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"Put on the whole armor of God"

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When is a Baby Considered Alive?

by W. Adam Boyd



Is a baby in the womb alive? Does a baby in the womb breathe? When should we consider a baby a viable life-form that is guaranteed human rights? These questions have been hot topics for the past several years, perhaps even decades, and have become unduly politicized. As we trudge through the nonsensical political rhetoric, let us briefly explore these questions and examine what God constitutes as life.

Let us first look at a few of man's definitions of life.

A few definitions of life according to Merriam Webster's Dictionary:

- the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body
- a principle or force that is considered to underlie the distinctive quality of animate beings
- an organismic state characterized by capacity for metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction
- spiritual existence transcending
- a vital or living being specifically
- spirit, animation
- the period of existence
- living beings
- human activities
- animate activity and movement stirrings of life
- something resembling animate life

There are some other ones out there, but as we can see the *bulk* of these do not mention breathing or specific requirements other than the capacity for metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction—all of which babies have. The reason I mention this is that there's a deceitful argument out there that purports that "babies don't breathe in the womb, so they aren't considered a lifeform."

Here are some excerpts taken from *renowned* science textbooks that define life:

"Although life is a continuous process, fertilization is a critical landmark because, under ordinary circumstances, a new, genetically distinct human organism is thereby formed.... The combination of 23 chromosomes present in each pronucleus results in 46 chromosomes in the zygote. Thus, the diploid number is restored and the embryonic genome is formed. The embryo now exists as a genetic unity" (O'Rahilly, Ronan and Mller, Fabiola. *Human Embryology & Teratology*. 2nd edition. New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996, pp. 8, 29).

"Almost all higher animals start their lives from a single cell, the fertilized ovum (zygote).... **The time of fertilization represents the starting point in the life history**, or ontogeny, of the individual" (Carlson, Bruce M. Patten's *Foundations of Embryology*. 6th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996, p. 3).

We can see that science has already defined when a baby is a viable lifeform: at the time of fertilization. Unfortunately, those who rely heavily on science and do not believe in God will pick and choose what they want to believe giving rise to moral relativism that tries to discredit this fact.

Now, if we looked in the current textbooks that are in use today in our children's schools, who knows what would be in them. However, you cannot redefine life. It is an absolute. Life is either present or not. A being is alive or dead. There's no in-between state of existence.

Does a baby in the womb breathe? Again, this is a popular argument that pro-abortionists use to negate the fact that babies in the womb aren't considered a lifeform. First, let's ask ourselves, what is the purpose of breathing? The purpose of breathing is to deliver oxygen (O₂) to and remove carbon dioxide (CO₂) from vital organs in the body. Can we say that O₂ is being delivered and CO₂ is being removed while in the womb? Certainly! The mother carrying the baby breathes (inhales O₂ and exhales CO₂ via the lungs) for the baby and oxygen rich blood is supplied to the baby through the umbilical cord which also removes CO₂ rich or deoxygenated blood. That is by design. So, we can understand that "breathing" is a process that is not necessary while in the womb, although the fundamental process of supplying the organs with O₂ is most definitely taking place as the baby develops in the womb. All placental mammals get oxygen in this way until birthed. Also, human babies actually perform exercise breathing movements beginning at around nine-weeks gestation!

The action of breathing is perhaps not even necessary even as an adult—who we consider a lifeform if they are not dead, right? Consider these examples of adjunct breathing: A lifetime smoker that uses an "iron lung"

to breathe. Is this person not alive? A patient who suffers from a bad pneumonia that is intubated and on a mechanical ventilator: Are they dead or alive? Well by the definition of some, these people would not be considered lifeforms. Of course, we know this is absurd, and yes, they are alive just as babies in the womb are alive!

What other things in nature are determined living that don't breathe? Plants do breathe—they give out carbon dioxide and absorb oxygen from the air that surrounds them. Their tissues respire just as animal tissues do. Plants, however, do not have lungs or a blood stream, so we cannot say that they breathe in the same way as animals.

