

# Anathema Maranatha — December 5, 2021

*Vessels of Wrath Fitted for Destruction, Esau, Jeroboam, and the Ark Among the Philistines: The Solemn Consequence of Despising Grace*

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**Scripture Reading: Romans 9:19–23; 1 Corinthians 16:22; 1 Kings 11:26–40; 12:20–33; 13:1–6; 14:1–16; 1 Samuel 6:1–16**

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*“If anyone love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha.” (1 Corinthians 16:22)*

*“That he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory.” (Romans 9:23)*

## **Vessels of Wrath: Fitted by Themselves, Not by God**

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Romans 9:19–23 is one of the passages most commonly misread to mean that God has predetermined some for destruction without reference to their own choices. But the text does not say that. It says the Lord endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction — and it does not say that God fitted them for destruction. It says he endured them with much longsuffering. God’s intervention toward man is not to condemn him but to save him. He is not willing that any should perish; he has commanded men everywhere to repent; he sent his own Son to die for sinners. His intervention is all in the direction of grace. Those who are fitted for destruction are fitted by their own persistent rejection of that grace — not by God’s decree.

This distinction matters because it bears directly on the terrible word at the end of 1 Corinthians 16: if anyone love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema

maranatha. The Aramaic means, roughly, let him be accursed — the Lord is coming. Paul places this solemn sentence in the middle of warm personal greetings, at the very close of an epistle full of grace. Why? Because the grace has been offered, and those who do not love the Lord Jesus — not those whom God has decreed should not love him, but those who choose not to — are under the sentence that Paul states. The Lord is coming. That pronouncement is God's assessment of every Esau, every Jeroboam, every one who has had the grace of God proffered to him and shrugged.

## **Esau: No Regard for the Grace of God**

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Esau is the type of the one who despises the grace of God. His birthright was a real inheritance — not spiritual, but a genuine portion of God's earthly blessing through the line of Abraham. He was hungry one day, and his brother Jacob had made a meal. Give me some of that, Esau said, and Jacob asked for the birthright in return. Esau gave it away for a bowl of food. Hebrews 12:16 calls him a profane person who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

God's pronouncement — Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated — came through the prophet Malachi, after Esau's life was long over, after his testimony was fully established. God did not declare Esau hated before he had proven himself to be one who despised what God offered him. The pronouncement followed the life; it was not a decree preceding it. Esau had heard the story of his grandfather Abraham and the ram caught in the thicket, his father Isaac on the altar. His father Isaac had told him those things. It meant nothing to him. Anathema maranatha. The Lord is coming, and it means nothing.

## **Jeroboam: God's Grace Refused at Every Point**

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The history of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11–14 is an extended case study in the same pattern. God pulled Jeroboam out of complete obscurity. He was a capable man,

promoted by Solomon for his industry. Then the prophet Ahijah came to him in a field and tore his new garment into twelve pieces, gave him ten, and said: God has determined to take ten tribes from the house of Solomon and give them to you. This was entirely unmerited grace — nothing in Jeroboam earned or deserved a kingdom.

And the prophecy came true exactly as given. When Jeroboam returned after Solomon's death, the people installed him as king over the ten tribes, precisely as Ahijah had said. What was Jeroboam's response? He said in his heart: now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. He began immediately calculating how to preserve what he had received, rather than trusting the God who had given it. He made two golden calves and set them in Bethel and Dan. He was like Esau — no regard for what God had given him, only concern for what he might lose.

A prophet came from Judah and cried against the altar Jeroboam had built, foretelling its destruction. Jeroboam stretched out his hand and said, Lay hold on him — and his arm withered. He could not move it. He knew instantly who had done it: he asked the prophet to entreat your God to restore my hand. He knew who God was. And yet there is no sign anywhere in the record that these repeated divine interventions produced any change in Jeroboam's heart. His arm was restored; he went back to his idolatry. A man can have more than sufficient witness of the power of God and remain entirely unmoved if his heart is set against submitting to God.

The end was commensurate with the sin. When his son Abijah fell sick, Jeroboam sent his wife in disguise to the aged and blind Ahijah — the same prophet who had promised him the kingdom. The disguise was pointless; Ahijah knew her the moment she walked in. And the message was: God lifted you from nothing and gave you a kingdom. You have done evil above all who were before you. Therefore not a single male of your house will survive; they will be eaten by dogs and birds of prey. The one exception was this sick son, because in him there

was found something good toward Jehovah. Only the one who was about to die would receive the dignity of a burial. That is what God thought of Jeroboam's entire career of despising grace.

## **The Ark Among the Philistines: Proximity to God Without Submission**

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First Samuel 6 shows the same principle at work in pagan hearts. The ark of the Lord had been captured by the Philistines and placed in the temple of Dagon. The idol fell before the ark two successive nights, the second time losing its hands and head. God struck the Philistines with affliction wherever the ark was taken. Finally they decided to return it and rid themselves of the presence of God.

They sent it back on a cart pulled by two milch cows whose calves had been taken from them — cows whose natural instinct would be to turn back toward their calves. But the cows went straight to Beth-shemesh, lowing as they went, not turning aside. The lords of the Philistines followed and watched. This was unmistakable: God was directing those cows. They had said, if they go straight to Beth-shemesh, we will know God did this to us. They saw it with their own eyes. And what did they do? They returned to Ekron the same day. No repentance, no turning to the God of Israel. Just: we have confirmed it was God, and we want nothing to do with him. They were like Esau. They were like Jeroboam. They wanted God away from them.

Even the men of Beth-shemesh, Levites who rejoiced to see the ark return, failed to be humbled by where it had been. They looked into the ark — something they had no right to do — and seventy of them died. Their response was not repentance but, who is able to stand before this holy God? And to whom shall he go from us? They too wanted the ark to leave. The presence of God without a humble and broken heart is a terror, not a comfort.

## Grace: God's Riches at Christ's Expense

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Every religion except one is a religion of do — something man must perform to earn standing before God. Christianity is the religion of done. God did everything on the cross. He sent his own Son to die for sinners; the debt has been paid; the offer stands. And for those who receive that offer, who are not like Esau or Jeroboam or the lords of the Philistines but who say yes to grace, the promise is not just forgiveness but all that we heard in the morning meeting: a place with Christ in glory, joint heirs with him, his own inheritance shared.

Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ — these are not only for the initial moment of salvation but for the ongoing walk. Grace does not overlook sin; it brings us to recognize the one who bore our sins. And for those who know the Lord, the solemn history of Esau and Jeroboam is not a warning of damnation but a warning against ingratitude, against treating lightly what God has given, against making ourselves comfortable in the world at the expense of the pilgrim character that ought to mark us on the way home.

*If anyone love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (1 Corinthians 16:22–23)*