

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: The Kingdom Divided

1 Kings 12:1–14:31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson addresses one of the most consequential doctrinal themes in the entire Bible study: the principle of authorized worship. Jeroboam's golden calves are not merely a colorful historical episode. They are the paradigm case of what happens when worship is shaped by human convenience and institutional calculation rather than divine authorization. The text treats his innovation with the utmost seriousness. The phrase 'the sin of Jeroboam' becomes a refrain throughout 1 and 2 Kings, a shorthand for the catastrophic spiritual trajectory that his unauthorized worship set in motion. The teacher must help students see that God does not treat the manner of worship as a secondary matter. He specifically commands where, how, and through whom He will be approached, and deviation from those commands is not merely a preference violation; it is covenant rebellion.

The New Testament application is direct and must be handled carefully. The church of Christ stands on the conviction that the New Testament provides the authoritative pattern for Christian worship, and that departing from that pattern, whether by adding human inventions or by importing Old Covenant practices the new covenant has superseded, is the same kind of error Jeroboam made. This means the teacher should connect Jeroboam's principle to specific New Testament patterns: the Lord's Supper observed weekly on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26), congregational singing without mechanical instruments (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), prayer, and teaching. The goal is not a defensive argument for church of Christ practice but a positive and compelling case that worshiping as Christ authorized is an act of love, trust, and submission to the Lord who has the right to define how He is to be approached.

Spiritually, this lesson should produce both humility and renewed conviction. Humility, because every student comes with inherited traditions and habits that deserve honest examination against Scripture. Conviction, because the God who tore an altar at Bethel to announce that He would not be worshiped in ways He had not commanded is the same God who revealed His will fully and finally in Jesus Christ and the apostolic word. The teacher's aim is to lead students to worship Him more faithfully, more carefully, and more joyfully precisely because He has told us how.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 1 Kings 12:1–15. Rehoboam had access to two kinds of counsel: the wisdom of experienced elders and the flattery of his young companions. What does the text reveal about why he rejected the better counsel, and what principle does that establish about the relationship between pride, accountability, and foolish decisions?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The narrative opens at Shechem, a location loaded with historical significance. It was at Shechem that Abraham first received the promise in Canaan (Genesis 12:6–7), where Joshua renewed the covenant (Joshua 24), and where the tribes had assembled before. Rehoboam's coronation there was a deliberate attempt to gather all Israel. The people's petition was reasonable: the corvée labor and heavy taxation of Solomon's reign had been burdensome. They were not asking for revolution; they were asking for reasonable relief.

The contrast between the two sets of counselors is deliberate and instructive. The elders who had served Solomon understood the political calculus, but more importantly they understood what leadership looks like from the receiving end. They knew that a servant-hearted king wins the loyalty that a harsh king can only demand at swordpoint. Their advice was not just strategically sound; it was morally right. The young men, by contrast, gave Rehoboam exactly what a proud young king wanted to hear: a chance to assert his own authority and distinguish himself from his father by being even tougher.

Verse 14 uses the word 'yoke,' and Rehoboam promises to make it heavier. The language is theologically resonant. Throughout the Old Testament and into the New, 'yoke' is the image of servitude and burden. Jesus would later offer a different kind of yoke: 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:30). The contrast between the servant-king and the domineering king runs from Shechem to Calvary. Rehoboam's failure to be a servant-hearted leader makes the longing for the true Son of David more urgent.

Verse 15 is critical: 'So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam.' This does not mean Rehoboam bears no responsibility for his choice. It means that God's sovereign purpose was operating through Rehoboam's real choice. Rehoboam genuinely chose his young friends' counsel out of pride. God genuinely used that choice to accomplish what He had announced through Ahijah. Both are true at the same time, and the teacher should not sacrifice either for the sake of a simpler theology.

