

# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Anatomy of Rebellion, Part 4

### The Fall of Israel at Ai

Things are not always as they seem. Recall, the history of God's people. Remember, the forty year wilderness wandering. Moses passed the baton to Joshua who then led God's people across the river Jordan. Then the men were circumcised before they spent seven days marching around Jericho. The walls fell down in a decisive victory in the Promised Land.

God's people then turned their focus to Ai after having thoroughly defeating Jericho. They saw that Ai was such a small city, so they sent a very small contingency to conquer the city.<sup>1</sup> No doubt the Israelites expected that they would return before nightfall.

Well this was not the case. The "small contingency" was routed.<sup>2</sup> And the hearts of the people melted.

Now, how was it that Israel was able to conquer the fortified city of Jericho with barely lifting a sword? But then when it came to the insignificant city of Ai, God's people were soundly defeated?

The answer is found in Joshua 7.

Joshua 7:10-11, "And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff."

It seems that during the conquest of Jericho, Achan violated the command of the Lord and took for himself that which alone belonged to God. The root cause of Israel's defeat at Ai was Achan's sin.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen the anatomy of rebellion or apostasy typically begins with an excuse. It almost always is reinforced by the opinions of others. It is driven by a passion or love for this world. And the servant of the God mis-takes or misunderstands the reasons behind the apostasy.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Joshua 7:2-4

<sup>2</sup> Compare Joshua 7:5

<sup>3</sup> Compare also Deuteronomy 7

## Rooted in Rejection of God

While all of this is fine and dandy, we still haven't gotten to the root of the problem, the lust which fuels all rebellion. And what is that lust... that Root Cause? The desire to cast off God and go it alone!

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

The rebellion of Israel here is rooted in a passion to reject God. And that is the core of all rebellion, the desire to cast off God.

What specifically is implied by God's statement here that Israel had rejected Him? And what about God is the rebel fleeing from?

## Rejection of God's Authority

All rebellion involves the rejection of the authority or sovereignty of God.

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

This is the essence of all rebellion; so don't miss it. When the people of God here requested a "king like the nations," they were not rebelling against God as a cosmic servant who lived for the happiness of man. They were not rejecting the thought of a loving and all-gracious deity who couldn't stand the thought of an existence without man. Neither were they rejecting the source of all life by which we live, move, and have our being. NO! They specifically were rebelling against His sovereignty, His authority as King!

The regency of God implies a relationship with man by which we are His subjects, committed to His rule, subservient to His desires, and expendable when it comes to His cause. God's regency means that

- He is judge.
- He is Lord and so calls the shots.
- His will is paramount and not our own.

Accordingly if the purpose of God is furthered by our suffering, sacrifice, or loss, so be it! We can neither complain nor regret it. In this regard, I am reminded of Alexander the Great.

## Alexander the Great

There was a time in Alexander's conquest of the world when he came upon a city which had been built on a hill. He could have laid siege to the city and waited it out, but that would have taken too long. Tradition tells us that Alexander assembled his troops on a cliff opposite the city. On command, a soldier began marching toward the edge of the cliff. In horror the city watched as man after man marched off the cliff to their death. Needless to say the city surrendered.

Why?

The city father's reasoned that they could not withstand a king whose subjects so willingly gave their lives to his cause.

This and much more is what is involved in serving a king. This and much more is what is required of all would-be-servants of King Jesus!

Now regardless of what you might think about this, the people of God in our passage are described as ones who rebelled against this aspect of God's authority.

- They no longer wanted to be expendable to God.
- They were tired of serving His will.
- They beheld life in the secular nations around them and concluded that a Philistine/Amorite/Hittite citizen had it better than a servant of God.

So they rebelled specifically against the Sovereignty/Regency of God. They deliberately and specifically cast off God as their King!

## Rejection of His Covenant

And yet that's not all. Verse 8 tells us two other elements when it came to the people's rebellion against God. The first of these is a rejection of His covenant.

1 Samuel 8:8, "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, **wherewith they have forsaken<sup>4</sup> me**, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee."

The second action ascribed here to the people is that of "forsaking God" which has a peculiar nuance. The basic meaning of this term is clearly seen in its literal use where it has three distinct emphases: "to depart," "to abandon," or "to loose." When used in relation to God, the nuance is that of apostasy or a falling away from God.

Now when this is the meaning, which clearly is the case here, the primary emphasis is that of a falling away or the loosing of one's self from **THE OBLIGATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE COVENANT**.

Deuteronomy 31:16, "And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them."

Any time we read of Israel forsaking God the concept of His covenant is not far away. One cannot forsake God without forsaking His covenant. After Elijah fled from Jezebel, God inquired as to why he fled.

1 Kings 19:10, "And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

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<sup>4</sup> עָזַב 'azab

Do you see it?

When Israel played the harlot and served other gods, they first abandoned or loosed themselves from the covenant of God! This was the love-bond that existed between them and the Lord, the relationship whereby they were God's people and Yahweh was their God! To the rebellious people of God who had become like lo-ammi, not my people, this is what God promised.

