

Failing to Cling to God's Promises

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[0 : 0 0] read in 1st Kings, 1st Kings chapter 12. You find that passage on page 294 of our church Bibles, the passage that's headed Jeroboam's golden calves, but of course there's so much teaching in this passage, so much application for us to learn. And you know, when we look at the passage before us, then we're sort of drawn to the truth that, you know, a strong, a sure, a certain, a sure and certain faith in the promises of God, that faith is one of the great blessings that a believer has, a Christian has in his or her walk with the Lord. When you walk by faith in the promises of God, the promises that God gives to his people, promise of eternal life for all who trust in him, for all who know him as Lord and Saviour, the promise that

Jesus gave, I will never leave you, I'll never forsake you, the promise of salvation for all who know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. Faith in the promise, these promises, it is a great blessing to have that sure, certain faith. And when you walk by faith and not by sight, when you're trusting in the invisible God who's made himself known by the visible Lord Jesus, you know him as children were saying that we hear his voice through his visible word. But you know, there are times when we fall and fail, there are times when we have to confess that we do walk by sight and not by faith. You know, when we make up our own minds about certain things, certain circumstances in our lives and we think, and we're tempted to think anyway, that God doesn't care, that God hasn't kept his promises. And we fall when we see things not by faith, but by our own estimation of what's best for me. And that happens when the promises of God aren't uppermost in our hearts and minds. And like Jeroboam, as we'll see in a moment, like Jeroboam, we listen to our own hearts. We listen to our own reason. And we doubt, as Jeroboam doubted the promises of God, we can doubt that God is with me always. You can doubt the sure salvation that you have in the Lord Jesus. And in our doubting and our lack of faith, we stumble and we fall and we dishonour God by wrong-thinking us. Again, we'll see in Jeroboam's case, wrong-thinking that leads to wrong actions. And we set up the idol of self in our hearts as Jeroboam set the idol of self in his heart. The idol that displaces the God of hope and love. The idols that take over, as it were, our whole lives. And when we stumble and fall, when we create an idol of self, we bring others down with us as well. And that is the picture that we see here in this next episode that we're looking through in the history of Israel.

[3 : 2 0] Israel, this foolish lack of faith, this unfaithfulness of King Jeroboam. And those of you who've been here the last few weeks, you'll remember how things have developed in the sorry state of affairs in the life of the nation of Israel.

You'll remember, as we've seen, the kingdom of Israel divided a kingdom that had been established and the wealth of wealth and King Saul. They've been united for about 80 years.

There's been a King Saul. There's been King David. There's been King Solomon. But of course, Solomon, he started well. He was a king of wisdom, a man of wisdom. He loved the Lord. But as we saw at the end of his life, he'd been lured away by all the women that he married and bringing in their false gods or false practices.

And God's going to punish, Israel punished Solomon by tearing the kingdom apart. Two tribes are going to remain in the south. The tribe of Judah, the tribe of Benjamin, and ten tribes to the north. Solomon's son Rehoboam is going to get the southern kingdom, Judah. The ten tribes are going to go to this capable individual, this man, Jeroboam.

[4 : 3 9] And as we saw last week, I mean, King Rehoboam is going to attack Jeroboam. He's going to raise 180,000 men. He's going to, you know, try and get this kingdom, this whole kingdom back.

But God intervenes. God, through a prophet, prevents this happening. And that's the background. And you'd think, you'd think that, well, you know, Jeroboam's already been told by a prophet he's

going to have ten tribes to rule over.

He's already seen that God stepped in to prevent this King Jeroboam taking over the whole land. You'd think that Jeroboam's going to rule well. You'd think that, you know, he's going to put God first in his life.

That he's going to, you know, make the kingdom of Israel a nation that truly honors God. But in fact, what we see so soon after he becomes king, that he's showing there's actually no better than his predecessor Solomon.

There's no better than Rehoboam. You're going to see his lack of faith in God's promises. That lack of faith is going to lead to unfaithfulness. And instead of a land that's going to know much blessing through faith and faithfulness, Israel's going to be troubled by its leaders.

[5 : 59] That's going to impact the people and their sin against God. And there are lessons. There are lessons here in this story. There are lessons for you and for me.

Lessons that we might say sort of are, it is covered in what Jesus said. When Jesus said, to whom much is given, much shall be required. And yes, there are these warnings.

