

## Deception, Idolatry and the Feast of Tabernacles

### Feast of Tabernacles

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I Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

Let me change just a few words so it will clarify it and maybe a few minutes later, it will mean a little bit more to you.

I Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will abandon, or some will withdraw, or some will apostatize from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

The ones who are going to depart are not necessarily the ones who are doing the preaching—they've already departed. Paul is talking about something that was in progress or was shortly to begin taking place. The ones who are going to depart are the ones who are going to be misled, not the heretical teachers.

Let's think about this in the context of our time, in terms of deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. If by chance you were somehow invited to attend a séance in which the leader called out for the spirits of those who were dead to arise and speak, I am pretty sure such a thing would not take you in. You wouldn't have any trouble at all identifying such a practice as being evil and demonic.

We're also pretty much aware that Ouija boards, black magic, sorcery, and like things lead to very dreadful spiritual consequences. We also know that compared to the vast majority of people, there are very few victims of these overt hoaxes of Satan the Devil.

We're not deceived at all when we're passing a Catholic Church, by seeing the statuary, the crucifixes, and even though we know that other people are bowing down before these things and they put their superstitious trust into these representations of these people that they believe are alive—we wouldn't be taken in by something like that. But we do need to consider that Satan is the author of both overt and covert deceptions.

There was a time when these deceptions (that are so obvious to you and me that we wouldn't be taken in by them) were not overt but covert, where he was moving inch by inch to take people in and take them away from the path toward God's kingdom.

I don't think we can come up with any exact ratio, but I am pretty sure that for every person deceived by Satanism and astrology there must be hundreds of people covertly deceived by false doctrines.

Christ warned us in John 8: 44 that Satan is a liar and he is the father of lies; that he has been lying from the beginning and he speaks what is natural to him; that lies come out of him just as easily, just as naturally as truth comes out of God.

You might recall from Colossians 2, that if you read the entire chapter you would have found that Paul, in the very last verse of chapter 2, said that this philosophy that he was talking about had a show of wisdom, but that this philosophy, this show of wisdom, included the worship of angels—demons. He also showed (in that very chapter) that the taproot of that philosophy went straight back into what has been translated as the elemental or the rudimentary elements of the world. I showed you (in previous sermons) that modern Protestant commentaries admit that that is demons. It's not something that is hidden.

So here is a philosophy that had a show of wisdom, but yet its taproot was in demonism. The important thing to you and me is that the apostle Paul was writing to a Christian church, converted people having God's Spirit, and they were being taken in by this philosophy that had a show of wisdom. What were they doing? They were departing; they were abandoning; they were apostatizing from the faith that had been delivered to them.

You ought to be able to see my point—that this is something of concern for you and me. Just because this happened back in the first century A.D. indicates that it ought to be able to happen now. We too can be taken in by something that has a show of wisdom.

Consider this proposition—that the best liars are those who speak things that are *almost* true. Satan is described as being the most subtle beast of all the fields. Surely he presents assertions that sound true and can only be found false when somebody honestly evaluates what he says in the light of God's truth. Somebody not equipped to be able to identify the real, absolute truth from God's Word is very likely going to be taken in by the things that he says.

The Feast of Tabernacles of 1992 is history and I am sure that it is going to go down in our record as one of the best that we have ever had. Before we put it completely on the back burner and let it simmer for a while, I want us all to reflect on something concerning the Feast. I want to help us understand, through an illustration I am going to give, how false doctrine is injected into the church.

One of the things that I admire about God is that He is so logical. That doesn't mean that I always understand His logic. I didn't always understand my parent's logic when I was a child, whenever they would either permit or deny something I requested of them. Sometimes they would say yes and sometimes they would say no, but as I have aged, I have come to understand that their much broader and more general experiences that life gave to them gave them perceptions and insights into things that I simply could not grasp as a child.

I am sure that this same principle is at work in regard to our relationship with God—that I don't always understand why He does or He doesn't do something. I don't understand why at times He heals and at other times He doesn't heal. I don't understand why at times some people are prospered and others are not.

