

Bethel



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

---

Volume 5 Issue 31

August 13, 2006

## The Anatomy of Rebellion, Part 2

You may have heard of the famous book written by Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. What an incredible treatment of the person and work of the Adversary who prowls about like a roaring lion.

Well this morning the text at which we are looking could easily be titled, *Precious Remedies Against SIN'S Devices*, for that is exactly what it is. Last week, I introduced you to this passage in which God's people transitioned from the era of the Judges to the era of the Kings. And yet we saw that the transition, though subject to the providence of God, was motivated by sin.

1 Samuel 8:7, “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: **for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.**”

And herein then is the theme of our passage: The Anatomy of Rebellion.

Now with this I want you to note that there is a distinction to be made between sin and rebellion. Sin is the broader category encompassing both accidental and purposed violations of God's word. On the other hand rebellion, as I am using it here, would be reserved to the sinful, willful act of willingly violating God's law.

Now of the two, it is the latter that is evidenced here. Recall that for many years the concept of a king in Israel festered in the hearts and minds of God's people.<sup>1</sup> Though God ordained the government evidenced during the Judges, nevertheless God's people longed for the life of the secular cultures surrounding them. And thus when the opportunity presented itself, the elders of this text acted quickly. They opposed the ordinance of God whereby they verbally cast off Samuel, and begged for a king.

And from this we observe two characteristics of rebellion. It begins with an excuse.<sup>2</sup> Samuel is old and his sons have fallen into sin. And the elders use this as the excuse to cast off God for a life that promised so much in return. Secondly, it is reinforced by the opinions of others.<sup>3</sup> In response to Joel and Abijah's sin, the elders do not confront the two boys or immediately go to Samuel. Instead we read this:

---

<sup>1</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 17:14-17; Judges 8:22; 9:2

<sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 8:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 8:4

1 Samuel 8:4, “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together [in conference], and [then] came to Samuel unto Ramah.”

This is typical of rebellion. In order for the Christian to reject God, he needs the support of others. And so as sinners, our natural inclination is to gather as much endorsement of our sinful acts/attitudes as we can and use this to fuel our rebellion.

## **Driven By Passion**

Now, let us consider another characteristic of rebellion: it is driven by a passion.

1 Samuel 8:4-5, “Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

At the outset, we know that the elders here are in sin. And yet interpreting this request is somewhat difficult. At first glance it appears that their motive is ungodly. They want a king like the nations.

1 Samuel 8:20, “That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.”

Listen any time a Christian wants to emulate the world, the motive can't be good. But then we read Deuteronomy 17:14. Listen to Moses' wording:

Deuteronomy 17:14, “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.”

Moses goes on to detail the process involved in selecting a king. Now notice that the wording here sounds familiar, because it is what is quoted by the elders requesting a king.

In light of this, some have suggested that there was no malice in the elder's heart here because they simply were quoting Moses' words. As Israel wasn't a monarchy under the Judges, all the elders were doing here was seeking a shift in the governmental structure of Israel.

So which is it? Are the elders here in sin? Or are they simply using Moses' words in their appeal for a King?

To answer this, I want to reflect upon five observations. First, Israel was a monarchy where God as King deigned to rule via governors (procurators, or prefects) who bore various and sundry titles in the Old Testament like these:

- Covenant Head
- Servant
- Judge

Isaiah 41:21 calls God, “the King of Jacob.” In fact we read this:

Psalm 47:2, “For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.”

Paul speaks of God this way:

1 Timothy 6:15, “Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

As such we are not surprised by God's response to the people's request in our passage.

1 Samuel 8:7, “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”

Truly, God was and always will be King. Israel knew this! So this is not a group of elders opting to transform the governmental structure of Israel to a monarchy. It already was a monarchy. Their issue was, “Who would be king?”

Secondly, the elders' motives in this context are far from pure. In 1 Samuel 8 all we read is the elder's rationalization which on the surface sounds valid.

1 Samuel 8:5, “And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

But in 1 Samuel 12:12, Samuel gives us a little more information.

1 Samuel 12:12, “And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king.”

This is not a group of leaders acting in wisdom, innocently seeking to morph the governmental structure of Israel from an oligarchy to a monarchy. NO! This is a bunch of frightened men beholding a potential conflict with the “sons of Ammon.” Just like many before and after them, their fear clouded the path of faith and trust.

So, rather than rely upon God, their King, for deliverance they opt to put their trust in a man (a warrior, a champion) who would be at their beckoning and so fight their battles for them.

