

Poor Choices

Whom Will We Choose to Lead Us?

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The last three weeks or so have not been good ones for America. Even though we as a church do not become involved in politics necessarily, most of us are still Americans. We were born here. We are involved in our communities in some way. We live and work within it, and what happens in the country affects us. If we are not Americans, we are at least interested observers.

Those of us to the north in Canada have to deal with America on a fairly regular basis because they get our television, they get our movies. Things that happen in America have an effect on what happens in Canada. I know in many cases that is not a good thing. We have transported our culture to them, and there are quite a few Canadians who resent that because they have a unique culture of their own.

It is disturbing to me, even dismaying; to see what is going on in Florida, and now what is going on in all of the United States because they have brought the United States Supreme Court into the matter. This is a situation that should have never gotten that far. To me, and probably to many of you as well, the matter seems very clear in terms of the law, in terms of the Constitution, in terms of just simple common sense. But the lawsuits and the heated rhetoric, and the anger and the partisan politics and the hate keep ratcheting up as it goes further and further into this mess.

Whenever I think of this situation for any length of time my thoughts almost invariably wind up wondering how poorly America chooses its leaders. Not only are Bush and Gore mediocre as politicians, and as people I would not rank them in my top thousand people in America. But that is whom this nation had to choose from, because it all comes down to two, normally, and not even counting Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader who got less than just a few percent of the vote.

Think about it. Over the past twenty years or so have we had any stellar leaders? Clinton *is* the bottom of the barrel. He is below the bottom of the barrel, if you ask me. Dole, a liberal Republican, would not have been much better. As for the elder George Bush, sometimes I wonder where his loyalties lie. He did not do a whole lot for America. The Democratic losers in the two elections of his time, (Dukakis and Mondale, and I should probably say a third—Carter who lost an election in there too), were not great in any way.

Ronald Reagan, who has been put forward by many people as the greatest President we have had since Eisenhower, or maybe since Lincoln, at least stopped the pell-mell plunge this nation was on into liberalism. But he had his faults too, did he not? There was the Iran-Contra, and a burgeoning national debt among other things, and a very poor way of controlling people under him. There were the old jokes about him sleeping during cabinet meetings and forgetting very important things.

When *was* America's last great leader? It is hard to say. Things that we know about our President and military generals and whoever it is that one considers a leader in this country, we could say were not great men. You might pick somebody out like Douglas MacArthur, but I hear that he was no picnic to live with. He was not converted, was he? Winston Churchill had a lot of strange proclivities, but he rallied Britain. But how long ago was it that America ever had a truly great leader? Now people are digging up things on Abraham Lincoln that make him less of a light.

Do we have to go all the way back to somebody like George Washington? I do not know. I am just kind of thinking off the top of my head about American leadership in the past. I do not know how far back we have to go to get a truly great American leader, but it is something to think about. Thinking about all this made me realize that in terms of all of history, in all nations, the record of leadership, whether it was chosen by the people in some democratic way, or whether it was by force of arms, or whether it was by inheritance because daddy or mommy was monarch, has been dismal. Think about it.

Name to me even a handful of great leaders. Do not mention any of them that are in the Bible, because you can get more than a handful from the Bible. Just think about all the world history and all the nations. Was Genghis Kahn a good leader? Was Alexander the Great a good leader? What about people like Gandhi? It depends on your perspective I guess, but were they really great or good men, and women? I have to say, that if we are going to judge by God's standard, the answer is no. They were not great people.

There have been a few good leaders who rallied their nations in times of trouble. There have been a few that have tried to rule their nations for the good of the people, but overall I think they are a very small percentage of the total of all the leaders that have marched down through history.

Let us begin in Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar makes a statement here. He is actually quoting an angel in verse 17. This whole scenario that happens in Daniel 4 in a way is to show this, that it is God Himself who puts rulers into position, or allows them to be in those positions of leadership.

Daniel 4:17 This decision [that Nebuchadnezzar would go around like an animal for seven years) is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, [He is sovereign in everything] gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.

Here we have testimony from God Himself, through an angel, that our leaders, going back as far as Adam and Eve, are going to be among the lowest of men. They are not going to be the "cream of the crop" necessarily. They are not going to be paragons of virtue. They are there for a purpose, and God sets them up to do what He needs to get done in His plan, but for the most part they are not going to be real beauties. We just have to take them as they are.

