

# Jeroboam

## 1 Kings 11-14

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Today we want to look at the story of Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel. As you know, the nation divided shortly after Solomon's death, and Rehoboam, Solomon's son, became the first king of the southern kingdom

Judah while Jeroboam became the first king of the northern kingdom - Israel. In order to study Jeroboam's life, we need to go back into the last years of Solomon's life. In the eleventh chapter of 1 Kings we find some statements about these years.

As we saw in our last study, in these final years of his reign, Solomon belied his name. In the Hebrew his name is "Shelomoh", which means "peace". It comes from the Hebrew word "shalom". But Solomon was anything but peaceful. He was a very restless, disturbed man in his last years. He was restless because he was disobedient to the Word. Disobedience always causes restlessness. Scripture says, "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." And though there are various stages of wickedness, any disobedience ultimately is wickedness, and it produces restlessness. In contrast to this we read in Isaiah 48:18, "If only you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea."

There is a kind of majestic peace, like a river as it flows past, which comes when we are responsive to the word of God. It was that peace which Solomon lost, and he was a restless man in the waning years of his reign. His restlessness is seen in a couple of things which Solomon did. One, he multiplied wives. In chapter 11, verses 1 and 2, of 1 Kings, we read,

**Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods. " Solomon held fast to these in love.**

This practice of marrying princesses from foreign nations began as political expedient for Solomon. He felt that this was the way to consolidate his kingdom and protect himself. But it was in conflict with the word of God to him. God had promised that he would consolidate Solomon's kingdom. But Solomon felt that he had to form these alliances by way of

marriage with ruling families in order to secure his kingdom. So he began to marry these women first out of a political motivation, and then ultimately because he was driven by his passions. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. You gain the impression that he was very much like the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well. After a while he simply ceased legitimatizing his relationships. He could not help himself. He was driven in this direction by his restlessness.

But he never found any peace in all of his wives. In fact, in Ecclesiastes he says, "I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these." Because you can never find peace in people, ultimately. I have a friend who says, "People will always disappoint you. Try Jesus." There is where you find peace - in a relationship with the Lord. It was this that Solomon had denied, and therefore he was a restless man, though he searched for some sense of satisfaction among his wives.

A second indication of his restlessness is his tendency to multiply wealth. Solomon inherited a great deal of money from David, and initially it was this wealth which he used to build the temple. It was right that he should build this sanctuary for the nation - God had ordered him to do so. But then he went on into other projects intended to aggrandize himself. He built a large and lovely house for himself, and homes for his wives and all of their retinue.

It became impossible to get volunteer labor and so he began to conscript slaves from the nation of Israel, some thirty thousand men, and one hundred fifty thousand Canaanites, descendants of the original inhabitants of the land, were pressed into service as slaves to complete Solomon's architectural projects throughout the land. This galled the nation of Israel, for they were a nation of free men, and they justifiably resented Solomon's efforts to enslave them. This was the issue which eventually divided the nation. His court became like those of the oriental kings about him, with wealth and extravagance and excesses of every kind. He fed thousands of people at his table every day. The people were forced to pick up heavy burdens of taxation in order to support Solomon's policies, and they resented it. In verse 9 of chapter 11 we read,

**Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.**

This is something which is not said of David. God never appeared to David, but to Solomon he appeared twice. Solomon had

privileges which David did not have. ...and yet Solomon's heart was not pure and whole before the Lord as David's had been. David was the man after God's own heart. He was the man who truly listened to the Lord. Solomon did not, though the Lord appeared to him twice. Verses 10 and 11:

**...and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded. So the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant."**

Then God goes on to say that, though he would tear the kingdom from Solomon, he would not do it during the days of Solomon's reign, nor would he tear all of it from Solomon's hand, but would only take ten tribes. This is an act of mercy on God's part because of his promise to David that David's kingdom would endure.

