–Save This Page as a PDF–

Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel
First Kings 12: 25-33

Golden calves at Dan and Bethel DIG: What human tendency did Jeroboam take advantage of as he started his new religion. When in your lifetime have you seen these tendencies in action? What various commands of God did Jeroboam change when he set up his new religion?

REFLECT: What is wrong with selecting elements from different belief systems that seem like they work well for people in their lives? What is wrong with thinking that all religions lead to God? How do you know that the belief in Yeshua is the only path to salvation?

Sin always costs you more than you want to pay, and takes you further than you want to go.



King Jeroboam I was a doer, not a philosopher; **he** was a man who first caught **Solomon's** attention because **he** was busy, efficient, dependable, and productive **(First Kings 11:26-28)**. **He** was the ideal popular leader who knew how to fight the people's battles and champion their causes. But ask **him** about **his** personal faith in **ADONAI** and **his** answers might get a little foggy. **He** had lived in **Egypt (First Kings 11:40)** long enough to develop a tolerance toward idolatry as well as

an understanding of how religion can be used to control people. In that regard, **Jeroboam** was in kahoots with **Nebuchadnezzar (Dani'el 3), Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:19-25),** and **the Antichrist (Revelation 13** and **17)**, and today's latest demagogue. But **Jeroboam** made **three serious mistakes** during **his twenty-two-year** reign.

He didn't believe in God's promises: Success in life depends on doing **God's** will and trusting in **God's** promises, but **Jeroboam** failed in both. When **Ahijah** gave **Jeroboam God's** message that guaranteed **him** the throne of the kingdom of **Isra'el (First Kings 11:28-39)**, the prophet made it clear that political division did not permit religious departure. **ADONAI** would have given **Jeroboam** the entire kingdom except that **He** had made an everlasting covenant with **David** to keep one of **his** descendants on the throne (see the commentary on **the Life of David, to see link click Ct – The LORD's Covenant with David**). This protected the Messianic line so that **the Savior** would come into the world. **YHVH** tore the ten tribes away from **Rehoboam** because **he** had followed **Solomon's** bad example and turned the people to **idols**. This should have been a warning to **Jeroboam** to be faithful to **Ha'Shem** and stay away from **false gods**. **God** also promised to build **Jeroboam** a continual dynasty if **he** would just obey **ADONAI** and walk in **His** ways. What a promise! Yet, **Jeroboam** didn't believe it.[333]

Fear: One of the first pieces of evidence of unbelief is **fear**. **Jeroboam's fear** was that **Rehoboam** would attack **him**. So, **Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel** on the east side of the Jordan River, and thus, much more defensible from an invasion by **Judah (First Kings 12:25 NIV).** Instead of trusting in **God** to be **his** shield and defender, **Jeroboam** trusted in **his** own defenses and strategy. Another **fear** of **Jeroboam** was that **his** own people would desert **him** and go back to **Jerusalem** to worship. Therefore, **he thought to himself, "The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam" (First Kings 12:26-27 NIV).** All **his** human reasoning showed a lack of faith from what **God** promised **Jeroboam He** would do.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise and thank **You** for **Your** steadfast **love** and your abiding presence in those who **love You**. **Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (John 14:23).** It is such a*

*comfort to know **You** are Almighty and All- Powerful, even when there are wars and world tensions and things seem to be falling apart.* **ADONAI, God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in Your hand and no one can stand against You (2 Chronicles 20:6).**

*When I keep my heart and eyes focused on **You**, I can have peace in my heart. I do not have to fear – no matter how awful the situation is, for **You** are with me to **strengthen**, help and to **uphold** me. **Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Surely I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. . . I will help you. It is a declaration of ADONAI, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Isra'el** (**Isaiah 41:10, 14b-c).** It is a great comfort to know that **You**, my **Holy Helper**, rules over all nations, and has paid the promised to redeem me. I pray in **the Name** of **the One sitting at Your right hand.** Amen*

Substitutes: The easiest solution for **Jeroboam** was to establish worship centers in **Isra'el**. But what authority did **he** have to devise a rival religion when **the Jews** had received **their** form of worship from the very hand of **God**? **He** certainly couldn't build a temple to compete with **Solomon's Temple** in **Jerusalem**, or write another **Torah** that matched what **Moses** had received from **YHVH**, or set up a sacrificial system that would guarantee the covering of sins. **He** was no **Moses**, and **he** certainly couldn't claim to be **God**! What **Jeroboam** actually did was to take advantage of the tendency of the Jewish people to turn to **idols**, and the desire of most people for a religion that is convenient, not too costly, and close enough to the authorized faith to be comfortable for the conscience. **Therefore, Jeroboam made four drastic changes in the true worship of ADOANI.**

First, he changed the object of worship from ADONAI to two golden calves. He didn't tell the people to forget **YHVH**, but to worship **Him** in the form of **golden calves. Jeroboam's** own words indicate **Aaron's golden calf** was exactly what **he** had in mind **(Exodus 32:4).** Worshiping **the golden calves** couldn't have been more convenient: **He said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Isra'el, who brought you up out of Egypt."** And **the people** were more than willing to believe **him**. If the Canaanites and the Egyptians could worship calves, so could the Hebrews!

