Community Group Discussion Guide

August 24, 2025

1 Kings 12:25-33; 14:21-26 | Divided Kings

MOTIVATE

- ⇒ *Starter Question: Do you prefer off-brand or name brand products? What goes into your decision to choose one over the other? Do all imitations live up to the original?*
- ⇒ *Are there instances of spiritual imitations? What are the consequences when we go "off-brand" with our faith?*

DISCUSS

After King Rehoboam's disastrous start, the northern tribes united under Jeroboam and made him their king. Rehoboam mustered 180,000 troops from his tribes of Judah and Benjamin to fight against the rebel Israelite tribes. The prophet Shemaiah brought Rehoboam a message from the Lord: "You are not to march up and fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Each of you return home, for this situation is from me" (1 Kings 12:21-24). Judah listened to the Lord and went home, but both kingdoms were at odds with each other and with God for several decades. This is evident in 1 Kings 12:25-32 and 14:21-26. In these passages the Israelites angered God with their sin and their false imitations of worship.

1. King Jeroboam builds his kingdom. (Northern Kingdom of Israel)

1 Kings 12:25: ***25*** *Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. And he went out from there and built Penuel.*

Jeroboam had already proven himself a capable leader. Solomon had placed him over thousands in the work-
force from the Joseph's tribes (1 Kings 11:28). Further, when the northern tribes met with King Rehoboam to discuss their grievances, it was Jeroboam, whose name may mean "he pleads the people's cause," representing their concerns.[1] After Rehoboam showed he would not make any concessions to the northern tribes, those tribes made Jeroboam king over all Israel (1 Kings 12:20). Jeroboam not only was a capable leader, but he was also smart politically.

The first step Jeroboam took was to build Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and live there. Jeroboam made the place that was well-associated with the patriarchs his capital city and the place of his royal residence. Fortifying Shechem was a wise move as it guarded four main roads, with each road connected to a different region.[2] By fortifying Shechem, Jeroboam protected himself from Egyptian incursions into Israel.

After that, Jeroboam fortified Penuel, a city on the eastern side of the Jordan River. This was the place where Jacob wrestled with God and received the new name "Israel" (Genesis 32:22-32). The city was on a caravan route that ran from Gilead to Damascus. Thus, Jeroboam protected himself from attacks from the east and northeast—the Amorites and Arameans.

- ⇒ *How did Jeroboam show wisdom in his decisions to build up his kingdom at key military points in the region?*

<u>1 Kings 12:26-27</u>: ***26*** *And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David.* ***27*** *If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah."*

Even though the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had split with Jeroboam getting the larger share, Jeroboam realized there was a unifying factor among all the tribes—their religion—that could result in him losing the loyalty of his subjects and possibly his kingdom. According to Mosaic Law, all Israelites were to make three offerings a year before the altar at the temple, which was located in Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Kingdom.

- ⇒ *Discuss this quote by John MacArthur: All that God required Jeroboam to do was obey His Word and follow His commands, and He would assure the new king of blessing and success. But Jeroboam refused to believe this was the truth. Instead, he convinced himself the people of Israel would turn against him once they got a chance.* [3]
- ⇒ *How can a lack of faith skew our view of God and His promises?*

2. Jeroboam builds his religion. (Northern Kingdom of Israel)

<u>1 Kings 12:28-33</u>: ***28*** *So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."* ***29*** *And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.* ***30*** *Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one.* ***31*** *He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites.* ***32*** *And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made.* ***33*** *He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings.*

The Lord had told Jeroboam that if he would follow the Lord like David, the Lord would establish a dynasty for him as well (1 Kings 11:38). Instead of following the Lord's commandments, however, Jeroboam followed bad advice and made shrewd decisions that pertained to worship:

a. <u>Jeroboam made two golden calves</u>: Instead of brute force, Jeroboam appealed to people's love for convenience and set up two places of worship at each end of his kingdom, with one calf housed on the southern border in Bethel and the other in the north at Dan near the source of the Jordan River. Jeroboam basically told his people, "Going to Jerusalem is too difficult for you. Going to Dan or Bethel will be more convenient." These places not only made the Israelites' pilgrimages more convenient, but both places previously had religious significance for Israel (Genesis 28:11-19; 31:13; Judges 17–18; 21:2-4).

