son*,” I Kings 14:20. Beginning with Jeroboam, there were some 19 kings who reigned over the northern kingdom, Israel, and **every** one of his successors engaged in calf worship, which he had introduced at the beginning of his reign! Of some 15 of his successors in office, it was basically said that he did “*evil in the sight of the Lord, in walking in **the way of Jeroboam**, and in his sin which he had committed to make Israel sin*,” I Kings 16:19, 26; 22:52; 2 Kings 9:9; 13:6, etc. The northern kingdom, Israel, lasted a little over 200 years, and was then taken captive by Assyria, around 721 B.C., 2 Kings 17.

Jeroboam had the potential for great success. Prior to his becoming king, the prophet Ahijah had informed Jeroboam that he would “*be king over Israel*,” and he then communicated God’s promise to him that “*if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as my servant David did, **then** I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to*

you,” I Kings 11:38. But Jeroboam did not walk in the “ways” of God, so God later sent Ahijah the prophet, saying, “*I will bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone,*” I Kings 14:10. He went from success to failure, from honor to dishonor, but, sadly, his sordid example was followed by every king which succeeded him, resulting in the fall and the captivity of the ten tribes over which he reigned. In the course of Israel’s 200-year history, it is probable that millions of Jews were adversely affected, both in time and eternity, by Jeroboam’s tragic legacy!

What Were Jeroboam’s Sins?

1. He did not trust in the promises of God! God had promised him great blessings if He would walk in His “ways” and keep His “commandments,” I Kings 11:38. But once Jeroboam was on the throne he began to worry about the people returning to Rehoboam king of Judah and killing him.

2. Instead of submitting to the word of God, Jeroboam “in his heart,” I Kings 12:26, decided to follow his own plan instead of the word of God.

3. He “asked advice” from the wrong sources; hence he introduced calf worship, thus engaging in the same behavior which earlier had cost the lives of 3,000 men of Israel, I Kings 12:28; cf. Exodus 32:1-4.

4. He changed the priesthood, making “*priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi,*” I Kings 12:31.

5. He changed the place of worship, setting up calves of gold in both Dan and Bethel, thus discouraging the people from going up to Jerusalem where the temple was.

6. He changed the time of worship, ordaining a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, instead of the fifteenth day of the seventh month, which God had formerly designated as the time for the feast of the Tabernacles.

7. He exalted himself above the God of Israel, appointed his own priests, creating his own gods, establishing his own feasts, all of which he had “*devised in his own heart,*” I Kings 12:33.

Application:

The seven items just mentioned constitute Jeroboam’s “legacy” which he left to his deluded followers. Consequently they also displeased God by the idolatry and immorality it spawned, and all ten tribes ultimately went into captivity. Jeroboam’s actions affected not only himself and his contemporaries; it affected the entire nation for the next 200 years, resulting in the nation’s fall!

What many of us fail to realize is the fact that our actions, our decisions, our conduct, our influence, etc., affect not only ourselves, but countless others whose lives and destinies are affected, either positively or negatively, by the example we set. And this impact of our lives could affect people in successive generations!

Jeroboam is dead, but **Jeroboamism** is alive and well! Think of the countless religious leaders who sought “*advice*” from the wrong sources, who trusted in the reasoning of their own hearts, who have perverted the teachings of God on the Authority of Jesus Christ, the inspiration

of the Bible, the plan of salvation, the worship of the church, who have even founded their own churches and established their own religions! They are following the example set by Jeroboam over 3,000 years ago! Or think of Mohammed who founded the religion of Islam, whose followers even today number over one billion people, multitudes of whom have been “radicalized,” and are threatening the peace and security of the entire planet! Other examples could be cited, but these are sufficient to prove that “Jeroboamism” is alive and well. Many of the examples which could be cited are probably critical of Jeroboam, but in principle they are walking in his footsteps!

Conclusion: Beloved, we must not follow the dictates of our own heart. We must not seek spiritual direction from uninspired religious creeds, dogmas, catechisms, church manuals, etc.; to the contrary we must turn to the Bible wherein is revealed “*all things that pertain to life and godliness,*” 2 Peter 1:3, and by which we will be judged in that last day, John 12:48. Make sure **your** “legacy” is opposite that of Jeroboam!

**** —Bobby Witherington