Secondly, he changed the place of worship from Jerusalem to Dan and Bethel. One he set up on the furthest southern border of **his** kingdom at

Bethel, just a short distance from Jerusalem, **and the other at Dan,** on the furthest northern border**. And this thing became a sin; the people came to worship the one at Bethel and went as far as Dan to worship the other (First Kings 12:28-30 NIV). He** forgot (or chose to ignore) the teachings of the **Torah, "I am ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the abode of slavery. You are to have no other gods before Me. You are not to make for yourselves a carved image of any kind of representation of anything in heaven above, on the earth beneath or in the water below the shoreline. You are not to bow down to them or serve them, for I, ADONAI, am a zealous God (Exodus 20:1-5a).** But **Ha'Shem** didn't forget!

Thirdly, a religion needs ministers or **priests**, so **Jeroboam built shrines on high places and he changed the priests of worship from Levities to all sorts of people.** The only requirement was that each candidate bring with **him a young bull and seven rams (Second Chronicles 13:9)**. **God** made it clear when **He** gave **Moshe the Torah** that only **the sons of Aaron** could serve as **priests** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fv – The Selection of Aaron and His Sons as Priests**) and if anyone from another tribe tried to serve, he would be **put to death (Numbers 3:5-10)**. Even **the Levites**, who were from the tribe of **Levi**, were not allowed to serve at that golden altar in the Holy Place on **penalty of death (Numbers 3:38)**. Unauthorized **priests** and unauthorized temples could never have access to **ADONAI** or present sacrifices acceptable to **God**. It was a man-made religion that pleased **the people**, protected **the king**, and unified **the nation** – except for **the** faithful **Levites** who abandoned the northern kingdom and moved to **Judah** to worship **God** according to the teachings of **Torah (Second Chronicles 11:13-17).**[334]

And fourthly, he changed a true God-given festival for a counterfeit festival. YHVH required **the Jews** to celebrate seven divinely appointed feasts each year (see the commentary on **Leviticus Dw – God's Appointed Times**), so **Jeroboam instituted a** counterfeit **festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month,** to take the place of **the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar** of **his** own temple**. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices** to **the calf** that **he** had made **on the altar he had built at Bethel. So, he instituted the** counterfeit **festival for the**

Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings (First Kings 12:31-33 NIV). Completing **his** religious innovations, **Jeroboam** instituted an brand-new annual **feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month**, no doubt rivaling the feast of Booths in the seventh month in **Jerusalem**. The institutionalization of a counterfeit religion was then complete. A syncretistic mix of Judaism and Baalism was in place. Northerners had to make a special effort just to worship **YHVH**. Just as there were then two nations, two capitals, two governments, and two kings, there were also two religions.[335]

Apostasy: Today we live an age when "manufactured religion" is popular, approved, and accepted. The biblical leaders of the blind assert that we live in a "pluralistic society" and that nobody has the right to claim that only revelation is true and only one way of salvation is correct. Self-appointed "prophets" and ministers put together their own theology and pass it off as truth. They aren't the least bit interested in what the Bible has to say; instead, they substitute their **fabricated stories (Second Peter 2:3)** for **God's** unchanging and inspired **Word**, and many gullible people fall for their lies only to **bring on themselves swift destruction (Second Peter 2:1-2)**. **Jeroboam's** "religion" incorporated elements of **the Torah** and from pagan nations that **the Jews** had already conquered. **His** system was what today is called "eclectic" (selective) or "syncretic" (combining many parts), but **God** called it heresy and apostasy. When **Isaiah** confronted the new religion of **his** day, **he** cried out: **To the Torah and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (Isaiah 8:20).**

Because **Jeroboam** didn't believe **God's** promise given by **the prophet Ahijah**, **he** began to walk in unbelief and to lead the people into false religion. The religion **he** invented was comfortable, convenient, and not costly, but it wasn't authorized by **the LORD**. It was contrary to the revealed will of **God** in Scripture, and it had as its purpose the unification of **his** kingdom, not the salvation of the people and the glory of **God**. It was man-made religion, and **God** totally rejected it. Centuries later, **Yeshua** told the woman of Samaria (the former kingdom of **Isra'el**), **You people don't know what you are worshipping; we worship what we know, because salvation comes from the Jews (John 4:22).** When **He** made that statement, **He** instantly wiped out every other religion and affirmed that the only way of salvation is from **the Jews**. **Yeshua** was a **Jew**, and the faith of all believers spring from father **Abraham** (see the commentary on **Genesis Ef – Abram Believed the LORD and He Credited It to Him as Righteousness**). Our modern "pluralistic

society" notwithstanding, **Peter** was right when **he** declared: **There is salvation in no one else! For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by whom we must be saved (Acts 4:12)!**[336]