

Imperfect Candidates in an Imperfect World

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, October 27th 2024

I. Introduction - Several “good kings” were imperfect candidates

Today is Reformation Sunday, and as I reviewed my Reformation Day sermons over the past three decades, I noticed that I have preached on just about every topic *except* the Reformation of Politics. And that surprised me. Believe it or not, there are several books that show how the Reformation had a huge impact on gradually reforming politics in the West - especially the doctrines of God’s sovereignty and human depravity. Both those doctrines made the Reformers not trust any civil government with very much power. They believed in limited government. And if you want a lot more material on *that* particular subject, you could start with John Eidsmoe’s books that show how Reformed doctrine had a profound impact on American civics.

But today I won’t deal with that. Instead, I want to address the frustrations that many have felt about how to vote when all candidates are majorly flawed. Indeed, what do you do when both presidential candidates have lived apparently unrepentant lives with regard to their positions on abortion¹ and both have given some support to homosexual marriage²). For example Trump said to a gathering of homosexual activists that he hosted at his home, “We are fighting for the gay community, and we are fighting and fighting hard. With the help of many of the people here tonight in recent years, our movement has taken incredible strides, the strides you’ve made here is incredible.”³ Obviously one is much more radical⁴

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2016/04/21/politics/donald-trump-republican-platform-abortion/>

² For example, a Log Cabin gala at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago beachfront club, Trump said, “We are fighting for the gay community, and we are fighting and fighting hard. With the help of many of the people here tonight in recent years, our movement has taken incredible strides, the strides you’ve made here is incredible.”
<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/12/16/celebration-same-sex-marriage-mar-a-lago-00074441>

³ Many sources have documented this quote. Here is one
<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/12/16/celebration-same-sex-marriage-mar-a-lago-00074441> Of course, this could be political rhetoric since several sites show statements by Trump that are both for and against the homosexual community. His daughter Tiffany said, “prior to politics, he supported gays, lesbians, the LGBTQIA+ community.”

⁴ On Kamala Harris’ LGBTQ advocacy over the past two decades, see
<https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/where-does-kamala-harris-stand-on->

than the other, but marriage and life are foundational issues. And people wonder what they should do.

One pastor⁵ told me that since God anointed Jehu in 1 Kings 19, and He did so with the express purpose of destroying the anti-life deep state corruption of Ahab, and God did so even though Jehu was inconsistent on that issue and a godless man, we can vote for President Trump for the same reasons. It was actually a fascinating argument that he gave - probably the best argument that I have heard. And while I will respect you if that is your approach to this next election, I want you to at least consider another approach - trusting God with the outcome without voting for either candidate. It may seem like foolishness, but at least hear me out. You always have the right to be Bereans and ignore what I say if you don't think it is Biblical. But I do believe that what I am going to be sharing with you is not only Biblical, but was *the* pervasive viewpoint and conviction of American citizens *and* politicians in the first hundred years of this Republic. This will not be anything new that I will be sharing. I will be much more grounded in Scripture than they were, but the concepts are not new.

And I'll start by pointing to the Holy Spirit's statement in 2 Samuel 23:3 states that "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." Two essentials are laid out in that verse (and a few more in the whole context), but that verse emphasizes justice and fearing God. And just to be fair, people on the *other* side of the equation could easily point to verse 5 where David admits that he did not perfectly line up with God's qualifications. And that's true. David says, "although my house is not so with God..." In other words, David blew it; he blew it big time. He committed adultery (like Trump has) and he murdered Uriah (which is an equally serious form of murder as abortion is). In fact, you could strengthen the pro-Trump argument by reading all of verses 5-7 and saying that these verses distinguish *three* kinds of candidates, not just two. There are kings like Josiah, who *did* meet all the qualifications that you see in the three circles of the graphic on your outline, and kings like David who failed some of them, and kings like Ahab who should be impeached and executed, but certainly should not have been not voted for. Let's read those verses. David said,

5 "Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; Will He not make it increase? [So that deals with kings like David who were saved and who wanted to do right, but who were imperfect. Next comes kings like Ahab in verses 6-7.] 6 But the sons of rebellion shall all be as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands. 7 But the man who

lgbtq-rights and many other websites. On her advocacy for abortion, see <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/harris-bold-abortion-stance-impact-2024-election-biden-exit-rcna163016> and many other websites.

⁵ He referred me to this very well-done sermon by another pastor who supports voting for Trump https://youtu.be/SitsLDo6X_Y

touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place.”

Toward the end of the sermon I will return to these verses and give my interpretation of them, but right up front I will have to admit that it is a pretty decent argument in favor of thrusting Kamala away as a thorn that will pierce your hand much more quickly and much more painfully than voting for Trump might do. But hold your judgment for at least a few minutes. And by the way, this sermon is not just about *presidential* candidates. This applies to all politics. So don't just apply it to the national issues. My hope is that I will give you enough Biblical information that you can make your own informed decision without having anxieties about it. Based on the Scripture you will be able to vote in faith and not in fear.

But I will start by saying that I agree that there really are three kinds of kings. They don't line up with the hierarchy of the three circles on page one, so don't confuse the three types of kings with the three circles on your outline. But in God's mind, there are three types of kings. It isn't a false dichotomy between a king Josiah and everyone else. We don't need to be perfectionistic in our politics. But before you jump to conclusions on whether one or more candidates in our election fit into one or more of these three types of kings, let me dig into God's qualifications a little bit deeper.

If one looks at all the so-called “good kings” listed in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, one finds that none of them were perfect, though a couple met *all* the qualifications in *all* three circles pretty well. This is not an idealistic list of qualifications. Not at all. But I will also point out that several of the good kings had major sins in their lives. Others started well but ended poorly. So the question I want to address this morning is this: “What made some imperfect kings ‘acceptable’ while other imperfect kings were not acceptable to God and He explicitly said that those kings should not have been acceptable to the people?” Do the Scriptures hold out any objective criteria by which we can support less-than-ideal candidates when we live during a time of downgrade? I believe it does. But it also helps us to see what God's minimum standards are.

