

Where Is the Beast? (Part 7)

Do We Believe God?

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We're going to begin this sermon by turning to Daniel 3:19-20.

Daniel 3:19-20 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

I read this because the Bible shows that God has a pattern of throwing His people right into the heart of the fire, so to speak, at important junctures in history, or we might say right into the heart of the issues that pertain to His purpose. He does this primarily for His glorification and as a witness, and for our preparation. He forces us to confront challenges we might otherwise withdraw or run from.

He did it with Noah and the flood. He did it when Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. He did it with Joseph in Egypt, with Moses and the Israelites in the Exodus from Egypt, and the pilgrimage through the wilderness. He did it with Daniel in the lions' den, and literally with these three men in the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar.

We find ourselves living in the end-time Babylon grown to the greatest extent of its evil anti-God influence. We are confronted by the fact that His people of old came through their trials because God delivered them. Now we are commanded to "come out of Babylon." However, that is no longer literally possible, because it is a world-wide organized system. We can still come out of it spiritually by resisting it, not allowing it to influence our decision making, and therefore our conduct and our attitude.

We've read of the encouraging victories of God in behalf of His people in those previously named, and there are many more besides. But we also have read of much evidence of Israel's weaknesses and failure, and it helps greatly for us to understand their weaknesses, because brethren, we are cut out of the same cloth.

Israel was always seeking ways to avoid confronting issues important to her relationship with God. We find a very important statement regarding overcoming these things in the book of Hebrews, chapter 3, verses 12 through chapter 4, verses 1 and 2.

Hebrews 3:12-19 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one

another daily, while it is called Today: lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end: While it is said, Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was He grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of your should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

It's right here that the Apostle Paul puts his finger on the fountain that spewed forth all of the fickle-minded disloyalties of the people of Israel—*an evil heart of unbelief*.

Like an inexperienced and immature teenager, Israel most of the time believed that she knew better than the Creator, and that sinful unbelieving heart stands in marked contrast to the faithfulness of Jesus. Let's note this in Hebrews 3: 2.

Hebrews 3:2 Who was *faithful* to Him [the Father] that appointed him, as also *Moses* was *faithful* in all his house.

So we have the faithfulness of two outstanding servants of God—Christ and Moses—as a contrast to the unbelief and disobedience of the Israelites. There is another thing here in verse 12, where it says:

Hebrews 3:12 ...*an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God*.

That "departing from," although it is not incorrect, is really a rather weak translation, because in order to get the forcefulness behind what is in the context it should really read "*rebellious against*." When we rebel against, or depart from, it's not against or from some dead doctrine, but it's from a living and dynamic Being—the Father, or the Son.

This entire exhortation that we have just read here is directly tied to us in verse 6, where it says: "But Christ as a Son over his own house; *whose house we are*." This aims this section directly to us, and our responsibilities to Christ in this deceptively perilous time. We are the people of God, and it is our responsibility to glorify God by being tenaciously *faithful* in all circumstances.

It was Israel's unbelief that was the breeding ground for her capriciousness. Israel's insatiable curiosity and the desire for variety and *control* continuously led them astray. This in turn produced the mistrust and the unreliability in the relationship with God. *We must not follow her in this*. Our stakes are much higher. This is addressed to "*Christ's house*."

In the previous sermon we digressed to a specific area of Israel's identity with the Harlot Woman of Revelation 17 and 18. This sermon is the second part of that digression. Israel's behavior, as revealed in the Bible, is *part* of her identification to us. It may not identify her to the world, but it should to us because we *know* how she should have conducted herself. Her behavior is a major cause of her departure from her responsibilities within the Old Covenant.

In that sermon we saw that God illustrated Israel as a "*deceitful bow*"; that is, to every outward appearance she was full of promise of success, but when put to the test of life she performed badly, and failed to carry out her responsibility, and so God called her "weak of heart," "insatiable," "unsatisfied," "contrary" in a variety of contexts.

I want you to notice in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 6, and verse 9 how *strongly* He described the drive that was in her toward capriciousness.

