

The Way of Jeroboam; the Way of David

King 12:25-16:34

Key Verse: 15:5

“For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life--except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.”

In our world today there seem to be many ways to live, especially in regard to religious preferences in this pluralistic society. However, Biblically speaking, there are only two ways to live. One is the way of Jeroboam, which is to follow one's own idea and desire, even making one's own religion. The other is the way of David, which is to follow the word of God. The way of Jeroboam is the way of curse. The way of David is the way of blessing. Each person must decide which way he or she will live. And each one has to bear the consequences of his or her decision. This passage also talks about the importance of one person's influence. We will each give an influence to our descendants and future generations, either good or bad. May God help us make a right decision today as to which way to follow.

I. The sin of Jeroboam (12:25-14:20)

When Solomon's heart turned away from the Lord, the Lord raised adversaries against him. One of them was Jeroboam. He was a man of standing and an able administrator (11:28). He must have been a responsible man and very faithful and diligent. He was leadership material. Even God noticed him and raised him as a leader of the ten tribes of Northern Israel (11:29-39). God exalted Jeroboam because Solomon did not walk in God's way and was not right in God's eyes. God said to Jeroboam through Ahijah the prophet: "If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you." God gave Jeroboam a special privilege and blessing in order to raise him as a shepherd like David over his people Israel. God gave Jeroboam the same promise and opportunity that he gave to David. Accordingly, when Solomon died, Jeroboam became king of Northern Israel (12:20). What did he do?

First, Jeroboam set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan (12:25-33). After the division of Israel between the ten northern tribes--Northern Israel--and the southern tribe--Judah--there was instability. Judah had Jerusalem with the magnificent temple, as its capital city. Northern Israel had none. Jeroboam fortified

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Shechem, made it his royal city, and built up Peniel for its defense (25). Then Jeroboam 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" (26,27). It was merely the speculation of his own mind. God had promised that he would rule Northern Israel, but Jeroboam did not believe this promise from his heart. Furthermore, he ignored God's will in this matter. He only thought about maintaining his position as king for the sake of saving his own life. When he had no faith in God's promise, fear ruled his heart. He feared the people he should govern, and not God who had appointed him. In fear, he fashioned idols in the shape of golden calves, and put one in Bethel and one in Dan. This violated God's most important commandments. To fulfill his own selfish political purpose, he abandoned faith in God.

Fear is the opposite of faith. Fear is rooted in unbelief. Anyone who is caught by fear will turn away from God's word and try to save themselves in their own way. The fear problem began with Adam. When fear entered Adam's heart, he hid himself from God, and his love relationship with God was broken. He tried to save himself by covering his body with fig leaves. Fear is not merely a mental phenomenon; it is planted by Satan. God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self discipline (Ro 8:15; 1 Ti 1:7). If Jeroboam had faith in God, he would trust God for his security and future. Since God appointed him as king, God would guide him accordingly; God is faithful and responsible. By faith Jeroboam should have sent the people to Jerusalem to worship God and receive his word. He should have constructed a highway and commissioned additional donkeys and chariots to transport people to Jerusalem for holy feast days. Then God would have been pleased, and their faith would have grown. His humble and God-fearing leadership would have inspired people and earned their trust, in both the North and the South. It would have opened up the possibility for reconciliation and mutual cooperation. But because Jeroboam had no faith, he engaged in fruitless conflict which caused pain and suffering to his nation and brought about his own ruin.

Though Jeroboam's inner thoughts reveal that he was fearful and self-serving, he did not express this to the people. He told them, "It is too much for you to go to Jerusalem. Here are your gods O Israel who brought you up out of Egypt." This was the same grievous sin Israel had committed in the time of Moses by worshipping a golden calf (Ex 32). In the name of ease and comfort, Jeroboam persuaded people to worship nearby idols instead of making a journey to worship the one true God. In our times, he would have encouraged them not to go to

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church, but to stay at home and worship through television. The author comments in verse 30, "And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there." Jeroboam went on to build shrines on the high places, appoint priests from all sorts of people, and to make his own religious feast days. This was all in violation of the Lord's commands to offer sacrifice only in Jerusalem (Dt 12:4-7), to appoint priests only from the tribe of Levi (Ex 29:9), and to observe feasts and celebrations according to God's command. In this way, Jeroboam made his own religion and led Northern Israel into idol worship. People today do the same thing. A recent Barna update shows that Americans are more likely to create their own religious beliefs than follow an established set of beliefs from a church or denomination. We call it smorgassboard religion. Jeroboam assumed that no one knew his inner thoughts. But God knows all things. God knew what he did, and why he did it. Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are everywhere keeping watch on the wicked and the good." We cannot escape from God's eyes which see into our hearts. If our inner thoughts are not right with God, we must repent. From our inner hearts we must trust God, holding on to his word. Then God will surely bless us. Otherwise fear will lead us to foolish idolatry.