Hosea 4:9-10, "And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings. For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to<sup>5</sup> [literally, forsaken] take heed to [literally, forsaken] the LORD."

Do you see it?

The concept of forsaking God is closely related to a lover forsaking his bride.

This is what "forsaking the Lord" is all about. When we rebel against God, in essence we are suing for divorce and so abandoning the love-relationship that God initiated way back in Genesis 3. "Forsaking the Lord" is the passion to be free from the obligations that accompany marriage, such as fidelity, commitment, allegiance, and love.

And such was the second characteristic of the people's rebellion in our passage. NOT ONLY did they long to cast off the Sovereign claim that God had over them as their King BUT they also wanted to be free from His covenant whereby they were obligated to fellowship and serve God alone.

## Rejection of His Service

And yet we still are not done. Notice a third element to the people's rebellion is a rejection of His service.

1 Samuel 8:8, "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, **and served<sup>6</sup> other gods**, so do they also unto thee."

This is the flip side of "forsaking." When a person forsakes their covenant obligations in the context of marriage, the net result is adultery.

Well so was the desire and activity here. God's people not only wanted to cast off the religion of Yahweh, which included His sovereign protection and covenant love, but more fundamentally, they wanted the freedom to "serve" or worship (which is the idea behind serve) other gods, gods which had captivated them.

See God's people weren't blind. They clearly watched with fascination how the Canaanite religion worked with its Ashtaroth and other cultic symbols. They also considered the Amorite religion and its devotion to Moloch. And no doubt the Philistine religion also was an object of fascination with Baal and Dagon.

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<sup>5</sup> עִזַּב 'azab

<sup>6</sup> עָבַד 'abad

Now, with each of these religions, in fact every religion outside of Israel at this time, the focus was on a subjective, emotional experiencing of the gods. The goal of these religions was not so much placating the deity, although that took place, but the experiencing of them. As such these were highly emotional, subjective, and transcendental religions which resulted in an ecstasy produced by some or all of the following: music, alcohol, drugs, sacrifice (be it animal or human), and sex.

In contrast there was Yahweh, a Being who did not call Israel to experience Him but to worship, love, fellowship, adore and serve Him. And this constituted a third part of their rejection of God. Israel abandoned the Lord that they might participate in a religion of fascination, entertainment, and fun.

With this we now see that which constituted the root of Israel's rebellion against God lay in the cross-hairs and so that against which they most repined was

- God's authority.
- His covenant.
- His service/worship.

We all want a god. But the god we want is one

- We can control and manage.
- Who serves us and our needs.
- Who requires/demands little if nothing at all, but gives so much back in return.

And that is why when it comes to rebellion, these are the three fronts in our battle against God!

Now, the questions that we must ask are these:

- Is that really all of us in Christ?
- We have beheld the content of Israel's rebellion against God- aren't we taking a leap when we universalize their lust by claiming that this is the root behind ALL Rebellion?

## **The Pervasiveness of the Rejection**

Notice with me the pervasiveness of their rejection.

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

With this statement we are informed that the rebellion as described in verses 7-8 was NOT simply germane to the Israelites in Samuel's day BUT that which characterized all of Israel's rebellion from Egypt on.<sup>7</sup>

What is described in our text is INDEED the root behind ALL of Israel's rebellion. In fact, it is the Root behind All Rebellion period! For you see, this was the central issue in the garden!

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<sup>7</sup> Compare also Psalm 106

## Genesis 3

Genesis 3:1-6, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

Here we read of the rebellion of mankind against God wherein, just like Israel in our passage, Adam and Eve opted to be emancipated from God's authority, His covenant and service. In fact, listen to my former professor and his explanation of the fall. It sounds very familiar to what took place in 1 Samuel 8.

“What precisely occurred in Genesis 3? In answer, our first parents permitted the serpent, through their embarrassment with God's authority over them, to challenge God's Word with an alternative interpretation of the tree. When the pair demonstrated their unwillingness to believe God on the basis of His bare claim of authority over them by remaining silent in the face of the serpent's lie, they, by that silence, permitted Satan to reduce the Word of God to a mere hypothesis- an hypothesis, it is true, of a 'religious expert,' but still and only an hypothesis, as seen by the fact that any and every position, unless it is received on sheer self-attesting authority, remains merely an hypothesis until its probability or improbability is tested by experimentation. This means, however, in a universe created by God that the center of authority, for man, shifted from another to himself. Man demanded that he become his own authority, that he determine for himself what is true and what is false. So our first parents, becoming the first 'scientist,' experimented, and we, their children, have wept ever since.”<sup>8</sup>

That which was behind the fall, the continual and constant rebellion of God's people during the time of the Exodus, the rejection of Samuel, and for that matter, ALL REBELLION is the rejection of God's sovereign authority for self-authority whereby the sinner opts for a life of independence from God to live and do as he pleases. W.S. Plumer put it this way:

“We never see sin aright until we see it as against God... All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His law that is broken, His authority that is despised, His government that is set at naught.”<sup>9</sup>

Any act of rebellion against God, no matter how slight, is done by a person who is seeking to cast off God as King that they themselves might live as a sovereign, independent god of their own making. That brothers and sisters, is the root of all rebellion!