Ezekiel 6:9 And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am *broken* with their whorish heart, ...

There is a lot of emotion in that word "broken." If you have a marginal reference for that word "broken," it means, "crushed." God says, "I am *crushed*." That's the way He felt in the rejection He received from Israel within this marriage.

Ezekiel 6:9 And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am *crushed crushed* with their whorish heart, which has departed from me, and with their eyes which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.

The idols represent what she greatly desired, and as the context clearly shows, what she greatly desired God (her Husband) prohibited.

This "whoring" is their fickle drive. They were always curious about how others did things. They were always ready for excitement in some new thing, and ever willing to experience a variety of things. Almost always what she chased after was outside the guidelines that God gave in His commands, but to her His commands always appeared to be denying her fun. Hosea is the earliest of the prophets to connect idolatry to adultery, but he was far from the last. He only *began* the comparison.

Jeremiah lived about one hundred years after Hosea, and Jeremiah, right at the very beginning of the book, God likened him to Israel through Jeremiah, when He said:

Jeremiah 2:9 Wherefore I will yet plead with you, says the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead.

Let's stop right here just to interject something, because we may get the wrong meaning or drift from this word "plead." It almost sounds like God is down on His knees pleading with her to come back. That's not what He's doing. That word is much better translated "contend." "I will contend," because the setting here, beginning with verse 9, is as though it is in a court, and God is the prosecuting attorney, and He is bringing forth His charges against His bride, His wife.

Jeremiah 2:9-26 Wherefore I will contend with you, says the LORD, and with your children's children will I contend. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Has a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? But my people [who are in contact with, in a relationship with, in a marriage with the true God, with the Creator] have changed their glory [God] for that which does not profit. Be astonished, O you heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be you very desolate, says the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he spoiled? [God is looking around at the country, and it's in devastation.] The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: [Yes, the Assyrians came through, and now the Babylonians are coming through Judah.] His cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of your head. Have you not procured this unto yourself, ...["Didn't you earn this?" God says to Israel.] ...in that you have forsaken the LORD your God, when he led you by the way? And now what have you to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? ["Why are you doing that?" He's asking.] Or what have you to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river? ["Are those people going to help you?"] Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backslidings shall reprove you: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and that my fear is not in you, says the Lord GOD of hosts. For of old time I have broken your yoke, and burst your bands; and you said, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree you wandered, playing the harlot. [He's jumping on her hypocrisy.] Yet I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then are you turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me? For though you wash you with nitre, and take you much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before me, says the Lord GOD. How can you say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? See your way in the valley,

know what you have done? You are a swift dromedary traversing her ways; A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffed up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? All they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her. Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst: but you said, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go. As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed: they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets.

What we have here is a survey of Judah's behavior in that period of time just before *they* went into captivity. This is really intense stuff. In the very next chapter God divorces Israel. This is like the final pleading, contention, of the straw that broke the camel's back. The intensity of her drive to show disrespect for God is illustrated in the comparison of the Dromedary and the wild ass in heat. Nobody can hold those female animals back when they are in heat. That's the illustration. It's like Israel was always in heat in order to commit adultery in departing from God.

Brethren, we have to make the historical connection that we are called from a nation cut out of the same cloth, and in us is the same potential for unbelieving stubbornness, fickleness, whose fruit is immature irresponsible unfaithfulness to obligation. The wayward drive is actually in all of mankind, but Israel is more responsible than any other nation on earth because she has been given so much in the way of knowledge.

Satan has succeeded in deceiving the whole world. Among these deceptions is that modern Israel is Christian. But Israel has *never* been truly Christian. It presents a counterfeit to the world, and it has nonetheless spread its wine over the entire world, drugging it with its poor example, and inducing much to the world to follow.

This particular deception that Israel is Christian is dangerous to true Church members since the vast majority of the people of God are in Israelitish nations, and it has the power to make us feel an affinity with Israel's brand of false Christianity. But that affinity might just lure us into producing the same tolerant, non-judgmental, politically correct, multi-cultural Laodiceanism commonly displayed in the Israelitish country. It hinders the separation from the world required of us in order to come out by making us feel a lingering sense of oneness with Israel.

