

# Why People Embrace False Religion

**Introduction.** With all of the different denominations and all the people calling each other “Christian,” it is hard to know where to turn. What can help is seeing a man-made religion in the Bible and that will help us figure out man-made religions today.

Jeroboam was successful in bringing false religion to Israel in 1 Kings 12:25-33. He was able to convince the entire nation to believe and practice error. The religion Jeroboam set into place resembles many other man-made religions in the world today. How was he able to do it? What can we learn about how false religion becomes accepted in our day?

## ***I. He Appealed To People’s Love Of Convenience (vv. 28-29)***

- A. The text says, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem ... And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.” Jeroboam knew that the people would return to Rehoboam if he allowed them to worship in Jerusalem.
- B. So, Jeroboam needed a way to explain his plan which the people would embrace. Convenience was his ticket.
  - 1. Jeroboam portrayed his false religion as a much needed and probably desired convenience for the people. No more would they have to trek from Shechem to Jerusalem in order to worship. He knew the people would be enticed by easy religion.
  - 2. Had they not just broken away from Rehoboam because they wanted an easier life (1 Kings 12:4)? Surely then, the people would gladly embrace his benevolent new plan of worship.
  - 3. You can almost hear Jeroboam saying, “The days of packing up the family and animals for sacrifice and traveling all the way to the temple are over! Now, wherever you live, you are only a day’s travel from either Dan or Bethel. Isn’t that wonderful?”
- C. Every false religious practice ever pawned off to people was sold by a preacher who said, “Listen to this, you’re gonna love it!!”
  - 1. Baptism is a burial (Romans 6:4), but false teachers effectively argue, “You’re gonna love it! We don’t need immersion anymore. Sprinkling is far easier. Tell the convert he doesn’t have to do anything. We will bring the water to him!”
  - 2. We are required to observe the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7), but false teachers say, “You’re gonna love this! Turns out we don’t have to observe communion every week. We can do it once or twice a year, and it will be more special to boot!”

## ***II. He Told The People One Religion Is As Good As Another (v. 28b)***

- A. The text says, “... behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Jeroboam acknowledged that Jerusalem was the acceptable place for worship, according to the Law, but he presented to them the novel idea that one could worship God acceptably anywhere, in any way, and at any time.
  - 1. His reasoning: “Jerusalem was long our holy city, but one really need not return there for worship. That is part of the past!”

2. You can almost hear Jeroboam saying, “Don’t get bogged down in traditionalism. God doesn’t care about the ‘place’ of worship. He only cares that you are sincere!”
- B. And yet, everything in the Old Testament demanded that there was only one religion of which God approved (Exodus 20:1-5; Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 4:15-19; 1 Samuel 7:3).
- C. Denominationalism thrives on the false concept that one church is as good as another. Yet, the New Testament is just as clear as the Old Testament was when it teaches that there is one church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18, 24).

### ***III. He Played To The People’s Willingness To Compromise (v. 30)***

- A. The text says, “And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.”
  1. There is no indication from the text that Jeroboam got any push back from the people about his proposed new religion.
  2. They not only went along with Jeroboam’s proposals, they were willing to travel whatever distance was required to engage in the ceremonies of the new religion.
- B. The children of Israel had spent over 200 years in Egypt, and had witnessed the worship of every imaginable idol. Therefore, when they left Egypt, it was not long until they wanted a statue to worship like they had in Egypt (Exodus 32:1).
  1. Later, when Israel inherited the land of Canaan, they absorbed the various gods of the land into their own lives and practices. Solomon worshiped the gods which his wives brought with them from their homelands (1 Kings 4-8).
  2. By the time Jeroboam came along, Israel had long before rejected the concept of the absolute sovereignty of God. They had established a long, sad tradition of compromising with the people of the land and their gods.
- C. Paul marveled at the Galatians willingness to compromise on the matter of the doctrine of Christ (Galatians 1:6-8). But denominationalism is a compromise.
  1. People only pay lip service to the authority of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18).
  2. No one thinks it is essential to follow the pattern (Hebrews 8:5).
  3. People long ago replaced speaking as the oracles of God with telling what they personally feel about God and His service (1 Peter 4:11).