Yet on the other hand, as I grow, my understanding does increase and I begin to see reasons, angles, get perceptions on why a healing does not occur or why prosperity does not occur. Each

piece of knowledge begins to fit beautifully into the overall picture. I am sure that in your experiences, this principle that I am talking about has impressed you as well.

There is no doubt that the Bible presents God as Creator and Ruler of His creation. Can you imagine a manufacturer, a creator—one who manages and governs his company, his corporation, his creation—without laws or policies to govern his operation? We would never think of that in human terms. No corporate president could operate that way. He would say that's stupid. And yet, we know there are many people who are deceived into somehow thinking that God as Creator and Ruler doesn't require obedience to law by many or all of His people.

In like manner, every manufacturer has a plan to carry out his purpose. God also has a plan to carry out His purpose—that is the very purpose for which He created everything that is. In addition to this, the whole creation screams at us (practically) that God is organized.

I remember reading an article by Wernher von Braun, the German rocket scientist. In the article he said he did not give his loyalty to any particular religious group, yet he confessed to all the world that his studies of the laws of nature and the universe led him to the conclusion that there absolutely had to be a Creator, because everything was so organized, that something that just randomly happened could not have occurred. That impressed him.

I have read that Albert Einstein said virtually the same thing. Though he did not give his allegiance to any particular group, yet he was so impressed by the organization of the creation that he had to come to the conclusion that indeed there was a Creator.

God is organized. Doesn't that give weight to believing that God has a purpose for what He created and He has a plan by which He is working that purpose out; that He is organized; that things are moving toward a conclusion that He has designed?

Every government, every nation, every team, and yes, even families have to have plans; a framework within which to work; budgets to give control over financial resources. So does God. This is important to you and me in relation to the Holy Days, because the Holy Days are the framework of God's plan. They give us insight into the direction toward which everything in history is moving and they give shape and form, not only to your life annually, but also shape and form to your entire life once the Holy Days become a part of your knowledge and you begin to operate according to them.

Anyone who has been in the church of God is going to have to agree that his year is organized around the Holy Days; that what anyone of us does in the way of planning for a year, usually the first thing we will mark down is when the Holy Days are. For a week, it automatically comes to our mind that the Sabbath is going to come up and our plans have to include thinking about the Sabbath. The Holy Days are important in order to structure our life for a year and also to instruct the entirety of our life.

What if Satan moved to destroy the unity of the Holy Days? What would happen? People would very quickly lose their direction. That is exactly what has happened! During the first century, one of the first things Satan began to do was to remove the authority of the weekly Sabbath. As he did that, he also began removing the authority of the Holy Days and he destroyed the direction of the Christian church in so doing.

It didn't happen all at once. It happened over quite a number of decades because he knows the general framework of time and he knew that he had plenty of time to work with, at least plenty of time in terms of human life. Do you think Satan would be so stupid as to cause something to occur for the removal of the weekly Sabbath or the removal of the Holy Days that was so abrupt that anybody would catch on to it right away?

No, he would move covertly, inch-by-inch, maybe millimeter-by-millimeter, so that people could slowly adjust to the idea of getting along without (or undermining) the authority of the law of God.

This sermon combines several factors we've been involved with recently in sermons—the Feast of Tabernacles, truth, deception, and idolatry. (We're going to touch a little bit on each one.) It's drawn largely from a biblical illustration of how deception was introduced to produce idolatry into the worship of God into the nation of Israel. Once you see it, it is so plain.

Zechariah 14:16-19 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

I think this is a good place to begin, because what we are looking at is a prophecy that pertains to the period of time after the return of Jesus Christ. That's what Zechariah 14 is all about—the period of time after the return of Jesus Christ. People are going to be required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles and it will not just be the people of Israel.

Every nation on the face of the earth is going to be required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Well why? If you listen to my introduction you'll understand why. The Feast of Tabernacles is an integral and perhaps, for the period of time we are talking about, the most important feast of all.