I think it will be instructive at this juncture in America's history that we review biblical history to see that people frequently make poor choices when it comes to picking their leaders. I think God just allows this, because it shows basically the heart of the people. The way that the people are usually ends up determining how they pick their leaders, and what leaders they get. In Bill Clinton, I think we got two terms of a man who reflects America in many cases, and it is sad. That is why I said it is dismaying and disturbing to look at that and to think that is where America has gone, where America has fallen.

My specific purpose statement today is that people—men—choose their leaders very poorly. We should not be surprised then if this election turns out differently from the way we think it should. I guess it really does not matter who wins. America will get the leader it deserves. No matter who wins, I think their choice is poor, unfortunately.

Let us go to Proverbs 29 and just lay a basis for the way I look at this. This is kind of a black and white way of looking at things, but it sets out the boundaries of this very neatly.

Proverbs 29:2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.

Is that not true? A righteous person in power, one who is really trying to do what is right, one who wants to do the things that God says should be done, will put things into practice by government power that make people happy, that gives them joy. That is just the automatic result of doing things right, properly, and godly. Because people live in an environment where things are being done well, they usually prosper, they are peaceful, and so they are happy. They rejoice. But when the wicked is in there and tearing down the foundation of what God has established as good, the people moan and groan because they are in misery.

I think we can see in this country that because our leaders have not had the backbone to stand up for what is truly right and good, at least to the level of the American Constitution and our Founding Fathers' ideal, America has steadily gone downhill, at least since the First World War. We can see this in our own land, that when the righteous are in power things go well, but when the wicked get into power, we feel it. We moan. We groan.

Let us start looking at this from the very beginning. Turn to Genesis 2:15. This was the first time humanity was given a choice as to who its leaders would be. There were only two representatives of humanity on earth at the time, but they had a very clear choice.

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

In a way you might say this was God's stump speech for His election. He was candidate. Now let us go and hear the other side.

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

You might say they voted with their mouths, and they chose poorly. Very poorly. They were wrong altogether. Here was the choice between God, who had created them and had given them every good thing, and Satan on the other hand who lied to them, who deceived them, and wanted to undermine God at every turn. And they chose the scoundrel. It is as simple as that.

When faced with a choice between God—or a righteous man—and a scoundrel, humans, with the carnal mind, will almost invariably choose the scoundrel. It is just the way it works out. The reason is they feel free by choosing the scoundrel, because then their leader is not better than they. He is not teaching them to change and grow. They can point to him and say, "Hey! He's doing it. I can do it too." And so they are much more comfortable with the scoundrel in office because it makes them feel good about themselves and it gives them an amount of freedom that the carnal mind fools us into thinking we have to do, whatever it is that we want to do.

In Rudyard Kipling's poem, *Mandalay*, one of the soldiers said, (and I am paraphrasing here), "Send me beyond India where there is no Ten Commandments." He said this because he wanted to do what he wanted to do. He did not want to be sent to a place where his regimental commander was a man of God, let us say, and would enforce proper discipline, proper living. He wanted to be sent to a place where he could be wild and free. I thought that was interesting.

Here it is, the Garden of Eden, and the first time that anybody had a choice, and they failed. Well, sixteen hundred years or so passed, and God decided to wipe the slate clean, because the record of history shows that their choice was really the wrong choice, and it resulted in death and destruction.

In Genesis 9 God had given Noah the command to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth," not only with the animals, but with mankind.

Genesis 10:8-12 Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before [meaning against] the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).

Here we have the first ruler that was chosen by the people. The tradition says that they chose him because he was able to fight off the wild beasts, and he gave them a sense of security. He would make sure that these people were fortified in some way and then he would go out and kill the wild animals that were plaguing them. They glommed onto him because he appeared to be a leader, no matter that his reputation far and wide was that he was a rebel against God, that he was the number one hunter, let us say, of God's good people, and against what God wanted to do. This resulted in the tower of Babel.

Genesis 11:1-2 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

This maybe taking it a little bit before what we just read there in Chapter 10, because its says that Nimrod built Babel in Shinar. Evidently what we have here is a little bit of a flashback to show you that when people migrated eastward from where the ark had landed and where they had begun to settle, that they built this city in the land of Shinar.

Genesis 11:3-4 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

What was it that God had said to Noah in Genesis 9:1? "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." What they wanted to do was to build a tower in defiance of God, and build a city in which they could all gather so that they would not have to scatter themselves over the whole earth. Who was the one that they chose to lead this? Nimrod.