In verses 14 through 25 it is recorded that God raised up two foreign adversaries against Solomon. To the southeast was Hadad the Edomite, who began to raid the kingdom along the eastern border. And to the northeast the Syrians again became troublesome. This sounds very contemporary, does it not? Part of Solomon's energy was drained in trying to meet these incursions from these hostile nations. But what was far more threatening to Solomon was an enemy whom God raised up in his own house, verses 26 and 27:

**Then Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also rebelled against the king. Now this was the reason why he rebelled against the king: Solomon built the Millo, and closed up the breach of the city of his father David.**

The Lord had prophesied that he would raise up someone in Solomon's house, someone who was his servant, who would be troublesome to him. It was Jeroboam whom God raised up, the son of one of the court servants. Two things are said of Jeroboam. First, he was an Ephraimite. The Ephraimites were descendants of Joseph. Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. And their descendants had become the leading tribes of the northern portion of the kingdom. The Ephraimites were a very proud and jealous tribe. Many of the leaders of the Israel had come from that tribe - Joshua and Samuel and others - and they were exceedingly ambitious to maintain their positions. So when Jeroboam was introduced into Solomon's court he evidently already had in the back of his mind the feeling that someone from his kingly tribe ought to reign.

But the issue which really triggered his rebellion was that Solomon built the Millo. The Millo was the old Jebusite citadel located in the city of David. It is clear from other parts of Scripture that Solomon restored the Millo at great cost to the nation, both of money and time, and he did this for his Egyptian wife. This simply enraged the Israelites! And further, he built a wall around the city which isolated him from the rest of the nation. This was the straw which broke the camel's back, as far as Jeroboam was concerned, and so he rebelled (the Hebrew says he "lifted up his hand" against Solomon) and said "No more! I've had it!" And he left Jerusalem. Verse 28 is really a look at an action Solomon had taken prior to Jeroboam's rebellion:

**Now the man Jeroboam was a valiant warrior, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious, he appointed him over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph.**

Being over the house of Joseph (i.e., the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh), he was in a place where he could subvert the tribes and lead them away from Solomon. He left Jerusalem with rebellion on his mind, convinced that his tribe ought to assert the leadership in Israel. Verses 29 through 31:

**And it came about at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah clothed himself with a new cloak; and both of them were alone in the field. Then Ahijah took hold of the new cloak which was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give you ten tribes . . .'"**

He goes on to state why in verse 33: "Because they have forsaken Me They had gone after other gods. He informs him that God will take only ten tribes from Solomon's kingdom. He will leave two, Judah and Benjamin, because of his promise to David. But the remaining tribes will be placed under Jeroboam's leadership and will form a separate nation. It is characteristic of the Hebrew prophets to use such colorful ways to convey truth. The Hebrew used here for "garment" is "salmah", which is akin to the word "Shelomoh", Solomon's name. He is actually illustrating the rending of the kingdom from Solomon as he tears this garment into twelve pieces and gives ten of them to Jeroboam. Verses 37 and 38:

**'And I will take you, and you shall reign over whatever you desire, and you shall be king over Israel. Then it will be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for**

**David, and I will give Israel to you.'**

Remember, from our study two weeks ago, Solomon's prayer that God would give him wisdom. And God assured him that he would, if Solomon had a heart that listened, a heart that heard. The key to wisdom is an open ear, a willingness to submit ourselves to truth. If we do that, then we become wise - not in a secular way but with a godly wisdom, the ability to discern between right and wrong and to make the proper judgments. That was promised to Solomon, if he listened.

But Solomon would not listen, and the last years of his life were characterized by folly rather than wisdom. So through the prophet the Lord says again, this time to Jeroboam, "Listen to me. If you listen to me I will give you an enduring kingdom. If you do not, nothing will allow your kingdom to endure."