With the added information of 1 Samuel 12:12, we see that the elder's desire for a “king like the nations” was NOT an innocent recitation of Deuteronomy 17:14, BUT RATHER a genuine passion whereby they sought to pattern life in Israel after the nations! Walter Brueggemann put it this way:

“The request suggests an intense dispute concerning the character and identity of this community. From its inception at Sinai, it was understood that Israel was chosen by Yahweh and that this chosen community of covenant was not to be like the other nations... In this dramatic confrontation the elders propose to abandon that self-understanding, that vocation which prized a peculiar form of social organization.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, page 62

Thirdly, in fulfillment of the people's desire, God tells Samuel to describe what life would be like under (NOT a benign ruler who loved the people, BUT) a worldly king who ultimately would live to please himself.

1 Samuel 8:12-18, “And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.”

Yes, God in His providence did ordain an earthly monarchy; but it was to be overseen by a man after God's own heart.<sup>5</sup> Based on God's answer to the elders wherein He gave them their request, we see that a longing for a “king like the nations” was a genuine passion to emulate the secular nations surrounding Israel!

Fourthly, the king that God gave in fulfillment of the elder's desire was Saul who, as we will see, was a wretched<sup>6</sup> and godless<sup>7</sup> individual whose life revolved around nothing other than himself. Truly, unlike David, he was a king like the nations!

Fifthly, God goes on record here with a scathing rebuke in response to the elder's request.

1 Samuel 8:8, “According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.”

## **Tired of Living by Faith**

In light of this we conclude that the leaders here are not simply quoting Deuteronomy 17. Rather, driven by fear of the Ammonites, they here endeavor to cast off God in favor of secular living.

In light of this, let's consider the phrase as it was originally given: “now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” By this request, the elders now can be judged as ones longing for the life that accompanied autonomy from God. Yes, God was their King. But they were tired of living by faith.

Accordingly, Israel looked around and saw the nations surrounding them. They saw the green grass with very few weeds. They saw a system where one man lived for the sole purpose of protecting and providing for the well-being of his people. This individual was always on the clock; always watching out; always ready to fight. And yes there might be a small cost to pay for such protection, but surely it would be worth it. Matthew Henry expressed the desire this way:

---

<sup>5</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 17:14-20

<sup>6</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 22:11-19

<sup>7</sup> Compare 1 Samuel 3:20; 9:6-7

“A poor prophet in a mantle, though conversant in the visions of the Almighty, looked mean in the eyes of those who judged by outward appearance; but a king in a purple robe, with his guards and officers of state, would look great: and such a one they must have.”<sup>8</sup>

And so these shepherds of Israel cast off their King. They actively, willingly, and premeditatively rebelled against God because they wanted the living afforded by the world!

From this we see the passion that drives rebellion in the life of the child of God is a love of the world. One longs to cast off the life of faith and live by sight. One has a passion to do it not God's way, but their own way!

Now this always is the choice that is set before God's people. On the one hand there is the striving toward godliness whereby we follow God, trust Him unswervingly, and long to serve Him whatsoever way He leads. On the other hand there is the striving toward worldliness whereby we cast off God and hence a life of faith and trust, and serve our own purpose, agenda, and cause.

## **Ahaz**

Now I want you to see that this always is the temptation laid before us! Isaiah 7:9 describes 734 BC. The countries north of Judah were feeling the threat of Assyria. As a result, they joined together to form a unified opposition to the Assyrian threat. However Judah (the southern kingdom) under king Ahaz refused to join. Accordingly two northern kings, Rezin and Pekah, came against Judah to depose Ahaz and place a king on the throne of Judah who would join their anti-Assyrian league.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Isaiah was commanded to give Ahaz a message.

Isaiah 7:4, “And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.”

And yet the message had a warning: Ahaz must trust God or perish.

Isaiah 7:9, “And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

From this I want you to notice the choice that was set before Ahaz: Will you live by faith in an unseen God? Or will you play it safe and live by sight? Will you choose to live in a desert with a God who loves you? Or will you choose to live in a land flowing with milk and honey without God?

This is the choice that is always before us!

## **Abram and Lot**

We see it in the time of Abram and Lot in Genesis 13. This is the account where Abram gave Lot a portion of the land which had been promised to the patriarch. After returning from Egypt with a sizeable amount of wealth, Abram and Lot settled in the region around what would become the city of

---

<sup>8</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, page 293

<sup>9</sup> Compare Isaiah 7:1-6

Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> And yet, the resources in this land were not enough to sustain both Abram's and Lot's cattle and their servants began fighting over water. Thus we read Abram's solution.

Genesis 13:9, "Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

In essence Abram says, "Take what you want!"

Notice Lot's response:

Genesis 13:10, "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar."

Lot beheld the valley region and saw that it was as good as any land in Egypt. It was a veritable "Garden of Eden." Thus we read this: Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

Genesis 13:11-12, "Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom."