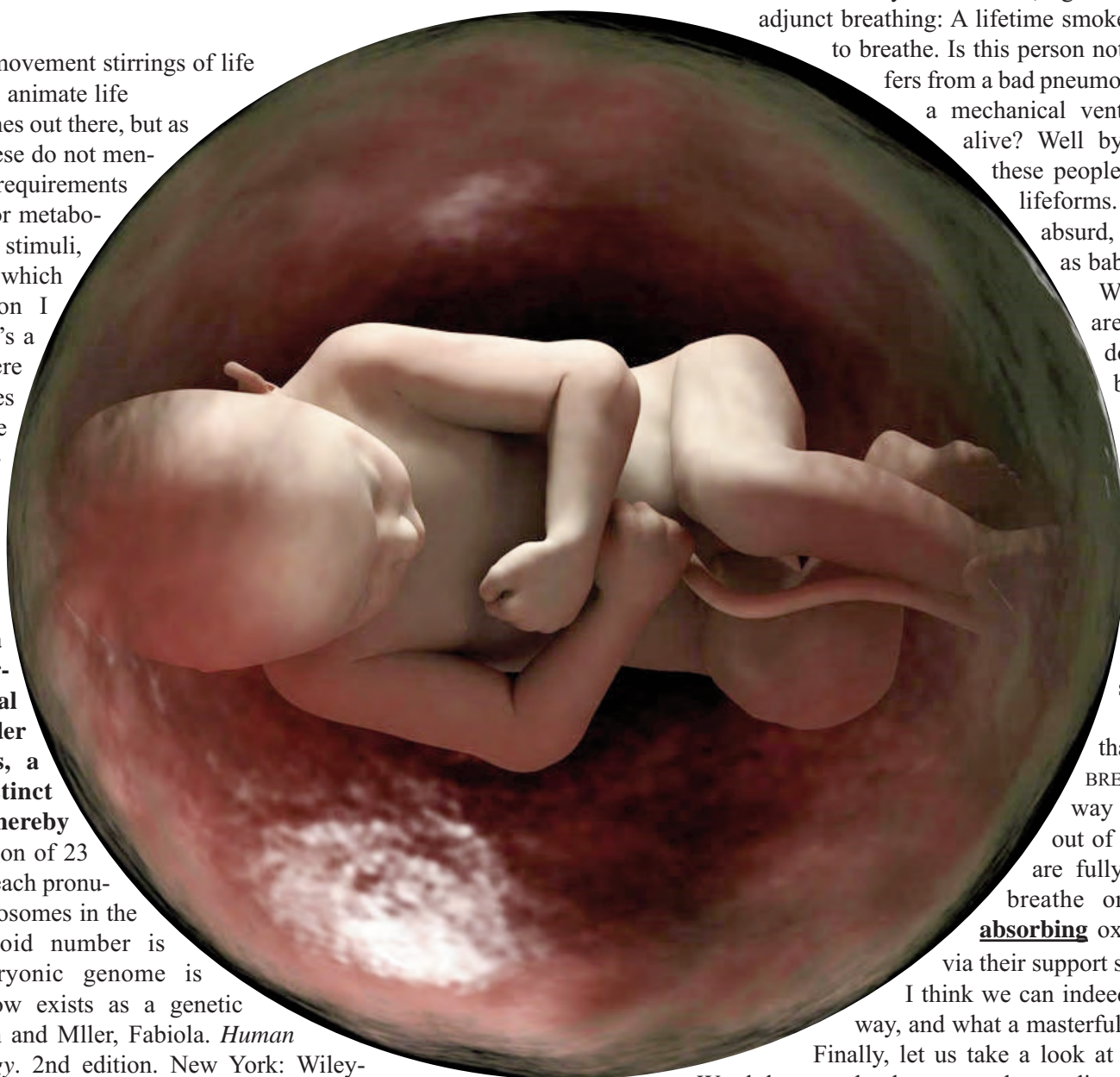
Could we agree, then, that babies in the womb DO BREATHE, just not in the same way as when they are birthed out of the fetus when their lungs are fully developed and ready to breathe on their own instead of absorbing oxygen and giving out CO₂ via their support system while in the womb?

I think we can indeed. God designed us in that way, and what a masterful Creator He is!

Finally, let us take a look at a few scriptures in God's Word that may lend to our understanding.

