

POLITICIANS AND FALSE RELIGION

– *AUGUST 15. – 1 KINGS 12:25-33. –*

THE RELATIONSHIP OF POLITICS AND RELIGION – THE REVOLT OF THE TEN TRIBES A GREAT MISTAKE – JEROBOAM'S POLITICAL WISDOM – GOD'S DEALINGS WITH TYPICAL ISRAEL – THE JEWISH REMNANT IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH – THE DIVINE PLAN DID NOT FAIL – SPECIAL THOUGHTS FOR THE PEOPLE TODAY.

**"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image."
– Exodus 20:4,5.**

JEROBOAM was not a bad man in the sense of sympathizing with viciousness and crime, nor in the sense of wishing to bring his people into slavery. On the contrary, he was a man of courage and love of liberty, who desired to deliver his people from what he considered to be oppression in connection with the new king Rehoboam, Solomon's successor. Under his leadership, the ten tribes of Israel revolted from the House of David and established themselves as a separate kingdom, with the avowed object of being free from the oppressions of the kings.

In many respects this would seem to have been a noble procedure; but it was a great mistake, as is every move which ignores God and His arrangements. The Divine arrangement for the nation was that its affairs were all to be under God's care as God's kingdom, with the family of David as God's representatives. Under these conditions the religious interests had gradually gathered more and more about the vicinity of the Temple at Jerusalem. The more religious of the people liked to be near it,

especially as it was obligatory under the Law that they should go up there to worship at least once or twice a year.

Whatever were the good thoughts of Jeroboam respecting the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, he quickly manifested the spirit of a politician. He reasoned that the going of the people to Jerusalem to worship yearly would mean that sooner or later they would again be drawn back to the kings of the line of David; and that in order to preserve his own power he must break off the religious connections with Jerusalem by establishing a new religious cult.

Two golden calves were prepared, the one located in the northern part of the territory, and the other towards the southern part, that thus the people might have the general thought that worship and sacrifice could be performed at one place as well as at another. Moreover, he arranged for religious festivals, at times different by about a month from the times of celebrations at Jerusalem. This was skilful political wisdom of the kind which would appeal to the majority of rulers not deeply imbued with faith in God. Alas, it seems too true that much of the religion of the masses is but a form of godliness anyway! That King Jeroboam was not very different from the people whom he ruled is manifest by the fact that they readily fell in with his plan, and that it was successful.

WERE GOD'S PLANS DEFEATED?

Many might be inclined to say that God's plans were thus defeated by an ordinary man; but the Scriptures show us that the very opposite was the case – that God's plans were forwarded by this opposition of Jeroboam. Let us see what God's Plan is.

God accepted Israel as the typical people of His favor. He had made the Promise to Abraham that through his posterity ultimately all the world should be blessed, which **[R5732 : page 221]** implied

great exaltation to Abraham's posterity of the line of Isaac. Four hundred years elapsed before any movement was made in this direction. By that time Israel was numerous and in bondage in Egypt, and God sent word to them through Moses that if they were so minded He was ready to fulfil to them the Promise made to Abraham.

They rejoiced greatly and followed Moses to Mount Sinai, where the Lord entered into a covenant with them, that if they would keep His Law perfectly He would give them everlasting life and qualify them to be the Seed of Abraham who would inherit the promise of qualification for blessing the world. They entered the covenant, but like all imperfect men were unable to keep the Law – unworthy therefore of everlasting life, and of being the favored Seed of Abraham to bless others.

Later on, when they were discouraged, God promised to send them Messiah, whose Kingdom would bless them and afford them an opportunity of sharing in the Promise made to Abraham. God's dealings with Israel, therefore, were of a typical character. Their Atonement Day, their Law, their mediator, their sacrifices, all typified better sacrifices, etc., under a better Mediator, Christ. The entire dealing of God with Israel was with a view to raising them up out of their fallen condition to as high a standard as possible for them, that thus they might be prepared, when Messiah would come, to be associated with Him in His Kingdom, as His Bride class. Let us see how this fits in with God's dealings in this lesson:

The deflection of Jeroboam and the majority of the nation had the effect of separating from the ten tribes, and of driving into the territory of the two tribes, the most faithful and loyal of the Israelites. To these the idolatries established by Jeroboam were properly repulsive. They were willing to forsake their earthly interests. They refused the opportunities of the politician, remained loyal to God and His institutions, and were thus at a disadvantage.

