

## I DON'T GET IT!

Presented by

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On Sunday morning, September 23, 2009, Tyler and I began a brand-new Bible class titled, “A Journey through the Old Testament.” As I present this sermon today (January 2, 2011), we are almost a year-and-a-half into this fascinating study of God’s Word. It goes without saying that during our in-depth investigation into what is known as “The Old Covenant,” we have learned an incredible amount of extremely valuable information that we did not know before. To choose just five prominent examples, we learned that:

- When God parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape pharaoh’s army (Exodus 14:21-29), that was not the **only** time He did something like that. Many years later, when the Israelites were finally ready to enter the Promised Land, God parted the waters of the River Jordan to allow His people to cross safely into Canaan (Joshua 3:14-17).
- When God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, that was the only occasion in all of human history when He spoke to an entire nation at once (Exodus 20:1-21).
- When Joseph’s envious, spiteful brothers sold him as a slave, and his life seemed to be ruined, neither he nor they could have known that, as he later informed his brothers from his elevated position as second in command to Egypt’s pharaoh, “God was sending me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:7).
- When Rahab the harlot was saved during the destruction of Jericho because earlier she had helped the Israelite spies, she ended up marrying a man by the name of Salmon, and gave birth to a son by the name of Boaz (Matthew 1:5), who then married Ruth, who gave birth to a son by the name of Obed (Ruth 4:21; Luke 3:32), who became the father of Jesse, the father of King David, from whose lineage, many years later, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, would come.
- When God chastised the high priest Eli because he did not restrain his evil sons, the Lord told Eli that He would take the priesthood away from his family forever. For many years God’s promise seemed to have been forgotten, until one day King Solomon unexpectedly stripped Abiathar the high priest—whose connection to the priesthood went all the way back to Ahimelech of the priestly clan of Eli from Shiloh (1 Samuel 22:20)—of all his rights and privileges, banished him from his court, and exiled him and his entire family, thereby fulfilling God’s promise of many years earlier to forever eliminate Eli’s household from the position of high priest (1 Kings 1:7-25; 2:22-35).

How astonishing it has been for Tyler and me to repeatedly watch the various purposes of God unfold according to **His** timetable rather than according to **man’s** wishes, desires, and plans! Little did we know, when we first started our “journey through the Old Testament,” exactly how many amazing surprises were lying in wait for us! Then—just when we thought we couldn’t **possibly** be any **more** surprised than we had been in our studies of the previous months—even **more phenomenal events** began to take place right before our eyes—causing us to remember that God is, as the ancient patriarch Job was forced to admit, the One Who “does great things that are unsearchable, and marvelous things that are without number” (Job 5:9).

As a result of the absolutely mesmerizing studies in which we have been involved for the past fifteen months, I truthfully can say that I understand why the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 11:33, “Oh Lord, how unsearchable are Your judgments, and Your ways past finding out!” **In other words...I get it!** Now I actually have come to the point where I **expect** God to surprise me, rather than being **shocked** when I discover that He has! I finally have come to realize that, as Job so well put it, “You, Lord, can do all things, and no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).

But, truth be told, there is one thing I **“don’t get.”** For the life of me, I cannot figure out why so many of the people whom we have encountered in our studies knew from their own personal experiences, or from the experiences of others who had gone before them, the horrifying consequences of disobeying God—**yet stubbornly chose to disobey Him anyway!** Of all the things that we have come across in our studies, this one is by far the most puzzling to me. Let me discuss with you a few examples, and I think you will understand why I feel this way.

