

Rise and Fall of Nations

It seems to me that America, the nation so obviously blessed by God over the last two centuries, is on the brink of or even actually already begun to experience drastic and severe change, and I'm not talking about for the good. And this change is actually occurring simultaneously in multiple areas of American life. We are on the verge of national economic collapse, precariously close to war with Iran, experiencing the greatest intrusion of our own government into American life in all of our history (American Revolution was about the excessive intrusion of British government into American life), hated by a major portion of the world population, and most importantly biblical morality, the standard by which our founding fathers established laws and policies for well over two centuries, is struggling to maintain a majority influence. We may have finally come up with a way to deal with illegal immigration that no administration has had the wisdom or tenacity to deal with. People may no longer want to come to the land of opportunity because the opportunities are diminishing at an alarming rate.

I'm not a dooms day purveyor. I still love my country. I love this land, the people and most of all the God who ultimately gave all this to us. We are still, at least three weeks ago when I began preparing this message, the most wealthy, strongest militarily, most generous, and the most powerful nation on the earth, but that status is fading. If we continue in the direction we're headed, especially in the realm of forsaking God and His standards for life, marriage and government, I'm afraid we may experience what Israel and other nations experienced throughout the bible and human history-God's judgment.

In this series of messages we are going to look at the times in Israel's history when they experienced the greatest blessings and protection of God and the times when God's judgment was the heaviest and most severe. We're going to try to look at how much responsibility can be placed on both the people and leaders during these times of great prosperity as well as judgment. And finally, we will determine the relevance to our nation as we face major decisions in our struggling democracy.

10 The LORD frustrates the counsel of the nations; He thwarts the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation. ¹² Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD—the people He has chosen to be His own possession! ¹³ The LORD looks down from heaven; He observes everyone. ¹⁴ He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth from His dwelling place. ¹⁵ He alone crafts their hearts; He considers all their works. ¹⁶ A king is not saved by a large army; a warrior will not be delivered by great strength. ¹⁷ The horse is a false hope for safety; it provides no escape by its great power. ¹⁸ Now the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him— those who depend on His faithful love ¹⁹ to deliver them from death and to keep them alive in famine. ²⁰ We wait for the LORD; He is our help and shield. ²¹ For our hearts rejoice in Him, because we trust in His holy name. ²² May Your faithful love rest on us, LORD, for we put our hope in You. **P**salms 33:10-22 (HCSB)

May the name of God be praised forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. ²¹ He changes the times and seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings. **D**an 2:20-21 (HCSB)

It is interesting to note that, up until the time of Samuel, Israel had a very unique form of government. There was no need for a

legislative branch for God had already written all the laws. There was no president, king, or executive branch because God was king of His people. The closest thing to our modern form of government possibly was the judiciary. From Moses through the times of the judges human beings served to settle disputes, legal matters between fellow Israelites. The main thing God-appointed leaders like Moses, Joshua, and Gideon did was “provide for the common defense.”

In the biblical, God-established form of Israeli government, we can easily see that a small, non-intrusive, central government was the norm and that was putting it mildly. The closest thing to a central government existed in the form of national defense. Was this unique to that time and place and not to be considered at any other time or place?

1 Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God. **2** So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God’s command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do good and you will have its approval. **4** For government is God’s servant to you for good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. **Romans 13:1-4 (HCSB)**

It is quite clear even after the rise and fall of Israel, Babylon, Medo-Persia, the Greek empire, and the reigning Romans in the time of Christ and the early church that God’s purposes for government had not changed. God ordained, and still does,

government to protect its citizens and punish those, individuals and nations, who would do harm and not a whole lot else.

This form of limited central government is what our founding fathers had in mind, which makes sense, because they were almost entirely bible-believing, committed Christians. That our nation would be led by a small, limited power form of central government focused primarily on the protection of its citizens from evil both within and without was reaffirmed by Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address.....

“We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Would you agree that we have come loose from the biblical moorings our founding fathers intended? What might we learn from studying Israel’s past that would help us discern God’s will regarding the upcoming elections and America’s future? Would not those who carefully crafted the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution be appalled at the enormity and intrusion of our current form of government?Let’s look back now at some things that took place in Israel’s early system of government and consider its implications for us today....

As Samuel began to grow old, he had appointed his sons to serve as judges over Israel. They didn’t have the integrity of their father. They took bribes and perverted justice. The elders went to Samuel and asked for a king. Samuel got upset so he prayed. God said, “they have rejected me as their king.” God also said, give them what they want but warn them of the rights

of kings. Samuel told the people that a king could take their children and force them to serve in the army, his fields, or his house or the homes of his leaders. He could take their property, crops and flocks.