There are these words of God that we do have to listen to and take cognizance of and apply in our lives to be the more faithful, to be the more men and women of faith, to be the more trusting in God's promises and abiding by them.

But let's look at the passage more closely and look, first of all, what we see is the insecurity of lack of faith. And as we said, I mean, Jeroboam starts his reign as if, well, things look as if they're going to be fine, that he's going to be safe.

There's no danger from the south. The 180,000 troops aren't going to attack. And you see what he does is, verse 25, he's going to strengthen his kingdom.

[7 : 11] He's going to fortify the city of Shechem. I mean, he's going to live there. If he's going to be king, he's got to be well protected. So he's going to build up the defences.

And then this other place, Penuel, well, it's a strategic city to the east. He needs to fortify that to protect his territory. And so from a military and a logistical perspective, fine.

But what's not here? What's not indicated? There's no indication that, first of all, he sought God. That, first of all, he sought God's protection.

There's nothing here in the passage to indicate that he's prioritised faith in God as his sure defence. Yes, of course, he's got to be a wise ruler.

He's got to exercise his responsibility as a king. But the passage shows that he hasn't come first before God.

[8 : 12] He's not come before God in worship and sought God's leading and God's guiding. And the principle of Scripture is absolutely clear. Proverbs 16, verse 3.

Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established. He's singing very much these words in Psalm 20. And it's this principle of faithful commitment.

And, of course, it finds its ultimate expression, the way that Christians are to live. And you're faithful following the Lord, your Saviour Jesus. What did Jesus teach?

The servant of mine. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And all these things will be added to you. You know, we know to our sadness that time and time again we're listening to our own hearts first of all before we come before God seeking the mind of God and maybe the direction of our lives, whether it be as individuals or as families or, I guess, even as a church.

And so often and too often, like Jeroboam, we listen to our own hearts rather than come before the God of wisdom and seek his leading and direction.

[9 : 31] Because that's what we see there in verse 26 onwards. Jeroboam said in his heart. He's, you know, he's not coming before God. He's saying in his heart, now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David.

The people in my kingdom, they'll want to go back south. They'll want to join up with their relatives in the south. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, well, of course, that's where sacrifices were offered, in the temple there.

Then the heart of this people will turn again to the Lord, to Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they'll kill me and return to Rehoboam, king of Judah. He said in his heart.

In other words, he's reasoning within himself. There's no recourse to God's direction. And what does he reason? He's reasoned that now that the people are in the north, they're in a separate kingdom, they're separate from their former place of worship.

It's where the temple was in Jerusalem in the south. And he's thinking to himself, my people are going to want to return to the south. They'll want to come back in with Rehoboam.

[10:37] They'll want to come back in with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. And if that's going to happen, they'll kill me. And I'll lose my kingdom, I'll lose my life. Unless I do something decisive.

And you see that the idol of self that's coming up in his heart, that idol that, you know, thinks of self first, thinks of, well, as Jeroboam did, thinking of himself first, his security, his power, his rule.

He didn't consider God in his thinking. I mean, God had brought about division in the kingdom. God hadn't done that simply for the kingdom to come back together again all at once.

God had made Jeroboam king of the northern kingdom. And God hadn't done that simply for, you know, the kingdoms to come back together again. It's so soon. God had set apart the people of the north from Jerusalem.

He hadn't done it simply to reverse the situation immediately. And you know this, we don't need to be a king in a high place of power to be prone to falling into that same trap that Jeroboam fell into.

[11:53] Because, you know, it does happen. You know, when we fail to cling to God's promises and, you know, almost that nurturing of a lack of faith in God's all-surpassing love for you.

We read in God's Word and we're assured that, yes, he's with me always, even to the very end of the age. And you panic, a panic when we don't feel his presence.

And there are various times, you know, when we can lack assurance of salvation and we doubt the faithfulness of God. And we fail to remember that God saves and God continues to save.

So rest. Rest in the promises of God to lead you and guide you. Don't, you know, automatically go firstly to your own heart. But go to the Word of God.

Go to His Word. Go to the Word of promise. That Word that tells you that He is with you always, even to the very end of the way. Don't, that word, decide to go your own way.

[12:57] And do your own thing. And fear the worst for yourself. If somehow, you know, God isn't acting in your own time rather than His time. You see, that comes from a lack of faith.

An insecurity. That insecurity when you forget the promises of God. When self draws away from God. And, well, we're creating an idol of self.