Genesis 11:5-9 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

They chose Nimrod, who was against everything that God did, to thwart God's plan of scattering them abroad over the face of the whole earth. That was their choice. They could have chosen Shem, or Noah and Shem, depending on whether Noah was still alive at the time, because it was Noah's job, and Shem's after him, to fill the whole earth with the people. But instead they chose Cush and Nimrod because their platform was, "No. Let's stay in our own little cities and stay united and build house to house (let us say) and be here cheek by jowl, and not let God tell us what to do." Instead they chose to rebel against God. They chose self-determination.

What happened is that God said, "I'm going to do what I told you to do anyway," and He confused their language and scattered them abroad over the whole earth. But they chose. That was their choice, and their punishment was a scattering and an inability to understand one another. Confusion. That just fits the mold of what we saw there in Proverbs 29:2. If they had followed the righteous leader, they would have been happy, but instead they followed the scoundrel, the wicked, and what did they have but misery. Since then things have not gotten much better.

We are now going to skip over quite a bit of history. This will take us past the time when God had brought Israel out of Egypt. We will go all the way to Numbers 16, because there was a rebellion in the wilderness in which they made another choice, and it ended up once again that they made the wrong choice. It always seems to happen this way. It's almost invariable that the wrong choice is made when carnal people have to make this choice.

Numbers 16:1-3 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

I want you to notice a few things. You might think that this rebellion was just Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On; but they also had 250 leaders of the people with them, so at least this is 254 leaders of the congregation. But there is one interesting little phrase in here. These 250 leaders were representatives of the congregation. How many people did these 254 men represent? It is hard to say, but we can get stuck here if we think it was just the leadership that was having this problem with Moses, but it is not. We will see later that it affected at least 14,700 people. I would imagine, that

because Aaron stopped the plague, that there were far more that were involved and on whom God had mercy.

Let us look at this. What was it that they were upset about? Well, they said that Moses was exalting himself, that Moses was taking too much upon himself. "Don't you know, Moses, that the whole congregation is holy? We're all equally holy. We all deserve our say in things." When Moses heard this he fell on his face because he knew what was going on, and he knew that if he did not get down he was going to get hit.

Numbers 16:8-10 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: [We see now who mainly the problem here was.] Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them: and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?"

This was a rebellion by the upper-management against the priesthood. These people who had been given the jobs that Moses mentions here wanted more. They wanted to be the priests. They wanted to lead Israel because they were not satisfied with the positions that God had given them.

Numbers 16:11 "Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. . . .

Moses did not take this personally. He knew actually beyond himself what it was that they were rebelling against. It was not against Moses, but against God, because God had been the One who had placed them where they were, and He was the One who had placed Moses where he was, and all the priests.

Numbers 16:11-12 . . . And what is Aaron that you complain against him? [He is a servant just like you.] And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up!"

"We're not going to do what you say. We're not going to bend a knee to you."

Numbers 16:13 Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, . . .

Look at how they turned things around here. Egypt was a desert. It still is. They called Egypt "a land flowing with milk and honey."

Numbers 16:13 . . .that you should keep acting like a prince over us?

See, that was their problem. Moses was in charge. They were upset that somebody else was in charge instead of them.

Numbers 16:14 Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. . . .

Ah ha! They were impatient too! They were saying that Moses had not fulfilled his end of the bargain.

Numbers 16:14 . . . Will you put out the eyes of these men? . . .

This is a Hebraism that means, "Will you throw dust in the eyes of these people?" "Will you add insult to injury by lording it over us?"

Numbers 16:14 . . . We will not come up!

Moses gets very angry because he knows what is going on.

Numbers 16:19 And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. . . .

Did you catch that? "Korah gathered *all* the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting"?

Numbers 16:19 . . . Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.

Uh oh! Things are starting to get tense.

Numbers 16:23-24 So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the congregation, saying, Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

It was pretty good that He said that, otherwise a whole lot more people would have been dead after this.

Numbers 16:28 Then Moses said: By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, . . .

Did you notice how he replied to them? "It's not me," Moses said, "who did all these things and who came up with all these things." Moses is saying, "Look. God was the One who told me to do everything that I have done. Your rebellion is not against me, but against God."

Numbers 16:28-30 . . . for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD.

He puts it in very plain language. "If they die supernaturally, you will know I was right. If they don't and they die naturally in their beds, then you'll know they were right."

Numbers 16:31-33 Then it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, [before the last word was out of his mouth] that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.

