

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-02-04—WAIT UPON THE LORD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Perhaps the most infamous king of Israel was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. He was the first to rule over the ten tribes after they were separated at the end of Solomon's reign. What is so striking about his story is the utter evil that he did. But it is not his actual sins that he committed that are my focus—it is the fact that he made the ENTIRE nation of Israel to sin. There are over twenty scriptures<sup>1</sup> in the Bible where it says, "... the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and **who made Israel to sin.**"<sup>2</sup>

To cause a whole nation of people to sin is an appalling accomplishment, to say the least. How can anyone, even the leader of the country, make an entire nation sin against God? What Jeroboam did was so vile that God eventually rejected the whole nation:

2 KINGS 17:21-23 For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and **Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin.** 22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; 23 Until **the LORD removed Israel out of his sight,** as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was **Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria** unto this day.

The Bible records Jeroboam's sin with some detail, but suffice it to say that he instituted idolatrous worship throughout the country. The truly astounding part is that God waited over 200 years and watched as eighteen successive kings failed to correct the evil ways of Jeroboam before He gave Israel up to the Assyrians. God is certainly longsuffering.

So, how is it that he caused an entire nation to sin against God? This happened because the hearts of the people **wanted** to do evil. The book of Jeremiah exposes the problem with the Israelites. Notice a phrase that he repeated so many times it became more of a slogan: "the stubbornness of their evil hearts."<sup>3</sup> But even that phrase does not reveal the depths of their depraved wickedness. The word for *stubbornness* has a sense of *twisted lust*. God certainly put the blame on Jeroboam, but God also knew the hearts of the people yearned for the idolatry that he instituted.

What God expected from every successor to Jeroboam was to PUT AND END to the idolatry. God's reckoning of the kings who reigned after Jeroboam was: "**you** have walked in the way of Jeroboam and his sin, which he did to make Israel to sin." God held each king responsible for eliminating Jeroboam's idolatry and reinstating God's Law, at least to the extent that they maintained an appearance of it

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<sup>1</sup> *Israel* refers specifically to the 10 northern tribes throughout.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kgs. 14:16; 15:30, 34; 16:2, 19, 26; 22:52; 2 Kgs. 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21-22; 23:15.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. 3:17; 7:24; et al.

Fast forward to today. I remember the election of President Trump. One aspect of his campaign that received a fair amount of attention was his religious connection. It appeared that he sincerely respected God to some extent. Whether or not that was personally heartfelt is not for me to say. Regardless, God expected him, like every other leader, to establish His Law and do away with the evil works<sup>4</sup> of their predecessors. Did President Trump do that? He seemingly tried to do good instead of bad, which is more than can be said of other presidents of recent times. In the end, did he change the hearts of the people? No, more people reject God than ever before because of the public hatred against him. It may come as a surprise, however, but that was not even his responsibility. A leader is required by God to:

**DEUTERONOMY 17:16** But he [*the king*] shall not multiply horses to himself, **nor cause the people to return to Egypt**, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth **return no more that way**.

This is a critical point. A leader is not to be like Jeroboam who caused “the people to return to Egypt” by reestablishing pagan worship of golden calf idols<sup>5</sup>. However, when it happens, successors are responsible for eliminating national idolatry, although I doubt it is even possible these days. Read chapter five of Jeremiah for the full text, but it essentially says the people:

- v1: Do not execute righteous judgment or seek the truth.
- v3: Have refused to receive correction and return to God.
- v4: Are ignorant of the ways and judgment of God.
- v5: Have rejected God.
- v7: Have forsaken God and turned to idolatry.
- v8: Have turned to fornication and adultery.
- v11: Have betrayed their covenant with God.
- v12: Have disregarded God’s warnings.
- v28: Have grown wealthy and cover up their wicked works.
- v28: Have oppressed the fatherless and poor.

The reason a modern human leader is incapable of removing idolatrous pagan worship is because it is impossible to change the lust in the hearts of the people who:

**JEREMIAH 5:23-24, 31** But this people **hath a revolting and a rebellious heart**  
... 24 **Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God** ...  
31 ... and **my people love to have it so** ...