In chapter 12 you have an account of the division of the nation into northern and southern kingdoms. After his father's death Rehoboam went north to Shechem to be crowned king over all of Israel. When he arrived at Shechem, the gathering place for all the northern tribes, these tribes appealed to him for leniency and asked that he remove from them the yoke of slavery and lift the burden of heavy taxation. Rehoboam conferred with his counselors (the Hebrew text almost contemptuously calls them "the boys"), the young men he had grown up with, and asked their wisdom.

They said that the only way to lead was to be harsh and strong. So he went back to the ten tribes and said, "If you think Solomon was tough, wait until you see the way I rule. He scourged you with whips (i.e., the whips used on the slaves) but I'll scourge you with scorpions." These were whips with metal hooks on the ends which were used for criminals. The leaders of the northern tribes said, "That's what we thought!" And they rebelled, refused to acknowledge Rehoboam's leadership, and set up their own kingdom.

By this time Jeroboam had returned from Egypt. Solomon had tried to kill him, and so he had had to flee to Egypt, living for a time with Shishak, the Pharaoh of Egypt, until Solomon died. But now he returns, and the Northern Kingdom crowns him as king over the nation of Israel. In chapter 12, verses 25 and following describe the events which took place at the beginning of his reign:

**Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there. And he went out from there and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their Lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah."**

Notice that he says, "They will kill me," in contrast to what God had said: "If you listen to me I will give you an enduring kingdom." But he gives way to fear.

**So the king consulted [evidently with himself], and made two golden calves, and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month of the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.**

Jeroboam had a fine beginning. He began initially to anchor Israel into their spiritual past. He established the kingdom at Shechem, which is the first place Abraham had camped when he arrived in the land, the place where he first built his altar. It was there Jeroboam established his capital. Then he went over to the other side of the Jordan and rebuilt Peniel, or Peniel, the place where Jacob had wrestled with God, and was given his new name - Israel, "prince of God". Jeroboam was attempting, I believe, to root Israel in their past, their spiritual heritage.

But he began to give way to fear. He was afraid that he would be killed, that as the time for the annual festivals occurred, because the people were so tied into the worship at the temple at Jerusalem, they would all go there and defect to Rehoboam. He was frightened, so he took a page right out of Aaron's book and built two golden calves, as Aaron had done at the foot of Mt. Sinai. And he said to Israel, in the same words Aaron had used, "Behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt."

The ironic thing is, as we learn from reading through the rest of 1 Kings, that mixed with this idolatrous worship was the worship of the Egyptian demon God, the goat demon. It was actually a religion made up not only of some aspects of Jewish worship, but also of Egyptian worship. And verse 30 says that this act of Jeroboam resulted in Israel's sinning. He made Israel sin. These altars endured until the time of Josiah, some three hundred years later, even after the Assyrian captivity. They continued to worship at Bethel in the southern part of the kingdom, and at Dan in the north.

And not only that - Jeroboam made up his own religion as he went along. He changed all the festivals, changed the dates, got rid of the Levites and appointed people as priests who were not Levites. The Levites were so upset that most of them returned to the south. In this connection there is an interesting note in history. Some years later, when Shishak the Egyptian king invaded Palestine, he went up into the northern part of the land and sacked and burned all the Levitical towns, but did not touch any of the others. Jeroboam had formed an alliance with Shishak when he was in Egypt, and, reading between the lines, it is easy to see that he sent of a letter to Shishak requesting military support. So when Shishak came into the land, those were the only cities he touched.

Not only did Jeroboam establish his own religion - he also established himself as high priest. For on this great day when this worship was to be inaugurated at Bethel, he himself put on the robes of the high priest and went up the ramp to ignite the incense, which would be the final act. And the next chapter tells us that out of the crowd a voice came:

**Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense.** [The Hebrew says that he came "in the word of the Lord". The idea is that he was truth personified, a man who stood before Jeroboam as the very representation of truth itself, the truth which he had rejected.] **And he cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you. Then he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the Lord has spoken, 'Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.'"**

The prophet first announces judgment against this altar, because it is the altar with which God has a controversy, not with Jeroboam. God, in his grace, is still trying to reach this young ruler. But he has a controversy with the altar, and so he pronounces judgment against it, judgment which was not fulfilled for three hundred years, but a very certain judgment: that one Josiah would destroy this altar. And this was fulfilled three hundred years later in the coming of Josiah, one of the kings of the Southern Kingdom.