The practical application for the class is the importance of the quality of counsel we seek and allow to speak into our major decisions. Proverbs, largely attributed to Solomon himself, says repeatedly that plans fail without counsel and succeed with many advisors (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22). Rehoboam's tragedy is that he had better counsel available than most people ever receive, and he rejected it because it required him to humble himself. Pride in the moment of decision is one of the most reliable predictors of long-term catastrophe.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The nature of responsible leadership as servant-hearted rather than power-asserting
- The role of quality counsel and the danger of choosing advisors who simply agree with us
- God's sovereign purpose working through Rehoboam's genuine and culpable choice
- The word 'yoke' as a theological image pointing toward the servant-king Jesus (Matthew 11:28–30)
- Pride as the specific sin that made Rehoboam deaf to wisdom he could have received
- Avoiding the error of collapsing divine sovereignty into human fatalism

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think Rehoboam chose the young men's counsel over the elders'? What does it tell you about what he actually wanted, underneath the question he was asking?
- What makes someone a trustworthy counselor rather than just a sympathetic one? How do you identify that difference when you are the one who needs advice?
- How do you hold together verse 15 (God brought about this turn of affairs) with verses 13–14 (Rehoboam deliberately rejected wisdom)? Why does it matter that both are true?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think about a decision in your own life, past or present, where you chose the counsel that told you what you wanted to hear rather than the counsel that told you what you needed to hear. What was driving that choice, and what did it cost you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites honest self-reflection about the universal human tendency to seek validation rather than wisdom. The choice Rehoboam made is not exotic; it is one of the most common decisions humans make. We ask for advice from the person most likely to agree with what we already want to do, and we call the process of hearing their agreement 'getting counsel.'

The cost of choosing comfortable counsel over honest counsel is almost always borne later and is almost always larger than the benefit of avoiding the discomfort in the moment. Rehoboam lost ten tribes. The teacher can help students name the specific costs of their own similar choices without requiring public confession of private details.

The transformational question is: what would it take to become the kind of person who genuinely wants honest counsel, even when it is uncomfortable? That is a character formation question, not just a decision-making tip. It requires cultivating humility as a daily practice, not just as a strategy for avoiding mistakes.

James 1:5 promises that God gives wisdom generously to those who ask. But the premise of that promise is genuine desire for wisdom, not just desire for the confirmation of a decision already made. The student who hears this passage and asks God for the grace to become someone who can genuinely receive difficult truth is taking the first step Rehoboam refused to take.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal human tendency toward confirmation bias in seeking counsel
- The long-term cost of short-term comfort in avoiding honest advice
- Humility as a character virtue that must be cultivated, not just applied in a single decision
- James 1:5 and the promise of wisdom to those who genuinely seek it
- The role of trusted community in providing the kind of honest counsel Rehoboam needed

Discussion Prompts

- What would it look like in your own life to actively seek out people who will tell you what you need to hear rather than what you want to hear? Do you have those people in your life right now?
- Looking back at a decision where you chose comfortable counsel over honest counsel, what would you do differently now, and what made the honest answer hard to receive at the time?
- How does pride make us vulnerable to bad counsel? What does humility look like in the specific moment when we are weighing competing advice?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 1 Kings 12:16–24. The ten tribes' revolt fulfills Ahijah's prophecy from chapter 11. When Rehoboam prepares to fight to reunite the kingdom by force and Shemaiah the prophet says 'Do not go up or fight against your relatives the people of Israel, for this thing is from me,' Rehoboam actually listens. What does his obedience here, despite having just been spectacularly foolish, tell us about God's ongoing pursuit of His people even through their failures?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Rehoboam's obedience to Shemaiah in verse 24 is one of the most surprising moments in the chapter. This is the same king who had just rejected the wisest counsel available to him and made one of the most catastrophic political blunders in Israelite history. And yet when the prophet speaks, he listens. The army goes home. There is no civil war.

