

# Kings Series #12 - "Convenient Religion" 1 Kings 12:25-33

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *An Age Of Convenience*

1. National Family Opinion
  - a. forms - rate products and services
  - b. consumer information
2. Ask what appeals about products
3. One of the choices on every form - "Convenience"
4. Marketing companies know that convenience is an important selling point
5. So advertising is saturated with appeals to consumer convenience
  - a. now easier to use
  - b. less mess & fuss
  - c. no special tools needed for assembly
  - d. batteries included
  - e. faster
  - g. turn it on and forget it
  - h. automatic
  - i. self-cleaning
  - j. self-sharpening
  - k. self-adjusting
6. Want a pet without the inconvenience of having to take them for a walk or feed them or clean up the litter box? Now you can buy a video pet! TV Fido the dog, TV Ms. Priss the cat, you can even turn your TV into an aquarium, complete with the sound of air pump
7. And because life is so hectic, we see the constant appeal to the convenience of minimum time and effort
  - a. it seems we have instant everything; from gourmet meals to oatmeal
  - b. we have banks in grocery store
  - c. banks are now open on w/e
  - d. you can even get a car loan from a bank on the w/e at the grocery store!
  - e. ATM's are conveniently located
  - f. you can have your paycheck automatically deposited to your account
  - g. auto detailers will come to your place of employment and wash and wax your car - even spraying the interior with the scent of your choice
  - h. you can buy stamps through the mail - and for some reason, that totally flips me out!
8. It's true -we Americans love convenience
9. We love our toys and gadgets and anything that makes life easier, quicker, and simpler

### B. *Danger!*

1. But there is a terrible danger in all this

2. There is a danger that our desire for convenience can influence our relationship with God
3. But this danger is nothing new
4. It's not unique to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Americans
5. It was a problem in ancient Israel

## II. TEXT

### A. V. 25

**{25} Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel.**

1. Solomon has died & the throne of Israel has passed to his son Rehoboam
2. But Rehoboam foolishly tried to secure the throne & the loyalty of the people through fear
3. The northern 10 tribes of Israel seceded from the southern 2 tribes and became a separate nation
4. They selected this man Jeroboam, to be their new king
  - a. Jeroboam had been an effective official and leader in the Solomon's court years before
  - b. but Ahijah the prophet had foretold that he would one day led the northern tribes as king
  - c. when Solomon found out, he tried to kill Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt to hide out
  - d. now he returns to take the throne of the new kingdom, just as God had foretold
5. Here-at the beginning of his reign, he selects his capital, the village of Shechem, and builds it into a fortress
6. He also built up Penuel, on the Eastern border as another fortress to protect Israel's eastern flank
7. So far so good
8. It's his next step which was a grave mistake . . .

### B. Vs. 26-33

**{26} And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David:**

**{27} "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."**

**{28} 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!"**

**{29} And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.**

**{30} Now this thing became a sin, for the people went *to worship* before the one as far as Dan.**

1. Jeroboam reasoned that while the people had split politically, they still shared a common religious bond

2. God had commanded that the people were only to offer their sacrifices at one place, the temple in Jerusalem, which was the capital of the southern kingdom
3. Jeroboam feared that after a few years of making the repeated trips to Jerusalem and seeing the glories of the Solomon's temple the people would come to regret their political disunity and be drawn back to King Rehoboam and the South
4. Then, needing someone to blame their rebellion on, they would find a ready scapegoat in Jeroboam and execute him
5. So he gathered his counselors about him, laid out his concerns, and together they came up with a solution . . .
6. Provide an alternative to the temple and Jerusalem
7. So they made a couple of golden calves and presented them to the people and said, "These are your gods."

