

ABILITY AND OPPORTUNITY MISUSED

--[I. KINGS 12:25-33](#)--JANUARY 8.--

**"Thou shalt not make unto thee
any graven image."--[Exodus 20:4](#).**

TODAY'S Study brings to our attention a man of large natural ability and of quite unusual opportunity. It shows us his disastrous error, which resulted from his endeavor to be worldly wise and to neglect his God and his religion. It furnishes an illustration which can be applied, not only to every political and every commercial enterprise, but also to the life hopes of each individual.

Jeroboam as a young man attracted the attention of King Solomon, who perceived that he possessed great executive talent and that he was a natural master and director of men. King Solomon put Jeroboam at the head of one of his corps of drafted workmen who were engaged after the manner of that time in building palaces and fortresses for the king--without pay other than very plain food and clothing. These labor armies were obliged to work for a number of months and then were replaced by others similarly conscripted.

Of the tribe of Ephraim, the largest of the ten tribes which separated from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, naturally Jeroboam may have felt something of the spirit of discontent as he perceived that the wealth of the nation was being principally gathered at Jerusalem--that all of the tribes were being taxed, and that most of the benefit went to the tribe of which the royal family were members. Jeroboam became the leader of a party of discontents, and an incipient rebellion was the result. This was quickly suppressed by King Solomon and thereupon Jeroboam fled to Egypt, from whence he returned at the death of Solomon and became the leader and spokesman of the ten tribes when they demanded of Rehoboam the reform of the government's policy.

JEROBOAM'S FIRST MISTAKE

It should be remarked that one of God's prophets had specially foretold to Jeroboam that he was to be the king of the ten tribes. It was doubtless this that led him to head the insurrection. He should have followed the example of King David, who was anointed king of Israel several years before the death of King Saul. Young David was content to wait God's time for bringing him to the throne. The fact that God had indicated that this would be so did not indicate that the time had come, hence David waited on the Lord and meanwhile learned valuable lessons of self-control and trust in Divine Providence. Not so Jeroboam, who was evidently a very different type of man, no doubt possessed of more confidence in himself than of trust in God; possessed of more impatience to be a king than of loyalty and patriotic zeal to serve God and his people. This first mistake should be noted by all. "Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord!" The man who ignores God is not wise; the man who opposes God is a fool.

JEROBOAM'S SECOND MISTAKE

When the ten tribes revolted against King Rehoboam, Solomon's son, they promptly accepted Jeroboam, one of Solomon's servants, as their king, in harmony with the Prophet's declaration of years before. Finally the boy of humble birth had reached a high station of influence --a grand opportunity for service for his God and his people. Whoever occupies a position of prominence-- political, social, literary--should recognize that thereby he has come under special responsibility and obligations toward all with whom he has to do. Such opportunities, whether in business life, in politics or in literature, should be used humbly, faithfully, as a responsible service. [R4723 : page 379]

But Jeroboam, king of the ten tribes styled Israel, took the course, alas, too commonly taken--the selfish course. He looked not to the Lord to serve him, nor to the people, to serve their best interests. He looked selfishly to his own interests. He reasoned thus: If I would establish my family in the kingdom of these ten tribes, I must separate them effectually from the influence of the kingdom of Judah. And since, in God's Providence, the Temple is in the land of Judah, and all the religious rites and interest of the people center there, I must as unobtrusively as possible turn the attention of the nation I rule away from sympathy with their fellows of the kingdom of Judah, and away from the regulations which God has established there.

Every worldly politician would declare Jeroboam a master spirit as a ruler, as a politician. He was worldly wise. God through the Prophet had assured him, "If thou wilt hearken to all that I will command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do right in my sight to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, thy kingdom will be prolonged." ([I Kings 11:38](#).) God explained that the reason for giving Jeroboam rulership of the ten tribes was that Solomon's course of dealing with the nations round about was gradually breaking down the true religion and leading the people toward idolatry. Jeroboam should have had all this in mind, and should have applied his heart with special fervor to the banishment of idolatry.

Instead, however, for policy's sake, he led the nation, of which he was king, directly into idolatry. He did not come out plainly and say to them, I wish to separate you and alienate you from God and the religious institutions of your nation by attracting your attention away from Jerusalem, its religion, its worship, its Temple. Under the pretext that it was too far for the people to go to Jerusalem, he erected a golden bull near the northern extremity of his kingdom, and another near the southern line, and the people went from one to the other. Additionally, he established near each of these golden bullocks (wood overlaid with gold) a house of high places. In these buildings lustful practices were carried on in the [R4724 : page 379] name of religion and in the manner of heathen peoples, this form of religion pandering to the fallen appetites and commending itself to the people who were not at heart religious.

Thus a man of great opportunities and of great natural ability for serving his God and his people dishonored the One and led the other astray. The lesson to each of us should be, See that thou do differently. Make not Jeroboam's mistake.

THE THING WAS OF THE LORD

Lest we should suppose that the affairs of Israel's Kingdom, under Divine supervision, were neglected and allowed to go astray, we are particularly informed that "the thing was of the Lord." From this standpoint of faith and from no other the history of Israel should be studied.

God had chosen to give Israel the Law Covenant for the very purpose of developing in them as a nation holiness, faithfulness. Their lessons of the past had been to this end, and now the time had come to do a sifting and a separating work. The kingdom of Judah had been enriched, and to it had been gradually gathered the more religious and the more intellectual of the nation. By the conspiracy of the ten tribes God purposed to humble Judah and to draw that people nearer to himself. To this end the ten tribes of less religious people were separated under Jeroboam.

But this did not work disadvantage to any true Israelites amongst the ten tribes, for we read that the Levites and the most religious of the people removed to the kingdom of Judah. Contrariwise we are safe to assume that the irreligious of Judah who favored idolatry, etc., had full opportunity for removing to the land of the ten tribes. Thus a sifting work was done which was beneficial to those loyal to God and to the kingly family which he had indicated in "his sure mercies of David."

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