

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 11, Part 2

1 Kings 12-13, Part 2

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We turn now to look at chapter 12, verses 24 through 33. And what we see in this passage is Jeroboam's apostasy. Chapter 12, excuse me, chapter 11 was chilling as we saw the end result of Solomon's love of foreign women.

These verses are equally chilling because in these verses Jeroboam is establishing the pattern that was going to be true for the next 200 years in the Northern Kingdom. How would you like that responsibility to be placed upon you? There was not going to be a king in the Northern Kingdom who would walk any path other than the path of Jeroboam. Every king we read of, he walked in the path of Jeroboam.

Oh my, oh my. Would you like that to be your epitaph? I don't want it to be mine. I want to establish a path like David so that people can say I want to walk in that path.

I want to follow that example. I want to live up to that model. But Jeroboam said no.

Now why? Well, Jeroboam was faced with a serious problem three times a year. Every male in the 12 tribes was expected to go to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. That's like during the Civil War or the war between the states or the war of northern aggression, depending on who you're talking to.

That's as though every Yankee was expected to go to Richmond three times a year. That's a problem. That's a big problem.

But there's not a trace of any evidence that Jeroboam asked God, how do you want to do this? God, you gave me these ten tribes. You put them in my hand, and you said that if I walked as David walked, you would establish my dynasty, my house, forever. How do you want to do this, Lord? No.

No. Friends, I say it again, and as often as you let me, I'll say it again. Human wisdom is virtually always flawed.

And if it's not flawed, it's inadequate. We need you, and I need to cultivate this habit of saying, God, what do you want to do? Because again and again, God's wisdom will appear strange to us on the surface. What do you want to do, God? How do you want to solve this problem of mine? As I said a few moments ago, sometimes the answer will be very clear.

I thank God for those moments in my life. Other times, in my experience, there has been darkness. There has not been an answer from heaven.

I think God is most interested in developing faith in us. And sometimes, silence requires faith. When I say, OK, God, as best I know, this is not so much what I want, but as best I know, this is what you want.

And I'm going to step out in faith. I think that's what God is after. But there's no evidence at all that Jeroboam did that.

So, he says, what am I going to do? Here's this beautiful, beautiful building with all of its glorious symbolism in the enemy kingdom. What am I going to do? And what did he choose? He chose. Can you believe it? He chose to make bull idols.

Now, the Bible says calves, and that may be true. We've got at least one example of a small bull calf idol. But I think it's also possible that this is the Bible's way of mocking.

I think it's very possible that these things were big, impressive bulls, full of life, full of sexual vitality, full of power. And the Bible says you're working for a bunch, worshipping a bunch of calves. I don't know.

But I think it's very possible. But in any case, why in the world would he have done that? And then, that's not enough. He establishes the Passover, the great opening festival of the year, a month later than the one in Jerusalem.

And then, he appoints priests from anybody he can find. I suspect he sold the jobs. He didn't even use the Levites who were scattered in the northern kingdom.

My goodness. What had he done? He had taken counsel of his fears. He was afraid.

You see it there. The kingdom will now likely, this is verse 26. 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. Then they'll kill me and return to Rehoboam. Oh really? Do you think so? They chose you, Jeroboam.

Those ten tribes chose you. But he's afraid. Oh my.

How often fear is the mother of sin? How often do we take counsel of our fears and rush off to solve the problem in our own foolish wisdom and justify disobeying God? Well, I got to make something that'll really be attractive.

So, I'm going to put it right there in Bethel, just about eight miles north of Jerusalem. I'm going to put a big golden bull and tell the people that's your God. And I'm going to put another one up in the north, up in the tribe of Dan.

So again, people won't even have to go south toward Bethel and maybe keep going toward Jerusalem. All those tribes up there will go in the other direction. It'll be good.

Now, let me ask another question. Why golden calves or bulls? It goes right back to the wilderness, doesn't it? Once again, once again, especially for those of you who may be younger. Oh, guard your choices early in life.

You can set a pattern that will dog you the rest of your days. That's what happened to Israel. In fact, we're told in Chronicles that one of the priests of these bulls was a descendant of Moses.

Guard your choices. They can set a pattern. We talked about this with Solomon.

Right there in the third chapter, even before the wonderful statements about his prayer at Gibeon, he married the daughter of Pharaoh. Oh my. Well, that was a wonderful opportunity.

My goodness, the king of Egypt is going to make an alliance with me, and he's going to give me his daughter to marry. Oh, who wouldn't do that? Well, only somebody who had read Deuteronomy 17. So here, I don't think it's an accident at all that what Jeroboam chose was a bull.

I think there had been a thread running through. What's Yahweh like? Oh, Yahweh is a great bull. Yahweh is the one who can trample his enemies. Yahweh is the one who can impregnate the world.

Yahweh is the one. Yahweh is not this world, and Yahweh does not operate like this world would operate. But again, again, he had taken counsel of his fears.

Now, the interesting thing to me here is, sort of, once he had gone off the rails, he went totally off the rails. And there again is a lesson for us, isn't it? It's interesting that once you've begun to live in sin, then there's a tendency for the devil to say to you, well, you've gone this far. You might as well go all the way. And so, okay, we're going to alter the worship calendar.

We're going to alter the priesthood. We're going to build shrines to our idolatrous Yahweh in every high place in the country. Guard your choices.

Guard your choices. So, in verse 32, he instituted a festival on the 15th day of the 8th month, not the 7th-month tabernacles, but the 8th month, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made.

At Bethel, he also installed priests at the high places he had made. Do you hear that repeated phrase, he had made, he had made, he had made? Yes. Not God, but Jeroboam.

On the 15th day of the 8th month, a month of his own choosing. The author is making his point pretty clear here. He offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel, so he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.

That's the third time, the third time he said this. Well, number one, there shouldn't be an altar at Bethel. Number two, it shouldn't be during the 8th month.

And number three, the king should not be making the offerings. But having taken counsel of his fears and having chosen his own way to solve his problem, he's gone all the way. Guard your choices, not merely for your own sake, but for the sake of those who will come after you.

As I said, Jeroboam established a pattern here that every king of the north after him followed. Oh, what a responsibility. What a responsibility.

And it's a responsibility you and I have. You say, well, I'm not a king. I'm not Jeroboam.

No, you're not. But there are people who are watching you. There are people who will follow you.

Maybe it's one or two. But maybe it's several hundred. You don't know.

For their sakes, be true to God.