This tells us something important about God's ongoing pursuit. He does not write off the foolish or the proud. He continues to speak. He continues to send messengers. He continues to offer the opportunity to respond rightly, even to people who have just demonstrated spectacular

capacity for foolishness. Grace does not wait for us to earn a hearing; it finds us in the wreckage of our mistakes.

The contrast between Rehoboam's disobedience to wisdom in verses 1–15 and his obedience to the prophet in verses 21–24 is also instructive about what kinds of authority we find it easier to submit to. Human wisdom required Rehoboam to humble himself before elders. Direct prophetic word from God had a different weight. The teacher can explore with the class what that difference means for us today, where the authoritative word of God comes to us through Scripture rather than through a prophet in the room.

Theologically, the obedience also prevents even more catastrophic violence. God's purposes in dividing the kingdom were being accomplished; a civil war would have added unnecessary bloodshed to the already-painful fracture. God's command through Shemaiah was also an act of mercy toward both kingdoms. Even in judgment, God is the God who prefers mercy to additional devastation.

The application for students who are living with the consequences of past failures is significant. The fact that God is still speaking, still guiding, still available to be obeyed even in the middle of a mess of our own making is not a theological abstraction. It is the lived experience of anyone who has ever turned around mid-disaster and found that God was already there, waiting to give direction.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's continued pursuit of His people even through and after their failures
- The contrast between Rehoboam's deafness to human wisdom and his responsiveness to prophetic word
- What hearing God's voice through Scripture looks like for Christians today
- God's mercy in preventing escalation: judgment shaped by restraint
- The pastoral encouragement available to those living with consequences of past failure

Discussion Prompts

- What does Rehoboam's obedience in verse 24 tell you about God's attitude toward people who have just made serious mistakes? Have you experienced that kind of continued divine engagement in your own life?
- Why do you think Rehoboam listened to Shemaiah when he had refused to listen to the elders? What was different about those two conversations?
- How does the fact that God's word still came to Rehoboam after his catastrophic failure encourage you in a season where you are dealing with consequences of your own poor choices?

Question 4

Student Question:

When you have made a serious mistake that has produced real consequences, how have you experienced God's continued presence and guidance in the aftermath? What helped you remain open to His direction even when you were dealing with the fallout of your own poor choices?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question is deliberately personal and invites the kind of honest self-examination that is uncomfortable but formative. The issue is not whether we occasionally make choices that are imperfect but whether we have settled into patterns of spiritual or religious life that were never actually examined against what God requires.

The categories worth exploring include inherited family traditions that were assumed to be biblical but never tested, church practices that feel normal because they are familiar, and personal devotional habits that feel spiritual but may have drifted from genuine encounter with God. The question is not designed to produce guilt but to produce honesty.

The positive invitation is to bring those unexamined areas to Scripture with genuinely open hands. The Bereans in Acts 17:11 were commended for 'examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.' That posture of ongoing, humble examination is the alternative to both defensive tradition-keeping and casual innovation.

For the teacher, this is also an opportunity to model intellectual humility. None of us has examined everything. All of us have inherited assumptions. The question is whether we are willing to keep holding those assumptions up to the light of God's word, because we love God more than we love our traditions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of inherited religious habit that has never been examined against Scripture
- The Berean posture of ongoing, humble examination (Acts 17:11)
- Distinguishing genuine encounter with God from comfortable religious routine
- The intellectual humility required to examine traditions we have previously assumed were correct
- Loving God more than our religious comfort zones

Discussion Prompts

- What is one practice or habit in your spiritual life that you have never actually examined against Scripture? What would it look like to examine it honestly?
- What is the difference between a tradition that is consistent with Scripture and one that replaces or contradicts it? How do you know which kind you are holding?
- What makes it emotionally difficult to question practices or traditions that feel spiritually familiar? What helps you hold those things with open hands before God?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 1 Kings 12:25–33. Jeroboam’s reasoning in verse 27 is painfully transparent: ‘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.’ His religious innovations were driven by political fear, not theological conviction. What does this reveal about the specific sin of creating worship practices that are designed around human convenience and institutional self-interest rather than divine command?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jeroboam’s confession in verse 27 is the most revealing moment of his entire tenure: ‘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.’ His golden calves were not a theological statement, though they became one. They were a political calculation. He needed to keep his people from gravitating back toward Jerusalem and the house of David, so he gave them a convenient, local, state-controlled alternative.