II. Mining information from the contrasts between Saul and David

I'll start by mining a bit of information from the contrasts God makes between king Saul and king David. I think they are helpful models from which to derive information precisely because their similarities explain why both were chosen by God at the beginning, and their contrasts show why God later rejected Saul, but he didn't reject a repentant (emphasis on *repentant*) David. (And I won't mention the boatload of supporting Scriptures that I have in my notes here. I'll mostly just try to summarize them.)

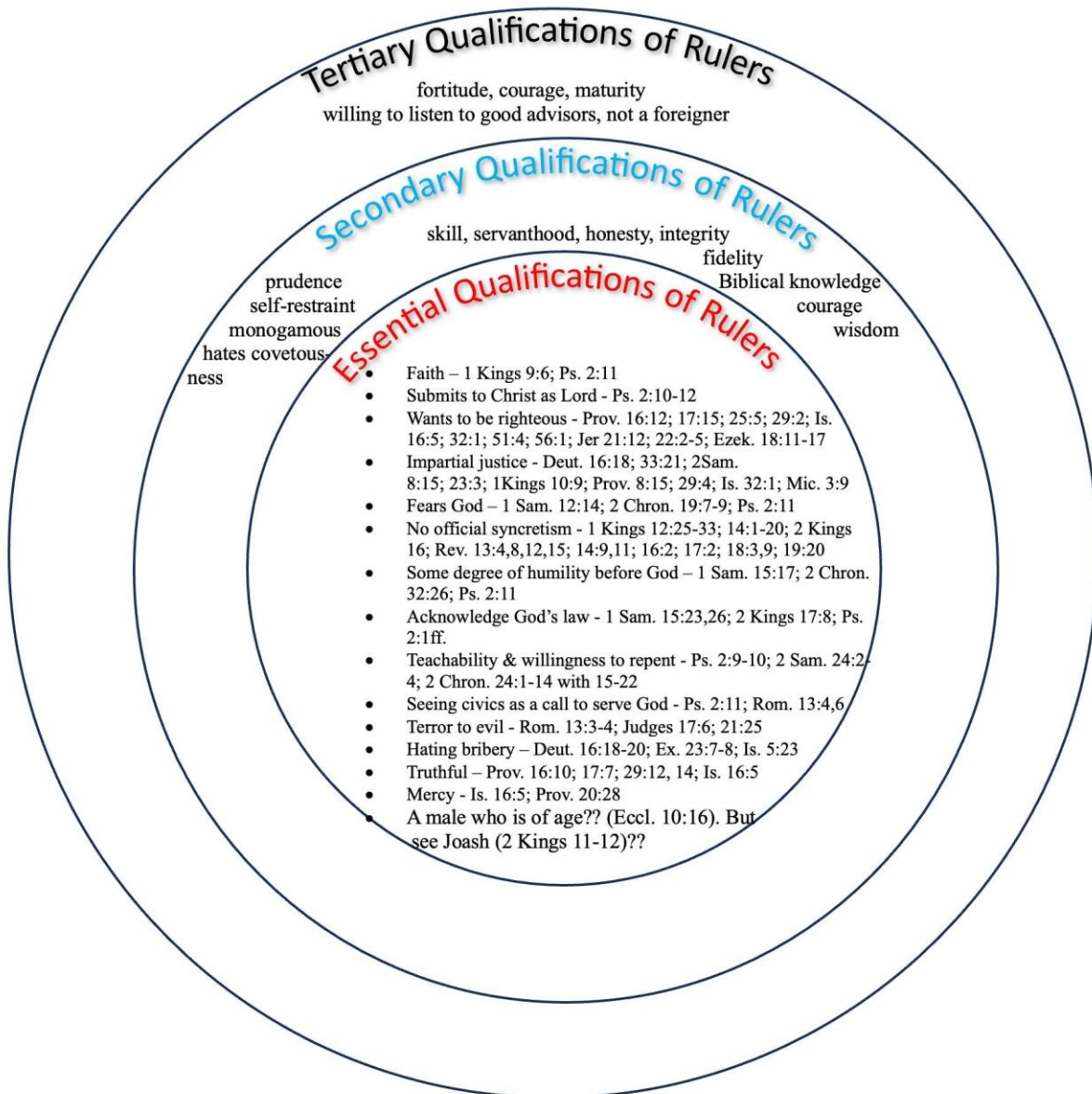
1. First, both Saul (1 Sam. 28:19) and David (1 Kings 2:10) were genuine believers to the day of their death and ended up in paradise after death. It might seem hard to believe that Saul was a believer with the horrible things he did. I wouldn't have believed it if Scripture hadn't said it. In 1 Samuel 28:19, Samuel made it clear that Saul would be with him in the underworld of Paradise-Sheol. You need to remember that in the Old Testament Paradise had not yet been transferred to heaven. But

Samuel made it clear that Saul made it to paradise. He was saved. He may have been saved by the skin of his teeth, but he was saved. Of course, in a bit we will see that even though being a believer is an essential qualification, it's not enough. Saul was later rejected by God and should have been rejected by the nation - even though he was a believer.