Luke 1:41: "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

Wow! The babe leaped in her womb! That is a physical animate being performing an action. Isn't it also interesting that the baby had a sense of what was going on outside of the womb! What then does a baby going through an abortion think or feel?



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Here’s an excerpt from a website I found that I thought makes a salient point: “When the virgin Mary learned that she was pregnant, and that she would bear the Christ child, she journeyed to the hill country of Judea and sought out her kinswoman, Elizabeth. Elizabeth, of course, was also pregnant with the child who would come to be known as John the Baptizer.

“Luke, the medical doctor (Colossians 4:14) and historian, declares that when Mary greeted Elizabeth, ‘the babe’ (John) leaped in her womb (Luke 1:41; cf. 44). The Greek word here employed by Luke is *brephos*. It is a term that is used in the Greek New Testament to denote either a pre-born or post-born child.

“Unlike some modern religionists who support the notion that the entity within the womb is a mere blob of tissue to be disposed of at will, the inspired writers of the Bible consider the unborn human to be a child in every sense of the word—as much a “baby” as a newborn infant. He or she is not just a fetus; there is a child in the mother’s body.

“The fact is, when Dr. Luke presents the record concerning the birth of Christ, he says the shepherds were told that they would find a ‘babe’ lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). Luke again employs *brephos*. From the divine viewpoint, the product of human conception is a baby—both before and after birth.

“It is no more justifiable to take the child’s life before its birth than it would be to dispose of it after birth. In either case, the crime is murder. Thus, beside Luke 1:41 write: *The pre-birth human is a ‘baby’—as much as the post-birth child is. See Luke 2:12 for the same word*” (<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/737-luke-1-41-baby-or-fetus>).

Jeremiah 1:4–5: “Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

First, we need to recognize and appreciate that God forms or creates us in the womb. Second, it says He knew Jeremiah before he was even created! That’s powerful! Obviously, there are other scriptures we can look at that lend support to our understanding of God-defined life, but it doesn’t get much clearer than babies leaping in the womb and possessing awareness, and God’s own Word stating He created us in the womb, which means we are alive at that time! It’s not rocket science, but the ruler of this world has deceived many into thinking it’s okay to murder their babies, mostly because of it being an inconvenience to them. Life isn’t an inconvenience—it’s a great gift.

It’s been estimated that approximately 125,000 deaths are due to abortion each day! That number is staggering! That’s far more concerning than the current “Coronavirus pandemic” that has prompted local and state governments to impose lockdowns, which have resulted in economic woes in the United States—all in the name of saving lives. Yet, seemingly, nothing is done to stop abortion.

Don’t get me wrong, lives are definitely in need of and worth saving. My point here is that all lives are precious, all lives matter, and all lives are worth saving! The progressive force trying to control the world likes to pick and choose and create rules and ethics based on their own beliefs and struggle for power which disregard any opposing views—one of which is often the belief in God, unfor-



A recent Planned Parenthood report reveals that PP affiliates performed 345,672 abortions from October 1, 2017, to September 30, 2018.

tunately. So we must be vigilant in not allowing false doctrines and feel-good politics to weaken our beliefs when we know what is good.

First Thessalonians 5:21 says, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” God’s Word proves that babies in the womb are alive!

So, who has the final authority on what constitutes life? God does! After all, He is the Author of it, and He has the final judgment on the matter. It’s pretty much that simple.



HUMAN LIFE MATTERS! This tiny human being, born prematurely, deserves a chance at life.

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: November 16, 2020
Submissions may be sent to vancestinson@cgi.org

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Touched By the Sting of Death

by Melissa M. Puzon



Have you ever been, by some chance, stung by a bee or a wasp or some other kind of stinging insect? A quick Google search would fairly give us an idea of how the stings of most of these insects can be quite painful and irritating. According to kidshealth.org., aside from the sharp pain, you may also experience swelling and itching due to the venomous toxin these insects inject into the victim. However, by applying appropriate precautionary measures we can mostly prevent or avoid an unwanted encounter with these troublesome creatures. If it happens that you got stung by one, with the proper first aid treatment, symptoms in most cases usually disappear or improve after a day or so and don't need medical care. How I wish the same thing is true for another kind of sting. This sting leaves behind a pain that no first aid treatment can remedy, and no amount of comfort or care could make the symptoms disappear in a day or two. Moreover, no human—whether rich or poor, bondmen or free, sinner or saint—could ever avoid or escape it no matter how hard one tries. I am talking about THE STING OF DEATH.