The language he used to introduce the calves echoes the golden calf episode of Exodus 32:4 almost verbatim: ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’ Whether the echo was deliberate or unconscious, the reader is meant to hear it. Jeroboam was repeating one of the most catastrophic acts of covenant rebellion in Israel’s history. Aaron had done this at the foot of Sinai; Jeroboam did it at Bethel and Dan. The calves were not atheism; they were a false representation of the true God, worship directed at the right deity through unauthorized means and images.

He also appointed priests ‘from among all the people, who were not of the Levites’ (12:31), established a counterfeit feast day in the eighth month ‘like the feast that was in Judah’ (12:32), and personally offered sacrifice on the altar, a role reserved for the Levitical priesthood. He built an entire alternative religious system from scratch, designed around political need. The detail about the feast day is particularly telling: ‘in the month that he had devised from his own heart’ (12:33). That phrase, ‘devised from his own heart,’ is the biblical writer’s definitive verdict on the entire enterprise. It was human invention, not divine command.

Deuteronomy 12 had been unambiguous: Israel was to worship God only in the place He chose, not according to the practices of the surrounding nations, not in ways they devised for themselves, but in the way He commanded. Jeroboam knew this. Every Israelite knew this. The sin was not ignorance; it was willful deviation from known divine command for reasons of political convenience. This is precisely what makes it so instructive for discussions about worship today.

The teacher should help the class see that the issue is not sincerity. Jeroboam’s people may have been perfectly sincere in worshiping at Bethel and Dan. The calves may have represented, in their minds, the God who had indeed brought them out of Egypt. But sincerity does not

sanctify unauthorized worship. God did not accept the golden calf at Sinai because the people were sincere. He treated it as a capital offense. The question is not 'Does this feel meaningful to me?' but 'Has God authorized this?'

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The political motivation behind Jeroboam's religious innovation: convenience over conviction
- The deliberate echo of Exodus 32 in Jeroboam's proclamation (12:28)
- Unauthorized priests, unauthorized places, and an unauthorized feast devised 'from his own heart' (12:33)
- Deuteronomy 12 as the legal background for understanding the sin of Jeroboam
- The insufficiency of sincerity as a justification for unauthorized worship
- The phrase 'devised from his own heart' as the biblical writer's verdict on human religious innovation

Discussion Prompts

- What does the phrase 'devised from his own heart' in verse 33 tell us about the essential nature of Jeroboam's sin? How does that phrase apply to religious innovations in any age?
- Jeroboam's people may have been sincere in worshiping at Bethel. Why is sincerity not sufficient justification for worship that God has not authorized? Can you think of a parallel in religious life today?
- The calves were explicitly justified as representing the God who brought Israel out of Egypt. Why was that not enough to make them acceptable? What does this tell us about the importance of worshiping God in the form and manner He has specified?

Question 6

Student Question:

Have you ever been tempted to shape your own religious practice around what is comfortable, familiar, or socially acceptable rather than around what God has actually required? What does it look like to examine your worship practices honestly against Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The man of God from Judah is one of the most fascinating figures in 1 Kings. He comes without a name. He comes with a specific prophetic word against the altar. He performs three miraculous signs. He refuses the king's hospitality with admirable clarity: 'If you give me half your house, I will not go in with you. And I will not eat bread or drink water in this place, for so was it commanded me by the word of the LORD' (13:8-9). His initial obedience is exemplary.

