

Lessons from Old Testament Kings - Jeroboam

Reading: Romans 15:4 “... *whatever things were written before were written for our learning*”

Introduction:

Both **Romans 15:4** and **1 Corinthians 10:11** tell us that the things which are written about events that happened in the Old Testament are there for our learning. While the Old Law is no longer valid today for our salvation (**Galatians 2:16**), having been taken away at the cross (**Colossians 2:14**), Old Testament history does provide us with a treasure-trove of examples of the nature of people, and how God rewards the righteous and punishes the rebellious. It gives us hope, because we can see how God is consistent and keeps His promises (**Malachi 3:6a**; **Hebrews 13:8**), which helps us to build our faith and trust in Him.

In this series of lessons, we will be looking at some of the Old Testament Kings, both good and bad, and drawing some practical experience from their lives in order to help us in our walk with God.

LESSON

1) God's people split into two nations

a) The reason why the kingdom would be split – Solomon's idolatry

When the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land after their years of bondage in Egypt and the 40 years of wilderness wanderings, God warned them not to inter-marry with the people from the surrounding nations. And the reason was this; “*For they will turn your sons away from following me, to serve other gods;*” (**Deuteronomy 7:1-5**). God wanted to ensure that His people remained faithful to the one true God (**Exodus 20:1-6**).

Roughly 400 years later, Solomon was king over Israel. He is probably best remembered for the great wisdom that was given to him by God (**1 Kings 3:5-12**; **4:29-34**). However, like all men, Solomon was not perfect (**Romans 3:23**). During his reign, He loved many women from foreign countries and married them (**1 Kings 11:1-2**)¹, disobeying God's command from **Deuteronomy 7:3**. Unfortunately, during his later years, these wives turned his heart away from fully serving the Lord, and he set up idols and high places to the false gods (**1 Kings 11:3b-8**).

Therefore, the Lord became angry with Solomon, and the consequence of Solomon's actions was that God would take most of the kingdom away from the descendants of David – the kingdom would be split into two, with David's descendants being king over just one tribe, Judah (**1 Kings 11:9-13**). This split would happen during the days of Solomon's successor (vs.12).

b) Jeroboam to be king over the tribes taken from the hand of Solomon

Jeroboam was a servant of Solomon. He was from the tribe of Ephraim, a man of valour², and was industrious. Therefore, Solomon had put him in

¹ He ultimately had a total of 700 wives and 300 concubines (**1 Kings 11:3**).

² *i.e.* “virtue”, “strength”. – reference Strong's Concordance of the Bible, Hebrew word 2428

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charge of all the labour force from the house of Joseph³ (**1 Kings 11:26-28**). While Jeroboam was still serving under Solomon, God used the prophet Ahijah to tell Jeroboam about the future split of the kingdom, and that he (Jeroboam) would be ruler over the tribes that would be taken from the hand of Solomon (**1 Kings 11:29-31**). When Solomon heard about all this, he sought to kill Jeroboam, causing Jeroboam to flee to Egypt until Solomon's life had ended (**1 Kings 11:40**).

c) The kingdom splits

After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam went to Shechem⁴ to be pronounced king. Jeroboam returned from Egypt and joined the people gathered at Shechem where they asked the new king for some relief from the burden (*i.e.* taxes) that they had incurred under Solomon⁵ (**1 Kings 12:1-4**). Rehoboam initially took counsel from the elders who served his father – they advised him to heed the people's request. He also took counsel from those with whom he had grown up – they advised him to be even harder on the people (**1 Kings 12:6-11**). Rehoboam decided to take the advice from the latter group, and subsequently told the people that he would be tougher on them, not easier (**1 Kings 12:12-15**).

The result was that the people from the northern tribes seceded⁶, and became the nation of Israel. They separated themselves from the tribe of Judah, and made Jeroboam their king (**1 Kings 12:16-20**) – just as God had foretold.