The significance of this choice is brought out in verse 13.

Genesis 13:13, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly."

While Lot chose the best land that this earth could boast he nevertheless chose to live in a place where the "Covenantal Presence" of God was not manifested!

The choice that was before Lot is the same choice which the elders in our passage were confronted with: Life with God in a difficult and weary land? Or the life of ease and plenty without God?

Again that always is the choice that lies before us. Do you want God? Or do you want man? Will you live by faith and so follow God through a difficult land? Or will you live by sight and enjoy the best that this world has to offer?

What is it that will determine the choice that you and I make when we are confronted with these options?

The answer to this question is found in our hearts. Does your heart beat after the love of the world or after the love of God?

## **Asaph**

In Psalm 73 we see Asaph confronted with this same decision. There came a time in Asaph's life when his walk took a bitter turn. First off, he began to resent God.

---

<sup>10</sup> Compare Genesis 13:1-4

Psalm 73:21, "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins."

And this lead him down a dark road.

Psalm 73:22, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee."

Is this not descriptive of so many in the Kingdom of God today?

They have bitter hearts. They live with anxiety and guilt- they're "pierced within." They are plagued with horrible and irrational thought like these:

- I don't care about God.
- Serving God has not been worth it.
- What difference does it make if I spend time with God?

And so in their sinning they have become "like a beast" doing things which would have been unimaginable a few short years before.

How did Asaph come to this? How is it that we too can be found emulating Asaph?

Psalm 73:3-7, "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish."

I hope you see it: the love of the world is the root of most rebellion! The one who willingly sins simply gives meat to the desire for a life "like the nations!" They want a life with no real responsibility or accountability. They desire a life of pleasure and ease with little pain and little if no obligation to God.

Truly, this is what fueled the elder's evil desire in 1 Samuel 8. And it will be this which will fuel the idolatrous thoughts of your heart.

From everything we have seen this morning I hope you see that there is a passion which fuels rebellion; and that passion is this:

- A love of the world.
- A longing for autonomy from God.
- A desire to play it safe and so live by sight.

What do you do if you are one this day who has found yourself moved by a love of the world?

The answer is NOT to do more Christian activities such as these good things:

- Spend more time in prayer.
- Start having quiet times.
- Memorize this or that passage.

Please know that I'm not down playing these disciplines. It is just that these don't address the heart of the

matter! What happens when a dead church seeks to emulate a living church by rearranging their programs is that you get a rearranged dead church! Accordingly, when the worldly Christian rearranges their schedule such that they make time for Christian disciplines, they naturally will see little if no result. Because the issue is NOT a failure to do such and such, BUT a love and longing for the world.

In a dog fight which dog wins? The one you feed. Likewise in our war against the flesh and sin if we spend hours in the word or on our knees and yet do so as ones in love with the world what ultimately are we feeding?

So how ought we to respond if we discover that dwelling in our hearts is a love of the world? Listen to the answer given in Revelation 2 to the dead church in Ephesus who had lost its first love, Christ.

Revelation 2:5, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”

What ought we to do?

Remember the gospel, that from which you have fallen! Consider that even in your sin God nevertheless still loves you! Know that even at your lowest point, God still was saying, “Behold My Child with whom I am well pleased!” Know that no amount of work on your part, or tears, or Christian activity can make up the debt you owe on account of your sin; BUT CHRIST CAN AND DID!

Repent and do the deeds you did at first! Stop the worldly living, fantasizing, longing, and thinking! Destroy any and all speculations raised up against the knowledge of Christ. Watch, be spiritually vigilant and pray.

Again I'm not opposing Christian disciplines. What I'm opposing here is the doing of these disciplines with one eye on the world. Accordingly, the call here is this:

- Violently take your eye off the world.
- Strive with everything within you to fellowship with Christ.
- If there is a part of your living which leads to sin, cut it off!

Oh Brothers and Sisters. Respond to the call that has been set before you this morning; it is one and the same as Joshua's call to Israel, “choose for yourselves today whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

May God grant us the grace that as the day draws near we might be found loving Him with sincerity, purity, and submission such that with Korah we might say, “I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the [posh] tents of [the] wicked” (Psalm 84:10).



## **Subscription Information**

A subscription to the *Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is on a free basis. To subscribe or unsubscribe send a post card to *Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word*®, Post Office Box 691, Windsor, Colorado 80550. Or you may send your request by email to [Nels Nelson](mailto:Nels.Nelson@TheBethelPresbyterianChurch.org) *The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and the these notes can be found at [Precious Remedies Against Sin's Devices](http://www.preciousremedies.com). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on August 13, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.