

Your whole heart belongs to God

Solomon lived nearly a thousand years before Christ.

He was blessed with great wisdom,
and applied it publicly for the benefit of all.

But Solomon's wisdom failed him privately,
for he married 700 wives and 300 concubines,
many of them from idolatrous peoples and nations.

We might say he was foolish to marry more than one wife,
and probably for more than one reason.

But worse than that,
many of his wives worshiped false Gods.

Solomon continued to worship the true God,
but he also reserved a space in his heart for others,
because he loved his wives.

Because of Solomon's split loyalty,
God intended to take the kingdom from his son,
split it into unequal pieces,
and give the lion's share to a servant of Solomon.

The chosen king was named Jeroboam, son of Nebat,
while Solomon's heir was Rehoboam.

Solomon effectively lost his kingdom,
by splitting his heart between God and false gods.

A thousand years later, the apostle named James the greater
was the older brother of John,
and the son of Zebedee and Salome.

Today the Church remembers him,
that Acts 12:2 says Herod killed him with the sword.

It may seem that James lost more than Solomon lost,
but in reality, James received a greater kingdom.

In his death, James became a martyr,
a witness that there is only one true God,
and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our only Savior.

The contrast between Solomon and James shows our theme today.

Your whole heart belongs to God.

So that we may not bow before anything else.

So that we may not mix false religion with truth.

So that we may trust Christ alone for everything.

1 Kings 12:26–33

And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.” Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made.

So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.

So that we may not bow before anything else.

We must ask, “What god was Jeroboam serving?”

Martin Luther was fond of pointing out

that our belief or trust make something our god.

If it’s the true God, then faith makes Him *our* God.

If it's something else, then our trust makes it an idol.

Where did Jeroboam seek the greatest good?

Where did he place the trust of his heart?

And Jeroboam said in his heart,

“Now the kingdom may return to the house of David.”

He was worried, because Israel's worship was in Jerusalem,
and his people might return to Jerusalem's king.

Did Jeroboam turn to the Lord for help or guidance?

No. He asked advice from somewhere else,
and then he made two golden statues of young cows,
directing the Israelites to worship them instead.

The Israelites at Mt. Sinai made a golden calf there too.

God was ready to annihilate the Israelites,
but Moses interceded on their behalf.

Jeroboam knew the history of Israel,
and that God's commandment forbids other gods or idols.

So Jeroboam was not following the true God, was he?

Instead, he trusted these new advisors,
and he trusted his plan to lead Israel into idolatry.

Jeroboam thought it better to leave the true God
than to risk losing his throne over Israel.

Do we not also make similar choices?

What are your concerns in life?

Security? Safety for your family?

The future of your children? Food and shelter?

Perhaps your concerns are more for luxuries:
status symbols, a nice car, truck, or house,
fame or fortune.

But where does your heart seek for these things?

Like Jeroboam, we have other advisors too.

“Trust your education, and skills,” they say.

“Trust your family.”

“Get plenty of money and you'll be set.”

“Find your vision and then live to achieve it.”

“Work harder than everyone else.”

“Forget religion; just reach for your goal!”

“Vote for me, and I’ll take care of you.”

There are moments we, too, forget to trust in God.

Instead of despising Jeroboam,

we should recognize that we sin the same way.

Then we should repent.

Now, using things is not necessarily wrong.

When it’s time to pay the bills,

you may look to your checking account.

When it’s time for a big test in school,

you may trust in diligent study to pull you through.

When you or your family is sick or injured,

you may entrust your well-being to doctors,

and your finances to insurance.

When a prowler breaks into your house at night,

you may entrust your family to Smith & Wesson

or the 911 dispatcher on the phone.

We can use these things as carpenter uses a hammer,

seeing them not as the true source of our good,

but as God’s blessings upon us.

In this way we can still live our lives,

trusting in God for all good things.

Remember that your whole heart belongs to God,

so that we may not bow before anything else.

So that we may not mix false religion with truth.

If Jeroboam had truly trusted in God above all things,

then he would not have replaced God with His plan.

But his plan itself was a wicked sin,

because Jeroboam used God’s name to corrupt Israel’s faith.

He made the two golden calves and said:

It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem.

Here are your gods, O Israel,

which brought you up from the land of Egypt!”

And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

Notice that Jeroboam did not claim to replace the true God,

but only offered a new and better way to worship Him.

This new worship with the calves
was supposed to be more friendly and reasonable,
while still worshipping the same God as always.

