

2 CHRONICLES 11:13-17

MAKING THE PAGANS HAPPY (FOR A WHILE)

“The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to him from all places where they lived. For the Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the LORD, and he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat idols and for the calves that he had made. And those who had set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon.”¹

Spiritual leaders from the Northern Kingdom, together with many individuals who wanted to honour the Living God, immigrated to the Southern Kingdom. There, their presence “strengthened the kingdom of Judah.” I find it fascinating to note that the Word of God states that their exodus from Israel made Rehoboam “secure.” Emigration from the northern kingdom made the southern kingdom secure. I suppose it would have been easy to complain that this was a gentle revolution and that such an influx would threaten the culture. However, the Bible saw matters differently. It is essential that we recognise that this was not an invasion that would alter the culture of Judah; those moving into the kingdom would adopt the culture of their new nation rather than insisting that Judah adapt to them.

You may recall that Jeroboam had compromised the Faith and led the people into gross idolatry. It wasn't that he meant to dishonour God, but he couldn't trust God to secure his kingdom, so he took matters into his own hands and made representations of the God of Heaven so that people wouldn't seek God in His Temple in Jerusalem. The result was that Jeroboam so compromised the Faith that people of conscience could not tolerate what Israel had become.

However, let's go back to the beginning. God promoted Jeroboam to reign over the northern tribes, tearing those tribes from Solomon's son because of compromise, Jeroboam was not willing to trust God to keep him on the throne. The Word pointedly states that God exalted this man Jeroboam, elevating him to the throne of what would become the northern kingdom. We read the account in the First Book of the Kings. “Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the reason why he lifted up his hand against the king. Solomon built the Millo, and closed up the breach of the city of David his father. The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel)”’” [1 KINGS 11:26-32].

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Think this through, God chose Jeroboam and promoted him to a position of authority. God did this because of the sin of Solomon. In this same passage, we see God saying of Solomon and of what would become the land of Israel, “[Solomon has] forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son’s hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you” [1 KINGS 11:33-38].

Almost immediately after God had elevated him as King over Judah, Jeroboam departed from the path God had laid out before him. He wouldn’t trust God to keep him secure, though it was God who had given him the kingdom over which he now ruled. In the Word, we read, “Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.’ So, the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, ‘You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’ And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So, he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings” [1 KINGS 12:26-33].

Jeroboam chose to dishonour God, pursuing his own religion. What his actions brought about was an impact he had not anticipated. As result of Jeroboam’s choice, the Levites, God’s chosen servants for duties in the Temple, were presented with an unenviable choice—they could have a secure job in the new religion, or they could honour God. They could not do both! The text before us this day makes it apparent that at considerable cost to themselves and their families, the Levites—*en masse*— chose to honour the LORD God. They chose to leave their homes, leave the Levitical cities that God had given their families and immigrate to the Southern Kingdom; and all who longed to honour God followed these godly Levites in their migration.

The sudden influx of so many godly people strengthened Judah. The Bible says that immediately, Rehoboam was made secure through their exodus. This was because the newcomers chose God over comfort. You see, the presence of the godly is a threat to the wicked. It is not that the godly would ever attack the wicked, but the godly cannot simply “go along to get along.” The godly answer to God, and not to man. The godly are less concerned about the feelings of the wicked than they are concerned to honour Him who redeemed them.

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Reading the news and watching the trajectory of our culture can lead to discouragement. We may wonder if our lives are making any difference in God's Kingdom. Christian, know that God is using your faithfulness in ways you can neither imagine nor even measure. As Paul has noted, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" [GALATIANS 5:9]. Remember that Jesus identified Christians as "salt" and "light" [MATTHEW 5:13-16], either of which commodity possesses an influence completely out of proportion to its size. Never forget that Heaven's math is simple: **One + God = Majority**. The presence of even a few godly people ensures strength in the home, strength for a congregation, strength of a nation.

THE CHOICE NEVER CHANGES — "The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to [Rehoboam] from all places where they lived. For the Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the LORD" [2 CHRONICLES 11:13, 14]. Robert Zimmerman crooned an obvious (if ignored) truth when he sang, "You're gonna' have to serve somebody." Zimmerman, known as Bob Dylan, simplifies the choice that each person faces when he warbles, "It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna' have to serve somebody."

In the same way, each one who hears me this day must choose whom you will serve. Joshua challenged the nation he had led as they entered the Promised Land and throughout the early wars in that land, "If it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" [JOSHUA 24:15]. In the account recorded in our text for this day, the priests and the Levites living among the northern tribes chose to serve the Living God!