We just returned from keeping the Feast at a central location. Now why keep the Feast of Tabernacles in a central location? There are two overall purposes that I can see. Maybe there will be others, but for the purpose of this sermon there are at least two.

Number one in keeping it at a central location is that it enables us to better realize that we are part of something bigger than just our own personal salvation. The Feast has the effect of developing within us a sense of mission. Even though we seem (personally) ineffectual, insignificant, and puny whenever we're confronted by each day's challenges and events, the Feast helps us to realize that we are part of something that is big and eternal.

*Big*—it portrays the salvation of all of mankind that comes after the first resurrection. That is

multiple billions of people big! When we keep the Feast now in this age of God's church, it connects us to them and it connects us to each other.

People come from Washington. People come from Oregon. People come from California. People come from Chicago, but we all come together and we begin to realize that we're part of something that is universal and eternal.

So we see here that all nations are going to worship the Lord and it shows thus its worldwide purpose. There is one more thing and that is that it also tends to show that there is order to life and that the events of history are moving toward a well-designed conclusion. We see in the Feast of Tabernacles the whole world coming to conversion.

The second thing that the Feast of Tabernacles does for us is it has the effect of unifying us to God's purpose. The Feast was designed by God to give us a sense of unity with each other as we sit and learn together, and as we fellowship with people who are of the same mind, that maybe live thousands of miles away and whom we do not see except maybe from year-to-year. We begin to have family feelings toward those people. There is nothing wrong with that at all. It is a family; it is God's family.

The world has absolutely nothing like the Feast of Tabernacles. It has conventions, but it doesn't have a religious convention anything at all like the Feast of Tabernacles on an annual basis.

I got this comment from the Interpreter's Bible, which is a liberal, Protestant commentary. But they can see this. They don't keep it, but they can see the principle that is involved with God's Holy Days and the Feast of Tabernacles. They say that Zechariah is saying that the Feast of Tabernacles will be the external bond of unity among all the nations after Christ returns.

The internal bond is God's Spirit. The external bond will be the Feast of Tabernacles. I want you to think of that in relation to us and the importance of keeping the Feast of Tabernacles.

If you wanted to destroy the unity of God's people, if you wanted to destroy their knowledge of the purpose that God is working out and the plan by which He is working that purpose out, don't you think that you would take aim at the Feast of Tabernacles? Very definitely. That would be very high on your hit list if you wanted to get rid of this church of God.

History shows us (the history that is recorded in the Bible, as well as secular history) that Judah lasted a great deal longer (after the division of Israel and Judah) than Israel. The Jews had their times of sliding away, but they revived again and again.

Have you noticed in your reading, especially of II Kings and II Chronicles, that almost every time they had a revival there was a Holy Day involved? Frequently, it was the Feast of Tabernacles. Maybe (just off the top of my head) the second one would be the Passover/Days of Unleavened Bread area.

Let's turn to II Kings 10 and pick up a verse or two to help set the stage. The story here is about God's destruction of the house of Ahab and Jezebel, and He used Jehu in doing this.

II Kings 10:11, 31 So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his close acquaintances and his priests, until he left him none remaining....But Jehu took no heed to

walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin.

Jehu had a wonderful opportunity. God gave him the opportunity to lead a revival of the truth of God in Israel after one of the worst reigns of the worst king (possibly) that the nations of Israel ever saw—Ahab and his wife Jezebel. But we see here that he didn't take advantage of it and instead he walked in the sins of Jeroboam.

Who was Jeroboam and what did he do? In order to find out, we're going to have to go back into I Kings, all the way back to the end of the reign of Solomon and get a running start on what occurred.

I Kings 11:4-6 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David.

Notice that this occurred when he was old and that his heart went not fully after the Lord. He did go after the Lord, but he did it in a haphazard way. To me, Solomon is perhaps the most vivid example of a Laodicean in the entirety of the Bible.

His downfall began (as we can see in the beginning of chapter 11) with laxity toward being careful about keeping God's commands regarding idolatry. Laxity is the first stage of lawlessness. The more lax he became, the more double minded he became.