Just remember that the earth closed over them. It is very interesting later.

Numbers 16:34 Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also!

Why were they so afraid? Because they were guilty. Remember, all the congregation was in this rebellion. Two hundred fifty leaders represented all the congregation, and they were afraid for their lives because they were just as guilty as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Numbers 16:35 And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

Not only Korah, Dathan and Abiram, but 250 representatives of the congregation were killed, the 250 being charred as they stood. It did not end here though.

Numbers 16:41 On the next day. . . .

On the very next day! It just happened. It was still fresh in the memory. The smell of burning flesh was still in the air.

Numbers 16:41 On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, You have killed the people of the LORD.

They missed the point altogether. Moses had just gotten finished saying, "If they die, you will know that it was the Lord that did everything through me." Moses did not split the earth open and cause them to fall down in, and the earth close back over them. He did not cause fire to come out of the tabernacle and kill those 250 men. But whom did they blame? Moses. You see whom they were choosing. Not God. Anybody but God, and anybody but God's representative, Moses, and his representative, Aaron. They were making a very poor choice again.

Numbers 16:42-45 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell on their faces.

This is at least the second time He has said this. "I've had it past here now. These people need to be snuffed out. They're not worth it." And then Moses and Aaron did the falling on the faces bit again. They were doing quite a lot a that these last two days. God was not happy.

Numbers 16:46 So Moses said to Aaron, Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun.

Moses did not even need to get up and look around to see that God was acting on what He had just said, that He was going to wipe them all out.

Numbers 16:47-49 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the

living; so the plague was stopped. Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident.

And you know, they still did not get it because God had to do another miracle in Chapter 17, to make Aaron's rod bud before they finally got the fear of God in them. After they saw this:

Numbers 17:12-13 The children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD must die. Shall we all utterly die?

And the answer was "Yes." They all died in the wilderness because they had rebelled against God. Very soon after they made their choice the results happened and disaster struck them. It was one of the most awful things that happened in that whole trek through the wilderness. It is really something to behold. When you make the wrong choice, it bites you.

There is another one in Judges 9 which I think I will skip. It is the story of Abimelech who killed his brothers—all the sons of Gideon. He only reigned three or four years. The men of Shechem who chose him to be their leader did not wait for God to raise up a judge of His own, and it all ended up in civil war. Who knows how many hundreds of thousands of people died. They made the wrong choice, and it caused so many problems.

Let us go now to I Samuel 8. *My New King James* has a heading on this section which says: "Israel Demands A King." Here is another time in which Israel made a very poor choice.

I Samuel 8:1-5 Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations.

They had a point, that Samuel's sons were corrupt. They were not good leaders, but they made a mistake in asking for a king. Now God allowed it, but you will see that Samuel was upset.

I Samuel 8:6-8 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, Give us a king to judge us. So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.

"Look. It's no different from what they've been doing these last four hundred or so years. It's the same pattern, Samuel." I could just hear God saying this in a kind of weary voice.

I Samuel 8:9 Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.

And so he does. Samuel tells the people how a king will take their money, take their produce, take their sons and their daughters for his own use. In a sense he says, "A king is going to drain you dry and make you miserable."

I Samuel 8:18 And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

He said, "I'm going to let you suffer your own choice."

I Samuel 8:19-22 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, No, but we will have a king over us, 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. And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. So the LORD said to Samuel, Heed their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said to the men of Israel, Every man go to his city [meaning this is going to take a little time to find the right king].

And of course he chose Saul. That is the one God had chosen for the people. If you think about verse 18 where it says, "and the LORD will not hear you in that day," and you think over the kings of Israel and Judah, you can see how that played out. Israel and Judah suffered under most of their kings. There were only a few good ones. There is none in Israel that I can think of, but there was David, and Solomon for a while.

Some of the first kings of Judah were not bad. Jehoshaphat was okay. And then you got a bunch of scoundrels, and then finally you got down to Hezekiah and Josiah. But after that the kings did not help Israel very much at all. The only good thing that came out of it was the line of David, and Christ from that line. This is all God's plan. That is why He allowed them to have a king. He was setting all this up so that it would happen, but that does not take away from the consequences that such an action brought. A poor choice ends up in very bad consequences. We see it all the time.

