

[R3385 : page 188]

SELFISH EXPEDIENCY MISLED THEM

– I KINGS 12:25-33. – JULY 10. –

Golden Text: – "Keep yourselves from idols." – I John 5:21.

JEROBOAM, by divine arrangement the king of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, trusted not in the Lord. To some extent he must have recognized that God had given him the kingdom; nevertheless he proceeded to establish himself in it, leaving the will and power of God out of his consideration. He was a worldly-wise man: expediency was the law which governed his course. He concluded that to make the separation between the ten tribes and the two tribes lasting, and thus to insure his own throne, the religious arrangements of the people must be changed. By divine order Jerusalem was the center of religious service, and all the people, individually or representatively, were expected to be at Jerusalem three [R3386 : page 188] times a year – at the feast of Passover in April, feast of Pentecost in June, and the feast of Tabernacles in October. Jeroboam feared that this recognition of Jerusalem as the center of the religious interests might ultimately lead the ten tribes to long for union with Judah; hence one of his first arrangements was to break the religious tie.

This was done by the establishment of two religious centers favorably located in the ten-tribe kingdom – one at Dan, in the most northern part, where an altar had long been maintained contrary to divine arrangement, where certain descendants of Moses had long officiated and continued to officiate under Jeroboam's arrangement. The other sacred place established was Bethel, the place where Jacob had his dream and saw the ladder with angels ascending and descending. This place on this account had always been somewhat sacred in the minds of the children of Israel. Jeroboam thus showed worldly wisdom in selecting places for the new religious movement that were already sacred to his people.

EVIL GARBS ITSELF AS ANGEL OF LIGHT.

Thus error and everything pertaining to it is always crafty, insidious. Temptations to wrong doing are rarely presented in an open, blunt manner – usually they come clothed in the garments of light and associating themselves with something sacred, claiming to be for spiritual advancement. So Jeroboam claimed that the ten tribes had long enough gone to the farther part of the country, to Jerusalem, to worship; that it was time that Israelites should recognize that their God was accessible from other quarters as well. It was time that they should feel a kind of national pride and patriotism in connection with their religion. Craftily he did not tell them his real reason, that he feared ultimately his own rejection and was merely strengthening his power over them and feathering his own nest. **[R3386 : page 189]**

The two bulls or calves of gold were probably made of wood overlaid with gold; as we would say, they were golden calves. One was located at each of the sacred cities appointed, and at each a house was built dedicated to the worship of God, and the golden bull installed as God's representative – as representative of him who brought Israel out of Egypt. We are not to think that Jeroboam and the people turned quickly to worship the bull as a god: they surely would have indignantly denied anything of the sort, just as today the Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics deny that they worship images, pictures, crucifixes, etc., and for the same reason. The claim is that these things represent spiritual truths and help the mind. We find to the contrary, however, that the scriptural declaration alone should be followed, and that any other course is sure to lead to idolatry; and so in this lesson it is stated that, "This thing became a sin" unto the people. It was not only a sin in that it was contrary to the divine arrangement to have any other place for a general convocation for worship except at Jerusalem, but it became a sin in that it led them gradually into idolatry. God was forgotten, and the worship attached more and more to the image.

TO RESIST EVIL IS PROFITABLE.

Not content with changing the arrangement, the king changed the priesthood also. The priests and Levites lived in various countries of Palestine, yet had certain seasons of the year at which they went to Jerusalem to take part in the services there, thus unifying the people and the religious sentiment and continually keeping it fresh. It is probable, though not so stated, that the Levites refused to join with the king, refused to cooperate in the establishment of these unauthorized religious services mixed with idolatry. If so, it was to their credit. But the king would have no difficulty in finding others willing to take the services, and quite probably to these would go the tithes of the people. This in turn would mean temporal deprivation to the Levites as a reward for their fidelity to the Lord and the Truth. As a consequence many of them removed to the kingdom of Judah. Thus, as we suggested in our last lesson, the sifting of the noblest, truest and best people from the ten tribes was gathered into the nation of Judah, and was evidently a part of the divine program for preparing that people for the reception of Messiah in due time.

Jeroboam's scheme was far-reaching. In addition to changing the place of gathering and the priesthood, he changed also the date for one of the gatherings, which, instead of being held on the seventh month, he appointed for the eighth. However, craftily he perceived that by taking the high priest's position to himself and being both priest and king he would attach to his own person more of the reverence of the people. This was the very matter which God had stipulated for the Israelites as being more favorable to their liberties, as putting less power into the hands of their rulers, as keeping their religion on a separate basis from their politics. But Jeroboam's plan evidently was to take the very step that would forward his personal ambitions. Similarly the emperors of Rome took to themselves the priestly office, in order that they might the more effectually bind the people to them and appear to be not only great military heroes, but the representatives of the gods.

LESSONS WE MAY DRAW FROM THIS.

Let us apply to our own hearts the lessons that evil is insidious, and that every parting of the ways, every leaving of the divine path, signifies a separation from righteousness to a degree we are unable to estimate at the beginning. Let us learn that the only safe course to pursue is to trust in the Lord and to be glad to have whatever his providences may mark out for us, and to refuse to have anything contrary to his will, however desirable it might be, however gratifying to human ambition. Let us learn the lesson that ambition is a dangerous thing – especially in our present imperfect condition, where our judgments are more or less warped from the fall, where our knowledge is imperfect and where Satan is sure to put light for darkness and darkness for light. Our ambitions must be curbed, yea, every thought must be brought into subjection to the will of God in Christ, if we would be on safe ground as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

MAMMON WORSHIP IS IDOLATRY.

Let us not too quickly suppose that we are not in danger along the lines of Jeroboam's fall. Let us note carefully the Golden Text applied by the Apostle, under divine guidance, to the New Creatures of this Gospel dispensation, "Keep yourselves from idols." On every hand policy suggests the setting up of idols – that we love or respect or serve some one or some thing or some system in an improper spirit or degree, and allowing such to take the place in our hearts which properly belongs to the Lord only. Some have their chief temptation from one quarter and others from another quarter. Some are disposed to idolize husband or wife or child, and really, in their affection and interest and devotion, give these a place superior to that accorded to the Lord. Others are inclined to idolize wealth and to devote themselves to it, continually serving it, seeking it as though it were the most important thing in the world. Others are disposed to worship fame, desiring to be thought some great one either in the Church or in

the world, to attain a position, a pre-eminence; they hunger and thirst more after the pre-eminence than after righteousness – they worship it, it becomes their idol; in their hearts and time and affections it takes to a considerable extent the place belonging to God, whose will and service is correspondingly neglected. Others set up selfishness pure and simple as their idol; they serve self, minister to self, comfort self, please self, etc., instead of God. In many respects this idol of self is the most horrible one of all – the meanest looking. Others, disdaining personal ambition and selfish consolations, take on in some respects a nobler thought, yet are deceived by [R3386 : page 190] the Adversary in worshiping a sect, a party, a faction. To it they will sacrifice, to it they will yield their lives, for it they would yield their reputations, and the while – like the Apostle, before his name was changed from Saul to Paul – they would verily think that they did God service. Let us, dear brethren and sisters, keep ourselves from all idols, and, as the Apostle exhorts, sanctify the Lord God in our hearts. "The Lord your God will prove you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. – Deut. 13:3."

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