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DISOBEDIENCE BRINGS DESTRUCTION

Have you notice how people seem determined to do the very things that hurt them? You probably know someone with high blood pressure whom they told that cut down on their salt intake and yet he or she ignores the warning. Excessive use of alcohol can produce liver malfunctions and create an addictive dependence on this dangerous chemical. We read about people who use cocaine with the result that their dreams fall apart as they spend their future on the present's passing pleasure. Jesus warned us that the devil came to steal, kill and destroy. The bent toward self destruction is indicative of a world that has not yet come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Because the nation of Israel did not submit itself to God and commit to following His ways, then it self-destructed. The nation first split and took on two separate governments. This division made them more vulnerable to outside enemies. Many people today are divided personalities. They are trying to live under two separate value systems. They think that it is possible to be friends with God, and at the same time, be friends with the world. We cannot embrace the world system of doing things and be submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We tolerate this tendency toward self-destruction in both the physical and spiritual parts of our lives because we do not see an immediate "cause and effect" relationship. It usually takes years for the permanent damage of alcohol abuse to show up. The effects of marijuana usage may not show up fully until the next generation. The ungodly lyrics of rock music may not surface in behavior aberrations until later in life. Entertaining lewd and impure thoughts may take years to surface simply because the opportunity to put such thoughts into practice may not present itself until later. It took two hundred years for the Northern Kingdom of Israel to see the full effect of ignoring God's warning against following other gods and adopting the ways of the heathen nations.

Even in the beginning of their nation as a separate state apart from Judah, they started in the wrong direction. To keep the people from returning to Jerusalem to worship God, their first king, Jeroboam, set up two separate places of worship in Israel. What might seem to have been a good thing (making worship more convenient) turned out to be terribly bad. To attract more people and perhaps to encourage those that had strayed into Baal worship, he combined elements of the local customs with worship of the Lord God. He made golden calves and had these erected in the temples! We consider this and think "how silly" to believe that people would fall for something like this. However, many churches have celebrations that are pagan in their origins. Halloween is one such example. The Celts believed that at this time of the year, Samhain, the lord of the dead, permitted the souls of the wicked to return to their earthly homes for a night of mischief. The Catholic church, in an attempt to make the heathen converts more comfortable, tried to combine that "celebration" of these people with a church activity of honoring all the past saints. It has been hundreds of years and the result is that the demons and witches get all the attention and most people do not even know that the day after Halloween is All Saints Day. The burning of the Yule Log and the Easter Egg are of similar origins. We, therefore, should not be too surprised that the people of Israel drifted away from God into heathen worship and practices.

Because the church has not taken a stand against such things and has literally ignored the reality of Satan, we have seen the rise of the occult and devil worship in the last several decades. We can lay part of the blame for this on the door step of the rock music culture that advocates worshipping Satan. We have heard warnings that this was happening and most people have dismissed the warnings and ridiculed the prophets who gave the warning. Israel did the same thing. The formal religious structure

was out of touch with God; however, God did send His prophets to warn the leaders and the people. The warnings did no good. They, as so many people today, would rather “do it their way” and die rather than surrender to God and find real life.

For Israel, stability deteriorated and toward the end, they had five kings in ten years. The last of the kings was Hoshea.

2 KINGS 17:1-6 Records of the Assyrians show that they took about 27,000 people of Israel captive. These were thought to be the leaders of the nation. The poor and ignorant were left in the land and they brought in foreigners to live in the area. These intermarried with the Hebrew people and their descendants were known as Samaritans. The Jews (the people of Judah) despised the Samaritans and this hatred was evident 700 years later during the time of Jesus.

2 KINGS 17:7-8 Secular history would say that the nation of Israel fell because the Assyrians were out for conquest of the area and they had superior military might. This is a true statement; however, it ignores the underlying cause which the Bible addresses. “The children of Israel had sinned against God . . . and had feared other gods . . . walked in the statutes of the heathen.”

2 KINGS 17:9-23 It is bad enough for a person to engage in pagan religious practice out of ignorance, engaging in practices that are deliberate acts of idol worship is even worse. The Israelites knew that burning incense to Baal and setting up altars to Asherah were acts of pagan worship. The fact they did these things “secretly” was a confession that they knew what they were doing. It was not something that just happened in the big cities but it was carried out in the remotest rural areas.

Such practices were not necessarily against their fellow man. They were against the Lord God. We may be great neighbors, law-abiding citizens and successful in business; but, still fail miserably in our relationship to God. We often neglect this spiritual aspect of life in our culture; however, our relationship with God is the foundation upon which every other facet of a truly successful life is built.

Apparently, recognizing messages from God is difficult for people. Surely, if we knew that a message was from God, then we would follow the instructions! The truth is, most of us obey God if it is convenient, if it doesn't cost us anything and if it is what we wanted to do anyway. Otherwise, we can get very stubborn or filled with excuses for not doing what God wants us to do. The person who cheats on his or her spouse knows what God wants and yet ignores it. The woman who has an abortion to end an inconvenient pregnancy knows she is taking a human life but does it anyway. As with the nation of Israel, people reject what the word of God says and pursue things that have no substance. The Bible says they followed vanity. We become like what we pursue. Those who pursue foolishness become foolish, those who pursue righteousness become righteous in their walk (1 John 3:7), and those who pursue vanity become vain.

God's people are repeatedly warned not to adopt the world's ways. We should have a mind set that we have no alternative except to do things God's way. When we adopt worldly ways in some areas of our lives, then we find we will be in constant debate about the remaining areas whether or not we will go the way of the world or the way of the Cross. Israel started with the two golden calves, moved to astrology (worshiped the hosts of heaven) and then move on to worship Baal. They eventually engaged in human sacrifice and adopted practices of witchcraft. All these are spiritual adultery. All were subjects of warnings from Moses regarding the consequences of such practices. The people must have thought that God would not do what He said He would do. We should pray that we do not make that same mistake, for we can know for sure that if God said it, then it will happen.