2. Second, both Saul (1 Sam. 9) and David (1 Sam. 16) were chosen by God. You can be chosen by God and still be rejected by God later. Jehu was chosen by God and rejected later. What we need to ask is why Saul (and Jehu) were initially chosen by God and then rejected later. It's not honest scholarship to just merge their whole lives together.
3. Third, both Saul and David began their reigns with at least the *appearance* of humility. Samuel said of Saul, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel?" (1 Sam. 15:17). We will see in a bit that humility is an important qualification for office.
4. Fourth, both Saul (1 Sam. 11:6) and David (1 Sam. 16:13) were anointed with the Holy Spirit for their office. The Holy Spirit later left Saul and a demon afflicted him. But when they began office, both had the Holy Spirit's anointing for their work. That's pretty significant. Right now I won't get into whether it is one of the essentials or not.
5. Fifth, both Saul (1 Sam. 10:9-13; 19:23-24) and David (1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 22-23; cf. Davidic Psalms) prophesied by the Holy Spirit. I don't think that is an essential, but it is interesting that they both did.
6. Sixth, both Saul (1 Sam. 11-13:7) and David (2 Sam. 1-10) started with great success. Both were quite capable leaders. Being capable in fighting the worst enemies is not a sufficient qualification. Saul too was a candidate who took on the deep state of the Philistines (who ruled over them at that time), but God later rejected him *and wanted the people to reject him too*. Saul did a pretty good job of reversing the weapons control act of the Philistines and other tyrannical things. God providentially used him for a time.
7. Seventh, both Saul (1 Sam. 13:8-15:35) and David (2 Sam. 11-12) engaged in grievous sin. So sin by itself does not necessarily disqualify. It's what we do with that sin.
8. Eighth, both Saul (1 Samuel 9:2) and David (1 Sam. 16:12) were attractive to the citizens of their nation on many levels. Even *Samuel* grieved when God rejected Saul (1 Sam. 15:11). Samuel wished God would let Saul continue be a king. Believe it or not, Saul was wildly popular. He had huge charisma. If there had been a confirming vote for Saul later on, he would probably have won again just on a popularity alone. But God later said that he was unqualified despite that popularity.
9. Ninth, both Saul (1 Sam. 11; 14:47-52; etc) and David (1 Sam. 22-2 Sam. 23) were amazing military leaders. Some have suggested that military prowess makes for a good candidate. Well, that is a good qualification. But (starting with Saul) several bad kings were excellent commanders of Israel's armies, and it appears that more than one "good king" made major blunders as a military commander. By itself its not enough. And I think we are naive if we do not look at the detailed nuances of Scripture.

The *contrasts* Scripture portrays between Saul and David also give several clues. Let me list some key things that Saul lacked that David had. 1. Saul had a lack of *enduring* humility. Saul's *appearance* of humility and being small in his own eyes seems to have actually sprung from insecurity. It was not true humility. And you can see his insecurity in 1 Samuel 9:21 and 10:22 and in many other places. Well, insecurity is quite compatible with pride; in fact it usually springs from pride. In contrast, though pride crept into David's life in 2 Samuel 24 (especially verses 1-4), he was quick to repent (vv. 10-25) and recognized the dangers of pride in any king in 2 Samuel 22:28. So pride versus humility was a key difference. 2. The second difference is that Saul repeatedly had incomplete obedience versus the whole-hearted obedience of David. Saul claimed to obey the Lord in 1 Samuel 15:20, but because his obedience was incomplete (1 Sam. 15:1-23), Samuel denied that it was true obedience (1 Sam. 15:22). Samuel makes obedience to God's Word a condition for continued kingship. Yet Samuel insisted that Saul "rejected the word of the Lord" (1 Sam. 15:23) and had a heart of rebellion (1 Sam. 15:19,23). This is a recurring theme in later kings. And on Initiative 434 you need to ask if it is in any way obedient to the Scriptures. 3. Third (and I believe this is key). Saul had an incomplete repentance. When confronted over sin, Saul either ignored the rebuke (1 Sam. 13:13-15), made excuses, made attempts to rationalize, and/or to cover his sins from the people (1 Sam. 15:9-31). In contrast, David engaged in thorough repentance before God and before the people. 4. Fourth, Saul feared man far more than he feared God. Saul admits, "I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Sam. 15:24). Samuel made fear of the Lord a condition for continued kingship (1 Sam. 12:14). But Saul continued to show more fear of man than he did of God throughout the rest of his story. 5. The final contrast is that though Saul made a pretense at seeking the Lord's guidance, he already had his mind made up of what to do (and you can see that in 1 Samuel 14:36-37). Because of that, God ceased answering him (cf. also 1 Sam. 28:6). Saul's record shows more dependence on the wisdom of man (see 1 Sam. 23:19-23) than God's Word – much like modern politicians who fail to seek God's wisdom on a host of issues (such as ecology, homosexuality, economics, taxes, abortion, Initiative 434, etc.).

III. Walking through the diagram of a hierarchy of qualifications



But more to the point of imperfect candidates in an imperfect world, what we have covered so far indicates that God did not expect all kings to be able to completely live up to the qualifications set for kings in the three circles that I have laid out for you. It appears that there are three different groupings of qualifications. You may disagree with which qualifications lie in each of those three circles, but if you look up each of the verses in the inner circle you will see that each of those are absolutely essential qualifications, whereas kings that are labeled as good kings sometimes lacked some of the other qualifications in the next two circles. The second circle deals with secondary qualifications that are super important (but not disqualifying). And the outer circle deals with tertiary qualifications that the best kings had, but some good kings did not. All of those qualifications are a standard to which all rulers should *aspire*, and they are a standard by which citizens should

prefer one ruler over another. But I think we can also conclude that when candidates for office lack certain things, they are utterly unqualified for office, *even if no better candidate comes forward*. Let me read some of the Scriptures that I have placed under the essential qualifications list. (That's the inner circle.)

I will take the first two qualifications together - faith and submission to Jesus. God expects rulers *in New Covenant times* (not just in the Old Testament, but in New Covenant times) to be genuine believers. How else can they be ministers of God? Romans 13:4,6 uses the same word for minister that it uses of Paul and ministers of the Gospel. And some might think, well, we are not voting for a pastor-in-chief; we are voting for a commander-in-chief. But let me read three verses from Psalm 2. Psalm 2 makes faith a requirement for "kings" and "judges" in the Messianic era when it commands post-cross kings to "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him" (Ps. 2:10-12). That's for our era. It tells rulers to trust Christ or you are out. And you might think, "Really? For America?" This was a standard requirement in most the states of the union for a long time. If you look at the second to last quote box on page two, here was the requirement in the North Carolina Constitution in 1876. It says,

"That no person who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State."

This point that I'm bringing up would not have been considered weird back then. God told Solomon, "But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me..." and then it goes on to say that God would bring judgments on both the king *and on the people* (1 Kings 9:6). Why would He bring judgments on the people as well? Well, the people deserve the judgment as far as God is concerned because they *chose* an unqualified king. How we vote impacts how God treats we the people. The people too are responsible. Psalm 2 requires that all kings in the New Covenant kiss the Son of God. And if the people themselves come under God's wrath when they choose unbelievers, it indicates that God holds citizens accountable for selecting those unbelieving rulers and for failing to impeach rulers who have fallen away from the faith. But we will see that faith in God is not a sufficient qualification.