Second, God warns Jeroboam through a man of God from Judah (13:1-34).

Jeroboam thought that as king he could do as he pleased without consequence. But God, the Ruler of his people, began to intervene.

Look at verse 1. "By the word of the Lord a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering." He cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord: "O altar, altar! This is what the Lord says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you'" (2). The man of God risked his life to deliver this message of judgment to Jeroboam. His courage was indeed great. This prophecy was fulfilled in detail some 300 years later (2 Ki 23:15-18). Yet that same day the man of God gave a sign: "This is the sign the Lord has declared: the altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out." How should King Jeroboam have responded? He should have repented. Instead he stretched out his hand toward the man of God and yelled, "Seize him!" But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out. Jeroboam must have been covered by the ashes. Then the king said to the man of God, "Intercede with the Lord your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored." Graciously, the man of God prayed for him and the king's hand was restored. Though God's warning was clear and his grace available, Jeroboam did not repent. Still, he tried to have fellowship

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with the man of God--inviting him to dinner and promising a gift. But the man of God answered, "No! Never!" according to the word of God (13:8,9). Most likely, God prohibited fellowship with the king and his people, in order to express his displeasure with them.

In verses 11-32, the man of God was invited by an old prophet to eat with him. At first he refused, according to the word of God. Then the old prophet deceived him, saying that an angel told him to invite the man of God. The man of God should have refused because he knew it violated God's word to him. At least, he should have prayed about it. However, he just followed the old prophet's words. Maybe he was very hungry and thirsty after his grueling message delivery. Maybe he was confused due to a sense of respect for seniors. In any case, it was not a small matter. He disobeyed the word of God. So he died. God's servant cannot treat God's word lightly. God cannot be mocked. The man of God started well by the Spirit, but his end was somewhat sorrowful, for he finished in the flesh, unable to overcome bodily temptation. Nevertheless, the man of God was able to deliver two messages. In living, he delivered the message of God's judgment to Jeroboam. In dying, he spoke of the certain outcome of disobedience.

It is hard to understand the old prophet in this passage. Why did he deceive the young man of God? Some think he wanted to test the truthfulness of his prophecy. Others think he was jealous and deliberately made the young man of God stumble. Still others think the old prophet was lonely and humanistic in his old age, and simply made a mistake in his desire for fellowship. We cannot say exactly, and there is no evidence of God's judgment against the old prophet in this passage. The significance, however, is clear: This verified the truthfulness of God's word against Jeroboam. The old prophet said in verse 32, "For the message he declared by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel and against all the shrines on the high places in the towns of Samaria will certainly come true."

God judged the altar at Bethel and warned Jeroboam strongly. How did he respond? "Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places" (33). Unrepentant Jeroboam continued to lead Israel astray. It was a serious matter. Look at verse 34. "This was the sin of the house of Jeroboam that led to its downfall and to its destruction from the face of the earth."

Third, God judges Jeroboam through Ahijah the prophet (14:1-20). After this, Jeroboam's son became ill. So Jeroboam sent his wife, in disguise, to Ahijah the

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prophet. Ahijah could not see, but the Lord had told him that Jeroboam's wife was coming. Ahijah delivered God's message to Jeroboam. God reminded Jeroboam of his grace, that he raised him up and gave Israel to him, hoping that he would rule as David did. But instead of following the way of David, Jeroboam went his own way. So God said to him through Ahijah, "You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back" (9). So God would bring disaster on his house, cutting off every male in Israel. Dogs would eat his descendants who died in the city, and birds would feed on his descendants who died in the country. Furthermore, Jeroboam's son would die. God had been gracious to Jeroboam in many ways. But when he did not repent, finally his house would be destroyed, and his nation uprooted and sent into exile. God would give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam had committed and had caused Israel to commit (14:16). One leader's evil thoughts, sin, and unrepentant heart brought disaster on his family, his nation, and future generations.