We're going to go back into some other frequently used scriptures in I John 2:15-16.

I John 2:15-16 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

These verses are a basic guideline to the alluring heart of the Babylonish system. This system has its basis in human nature. It feeds right into our desire for frequent change and variety of experience as the answer to fulfillment in life, but the Bible clearly reveals God drawing *His* children into *His* oneness.

Babylon promotes fulfillment in material things, excitement and gratification of the flesh, and variety of experience. Those major fruits are easily seen in the world around us as confusion of purpose. People don't know where they're going. They're going in every different direction. There is competition—Bang! Bang! Bang!—hitting heads with one another. There is disunity and diversity everywhere. There is disharmony, fighting with your neighbor. There is separation from each other, and eventually God, and death. The result is that the world is not a happy place to live in.

None of these factors that are part of the allurements of Babylon can give a lasting sense of peace, fulfillment, abundant living, and purpose in life because none of them is in constant harmony with the purpose of God. Each of these things, though they may not be sin of and by themselves, can only produce a temporary burst of well-being.

God, many, many times, instructed Israel in many ways against this proclivity. They were to seek out only Him in His only habitation in Jerusalem. But Israel is disastrously curious and terribly smitten with the discontented, unsettled, impatient "grass is always greener" disease.

Psalm 11:4-5 The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try [or test] the children of men. The LORD tries the righteous: but the wicked and him that loves violence his soul hates.

It's good to remember that God clearly shows that just because He makes something available to us—even things that might ordinarily be considered as good—it doesn't mean that it's going to be good for *us*—His called and chosen people. God's eyelids look at the son of man. He is always testing us to see whether we understand how intimately *He* is working with us. We're to be a self-controlled people. Our conduct is to be motivated by faith, because we are a distinctive people summoned by the Great God for His purposes, and His purposes only. God is drawing us into His oneness with Him, and this is why there is so much stress in His word on His one way.

As I was preparing this, it came to mind about that famous answer as to why the man risked life and limb to climb the mountain. He replied, "Because it was there." In other words, it was available. I guess this illustration is supposed to indicate that he rose to the challenges of life and overcame them. However, what is not explored, at least very often, is that he didn't *have* to risk his life by climbing the mountain. It is a risk, a gamble, that he took on himself. God nowhere requires that in His word. It was vanity that drove him to do that so he could have the personal satisfaction of accomplishment, and may be able to tell others he had done it.

Now exercising faith, brethren, is *not* a gamble, though it may *seem* like a gamble to human nature. God's way—living by faith—is *always* following the *safe* way. Babylon's system is a way though that promotes gambling, betting on the outcome that one may be able to beat the odds. Brethren, it began with Adam and Eve in the garden, but today it infects every area of life. Satan said to them, "*You shall not surely die.*" They bet on that, and made themselves captive to Satan and to death.

Now what about us? Are we gambling with life? Are we turning aside from the way, the principles, the knowledge of God? Despite all of the information we have available to us, we gamble with our health regarding what we choose to eat and how much we eat. People gamble with smoking, knowing full well what they are doing despite all of the warnings that the gambling risks are very high, and they lead only to an early death. The slogan says, "Smoke Lucky Strikes. They satisfy."

People gamble against getting hooked on drugs for the thrill of the moment. Consider what is happening in the AIDS epidemic. Despite all the information available everywhere, this nation is in a very dangerous potential of this disease. It is being willfully ignored in a continuing hedonistic lifestyle, betting that a cure will be found before it strikes *them* down.

We may gamble in the way we drive our automobile. People skydive or bungee-jump from high bridges spanning deep canyons, and involve themselves in a whole host of other life-threatening experiences, gambling their survival for the sake of a curious thrill.

We go heavily into debt, gambling that economic things and our health will continue as they are, and we will somehow though manage to keep our nose above the financial flood. But brethren, economic things *never* stay the same for very long. They are always becoming something else. The solution, brethren, is to stop indulging ourselves in overspending by sacrificing. But you see, Israel doesn't *want* to sacrifice. Israel wants satisfaction *her way*, so she boasts (and it's recorded in Revelation 18), "I sit as a *queen*, and am no widow, and shall never see sorrow."