Then there was an immediate act of judgment which was accomplished in order to indicate that God meant business about the altar. The young prophet prophesied that the altar would be split, and that the ashes which were saturated with the fat of the sacrifices would be poured out. Jeroboam was angered, because this was his "coming out party", his moment of glory. He stretched out his arm and said, "Seize him!" And as he stretched out his arm, two things happened: his arm withered, and the altar split so that the ashes and fat poured out around Jeroboam.

Jeroboam appealed to the prophet to spare him and give him back the use of his arm, and the prophet did. Jeroboam asked him then to come to his home and eat and drink with him. But the young prophet said he could not do that because he had come by the word of God, and God had told him he was not to eat or drink until he had returned home. Then the young prophet turned on his heel and went back to Judah. What a contrast between this young prophet, for whom there was no turning back, no "fail-safe", only the word of God - he was going to act according to the word of God, no matter what and Jeroboam who, already in his heart, was not willing to listen to the truth.

We could wish that the story concluded there, but it does not. As the young prophet was on his way home he was waylaid by an old prophet of Bethel, an old derelict, probably a survivor of one of Samuel's schools, who had been bought out by Jeroboam and paid to keep his mouth shut, and who had gone along with all the apostate religion that Jeroboam had introduced. He waylaid this young prophet, lied to him, and brought him into his house. In disobedience to the Lord, the young prophet went with him. And was judged by the Lord for his disobedience. On the way home a lion slew him.

I could not help but think, as I read that, of C. S. Lewis' use of Aslan the lion in his *Chronicles of Narnia* series for children. Aslan was his figure representing the Lord in those novels. Lewis says of him that Aslan is not a tame lion; he is a wild lion. The point is that he does not conform to our will; we conform to his. You see, God wants his people to listen to his word and to conform to his will. And when they will not, judgment follows - not always immediately, but inevitably.

I am convinced that God acted in immediate judgment on this young man primarily as a sign to Jeroboam. God was still reaching out to Jeroboam, appealing to him to return. Both the word of the prophet and the judgment on the prophet were intended to be a message to Jeroboam, because in chapter 13, verses 33 and 34, we read,

**After this event** [the Hebrew text says, "After this word from the Lord..."] **Jeroboam did not return from his evil way, but again he made priests of the high places from among all the people; any who would, he ordained, to be priests of the high places. And this event became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to blot it out and destroy it from the face of the earth.**

The Lord made repeated attempts to reach Jeroboam. Jeroboam refused to listen, and finally came to the point where he was

established in his rebellion. He would not listen to the word of God. The following chapter is perhaps one of the most tragic in Scripture. Jeroboam had a young son whose name was Abijah. He evidently was the last link with the time in Jeroboam's life when he followed the Lord, for his name means "Jehovah is my father". He was the eldest son, the one destined to reign, the one green spot in all of Israel, the hope of Israel. He fell sick.

In their anguish Jeroboam and his wife turned to the only person they felt could help them at this time - the old prophet Ahijah, who had moved back to Shiloh. He was now blind and infirm. And because Jeroboam was afraid to go himself, he dispatched his wife. In chapter 14, beginning with verse 6, we read,

**And it came about when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet coming in the doorway, that he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam, why do you pretend to be another woman? For I am sent to you with a harsh message. Go, say to Jeroboam, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Because I exalted you from among the people and made you a leader over My people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you - yet you have not been like My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My sight; you also have done more evil than all who were before you, and have gone and made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back [that final, irrevocable decision that Jeroboam made, which cast God away] therefore behold, I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bound and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs will eat. And he who dies in the field the birds of the heavens will eat; for the Lord has spoken it.' "**

This was fulfilled one generation later when Nadab his son was assassinated by Baasha, the third king of Israel. The whole family was destroyed, and his dynasty came to an end within twenty years.