Death is not a very pleasant topic for most of us to talk about. But death, as we all know, is an inevitable part of life. It's as natural as birth. That may seem a bit ironic, but the Holy Book does tell us that "it is appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27). And as fate would have it, I have come face to face with the pains of death not just once, not even just twice, but three grievous times in my life. Yes, those three times I've felt the burning and penetrating sting of death. I've felt it so deeply that it hurt me right to the core.

A little over a year ago I lost my dear husband of 33 years as he succumbed to heart failure after years of dealing with an enlarged and weak heart. After his passing, my two remaining children and I were still reeling in grief when we had to frantically rush my eldest daughter to the hospital who, at that time, was suffering from a cancerous kidney tumor. Over a month later, she too succumbed to the inevitable. It was distressing to witness them in affliction as their bodies began to fail and yield to death. And each time, the words of the Psalmist bitterly struck home: "The pangs of death surrounded me...The snares of death confronted me" (Psalm 18:4-5). "My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me" (Psalm 55:4). I came to experience firsthand what it was like to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). "My face is flushed from weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death" (Job 16:16).

The death of a spouse is a difficult and crushing blow, but for a mother like me, the death of a child is unfathomable, almost unbearable—particularly because it was not the first time that it happened to me. Eleven years ago, I also lost a teenage daughter to a sudden illness. Yes, a total of three major losses within a decade. I should say four, to count in the death of my loving father who died at the ripe, old age of 86 within the said period. Whatever the circumstances, whether they died young or old, suddenly or expectedly, a beloved's funeral is at all times one of the most dreadful occasions in life. That's when death's bitter sting crosses the threshold of your heart and mind. That's when death seems to take a wicked delight in its apparent victory.

When death has cast its shadow over your dwelling place, especially several times, your faith will undoubtedly be tested by fire. Coming to grips with the situation was a slow and delicate process.

Numerous questions had crossed my mind scanning for answers. Why? Why me? Why, God? Weeks before my husband died, as if preparing us for what was to come, he led us in a series of Bible studies on the Book of Job. So, with the lessons of Job still clearly etched on my mind, I just knew all too well that I had no right to question my Creator for all that had happened. But, I thought to myself, to ask questions because of the sincere desire to know the answers is different from questioning in the sense of alluding to doubts and raising objections. I knew that the only way to go was to delve more deeply into the Word of God.

Allow me to share with you some of my striking realizations brought about by my ardent quest for understanding. As I studied and contemplated the subject matter of death, one of the first things that had dawned on me was that God does not owe me anything—not even an explanation of what He allows to happen in my life. He is the Potter, and I am just a lump of clay in His hands (Isaiah 64:8). The more I reflected on it, the more I was led to fully understand what God meant by the words, "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). "Faith is...the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). You do not only believe because you have witnessed His interventions in your life or because He has granted your petitions; instead, you choose to continue to believe and put your trust in Him even when He seems to be silent or even when He has apparently denied your request and you do not understand why. I know that's easier said than done. It helps to be reminded of what Jesus Christ said to the doubting Thomas: "because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). God is God. He has the sovereign right to do virtually anything according to His will. That statement may give the impression of being tyrannical, but our God is a God of love and He does things in love. And, as incredible as it may sound, God has loved us *as much* as He has loved Jesus Christ. That's exactly what Christ our Savior said in John 17:23. That is absolutely heartening, especially if we grasp its full meaning. Additionally, it occurred to me that every time I would tell God that my pain is too much for me to bear, I make God a liar. Why? Because He had told us in the Scriptures that "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but...will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Will I take God's word for it and step out in faith? Or will I doubt His words and, in effect, accuse God? It's a matter of choice, and ultimately a matter of salvation.

