**Characteristics of False Religion**

We are expected to learn from the accounts of God’s dealings with our forefathers. Romans 15:4 tells us that “whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Throughout the ages men have authored false religions that are the product of their own arrogance, ignorance and preference. Some take it upon themselves to devise something new to address concerns about the conditions of their day. Others frankly are con-men who are willing to destroy the souls of others for their own selfish gain.

One such man guilty of creating his own religion was Jeroboam the son of Nebat, first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. God tore most of the kingdom from Solomon’s son, Rehoboam because of Solomon’s idolatry, but Jeroboam’s greatest fear was losing control over his people. He simply refused to believe God when He promised to establish an enduring dynasty for Jeroboam’s descendants if he would only serve God faithfully like David before him. He theorized that the only way to secure the loyalty of his subjects was to prevent them from celebrating the annual Jewish feast days in Jerusalem. His solution: create a religion unique to the Northern Kingdom.

Jeroboam went all out. He created two golden calves complete with altars and created two centers of worship, Dan toward the North and Bethel toward the South. He shunned the Levitical priesthood God had commanded and made priests of worthless men from all the other tribes. He even proclaimed a feast day of his own devising at the expense of the festivals God had given through Moses.

Most of the folks in the North went along with Jeroboam’s new religion. Not the Levites. Most of them defected to the South where the worship of Jehovah God was still somewhat intact. But the majority of Jeroboam’s subjects were content to accept whatever heresy their king suggested. There were some things he did to make error a little more palatable for them.

**They’re sort of like Jehovah.** When Jeroboam introduced the Israelites to his new golden calves, he said, “Behold, O Israel, the gods who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” Well, no, they weren’t. In fact, the God who brought them out of Egypt clearly said, “Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman” (Deuteronomy 27:15). I guess they forgot that part. There are religions that claim to be God-centered, but when you investigate their definition of God, they are devoted to a being who is something else entirely.

**There are some similarities to truth.** Jeroboam offered them a system of faith that included a feast day, altars, animal sacrifices and a priesthood. With some stretch of the imagination, one could pretend that they were almost doing the same things they had been doing. The fact that unqualified men were offering their sacrifices to pagan idols at a meaningless feast must have seemed insignificant. False religion today may borrow enough truth to make it seem legitimate, but Paul said that a perverted gospel is another gospel that must be rejected (Galatians 1:6-9).

**Focus on worldliness.** Jeroboam’s excuse for keeping his people from participating in the Jerusalem feasts was, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem!” (1 Kings 12:28) When men are more concerned about pleasing themselves than pleasing God, they are in serious trouble. God has clearly revealed the kind of worship that pleases and glorifies Him, but men are willing to abandon His teachings and create forms of worship designed to attract and entertain the worldly minded.

We should learn from the failures of Jeroboam. We are not at liberty to fashion God in the way we would like. He is the creator of all things and it is His sovereign prerogative to define the terms of our relationship with him as He sees fit. Getting it sort of right is not good enough. We must give diligence to show ourselves approved of God by handling His word properly (2 Timothy 2:15). We must be mature enough and spiritually-minded enough to seek His pleasure and approval first and always. Our own comforts, preferences and conveniences are of little importance when determining the nature of our service to Him. Jeroboam is the last person we would want to emulate.

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