From the perspective of the Word of God, an individual has only two choices—either obey the LORD God or obey someone other than the Living God. You must never imagine that you can "follow your heart," since we are assured that,

"The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick."

[JEREMIAH 17:9]

However, in the view of many, the choice is not as simple as choosing between God and another. Many individuals feel they are being pulled simultaneously from multiple directions. Despite the ubiquitous assurance throughout the Word that God controls our destinies, it is common for far too many saints to live as though He doesn't know what is going on in our lives. Hence, they feel as if they are being pulled away from God, but they have convinced themselves that the ones pulling are so many that it is impossible to resist, that it is too difficult to honour the Lord. And I'll be the first to admit that the challenges facing individuals in this day can appear complex. My advice, however, is to stay focused on one thing—honouring the LORD.

Early in my service before the Lord, I laboured within a major denomination. At the time I was serving, titanic struggles for heart of the denomination were being waged. Though many of the men with whom I served were good, honourable men prepared to stand firm for the truth, a surprising number were vocal in seeing their service as a job. "If we split," was a common saying, "I go with the side that gets the Annuity Board." The majority of those engaged in that struggle voiced this particular view. That attitude disillusioned me then, and it disillusioned me to this day.

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What proved true of pastors, evangelists and denominational leaders, holds true for religious leaders in many communions to this day. The same truth holds true for individual Christians serving in local assemblies. Each individual has a choice to “go along to get along,” or to seek the mind of the Lord, courageously standing with Him. The very finest church will inevitably begin to drift after a time, as will the most stalwart Christian. The Spirit of God will be required to energise each succeeding generation, reviving each one in turn. Each generation is responsible to rouse itself, returning to the LORD God and seeking to discover His will. Likewise, each one who follows the Master must constantly seek Him and His will.

No generation can rest on the efforts of those who have gone before; no follower of the Master can rest on what has already taken place. No Christian can expect continued blessing because he or she has been blessed in the past. Each day you must seek Him; each day you must find His will for that particular day. The Master has instructed His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross *daily* and follow me” [LUKE 9:23]. There must be a conscious decision to refuse to serve “self” and a conscious decision to serve the Risen Saviour each day. It is a healthy practise to pray upon arising each day, asking the Master to take control of the day, guiding every decision and revealing His will in all things.

Though I alluded to events then taking place during the introductory remarks, let’s refresh our memories by going again to the Word of God to see how this situation developed. God had blessed Israel with two wise leaders—David, who was followed by his son, Solomon. Their reigns ensured greatness for the kingdom. The nation projected power and wealth, and the people enjoyed the richest of blessings. However, not everything was copacetic in the realm. One young man proved himself to be exceptionally able and industrious. Such ability does not escape the notice of those who reign, and Solomon learned of this young man, named Jeroboam. The king appointed him to be in charge over the forced labour of the house of Joseph.

One day, the Prophet Ahijah met Jeroboam outside of Jerusalem, and everything changed. This is the account provided in the Word of God. “Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and [Ahijah and Jeroboam] were alone in the open country. Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son’s hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.”’ Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon” [1 KINGS 11:29-40].

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After a reign of forty years, Solomon died. Rehoboam, his son, was elevated to the throne, and all Israel assembled at Shechem to make him king. Jeroboam was informed of this event, and he returned to Israel. He would lead the delegation of tribes assembled before Rehoboam. Tribal delegates asked the newly crowned king to lighten the service requirements and the burden of taxes, which he promised to consider.

Rehoboam sought the counsel of those who advised him. This is how that went down. “King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, ‘How do you advise me to answer this people?’ And they said to him, ‘If you will be good to this people and please them and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.’ But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. And he said to them, ‘What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, “Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?”’ And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, ‘Thus shall you speak to the people who said to you, “Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us;” thus shall you say to them, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”’

“So, Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, ‘Come to me again the third day.’ And the king answered them harshly; and forsaking the counsel of the old men, King Rehoboam spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, ‘My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’ So, the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by God that the LORD might fulfill his word, which he spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat” [2 CHRONICLES 10:6-15].

No one should be surprised that the people were less than ecstatic with this arrogance. Therefore, the people were enraged and reacted strongly in defiance, “What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each of you to your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David” [2 CHRONICLES 10:16]. This was the start of the division of the Kingdom. A brief civil war would follow, but the nation would ever after be divided.

God had promised Jeroboam, “If you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you” [1 KINGS 11:38]. However, as is too often the case for those elevated to leadership, Jeroboam could not trust God; he felt he had to do something to make himself secure. The power and the position became more important than obedience.