I Samuel 10:17-23 Then Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah, and said to the children of Israel, Thus says the LORD God of Israel: I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all kingdoms and from those who oppressed you. But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversaries, and your tribulations; and you have said to Him, No, but set a king over us! Now therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was chosen. And Saul the son of Kish was chosen. But when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the LORD further, Has the man come here yet? And the LORD answered, There he is, hidden among the equipment. ["He is skulking over there. He does not want to be picked out."] So they ran and brought him from there; and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward.

No one in Israel even came up more than his shoulders. He was literally "head and shoulders" above everyone in the kingdom. He looked every inch a king, commanding presence. He towered over the people. "This is the man that will lead us into battle." But there he was, hiding among the equipment.

I Samuel 10:24-25 And Samuel said to all the people, Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, that there is no one like him among all the people? So all the people shouted and said, Long live the king! ["Yea Saul!"] Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, [He did it again. He reiterated to them how a king will act,] and wrote it in a book [as a testimony against them] and laid it up before the LORD.

I get the impression that he maybe put it in the ark as a witness against them, like Aaron's rod, like the manna that was in there, like the Ten Commandments that were in there. All these things are witnesses showing what Israel should have done for what God had provided, and that the people had rejected.]

I Samuel 10:26 And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched.

God had inspired some to support Saul. But listen to this. Immediately after Saul was crowned king:

I Samuel 10:27 Some rebels said, How can this man save us? So they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.

Immediately after a king was crowned, they had rebellion. You get the impression that Saul held his peace so he could crush them later when he was strong, and he was already beginning to show the signs of kingly behavior about which Samuel had warned them. He was just holding his peace, biding his time.

Let us go to I Samuel 15. This is with Saul and King Agag, where Samuel told him specifically what he should do, and he did not do it.

I Samuel 15:10-15 Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; [Now he is putting up statues and things to his glory] and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal. Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD. But Samuel said, What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They [the people] have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

He twisted the command. Samuel had told him to slay everything.

I Samuel 15:16 Then Samuel said to Saul, Be quiet! ["Shut up!" That is basically the tone of that.] And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night.

Samuel was not in too good a mood. Not only had he heard this from God, and had stayed up all night beseeching Him to spare Saul, but then Saul went hither and yon all over Israel, and then he had not obeyed the commandment that he had been given, and so by this time Samuel was in a fit.

I Samuel 15:17-21 Samuel said, When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said to Samuel, But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.

And then Samuel goes on to explain that obedience is better than all these things that Saul thought he was doing.

I Samuel 15:24 Then Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.

At least he was honest enough to admit what it was actually that had happened.

I Samuel 15:25 Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.

I get the impression he had not done it in a while.

I Samuel 15:26 But Samuel said to Saul, I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.

Israel's choice to have a king ended in utter failure. The end of Saul's reign was constant warfare, here against Amalek, against David, against the Philistines. He, in his own reign, fulfilled most of those things that Samuel had written in that book about the behavior of kings, and that is why God said, "I don't want this man anymore. I regret that I ever put him in this position," and He got rid of him.

Notice in chapter 16 something very interesting.

I Samuel 16:1 Then the LORD said to Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? . . .

Samuel had probably invested a lot in the man, and he had seen his project end in ruin. God says, "Get over it, Samuel." "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?" What God has rejected, we can forget.

I Samuel 16:1-2 . . . Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.

And then God tells Samuel what to do.

I Samuel 16:6-7 So it was, when they [all the sons of Jesse, and Jesse himself] came, that he looked at Eliab and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him. But the LORD said to Samuel, Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

This is interesting, because not only did more sons of Jesse pass before Samuel, and each one seemed to be just as good to Samuel to be king, but none of them fit God's bill. David, the shepherd, the little one, was the one that God wanted. Even Samuel made the wrong choice. A converted man looked at the outward appearance instead of on the heart. Of course he never saw David until they brought him in, but immediately, when Eliab came, he looked and saw this strapping young man who looked kingly to him and said, "Surely this is the one that will lead Israel." And God said, "No, Samuel. You still don't get it. I don't look at how these people appear, whether they're tall, whether they're strong. I look at their character, at what's in their heart."

Chapter 16 is juxtaposed against the previous eight chapters. Remember, it was in chapter 8 where they asked for a king, and then a king was chosen. It was this hulking Benjaminite named Saul who looked every inch a king. I think that is what Samuel was looking for, and the people. But God finally tells Samuel here, when he is anointing David, that the real way to find a king is to find one who has a heart just like God. And that is what David was. He was "a man after God's own heart."