- ⇒ *How was the creation of the two golden calves similar to what the Israelites did in Exodus 32:1-6? What did Jeroboam accredit to these golden calves?*
- ⇒ *How was claiming historical precedent for his state religion another shrewd move on Jeroboam's part?*

These calves would be worshiped until the time of the last king of Israel, King Hoshea (2 Kings 17:16). The prophet Hosea, who ministered in the Northern Kingdom, was shocked that the worshipers were kissing the calves (Hosea 13:2). He rebuked them for not turning to the Lord, telling the people of Israel that they would not find any protection in "the calf of Beth-aven" (i.e., Bethel; Hosea 10:5-6).

b. Jeroboam built temples on high places: Many high places in Israel originally had been Canaanite places of worship for their idols. The law strictly forbid Israelites from using these pagan places in their worship (Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3). As for the local shrines, 1 Kings 13:32 testifies that the Israelites built "all the shrines of the high places in the cities of Samaria." These shrines were used primarily in local celebrations and festivals as most of the people lived in small villages.

c. Jeroboam opened the priesthood to tribes other than the Levites: In Judah, the priests came from the tribe of Levi, with the high priest coming through Aaron's line. To distinguish his religion from that of Judah's, anyone but a Levite could serve as a priest, as long as he brought the right bribe (2 Chronicles 13:9).

- ⇒ *How does this demonstrate a complete disregard for God's law and His desires?*
- ⇒ *In what ways are we blatant in our disregard for God today?*

The Levites, who were supposed to make God's sacrifices and teach His law, were righteously angry about the appointment of non-Levites to lead worship. So they left and moved south to Judah (2 Chronicles 11:13-17).These spiritual shepherds were to teach the Israelites the law so they in turn could disciple their children as they went about everyday life (Deuteronomy 11:19). But with their departure, the tribes in the north lost all semblance of faithful worship and simply followed their king into his imposed idolatrous worship practices. Jeroboam's religion was inclusive and convenient, but his self-interest skewed Israel's worship and led the whole nation into idolatry.

- ⇒ *What are some ways we might skew our worship of God for convenience or self-interest?*
- ⇒ *Why does it greatly matter to God whom we worship and how we worship?*

d. Jeroboam revised the religious calendar so it would be different from Judah's: The prescribed festival in Judah that occurred on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishri) was the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-44), one of the festivals that Israelite males were to go to Jerusalem to celebrate (Deuteronomy 16:13-17). Jeroboam set up a rival festival one month later to the exact day.

- ⇒ *Why is it right for God to be angered by cheap imitations and false worship?*
- ⇒ *How can we be on guard against imitations of the true worship of God to which we are called?*

What Jeroboam introduced to Israel is called syncretism, a blending of religions. He sought to mix the worship of God, with its priesthood, sacrifices, and festivals, with the trappings of pagan idol worship. Jeroboam created a rival religion with just enough similarities to the religion of Judah that his people would adopt it and not be tempted to turn toward the south. Jeroboam's false worship would mar the Northern Kingdom for their whole existence as a nation.

- ⇒ *Has syncretism continued to be problematic for God's people? Can you give an example?*
- ⇒ *Read 1 Kings 13:33-34 and discuss the judgment that will eventually come to Jeroboam.*
- ⇒ *Read 2 Kings 17:21-23 and discuss the judgment that will eventually come to the entire*

Northern Kingdom of Israel.

⇒ *In terms of God's judgments, what application can you make to your life today?*

3. Rehoboam fails his people. (Southern Kingdom of Judah)

1 Kings 14:21-24: ***21*** *Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite.* ***22*** *And Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their fathers had done.* ***23*** *For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree,* ***24*** *and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.*

Rehoboam's father had been deeply attached to foreign wives who worshiped foreign gods. Solomon's marriages, numbering 700 wives with 300 concubines, represented political alliances with foreign nations. Solomon built a form of peace that was characterized by the absence of war, but the kingdom was divided in worship with each wife he married.

On the religious front, aside from Rehoboam's initial pride, he seemed to do right, walking "in the ways of David and Solomon" (1 Kings 14:17). However, like his father, Rehoboam pursued peace in a similar manner by permitting whatever kind of worship the people wanted rather than promoting obedience to the Lord as his grandfather David had done. The promise God made to David that He would be with David's offspring if his sons followed God's laws and walked in His ways was for Rehoboam too, but Rehoboam failed to trust in God's covenant, just as Jeroboam did.

⇒ *What are your insights into the inability of David's line to stay true to God and His promises?*

⇒ *How does this point to our desperate need for a Savior?*

Judah's lack of wise, godly leadership caused them to spiral into idolatry. Judah did not even pretend to say they were worshiping God alone. They either abandoned the worship of the Lord or placed Him as equal to other gods in their hearts and spaces of worship, thereby breaking the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:3-6), just like the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Judah did what was evil in God's eyes. In fact, things became so bad that the biblical writer stated, "They provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their fathers had done."