Only God can change the hearts of the people—through severe afflictions. But there is another reason that a modern leader is unable to change things. God looks for a leader who is “a man after My own heart, who will perform all My will.” (Acts 13:22). A leader is

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<sup>4</sup> Rom. 13:1.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Kings 10:29.

personally responsible for seeking after God's own heart and obeying His Law. Other responsibilities include:

DEUTERONOMY 17:17-20 **Neither shall he multiply wives to himself**, that his heart turn not away: **neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold**. 18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that **he shall write him a copy of this law in a book** out of *that which is* before the priests the Levites: 19 And it shall be with him, and **he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them**: 20 **That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren**, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, *to the right hand, or to the left*: to the end that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.

What modern leader has not had adulterous affairs or become incredibly wealthy? Which of them has ever read, much less written down and studied, the Law of God? I seriously doubt that even President Trump has done so. He has “multiplied wives” and had an extramarital relationship. He is certainly “lifted up above” in his pride. But he is no different than the other leaders today. If a leader is not seeking after God and not doing those things for which he is *personally* responsible, is God going to bless anything he does, especially when it comes to the hearts of the people being filled with lust?

So, anyone who hoped that President Trump would turn the USA back to God does not understand that a leader cannot change the hearts of the people—only God can do that. If a leader is not even willing to obey God on a personal level, then certainly nothing will ever change. But there is another problem. In this country, leaders are chosen through a popular vote. What is often overlooked is that the people are responsible for choosing their leaders according to the following stipulation:

DEUTERONOMY 17:14-15 When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that *are* about me; 15 **Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose**: *one* from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which *is* not thy brother.

God prophesied to the ancient Israelites that whomsoever THEY setup as king shall be someone **God** chooses. Again, it comes down to the heart of the people. A rebellious nation will reject those leaders whom God might choose and elect those who hate Him. This was painfully obvious during the Trump presidency with all of the false accusations against him as well as the election fraud. Not that Trump was chosen by God but neither did he entirely reject Him.

So, what about evil leaders? It is certainly a frustration for people who sincerely seek after God. What are they to do when they are ruled over by a wicked leader? I think one answer comes from the story of Elijah. It has always been God who corrects evil rulers by warning them through a prophet. Elijah spent himself as a prophet of God warning Ahab and Jezebel. It wore him out completely. This story is captured in 1 Kings 19. God

even warned Jeroboam through Ahijah and Iddo<sup>6</sup>. God has never required the people of a nation itself to correct a leader—that solely His responsibility. God is also responsible for removing evil leaders<sup>7</sup>. This was why David refused to kill Saul<sup>8</sup>.

Again, what are people who seek after God to do when their rulers are evil? Exactly that—continue to seek after God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Elijah felt all alone and exhausted after battling against Ahab and Jezebel, so he fled for his life. After leaving his servant in Beersheba, he begged God to take his life. In response, God set him on a journey of forty days and nights without food to a cave in Mount Horeb (Sinai), which is the “mount of **God**.” It was there that God asked a simple question, “What *are* you *doing* here, Elijah?” Elijah replied, “... I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, **even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.**” (1 Kings 19:10).

God knew Elijah had given everything he had and he did not have the strength to continue as the prophet of God. But he was not alone. There were 7,000 other people who had dedicated themselves to God while they were under the evil rule of Ahab and Jezebel<sup>9</sup>. Elisha was among them and the torch of prophet was passed to him.

What are God’s people to do when living under wicked rulers in a terribly pagan and idolatrous nation? Seek after God all the more. The world does not know us anymore than we know the 7,000 names of those who refused to worship Baal. All we can do is remain faithful to God. Perhaps some of us will be called into a special service to God in the end as was Elisha. Most of us, however, are part of the reserves—we are to wait:

PSALMS 37:9-10 For **evildoers shall be cut off**: but **those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.** 10 For yet a little while, and the wicked *shall not be* ...

Many times our desire is to do something about evil. But these are times where the hearts of the people are filled with twisted lust. Only God can change that—now is our time to “stand still and [*wait to*] see the salvation of the LORD which He will work for you.”<sup>10</sup>

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Chr. 9:29.

<sup>7</sup> Dan. 2:21.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Sam. 24:6.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kgs. 19:18; Rom. 11:4.

<sup>10</sup> Exo. 14:13.