

Subject: *Worship Gone Wrong*

Scripture: *1 Kings 12:25-33*

Throughout history people have sometimes been casual and careless about how they worship God. They have replaced the one true God with false gods, and they have misrepresented God and made Him out to be something far less than He is and much different than He is.

How does this happen? It happens whenever people have a low view of God and a low view of worship. It happens whenever people think worship is about them instead of about God. It happens when worship is about what people want instead of what God wants and deserves.

Whenever worship becomes people-centered it has gone wrong. When worship is about what works instead of what honors God it has gone wrong. Worship has gone wrong when it becomes humanistic and pragmatic. We see a lot of that kind of worship today, but it's not new. People have taken worship off track for a long time. In this sermon we're going to look at two Old Testament accounts of worship that went terribly wrong.

1. THE COUNTERFEIT WORSHIP OF JEROBOAM (1 Kg. 12:25-33)

The Lord allowed a political, but not a religious division of the kingdom. The Lord had promised Jeroboam political control of the ten northern tribes (11:31-37). He had warned Jeroboam to stay faithful to His commandments (11:38). Jeroboam ignored God's Word and led the people into idolatry. He set up his own man-made religion. In this text we see Jeroboam's fear, his false gods, and his false system of worship.

A. Jeroboam used worship for a selfish reason (vs. 26-27)

He was afraid he might lose political control over the people if they returned to worship at Jerusalem. All Jewish men were required to travel to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year (Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, Deut. 16:16). He thought it was in his best interest to keep people away from Rehoboam, even at the expense of keeping them away from God. He acted out of fear and forgot God's promise (11:38).

B. Jeroboam made worship convenient (vs. 28-30)

He made two golden idols in the form of calves. He set one up at Bethel in the southern part of the kingdom, and the other at Dan in the northern part of the kingdom. He made it easy for the people to worship. This was an attempt to worship God in a forbidden way. He distorted the very nature of God by reducing Him to a physical image. Jeroboam repeated the sin of Aaron at Mt. Sinai when he made the golden calf (Ex. 32:1-6).

C. Jeroboam made a counterfeit religious system (vs. 31-33)

He led the people into idolatry in clear violation of the first two of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-6) and in light of God's punishment of Aaron and the people (Ex. 32). Maybe he didn't know the scripture or he just decided to ignore it. We can't afford to ignore lessons from the past (see 1 Cor. 10:1-11). He made houses of worship in high places. These were a constant source of trouble for Israel as a breeding ground for idolatry and immorality. Jeroboam made priests out of people who were not qualified to serve. Only the tribe of Levi was chosen by God to serve as priests (Num. 3:10). Jeroboam also made a special feast in the eighth month as an alternative to the Feast of Tabernacles that was in the seventh month,

exactly one month earlier. He also offered unauthorized sacrifices on an altar. God had clearly prescribed the place and manner of worship in Jerusalem. All other worship was unauthorized.. Jeroboam's apparent motivation was to keep the people unified under him. He used this false religion to appease the people and solidify his political power. Ungodly leaders have often used religion for personal and political reasons.

Jeroboam's counterfeit religion...

- had the wrong purpose (Jeroboam's political control instead of God's glory)
- had the wrong places (Bethel and Dan instead of Jerusalem)
- had the wrong priests (unauthorized men instead of God-ordained Levites)
- had the wrong plan (self-appointed feasts instead of God's prescribed plan)

This counterfeit religion was popular with all the kings in the Northern Kingdom and caused the people to sin against the Lord as long as the nation lasted. Jeroboam's counterfeit religion brought short-term gains and long-term pains.

2. THE CORRUPTED WORSHIP OF SAMARIA (2 Kg. 17:24-41)

A. Their worship was *pragmatic* (vs. 24-28)

Lions were killing people and they thought it was because the people were ignorant of the proper rituals of worship (vs. 26-27). The real problem was not their ignorance of the rituals of worship but their ignorance of God. So they sent a priest who knew the "right way" to worship God so he could instruct them how to fear the LORD. We're not told in the text how faithful the priest was to his assignment, but one of two things happened. Either he told them the truth and the people ignored it or he failed to tell them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

B. Their worship was *permissive* (vs. 29-33)

The worship of false gods continued right along with worship of the one true God. They were inclusive and tolerant, accepting whatever the people wanted. They permitted the worship of false gods and they permitted the ministry of false priests.

C. Their worship was *perverted* (vs. 34-40)

God had made it clear that He requires our total devotion. He is a jealous God. He will not tolerate any other gods among His people.

D. Their worship was *persistent* (vs. 41)

This kind of corrupt worship was passed on for many generations. It began in the days of Jeroboam and continued until after the time of God's judgment and captivity of the people in Assyria and later in Babylon. False worship has serious and lasting consequences. Once corruption and compromise are allowed in worship, they are so hard to root out.

Whenever worship is driven by convenience, there are serious consequences.

Whenever worship tolerates compromise and corruption, there are serious consequences.

Whenever worship is based on humanism and pragmatism, there are serious consequences.