This continued for years, until in God's providence the ten tribes went into captivity to Babylon, at which time more and more of the people gravitated towards the territory of Judah and Benjamin, known as the kingdom of Judah. Later on, God overthrew the kingdom of Judah, and allowed those people also to go into Babylonian captivity; but they preserved in large measure their religious sentiments and interests while in the land of Babylon.

THE RETURN FROM BABYLON

Later, when the Lord delivered the people from Babylon through the instrumentality of King Cyrus, matters had so changed that there were only a few who considered it advantageous to return to Palestine. The great mass of the ten-tribe kingdom had become thoroughly incorporated with the Gentiles, and no longer professed the religion of their fathers or had faith in the Promise made to Abraham. Many of the Judean captivity similarly lost faith and became Gentiles. As a matter of fact, only about 50,000 altogether returned to Palestine; and they represented the faithful, who trusted in God and sacrificed all Babylonian advantages and privileges, coming back to a desolate land and the city of Jerusalem.

These became the nucleus of a new people, who, in the days of Jesus, were in wonderful readiness for Him, as compared with the remainder of mankind. In a very few years approximately 25,000 accepted Christ, with a full consecration unto death, as His footstep followers. The remainder of the nation being then cast off from special favor, the door was opened to the Gentiles, that they might hear the Gospel Message and become fellow-heirs of the same Body, or company, with these 25,000 consecrated of Israel, representatives of all the tribes. If we lacked evidence of the value of the Divine dealing **[R5733 : page 221]** with the nation of Israel in preparing them to accept Messiah, we see it in the fact that so many were ready to receive Him in so comparatively short a time;

whereas it has required 1,800 years to gather from all the other nations of the world the remainder of the elect company, the total of which, according to the Scriptures, is 144,000.

Our lesson, thus seen, indicates no failure on God's part, but wisdom, in permitting the rebellion of Jeroboam and the ten tribes of Israel. Surely it will eventually be seen, as the Bible declares, that all of God's good purposes will be accomplished; and that the word which has gone forth out of His mouth shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleases and shall prosper in the thing whereunto He sent it. (Isaiah 55:10,11.) Soon the elect Church, the spiritual Seed of Abraham, will be completed; and then God's Promise to Abraham will begin to be fulfilled. (Galatians 3:8,16,29.) All the families of the earth will be blessed by the Kingdom of Christ and His Church.

"WAIT UPON THE LORD"

Modern Jeroboams may be found all along the paths of history – men who, under guise of respect for religion, are really politicians, seeking their own advantage, and willing to sell the people to any religious system which would work to their benefit. Every one familiar with history must realize that religion has been made a cloak for all kinds of political intrigue, and always, as in the case of Jeroboam, under pretense of giving the people greater liberties.

The special thought for the people today is the one which would have been the safe one for the ten tribes of old; namely, to wait for the Lord to overrule their affairs and to deliver them from the bondage of kings in His own way. This is the Lord's message to us now. God's people are forewarned not to use carnal weapons, and not to trust in such weapons in the hands of others. The trust of God's people is to be in God. They are to realize His faithfulness and the truth of His promises, which assure them that all things are

working together for good to them that love God, to the called according to His purpose. – Romans 8:28.

To these God is now saying, as in olden times, "Wait ye upon Me, until the time that I rise up to the prey; for My determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them Mine indignation, even all My fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy." This will not be literal fire devouring the literal earth, but a symbolic fire of trouble devouring the political, financial, social and religious structure of the world, and preparing them for the great blessings of Messiah's Kingdom. These are referred to in the next verse, in which the Lord declares, "Then [following the fire of trouble and national distress] I will turn to the people a pure Message, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent." – Zephaniah 3:8,9.

That pure Message is what the Bible elsewhere speaks of as the still small voice of God, which will be heard amongst the people during the thousand years of Messiah's Reign and which will effect their full deliverance from ignorance, superstition and sin back to harmony with God. And the Scriptures declare that whosoever of all mankind will not obey that voice of God through the great Messiah will be utterly destroyed from amongst the people. – Acts 3:19-23.