Albert Einstein was once asked for his definition of insanity. Listen to this. This is rich! "It is when one keeps doing the same things over and over again, and expects a different result." Brethren, this entire creation works according to laws, and those laws cannot work any other way than they do. That's why they're laws. The solution is to quit disbelieving God, control ourselves, and obey the laws *He* counsels us will produce the abundance, the satisfaction, and the peace that we so desire.

Israel would not do this, and it remains to see whether *we*, after being given the opportunity, will follow fickle Israel's example, or follow the heroes of faith. Hebrews 3 is addressed to Christ's house. God is looking to see if we have an evil heart of unbelief, or if we believe Him and follow those who have already made it into the Kingdom of God.

Israel's sin was driven by an over-weening self-concern, forgetful that God is working out a purpose and plan, overseeing *everything* in our life. *Everything*, brethren! There is nothing that His eyelids do not test. He is that concerned about how we finish life. He bought and paid for us with the most precious thing that could be given by Him through Christ's sacrifice, and we vowed to submit to His authority when we gave Him our life to create Himself in us.

Brethren, He shows us that what He has provided in the past, and what He is providing for us as we head toward the Kingdom of God, is more than fair. He provides abundantly what is good and loving for us. He promises to supply our every need. But in Israel's fearful and fickle discontentment, they didn't seek Him to understand what He was doing, but instead sought for something different from what He was providing in the way of experiences in order to prepare for His kingdom.

The other day Richard and I were talking about this general subject, and Richard told me he heard from Rush Limbaugh regarding something that I think is worth repeating to you. I think it sticks right here, because it illustrates a right principle.

Limbaugh said that people are saying that it is multiculturalism—diversity—that made America rich and powerful as it is today because people came here from all over the world. Now Limbaugh said this is not so. "It is the *melting pot* principle that did it." Yes indeed, people came here from all over the world, but when they arrived they strove with all of their being to become American. They made the American way *their* way. They strove for oneness with the system. They didn't remain separate from it, isolating themselves in their own little nationality ghetto, never to come out. God shows the same principle many, many ways.

Now listen to this. This is just touching on the very surface. God commanded the priests to wear *one* and *only* one kind of uniform when they were serving. There was only *one* Old Covenant, made with only *one* nation descended from *one* man and *one* woman—Abraham and Sarah. The coals from the *one* incense altar came from the brazen altar only. There was only *one* brazen altar located in *one* tabernacle, or temple. There was only *one* place of worship, *one* place for feasts. The high priest had only *one* uniform.

Only certain animals were acceptable for offerings. There was to be absolutely no variation from the ceremonies. The priests came from *one* tribe. The high priest came from *one* man—Aaron. The king came from *one* man—David. There is only *one* set of commandments. Brethren, I have only touched the *beginning* of the oneness that God shows. I've been thinking of a sermon for the Feast of Tabernacles on this oneness that I think is awesome in connection to you and me.

Let's consider more of the warnings and admonishments to *oneness* with His way.

Deuteronomy 12:29-32 When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you, whither you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land: Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you: and that you enquiry not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates, have they done unto their gods: for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

This one is specifically aimed at Israel's proclivity to look into many foreign religions. "Curiosity killed the cat." There is a lesson in that. Now did Israel follow this warning? Did they seek out other religions than His? You know the answer to that.

Deuteronomy 23:6 You shall *not* seek their peace nor their prosperity

all your days forever.

This statement also appears in Ezra 9:12, and it is an early version of "Come out of her, My people," only here God is telling them to avoid something. God is telling Israel that they are to keep themselves so separate that they are not to even make peace treaties with the other nations. "You shall not seek their peace."

But brethren, Israel is spreading its whoredom, its idolatry everywhere—things that she has picked up from the foreigners, and now we are giving things to make peace with them, to persuade *them* to *do* as we do. We are buying our adulterers.