I will take the next four qualifications together - wanting to be righteous, seeking to be impartial in justice, fearing God, and not having personal or state syncretism. Proverbs 16:12 says, "It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness." Any throne is *established* by righteousness. It's one thing to commit wickedness and repent of it (which good kings did), but to persevere in wickedness, and to praise it, and defend it is an abomination to God. What about if the ruler *wants* to do good, but surrounds himself with wicked people on the administration? Proverbs 25:5 says, "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness." That implies that he becomes disqualified (not established) if he surrounds himself with a wicked administration and follows their advice.

What about the fear of the Lord? I've given several Scriptures under that point that make this an essential qualification even in the New Covenant. Psalm 2:11 commands modern kings, "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." That's two different ways of saying the same thing - fear God.

As to syncretism, the book of Revelation makes this principle a post-cross principle for all rulers - and I've given a bunch of Scriptures on that (Rev. 13:4,8,12,15; 14:9,11; 16:2; 17:2; 18:3,9; 19:20). Just as Saul sought to worship God but also dabbled in the occult, there were believing kings who were disqualified as "bad kings" because they mixed the worship of Yehowah with occultism and even the worship of other gods. It is clear that this was a major reason why God rejected Jereboam (1 Kings 12:25-33; 14:1-20) and Ahaz (2 Kings 16). God told even good king Solomon, "if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and ... go and serve other gods and worship them" and then it goes on to say that judgment will come upon you (1 Kings 9:6ff). Thankfully, Solomon repented in his later years. Interestingly, though the king's own involvement in religious compromise disqualified him from office in God's eyes, failure to remove the *citizen's* false worship did not completely disqualify. Though God praised kings who eradicated the perverted temples of pagan gods (eg., 1 Kings 15:11), failure to do so was not a complete disqualification. For example, God says of Amaziah, "he did what was right in the sight of LORD... however, the high places were not taken down" (2 Kings 14:3-4). God said of Azariah, "he did what was right in the sight of the LORD... except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense in the high places" (2 Kings 15:3-4). The same was true of good king Asa (2 Chron. 15:17) and good king Jotham (2 Kings 15:32). So it seems to have been *personal* syncretism and *official state* syncretism that completely disqualified a king, whereas an inability to destroy pagan worship in the nation did not necessarily disqualify him.

The seventh essential seems to require some degree of humility before God. Psalm 2 describes this humility of New Testament "kings" and "judges" as serving Yehowah with "fear" and "trembling" before God (v. 11). Romans 13:1 describes this characteristic by rulers affirming that they have no authority except that which is derived from God. Failure to recognize and repent of one's own pride and arrogance was clearly a disqualification in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 15:17). This was true of even Hezekiah, who was one of the best of the kings. 2 Chronicles 32:25-26 says that "wrath was looming over him" "because his heart was lifted up." But Hezekiah "humbled himself for the pride of his heart... so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah." In other words, he recognized his own pride and repented of it. But even his example shows how a lack of humility can eventually become a disqualification for even a good ruler. He must see himself as "God's servant" (Rom. 13:4,6).

You will see in your outline that official acknowledgement of Biblical law is another qualification. People think that is utterly ridiculous in America, but up until my lifetime it was standard for presidents to acknowledge God's law, and several presidents (whether sincerely or not) have done so during my lifetime. Psalm 2 guarantees that even after the time of the cross, the Messiah's judgments would fall upon "rulers" who cast off the bonds of God's law (Ps. 2). The book of Revelation describes judgments that Jesus promised to bring on rulers who rejected His authority (Rev. 6:15; 16:12,14; 17:2,10,12,14,18; 18:3,9;

etc). This is in New Covenant times! Our times! Samuel told Saul, “Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Sam. 15:23). Even though Samuel loved Saul, he said, “I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel” (1 Sam. 15:26). Since God rejected Saul Samuel was not going to support him. In other words, citizens should reject a ruler if God rejects that ruler. If impeaching such a civic leader is not possible, the citizens should at least passively resist the unlawful statutes of those rulers - as David did. Just as modern rulers are technically disqualified if they are not willing to rule in terms of the constitution, the evidence I have given so far shows that Biblical rulers were disqualified if they rejected God’s law as being the law of the nation. 2 Kings 17:8 particularly ascribes God’s judgments on northern Israel as coming because they rejected God’s civil statutes and instead “walked in the statutes of the nations.” That’s what we are now doing in America. God told Solomon, “if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you...” then disaster would follow (1 Kings 9:6ff).

The next qualification is teachability – a desire to know God’s will. Psalm 2 makes this a continuing essential for “kings” and “rulers” in the post-cross period when it instructs them, “be wise, O kings, be instructed, you judges of the earth” (v. 10). This is given as a necessary condition if those rulers are not to be broken by Christ’s rod of iron in verse 9. How can we vote for a person that Christ intends to strike with His iron rod? And by the way, Revelation 2:26-27 makes this relevant to both kings *and* citizens. It was precisely when David lost teachability (2 Sam. 24:2-4) that God’s anger loomed over Israel despite David’s repentance (vv. 10-25). Similarly, Joash started off good (2 Chron. 24:1-14), but later apostatized and refused to listen to the prophets (vv. 15-22).

The next qualification is seeing civics as a calling to serve God. Psalm 2 makes this a New Covenant responsibility for civic rulers when it calls “kings” and “judges” to “serve the LORD” (v. 11). Likewise Romans 13 gives civic officers the calling of being “God’s ministers” (Rom. 13:4,6). Civics is a calling accountable to God, not just accountable to the people. Now, this may all seem so theoretical, but this was standard fare for politics in generations past - and I will demonstrate that in a bit. But if you look at the second quote on page 1, I took this right out of a court decision of the Supreme Court of the United States. Justice David Brewer said,

Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible that it should be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian.

That Supreme Court decision was made in 1892. And it goes on to say that civil office is a calling under God and is accountable to God. It points out that God’s authority over the state must be recognized.