**"Now arise, go to your house. When your feet enter the city the child will die. And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he alone of Jeroboam's family shall come to the grave, because in him something good was found toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. Moreover, the Lord will raise up for Himself a king over Israel who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam this day and from now on. For the Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger. And He will give up Israel on account of the sins of Jeroboam, which he committed and with which he made Israel to sin.**

What terrible notoriety - to be known throughout history as the man who made Israel to sin! I cannot think of anything worse to have said of us than that we made someone to sin, that we caused a nation, or an individual, to sin. But this was said of Jeroboam. There were nineteen kings who followed Jeroboam, and it is said of every one that he walked in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

What this terrible story tells us is that we cannot be neutral in life. We saw in Solomon's life that sin affected his life, so that his own life and kingdom began to disintegrate. But what we see in Jeroboam's life is that sin in our life affects others as well. It spreads and ruins and destroys the lives of others. Jeroboam made a whole nation to sin.

In the book of Hebrews there is this statement: "See to it... that no root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled." If you go back into the Old Testament quotation from which that is taken, you find that it is not referring specifically to resentment or bitterness, although it can be applied that way. It is referring rather to an attitude of rebellion which had set into the nation of Israel, which the Lord describes as a bitter root which defiles everything it touches. It is like a bitter herb which somehow finds its way into a dish and ruins everything. This is what happened to Jeroboam because he would not listen. He absolutely refused to listen. He defiled his family, he defiled his associates, he defiled his nation.

You see, we cannot be neutral. We cannot live lives of private sin. We cannot isolate ourselves from the world and feel that we will just trip on through life and do our own thing and think that it will not affect everyone around us, for we will affect them. And it can be said of us, just as it was said of Jeroboam, that we have caused others to sin.

On the other hand, we can heed the admonition of Hebrews 10: 23-25 and lay hold of the life of Jesus Christ, stimulate one another to love good works, and not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together but encourage one another, and all the more as we see the day approaching. While it is true that we cannot be neutral, we do not have to have a negative influence on those around us. God wants us to have a very positive, righteous, godly influence on others, stimulating them to good works, and encouraging them to move on to maturity in Christ.

The key to whether or not we cause others to sin, or whether we stimulate them to good works, is whether or not we listen to the

Lord and have that trustful, restful obedience which comes from an open heart, a desire to follow the Lord, no matter what it costs us. Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found, and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart." Is the Word like that to you? Is it the joy and rejoicing of your heart? Are you eating it, in the sense that you are assimilating it into you life and are letting the Spirit of God make his truth visible in your life? If you are, then you need have no fear about causing others to sin. The result of your life will be that you stimulate and encourage others on to righteousness. But what terrible results ensue when we refuse to listen to the Word. This destroys us, and it destroys others. Isaiah says,

**The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.**

That is what we want - a wise tongue, a learned tongue, one which stimulates others to righteousness, one which heals and ministers to the needs of others. He goes on to say,

**The Lord God has opened My ear;  
And I was not disobedient,  
Nor did I turn back.**

That ought to be our prayer: "Lord, give us an open ear to hear the Word and to give heed to it by faith." If we do so, the result of our life will be life in others. Wherever we go the result will be encouragement and stimulation to a righteous life.

*Father, what a word of rebuke the life of Jeroboam is to us. How often in the past by our failure to listen to the Word we have caused others to sin. We thank you, Lord, that you can set all of those things right, repair the damage which has been done, restore the years that the locusts have eaten, and that, if we begin to respond in obedience to the truth, you begin to use us in a very powerful way to affect the lives of others. Lord, help us to take your Word seriously, to give heed to it, to be one who is a hearer of the Word and a doer of it, knowing that we will be blessed in our doing, that we have the life of Jesus Christ himself, who empowers us to respond in obedience. We thank you for that, in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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