God's mercy toward Jeroboam in restoring his withered hand (13:6) is worth dwelling on. Jeroboam had just commanded that the prophet be seized. His hand stretched out in command

withered instantly. And then the prophet prayed for him, and God healed him. The man who had just tried to arrest a prophet of God received healing through that prophet's intercession. This is the pattern of a God who takes sin with absolute seriousness and who simultaneously reaches toward the sinner with mercy. The two are not in tension; they are the dual expression of a single holy love.

The altar's tearing apart and the pouring out of ashes (13:5) is a direct fulfillment of the sign the prophet announced in verse 3. It is also a preview of what the altar would ultimately represent. The man of God from Judah named the future king who would desecrate that altar: 'O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you' (13:2). This prophecy was fulfilled 300 years later (2 Kings 23:15-16), a remarkable testimony to the reliability of God's word across centuries.

The character of God displayed in this passage has two faces that belong together: absolute seriousness about the holiness of worship and genuine mercy toward persons who have violated it. The teacher should resist the temptation to choose one face and minimize the other. A God who only takes worship seriously becomes a harsh legalist. A God who only shows mercy becomes a deity with no standards. The God of 1 Kings 13 is neither.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The man of God as a type of faithful prophetic witness: nameless, obedient, clear
- God's mercy in healing Jeroboam's hand as an expression of grace toward a sinner in the midst of judgment
- The tearing of the altar as a sign of God's rejection of unauthorized worship
- The 300-year prophecy naming Josiah as specific evidence of divine omniscience and the reliability of God's word
- Holding together God's holiness about worship and His mercy toward persons: both are essential

Discussion Prompts

- What strikes you most about God healing Jeroboam's hand immediately after Jeroboam had tried to arrest His prophet? What does that tell you about God's character?
- The man of God gave a prophecy that would not be fulfilled for 300 years and named the specific king who would fulfill it. How does that kind of specificity affect your confidence in Scripture?
- How do you hold together the picture of God tearing apart an altar (severity) and healing an outstretched hand (mercy) in the same passage? What does it tell you about who God is?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 1 Kings 13:1–10. The man of God from Judah arrives at Bethel, cries out against the altar, and performs three miraculous signs: the altar tears apart, the ashes pour out, and Jeroboam's outstretched hand withers and is restored only through the prophet's prayer. What does God's response to Jeroboam's unauthorized altar, and His willingness to restore Jeroboam's hand even in judgment, reveal about the character of a God who takes false worship seriously but remains merciful toward persons?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The man of God's subsequent disobedience is one of the most unsettling subplots in 1 Kings. He had been crystal clear about his instructions. He had refused the king's hospitality with apparent certainty. And then an old prophet who lived in Bethel, the very city whose altar God had just condemned, told him a lie: 'I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water' (13:18). The text tells us bluntly: 'he lied to him.' And the man of God believed him.

The tragedy is the location of the failure. He did not compromise under pressure from the king. He did not fail under threat of the withered hand or the royal command to be seized. He fell in a quiet moment of relaxation, over a table set by someone who seemed like a fellow servant of God. The spiritual guard that held under dramatic confrontation dropped in ordinary fellowship. That is a pattern worth examining carefully.

The old prophet's message, once the man of God had disobeyed, was genuinely from the LORD (13:20–22). The prophet who had just lied to the man of God now pronounced God's judgment on him for believing the lie. He would not be buried in his fathers' tomb. A lion killed him on the road, and yet the lion did not eat the body and the donkey stood beside it, a strange mercy in the midst of judgment, God still marking the moment as significant even as He executed the consequence.