Next qualification - when a ruler refuses to punish crimes (such as abortion and homosexuality), what’s the point of being a ruler? Romans 13:3 says that rulers are required to be a terror to evil works, and to not be persecuting good works. The ruler in

Romans 13 is not supposed to bear the sword in vain against heinous crimes. The sword was given to him to punish what God considers to be crime - and the Bible doesn't actually give that many crimes. America has thousands of crimes. It would not be a hard thing to enforce Biblical crimes since Biblical government was so limited.

The next qualification is that he is not supposed to be bought off or bribed. Deuteronomy 16 shows that a bribe eventually blinds the eyes of magistrates. Megan Basham wrote a book on why seminaries, colleges, and pastors have been bought off by big money. It's changed the way they think and teach. There needs to be a similar exposé of the myriad ways that Big Pharma and other corporations have bribed Congressmen and Senators. Legal bribery is now a huge business. Isaiah 5:23 condemns those who justify the wicked for a bribe, and who take away justice from the righteous because they have been bought off.

The next qualification requires truthfulness. If a person is an inveterate liar, he should not be in office no matter how skillful he may be. You can't trust him. He may make you promises, but how do you know he will keep them? But worse, Proverbs 29:12 says, "If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked." Verse 14 says that a ruler who values truth will be established on his throne. I believe I have only put into that inner circle the things that Scripture seems to indicate God didn't budge on. And if God won't budge on them, like Samuel we shouldn't.

And then finally, Isaiah 16:5 says "In mercy the throne will be established..." Prov. 20:28 says, "Mercy and truth preserve a king, and by lovingkindness he upholds his throne." And this would include mercy and lovingkindness to the unborn.

I believe that the books of Judges through Chronicles were given to keep us from perfectionism on one extreme and to keep us from ignoring God's qualifications on the other extreme. I have tried to keep in the essentials circle only those things that resulted in God rejecting a king or which say that God establishes a throne that has them. You may disagree with some that have been placed there, but at least you have a bit of Scriptural data to help guide your voting.

Since I've preached on 2 Samuel 23 before, I won't get in depth, but let me pull a few ideas from this passage that may help you to be involved in reforming politics and that may motivate you to encourage godly Christians to run for office in the future. We need them; we desperately need them. This passage was a favorite election day passage for a long time in American history.

IV. Mining information from 2 Samuel 23:1-7

A. Unashamedly Urge Our Nation To Be One Nation Under God (vv. 1-5)

In verses 1-5 David advises us to unashamedly urge our nation to be one nation under God. And we still have "In God We Trust" on all of our money. It's a hypocritical statement now,

but it is still there. A few years ago there was a lawsuit against Congress by Michael Newdow. The suit claimed that the national motto, “In God we Trust” is unconstitutional. Of course, he failed - and he failed because even our unqualified judges on the Supreme Court know what the history of our nation’s laws clearly say. Anyway, let’s dig into the passage.

1. God Raises Up Rulers (v. 1)

First, we find that God raises up rulers. Who put David on the throne? Verse 1 says that God did:

Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

a) Though David was not perfect, a ruler can take him as a role model

He words it in a way so that we can’t dismiss this as being theoretical. David was a real king (the son of Jesse), an imperfect king, and yet a king who was loved by both God and by the people. It is possible to rule in a way that is pleasing to God even in an imperfect society. He is a good model, even though he is not a perfect exemplar. And I think this passage warns us about the total perfectionism that some people take toward politics. But there *are* minimum qualifications that David sets forth. And we should not be accused of perfectionism when we insist on these qualifications for a ruler. David was not perfect, yet we could have voted for him. Let’s look at some of the qualifications.

b) A ruler should be called

First is the issue of calling. Whatever else David was, He was anointed by God and raised up on high by God. God called him to office. Just as an uncalled man should not enter *church* office, an uncalled man should not enter *civil* office. Now, sometimes they do, and until they are impeached as unqualified, the office must still be respected - just as David respected the office of Saul. But this issue of calling is an important one when we are choosing candidates. Has God really called him?

Back in the 1800’s, Senator Daniel Webster said that this issue of calling is critical for citizens to consider on Election Day, and he was personally opposed to any candidate who was not called and was not a Christian. So the first thing implied by these words is calling. Daniel Webster totally agreed with my list of essentials for office. He was a Congressman, later a Senator, and still later served as Secretary of State. He was no chump. And he represented many politicians of that day who said that these qualifications were critical to the future of America. What I am preaching today is not theoretical irrelevant information. It’s really when Christians started embracing incrementalism that God’s qualifications started going out the window.

c) A ruler should be accountable to God

But the second thing that is implied in our verse is accountability to God. An elder is held accountable for how he relates to those *under* his authority, and that is true of a civil magistrate. But far more important is that he is also accountable to God. He must live as the

spokesman for God, not for special interests. Special interests have ruined our nation. But if we had in the past been voting for men with these essentials, they would not have succumbed to special interests. It's the fault of the citizens.

d) A ruler should see God as more than just a theoretical authority

But if God raised him up and God anointed him, it means that *God is his ultimate authority*. And it is more than just a theoretical authority above the king. What do I mean by theoretical authority? Well, that would be a king who says that his word is God's Word but be unable to prove it. This is what the king of England did when he claimed to have the divine right of kings. He claimed Rex Lex, or the King is Law. In other words, he claimed to have the full authority of God in all that he said. Rex means king, and lex means law, so rex lex is a claim that everything that the king says is law. Well, the Puritans showed that this claim was nonsense in that the Scripture disapproved of many things that the king commanded, and even commanded people in certain situations to disobey the king. Even Jesus engaged in civil disobedience. But they also pointed out that the very idea is so theoretical that it is meaningless. There is no objective standard against which you could test the king's claims. In contrast, the Puritans reversed those two words and said, "Lex Rex" or the law is king. God's authority is meaningless (let me repeat that - God's authority is meaningless) if there is no law above the king that the king himself is obliged to obey. Therefore, the very idea that God raised him up and anointed him implies that David was accountable to obey his Superior by obeying His word. If the king can do anything he wants, and there is no law above him, then God is not really his Superior, is he?