And we think, well, we have to serve self if we're to be truly fulfilled. And that's, you see, what Jeroboam was doing here. All Jeroboam could think of was himself. He set up that idol of self in his heart.

And again, as we said, there's so much warning for us. And we have to heed the warnings of God. Because when we displace God first in our hearts, we're going to replace Him with something else or someone else.

And invariably, that something else is self. When I am the centre of my thoughts apart from God. When self is the be-all and end-all of all decisions.

[14:05] Even when worship, for example. When self becomes the most important part of coming before God rather than giving Him the glory and praise when we come before Him.

And we can all fall in that respect. As a preacher, and those here who preach as well. You know, the temptation to create the idol of self even in preaching and being self-absorbed and giving the Word of God.

No, the Word of God is proclaimed not for self's glory but for God's glory. And remember this. The idol of self will not satisfy. Self cannot and mustn't be sovereign in your decisions.

But seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you. Don't allow self to somehow draw your heart away from God.

But return, return to Him with all, with all your heart. Because you see, the idol of self is going to crave more and more for self.

[15:14] And an idol of self actually makes, as it were, creates other idols. False gods. Those things that take the place of God in your primary affection.

And you see that here, certainly from verse 28 down to verse 31, the insensitivity of faithlessness. This slide that you see, Jeroboam falling down, this slide of spiritual decline.

I mean, there he is with the idol of self. And then that's followed by the idols of man-made creation. That's why we read in the book of Exodus the same backsliding sins of the Israelites.

Remember when they're wandering in the desert, many, many years before, of course. And it's now happening in this northern kingdom. Remember that, as we read, the Israelites demanded of Aaron that, well, Moses had been away in the mountain for 40 days.

He'd been receiving the law. He's not back yet. How are they going to, what's happened to him? They don't know. But they've got to move forward. And they're asking Aaron, make us God to lead us.

[16:24] And Aaron makes, the image, Aaron makes the golden calf. And he says these, and the people say, these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

The lack of faith in the people seeming the creation of the golden calf. And it's exactly what we're hearing, happening here in 1 Kings 12. The king makes two golden calves.

He says to the people, you've gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. There's Jeroboam in his faithlessness.

He's not trusting in the one true God who'd led him to the throne of Israel. He's making idols to satisfy his weakness. He's listening to the advice of fools, just as Aaron listened to the advice of the foolish people.

And that foolishness leads to images being made, images being worshipped. And there's a golden calf placed in the north of the country, a golden calf placed in the south. Priests appointed who weren't of the priestly family.

[17:36] All because Jeroboam wouldn't trust in the Lord. He wouldn't trust in God who'd led him thus far. And that's again, this is very much a sermon of warning.

It's a warning surely to each one of us. When the idol of self takes prominence, takes precedence in our heart.

And that self-made idol leads to that downward decline. And we less and less come before God and true God honouring of his name.

And there's Jeroboam. We'd order these idols to satisfy a religious need of the people. But he's leading the people in the wrong direction. And it's the kind of thinking that you do see all around us. Because mankind does have a need to believe. As Augustine said, there's that God-shaped space in the heart of every individual. But man, religious man, is going to try and fill that space with anything but the one true God.

[18:43] And he'll try and fill it with the false idols of riches and of fame or of power or popularity. These things that promise full satisfaction but can never, never truly satisfy man's greatest need to know the Lord Jesus who fully satisfies.

And Jeroboam, you see, he's reckoning that, you know, making these golden calves, that's going to consolidate his rule. He's going to be saved. He's going to be, you know, the people aren't going to want to go back down to the temple in Jerusalem to worship when they've got these golden calves to come before and worship.

And, you know, making these idols, I think the more precise kind of interpretation, surely, is that it's making these idols to represent God, to keep the people from wanting to return to Jerusalem.

But what's he revealing? He's revealing a heart that's far from God. He's revealing a heart that's inclined to, well, to false worship. Because no idol ever brought anyone to saving faith in the one true God.

We don't need idols to worship God. We come before the living and true God through faith in the Lord Jesus. But, you know, again, what do we see here?

[20:00] We see inconsistency, the inconsistency in false worship that Jeroboam's bringing here. You see that in verses 32 and 33.

I mean, Jeroboam, you know, he's adding to all this false religious practice. He's actually trying to mimic the sacrifice in Jerusalem.