The application for the class is specific: the spiritual guard we maintain in high-profile moments of public faithfulness must be maintained equally in the quiet, ordinary moments of daily life. Satan does not always attack when we expect him. He is perfectly content to wait until we have just had a spiritual victory and our vigilance has relaxed. First Peter 5:8 warns: 'Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.' The man of God met a lion on the road because he had stopped being watchful at the table.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pattern of spiritual failure coming in the ordinary moment after a public victory
- The danger of false prophecy and the responsibility to test claimed divine messages against God's already-revealed word
- The consistency required between high-profile faithfulness and daily-life vigilance
- 1 Peter 5:8 and the specific warning about post-victory vulnerability

- God's ongoing seriousness about obedience even when the disobedience came through deception
- The strange mercy embedded in God's judgment: the preserved body and the non-eating lion

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think the man of God was more vulnerable to the old prophet's lie than to the king's command? What does that tell you about where your own spiritual guard is most likely to drop?
- How do you test a claim that someone has received a new word from God that modifies or overrides what you already know from Scripture? What did the man of God fail to do?
- When have you experienced your greatest spiritual vulnerability coming right after a moment of public faithfulness? What have you learned from that experience?

Question 8

Student Question:

What does the man of God's initial obedience in refusing the king's hospitality (verses 8–9) and his later disobedience when deceived by the old prophet (verses 11–22) teach you about the specific dangers of relaxing your spiritual guard after a moment of public faithfulness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the lesson's heaviest doctrinal question and must be taught with both rigor and pastoral warmth. The principle of authorized worship is not a church-of-Christ hobby horse; it is a principle that runs from Sinai to the New Testament and is grounded in the very character of God as a God who has the right to define how He is to be approached.

The foundation is Deuteronomy 12, which commanded Israel to worship only as God directed, not as the surrounding nations worshiped, and not as they themselves might devise. Jeroboam's sin was the direct violation of this principle. He created worship that was directed at the right God (the God who brought them out of Egypt), but through unauthorized means (golden images), in unauthorized places (Bethel and Dan rather than Jerusalem), with unauthorized priests (non-Levites), and on an unauthorized calendar (a feast day of his own invention). The text condemns each of these deviations specifically.

The New Testament does not abolish the principle of authorized worship; it applies it within the New Covenant framework. Christ is the mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6), and the pattern for the worship of His church is found in the apostolic teaching and example, not in continued Old Covenant practice (Colossians 2:14–17) and not in human innovation beyond what the apostles delivered. The relevant passages for the church's authorized worship include Acts 20:7 (the church assembling on the first day of the week to break bread, the Lord's Supper), 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (the Lord's Supper as Christ delivered it through the apostle), Ephesians

5:19 and Colossians 3:16 (singing and making melody in the heart, speaking psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another), Acts 2:42 (the four pillars of apostolic practice: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers), and Hebrews 10:25 (not neglecting to meet together).

The specific question about mechanical instruments in worship is appropriate here. The New Testament authorizes singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). It does not authorize mechanical instruments. The church of Christ has historically concluded that adding what the New Testament does not authorize follows the same logic as Jeroboam's innovations: taking what God specified (in this case, vocal music) and supplementing it with what human tradition or preference suggests. This is not a claim that instrument users are insincere; it is the same point that sincerity does not sanctify the unauthorized. The teacher should present this clearly and charitably, without ridicule of those who differ, but also without apologizing for the biblical principle that underlies the practice.

More broadly, the principle applies to any addition to or subtraction from the apostolic pattern. Human-invented titles, practices, organizational structures, doctrines, and ceremonies that go beyond what Christ authorized through His apostles fall under the same indictment: 'devised from his own heart' (12:33). Second John 9 is the clearest statement: 'Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.' The teacher should help the class see that this principle is not restrictive in a grudging sense but is instead the expression of a deep respect for Christ's authority as the head of His church.