David was a man who made a lot of mistakes in his life, but he repented of them and always strived to do what God wanted him to do. He was thick-headed at times. Sometimes he did not get it right away. Sometimes we shake our heads and say, "Why in the world David did you ever do that?" But he had the right attitude, the right heart. His heart was soft and malleable, and he made a great king because God was with him, and he was with God. It was the heart that made the difference.

There is the account of Absalom. David was not even dead before the people made another wrong choice. This time the choice was between "old" David, who was probably in his sixties at this time, and young strapping Absalom, who had gotten the heart of the people by giving them what they wanted. He too probably looked every inch a king, but they made the wrong choice. The throne of David was to go to Solomon, not to Absalom. That episode ended in civil war, Absalom dead, and Ahithophel, David's chief counselor, dead by suicide.

David's heart was broken because he loved Absalom. And then finally the seeds of national division were sown, because it was just after Absalom's rebellion was put down that the Judahites and the rest of Israel began to quarrel. David was still strong enough to keep them together, and so was Solomon, but as soon as Solomon died, another choice was made. This choice was whether to choose the line of David—Rehoboam—or whether to choose a new man, Jeroboam. What did the Israelites do? They chose the wrong one. They chose Jeroboam. What was the first thing Jeroboam did? He changed the priesthood. He changed the holy days. He set up two golden calves and changed the religion of Israel into idolatry, and that nation plummeted like a rock.

Something very interesting can be seen in Matthew 27. Here was another choice that was made. Maybe you never thought of it in this way, but I think it is very significant.

Matthew 27:15-16 Now at the feast [meaning the Passover/Days of Unleavened Bread] the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they [the people] wished. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

If you look in the other gospels regarding this notorious prisoner, one calls him a thief, another calls him an insurrectionist, and another calls him a murderer. He was all those things. He was a brigand of the first order. He was someone you would not want to live anywhere near. You would want him incarcerated. He was not one that should have been even in a position to be chosen along side Jesus Christ. But he was.

My New King James has a marginal reference which says that his name was *Jesus Barabbas*. That comes from a very old text. It is called the Caesarian Text, and the word "Jesus" is in the text there—*Jesus Barabbas*. It is thought that the word "Jesus" fell out of the text somewhere a couple centuries after Christ because they thought it was blasphemous that Barabbas had the same name as Christ, and so they dropped it. That is the thought of the scholars who go over this.

I am not saying that his name was Jesus Barabbas, but it is very interesting if it was. I will tell you why. Let us go on and read this before we do that.

Matthew 27:17 Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, Whom do you want me to release to you?

This is why they say they are pretty sure that there was "Jesus" in there because of the way Pilate said this. "Whom do you want me to release to you?" They were all shouting "Jesus!" "Jesus!" "Jesus!" And so Pilate said, "Which one do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or the Jesus that is called Christ?" Does that make sense? Actually they would have been saying "Jeshua" or "Joshua,"—something along that line—and Pilate was saying, "I don't know which one it is that you want me to release, this innocent man, or Barabbas, the insurrectionist."

Matthew 27:18 For he knew that because of envy they had delivered Him.

He knew that the Jews had done this because of their own machinations, that they coveted their positions.

Matthew 27:19-20 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him. But the chief priest and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

They were going out among the crowd which was there to try to get a prisoner released for the Passover, and they were stoking the flames against Jesus of Nazareth, and for Jesus Barabbas.

Matthew 27:21-22 The governor answered and said to them, Which of the two do you want me to release to you? They said, Barabbas! Pilate said to them, What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? [This is another indication that both were named Jesus.] And they said to him, Let Him be crucified!

After Pilate washed his hands of it:

Matthew 27:26 Then he released Barabbas to them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

This may be the *ultimate* choice. The people represented mankind in general. Pilate represented the leadership of government. The rabbis and the priests and the elders represented man's religious leadership. Government, religion, and the people all made the same decision, and they chose Barabbas instead of Christ.

I already mentioned that Barabbas' name was probably Jesus as well. Do you know what Barabbas means? It is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic *bar-abba*. Do you know what *bar-abba* means? Have you ever heard of Simon bar Jonah? What does that mean? It means "Simon, son of Jonah" (or John.) Now what does "Jesus bar-abba" mean? It means "savior, son of the father,"—an exact opposite of the true Savior, Son of God. It kind of like black and white facing each other.