A double minded person loses his grip. Can you understand that? Just think of grasping something with your hand. If you're not really sure what you want to hang onto and your mind is playing back and forth between two different things, your grip is going to loosen on one or the other, because you're going to want to let go of the one and maybe get the other if you think maybe you have a better chance with the other. Your grip is going to loosen. I'm talking about a mental grip, but I think we get the idea.

Solomon gradually came to the place where he was not really hanging onto anything, but he was straddling between choices, gradually becoming more and more unstable, unsettled, and even deceitful until he became completely reintegrated into the world. He began to be moved almost entirely by human nature once again.

Why is the first commandment listed first? The reason is it is the most important of all the commandments. God wanted to draw special attention to it because it is the one that is also most easily broken.

Do you realize that five commandments bear directly on idolatry? Numbers one, two, three, four, and ten. The tenth one brings you right back around to the first. That's why the Bible describes them as a chain. Covetousness is idolatry. That's the way the apostle Paul wrote it.

I Kings 11:9-11 So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant."

You can see from these three verses that idolatry came to the place where it dominated Solomon's relationship with God. Also, this verse begins to lead into Jeroboam. You ought to be able to begin to see from what I have said so far; that what Jeroboam did had something to do with the Holy Days and also with idolatry.

Notice also in verse 11, where God says, "Because you have done this and have not kept My covenant and My statutes." The Holy Days are statutes. Tell me something: Could Solomon be keeping the Holy Days of God and worshipping Milcom and Chemosh? Wouldn't they have holy days? Something was being done here.

I Kings 11:26, 28 Then Solomon's servant, Jeroboam [now we know who the servant was in verse 11] the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite from Zereda, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also rebelled against the king....The man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor; and Solomon, seeing that the young man was industrious, made him the officer over all the labor force of the house of Joseph.

We begin to see something taking shape. This is like a flashback to what occurred in verses 9-12—that Jeroboam was somebody who came to Solomon's attention and he promoted Jeroboam. Jeroboam became renowned within the kingdom.

I Kings 11:29-31, 34-35, 37-38 Now it happened at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite met him on the way; and he had clothed himself with a new garment [Ahijah had], and the two were alone in the field. Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you....However I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand [Solomon's], because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand [Rehoboam] and give it to you—ten tribes....So I will take you, and you shall reign over all your heart desires, and you shall be king over Israel. Then 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."

What a fantastic promise! This guy, this man Jeroboam, was someone that I think that even God could respect in terms of his ability, in terms of his potential as a leader—somebody up there who had the potential of a David.

Solomon died and his son, Rehoboam, came on the scene as the king. The people of Israel are complaining to Rehoboam because of the heavy taxation under Solomon. They're asking him for relief. "Give us a break and we'll be your servant."

I Kings 12:4-8, 10-11 "Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." So he said to them, "Depart for three days, then come back to me." And the people departed. Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, "How do you advise me to answer these people?" And they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him....Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us'—thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!'"

This is interesting in light of the election that just took place in the United States. "Please lower the taxes." Will he or won't he?

The stage is set for a secession to occur. A civil war is on the scene because we understand that Rehoboam rejected the advice and gave Israel an ultimatum—either you accept the terms that I give to you, or else.

Jeroboam and Israel rejected what Rehoboam offered to them and it says in verse 16:

I Kings 12:16-17 Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, "What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!" So Israel departed to

their tents. But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah.

Israel returned to their tents and Jeroboam became their king. Let's watch carefully what Jeroboam did, because when he took over he enacted certain measures that were designed to accomplish something. We need to watch this carefully because what we see in vivid actions, vivid illustrations, is how false doctrine is introduced and eventually becomes established as orthodoxy, because the true doctrine eventually becomes forgotten because of a lack of practice.

I Kings 12:26-27 And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: 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."

It's a real fear that the man had. But what he did was motivated by a selfish regard for his own life and his own position as king, and a disregard of the promise that God had made to him. God had already told him, "You obey Me, and I will establish you as king"

Obviously, Jeroboam was not walking by faith, because he was more concerned about the people leaving him, because down in Jerusalem was the temple; down in Jerusalem was the brazen altar where the sacrifices were made; down in Jerusalem was the central spot of the worship of God.