But he's changing things around. He's altering the date of the feast as he devised in his own heart. And as you read that passage, the number of times you read, as he had made, as he had made.

He's doing things his own way rather than following the way of God. You see, Jeroboam believed that what he was doing was actually right.

You know, trying to keep to a sort of form of worship actually was so contrary to the worship of God that God had given to his people in his law.

[20:56] I mean, even making these golden calves, that wasn't just a chance thing that Jeroboam did. Israelites, they'd made a golden calf. Actually, the way of looking at that is to say, well, yes, they made that golden calf to represent God.

And, you know, and so Jeroboam's justified making these golden calves. It's the same thinking, a different tradition. But, well, it's the same God after all.

You don't need to go to Jerusalem to worship God. You don't need to go there to sacrifice to God. You can worship God here, but, well, but in a different form to that in the temple.

That's the way he's thinking. And isn't that the way of thinking of so much of modern man, the modern mindset that says all religions lead to God?

That, you know, all these religions are just a variation on the same thing. Well, the subtle heresies that we see every time you go to Princess Street in Edinburgh or wherever else, whether it's in northern Italy or wherever, the JW's with all their propaganda, you might say, the Mormons who claim to follow God, even quoting parts of Scripture when, in fact, the teaching that these heresies have is so contrary to God's Word and the denying of the Lord Jesus as Saviour, the denying of Jesus as the sinless Son of God, the sin of that belief, the denial of salvation by faith alone and Christ alone, false teachers who claim to be Christians but deny the all-sufficient death of the Lord Jesus.

[22 : 44] You have to be so careful and so discerning. You know, the false teachers, these false religions, they can be so appealing, they seem so plausible but are utterly, utterly wrong and sinful, have nothing, have nothing to do with them.

It's the warning that Paul gave to Timothy when Paul warned Timothy to avoid people, as Paul said, who were lovers of self, you know, who made an idol of self.

And lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. And, you know, if there's any lesson to take from this passage, it's surely this.

God's given us to come before him in a way that's his way, not by our choosing, not by our making, but his way.

And not like Jeroboam to somehow devise that we come before God by our own hearts. Because as Christians, we come before God and worship through the Lord Jesus. We come to God through the one who's made it possible for you to come before God and worship.

[24 : 01] And we give glory and praise to God that we are worshiping God this morning through the Lord Jesus. Because we come before him in Jesus' name. We come to God to praise him, to worship him, to give him the glory.

We do so as we're centered in the word of God. And it's not about self. It's not to glorify man. But you worship God.

You adore him. Give him adoration in your worship. Praise him. You praise him. Praise him as you come before him. And come, yes, confessing your sins as we have to all confess our sins before God.

But come before him with thankful hearts that God is the God who forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all our unrighteousness. So give the glory to God in the way that you worship him. Yes, we all have to confess our sins of selfishness, of faithlessness, of lack of faith, and the all-caring, all-seeing, all-knowing God, the God of all grace.

[25 : 07] And let's be consistent in the way that we come before God. Let's have nothing to do with anything that would entice you away from a false perception of God, a false worship of God, a false coming before him.

No, come before him rejoicing. Come before him through the Lord Jesus. Come before him with that heart that delights to serve him, that delights to know him, and that delights to be faithful in following our Lord and Savior.

So come before him with that wholehearted desire to worship him, to glorify him, to do as God gives you for his sake and for his glory.

So may God bless us. His word. Amen. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we come before you, the one who is the prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

Lord, and we come before you with our prayer, with our prayers. And we come before you, Lord, seeking your face, adoring you, worshipping you, and yes, Lord, confessing our sins before you.

[26 : 21] Lord, may it be that where even a trace of the idol of self is in our hearts, that we will truly pluck that idol from our hearts, and that we will worship you fully, wholly, completely.

So hear us, Lord, as we continue before you, as we continue in worship before you. And bless our fellowship. Indeed, Lord, bless our time after this service.

May we rejoice, yes, Lord, in the presence of one another, and that we will truly go from this place rejoicing, knowing that we have met with you.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue before you in praise. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.
Well, let's close in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51 on page 281. And we're going to sing from verse 7 down to verse 13.

[27 : 23] Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me, I shall be cleansed, so yea, wash thou me, and then I shall be whiter than this prayer of David, his prayer of confession and his prayer that God would forgive him and cleanse him.

Psalm 51, 7-13 to God's praise.