One of the dark passages of the Word records the first steps away from God and toward man’s exaltation for Israel. We read in the Word of God, “Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.’ So, the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, ‘You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’ And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan” [1 KINGS 12:26-29]. Jeroboam could trust God to give him a kingdom, but he couldn’t trust God to keep the kingdom. It is a story as old as sin itself. God blesses a man, but the man can’t trust God to continue blessing. God blesses a nation, but the nation ceases to trust that God will continue to bless the nation.

If this wasn't sinful enough, Jeroboam compounded his sin by making an entirely new religion. "[The golden calves Jeroboam made] became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So, he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings" [1 KINGS 12:30-33].

Jeroboam created a religion. The situation has similarities with the conflict of Henry VIII in his rebellion against the papacy resulting in founding the Anglican Church. Perhaps this strange new religion could be seen as similar to the synthesis of a new cult growing out of Adventism when David Koresh formed the Branch Davidians. Jeroboam's new religion was similar to worship of the Living God that had thrived under David and Solomon, but it was a rebellious cult. It was an apostate religion, heretical and false in every respect. Though his kingdom would bear the name God had given to His people, it could not lay claim to divine blessing. This apostate religion was a creation of government and not designed by God.

GOVERNMENTAL MALFEASANCE — "Jeroboam and his sons ... appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat idols and for the calves that he had made" [2 CHRONICLES 11:15]. It is always a source of disillusionment and sorrow to observe politicians using the churches for their own tawdry ends. It is as though they are attempting to reduce the Holy Bride of Christ to a sleazy tramp. It is even more discouraging to see churches eagerly permit this to take place. Don't say you would never be seduced in this way; political power is well-nigh irresistible, seemingly sweeping aside all religious objections in its path.

At one time or another, each of us has no doubt seen pictures of politicians visiting churches in their quest for votes. Politicians are willing to tolerate a religious service in order to demonstrate to adherents of a particular religion that they are a friend of religion. While few politicians are willing to admit to being atheists, few are known to be vibrant followers of Christ. Visiting an assembly, the politician can be seen swaying and clapping (if somewhat awkwardly) to the rhythms of the music and lifting hands as though worshipping the High God of Heaven. Those same politicians, once elected, will ignore every act of righteousness in order to push legislation that allows for the slaughter of the unborn, allow the distribution and use of recreational drugs, legalise the murder of the aged and the infirm or to strip hard-working citizens of the moneys they have accumulated. Government of the Northern Kingdom was no different, for as soon as Jeroboam began to reign, he became more concerned with maintaining his grip on power than in doing what was right and honourable.

A moment ago, I pointed out how the Word revealed Jeroboam's political calculation that he used to justify dishonouring the LORD by inducing the nation to accept idolatry. The divine record that is provided in the Kings informs us, "Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah'" [1 KINGS 12:26, 27]. Jeroboam's sole consideration was self-preservation rather than doing what is right. Instead of asking, "How may I honour the LORD who has honoured me by elevating me to the throne," Jeroboam's sole consideration was preserving his position as king.

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In the midst of this dreadful turning away from God, some refused to compromise, even though they would pay a high price. In order to honour God, the priests and Levites who left the Northern Kingdom did so by sacrificing their homes and family lands. We read in the text, “The Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the LORD” [2 CHRONICLES 11:14]. Leaving their natal home, they would not be able to return; yet, they chose to honour God rather than serve the king. Their actions anticipated the stance taken by the Apostles many centuries later. When the Jewish Council demanded that the Apostles cease declaring the Gospel, Peter and John replied, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” [ACTS 4:19, 20]. Standing firm for what is right may cost you; equivocating will cost you much more.

Let me tell you a story of a man and his wife that is so unusual that it is almost unbelievable. In fact, it is difficult to believe it is true—and yet it truly happened. Chiune Sugihara was an unusual man. Born into a samurai family, he studied English in university. While in university, he joined a Christian fraternity in order to become more facile in English. While serving the Japanese foreign ministry in Manchuria, he was baptised into the Russian Orthodox Church. These moves in themselves were unusual for a Japanese man.

In 1939, Sugihara was assigned to the Japanese consulate in Lithuania. He was there during a crucial time for European Jews. As the war raged in Europe following the Nazi invasion of Poland, thousands of Polish Jews escaped into Lithuania. In June of 1940, the Soviet Union annexed Lithuania, ordering all embassies closed. Now, it would be too late for Jews to escape the Nazi Holocaust. However, the Soviets agreed to allow Polish Jews to emigrate through the Soviet Union provided they could obtain the necessary travel documents. The Japanese consulate was one of only two foreign ministries still open in Kaunas.

