

A Man-Made Religion

Jeroboam was the son of Nebat; he was of the tribe of Ephraim; he was “*a mighty man of valor;*” he was also “*industrious.*” These were qualities which doubtlessly influenced Solomon to make him “*the officer over all the labor force of the house of Joseph,*” I Kings 11:26,28. On one occasion when Jeroboam “*went out of Jerusalem,*” he encountered the prophet Ahijah. Jeroboam, at the time had “*clothed himself with a new garment,*” and “*Ahijah took hold of the new garment...and tore it into twelve pieces.*” Then he told Jeroboam to “*take for yourself ten pieces,*” and informed him that God would “*tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon,*” and give “*ten tribes*” to him because they had “*forsaken*” God and had “*worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess*” of the surrounding idolatrous nations, I Kings 11:29-33. Solomon, learning of this incident, “*sought to kill Jeroboam,*” so he “*arose and fled to Egypt,*” where he remained until the death of Solomon, I Kings 11:40.

Solomon was succeeded to the throne by his son Rehoboam, unto whom the people requested that he “*lighten the burdensome service*” his father, Solomon, had imposed upon them.. Before responding to their request, Rehoboam consulted with “*the elders,*” who advised him to heed the people’s request. Rehoboam then consulted with the “*young men who had grown up with him,*” and they advised Him to make matters even more difficult. And Jeroboam foolishly followed their advice. So the people rebelled, resulting in the united kingdom being divided, with Rehoboam reigning over two tribes, and Jeroboam being made king over the ten northern tribes which would constitute the northern kingdom, Israel, I Kings 12:1-24.

It seems that, spiritually speaking, some people cannot stand great success and power. Jeroboam proved to be such a person. Apparently, in a short time, he built Shechem, and dwelt there, and he also built Penuel. He began to reason in his own heart that if the people “*continued to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem*” (as God had appointed), then their heart would “*turn back to their lord Rehoboam, king of Judah,*” I Kings 12:26-27. So he “*made two calves of gold;*” he “*set up one in Bethel, and the other...in Dan*” (the southern and northern extremities of the land), and He said to the people “*here are your gods... which brought you up from the land of Egypt.*” And he also told the people “*it is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem,*” I Kings 12:26-29.

And, adding insult to injury, Jeroboam also made “*shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi,*” and he “*ordained a feast on the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar,*” I Kings 12:31. Thus he changed the date for the observance of the feast of tabernacles from the fifteenth day of the seventh month (which God had ordained, Lev. 23:33-34), to the fifteenth day of the eighth month as he had devised in “*his own heart.*” What Jeroboam did “*became a sin,*” I Kings 12:30, and it set the stage for the continuous idolatry which followed. Every one of the 18 kings which succeeded Jeroboam to the throne followed his example in pursuing calf worship as opposed to the true worship of God. Moreover, it was said of fifteen of eighteen kings that succeeded Jeroboam that they followed the example of “*Jeroboam, who sinned and made Israel sin,*” I Kings 14:16; 15:30,34; I Kings 16:2,26; I Kings 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29,31; 2 Kings 13:2,6,11; 2 Kings 14:24; 15:9,18,24,28; 2 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 23:15. And because of the continuous idolatry which characterized the northern kingdom Israel, which began with Jeroboam, the northern kingdom was ultimately carried away into Assyrian Captivity, 2 Kings 17. It would be difficult (if not impossible) to conceive of a worse and more lasting legacy than that of Jeroboam who “*sinned and made Israel sin!*”

However, in a nutshell, what was the basic underlying cause of the fall of the northern kingdom Israel? Basically, it can be summed up in one short sentence; “**they followed a man-**

made religion!" Of course, in so doing they ceased to follow the true religion of God, or the law which God had given Israel at Mt. Sinai.

In Forming a Man-Made Religion, What Changes Did Jeroboam Make?