First, after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea and camped at the base of Mt. Sinai, God said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel” (Exodus 24:1). Exodus 24:9 tells us, “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel.” Later, in Exodus 28:1, we see Moses installing Aaron as Israel’s first high priest in obedience to God’s instructions. Yet just four chapters later, in Exodus 32:1, we read how the Israelites came to Aaron and cried out, “Make us gods that shall go before us; because as for Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him!” Aaron **should** have said, “**No, I will not do this!**—because God Himself commanded us, ‘You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, and you shall not bow down to them nor serve them’ ” (Exodus 20:3-4). Yet here is what Aaron actually **did** say: “Break off the golden earrings that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me” (Exodus 32:2). The Israelites then did as Aaron said. And, as Exodus 32:4 goes on to tell us, “Aaron received the gold from their hands, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.” **I don’t get it!** Aaron had seen God destroy the entire Egyptian army beneath the raging waters of the Red Sea. Plus, he had been with Moses on Mt. Sinai in the very presence of God, Who subsequently had honored him with the appointment as Israel’s first high priest. Yet in spite of all that, Aaron committed a terrible sin that, as Exodus 32:28 informs us, ultimately cost the lives of more than 3,000 of his fellow Israelites. How could Aaron have done that? What was he thinking?!

Second, I would like you to consider the actions of the wisest human ever to live on Earth—King Solomon. In 2 Samuel 12:24 we are told, “The Lord loved Solomon.” As a result, Solomon, David’s youngest son, was elevated above all of his older brothers to the status of king of Israel. Then something un-

usual happened: God Himself appeared to Solomon, **not once, but twice!** The first time, according to 1 Kings 3:5, God said to the king, “Ask; what shall I give you?” How amazing is **that?! God came to Solomon and offered him anything he wanted.** The second time that God appeared to Solomon He told him, “If you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you will keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever” (1 Kings 9:4-5). The first king of Israel, Saul, **begged** for God to talk to him, but, as 1 Samuel 28:6 tells us, “When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord would not answer him.” Solomon, on the other hand, had God appear to him **twice!** Yet, in spite of God’s love for him and multiple appearances to him, what did Solomon do? As 1 Kings 11:3-8 tells us, “Solomon took seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. And when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God.... So Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kings 11:3-8). **I don’t get it!** God loved Solomon. He gave him greater wisdom than any other human who would ever live. He gave him a kingship that should not even have been his. Then He gave him riches beyond any human’s wildest dreams. And how did Solomon repay the Lord? Here, from 1 Kings 11:5-7, is the answer: “Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon also built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab.” As a result, God said to the king, “Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant” (1 Kings 11:11). The king to whom God had appeared not once, but twice, **lost everything**—not just for himself, but also for his son, Rehoboam, who ended up being king, not over all of Israel, but instead over only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. How could Solomon have done that? What was he thinking?!

Third, I would like to call your attention to the “servant” mentioned in God’s threat to Solomon, which I quoted earlier from 1 Kings 11:11 where God told the king, “I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.” That servant, as we now know, was Jeroboam, who, according to 1 Kings 11:28, had been Solomon’s “officer over the entire labor force of the house of Israel.” Jeroboam had not a drop of royal blood flowing through his veins—which meant that, under normal circumstances, he never would have been in line to be the next king of Israel. But the fact that “Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord” changed all of that. God sent the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam to tell him, “I will take the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give it to you” (1 Kings 11:35). In a single moment in time Jeroboam went from **servant** to **sovereign**—no thanks to his own talents or accomplishments. Rather, his kingship was an undeserved gift from God. And how did Jeroboam handle that incredible gift? The text of 1 Kings 12:28-30 tells us when it says that Jeroboam “made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land

of Egypt!’ So Jeroboam set up one calf in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went there to worship.” Whereas Aaron had **tried** to reestablish calf worship in Israel, Jeroboam **actually succeeded!** And that leads me to say, **I don’t get it!** Jeroboam had personally witnessed the kingship of Israel being ripped from Solomon’s hands because of his sins against God. Yet practically the very first thing Jeroboam did after being made king was to **sin against God!** How could Jeroboam have done that? What was he thinking?!

Do any of these events make any more sense to you than they do to me? I suspect that they do not. As I said at the beginning of this sermon, for the life of me I cannot figure out why so many of the people whom we have encountered in our Old Testament studies knew from firsthand experience the grisly consequences of disobeying God—**yet still chose to disobey Him anyway!** As I bring this lesson to a close, I suppose that the best thing for me to do is simply to learn from the mistakes that these people made, and make up my mind not to be like them. Perhaps the best way for me to do that is to try to remember, each and every day of my life, what Jesus said in John 14:15—“If you love Me, keep My commandments!” **That, I do get!**