e) A ruler's authority is limited, delegated, and specified

But there is a fourth thing implied in these words, and that is that the king's own authority (if it is legitimate authority) is a limited authority, a delegated authority, and an authority specified by God and not by his own imagination. The king is not a god himself, so he must derive legitimate authority from God. It is automatically a delegated, specified, and limited authority. And if you have studied the history of civics in America you will recognize those words. This keeps the state from deifying itself.

f) All of this means that we should only vote for Christians

Well, if we took at all seriously the first four implications of this passage for rulers, then we would only elect Christians. And did you know that this was the pattern for many states long after the constitution was ratified? Delaware required the following oath of office, and continued to require it long after the ratification of the First Amendment: "I...do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; I do acknowledge the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be given by divine inspiration." You could not be in any office in Delaware without taking that oath of office. Maryland's Constitution of 1851 required this of public officials - "a declaration of a belief in the Christian religion." You couldn't even be in office if you held to the ACLU's position. In 1876 (almost a hundred years after ratification) the North Carolina Constitution still stated (and still enforced), "That no person who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority of the Old or New

Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State.” Pennsylvania and other states had similar requirements. It just shows how far we have fallen as a nation. Almost nobody back then would have considered my graphic in your outline to be ridiculous. They lived by it.

2. God Speaks To Rulers (vv. 2-3a)

Now back to our passage. Verses 2-3 show that God speaks to those whom He calls. David says that it is not enough to theoretically acknowledge that God has appointed public officials; they must also listen to God. That makes sense, doesn't it? If they are accountable to God, they can't refuse to listen to Him. And God does indeed speak to rulers *through the Scripture*. Look at verses 2-3.

The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me.

Now it is true - David sometimes had the privilege of being a direct channel of God's prophetic revelation. He even wrote some of the Scriptures. But more frequently God spoke to David *through the rest of the Scriptures*. Either way, he was willing to listen. The phrase, "Hear what the Spirit says," is used before a quotation of Scripture. Nor was it just Israelite kings that needed to listen to God's wisdom. In Proverbs 8:15-16 personified Wisdom is speaking and says,

By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth.

Not just Jewish judges – all the judges of the earth are required by God to rule consistently with the Scriptures. If those we elect into office are to rule effectively, they must listen to God. They may not listen perfectly, but they must at least seek to follow the Scriptures as they understand them.

And so Deuteronomy 17 says that every king was to be familiar with the Bible. In fact, let me read you that section, because this says that reading Scripture regularly is a precondition to ruling in the fear of God. It's a precondition to the later points of being just and ruling in the fear of God. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 says,

Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book...And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, and that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom...

Can you imagine how long it would take to write out the first five books of the Bible? Those five books contain a lot of words! You might think that a king would be too busy to do that. You might think that God would cut him some slack and let him hire a scribe to copy it for him. But no, God insisted that the king himself write it out by hand because He didn't want

the king to miss anything in true law. God wanted rulers to be thoroughly conversant in the Scriptures.

3. God Is The Only Security (“Rock”) Of A Nation (v. 3a)

Third, God is the only security for our nation. It’s not the military, or a balanced trade agreement, or good treaties. It’s not even ensuring that Kamala Harris doesn’t get into office. The only security for our nation is God. In verse 3 David says, “the Rock of Israel spoke to me.” A Rock was a natural fortress as well as a strong foundation. And so this is another feature that we should look at in candidates to office. Do they find security in God, or do they find security in something else? Psalm 33:12 says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” And so our money says, “In God We Trust.” We really don’t anymore, but we should. Benjamin Franklin warned Congress that their only security was as they trusted God. It is a shame when a Deist like Benjamin Franklin has to rebuke us into trusting God as a nation. Our modern politicians are far more embarrassed of the Scriptures than he was. And Franklin’s words were right on. Some people say that he left his Deism, I don’t know. But He said,

“In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard - and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor... and have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need its assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow can not fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?” We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that ‘except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it’ (Psalm 127:1). I firmly believe this and I also believe that, without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel....”

4. A Ruler Is Accountable To God For Justice (v. 3b)

But David goes on to say in verse 3, “He who rules over men must be just.” If you have a candidate who is the lesser of two evils, but still unjust, God says that you should not choose him. Just write in a candidate. Pragmatic considerations should not trump God’s “must.” He who rules over men must be just. And who defines justice? It’s God’s Word. This is not just advice for he who rules over ancient Jews. No, this is a universal “must” - he who rules over men must be just. And if God’s law is the definition of justice, we are in trouble in the United States of America.

The ancient church father, Augustine, said, “Without justice, what are states but great bands of robbers?” That implies that the definition of justice comes from outside the state because he is calling the state unjust. The state is defined as unjust by something other than the state. Let me repeat that quote, because I think it is a profound statement on civics. Augustine said, “Without justice, what are states but great bands of robbers?” Do you feel

robbed by the state? I sure do. Virtually all of the taxes that we are paying are unbiblical. But Augustine's point was that if God does not limit government with Biblical principles of justice, then there really is no limit to the tyranny the state can engage in. The *state* becomes the definition from which you cannot appeal.

Ultimately, only Christ, the King of Kings is perfectly just, but it is by His grace that He enables rulers to rule in justice. Isaiah 42 prophecies of Christ saying,

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth *justice* to the Gentiles....He will bring forth *justice* for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.

The mention of discouragement anticipates that there will be opposition to Christ's justice. God is not surprised by that. But as God's people live by faith, over time Christ will establish justice in the nations of the earth. Scripture prophesies that all nations will eventually follow God's law. But God has ordained that it will not happen until God's people live by faith. And it has to come from His grace or it won't happen.

Our founding fathers said that this republic would stand only so long as the people are a moral people. The following words are inscribed on the Department of Justice Building in Washington, D.C.: "Justice in the life and conduct of the state is possible only as first it resides in the hearts and souls of the citizens." It can only reside in our hearts if we are being sanctified, and we can only be sanctified if we first have a standing in Christ's righteousness (that's justification).