Nehemiah 9:13-14 You came down also upon mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And made known unto them *Your* holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes, and laws by the hand of Moses your servant.

I think that you understand the context. Nehemiah had returned to where the people were who were liberated from the captivity in Babylon. He is now giving them a little bit of a run-down of their history, and what occurred that got them into the captivity in the first place. He is reminding them that God showed them *one* way to live.

Nehemiah 9:15-17 And gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, and brought forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, ...[He not only provided them with laws, He provided them with daily sustenance.] ...and promised them that they should go into possess the land which you had sworn to give them. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to your commandments, And refused to obey, neither were mindful of your wonders that you did among them; but hardened their necks, and in their *rebellion* appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but you are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsook them not.

What we see here in Nehemiah's prayer to God is a legal description of what literally happened in real life and in real times. He uses an economy of words. There are many things he could have gone into in great and specific detail, but he gives us an overview of how they turned away from the *one* way that God showed to them.

This is what *we* have done. By "we" I mean Israel. This is what Israel has given the world to drink, influencing them through the power of our example, because we have had the wealth to enable us to provide it for them to consume into their minds, and thus they desire too to emulate us in our gross idolatry.

Now the sexual designation of what is written of her sin is used because sexual sins are the

most common and the most disgusting way that unfaithfulness in marriage is shown to the public. It is something that everybody can relate to. However, the real spiritual sin behind all of these sexual terms is gross idolatry—idolatry on a massive nationwide scale of people who should have known better. Israel simply did whatever it wanted to do, *when* it wanted to do it, and in the *manner* that it wanted. The harlotry inferred is clearly the breaking of the terms of the marriage covenant. The harlotry *is* unfaithfulness, disloyalty. It is spiritual in nature. It is primarily idolatry, but all other sins are encompassed within that term "idolatry."

If we would go through the book of Amos chapter by chapter, we would see these things put in specific detail, that Israel was unfaithful in conducting business, both domestically and internationally. Israel was *unfaithful* in managing God's great green earth, and *unfaithful* in forgetting who their great blessings came from, and *unfaithful* in the way they treated one another in their personal marriages and in their community relationships.

We're going to take a look at an event that clearly shows Israel's powerful and seemingly irresistible *bent* to be just like everyone else, and contrarily throw out the things that made her different, peculiar, and I might add "holy." We're going to go to I Samuel 8: 7-8.

I Samuel 8:7-9 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto 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 unto this day*, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto you. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

I think that we all know that shortly after the marriage, which took place on Mount Sinai, that even while they were yet in the wilderness, Israel was already deviating from faithfulness. But recorded here is an especially significant event following the marriage, and in it Israel formally rejected God as her ruler, thus taking a major step to being a worldly nation. This occurred somewhere between 1100 B.C. and 1000 B.C., or roughly about 350 years after the making of the covenant. Except for brief periods when Israel had a judge or a king who did right in the eyes of God, the spiritual harlotry continued unabated, as God testifies right there, until God divorced her and sent Israel and Judah into captivity.

The truly important part of this I think is largely glossed over as we read through this, but I think it helps to point out the real problem in Israel's relationship with God. Having a king is not the real issue here, because God had already anticipated Israel having a king. Every organization needs or requires a leader. What he is called—what his title is, whether it be judge or king—is of virtually no importance.

I want you to go back with me to Genesis 17: 7. Notice this. God is making a promise to Abraham.

Genesis 17:6 And I will make you exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you.

God had already planned that there be kings. Now just in case you think that possibly God was not referring to the Israelites, I want you to turn with me to Deuteronomy 17. This is aimed right at Israel.

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 When you are come unto the land which the LORD your God gives you, and shall possess it, and shall dwell therein, and shall say, I will set a king over me like as all the nations that are about me; You shall in any wise set him king over you whom the LORD your God shall choose: one from among your brethren shall you set king over you: you may not set a stranger over you which is not your brother. But he 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 has said unto you, You shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sits 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: 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. 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.