The pastoral application is direct: examine what you do in worship each week and ask, 'Is this what Christ authorized through His apostles, or is this something we have added because it feels meaningful, because it is traditional, or because other churches do it?' That question, applied with humility and genuine desire to please God, is the antidote to Jeroboam's error.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The principle of authorized worship: God defines how He is to be approached (Deuteronomy 12; 1 Kings 12:28–33)
- Jeroboam's specific violations: wrong images, wrong places, wrong priests, wrong calendar
- The New Testament as the authoritative pattern for New Covenant worship, replacing Old Covenant forms
- Authorized elements of New Testament worship: Lord's Supper weekly (Acts 20:7), singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), prayer, giving, teaching
- The silence of Scripture as prohibitive rather than permissive in matters of worship
- Why sincerity does not sanctify unauthorized worship: the Sinai golden calf and Bethel's calves were sincere but condemned
- 2 John 9 and the call to abide in the teaching of Christ rather than innovating beyond it

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between a worship practice that is authorized by the New Testament pattern and one that is merely not condemned? Why does that distinction matter?
- How would you respond to someone who says, 'God doesn't care how we worship as long as we are sincere'? What does Jeroboam's story say to that claim?
- If you were examining the worship of your congregation against the apostolic pattern of Acts 2:42 and the specific references in Acts 20:7 and Ephesians 5:19, what would you conclude? Where is there strong alignment, and where is there room for deeper examination?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 1 Kings 12:28–33 carefully alongside Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, Ephesians 5:19, and Colossians 3:16. Jeroboam did not tell the people to abandon God altogether; he told them 'Here are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt,' set up unauthorized places, appointed unauthorized priests, and established an unauthorized feast day. The text treats this as the gravest covenant sin. What is the timeless principle about authorized worship that this passage establishes, and how does that same principle apply to the New Testament church: what has Christ actually authorized for His church's worship, and why does worshiping in ways He has not authorized, no matter how sincere, constitute the same kind of error Jeroboam made?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ahijah's prophecy to Jeroboam's wife in chapter 14 is brutal in its precision. She came in disguise, as if she could fool the prophet of the God who had given Jeroboam the kingdom in the first place. The blind old prophet identifies her before she speaks: 'Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend to be another? For I am charged with unbearable news for you' (14:6). The attempt to deceive the prophet of God was itself a symptom of the same fundamental problem that had produced the calves: the refusal to come to God as He actually is and on His terms.

The indictment in verse 9 is one of the sharpest verdicts in the books of Kings: Jeroboam 'has done evil above all who were before him' because he 'cast me behind his back.' That phrase is extraordinarily vivid. To cast God behind your back is not merely to neglect Him; it is to take the living God and deliberately put Him out of sight, to refuse to let His presence and His word have any bearing on your choices. Solomon had done this gradually. Jeroboam did it programmatically, building the entire infrastructure of the northern kingdom on God's marginalization.

The death of Abijah the child is described with striking tenderness. He alone in the house of Jeroboam had 'something pleasing to the LORD' in him (14:13). His death before the full destruction of Jeroboam's line fell is interpreted as mercy. He would be mourned and buried with honor, the only member of the family to receive that dignity. God's care for the innocent

and the good even within the household of the wicked is a reminder that His judgments are not indiscriminate.

The broader pattern of chapters 12 through 14 is relentless divine engagement. God speaks through Shemaiah (12:22–24), through the man of God from Judah (13:1–10), through the old prophet's message of judgment (13:20–22), and through Ahijah (14:6–16). The God of these chapters is not a distant deity who has written off His people. He is a God who keeps speaking, keeps warning, keeps sending messengers, and keeps holding open the possibility of response. The refusal of Jeroboam to respond at any of those junctures is what seals his family's fate.

