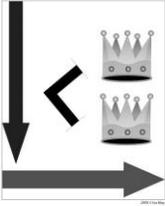


Week Twenty-three: A Kingdom Divided, Israel - 2

Kings 12:25-33; 2 Chronicles 11:13-17



Overview

In his later years, Solomon loves and marries many foreign women, even though it is forbidden for kings to do so. His wives turn his heart away from God, so God appears to him and promises him that his kingdom will be torn away from his son. Meanwhile, He raises up adversaries against Solomon, including Jeroboam, a servant and mighty man of valor.

At Solomon's death, his son, **Rehoboam** succeeds him as king of the consolidated kingdom. Rehoboam is a foolish leader who does not listen to the counsel of his elders. He seeks the counsel of his peers and acts with boastful pride. In response, Jeroboam leads a rebellion in which ten tribes follow him to establish their own nation, the northern kingdom of Israel. His leadership provides the metric by which all succeeding kings are measured, "He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin" (1 Kings 15:26, 34). To prevent Israel and Judah from reunification, **Jeroboam** creates and establishes a syncretistic religion for Israel to follow. He blends the God-established practices with the practices of the pagan religions. These continuing syncretistic religious practices invite the judgment of God--eventual captivity for the nation by the Assyrians. God promises, however, that He will give one tribe to Solomon's son (1 Kings 11:13).

This lesson will concentrate on Jeroboam's evil influence as Northern Israel's first king.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will understand the development, characteristics, and dangers of syncretistic religion.

Key Truths

When the light of Bible literacy grows dim in the hearts of leaders, they lead others down the path to destruction.

Leader who despise the ways of the LORD develop false practices and justify their new ways by making them sound acceptably religious.

People embrace leaders who allow them to follow the dictates of their own hearts. Syncretistic religions often embrace acceptable forms but give them new meanings.

Lesson Outline

God prepares Israel to enter the land of Canaan by giving them guidelines regarding worship and the priesthood. These commands are specific, and clear, and especially apply to the kingdom era with its temple and worship.

1. Worship regulations given by Moses - Deuteronomy 12:1-14

- Regulations regarding places of worship - "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods You shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go" (12:2, 5). Six times in this passage God refers to a specific place designated by God (12:5, 6, 7, 11 (twice), 14)
- Regulations regarding prescriptions of worship - "You shall not at all do as we are doing this day—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—" (12:8). God's Word clearly establishes a divine standard and even requires Israel to create a reminder to follow the LORD instead of the dictates of their own hearts-- the tassel of blue on the hem of their clothing (Numbers 15:38-39).

2. Worship regulations reformed by Jeroboam - 1 Kings 12:25-33

- Jeroboam's motive behind his developing a syncretistic religion is revealed, "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" (12:27)
- Jeroboam's method - Perhaps Jeroboam feels that the people will balk if he offers an entirely pagan religion, so he offers a blending of the two. Jeroboam follows a predictable pattern, which characterizes all syncretistic religions:
 - He redefines the Holy One - He makes two calves of gold and introduces them to the people, "Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt" (12:28). Universalism is rampant today among those who believe the god of every religion is the same god but with another name. Syncretism is a religion of "tolerance."
 - He redefines the holy place of worship - He offers alternate places of worship, "He set up one [golden calf] in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan" (12:29). Because he does not want Israelites to travel up to Jerusalem, he offers convenient worship centers at the northern and southern borders of his kingdom. Syncretism is a religion of convenience.
 - He redefines the holy servants - He diminishes the priesthood requirements by opening up the office to anyone with a desire to serve in this capacity, "He . . . made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi" (12:31). Syncretism is a religion without conviction.

- He redefines the holy days - Jeroboam gives Israel's holy days new meanings, "So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart" (12:33).

Syncretism is a religion of imagination.

- He redefines the holy offerings - Jeroboam offers sacrifices and burns incense as in Jerusalem's temple, "He ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense" (12:33). Syncretism is a religion of casual indifference.

3. Worship regulations rebuked by God's prophet - 1 Kings 13:1-2

God sends an unnamed prophet to rebuke Jeroboam as he burns incense at the altar of his own making. This prophet speaks of the day when Judah's king, Josiah, will burn Jeroboam's priests on his altar and then destroy Jeroboam's altar.

In essence, syncretistic religion appeals to those who desire *ritual without responsibility, religion without morality, and form without power or the presence of God*. God established parameters for worship in Deuteronomy, but Jeroboam craftily omits from all of his worship plans any reference to or reading/recitation of the Book of the Law.

Everyone doing what is right in his own eyes without reference to God and His prescribed standards recorded in the Bible (tolerance) becomes the religion of Northern Israel, much like it is today in America's postmodern culture.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

- All worship forms are not acceptable worship to God.
- Leaders who minimize God's Word create a ripe environment for syncretistic religion to develop.
- All cults and liberal religions redefine key biblical/religious terms so as to twist them to serve their own goals and ends.

Summary

God speaks by establishing guidelines to teach His people; His Word is eternally relevant and violation of that Word always brings destructive consequences.

God acts by judging Jeroboam's religion not only in his days but by referring to Jeroboam's sin as the key explanation for the idolatry of succeeding generations in the Northern Kingdom.

God reveals the terrible price of sin through the words of the prophet who rebukes the king at the altar.

Discussion Questions

In what way do cults and liberal religions today redefine key terms to make their religion seem “Christian”?

How have some “evangelicals” redefined Biblical truths to make them culturally relevant? How do churches hold the tension between cultural relevance and biblical truth?