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Prison Ministry

**Prophets and Kings** (1917) Edition – Chapter 7 – “Jeroboam”

Placed on the throne by the ten tribes of Israel who had rebelled against the house of David, Jeroboam, the former servant of Solomon, was in a position to bring about wise reforms in both civil and religious affairs. Under the rulership of Solomon he had shown aptitude and sound judgment; and the knowledge he had gained during years of faithful service fitted him to rule with discretion. But Jeroboam failed to make God his trust. {PK 99.1}

Jeroboam's greatest fear was that at some future time the hearts of his subjects might be won over by the ruler occupying the throne of David. He reasoned that if the ten tribes should be permitted to visit often the ancient seat of the Jewish monarchy, where the services of the temple were still conducted as in the years of Solomon's reign, many might feel inclined to renew their allegiance to the government centering at Jerusalem. Taking counsel with His advisers, Jeroboam determined by one bold stroke to lessen, so far as possible, the probability of a revolt from his rule. He would bring this about by creating within the borders of his newly formed kingdom two centers of worship, one at Bethel and the other at Dan. In these places the ten tribes should be invited to assemble, instead of at Jerusalem, to worship God. {PK 99.2}

In arranging this transfer, Jeroboam thought to appeal to the imagination of the Israelites by setting before them some visible representation to symbolize the presence of the invisible God. Accordingly he caused to be made two calves of gold, and these were placed within shrines at the appointed centers of worship. In this effort to represent the Deity, Jeroboam violated the plain command of Jehovah: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." Exodus 20:4, 5. {PK 100.1}

So strong was Jeroboam's desire to keep the ten tribes away from Jerusalem that he lost sight of the fundamental weakness of his plan. He failed to take into consideration the great peril to which he was exposing the Israelites by setting before them the idolatrous symbol of the deity with which their ancestors had been so familiar during the centuries of Egyptian bondage. Jeroboam's recent residence in Egypt should have taught him the folly of placing before the people such heathen representations. But his set purpose of inducing the northern tribes to discontinue their annual visits to the Holy City led him to adopt the most imprudent of measures. "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem," he urged; "behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." 1 Kings 12:28. Thus they were invited to bow down before the golden images and adopt strange forms of worship. {PK 100.2}

The king tried to persuade the Levites, some of whom were living within his realm, to serve as priests in the newly erected shrines at Bethel and Dan; but in this effort he met with failure. He was therefore compelled to elevate to the priesthood men from "the lowest of the people." Verse 31. Alarmed over the prospect, many of the faithful, including a great number of the Levites, fled to Jerusalem, where they might worship in harmony with the divine requirements. {PK 101.1}

"Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made." Verse 32. {PK 101.2}

The king's bold defiance of God in thus setting aside divinely appointed institutions was not allowed to pass unrebuked. Even while he was officiating and burning incense during the dedication of the strange altar he had set up at Bethel, there appeared before him a man of God from the kingdom of Judah, sent to denounce him for presuming to introduce new forms of worship. The prophet "cried against the altar, . . . and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. {PK 101.3}

"And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the Lord hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out." Immediately the altar "was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord." 1 Kings 13:2, 3, 5. {PK 101.4}

On seeing this, Jeroboam was filled with a spirit of defiance against God and attempted to restrain the one who had delivered the message. In wrath "he put forth his hand from the altar" and cried out, "Lay hold on him." His impetuous act met with swift rebuke. The hand outstretched against the messenger of Jehovah suddenly became powerless and withered, and could not be withdrawn. {PK 102.1}

Terror-stricken, the king appealed to the prophet to intercede with God in his behalf. "Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God," he pleaded, "and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again, And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before." Verses 4, 6. {PK 102.2}

Vain had been Jeroboam's effort to invest with solemnity the dedication of a strange altar, respect for which would have led to disrespect for the worship of Jehovah in the temple at Jerusalem. By the message of the prophet, the king of Israel should have been led to repent and to renounce his wicked purposes, which were turning the people away from the true worship of God. But he hardened his heart and determined to follow a way of his own choosing. {PK 102.3}