18 When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you've chosen for yourselves, but the LORD won't answer you on that day." **19** The people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We must have a king over us. **20** Then we'll be like all the other nations: our king will judge us, go out before us, and fight our battles." **1** Sam 8:18-20 (HCSB)

The Lord told Samuel to appoint a king.

Lessons:

Upset? Pray!

Be careful what you ask for.

Don't reject God as King. Wanting to be like other nations is not necessarily good.

So Samuel was led by God to Saul who was anointed king, the first king, of Israel. In spite of Israel's rebellion in the matter, **God blessed Saul and the people he led.**

1 Nahash the Ammonite came up and laid siege to Jabesh-gilead. All the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you." **2** Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I'll make one with you on this condition: that I gouge out everyone's right eye and humiliate all Israel." **3** "Don't do anything to us for seven days," the elders of Jabesh said to him,

“and let us send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. If no one saves us, we will surrender to you.”⁴ When the messengers came to Gibeah, Saul’s [hometown], and told the terms to the people, all wept aloud.⁵ Just then Saul was coming in from the field behind his oxen. “What’s the matter with the people? Why are they weeping?” Saul inquired, and they repeated to him the words of the men from Jabesh.⁶ When Saul heard these words, the Spirit of God suddenly took control of him, and his anger burned furiously. **1** Sam 11:1-6 (HCSB)

Saul assembled a massive army of 330,000 and profoundly defeated the Ammonites..... Some time later, after many victories against Israel’s enemies, walking in obedience to God and experiencing His blessings..... Saul had experienced a decisive victory against the Amalekites. After the battle-

Saul disobeyed God.

17 Samuel continued, “Although you once considered yourself unimportant, have you not become the leader of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel¹⁸ and then sent you on a mission and said: ‘Go and completely destroy the sinful Amalekites. Fight against them until you have annihilated them.’¹⁹ So why didn’t you obey the LORD? Why did you rush on the plunder and do what was evil in the LORD’s sight?”²⁰ “But I did obey the LORD!” Saul answered. “I went on the mission the LORD gave me: I brought back Agag, king of Amalek, and I completely destroyed the Amalekites.²¹ The troops took sheep and cattle from the plunder—the best of what was set apart for destruction—to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”²² Then Samuel said: Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD?

Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention [is better] than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king. **1**
Sam 15:17-23 (HCSB)

Saul and Israel are judged.

1 The Philistines fought against Israel, and Israel's men fled from them. Many were killed on Mount Gilboa. ² The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons and killed his sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua. ³ When the battle intensified against Saul, the archers caught up with him and severely wounded him. **1**
Sam 31:1-3 (HCSB) Saul killed himself. The army fled. The Israelites fled their cities. The Philistines occupied them.

Saul's journey:

Saul was blessed. Even though he was chosen to be king out of Israel's rebellion against God as their king, God blessed Saul and granted him victory over Israel's enemies, peace and prosperity

Saul disobeyed God. Everything seemed to go perfectly well for him until this seemingly insignificant obedience not destroying everything.

Saul's life tragically turned. An angry evil spirit, paranoia, jealousy, loss of God's presence and anointing, desperately sought a witch, tragic death.....

God's judgment came. Israel was defeated and overrun by the Philistines. They Philistines occupied Israeli lands. Saul and his

sons were killed. And this wasn't because of poor foreign or economic policy. It was because Saul disobeyed God in one clear, seemingly relatively small command.

What is the **main point** (only point) from the story of Saul's life for us today? **One act of defiance, of disobedience to God's clear command caused the entire nation of Israel to suffer.** Saul's entire life turned from that of peace, fame, prosperity, victory, power and most of all the protection and blessings of God to evil, hatred, division, violence, humiliation, shame, confusion, defeat and death. And this didn't just affect Saul, it affected his family, all relationships, and ultimately the whole nation.

When a national leader defies God it affects the whole nation in natural and supernatural ways. God is still God. He still judges nations and their leaders. Leaders of our government, local, state, and national are being judged by God. No doubt. It's just a matter of how and when.

We have the unique opportunity and responsibility before God to choose who our leaders are and will be. We get to vote. But I'm afraid that we who are devoted followers of Christ may be too concerned about things that don't really matter that much to God and we are not concerned enough with what really matters to God. What matters most to God about America? Leaders- Integrity, obedience, faithful, acknowledge and believe Him Nation- abortion, deterioration of biblical morality (biblical marriage), forsaking of His name, commands, purposes of God from the public square.....

In any election cycle, we must choose between the lesser of two evils. No one is perfect. But, there is always clearly one who is more in line with God's purposes than the other. (Remember God spoke once through a donkey) Do you want God to bless America. Choose leaders at all levels of government, based on the greatest evidence of submission to God's purposes.