It just dawned on me as I was reading through those verses where it says, "You shall not make a stranger king over you," that just this last week or so Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah proposed that we make a change in the Constitution of the United States that will *permit* a non-American to be president of the United States. "Hail Schwarzenegger!" The president is supposed to be native-born, but it shows the drift that is in Israelitish thinking, and we are repeating the same kind of errors and mistakes that our forefathers did whether in the wilderness or after they came out of the wilderness.

God was planning that Israel would have a king, so He laid down these regulations that are in Deuteronomy 17 so as to show how He expected that the king should conduct himself within the office. These regulations are designed to ensure that the king does not overly elevate himself above the people and rule as an autocratic despot; rather he is to be thoroughly familiar with and guided by the attitudes and laws of God. He must comprehensively know that his own nature is just like those he serves, and be humbled.

But the key to understanding the significance of what Israel has done here in I Samuel 8 is that

they wanted a king *just like the other nations*; not that they should merely have a king, but the king had to be just like the other nations' kings were; not the way God detailed them in Deuteronomy 7, but an autocratic despotic king like Babylon, or Assyria, or Egypt, or whatever. They thought with man like that in control, everything would be great. That is why God had Samuel spell out what was going to happen as a result of having a king like that, and the sum and substance of it is, he's going to enslave you. What this of course does is confirm Israel's whorish behavior. They wanted to do things just like all the other nations, even to the point of having a ruler like them.

This occasion here in I Samuel 8 is on Israel's part a complete rejection of her marriage vow. She wants her benefactor and husband—God—to have no say in her life. She was going to be in control (she thought), and thus she has declared herself "free" of Him, and is completely and totally a nation of this world and no longer *the* type of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Mr. Armstrong had a wonderful gift. He seemed to be able to cut through a seeming jungle of confusing information and to penetrate right to the heart of a matter. He wrote and spoke in simple terminology, and thus *the learned* of the land tended to minimize or outright reject what he said. It wasn't academic enough for them.

But Herbert Armstrong said that the issue between God and man is simply a matter of government. Now the issue is primarily a matter of sovereignty and providence. This is shown no later than Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve rejected God's rule over them, and chose Satan.

Once God reveals Himself through His calling, this issue of government clearly comes to the fore in our life, and thus it is what we are confronting in decision making. As the Bible has recorded in great detail, mankind has shown that it wants to retain this authority to itself. But the naked truth is that we cannot retain sovereignty to ourselves and still have what God is offering in the way of entrance into the spiritual Kingdom of God. We cannot have it both ways. Either we will be submissive to God and His will, or we will be submissive to our own fickle drive.

It's taken me a long period of time to understand what Herbert Armstrong was getting at when his jowls shook, and he said, "You people just don't get it!" It's a simple thing. It's a matter of government. Who is going to rule? God, or us? It's that simple. Israel rejected God's rule. God makes that very plain. Now will we? That is the issue.

Turn with me to another familiar scripture in Romans 8: 7.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The core of life for us is government. The issue is who we will allow to govern us. We can govern ourselves in deciding to kill, commit adultery, steal, or lie; that is, break the commandments, or we can submit to God who says "No" to everyone of these things. The decision as to what morality is, has already been decided by God. Our only decision is *whether* we will submit to what He says to do.

Earlier we read from Psalm 11. Dwight Armstrong translated one line in the hymnal, which incidentally I believe is also number 11 in the hymnal. "His eyes behold the children of men,

testing and proving the upright in heart." Now what is He testing? He is testing our loyalty. He is testing our faithfulness to Him. He is testing whether we will keep the covenant in a wide variety of situations. Now Israel failed when He tested them.

Doesn't it seem as though these tests never come at a convenient time? Don't they always seem to hit when we're in some kind of a bind or other, and the making of a choice or choices seems all the more difficult? But who comes first in our life? God, or ourselves? God, or our nature, or our flesh?

What are we to do when the issue is whether to break the Sabbath by working, or keep it by refusing? What are we to do when we are in a financial bind, and in debt? Should we submit to God and pay His tithes first? Will God be trusted to provide our needs in a tight financial situation even though we tithe? What are we to do when we desire to cover ourselves, or brag, or lie, or tell the truth? What should we do when we are sexually enticed? Flee, or commit adultery or fornication? What are we to do ~~any~~ in any case when submitting and the glorification of God is the issue?

