

## **The First Denomination 10-25-20**

The story of Jesus' church is important. First, let's remind ourselves that it was built by Jesus' identity as the Savior of Man and the Son of God. In Matthew 16:18-19 Jesus made this clear, along with the clear statement that the church is His kingdom. Once established the church was framed by the Holy Spirit who worked through the Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 2:20). These inspired men left us the New Testament, which is the pillar of the church (1 Tim. 3:15-16). We know that the church was finished with the completion of the writings of the New Testament per Jude 3.

The church universal is the kingdom, and the local church is the manifestation of that universal one in our lives. Local churches follow the pattern and authority of the New Testament writers; this was their way of establishing every congregation (1 Thes. 2:14). But there was a warning given to these (and all) local churches: the great apostasy. The Great Apostasy was a prophesied falling away that would begin occurring during the time of the apostles, and continue to the end of time. It was mentioned throughout the New Testament (Matt. 24:12, Acts 20:28, Gal 1:9, 2 Thes. 2:3-7, 1 Tim. 4:1-4, 2 Tim. 3:1-5, 2 Pet. 2:1-10).

Apostasy is important to understand, because it frames most of the religious world today. At the end of the apostolic time, men rose up to distort the Gospel. Sound churches were subverted into error. Soon after this churches created and authorized by men arose. Over a period of several centuries these churches coalesced into groups of churches, and soon became the origins of many denominations we know today (Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, etc.).

But what was the first denomination? The answer is: The Way of Jeroboam

The 1st denomination is found in 1 Kings 12:25-33. There we read that King Jeroboam, fearful that the people of his kingdom would cease to support him if they continued to worship in Jerusalem, established a parallel (counterfeit) Law of Moses for the people. This manner of worship consisted of unauthorized images, unauthorized priests, unauthorized sacrifices, and unauthorized places to worship. These institutions he created were very similar to the true worship of Jehovah. He paralleled the feast days of worship; they proclaimed the same Name of God at a place called the "House of God". Without a doubt, this seems to have satisfied the genuine desire of Jeroboam and the people to worship.

God's response to this first denomination is found in 1 Kings 13:1-10. There we see God's unnamed prophet doing the following: cursing the place of worship, cursing the officers of worship, and cursing the altar of worship. At the end of the chapter, we are told that God destroyed the house of Jeroboam over this. There is an important point to this that can be summed up as follows: it is God's way or no way when it comes to worship.

The Way of Jeroboam is the same as the denominational path. It is seeking something close to truth (a form of godliness - 2 Timothy 3:5) but lacking authority for existence (Matt. 7:23). Denominationalizing the Way of Christ creates a religious world that is lost (Matt. 24:12).

The lesson here is not about pointing fingers at others, it is about asking ourselves important questions about our purpose and behavior. Any church can become a denomination or fall into a path of denominationalism. A lack of authority is lawlessness; not following the pattern is lawlessness. Any church that seeks the pattern must determine that it will not itself fall into this pattern of apostasy.