When panic and fear was gripping me at the sight of a loved one slowly slipping away from me, I heard one minister say something that I needed to hear at no better time: "Many have the faith to be healed, but how many of us have the faith *not* to be healed...when God says 'No—I'm not going to heal you...not yet,' how many of us have the faith to continue to have faith in God?" Talk about living faith! Likewise, not too long ago, a friend who was confiding in me her share of trials and tests had told me that every time her prayers are answered her faith is strengthened. Hence, I posed to her the question, "What if your most heartfelt prayer was not answered?" She then gave me a thought-provoking reply, "That is more difficult. That is when having faith is most crucial." Certainly, faith is something we believers cannot do without if we are to successfully maneuver through the seemingly intricate ways God deals with us.

Perhaps we could glean some useful insights from the writings of the "pinnacle of Israel's wise men" as to why God allows us to experience sorrowful circumstances. It appears to be that King Solomon gives more weight to sorrow and mourning than mirth and

laughter. As stated by him in Ecclesiastes 7:2-3: "Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart...for by a sad countenance the heart is made better." How true it is that when confronted with the reality of our transient physical existence we ponder the value and purpose of life. "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). Mourning somehow inspires us toward more serious and solemn introspection of our time on earth which positively affects how we conduct our lives. I've learned that when grappling with affliction, sorrow, pain, grief, and other adversities we are given the chance for growth. We decide what personal and life lessons we can take away from our experiences. We may find ourselves standing at a crossroads; it's either we make it or we break it. It can be our opportunity for growth or decline—depending on how we decide to act or react. On the other hand, seeking fun and laughter, while not altogether bad, follows the path of least resistance that it doesn't offer a great deal of opportunity for growth. It is much like what a popular maxim states, "No pain, no gain." Evidently, death and sorrow are more instructive when it comes to living a purposeful life. When my precious second daughter departed this life, her classmates had turned over to our family one of her last school projects. It was sort of a collage in which was a poem which, curiously, she had chosen (of all poems) to be the centerpiece of that collage. The poem was entitled "Live a Life That Matters" by Michael Josephson. In a nutshell, the poem's topic is about death. Call it a premonition or what, her choice of that poem clearly brought home a message. It was a reminder on how life can be fleeting; it is therefore incumbent on us all to live a life of lasting significance. It's a very insightful poem, but I'd like to add a word or two to the title, if I may, to make it more complete: "Live a Life That Matters To God."

Sometimes people would ask me how I survived the ordeal of losing my loved ones. It's still an on-going process, and I have my high times and low times. The fact that I have kept my sanity intact up to now is probably an indication that I may be at least doing something right. But truly, the only explanation I could offer is, it is not because of any good or innate strength in me. It is "Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13), and it is God who works in me "both to will and to do" (2:13) what I should do. I give all the credit to God alone. But I cannot discount the tremendous help we received through the outpouring of love, support, and encouragement from brethren, friends, and relatives. This was also God's doing. And on top of all that, numerous passages from the Bible, like this one magnificent passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, have been such a wellspring of comfort for us. We sorrow yet not without hope, we grieve yet not without faith, because we are not ignorant of God's Plan. We know that death is not the end. Death is sleep. Death's victory is only temporary. And knowing that their spirit is now in God's safekeeping (Ecclesiastes 12:7) enables us to accept their death with optimism and consolation. More importantly, God gave us the blessed hope of the resurrection (Titus 2:13). His intention is for us all to spend eternity with Him (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The faith of Christ and the knowledge of God's Master Plan make it possible for us to look beyond the moment of death and look forward to life eternal with our resurrected loved ones and with God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Our God is undeniably the God of all comfort!

As we all know, God has decreed death to enter the world and spread to all men (Romans 5:12) for the

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benefit of His eternal plan and purpose, but ultimately it is the Father's good pleasure to give us His Kingdom (Luke 12:32) and to dwell with us forever and beyond. Who knows what else God has in store for us beyond the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment? It's certainly thrilling to imagine the possibilities! It should set our imaginations on fire! Thereby, hopefully helping us to learn God's perspective about life, death, and time. Our life compared to eternity is but a vapor, and walking about like a shadow (Psalms 39:5–6). Death becomes, particularly to His elect, like a passage to eternal life; like a doorway into a higher dimension of existence; like a transition to far superior reality. Furthermore, the Holy Scriptures describes death as a relief from all our hard labors and troubles: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...that they may rest from their labors" (Revelation 14:13). Similar to King