II. Kings who walked in the ways of David and Jeroboam (14:21-16:34)

14:21-15:24 is a record of the kings of Judah. 15:25-16:34 is a record of the kings of Northern Israel. David, the exemplary good king of Judah, showed one way. Jeroboam, the exemplary bad king of Northern Israel, showed the other way. In these verses, we find the final outcome of each way and what happened to those who lived in that way.

First, kings who walked in the way of David (14:21-15:24). Three kings of Judah are listed in these verses: Rehoboam, Abijah and Asa. Although some kings of Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord, among them there were good kings who followed in David's footsteps, such as King Asa.

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, reigned in Jerusalem for 17 years. Rehoboam's mother's name was Naamah, an Ammonite. The author notes this two times to emphasize the impact of his mother's influence (21,31). God's command to the Israelites not to intermarry with foreign women was important, not only to keep a godly husband's heart pure, but to make a good environment to raise godly children. The idolatry that began in Solomon's time was now widespread. The whole nation of Judah was involved. They stirred up God's jealous anger more than their fathers had done. The people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. There were even male shrine prostitutes. So God punished them. In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, God sent Shishak king of Egypt against them. He carried off the treasures of the temple and

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the royal palace, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. So Rehoboam had to use bronze shields. His kingdom had digressed from the gold medal level to the bronze medal level. It was because of their sins. They should have felt shame and repented. But they just pressed on.

After Rehoboam's death, his son Abijah succeeded him as king. Abijah reigned over Judah for three years. Look at verse 3. "He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been." There is a saying, "Like father, like son." Abijah followed the empty way of life handed down to him from his father. Look at verses 4-5. "Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and by making Jerusalem strong. For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commandments all the days of his life--except in the case of Uriah the Hittite." Although Abijah committed all the sins his father had done before him, God didn't remove him. Here we learn that God was willing to bear with Abijah for David's sake. Moreover, God had hope that Abijah's son would be better than he. Sometimes God bears with the failings of one generation for the sake of the next generation. God's heart's desire was to raise a king like David to do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. David feared the Lord and loved the word of God and served his people with God's mind. God wants to raise such leaders, even in our times.

After Abijah died, his son Asa took his place as king and reigned for 41 years, doing many good things. Look at verse 11. "Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done." He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his father had made (12). He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. It was not easy for him to depose his grandmother. But he did not compromise. He stood on the side of the truth and obeyed the word of God clearly. He said, "Repent Grandma!" Then he cut down her Asherah pole and burned it in the Kidron Valley (13). Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life (14). Asa delivered his people from Baasha king of Israel by means of a treaty with the king of Aram. Then Asa rested with his fathers and his son Jehoshaphat succeeded him as king.

Even though Solomon, Rehoboam and Abijah were a bad influence, God raised Asa as a good king for the sake of David. Asa followed David's good example. Here we can learn the importance of examples. In our times, most people want to live in their own way, doing what is right in their own eyes. Throughout his

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history, God has raised exemplary people who do what is right in God's eyes. God wants to bless others through their good examples. Each of us must follow good examples, especially our Lord Jesus Christ, as his disciples. We must also be good examples to our family members, our community, our nation, and to future generations as well.

Second, kings who walked in the way of Jeroboam (15:25-16:34). These verses cover the reigns of six kings of Northern Israel who reigned about 62 years in total. Their transfers of power were not peaceful. There were rebellions, coup d'etats, insurrections, and bloody purges of entire family lines. The kingdom was torn apart in bloody wars of revenge. Nadab, the son who succeeded Jeroboam, reigned for two years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, walking in the ways of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit. Baasha, from another family, killed Nadab and took power. Then Baasha killed Jeroboam's whole family. He did not leave Jeroboam anyone that breathed, but destroyed them all according to the word of the Lord (30). Though Baasha destroyed Jeroboam's family, he committed the same sins that Jeroboam committed (34). God prophesied through Jehu the destruction of Baasha's family. Baasha died and his son Elah became king and reigned for two years. Then Zimri, an official, killed Elah and Baasha's entire family, not sparing a single male, whether relative or friend (11). He did this according to the words of the Lord (12). Zimri only reigned for seven days (15). When his capital city was besieged by the army commander Omri, he went into the citadel of the royal palace and set it on fire around him. So he died. It was because of his sins (19). Then Northern Israel was divided into two factions, Omri's and Tibni's, and fought a civil war. Omri proved stronger than Tibni. Tibni died and Omri became king. Omri reigned for twelve years, six of them in Tirzah. Then he bought the hill of Samaria and built it up; this would become the capital of Northern Israel. Omri was successful politically, but the author assesses simply that he did evil in the eyes of the Lord (25-26). In the eyes of the Lord political achievements are not important. Omri died and his son Ahab succeeded him as king. Verse 31 says about Ahab, "He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him." Before Ahab's reign, Israel did not serve Baal publicly. But under Ahab's reign, Baal worship became the national religion. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings before him (33). Though the situation of Northern Israel was tragic and chaotic, God was still fulfilling his word. When Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho, he did so at the cost of his firstborn son and his youngest son, in accordance with God's word spoken by General Joshua (34).

