

In Nomine Iesu

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Text: 1 Kings 12:26-33

And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David:²⁷ "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."²⁸ Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!"²⁹ And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.³⁰ Now this thing became a sin, for the people went *to worship* before the one as far as Dan.³¹ He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.³² Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that *was* in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made.³³ 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. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ,

"Then it shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do *what is* right in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you." Those were the words of God to Jeroboam when God chose Jeroboam to become king over the northern part of Israel.

David's grandson, Rehoboam, in his pride and arrogance, had lost the northern part of the kingdom. God took it away and gave it to Jeroboam. Jeroboam received this great gift from the Lord, the gift of being king, the gift of his family continuing on after him as the royalty of Israel. The conditions for Jeroboam's kingship were his faithfulness to the Lord's commands, doing what was right in God's sight.

In the text before us this morning we learn how Jeroboam intends to keep the northern kingdom under his authority.

Jeroboam is concerned about losing his kingdom. He is concerned because the worship for all of the Israelites, whether they are part of the northern kingdom or the southern kingdom, is still centered at the temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is still the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. And with various festivals throughout the year scheduled for Jerusalem, Jeroboam begins to think that he will lose the hearts of the people; that they will return to be under the kingship of Rehoboam, instead of himself. So Jeroboam devises a plan to keep the people with him.

We need to see that Jeroboam's plan is not done out of a desire to lead the people away from the true worship of God. Jeroboam, in fact, wants to keep festivals and the worship of the people of God, only he wants to do it in a way that will insure that he won't lose the kingdom. Jeroboam's intentions are not necessarily evil.

That being said, Jeroboam commits a grievous sin. His sin is first of all unbelief. Jeroboam does not believe God's promises. Jeroboam looks at the political situation, and he makes his decisions based on that. He ignores the promise of God. He doubts, and all the rest of his decisions are based on that doubt.

Jeroboam does several things to keep the people within the borders of the country. He builds two new worship sites to replace the one worship site at Jerusalem. The two new ones remain in the northern kingdom, one very near the border to the south, and one up in the north – perhaps built there to accommodate those people who complained about having to travel all the way down to Jerusalem for the divinely ordained festivals. Jeroboam also makes two images out of gold – golden calves. Now again we don't need to think that Jeroboam is deliberately leading the people away from worshipping the true God by doing this. He may very well think that these golden calves are a fine representation of the strength of the true God, perhaps wanting them to be understood as pedestals for the invisible Yahweh. He may have other reasons. But

he ignores the fact that the golden calves also bring to mind the fertility rites of Canaan, the very false gods, that Joshua and others had worked to cleanse from the promised land. And those golden calves become a stumbling block for the people.

In addition to the new places of worship and the golden calves, Jeroboam sets up new festivals to mimic the festivals at the Temple in Jerusalem, and he decides to have priests from all the various tribes of Israel, instead of the tribe of Israel. Both of these decisions are made against the clear will of God – for God had established the Passover and others festivals, God had established the Levites as the only tribe from which priests were to come. Now instead of the people having worship instituted by God, they have worship instituted by Jeroboam.

Jeroboam's lack of trust in the promises of God has led him to abandon the true worship of God. He could probably defend each of these actions in some fashion. He could argue that men from tribes other than Levi were capable of offering sacrifices and serving the Lord as priests. But that argument is empty. God did not choose the Levites for service in the temple because they were the only ones who could do it. He simply appointed that particular tribe for that particular duty. All Jeroboam had to do was to follow the ways God had appointed, to follow the statutes and keep the commands. But he does not.

This sin of unbelief on the part of Jeroboam would result in great tragedy for himself, for his family, and for the nation that had been put under his care. Great spiritual damage was caused as the king introduced worship that was not commanded by God, and that actually kept the people from the ways established by God at the Temple, festivals that had been instituted by God four hundred years earlier. The result would be a gradual deterioration of the faith of this northern kingdom. Not all would follow this way of Jeroboam. But no king that succeeded him would ever undo what would be called the sin of Jeroboam.

Jeroboam did not start out trying to lead the people away from God. His intentions were not evil or cruel or deliberately idolatrous. But great evil came because of his actions of moving away from the appointed place of worship and from changing the established institutions of God.

As I look at much of what is happening in Christian churches and the worship of God here at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, it is apparent to me that there have been many well intended changes attempted and implemented within church services, yet changes that have not given the good fruit that they were intended to bring forth. I am afraid that much of the damage that is being done within congregations by the weak theology, the unwitting loss of strong hymns, the watering down of substantial theology, much of this damage will not be seen for decades. Three hundred years ago in Germany the Pietists were very intent on trying to liven up services and to make spirituality real and personal for the people. However, the result was the weakening of the faith to such an extent that the lies and errors of the Enlightenment devastated the church. A time of theological weakness and compromise led to the death of many congregations, as God's Word was abandoned for those things that made sense humanly speaking.

It didn't make sense to Jeroboam to allow his people to go to Jerusalem. He thought that for sure that would cause him to lose the kingdom. In fact, his solution to the supposed "problem" is what actually caused him to lose the kingdom as he acted in doubt and unbelief, instead of trusting the promises of God.

What we do here as we gather on Sunday mornings does matter. How we do things does matter. Compromise on things that seem not to matter can bear evil fruit in years to come. Jesus used the phrase "wolves in sheep's clothing" to describe false teachers. He did so in order to teach us how hard they can be to discern, to distinguish, from truth. Now is not the time for us to compromise on truth. Now is the time for us to grow in our conviction that God's Word is our great heritage; that it is by grace alone that our churches have been able to resist much of the spirit of this age, a spirit that is not the Holy Spirit. To remain steadfast to the truth means that we are to continue to hear God's Word faithfully, regularly, and to know that faith lives only by this truth, only by the forgiveness of sins paid for by the death of the Son of God on the cross, and by the delivering of this forgiveness through the ways appointed and instituted by God: preaching, teaching, baptizing, communing.

As we gather around the altar today we are making a confession of our need for the remission of sins given us in this holy sacrament, we are making a confession of the truth of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, given and shed for us, and we are making a confession of the way by which we receive God's mercy – through faithful reception of the ways God uses to bring His undeserved love to us again and again. God keep us steadfast in this word and truth. In the name of Jesus. Amen.