Solomon's disposition is a spiritually mature mind like that of the apostle Paul's, who counts having a desire to depart and be with Christ as far better: "To die is gain" (Philippians 1:21, 23). After all, our true and blessed hope hinges not on the mundane rewards of this present life but on our future glory and immortality with Christ. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Aside from all the foregoing Bible verses, I also find verse 8 of Romans 14 very reassuring: "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." Thus, whether our life is cut short today or we live to see the coming of Christ, we gladly anticipate that monumental day when "in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet...the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52). When that much-awaited event comes on the scene when the last enemy, which is

Death, is mightily destroyed by Jesus Christ Himself, we can finally exclaim with thunderous shouts of pure joy and triumph: "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57)!

How I fervently long for that time of unparalleled rejoicing and peace when "God shall wipe away every tear from our eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Indeed, all majesty, glory, praise, honor, and thanksgiving belong to our Omnipotent and Omniscient God, for "HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH FOREVER" (Isaiah 25:8)! And when this epoch-making event finally comes to pass, with God having loosed the pains of death, we will never have to fear death again; we will never again be staring death in the face, and no longer will death's painful sting touch anyone of us again ever!

The Book of Acts records that, at the end of the Apostle Paul's second missionary journey, he told the Ephesian Jews with whom he had been reasoning the following: "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing" (Acts 18:21, NKJV). This statement of the Apostle Paul does not appear, however, in many modern translations of the New Testament, including the New International Version, which records the entirety of Paul's statement to the Jews as follows: "I will come back if it is God's will" (Acts 18:21).

Why is this very clear statement of the Apostle Paul keeping one of God's feasts omitted from many modern translations? Is this an authentic declaration of the Apostle Paul, or was it added in by some scribe centuries after the events Luke records in Acts 18? Finally, what impact, if any, does the authenticity of such a statement have for modern Christian observance in the 21st century?

This article seeks to answer these questions in the following manner: 1) Luke records an authentic statement made by the Apostle Paul in approximately AD 51; 2) the manuscript evidence, as well as the historical record, support the conclusion this statement was possibly omitted from the earliest manuscripts by copyists who wanted to erase a clear reference to the Apostle of the Gentiles observing a "Jewish" feast; and, 3) this verse is one of several in the New Testament providing apostolic precedent for the continued Christian observance of the festivals of Leviticus 23.

A. The statement of the Apostle Paul is a part of the original text of Acts 18:21.

The reason given by textual critics for not accepting the authenticity of Paul's statement in Acts 18:21 is that this statement does not appear in the earliest manuscripts we possess of the Book of Acts. The NKJV has placed a footnote on Acts 18:21, which states: "NU-Text omits *I must through Jerusalem*." (*The American Patriot's Bible*, edited by Dr. Richard Lee, Thomas Nelson 2009, pg. 1263).

The NU-Text is described as follows: "NU-Text: These variations generally represent the Alexandrian or Egyptian text type as found in the critical text published in the twenty-sixth edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (N) and in the United Bible Societies' third edition (U)" ("Preface to the New King James Version," *The American Patriot's Bible*, p. x).

For these same reasons, noted textual scholar Bruce Metzger argues against the authenticity of Paul's statement in Acts 18:21 in his monumental work *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (UBS 1971, p. 465). As explained by James M. Ross, Metzger's

"I must by all means keep the Feast"

by David Miller



argument is that if the longer version of Acts 18:21 were original, "the words must have been omitted at a very early date for the omission to have got into such a wide variety of manuscripts and versions" (J.M. Ross "The Extra Words In Act 18:21," XXIV *Novum Testamentum*, 247, 1992). Further, the argument runs that, if the longer version of Acts 18:21 was original "the omission must have been deliberate and not merely accidental . . . but there was no reason why the words should have been deliberately omitted" (*id.*).