What could he do to keep the people from going down to Jerusalem and having their loyalty shifted back to King Rehoboam through religion? Jeroboam was no dummy—I mean when it came to political things. He was politically astute. He was a real man of the world. He was as pragmatic as you can get. He was a very clear practitioner of situation ethics.

I Kings 12:28-33 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!" And he set up one in Bethel, and the other in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. 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. 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.

Now what did he do? Let's clarify. First of all, he established new centers of worship—Bethel in the south of Israel and Dan in the north. Two, he replaced the God-ordained Levites with men of other tribes as the nation's spiritual leaders. Three, he did away with the Feast of Tabernacles (specifically) and he substituted another feast of his own devising.

Don't get the idea that all of this was done in the blink of an eye. Sometimes the Bible fools us that way because the history that is written is written in such a way to conserve a great deal of space. It appears to us as though Jeroboam just snapped his fingers and issued orders of all these things to be done at once. But the Bible does not say that. These things could have taken months; they could have taken years to evolve into practices that became orthodoxy.

"It is too much for you to go to Jerusalem." Notice this appeal, because here is how idolatry gets started. Make it easier, more convenient, for the people.

Don't we always have a tendency to attempt to make things easier for ourselves in worshipping God, in obedience to God? But the strange thing is we don't make it easier. It only appears easier for the short period of time. All of history that is written in the Bible screams that God's way is the easy way, but it is something that has to be viewed over a lifetime, over longer periods of time than we like to think in.

We have the tendency to make things easier for the immediate moment, forgetting about the long-term effect of what we are going to do. Jesus said to take My yoke upon you for it's easier, it's lighter than the way of this world. There is a way that seems right unto men but the end thereof is the way of death.

But the way idolatry gets started is the thought; "I will make it easier, more convenient on myself." So what did Jeroboam do? He cleverly gave the people something that would satisfy their itching ears—convenience.

Let's ask a question: In what way is our twentieth century, western culture superior to what these people (we might say) in biblical times were living in? I think the reality is the only way it is better is in material comforts and conveniences. To us, convenience equals progress. That is a carnal, human way to think. But even physically in this nation and in other nations, we are gradually being led to see from what we are doing to the environment that material progress begets problems that are devastating in their effects in terms of water pollution, soil pollution, air pollution, and on and on it goes. All of this is being done in the name of progress, i.e., convenience. Convenience is not progress in terms of obedience and character building as it relates to God.

But Jeroboam appealed to their carnality—let's make it easier. Undoubtedly, traveling to Jerusalem from Samaria or from Dan—way up on the extreme north end of the nation—was not all that convenient. Jerusalem was not just around the corner to those people who were confined to walking, riding a donkey, or maybe riding in a cart. It would take them days, not hours, to get to a service that was being held at the Temple.

There is a clear lesson for you and me, and that is that sacrificing (that would take place at the Temple) is not convenient.

Jeroboam knew what he was doing. I said to you earlier that he was really astute in terms of a politician. He knew what he was doing when he did this. I want you to listen to this quote from the *Story of Civilization*, Volume 1, entitled "Our Oriental Heritage." It's by Will and Ariel Durant. This comes from chapter 12, page 308. The chapter is about Judah.

"Next to the promulgation of the Book of the Law, the building of the Temple was the most important event in the epic of the Jews history."

This is, of course, just one historian's conclusion, that the second most important thing that ever happened to Israel, once they were called out of Egypt, was the building of the Temple. Do you think Jeroboam was dumb?

Durant goes on:

"It not only gave Yahweh a home, but it gave Judea a spiritual center and capital, a vehicle of tradition, a memory to serve as a pillar of fire through the centuries of wandering over the earth, and it played its part in lifting the Hebrew religion from a primitive polytheism to a faith intense and intolerant; but nonetheless, one of the creative creeds in history."