At the time of the feast at Bethel the hearts of the Israelites were not fully hardened. Many were susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Lord designed that those who were taking rapid steps in apostasy should be checked in their course before it should be too late. He sent His messenger to interrupt the idolatrous proceedings and to reveal to king and people what the outworking of this apostasy would be. The rending of the altar was a sign of God's displeasure at the abomination that was being wrought in Israel. {PK 102.4}

The Lord seeks to save, not to destroy. He delights in the rescue of sinners. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Ezekiel 33:11. By warnings and entreaties He calls the wayward to cease from their evil-doing and to turn to Him and live. He gives His chosen messengers a holy boldness, that those who hear may fear and be brought to repentance. How firmly the man of God rebuked the king! And this firmness was essential; in no other way could the existing evils have been rebuked. The Lord gave His servant boldness, that an abiding impression might be made on those who heard. The messengers of the Lord are never to fear the face of man, but are to stand unflinchingly for the right. So long as they put their trust in God, they need not fear; for He who gives them their commission gives them also the assurance of His protecting care. {PK 105.1}

Having delivered his message, the prophet was about to return, when Jeroboam said to him, "Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward." "If thou wilt give me half thine house," the prophet replied, "I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so was it charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest." 1 Kings 13:7-9. {PK 105.2}

Well would it have been for the prophet had he adhered to his purpose to return to Judea without delay. While traveling homeward by another route, he was overtaken by an aged man who claimed to be a prophet and who made false representations to the man of God, declaring, "I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water." Again and again the lie was repeated and the invitation urged until the man of God was persuaded to return. {PK 106.1}

Because the true prophet allowed himself to take a course contrary to the line of duty, God permitted him to suffer the penalty of transgression. While he and the one who had invited him to return to Bethel were sitting together at the table, the inspiration of the Almighty came upon the false prophet, "and he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, . . . thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulcher of thy fathers." Verses 18-22. {PK 106.2}

This prophecy of doom was soon literally fulfilled. "It came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass. . . . And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcass was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcass. And, behold, men passed by, and saw the carcass cast in the way, . . . and they came and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord." Verses 23-26. {PK 106.3}

The penalty that overtook the unfaithful messenger was a still further evidence of the truth of the prophecy uttered over the altar. If, after disobeying the word of the Lord, the prophet had been permitted to go on in safety, the king would have used this fact in an attempt to vindicate his own disobedience. In the rent altar, in the palsied arm, and in the terrible fate of the one who dared disobey an express command of Jehovah, Jeroboam should have discerned the swift displeasure of an offended God, and these judgments should have warned him not to persist in wrongdoing. But, far from repenting, Jeroboam "made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places." Thus he not only sinned greatly himself, but "made Israel to sin;" and "this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth." Verses 33, 34; 14:16. {PK 107.1}

Toward the close of a troubled reign of twenty-two years, Jeroboam met with a disastrous defeat in a war with Abijah, the successor of Rehoboam. "Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: and the Lord struck him, and he died." 2 Chronicles 13:20. {PK 107.2}

The apostasy introduced during Jeroboam's reign became more and more marked, until finally it resulted in the utter ruin of the kingdom of Israel. Even before the death of Jeroboam, Ahijah, the aged prophet at Shiloh who many years before had predicted the elevation of Jeroboam to the throne, declared: "The Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and He shall root up Israel out of this good land, which He gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the Lord to anger. And He shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin." 1 Kings 14:15, 16. {PK 107.3}

Yet the Lord did not give Israel up without first doing all that could be done to lead them back to their allegiance to Him. Through long, dark years when ruler after ruler stood up in bold defiance of Heaven and led Israel deeper and still deeper into idolatry, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. Through His prophets He gave them every opportunity to stay the tide of apostasy and to return to Him. During the years that were to follow the rending of the kingdom, Elijah and Elisha were to live and labor, and the tender appeals of Hosea and Amos and Obadiah were to be heard in the land. Never was the kingdom of Israel to be left without noble witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. Even in the darkest hours some would remain true to their divine Ruler and in the midst of idolatry would live blameless in the sight of a holy God. These faithful ones were numbered among the goodly remnant through whom the eternal purpose of Jehovah was finally to be fulfilled. {PK 108.1}

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