Mr. Ross, another New Testament textual scholar, disagrees with Metzger's analysis, and contends that Paul's statement in Acts 18:21 was part of the original text. First, he writes that the "shorter version could have got into a wide variety of manuscripts and versions if the words had been omitted sufficiently early." Second, Ross states a possible motive for their omission: "But there is a possible motive: the words could have been excised by someone who thought Christians ought not to attend Jewish festivals, and removed the words so as not to give a Pauline example of such reprehensible conduct" (*The Extra Words*, p. 248).

Ross further notes that the shorter form of Acts 18:21 "makes it very difficult to understand verse 22" (*The Extra Words*, p. 248).

Acts 18:22 reads: "And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch" (NKJV). The phrase "gone up" is translated from the Greek word *anabaino*, Strong's Number 305, and "went down" is translated from the Greek word *katabaino*, Strong's Number 2597. Ross notes that *anabaino* has the technical meaning of "going up to Jerusalem." However, Luke does not specifically mention Jerusalem in verse 22, thus causing some ambiguity as to the location where Paul had "gone up."

Ross reasons that mentioning Jerusalem "would have been unnecessary if he [Luke] had already referred to Jerusalem in verse 21" (*The Extra Words*, pp. 248–49). In other words, the absence of a reference to Jerusalem in verse 22 suggests the authenticity of Paul's statement in Acts 18:21, when he told the Jews he must "by all means" keep the coming feast in Jerusalem. The use of the word *anabaino* in verse 22 further supports the authenticity of Paul's statement because that word had the technical meaning of going up to Jerusalem.¹

At the end of his article, Ross again refers to the possible motive of the deliberate omission of Paul's words from Acts 18:21: "[b]ut a more likely motive would have been that suggested above—that an early copyist did not wish to give Pauline authority for attendance at Jewish feasts" (*The Extra Words*, p. 249). He concludes that the statement of Paul was "inserted by Luke himself, to explain why Paul was anxious to make an early depart-

ture from Ephesus" (*The Extra Words*, p. 249).

Similarly, scholar Matthew Black concludes that the longer version of Acts 18:21 is

authentic. In his words, the manuscripts supporting the shorter version of Acts 18:21 show signs of "botching" (Matthew Black. "Notes on the Longer and the Shorter Text of Acts." *On Language, Culture, and Religion: In Honor of Eugene A. Nida*, Mouton, 1974, pg. 125).

Mr. Black explains: "This seems to me, however, to be a striking example of a 'botched' text. Verse 18, Paul's Nazarite vow, is left without its necessary sequel, the visit to the Temple in Jerusalem in the near future to discharge it. The most convincing evidence of 'botching,' however, is the use of (*anabaino*) and (*katabaino*) with nothing in the context which allows them their full and idiomatic meaning as virtually *termini technici* for 'going up' or 'coming down' from Jerusalem, i.e. quite literally, physically 'ascending' and 'descending' from the plains to the hill country and vice versa" (*id.*, pg. 125).

Further, the term *anabaino* carried the implication of going up to Jerusalem to worship God. In John 7:10 this word is used twice in reference to Jesus and his brothers going up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. "But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast" (KJV).

Geoffrey Bromiley writes about the word *anabaino*: "More important in the NT is the cultic use (based on OT and LXX) . . . Going up to the sanctuary or Jerusalem is a stock phrase (Lk. 18:10; John 2:13; 5:1; 7:8, 10, 14; 12:20). For Paul this means not only going to a place but to the mother community (cf. Acts 18:22). Actual ascent is indicated (since the holy city is on a hill) *but going to worship is implied*" ("Anabaino," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company (1985), pg. 90).

Finally, *The Pulpit Commentary* also agrees that Paul's statement about keeping the Feast in Acts 18:21 is part of the original text of Acts. While noting that many early manuscripts omit the statement, *The Pulpit Commentary* writes: "It is certainly difficult to account for such words being inserted in the text if they were not genuine; whereas it is easy to account for their omission" (*The Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database*. Copyright © 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010 by BibleSoft, inc., Used by permission).