Jeroboam was not dumb. He knew how important that Temple was. So, the first thing he did was come up with what appeared to be (and indeed was, as history shows) an appeal to convenience. "Oh, it's too far to go to Jerusalem. Take it easy. God is the God of all the earth. God is everywhere. You can talk to God, worship God, pray to God, sacrifice to God anywhere you want." It sounds logical, carnally.

The second thing he did was he connected what he was instituting to something already somewhat popular, and also this thing had a connection to Israel's ancient history. Again, very astute.

Jeroboam disconnected the people from their immediate headquarters, and in so doing he (at least somewhat) discredited the previous administration—their roots, one might say. It made it seem as though he was saving them from the deviations of Solomon. Remember, his motivation was to establish himself. He was making it more convenient. He was liberalizing. He was the friend of the people.

In order to help himself, he did not entirely disconnect them from their history and traditions. This made the changes seem that much more acceptable. "Oh, our ancestors did that. All the people of the land are already doing this." What he did was he reached back into the history of Israel to some things they might connect to.

In Genesis 28 is the story of Jacob fleeing for his life whenever he stole the birthright away from Esau. He hightailed it out of there at the urging of his mother who conspired with him.

Genesis 28:10 Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward

Haran.

While he was there he had this dream of the ladder. The angels of God were ascending and descending on it. It really made an impact on Jacob's mind. Then, God spoke to him and He said in verse 15:

Genesis 28:15, 19 "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."...And Jacob called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.

Jacob was the father of the Israelite people. Jacob had a life changing experience with God at Bethel. From that time on, Bethel became a place of special regard, an honor, an awe and respect to the people who were descended from Jacob because it was that way to Jacob. Jacob passed the knowledge of that on to his children, who in turn passed the knowledge of that on to their children.

So Bethel was almost like a holy place, because God Himself had actually been there. Of all the places in the nation of Israel, that was one place that they could say that God had actually been there. It was a place of special regard to them.

You can begin to see why Jeroboam, astute politician that he was, reached back into the past and said we're going to set up an altar (which there had never been) at Bethel. "Our father Jacob was there." Sounds good. Sounds logical. Why didn't somebody think of that before? New knowledge; new doctrine; God is revealing things to us.

Does God change His mind about things like that? He said to go to Jerusalem not to Bethel. But the people bought it! And Jeroboam did the same thing with Dan.

In Judges 17—we won't go through the whole story because it's a rather long affair about a man named Micah who hires himself a Levite to be his own personal priest. In the course of this Levite's service to Micah, the Danites come through the area and they steal this Levite away. Micah wasn't going to fight against six hundred armed men, so they took his teacher (his father as he called him, the Levite) and they took his idols and statues that were there, and they took this Levite to Dan—the city that they named after their father.

Judges 18:30 Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; [now we find out what the Levite's name was and why he was so important] and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh [Moses].

It says Manasseh in most Bibles, but if you will look in your margin it says Moses. The Jews were ashamed that a grandson of Moses would be caught up in something like this and so they changed it.

What bigger name was there in Israel's history than Moses? Do you see why he picked Dan? Do you think Jeroboam was dumb? "Hey, Moses' grandson had set up an altar there. This is a holy place. There isn't any place in the nation, except maybe Bethel, that can even begin to approach, in terms of holiness, in terms of religious value, the city of Dan. Let's set up an altar there too. Doesn't that sound good? After all we need to honor Moses. What greater honor could there be than we establish an altar, a place to make sacrifice? All the time we go there to honor God, we'll also remember Moses as well."

You can come up with all kinds of arguments in terms of carnal, logical arguments. He could have never done this unless the people were agreeable to it. But you see, little by little, using arguments that were very close in some areas to truth and people wanting something convenient in terms of a religion, because God requires an awful lot of us to go all the way down to Jerusalem. He's the God of the whole earth. We can do it just as well here. Inch-by-inch, millimeter-by-millimeter they were weaned away from the truth of God.