### **C. Much To Learn!**

Friends, this passage has much to teach us

**FIRST** - Notice that Jeroboam had little confidence in the promise of God

1. In 11:38 we read God saying this to Jeroboam . . .  
**It shall be, if you heed all that I command you, walk in My ways, and do *what is right* in My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build for you an enduring house, as I built for David, and will give Israel to you.**

2. God's blessings on Jeroboam were conditioned on only one thing - his obedience
3. All he had to do was trust God and remain faithful and God would take care of everything
4. But he didn't trust God, so he set about to take action to forestall what he feared might happen
5. To Jeroboam's sensible mind, inaction meant certain ruin
6. Oh how hard it is for some people to patiently wait for God!
  - a. they think they have to do something to help God out
  - b. they are like Abraham and Sarah who grew impatient waiting for God to fulfill His promise, so they took matters into their own hands and acted; and the result was years of misery
7. Jeroboam was a man who lived by sight, not faith
8. Friends, God does not need our help = only our obedience!

**Second** - Note Jeroboam's motive for making the idols

1. In v. 26 we read, "He said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom may return to the house of David.'"
2. He was afraid
  - a. afraid of losing his position
  - b. afraid of losing his power
  - c. ultimately, afraid of losing his life

3. Again, he was afraid, in spite of God's promises to him
4. Jeroboam was moved by ambition and his own ends
5. Outwardly it may have appeared to the people that he was concerned for them, but behind the closed doors of his counsel chamber, everyone knew why he did his - Fear of the Loss of Position & Power
6. History is filled with the tragic stories of people who have used religion as a means of personal gain
  - a. the church has often been used as a ladder for some man's personal and self-serving ambitions
  - b. Jeroboam was neither the first nor the last politician to use religion as one more way to secure their power base and recruit votes
7. Dear people - even in our own day, there are leaders in the church who are more interested in their position and power than God
  - a. they appear religious and sound okay
  - b. but a closer look and listen reveals that they have departed from the faith and have set up a doctrinal golden calf around which many are bowing
  - c. for many of these modern day Jeroboam's, a faithful obedience to the Lord wasn't drawing big enough crowds
    - 1) in fact, people were leaving their church or ministry and going to other churches
    2. so they came up with some "new and improved" message
  - d. this is precisely how the Faith Movement got started
    - 1) EW Kenyon was a Methodist, and then Baptist minister who grew concerned over the declining state of the church in the early 1900's
    - 2) in his college years he had been influenced by the metaphysical cults and what was called "New Thought" Today it's called religious science
    - 3) so Kenyon borrowed a lot of the more "appealing" ideas of New Thought and wrapped them up in a Christian package
    - 4) the response was pretty good, especially among the new Pentecostal movement
    - 5) then, Kenneth Hagin brought Kenyon's ideas and writings into the mainstream of Pentecostalism
8. Friends, we need to be wise and discerning whenever someone has a new and improved way of following the Lord
9. As we read in Jude 1:3, "We must contend for the faith that has been once for all delivered to the saints."

### THIRD - Take note of Jeroboam's stated motive for making these idols

1. "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel!"
2. He makes it seem as though his concern was for the people's sake
  - a. it was just too much to go all the way to Jerusalem
    - 1) it's so far
    - 2) the journey is hard

- 3) it takes so long and you'll lose pay from work
- 4) and it's dangerous!
- b. why - here, let's make it more convenient for you to worship
  - 1) don't go to Jerusalem
  - 2) HERE are your gods, right here
  - 3) why go there when you can worship here?
- 3. Then notice what he did . . .
  - a. he put one golden calf at Bethel, in the south
  - b. and the other he put in the north
  - c. all so that the people would have easier access to them
  - d. and while we're at it, making worship more convenient, why not go all the way and make lots and lots of places for people to offer their sacrifices . . .

**{31} He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.**

- 1) if you lived in the south, went to Bethel
- 2) if you lived way up north, you went to Dan
- 3) if you lived in the middle of the land or just wanted something closer, then you went to whatever high place was convenient
- 4. And you know what—the people *loved* it! They ate it up!
- 5. Jeroboam really thought this thing through: Notice what we read next . . .

