

Exposition of
1 Kings 12:25-13:10,33,34

Sermon Series:
Spiritual Lessons from OT Kings

Sermon Title:
God Cares How We Worship.
Lesson from King Jeroboam

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INTRODUCTION

Does God really care about how we worship Him? A satisfactory answer to this would surely prevent many of the so-called “worship wars” that sadly divide many churches from ever taking place to begin with. At minimum, such an answer would shed light upon a subject that not many Christians give much thought to and sadly as a result end up making the mistake of copying various forms of worship that imitate and resemble secular society, instead of resembling a form of worship which is holy, pure and set-apart as expected from the bride of Christ.

In these mistaken choices of worship often times subjectivism, and emotionalism quickly become the standards for what is or is not validated as acceptable worship to God. Cultural relevance this is the frequent battle cry from many who make this mistake, much is written, blogged and articulated to justify their “cultural affirmation” of such worship.

It is interesting that in nearly every other area of human life we (as Christians) ask “What does God’s word teach on this subject?”. Yet still, many Christians forget at best or ignore at worst to consult the Precepts and Principals contained in God’s Holy Word when considering what is acceptable worship. Or, perhaps to put it another way...are we as His people at liberty, or complete freedom to adopt and adapt other methods, forms, and elements into the worship of God?

Well, I believe that in a very large way, that this is what lies at the root of what we are seeing here in the text today.

We see here a real historical illustration of a king and people who assume that their own tastes, ideas, preferences and desires are what should guide worship instead of the precepts and principals of God’ word.

So then, as we further seek in this series of messages to be spiritually instructed from the lessons we learn from the lives of

the OT kings let's take heed to the fact that God Cares How He Is To Be Worshiped.

BODY

v.25 Fertile Ground for Sinful Worship

- Give a little backdrop to Jeroboam. (11:26-38)

v.25 This describes the initial political Maneuvers of Jeroboam to establish the Independence of the northern kingdom. Jerusalem was not the capital of the new Kingdom, and Jeroboam needed a political and military headquarters the people could identify with and from which he could control the nation.

- Shechem. This was the first place in the Land of Canaan to which Abraham, had come after God had established with him what is known as the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen.12), and upon Abraham's arrival Shechem the covenant was reconfirmed.
- This is significant because the new religion and its worship that soon develops out of these northern tribes lead by Jeroboam would come to greatly emphasize this historical connection with Abraham over that of Moses and the Mosaic Law. In fact, as they continued in their rebellion they would come to reject the Law altogether.
- Penuel was a significant choice because it again shifted the attention from Moses and Jerusalem by pointing to Jacob, who predated Moses.. Penuel was the place where Jacob wrestled with an angel and was stricken in the thigh (Genesis 32).
- APPLICATION: **The obvious intention of Jeroboam is to turn the attention and thoughts of the people away from the former place they had recognized as their capital and national identity**

by establishing these political centers which carried with them heavy religious significances.

~ This shift in national identification, this doing away with the old in favor of a new progressive direction is that which creates a fertile ground for Sinful Worship that begins to manifest itself next.

vv.26-27 Origin of Sinful Worship

• **“In his heart”**, "In his heart" Jeroboam perceived that the current worship system of the people that was in place (and commanded by God) was presenting his personal ambitions and goals with a significant problem.

Establishing Shechem gave the northern tribes the precedent of the Abrahamic Covenant, likewise, in establishing Penuel gave them claims to the land, in fact, going as far back as Jacob.

However, the acceptable way of worship of the nation had been established through Moses. And worship as it was prescribed in the Law of Moses centered at Jerusalem which was under the control of Jeroboam’s adversary -King Rehobaom in Judah.

Therefore, to further gain and maintain full control and achieve his desired end result Jeroboam “in his heart” conceived the need to change the worship.

• **It is very clear that in the later part of v.27 “so shall they kill me...” that Jeroboam allows his own fears to control his thinking regarding worship instead of the promises God. (11:38)**

• APPLICATION: An important aspect for us to consider at this point in the text is that we too as Christians must guard against the

temptation of being driven by fear or other ambitions when approaching how we worship God.

Unlike Jeroboam, there are some Christians who have sincere desires to see the churches of Christ full and with good intentions want to be relevant to the current generation, and ‘in their own hearts’ have come to believe that traditional worship using Psalms and Hymns without any contemporary flare or modern presentation is an obstacle and problem that needs alteration or changed.