Now as this is the root, I want you therefore to be ever mindful of what is at stake when you

- Willingly sin.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Raymond, *The Justification of Knowledge*, page 19

<sup>9</sup> This is as quoted by Jerry Bridges, [\*The Pursuit of Holiness\*](#), pages 20-21

- Rebel against God.
- Know His commandments and yet choose the path of disobedience.

## **Not a Benign Course**

First off, you must realize that you are not innocently choosing a benign course of action. Sin is a cancer which can do nothing but destroy. Take sin lightly, and it will not lightly take you. No! It will turn your joy into sorrow. It will rob you of your life and vitality. It will make you a prisoner of your base desires. It will transform your taste buds such that the good things of the Lord will seem bitter and sour. We see it in David.

Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.”

There is nothing benign about any sin that you may privately commit.

## **Cosmic Treason**

Having said this, notice what is behind every act of rebellion, realized or not. First to rebel against God is to cast off His Sovereign claims upon you. At the cross, the Lord did two of many things. He demonstrated His love and goodness whereby He delivered sinful/wicked/rebellious people through His own death. And He re-established His authority over life.

Philippians 2:9-11, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

As such when you willingly sin as a Christian you are challenging that authority. You are saying that

- God is NOT Lord.
- He doesn't call the shots.
- He does not have absolute claim over you.
- You are independent from Him and so able to choose what is best for you.

You are committing cosmic treason akin to the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the garden. You are exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for a passing pleasure.

## **Trampling the Covenant**

I hope this melts your heart! If it doesn't, consider further. When you and I rebel against God, we are trampling underfoot His covenant!

After the fall of man, the Lord entered into a love relationship with His people, a love relationship predicated upon Christ's life and death.<sup>10</sup> Through Christ's cross work we become the apple of God's eye. We are His beloved bride. We are His precious children to which He has committed His life in

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Genesis 3:15

order to protect, nourish, strengthen, purify, and established us. Now, everything that God ordains in this life is for our good!

Ah but when we sin, we cast off this covenant. Essentially we say this:

- My sin will give me far more than God ever could or has.
- This passing pleasure is more valuable to me than the blood of the covenant.
- Never mind the intimacy I enjoy with God, I am better off with my lovers.

This is the nature of rebellion. Recall the words of David, “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight” (Psalm 51:4).

## **Aiding Satan’s Cause**

And yet it goes beyond even this. When you and I purposely sin against God, we serve the enemy and so further his cause. Truly, behind every false god is Satan.<sup>11</sup>

In light of this, consider with me the regency of Satan. It flourishes in destruction and misery. It delights in rebellion. Its sovereignty is exercised in our fallenness and the corruption of the world.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, there is pleasure when man sins or suffers and fallenness ripens. When the original order of things is turned upside down men delight.

So let us count the cost. When we willingly sin we are casting our vote for the continuation of this state of sin. We continue to choose death over life. We endorse the misery of this world and all that this entails:

- Tragedy.
- Illness.
- Sickness.
- Disease.
- Loss.
- Suffering.
- Sadness.
- Death.

Oh what hypocrites are we. We weep by the grave. And then we return to our sin. We fail to realize this sin that we so easily shrug off, and all the misery of this life would not be upon us if Adam and Eve had never sinned!

This and nothing less is what is at stake when we willingly sin against God.

- The rejection of His authority.
- The trampling underfoot of His covenant.
- The furtherance of the enemy's cause.

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<sup>11</sup> Compare 1 Corinthians 10:20

<sup>12</sup> Compare Ephesians 2:2

## **Our Response**

So how ought we to respond? I know I am speaking to men and women this morning whose past week was filled with rebellion against Christ; so what ought you to do?

God gives us the answer in 1 Samuel 12. Here we read of Israel when they finally knew conviction.

1 Samuel 12:19-22, “And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.”

## **Confess and Repent**

From this we have our marching orders. We must confess and repent of our sin.

1 Samuel 12:19, “And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.”

The chief mark of a genuine child of God is not the lack of rebellion, but the presence of conviction, sorrow, and mourning on account of our sin. So do not be discouraged by your sin. Yes weep, mourn, lament, know the brokenness and sorrow of sin and confess it!

## **Serve God**

We must not fear God's wrath, but diligently labor to serve Him all the more.

1 Samuel 12:20, “And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.”

If God loved us when we were His enemies, don’t you suppose now that you have been made children of God that He will continue to love you?

In light of this grace, do not fear retribution or punishment; God is not against you on account of your sin. Rather, having confessed your sin now diligently serve Him.

## **Assurance of Love**

We must be assured of the grace, love, and goodness of God who will not abandoned His people.

1 Samuel 12:22, “For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.”

Did you get that?

Even when you are in the heat of your sin, the Lord still regards you as His child!

But you say, “What will happen if I sin again? What will God do if I once again purposely transgress His commands?”

Though we are faithless, God always will remain faithful. Accordingly, He will not abandon you, but will continue the work of sanctification whereby you someday will be presented to Him as a spotless bride!

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## **About the Preacher**

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