Remember the scripture in Jeremiah 5 we read last week? God said to Jeremiah, "Go out and see if you can find one person in the whole city of Jerusalem who is seeking truth and if you can find one person, I will spare the whole city." Jeremiah could not find one person and God said at the end of the chapter the reason this happens is that the people love to be lied to!

That sounds almost impossible, but I'm not going to argue with God. If He said they love to be lied to, then they must love to be lied to.

Do people today love to be lied to? We just had Halloween celebrated last Saturday. Do people love to be lied to about Halloween? They show by their actions they love to be lied to, because people know better than that. They know it came out of paganism. But they love to have it so because it's part of tradition. If we stop doing those things we cause problems in the family.

Jeroboam didn't stop there. He went on to the golden calf. Did you notice what he said? "This be your god O Israel." He quoted Exodus 32—lies in the name of scripture. See how he was connecting it to their history? Jacob, Moses, the golden calf. It seemed so logical to do something like that.

We find in the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 that those people were motivated to go into the golden calf thing by their impatience. People were no different then. They said they didn't know where Moses went. He's been up there so long and they wanted to do something, so they immediately reverted to the things they had learned in Egypt. Their impatience for the return of their leader led them back to the things that they had done. Carnal thinking—"These be your gods O Israel."

Now tell me something: Were the bulk of the Israelites in the golden calf incident revolted by what they saw? They loved it—the lie. Their own experience told them it was not the golden calf who devastated Egypt; it was not the golden calf that had split the Red Sea; it was not the golden calf that was in the cloud and the pillar of fire; it was not the golden calf that brought the water out of the rock; it was not the golden calf who brought the manna every morning—they loved to be lied to because it was convenient, and it was inconvenient to change their mind and their lives. That would cause trouble.

I mentioned Halloween. I cut this article out of the *Charlotte Observer* dated Thursday, October 29, two days before Halloween. The writer of the article is a man named Alan Norwood and it begins this way:

"When the Reverend John Alexander was with a congregation in another town, a woman would visit every year and complain that Halloween was demonic, Satanic, and otherwise anti-Christian. The lady came by and gave me down in the country," said Alexander, Pastor of Charlotte's Sharon Presbyterian Church. "She visited all churches. We passed it off as her annual crusade."

"Well, it kept her out of trouble on Halloween." That's what the preacher said.

"Well I hope so," said the writer of the article, "but I hope she didn't ruin the occasion for the little ones. A grownup who would steal the smile from a five year old Ninja Turtle at a carnival in a church basement is one curmudgeonly grump."

Now you know why Christ was killed—because He told people the truth. When people are confronted by truth that they recognize, they are at a crossroads.

A little further in the article, the *Observer* gets letters each year saying that Halloween is anti-Christian. This is not something that is hidden in a corner.

We received a few this year, although they haven't been published in deference to readers who want to comment on the important elections. The letters typically say that Halloween was born in pagan festivals. Seven of thirty-three Halloween festivals lifted in a calendar in some editions of the Wednesday paper were being sponsored by churches and two more were being sponsored by YMCA's. Alexander said he never has heard of anyone complain about the annual Halloween festival at the Sharon Presbyterian Church.

People love it.

"It was established," he said, "before I came. It is seen as nothing more than fellowship—an alternative to knocking on doors to trick or treat."

Further on in the article, another pastor reports that it's nothing more than good fellowship.

Another pastor says, "I don't believe Halloween is Satanic. I believe it is a Christian feast. It comes from All Hallows Eve—the eve of the feast of all saints. Children will hear that. They'll also hear that the pumpkin is a gift of the harvest and the candle inside is a reminder that the light of

Christ should shine from their faces."

Do you know what the lesson of the golden calf is? It is in there for one major reason and that is to show us very clearly that we cannot take *anything at all* from paganism and use it in the worship of God. God will not accept it because it is misleading in terms of His purpose, and He doesn't want anybody deviating because it's going to destroy them!

"It doesn't mean a thing," people say. Exodus 32—God's truth disagrees.

We didn't get as far in this message as I wanted to, but nonetheless, we will continue it and pick it up again at this place next week.