Sugihara and his wife, Yukiko, awoke one morning to the sight of hundreds of desperate Polish Jews gathered outside of the consulate. Sugihara was their last hope. Could he issue them transit documents allowing them to pass through the Soviet Union to Japan and then on to a receiving nation. Remember, Imperial Japan was an ally of Nazi Germany. Thus, when Sugihara requested permission to issue travel documents, Tokyo said “No.” On three separate occasions he was denied permission to assist these Jews.

If Sugihara issued the visas, he could be fired and disgraced; if he didn't issue the visas, the Jews would die. He told his wife, “I may have to disobey my government, but if I do not, I will be disobeying God. I know I should follow my conscience.” Yukiko agreed with him, and the two went to work.

Sugihara obtained permission from the Soviets to keep the embassy open for another twenty days. He and his wife frantically wrote and signed visas by hand—three hundred a day! As the deadline approached, these two brave souls sacrificed food and sleep so that others might live. Yukiko brought sandwiches and he wrote night and day. When they were finally forced to close the consulate and leave Lithuania, Sugihara continued signing visas from the train, throwing them out the window even as the train left the station. In the end, he simply signed and sealed blank visas to be filled in later.

No one knows precisely how many visas Sugihara wrote—not all were used, some people waited until it was too late to escape. The most commonly accepted figure of those who lived because of his action is that between 6,000 and 10,000 Jews escaped the Holocaust because of Chiune and Yukiko's actions. Today, between 40,000 and 80,000 people are descendants of Jews saved by this godly couple. They called themselves Sugihara Survivors.

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Because of his choice, Sugihara and his wife paid a high price for his heroism, for his courage. He was drummed out of the diplomatic service. His family lived in squalor for years as he worked at odd jobs, unsure for most of his life whether his efforts had made any difference. His neighbours knew nothing of his actions, until one day a delegation from Israel came with the announcement that he and his wife were honoured at the Yad Vashem in Israel. In 1985, Chiune Sugihara and Yukiko Sugihara were awarded Israel's highest honour; they were recognised as "Righteous Among the Nations," by the Yad Vashem Martyrs Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem. Chiune Sugihara was by then an old man and unable to travel to Israel to receive the award. His wife and son received the honour on his behalf. Moreover, a tree was planted in his name at Yad Vashem, and a park in Jerusalem was named in his honour.

Chiune Sugihara died a year later. The people in the community in which he and Yukiko lived had no idea of what he had done until a delegation from Israel arrived for his funeral. His actions and his courage were clearly inspired by his faith. His decision to help the Jews, defying his own government, was inspired especially through reading the Book of Lamentations.²

THE PRESENCE OF THE GODLY STRENGTHENS THE NATION — "Those who had set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came after [the Levites] from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon" [2 CHRONICLES 11:16, 17].

The actions of godly leaders encouraged many others to take a stand in difficult days. Standing for what is right, standing tall for godliness is never an action taken in a vacuum. Standing for righteousness encourages those who love God to stand firm, even though the cost appears excessive. That is what happened in this instance. "Those who had set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel," saw the courageous stand by the priests and Levites, and they chose to stand with them. When one stands for what is right, he never stands alone. Though the eye sees no one standing with you, if you are standing for God and for righteousness, the Lord stands with you. However, there will be others who stand, even if they stand timidly. Elijah believed he stood alone, but God encouraged him that he was not alone when the LORD said, "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" [1 KINGS 19:18].

What I find especially fascinating, is that those who left Israel, demonstrating conscience and character, strengthened the nation of Judah. To be certain, Jeroboam was glad to see them go! Their absence meant that he could seize their lands, enriching himself and ridding himself of potential conflict. It is doubtful that Rehoboam fully realised the blessing that was flowing to Judah—it is difficult to appreciate the strength of righteousness at the time righteousness is demonstrated. Hitler could not realise the loss when Jews began to emigrate from Germany. The basis for Germany's defeat lay in the minds of Jewish scientists who brought their knowledge and insight to Great Britain and the United States. The Soviet Union could not realise the cost as they persecuted Jews and drove them to immigrate to Israel. Turkey could not anticipate the loss of strength when they initiated a pogrom to extirpate the Armenian Christians.