### ***IV. He Made His Religion Look Enough Like The Mosaic System (vv. 31-33)***

- A. If Jeroboam had repudiated Moses outright, he would certainly have been rejected by the people.
- B. He knew that he needed to make his new religion look as much like the Mosaic system as he could. He could not conflict with the people’s expectations of what serving God was all about.
  1. There needed to be an object of worship.
  2. There needed to be feast days.
  3. There needed to be a priesthood.
  4. There needed to be altars and sacred places to go for worship.
- C. People today have expectations when they are looking for a church to attend.

1. There must be clergy — a preacher or pastor.
  2. There must be Bibles in evidence or at least a creed book.
  3. There must be an assembly that includes a sermon, music, and communion.
  4. There must be an indoctrination program.
  5. There must be a program of work, something that makes an “impact” in people’s lives. Usually, this desired work is a socialistic gospel.
- D. Yet, the New Testament church is expressly unalterable, and it is not one of many varieties of acceptable churches.
1. Jesus is the head, not some pope, president, or pastor (Ephesians 1:22-23).
  2. Worship must be in spirit and in truth, according to the pattern (John 4:24).
  3. The organization consists of “saints, bishops, and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).
  4. Our work is evangelism, not socialism (1 Timothy 3:15).
  5. Benevolence is limited to the relief of needy saints (Romans 15:26).

**V. He Made Calf Worship The “People’s Religion” (v. 31)**

- A. The text says, “And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.”
- B. According to the Law of Moses, only the sons of Aaron from the tribe of Levi could serve as priests. However, Jeroboam dismissed the Levitical priests from their duties, and he appointed priests for the calves from among the people.
- C. By doing so, he appealed to the people's loyalty based on two facts:
1. The people’s desire for inclusiveness. Anyone could potentially be a priest in Jeroboam’s church, not just the uppity Levites!
  2. The people’s desire for a “personal religion.”
- D. This same appeal is the one offered by the religious world.
1. Women in Catholicism are now making headway to eventually enter the priesthood. Many Catholic clergy see this as necessary to prevent massive losses to other religions who all include women already (1 Timothy 2:11-12).
  2. Homosexuals are being allowed to serve in leadership positions in many denominational churches so that they can appear open-minded and accepting (Romans 1:26-28).

**VI. He Legitimized Calf Worship By Practicing It Himself (v. 33)**

- A. Jeroboam demonstrated his own commitment to the new religion in Israel by making his own offerings on the altars in Dan and Bethel.
- B. By making his offerings as he did, Jeroboam gave his imprimatur and implied the approval of God to calf-worship.
- C. People of our day are moved by this kind of display.
1. Islam has taken on treasured status in our country, in spite of its adherents slaughtering millions of people in the name of Islam. All it took for Americans to revere Islam is for President Bush, President Obama, and every public official in America to call it a “great religion.”
  2. Catholicism is legitimized every time the Pope is hailed as the world’s moral compass by media, politicians, and even Protestant pastors!
  3. Mormonism ought to be a laughing stock, but instead, historians call it a “truly American religion” and “iconic Americana”.

- D. Also, these false religions are judged legitimate because of the greatness of the people that practice them.
1. Muhammad Ali was a devout Muslim. In spite of his womanizing and draft dodging, Muhammad Ali is regarded as an American hero. What's good for him is surely good for other people!
  2. Pope John Paul II, Mother Theresa, and John F. Kennedy were all Catholics. Catholicism must be good if it produces these kinds of adherents!
  3. Mitt Romney and the Osmonds are Mormons.

**Conclusion.** You can see why we place so much emphasis on the Bible. Can we rise above the attitude that everything is a matter of opinion? Is there anyway to sort out the confusion? There are too many man-made religions just waiting to enthusiastically accept someone. You make sure that you believe what you believe because it is the Bible, not because someone is trying to get you to embrace a false religion.

I am deeply indebted to David Weeks for the use of his material.