**{32} 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.**

**{33} 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.**

- 6. Jeroboam didn't set these golden calves up as new gods
  - a. no, he said, "These are the gods who brought you up out of Egypt."
  - b. he is almost echoing the words of Aaron who made the first golden calf at Mt. Sinai
  - c. Aaron said it was an idol to Jehovah, a visible representation of the living God
  - d. Jeroboam taps into a deep part of the Jewish soul and pulls this out of their collective memory
  - e. by doing so, he presents something new, yet something the people would readily identify with because it was a part of their past
- 7. Clever religious manipulators do that
  - a. they appeal to something deep in the soul
  - b. one may play on a desire for a return to traditional values
  - c. another may play on the desire for health and wealth
  - d. another may simply appeal to the flesh's abiding desire for convenience
- 8. Jeroboam's idea was this, "It's too hard to worship a God you cannot see.

- And while God is Himself invisible, in order to make our worship more real, we'll just make these aids to worship. Worship is so much easier when you have something to look at and focus on."
9. Never mind that God had expressly forbidden the use of idols in worshipping Him
  10. Watch how the appeal to convenient worship led Israel into gross sin . . .
    - a. it began with the making of idols to "help" people concentrate on God
    - b. but an idol needs a shrine to hold it
      - 1) and since shrines can't get around
      - 2) why not make lots of shrines so it's more convenient for people to get there to worship?
    - c. and a shrine needs an altar so the people have a place to put their sacrifices
    - d. and altars need the sacrifices
    - e. and sacrifices need priests
    - f. and priests need a priesthood
    - g. and a priesthood needs rituals and feast and festivals
  11. So Jeroboam gave it all
    - a. he built shrines and altars all over the place
    - b. and he staffed them with priests drawn from every Tom, Dick, and Harry, or maybe I should say, every Amaziah, Nadab, and Abihu
    - c. he even set up feasts and religious festivals to rival those of the true faith in the South
  12. All for the sake of convenience!
  13. Yes, there was a lot of religious devotion in Israel
  14. In fact, with these reforms of Jeroboam, there was probably a lot more religious activity in Israel than ever before
    - a. if there had been newspapers back then they would have written articles about the tremendous revival sweeping the country
    - b. the magazines would have run cover stories with Jeroboam's picture on the cover, dressed in his clerical robes and heralding him as the leader of a new wave or spirituality
  15. But in spite of all the noise and flash, and pageantry - it was all an empty show
  16. Because they weren't worshipping God!
  17. Their religion of convenience was vain and void of life
  18. It was all show - not go!
  19. I wonder how many churches today are in the same place
    - a. a lot of activity
    - b. a lot of noise and motion
    - c. well orchestrated, well oiled, well financed
    - d. but utterly void of life and reality because they are merely worshipping a God of heir own imagination
  20. Oh - and understand something - Jeroboam and the people were mouthing the name of "Jehovah"
  21. But that's all it was - a word - simply because they had rejected the way HE said they were to come for a way of their own devising

22. Charley gave article: Megachurches & the NEXT CHURCH
  - a. not all but many driven by philosophies of the marketplace
  - b. church like a business struggling for a market share
  - c. one pastor said their strategy was to "Give them what they wanted."
23. Another pastor described the "worship menu" at his church as "chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry." He said, "We do not want to be a church just for people who are already Christian. We are not a church of the Way. We are a church of options."

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Careful!**

1. The pull of convenience is something everyone of us knows well
2. The threat of a convenient religion is very real today because we have made convenience a priority in our consumer driven culture
3. But if this passage teaches us anything it is this . . .
4. Our relationship with God, our worship and service must never, ever become a thing of convenience
5. we must never let a "consumer-mentality" drive our personal relationship with God or our church's pattern for ministry
6. We do not exist as a congregation to make Christianity entertaining, convenient, quick, or easy
7. We exist to glorify God and to help people grow and be conformed to the image of Christ
8. Now, let me say that when that is done right and well, it can be both fun and extremely rewarding
9. But we don't aim at convenience = We aim at obedience!

#### **B. Test Time**

1. Mind if I get personal?
2. Too bad
3. How often is your relationship with Jesus hindered because pursuing it is inconvenient?
  - a. do you avoid a daily time of devotions because you can't find a convenient time for them?
  - b. do you skip church, or bible study or home group because they are an inconvenience and sleeping in or watching TV fits your schedule better?
  - c. is helping serve in the ministries of the church inconvenient because it cuts into the time at the beach, surfing, skiing, or shopping?
4. Okay - that's enough; you get my point.