² Glenn Sunshine, "Chiune Sugihara (1900-1986)," March 1, 2013, <http://www.breakpoint.org/2013/03/chiune-sugihara-1900-1986/>, accessed 13 April 2018; Jan Zwartendijk, "Chiune Sugihara (1900-1986)," <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/chiune-sugihara>, accessed 13 April 2018; John Stonestreet & Anne Morse, "Breakpoint: Sugihara's Holocaust Survivors," April 11, 2018, <http://www.breakpoint.org/2018/04/breakpoint-sugiharas-holocaust-survivors/>, accessed 13 April 2018

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Focus on the final verse in our text: “[Those who emigrated to Judah] strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam the son of Solomon secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon” [2 CHRONICLES 11:17]. This past week, I read again the Chronicles. As I read 2 Chronicles again, I found myself marvelling at the evidence for the correlation between honouring God and blessing, between dishonouring God and judgement. It was an unfolding demonstration of the veracity of Moses’ warning to Israel.

God promised through Moses, “If you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out” [DEUTERONOMY 28:1-6].

Contrast the blessing that Moses pronounced for obedience to the Word of the LORD with the curse he pronounced if Israel did not obey the LORD. God warned Israel, “If you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out” [DEUTERONOMY 28:15-19].

Note, especially, the impact of God’s warning concerning interaction with the nations. “The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away” [DEUTERONOMY 28:25, 26].

As I read this seventeenth verse, I noted something that had escaped my attention in previous readings. The Chronicler states that those coming into Judah “made Rehoboam the son of Solomon secure, for they walked *for three years* in the way of David and Solomon.” Why three years? Why should the Chronicler be so specific in giving us such a short timeframe? The answer is found as we move to the next chapter. As the twelfth chapter opens, we read, “When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him” [2 CHRONICLES 12:1]. How could this happen? Had the king not witnessed God’s rich blessings?

I am chagrined to say that this appears to me to be a case of “like father, like son.” Reading the account that is provided in the First Book of Kings, we witness the pitiful admission, “[Solomon] had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And *his wives turned away his heart*. For *when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God*, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So, Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods” [1 KINGS 11:3-8].

2 CHRONICLES 11:13-17
MAKING THE PAGANS HAPPY (FOR A WHILE)

To this point I've applied the message to nations, and I would not deviate from that truth. Such application is assuredly appropriate in light of what has been written in the text. It serves as a reminder that Canada can never be stronger than when our people seek God and when our governments endeavour to implement righteous laws that honour the LORD God. However, I caution you that what is true of nations holds equally true of churches. No church can last long that ignores honouring the Living God. A congregation is the sum of the parts, and if the parts are diseased, the Body will be unhealthy. If a diseased part is not cured, or if necessary, excised, it will destroy the Body. A healthy, vibrant congregation can become diseased and defeated within a very short time if that assembly fails to remember first responsibilities.

We must never overlook the fact that when the priests and Levites immigrated to Judah, they did so as individuals, as did the other individuals who left their natal lands for a new country. Without question, many people were encouraged in their decision through witnessing courageous decisions implemented with determination to do what was right. I have been a student of church life for nearly five decades now. I have discovered that many people recognise something is wrong in their congregation, but they are unwilling to leave. They are often prepared to tolerate a little bit of error in hopes that it may get better.

I recall a Sunday morning service in which I preached for a Methodist church in California. The man who asked me to speak would not tell me where I would be speaking; he was fearful that I would refuse to go. He didn't know that I am prepared to speak anywhere if I have freedom to hold forth the Word of God. That morning, I poured my heart out to those good people. My message was "sin black, hell hot, eternity long, Christ sweet, salvation free and full." That was in a day when I was still young and didn't know I was supposed to be gentle. I thought I was called to charge hell with my squirt gun.

I brought the message to a conclusion, noting that most of the people were sitting there as if a tornado had swept through the auditorium. God prompted me to issue an altar call. Not knowing what might happen, I invited anyone who wished to confess Christ to come to the front of the auditorium where we would pray. To my joy, a young man of perhaps sixteen-years stepped out of his seat and hurried to the front of the building. He wanted to trust Christ. And the floodgates of heaven opened.

Without farther prompting, many of those dear old saints came to an old-fashioned Methodist altar. There was weeping and shouting such as you seldom hear anymore. Those dear Methodists of another era knew what it was to be excited in the Lord. For the better part of an hour, they flooded the altar with tears, pleading with God for revival, confessing sin and seeking His honour. Many of those dear saints came to speak with me following that service.

One dear soul in particular broke my heart. "We used to hear Bible preaching," she said. "We don't bring our Bibles any more; it's been so long since we heard a message from the Bible." How desperately they needed encouragement to do right! They needed a John Wesley to call them to repentance and godly living. I pray we never fall into such a condition. However, I know that if we do not hold one another accountable before the Lord, and live courageously, we are just as susceptible as were those good old Methodists saints. God, stir us up! Amen.