Should we expect God to bless us when we choose to take sovereignty and control (we think) to ourselves? When we take sovereignty to ourselves, that is when we introduce idolatry into the mix of the relationship. Once we are no longer ignorant of the choices before us, and choose to take sovereignty to ourselves, sin becomes exceedingly more serious in its consequences, and we become the idol, because that is who it is we are serving.

Paul tells us what to do, in simple terminology in Romans 12: 1-2.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable [spiritual] service. And be not conformed to this world: [lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life] but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This Israel would not do. I am not in any way intimating that this is easy to be a living sacrifice. If it were, there would be no test. It has to be this way, because if there is no test, there is no evaluation, and if there is no evaluation, neither God nor we know where we stand.

Let's go back again to the Old Testament to Deuteronomy 8: 2-3. Let's really pay attention to this.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 And you shall *remember* all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not [or had no experience with], neither did your fathers know; that he

might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live.

God deliberately made difficulties for them to face. This is why the test never comes at convenient times. The more difficult choices seem to come in times of hardship, and then our loyalty is really in question, and then it is much easier to serve ourselves, but God wants us to sacrifice ourselves instead.

A portion of Psalm 53 also appears in the hymnal, and Dwight Armstrong translates one line of that Psalm in this manner: "God did from heaven look down upon the sons of men abroad, to see if anyone were wise, any seeking after God."

Here brethren is an overall solution to this unbelieving, stubborn, and debilitating proclivity toward fickleness that draws us right into the maelstrom of Babylon, seeking its brand of fulfillment.

Isaiah 55:1-3 Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that has no money; come you, buy, and eat: yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfies not? [Think of this in terms of Babylon. Think of this in terms of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.] Hearken diligently unto me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul [or your life] delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

Isaiah 55:6-7 Seek you the LORD while he may be found, call you upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

This section is written to those who had been with God, as it were, and they backslid to a way that will not satisfy, and He is calling them back, to seek Him out to a way that *will* satisfy. You can tell by the very wording that Israel did exactly what He didn't want them to do. They sought satisfaction and fulfillment in the world in things that do not satisfy. They believed the world's word, and practiced *asthey* did, thus rejecting God and His word.

Amos 5:4-5 For thus says the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek you me, and you shall live: But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought.

These were cities that were famous in Israel as being centers of religion, but they weren't God's religion. They were foreign religion, pagan religion. They were also cities that were famous in regard to being places that were associated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Amos 5:6 Seek the LORD, and you shall live: lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel.

That is real pointed and personal to you and me when He aims this right at the house of Joseph. That's us.

Amos 5:7 You who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth.

Amos 5:14-15 Seek good, and not evil, that you may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts shall be with you, as you have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

Brethren, the issues are very clear.

We're going to go back to the New Testament for a final series of verses—very sobering verses, especially when we consider what we began the sermon with there in Hebrews 3, and how that is addressed to Christ's house, which we are. Paul writes some of the most thunderous sobering words in all of the Bible in the book of Hebrews. Some of them are in chapter 10, and this one here in chapter 12.

Hebrews 12:22-29 But you are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you refuse not him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, what more shall we not escape if turn away from him that speaks from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth, but now he has promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken shall remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

Do we believe God? That is the issue. Who are we going to allow to be sovereign? Do we believe that He is involved in our life, and that He truly loves us? Are we willing to discipline ourselves, and sacrifice, thus seemingly bring some measure of discomfort upon ourselves in order to be faithful? Fulfillment is not generated in variety. It is generated in oneness with God through His way.

I know that my judgment is not even one tenth of one percent of what God is, and yet, even with my very limited grasp of things, I see sadly a great deal of disbelief, generated by fear, that He really doesn't love us and will not provide.

Brethren, let us not fail where and as Israel did. Believe God. He is working in us, and He is keeping account.