a. <u>They built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree</u>: In other words, Judah accepted and practiced all the evils of Baalism. The "sacred pillars," or sacred stones, were standing stones that represented a god and had divine symbols carved into them (2 Kings 3:2). The wooden Asherim (also Asherah) poles represented the female goddess consort of Baal in the pagan Canaanite religion. Together, these objects represented both the male and female deities necessary in a primitive fertility religion. All of this God had forbidden among His people (Exodus 23:24; Deuteronomy 16:21-22).

b. <u>They allowed male cult prostitutes in the land</u>: Oddly enough, the Hebrew term rendered "male cult prostitutes" literally is "those set apart as holy" or "holy men." This term was used collectively to include both sexes, hence it involved both male and female cult prostitutes who enacted with worshipers the fertility rites and rituals associated with Baalism. All of this the Bible calls detestable

practices or "abominations" and identifies them with the nations the Lord dispossessed before the Israelites. God clearly had forbidden such practices even before Israel entered the land (Deuteronomy 23:17-18). It is no wonder, then, that the text says they provoked the Lord to jealous anger.

- ⇒ *How do we avoid provoking God to jealous anger?*
- ⇒ *Why must God's judgment also come to the Southern Kingdom of Judah?*
- ⇒ *How do we reconcile His judgments with His promises?*

1 Kings 14:25-28: ***25*** *In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem.* ***26*** *He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house. He took away everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made,* ***27*** *and King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house.* ***28*** *And as often as the king went into the house of the Lord, the guard carried them and brought them back to the guardroom.*

The Israelites had lived among these cultures for centuries, but they did not keep God's covenant laws, which would have set them apart from the pagans around them. As a direct punishment for allowing these sins to flourish in Rehoboam's kingdom, the Lord allowed King Shishak of Egypt to attack Jerusalem. Shishak invaded with a force of 1,200 chariots and 60 divisions of cavalry, comprising 60,000 troops (2 Chronicles 12:1-3).

God allowed Judah's enemies to seize the treasures of the temple and palace. In another sign of weakness, Rehoboam had to replace the gold shields his father had made with inferior bronze shields, an indication of the lowered economic conditions in Judah. Thus, Solomon's great kingdom suffered three devastating blows under his son, Rehoboam: the loss of the ten northern tribes, the wholesale abandonment of the worship of the Lord, and the loss of Jerusalem's pride and glory to Egypt.

In 2 Chronicles 12:14, the Bible's final verdict on Rehoboam is tragic and reveals the whole secret of his failure as king and leader of his people and nation, yet it points to an important lesson for everyone today: "Rehoboam did what was evil, because he did not determine in his heart to seek the Lord."

- ⇒ *Why does it take determination to seek God in our hearts?*
- ⇒ *How are you seeking Him?*
- ⇒ *What can you learn from the consequences of Israel's and Judah's imitation forms of worship?*

TRANSFORM

Our sin and false worship does not humor, surprise, or confuse God. He knows who we are—sinners—and what is in our hearts. But the sin and false worship of God's image-bearers does disappoint and anger Him. We were created to worship and obey Him alone, and this was for our good and His glory. But sin leads us to chase after imitations that can never live up to the one true God and can only lead to death and destruction. A true king leads his people to worship faithfully the one true God. Jesus came as this King, for He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

1. HEAD: Jeroboam made his decisions in favor of imitation worship out of worry for the longevity of his situation. He forgot what the Lord had promised—a dynasty if he obeyed God's commands. Rehoboam consolidated his power in Judah after the division of kingdoms, and once he was settled, he and his people abandoned the law of the Lord to worship the idols of foreign nations. Whether we find ourselves in a place of worry or comfort, we must be on guard against the temptation of cheap imitations and false worship.

⇒ *Why does God deserve our sole devotion and worship?*

2. HEART: The temptation toward cheap imitations of worship is strong because it puts us in control over the direction of our heart. But true worship is a matter of loving and total submission to the One who created us and saves us in Jesus. Like children, we can be subtle in our rebellion, putting on a good show that satisfies an audience but falls short of pleasing the Lord. We can also be blatant in our rebellion, going after anything and everything but what the Lord has given us and called us to. The temptation is strong, but our salvation in Jesus and the powerful gift of God's Holy Spirit is more than adequate help us keep our eyes on God alone.

⇒ *How do you guard your heart to protect it from temptation taking root?*

3. HANDS: While imitation forms of worship tempt us to abandon the Lord, the world is full of people already caught in the trap and consequences of false worship, and many don't even know it. God has called us to challenge the imitations that hold sway over others by proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel.

⇒ *With whom will you share the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ this week?*

References

[1] Christopher Knapp, *The Kings of Judah and Israel* (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2004), 191–92.
[2] Amy L. Balogh, "*Shechem, City of*," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
[3] John MacArthur, 1 Kings 12–22: *The Kingdom Divides*, MacArthur Bible Studies (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 14.
[4] Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 9, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 163.

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