Brothers and sisters – we have a lot of work before us because we do not have justice in the state of Nebraska and we do not have justice in our nation. The evil of homosexuality is called good; the evil of abortion is protected in our courts. Even Christians are now calling us to vote in favor of limited abortion. Land is confiscated from farmers. The IRS and other agencies are unaccountable. We live in a topsy turvy world when it comes to justice. And the reason is that *the church itself* has abandoned the law of God. Only God can define justice. New Jersey used to have this Bible verse as its official seal, "Righteousness exalteth a nation." The rest of that verse says, and sin is a reproach to any people.

5. A Ruler Must Rule In The Fear Of God (v. 3c)

Well, our text goes on to connect justice with the fear of God. The third part of verse 3 says, "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." This is probably the fundamental problem in America – our nation has no fear of God. Rulers and judges have no fear of God. And even many Christians in office fear their constituents far more than they fear God's opinion. It appears that Christians fear Kamala Harris more than they fear God.

Some of you have McGuffey's Readers in your homes. We've got a copy in the church library. In his Fifth Eclectic Reader he says, "Erase all thought and fear of God from a community, and selfishness and sensuality would absorb the whole man." The two go hand in hand. A man without the fear of God can eventually fall into any sin. That means that

without the fear of God, *any* politician can fall into the sins of Kamala Harris. Proverbs 16:6 says, “By the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.” We see people going to Washington D.C. who initially oppose homosexuality, but by the time they have been there one term they are promoting homosexuality - like Trump recently did with the log cabin Republicans. Why do so many politicians in DC completely change their morals after being in office for a while? I believe that it is in part because they don’t have the protection of God from the attacks of demons - they don’t have His protuberance angels encamped round about them. But I believe it is also in part because the fear of man will change your behavior *depending upon which men you are with*. And the only remedy for the fear of man is an even greater fear of God. And so David says, “He who rules over men must be just ruling in the fear of God.” It’s not an option for any ruler, and that ought to inform our voting.

This is why Patrick Henry (perhaps the most consistent of debaters at the time of the Constitution – one of my heroes who was an anti-federalist) said that Christianity and Biblical law is imperative in rulers. Let me quote him. He said,

It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians. It is when a people forget God that tyrants forge their chains. A true patriot as well as a genuine leader must always take the *higher ground of God’s law when confronted with the evils of man’s law*. [Very interesting. He says that man’s civil laws can be evil; can be abominable, and the only remedy is a return to God’s law. Anyway, he continues:] Government is not the enemy, for it is ordained of God. The enemy to freedom is *tyrannical government that presumes to take the place of God*.

And I say, “Amen! He is right on!” This really is the fundamental issue. Do rulers fear God? This is becoming my prayer request: “Lord, make these men tremble at Your Word and fear Your name.” Without the fear of the Lord we cannot return to being a godly republic. And I believe our republic was blessed beyond measure because we had so many generations of men who feared God - yes, imperfectly; but they feared God.

6. Blessing Comes To A Nation Under God (v. 4)

OK, next point: Verse 4 indicates that blessing comes to a nation that is *under* God. Look at the beautiful description of blessings promised in verse 4 to such kingdoms.

And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.

That is a poetic description of blessing and happiness that God will give when rulers rule in the fear of God and with justice. I fear that the blessings that America has enjoyed for so long will soon run out unless the Lord brings our nation to repentance. Senator Daniel Webster said in the early 1800s,

“If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering and to prosper; If we and our posterity shall be true to the Christian

religion, if we and they shall live always in the fear of God and shall respect His Commandments...we may have the highest hopes of the future fortunes of our country;..."But if we and our posterity neglect religious instruction and authority; violate the rules of eternal justice, trifle with the injunctions of morality, and recklessly destroy the political constitution which holds us together, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity."

Pray that our nation will embrace not just the blessings, but the whole package.

7. All rulers will need the gospel as David did (v. 5 NKJV)

Next point: David brings a hint that even he himself had not lived up to the description of a king that has just been given here. Verse 5 says, "Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant." If you have an ESV, you will notice that it says the opposite. It says, "For does not my house stand so with God?" It is the very opposite meaning of what I have read. And I might say, it is the very opposite of what David says and what God says in 2 Samuel 7 when God made this covenant with David. God spoke of chastening David's house with a rod of men and blows of the sons of men, and David says, "Who am I, O LORD God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" He realized that his house had not lived up to these expectations. In that chapter it speaks of God's *mercy* on David's house. He needed mercy, he asked for mercy, and he got it. And 2 Samuel 7 made clear that apart from the Gospel of Christ, and unless God saw David as united with the King of kings, David too would have been rejected. Again, he needs the gospel if he is to rule in a way that is pleasing to God.

So David is not saying that he was blessed because he was so good. That is the way three versions translate it. That's the implication of the ESV. He is saying the opposite. He is saying that God has blessed him and made a covenant with him despite the fact that he has messed up several times. Let me read three translations to this effect. The NKJV says, "Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant." The ASV says, "Verily my house is not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant." The W.E.B. translation says, "Most assuredly my house is not so with God; yet he has made with me an everlasting covenant."

Now what difference does it make how we translate that? Well, to me this is a statement that we can take tremendous comfort in as we pray for our nation. All it would take is God's grace to make a sitting president and a sitting Congress and Senate to repent and to change their policies. He can do that. He did it with the entire city of Nineveh. He did it with Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He did it with Cyrus king of Persia. Sometimes God uses war and other judgments to bring nations to that repentance. God's mercy rests upon kings and nations who submit themselves to His rule. It is mercy, not what we deserve. We have sex scandals in Washington, but so did David. The difference is that David ran to the Gospel. Our nation has murder on its hands, but so did David. We have lies and deceit in Washington, but so did David. We have oppression in government, abuse of spending, overtaxation, but so did Solomon David's son - at least in his later backslidden years. God recognizes that even in government we are not perfect and the only way He can bless

governments is through the mercies of Jesus, who alone is perfect as King of Kings and Lord of lords. Everything in life needs to be seen through the eyes of Christ – including civil government. We must not be perfectionistic. But that doesn't mean compromising incrementalism. It means looking to Christ.