Which one would the people choose to be released? It is very interesting they chose the rebel—the sinner—over the sinless One, the One who perfectly conformed to His Father's will. They chose the murderer over the Creator and Life-Giver. They chose the thief over the One who gives us all good things. They chose a physical messiah—one who they thought might free them from the Romans—instead of the spiritual Savior, the One who could free us from sin and give us eternal life.

Mankind, when faced with a choice between a righteous man backed by God, and a wicked man who is just like them, will invariably choose the one who is just like them. It is sad to see, but true, and it is happened time and time again since the Garden of Eden.

Let us go now to Jeremiah 17. I told you that this would be interesting to look at.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength,

That's what we're talking about here, about people who choose a man rather than God, or the one whom God appoints.

Jeremiah 17:5-6 . . . whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited.

Think back to Proverbs 29:2.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its root by the river, and will not fear when heat comes [or trial or tribulation comes]; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

This person will grow, and produce, and prosper. And this is where that famous verse comes into play:

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

I found out today that this word "deceitful" comes from the same root as the word "Jacob." Supplanter. "The heart is supplanting above all things." The way I think *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown*

put it is that "they always supplant God with something of their own devising," meaning the man's heart. Man's heart always supplants God with something that it devises of itself, or something like itself.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, [Remember He said that in I Samuel 16.] I test the mind, [meaning God knows man's heart], even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

What we choose is how we will be judged.

Jeremiah 17:11 As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, so is he who gets riches, but not by right; it will leave him in the midst of his days, and at his end he will be a fool.

At the end of our lives, we will see whether we chose correctly.

Jeremiah 17:12-13 A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be ashamed. . . .

This is where I said that I wanted you to remember this about Korah having the dirt and the earth come over them.

Jeremiah 17:13 . . . Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.

Very interesting. Those who forsake God will be written in the earth. Korah was a very vivid illustration of someone being "written in the earth." It is like saying, "You're dust, and that's as high as you'll ever get. That's your destiny. Dust."

It is kind of interesting too if you just want to think about this that when the Jews found the woman caught in adultery, what did Jesus do? He wrote in the dust. Some people think that what He was doing was writing her accusers' names in the dust, and it is a reference back to this being "written in the earth." It is very interesting to think about.

There is another choice that's coming—a choice of the Beast.

Revelation 13:1 Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.

Revelation 13:8-10 And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

I do not want to get all caught up in when, and who, and all that, but the people of this earth are making a choice right now. Do not get caught up in the fact that this is going to be a man. The man is simply the culmination of six thousand years of Satan's rule that began in the Garden of Eden. This

man will be the epitome of that system that Satan has forced on mankind who has rejected God. It says that everyone—the whole world—will worship the Beast; not just the Beast, but the system that is produced.

We should think about this very deeply because we live and work in this system. All our activities, outside of church functions (our prayers, our study), are caught up in this system. We cannot really look at these things that I have been talking about today and say, "Look at those people. They're just terrible choosers. They can't make decisions. If I were there, I would have picked Jesus instead of Barabbas." We cannot do that. Remember, Samuel picked how many sons of Jesse before God said, "Come on. I want the last one. I look on the heart." Not even Samuel was wise enough to make the right choice. Now that was a particular situation. Mostly he made the right choices in his life. He missed the one about the king.

But we are faced with choices every day, not of this magnitude, but with every choice that we make we choose either God or something else. Every choice we make will tell God where our heart is. Is our heart for Him, and steadfast with Him, or are we willing to sometimes take it easy and choose poorly just for our own fun, aggrandizement, or what have you, for our self-interest? That is what I think we have to take out of this sermon. It is not that man has always chosen poorly, but that we everyday have a chance to choose wisely.

Deuteronomy 30:11 For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off.

It is not something that is esoteric and not understandable. It is not far off. It is not something that we cannot grasp.

Deuteronomy 30:12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?

No. It is not something that is beyond us.

Deuteronomy 30:13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?

It is not something unreachable.

Deuteronomy 30:14 But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

That is, make the right choice.

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not

prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore [choose wisely], choose life. . .

Do not get all bogged down in the distractions that Satan puts up to confuse us about this choice. *Always choose life.* Choose, decide on the thing that will make for eternal life, that will please God.

Deuteronomy 30:19 . . .that both you and your descendants may live [and to us, eternally].

Deuteronomy 30:20 That you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; [That is the only reason why we breathe, because God allows it.] and that you may dwell in the land [in God's Kingdom] which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them, [and to give us].