2) God's promises and Jeroboam's apostasy

a) God's promises to Jeroboam

God had chosen Jeroboam to be the leader of the 10 tribes that were removed from the house of David. There was to be no battle for this separate kingdom – God was handing it to Jeroboam (**1 Kings 11:37**). God had also made this promise to Jeroboam – heed all that God commanded him and walk in His ways, then God would give him an “enduring house” just as He did for David⁷ (**1 Kings 11:38**). In other words, if Jeroboam lived a faithful life to the Lord, then the Lord would bless him and ensure that his descendants would continue on the throne of Israel. He would have a dynasty, just like David.

b) Jeroboam's apostasy

The male Jews were required to attend three feasts every year at “the place of God's choosing” – the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the Passover), the Feast

³ The house of Joseph = the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim (**Genesis 48:1; Joshua 14:4a**)

⁴ Shechem is in central Israel,

⁵ An example of the burden Solomon had placed on the people can be seen in the daily provisions that Israel had to supply for the king and his bureaucracy – **1 Kings 4:22-28**;

30 kors of fine flour (30 kors = approx. 3750 kg)

60 kors of meal (60 kors = approx 7500 kg)

10 fattened oxen

20 oxen from the pastures

100 sheep, plus deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl

⁶ There had also been a kind of “split kingdom” after the death of Saul. David initially reigned over just Judah, while the other tribes remained separate (**2 Samuel 2:8-11**).

⁷ For examples of God's promise to David, see **2 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Kings 9:5**.

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of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (**Deuteronomy 16:16**). By the time of Jeroboam, the “place of God’s choosing” was firmly established as being Jerusalem, located in Judah (**1 Kings 8:29, 48; 9:3; 11:13, 32**). Therefore, at least three times a year, people from the new kingdom of Israel would travel to Jerusalem to observe the feasts. But Jeroboam feared that this on-gong contact with Judah would result in the people wishing to be reunited under Rehoboam, causing him to lose his kingdom, perhaps even his life (**1 Kings 12:27**).

Jeroboam, therefore, set up his own religious institutions to stop people travelling to Jerusalem. He set up two golden calves to be their gods – one at Dan in the north, the other at Bethel in the south He set up new places for worship, and priests from tribes other than the tribe of Levi. He also instituted a new set of feasts for the people to observe All of these things were contrary to what God had commanded⁸ (**1 Kings 12:28-33**).

A man of God came to Jeroboam and told him of God’s disapproval of what he (Jeroboam) had done (**1 Kings 13:1-5**). But Jeroboam did not turn away from his evil (**1 Kings 13:33-34**), and so he incurred God’s condemnation and judgement (**1 Kings 14:7-16**).

3) Lessons for us

There are various lessons that we can learn from the life of Jeroboam, but for now, I just want to mention three of them.

a) Continue to trust in God – even when things look bad (real or imagined)

God had promised Jeroboam that if he obeyed His commandments, then he would have an enduring dynasty⁹, just like King David (**1 Kings 11:38**). But Jeroboam failed to show trust in God when he feared that the people might want to be joined again to Judah and come under Rehoboam’s reign. This lack of trust in God’s promises led him to commit sin.

We have promises from God such as; “... *all things work together for good to those who love God ...*” (**Romans 8:28**). But how often do we forget this promise when things don’t seem to be going too well for us? When trouble comes, we may ask ourselves, “*I thought God makes all things work for good for us? Why is this happening to me?*”.

There are two things we need to remember;

- i) Everything that happens to us is not necessarily caused by God. For example, when we face temptation, it is not God who causes us to be tempted – it is our own desires (**James 1:13-14**). Sometimes, the troubles we face are because of our own doing (**1 Timothy 6:9**). Sometimes, we are badly affected by the sins of others (**Matthew 2:16; Acts 7:54-59**). Sometimes we are affected by the natural working of this world – the normal issues of this life (**Romans 8:22**).

⁸ **Exodus 20:3-4** – “*You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image ...*”

Numbers 3:5-13 – Only those from the tribe of Levi were to be the priests.

Deuteronomy 16:16 – The feasts were to be observed at the place of God’s choosing, not the place of Jeroboam’s choosing.

⁹ *i.e.* there would always be one of his descendants on the throne of Israel.

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- ii) God may allow some “undesirable” things to happen to us as opportunities for us to grow in the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**). For example, how can we grow in patience/long-suffering if we are never in a position that requires us to be patient? Or how can we grow in self-control if we are never in a position where self-control is required to be exercised?