1. He changed the Object of Worship. God had plainly charged Israel, saying, "*I am the Lord our God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me,*" Ex. 20:1-2. However, Jeroboam made "*two calves of gold;*" he "*set up one in Bethel,*" and the other "*in Dan,*" and said "*Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt,*" I Kings 12:29. It is difficult to conceive of such unmitigated gall!

2. He changed the time of worship, from the fifteenth day of the seventh month, to the fifteenth day of the eighth month, I Kings 12:33.

3. He exchanged the commandments of God for that which "*he had devised in his own heart,*" I Kings 12:33. What **God had ordained** took second place to what he had "*devised in his own heart!*"

4. He changed the place of worship. There were three annual feasts God required of the Israelites — the Feast of unleavened bread (Passover), the Feast of weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of tabernacles which were to be observed "*in the place*" God chose, Deut. 16:16, the "*place*" being Jerusalem. Cf. Luke 2:41; John 4:21.

5. He changed the priesthood. Under Moses' law the priests were to be taken from the tribe of Levi, the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses (Ex. 6:16-19; I Chron. 6; Heb. 7:11). Incidentally, Jesus was of the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14); hence, even Jesus could not legitimately have served as a priest under the law of Moses, Heb. 8:4! However, Jeroboam completely disregarded the requirements of the law of Moses "*and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi,*" I Kings 12:31.

In view of all of these changes Jeroboam made with regards to the worship of God, it is evident that he was indeed a religious man. He founded a man-made religion, and what he did was sinful, and tragically he "*made Israel sin,*" I Kings 14:16, and ultimately Israel was carried into Assyrian Captivity (I Kings 17). Why? They followed **a man-made religion!** No doubt, many who followed the religion of Jeroboam were sincere, but they were sincerely wrong and they suffered the dire consequences as a result!

Application:

We are not under the law of Moses. Jesus fulfilled that law, Matt. 5:17-18, and through His death the law of Moses was "*taken out of the way,*" having been "*nailed..to the cross,*" Col. 2:14. Jesus is now "*the mediator of the new covenant,*" Heb. 9:15, which is now in effect. However, the things that "*were written before were written for our learning,*" Rom. 15:4, lest we follow the tragic example of the erring Israelites, I Cor. 10:6.

In many respects, "*there is nothing new under the sun,*" and that "*which has been is what will be,*" Eccl. 1:9. History continually repeats itself. In principle, what Jeroboam did has been repeated countless times since Jesus built His church in the first century. Jesus did not build a religious denomination, and no denomination existed in the first century. Jesus built the church, Matt. 16:18, which he purchased with "*His own blood,*" Acts 20:28, which is His "*body,*" over which he reigns as "*the head,*" Eph. 1:22-23, and concerning which there is "*but one,*" I Cor.

12:20; Eph. 4:4. “*One*” is one more than none, and one less than two. That is how many churches **Jesus** built. Yet in today’s world there are literally hundreds of religious denominations, each one differing in some ways from the church Jesus built, and all of which are **man-made**! Jeroboam has many counter parts in our society. They are not called “Jeroboam;” they are called by such names as Mohammed, Ellen G. White, Joseph Smith, Martin Luther, “Pastor Russell,” etc., etc. Doubtlessly, most of the followers of these founders of man-made religions are sincere, but they need to do their home work and examine everything they hear religiously by the word of God, Acts 17:11, striving to “*test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world,*” I John 4:1. Sadly, there will be many judgment day surprises, at which time many will say “*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name,*” only to hear Jesus reply, saying “*I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness,*” Matt. 7:22-23. In this, the gospel age, “*the law of Christ*” (Gal. 6:2) is in effect; if we disregard His “*law,*” and do our own thing in matters religious we are practicing “*lawlessness!*” Because of the influence of Jeroboam (and his man-made religion) the ten northern tribe of Israel were eventually taken into captivity. Sadly, in today’s world millions are “*slaves of sin,*” and only Jesus and His Gospel can set us “*free from sin,*” Rom. 6:17-18. Remember this: “*if the Son (of God, bw) makes you free, you shall be free indeed,*” John 8:36!

**** — B. Witherington