I submit that **just as the inner desire of his own ambitions, and his own fears clouded Jeroboam’s perspective on worship, often times our own personal motivations or fears, either as churches leaders or individuals can also affect our thinking and application when it comes to the corporate worship of God.**

God’s worship must never be thought of as a tool to be used by ambitious men for achieving their own idea of success. God’s worship must never be thought of as an instrument to be ‘relevant’ to any particular people group or generation. **God’s worship is and must be thought of as an obedient act of adoration toward our LORD guided by His precepts and principals.**

• **THOUGHT OF THE WEEK:** Puritan quote George Swinnock: “Worship comprehends all that respect which man oweth and giveth to his Maker...It is the tribute which we pay to the King of Kings, whereby we acknowledge his sovereignty over us, and our dependence on him...All that inward reverence and respect, and all that outward obedience and service to God, which the word ‘godliness’ enjoineth, is included in this one word – worship.

• Before moving on I must point out something that’s not presented in our immediate text but is relevant to our study at this point,

which is this: the very thing Jeroboam was fearful of and wanted to manipulate worship to prevent (people leaving his nation) ended up still happening to a certain degree: we know from later portions of Scripture (2 Chorn. 11:14-16) that many of the priests and Levites in the north defected to Judah along with many others who sought to serve and worship the Lord as was acceptable.

Of course this reminds us of:

Pro 19:21 “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.”

~ If we then understand that the origin of this sinful worship began in Jeroboam's heart in its bud form, what we then see next is the blossom and the fruit which is allowed to forever pervert their worship.

v.28-33 Elements of Sinful Worship

• v.28 – We are not given the names of the counselors (however as we learned last week in reviewing the distinctions of a fool in Proverbs, these counselors are men of great folly).

• #1 THE GOLDEN CALVES

Influenced more by surrounding culture vs. God's commands:

As these fruits of sinful worship begin to make themselves manifest we can't help but note that the particular element which Jeroboam selects to be added into the worship of God is - two golden calves! Why this? Why not golden beetles or golden birds?

Recall that Jeroboam not only spent a lot of time submersed in the pagan culture of Egypt while in exile during the reign of king David but additionally Jeroboam was also married to the sister-in-law of the Pharaoh.

This is all note-worthy because the pagan, idol worshiping Egyptians considered calves sacred in their plural-theistic religion.

It is obvious that **Jeroboam's selection of the calves as symbols representing God was more influenced by his previous cultural surroundings than the precepts of God's word.**

APPLICATION: We too of course must watch that we not become so culturally affirming that we allow secular thinking and practices to influence us more than the precepts and principals of God's Word regarding His worship.

• Appealing to the flesh

"...it is too much for you to go up to Jeresalem.."

He is appealing more to their personal desires of convenience and comfortability than God's lawful commands.

These tactics are still common today. The substitute for the regulative principle of worship for that which appeals to the desires of men has become the modern "golden calf" of our own generation.

The claim that the old forms of worship are no longer effective or useful is equivalent to the declaration that it would be too much to continue to go to Jerusalem and so, in the same, humanistic, Jeroboam line of reasoning, the same false cry is being heard today, let each man do his own thing for all experiences are equally valid; and so it seems as though relativism alone has become the absolute standard in place of God's word.

• Not another God.

Just like Aaron back in Exodus 32:4 Jeroboam presents these calves as the God of Israel. So, at least at this point, he is not inventing a new God, but surely he is guilty of trampling upon the second commandment which forbids the making " any graven image, [or] any likeness [of anything] that [is] in heaven above, or

that [is] in the earth beneath, or that [is] in the waters beneath..”
Duet.5:8 This disregard for the Mosaic laws goes on to grow and manifest itself with these northern tribes, in fact all the way up until they lead away in captivity.

v.29 #2 INVENTED LOCATION

Why did he place them in Bethel and Dan?

Bethel was on the border with Judah, on the way to Jerusalem. Anyone going from Israel to Jerusalem would probably go through Bethel. Jeroboam's intention was no doubt to cause his people to worship at Bethel first.

The other calf was placed near the northern entrance to the kingdom at Dan. Anyone leaving or entering the kingdom at this strategic point would also be reminded about his commitment to the king's religion.

They did not have liberty to do this, because God required they make their sacrifices at the Temple located in Jerusalem.

vv.31-33 #3 thru #5 ELEMENTS OF SINFUL WORSHIP

#3 He constructed his own place of worship, or “high place” and thus violated the call to worship at the Temple.