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In the period covered in 15:25-16:34 the author repeats the phrase, or variations of it: "he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, walking in the ways of Jeroboam" (15:26,30,34; 16:2,13,19,25-26). The bad influence of Jeroboam did not disappear at his death; it plagued Northern Israel for generations. What is worse, each generation became progressively more evil than the one before it. The last king mentioned, Ahab, was the most evil. Comparatively, the southern kingdom, Judah, was much better. In brief, we find here two ways. One is the way of Jeroboam, which the kings of Northern Israel all followed, without exception. The other is the way of David. Some, but not all, of the kings of Judah followed David's way. Perhaps it was because people follow a bad example very easily, but it is not easy to follow a good example. There are always two ways before us: the way of Jeroboam and the way of David; in other words, the way of the world and the way of God; the way of darkness and the way of light; the way of evil and the way of good; the way of disbelief and disobedience, and the way of faith and obedience. There is a broad road that leads us to destruction and a narrow road that leads us to life (Mt 7:13-14).

Deuteronomy 30:15 says, "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction." There is before us the way of life and the way of death; the way of blessing and the way of curse. We are free to choose which road we take. Each of us must decide. God promises that if we love the Lord and walk in his ways, obeying his words, then we will live, and all his blessings will come upon us. We will be blessed when we come in and when we go out. The Lord will grant us victory over our enemies. The Lord will grant us abundant prosperity--in the fruit of our wombs, and in the work of our hands. The Lord will make us the head and not the tail (Dt 28:2-13). However, if we abandon God and disobey his commands, if we worship idols and live for power and pleasure, the Lord will bring a curse upon everything we put our hands to. The Lord will plague us with all sorts of diseases, and disasters will come without end. We will always be borrowing, always be the tail, and always be hungry, thirsty and in distress. Despair and fear and futility will follow us everywhere.

Each of us must decide which way to take. This decision will have a great impact on our lives, our families, our nations, and future generations. We must think clearly about this and decide based on God's truth. In the July 22, 1900 issue of The New York Times, there appeared an article that compared the lives of two men who lived in Colonial times: Max Jukes and Jonathan Edwards. Max Jukes was an atheist who married an unbelieving woman and had many children, both legitimate and illegitimate. Jonathan Edwards was a Puritan preacher who married a godly woman, Sarah, with whom he had eleven children. Edwards was used by God in

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the Great Awakening, and served as president of Princeton University. According to five years of research conducted by Richard L. Dugdale, among Max Juke's 1,292 descendants, 309 died young, 310 were beggars, 440 were crippled, 50 were prostitutes, 60 were thieves, 7 were murderers, and 53 were ordinary Joes. By 1880, the state of New York had spent \$1,250,000 to bear the burden of dealing with the Jukes family. In contrast, according to research done by A.E. Winship, among 873 direct descendants of Jonathan Edwards, 12 were college presidents, 100 were ministers, 65 were professors, 60 were doctors, 75 were naval officers, 85 were prominent authors, 100 were lawyers, 30 were judges, 80 were civil servants, three were congressmen, two were senators, one was vice president of the United States (Aaron Burr), 260 were ordinary people, and only six were criminals.

When we disobey God's words and live as we want, it may seem fun at the time, but later it brings a curse upon not only us, but on our descendants as well. When we live by faith in God and fear the Lord, our lives will be blessed and our children and descendants will be set on the right path and they will also be blessed. So we have to decide what kind of life to live in the eyes of the Lord. Let us sincerely pray that we may not follow the way of Jeroboam, but the way of David. Then God will bless us abundantly and make us a blessing to our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and generations to come.