The thing to remember is this: It is not what happens to us that is most important. Rather, what is important is how we respond to what happens to us (**2 Corinthians 1:8-10; Philippians 4:12-13; Hebrews 12:3-11**). And always remember; God is in control (**Matthew 5:45; 10:29**); the Lord knows who are His (**2 Timothy 2:19**); and He will never leave us or forsake us (**Hebrews 13:5**). Therefore, continue to trust in Him, no matter what.

- b) The decisions we make in life can affect the spiritual welfare others

Jeroboam decided to set up “his own” idolatrous religion for the people of Israel to follow, and he told them that they no longer needed to go to Jerusalem to worship (**1 Kings 12:28b**). Now this didn’t excuse the people of Israel from their own sin of worshipping these idols, *etc*, that Jeroboam had set up¹⁰ - each person is responsible for their own actions and are accountable to God for what they have personally done or not done (**Ezekiel 18:20**).

When we make decisions, we also need to consider what effect our decisions may have on those around us, particularly decisions that involve morality, ethics and conduct. What we decide to do (or not do) can influence others. An example of a bad decision which also resulted in a bad influence can be seen in **Galatians 2:11-13**. The apostle Peter would mix with Gentiles when certain other Jews were not around, but when these Jews were around, he didn’t mix with them¹¹. This was portraying a double standard – Paul uses the word “hypocrite” – and Peter’s actions were also having a bad influence on others, including Barnabas. Therefore, Paul confronted Peter over the matter.

When we make decisions, particularly decisions that involve our faith and may impact other people, one of the things to consider is what effect it may have on their spiritual welfare (as well as our own);

- will it help them to draw nearer to God, or will it hinder them?
- will it edify and build them up (**Acts 18:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15**), or will it put a stumbling block in their way (**1 Corinthians 8:9**)?

Jesus commanded us to be an influence on others, but it needs to be an influence that brings glory and honour to God (**Matthew 5:13-16**).

- c) Being blessed by God is no guarantee of ultimately being saved

Jeroboam was given the kingdom of Israel by God – he didn’t have to fight for it, he was basically “invited” to take on the role (**1 Kings 12:20**). He also

¹⁰ Where there is a conflict between obeying man – even rulers - and obeying God, then we must choose the latter, e.g. **Acts 5:29**.

¹¹ There was nothing wrong with Jews mixing with Gentiles – both groups are “one” in Jesus Christ (**Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 3:11**). However, there were areas of contention in the early church where some of the Jewish Christians incorrectly taught that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved (**Acts 15:24; Galatians 6:11-15**).

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had the promise from God that he would have an enduring dynasty if he remained faithful. But Jeroboam disobeyed God, and as a result, incurred His wrath (**1 Kings 14:7-16**).

We are fortunate that God is who He is. Yes, there will be a day when we will face God in judgement and receive either a reward or a penalty (**John 5:28-29; Romans 2:5-11**). While we live here on earth, all men receive God's blessings to some extent (**Matthew 5:45**). But being the recipient of God's blessing and providence is not a guarantee of ultimate faithfulness on our part. It is possible for a Christian, and even churches, to fall from grace (**Galatians 5:4; Revelation 2:5; 3:16**). We cannot rest on our laurels, as good as they may be. We need to remain "... *faithful unto death* .." (**Revelation 2:10b**), not turning back to the ways of the world (**2 Peter 2:20-21**), rather, "... *reaching forward to those things which are ahead* *the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" (**Philippians 3:13-14**).

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Annex A - Kings of Judah and Israel

Combined nation	Year BC (approx.)	
Saul	1050	
David		
Solomon		
Judah	Kingdom splits	Israel
Rehoboam	930	Jeroboam*
Abijam		Nadab
Asa		Baasha, Elah, Zimri
		Omri
Jehoshaphat		Ahab, Ahaziah
Jehoram		Jehoram
Ahaziah	840	Jehu
Athaliah		
Jehoash		Jehoahaz
Amaziah		Jehoash
Uzziah		Jeroboam (ii)
		Zechariah, Shallum,
Jotham	740	Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah
Ahaz		Hoshea
Hezekiah		Fall of Israel - 722
Manasseh		
Amon		
Josiah	640	
Jehoahaz		
Jehoiakim		
Jehoiachin		
Zedekiah	586	
Fall of Jerusalem - 586		

*the subject of this lesson