The capstone application for the lesson is that living under the authority of a God who takes His own word seriously is not a burden but a privilege. The God who tore the altar, withered the hand, killed the disobedient prophet, and announced the death of a king's son through a blind prophet is the same God who healed the withered hand, preserved the prophet's body with supernatural restraint over a lion, and described the child Abijah with love. He is not a God who can be maneuvered or domesticated. He is the God before whom heaven and earth cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:27), who nonetheless stoops to speak, to warn, and to call. The only appropriate response is wholehearted, obedient worship on His terms.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The verdict of verse 9: 'cast me behind his back' as the definitive description of Jeroboam's sin
- God's sustained prophetic engagement throughout chapters 12 through 14 as evidence of continued pursuit
- The mercy embedded in Abijah's death: the good thing in a wicked household is preserved from greater suffering
- The attempt at deception (Jeroboam's wife in disguise) as a symptom of the same root sin: refusing to come to God on His terms
- Wholehearted, obedient worship on God's terms as the only appropriate response to the God revealed in these chapters

Discussion Prompts

- What does the phrase 'cast me behind his back' (14:9) tell you about the nature of Jeroboam's sin? How is deliberate marginalization of God different from simple neglect?
- God sent multiple prophets and multiple signs throughout these chapters, and Jeroboam responded to none of them. What do you think hardened him so thoroughly against God's word? Do you recognize any of that hardening in yourself?
- Looking across the full sweep of 1 Kings 12 through 14, what is the one image or moment that stays with you most, and what is God saying to you personally through it?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 1 Kings 14:1–18. Ahijah's prophecy to Jeroboam's wife names the sin precisely: Jeroboam 'has done evil above all who were before him' because he 'went and made for himself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and has cast me behind his back' (14:9). The death of the child Abijah is described as mercy for the one good thing in the house of Jeroboam. As you look back over the entire narrative of chapters 12 through 14, what does God's sustained, specific engagement through prophets, signs, warnings, and consequences tell you about what it means to live under the authority and care of a God who takes His own word with absolute seriousness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to move from study to specific, named response. The entire narrative of 1 Kings 12 through 14 has been a sustained argument for worshiping God as He has directed, coming to Him on His terms, and refusing the convenience of self-devised religion. The capstone calls each student to name what that looks like for them, specifically and concretely, this week.

The teacher can offer several categories of response to help students who are unsure where to start. Some may be called to examine a specific worship practice more carefully against Scripture. Some may be called to address a pattern of coming to God with divided attention or divided loyalty. Some may be called to take more seriously the weekly Lord's Supper as the covenant meal Christ authorized, not just an add-on to the service. Some may be called to examine whether their personal Bible reading and prayer are genuine encounter with God or religious routine.

Jesus is the answer to the question Jeroboam's kingdom raised without answering. Jeroboam needed a king who would lead the people to worship God rightly, who would not be driven by political fear or personal convenience, who would approach God on God's terms rather than manufacturing a substitute. Jesus is exactly that king. He is the Son of David who said 'the Father seeks those who will worship him in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23–24). He is the high priest who opened the way into the holy of holies once for all (Hebrews 10:19–22). He is the one who, when He called people to come to Him, did not set up a convenient substitute in Bethel or Dan but said 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (John 14:6).

The teacher should close by inviting the class to renewed commitment to worship as Christ has authorized, not as a legal burden but as the joyful response of people who love the God who has revealed Himself fully and finally in Jesus. The church of Christ does not worship as it does because it wants to be different from other churches. It worships as it does because it loves the Lord enough to ask, every week, whether what it is doing is what He has asked for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The move from doctrinal understanding to specific, concrete weekly practice
- Jesus as the perfectly faithful Son of David who leads us to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24)
- The Lord's Supper as the specific covenant meal Christ authorized for His church's weekly gathering
- The church's motivation for authorized worship: love for Christ, not mere distinctiveness
- Renewed personal commitment to genuine encounter with God rather than religious routine

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one specific thing this lesson is calling you to examine, change, or commit to in your own worship life this week? How will you know if you have actually done it?
- How does seeing Jesus as the answer to everything Jeroboam's counterfeit religion failed to provide change the way you approach worship each Lord's Day?
- If you were to describe the difference between worship that is 'devised from your own heart' and worship that is genuinely offered in response to Christ's authority and invitation, what would that difference look like in practical terms for your own life?