But God had been very clear and particular in Deu. 12:2–5,
where He prepared Israel to enter the Promised Land:

**You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations
which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high
mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And
you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and
burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the
carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that
place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such
things. But you shall seek the place where the LORD your
God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His
dwelling place; and there you shall go.**

To worship God in a way that omits the Temple,
including its sacrifices, the priesthood God established,
the Ark of the Covenant and many other things,
was to change the true worship of God.

In fact, Tabernacle, Temple, and priesthood were important
precisely because they were shadows of Christ to come.

Hebrews 9:24-26 refers to the Holy Place in the Temple:

**For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands,
which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to
appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer
Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place
every year with blood of another — He then would have had
to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now,
once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin
by the sacrifice of Himself.**

By worshipping God at the Temple,
believing Israelites worshipped through Jesus;
by omitting the Temple and all God had commanded,
Jeroboam was removing the Savior from their religion.

Whenever anyone tries to mix human opinions, laws, or teachings
into the doctrine that God has revealed in His Word
the result is the same:

it ultimately takes away our Savior.

Now, I know there are times we hear reasonable-sounding words.

Perhaps a teacher or professor at school.

Perhaps a family member: spouse, parent, aunt or uncle.

Perhaps even someone respected as a scientist.

Perhaps something we read.

They will say, “That part of your faith can’t be true.”

or: “That part of your worship is no good to you.”

And we are tempted to listen to their words.

Now, they might be correct,

if what they say comes from God through His Word.

Sometimes we may believe things that are not true.

Sometimes we may worship without understanding.

But if you search the scriptures,

and find that those reasonable words contradict them,

then the reasonable words have to go.

Respectfully, courteously, and with love for our fellows,

we must say, “You are wrong. God is right,

and since He is my God, I will believe what He says.”

Where we fail to do this,

we give our approval to falsehood.

Remember that your whole heart belongs to God,

so that we may not mix false religion with truth.

So that we may trust Christ alone for everything.

There’s a reason for God’s law against worshipping golden calves.

God is not a golden calf!

Jeroboam said, **Here are your gods, O Israel,**

which brought you up from the land of Egypt!

Aaron had said the same thing about the golden calf at Sinai.

But God’s presence among His people

is not in mute statues made by human hands,

nor in any other earthly thing we might trust.

God’s presence among His people

is in the Man called “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us.”

Even from the beginning of time,

God knew that this would be so.

He ordered all things — including Israel’s worship —
around that fact, around the person of Christ Jesus.

It may have seemed a small thing to Jeroboam:

shift the place where Israel worshipped,
let anyone be a priest to make the worship easier,
introduce new and fresh traditions into their religion,
but continue worshipping the same God as always.

Only it’s not a small thing.

Jeroboam’s trust was not in the saving wisdom of God,
but in the seeming wisdom of this world.

He was leading Israel into a new, mixed religion.

He was leading them away from Immanuel, away from Jesus.

Perhaps he did not understand this great sin,

because his own worship had become boring, vain repetition.

Maybe Jeroboam himself had forgotten the meaning of his faith,
so that his worship became disconnected from reality.

That happens to us, too.

When you recite the Creed,

is it your confession of what’s true?

When you say the Lord’s prayer, do you pray it to God,

or do you merely recite it with the rest?

Do you trust each day in your Baptism,

by the promise God set upon you with His Name?

Communicants: do you prepare for the Lord’s Supper?

Do you repent of your sins every day?

Faith and worship go hand in hand.

An ancient church father wrote:

“The law of prayer is the law of faith.”

By changing Israel’s worship practice,

Jeroboam was changing Israel’s religion.

The true religion of Israel centered upon the presence of God,
especially in the Messiah they expected.

That has not changed.

Today, believing Gentiles have been incorporated into Israel,
but the focus of our worship remains the same:

God’s favorable presence in our midst to save us.

God's presence in Israel was concentrated at the Temple,
but now God has replaced the Temple with His Son.

We come to Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins,
whether it be grievous deeds, hurtful words, wicked thoughts,
or even our lukewarm attitudes toward faith and worship.

Jesus invites you to repent and receive His full forgiveness.
He has purchased it with His suffering and death.
He has obtained righteousness for you by His innocent life.
He has applied this to you through His Word of promise.
He has provided Baptism to seal that promise upon you.
He bestows His body and blood as a personal pledge
that all of these things are true, even for you.

The true religion of Israel still focuses upon God's presence.
As long as our worship remains centered upon Him,
His Word will remain our certainty of God's favor.

You have God's Word now. You have His promise.
Your whole heart belongs to God,
so that you may trust Christ alone for everything.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!