Notice that this sinful worship appears to be VERY similar to real worship, however it is all performed without the command of God to validate it.

#4 He recruited his own priests, disobeying God's command that priests were to come only from the tribe of Levi. Further, these priests were of the "lowest of the people," a reference to the violation of the requirements of purity for priests.

APPLICATION: The scriptures present us with a pattern and requirement for Elders and Deacons of churches and how they are called and ordained.

v.32 And Jeroboam ordained a fest in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month...

#5 Invented days of worship - Jeroboam also set his times of worship in the northern kingdom to correspond with the times of worship in Jerusalem. The calves were to be worshiped at the same times as the Temple worship in Jerusalem.

Notice how Jeroboam set himself up as the key person in this system of worship by designating himself as the one person who made the sacrifices and burnt incense on the special feast day.

This is significant, because by doing this it shows that he had completely lost all regard for the authority of God's commands over his conduct. He had lost all regard to worship God only in a way that God had revealed in His Word.

~ At this point it appears that all one must do is create an experience for the masses to achieve successful worship. In Jeroboam's selfish pursuits he had it all planned out...he created the calves for the visual stimulation, he re-routed the location of worship, he built the high places with altars, he put the right worship leaders (priests) in place with himself of course being at the center of it all and that's all is needed.

Among the many great tragedies in all this is the fact that Jeroboam and the people glorified more in the external elements of worship rather than in the God who deserves all their worship!

All these external things that they saw as vitally important actually detracted from the glory of our Lord God, who needs no man, building or special presentation to stir or move us to praise and

worship Him! His glory, as revealed in the love and mercy of Christ is what compels us to praise and worship Him, not any particular genera or style of music, but Christ and Christ alone.

~ Just when the people are pretty proud of themselves for their “improvements” on the worship of God, we see next God’s response to their sinful worship.

vv.1-10 God’s Response to Sinful Worship

- The Messenger and Neglectful prophets.

v.1 *“And behold, there came a man of God out of Judah...”*

Our first observation is that there is not any prophets within Israel who stood up and spoke against the plain violations of God’s law.

The SIN of silence: Martin Luther once said “.....”

v.2 The man of God was so bold as to not even acknowledge the king and spoke directly to the altar as if it were an entity of some sort. This altar, was after all the central focus of their worship, it was where we see here Jeroboam burning incense. The altar of course did represent demonic influence and evil, so the man of God comes to bear judgement upon it and all the evil it represents.

- In the word of the Lord.

He declared that a leader out of the lineage of David by the name of Josiah would be born. That he would literally burn the bones of the priests of Jeroboam's religion upon that same altar. As a sign that the judgment would come to pass, the altar would suddenly break and the ashes on it would pour out.

We know from 2 Kings 23 that this prophecy came to pass some 275 years later. The northern kingdom was captured by the Assyrians within 200 years, at which time the northern tribes were

dispersed. After the dispersion, while reforming the southern kingdom, Josiah crossed into the old northern kingdom and burned the bones of Jeroboam's priests which were contained their respective sepulchers. He did this not only in Bethel but throughout the entire northern region of Samaria (2 Kings: 23:15-20).

Despite the manipulations and perversions of men, God will be glorified by true worship which He has commanded.

Furthermore, this particular fulfilled prophecy about Josiah teaches us that God's judgment regarding sinful worship cannot be avoided, though it may come with the passing of history and many years, God will ultimately be glorified.

vv.3-6 The miraculous evidence displayed.

- The withered hand, the rent/broken altar, the king's hand restored.

Of course all this was powerful displays of the displeasure and judgement of God upon this sinful, man-centered worship that Jeroboam had lead the people into. One would think that with such a profound experience as this that Jeroboam, having been so personally effected would have turned from his ways!

• vv.33-34 The Obstinate/Stubborn Effect of Sinful Worship

- "...Jeroboam returned not from his evil way..."

Sadly, this text reminds us of the reality and deceitfulness that sinful worship has upon one's thinking. **People would rather defend and die for traditions and man-centered worship than let go of their inventions and worship God as he has instituted.**

CLOSING

I pray that you would agree with me that God does care about how we worship him and whenever in the future we are faced with decisions regarding worship we must always ask these simply but important questions:

1. What is the primary influence driving our change or desired direction in how we worship God?
2. Does God's word give us warrant to worship Him in the way we desire.
3. What impact will this have on future generations...what trajectory will this establish?

2Ki 17:21 ...Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. 22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; 23 Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.