And don't think that things are hopeless today for our nation. The Davidic covenant that David speaks of here brought tremendous encouragement to the Reformers because it means that God *can* bless nations despite imperfections if they will confess their sins like David did and turn to the Lord. What God is interested in is our covenantal relationship with Christ. It's not comfortable living apart from Christ; it's not less taxes apart from Christ. Are we as a nation willing to covenant with Him once again; willing to have Him rule over us? Verse 5 indicates that salvation and Gospel must be applied to politics:

2Sam. 23:5 “Although my house is not so with God, Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, Ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; Will He not make it increase?”

That “increase” speaks of sanctification and growth in the application of law and Gospel in a ruler's life.

B. The Only Other Option Is To Acknowledge That Our Nation Stands In Rebellion Against God (vv. 6-7)

Now, what are the alternatives to such a total submission to King Jesus? Not very good. Look at verses 6-7.

2Sam. 23:6 But the sons of rebellion shall all be as thorns thrust away, Because they cannot be taken with hands. 2Sam. 23:7 But the man who touches them Must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, And they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place.”

That is the destiny of *all* rebel rulers. I won't spend a lot of time on those verses, but let me make a couple of key points.

1. Is Your Vote Promoting The “Sons Of Rebellion”? (v. 6)

First of all, I think it is worth asking if your vote is promoting a son of rebellion, when God wants him thrust away? David says in our passage that there can be no neutrality. We are either for Christ or against Him. Certainly He is a merciful King, and has blessed our nation richly despite our repeated sins against Him. But there comes a time when He says, “Enough is enough.” He says, “But the sons of rebellion shall all be as thorns thrust away...” It is not enough for you to vote for the person who has the best economic plan, or who can debate the best, or who has the best plan for some pet project that you like, or who can keep an-even-worse-candidate out. If you are voting for a man or a woman who is a rebel against Christ's kingdom and who is determined to destroy Christ's laws (such as Christ's laws against abortion and homosexuality), you are voting for thorns destined for God's judgment; thorns that He wants the people to thrust away. If Christ wants them thrust

away, how on earth can you think that He is pleased with your choosing such a ruler? You don't embrace a thorn. It will hurt you. He goes on to explain:

2. Why Is It That "They cannot be taken with hands"? (v. 6b)

"Because they cannot be taken with hands." Why? In the physical realm you know why. If you take a thorn in your hand your hand will be hurt. But in the political realm the same is true. The answer to liberal humanistic politics is not conservative humanistic politics. They are both thorns to be thrust away. And we have seen it. Despite the squabbling of the Republican and Democratic Parties, they have both advanced the same things - one slower than the other. They have both advanced collectivism or statism, and we are hurting for it. We've got to get back to a Scriptural perspective on politics. There are enough Christians in America that if they would once again embrace God's plan for voting, things could be turned around very quickly. The conservative and pragmatic approach to politics has not worked because it violates God's spiritual laws of harvest. If you insist on planting thorns, you are going to keep on getting more thorns. It's just the way the laws of harvest happen. And by voting for them, you *are* planting thorns. Don't expect God-honoring results.

a) Every nation that has persisted in rebellion against Christ has suffered the ravages of Christ's rod of iron (vv. 6-7)

Now of course, when he speaks about *human* hands it implies that humans are involved in either the rejection or the choosing of a civil magistrate. But God wants our judgment of evil men to be the same as *His* judgment of them. It says, "But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place." In other words, once kings turn into rebels, it is very rare that they turn good. Only interposition removes them. States have a responsibility to interpose against higher tyranny - and even to secede if needed. And if States won't interpose, Sheriffs have a duty to protect their citizens from tyranny. Tyrants don't tend to step down on their own. And when citizens are unwilling to get rid of their treasonous kings through lawful means (and I emphasize lawful means, not revolutionary means), God has to resort to providential judgments, and He often uses humanistic man to destroy humanistic man - and it's awful. He used Babylon to judge Judah and he used Persia to judge Babylon, and He used Greece to judge Persia. It wasn't pretty.

b) But judgment is not a foregone conclusion

Now, I will hasten to remind you that judgment by the sword is *not* a foregone conclusion. Remember David's statement, "Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant." King Josiah, Hezekiah and others turned from the paganism of their parents and returned to the Davidic covenant spoken of in verse 5. Prior to their turning, it seemed *more* hopeless for their nation than our current situation in America. No one expected things to get better. But God turned the hearts of politicians and brought that nation back to God quite a few times. Nebuchadnezzar is another example of a tyrant being brought to salvation and being used to restore liberty. The Davidic covenant gives a basis for mercy in the face of political rebellion.

We may grow hopelessly depressed as we look at the state of affairs in America. But remember that *politics is not your Savior. God is*. And there have been several times in past history when things have looked as bad or worse, and God turned them around. Yes, things have been this bad or worse. People forget history. I've started reading a book which documents those cycles in America. It's *The Fourth Political Theory in Biblical Perspective* by Jay Rogers. I haven't finished it yet, so I can't fully endorse it. But things were really worse than this in England prior to the time that God raised up Wesley and Whitfield - two powerful preachers. And many historians have said that the revival brought through these two men was the only thing that averted a bloody revolution like France had. It could have easily happened to England apart from the First Great Awakening. The efforts of those two evangelists transformed men, and through those men transformed society in England and America. That is why 2 Chronicles 7 says it is the *church* which is key to averting God's judgment upon a civil government. That's why I am preaching to the church. We have seen from the Bible and from history that it is the *church* which is key to averting God's judgment upon a civil government. "If My people who are called by My name [that's the church] will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." But if the church compromises in its voting for politicians, why should God bless us? We are not living by faith; we are living by fear.

V. Conclusion

We are in a time of crisis, and the only hope for our nation is another Reformation of the *church* of Jesus Christ. And we don't need a majority for that. It has always been minorities on fire for God that have made a difference. There is hope if we will repent like David repented, and pray like David prayed, and return to the Scriptures as the foundation for politics as David returned to the Scriptures, and if we will insist on only choosing rulers that meet the essential qualifications laid out in Scripture. You might not have very many candidates to vote for, but the duty is ours and the outcome is God's. But let us seek to do what we can. Amen.