The Pulpit Commentary goes on to state under Acts 18:22: "He went up and saluted the Church; meaning, without any doubt, he went up to Jerusalem, as both the word ἀναβαῖς, and the object of his going up, 'to salute the,' conclusively show. For ἀναβαῖς νῶ, whether

¹"Going up' and 'going down' are almost technical terms that refer to going to and leaving Jerusalem's higher elevation." Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Acts and Epistles*, Published by David C. Cook, 2018.

coupled with εἰς εὐχὴν λῦμα as in Matthew 20:17, 18, or standing alone as in John 7:8, 10, and John 12:20, is the regular word for going up to Jerusalem (see Acts 11:2; Acts 15:2; Acts 21:12, 15; Acts 24:11; Acts 25:1, 9); and ἡ ἐκκλησία, the Church, which Paul went to salute, can mean nothing but the mother Church of Jerusalem.”

The above strongly supports the conclusion that Paul’s stated desire to keep the Feast in Jerusalem in Acts 18:21 is a part of the original text of the Book of Acts. His statement is actually contained in the vast majority of the over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament in existence today, including manuscripts from the Western part of the Roman Empire as well as “the mass of the Byzantine manuscripts” (*The Extra Words*, p. 247). The primary reason it is rejected by many textual critics is because it is missing from the small number of earliest New Testament manuscripts, i.e. from the Alexandrian and Egyptian textual tradition. To this issue we turn next.

B. The early omission of Paul’s statement from the Alexandrian textual tradition.

As noted above, Mr. Ross is of the opinion that the “extra words” of Paul in Acts 18:21 were deliberately omitted by some early copyists, who were motivated to remove the words because they gave Pauline authority for keeping the “Jewish” feasts. Matthew Black also recognized the text of these early manuscripts had, in his words, been “botched,” and the *Pulpit Commentary* likewise acknowledges that it is “easy” to account for the omission of Paul’s words from Acts 18:21, while much harder to account for their *addition* to the text.

Since Paul’s words are missing from texts originating primarily in the Alexandrian textual tradition, is there some historical support for Ross’s conclusion?

First, we have the testimony of Origen, one of the great Alexandrian church fathers of the third century, who acknowledged that some copyists of his day were deliberately altering the manuscripts of the New Testament. He wrote that “the differences among the manuscripts [of the Gospels] have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they lengthen or shorten, as they please” (Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed., 1991, pp. 151–152).

Further, we know that the Church of Alexandria sided with the Church of Rome and other churches against those Christians in Asia and elsewhere who continued to observe God’s Passover on the 14th of Nisan in accordance with the Scriptures. During the great Passover controversy of the second century, Eusebius records that the Church of Alexandria was at that time observing the Passover (later called Easter), not on the 14th of Nisan, but on the Sunday following in agreement with the churches in Palestine and with the Church of Rome (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 5, Chapter 25. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250105.htm>).

It is well attested by many historians that the reason the churches in Rome, Alexandria, and Palestine discontinued the observance of the Passover on the 14th of Nisan in the second century A.D. was because of a desire to dissociate themselves from the observance of so-called “Jewish” feasts. The *Encyclopedia Americana* notes: “At first the Christian Passover was celebrated on the same day as the Hebrew, the 14th day of the month Nisan (April). But the Church of Rome and other churches of the Latin world soon transferred the observance to the Sunday next after the 14th Nisan, primarily to mark the difference between Judaism and Christianity” (Charles Leonard-Stuart. “Easter.” 9 *Encyclopedia Americana*. New York: The Encyclopedia Americana Corp., 1918, p. 508).

Also, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* remarks on the reason underlying the change in the observance of the Passover in the second century: “As Christianity separated from Judaism, gentile Christians objected to observing the principal Christian feast on the same day as the Jewish Passover” (12 *New Catholic*

Encyclopedia. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965, p.13).

Further, some of the earliest New Testament manuscripts (called Unicals) which omit the words of the Apostle Paul in Acts 18:21 originated around and shortly after the time of the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century AD. These Unicals include the Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, and Sinaiticus (<http://www.egw.org/zboard/325958>. This website argues the words of Paul in Acts 18:21 were not in the original text).

We know that one of the reasons the Emperor Constantine convoked the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 was to settle the Passover controversy. The Council decided to officially reject the observance of the Passover on the 14th of Nisan in favor of what became known as Easter Sunday.

Constantine’s explanation for the decision was spelled out in a letter he issued after the Council of Nicaea ended: “And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin . . . Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Savior a different way” (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, p. 129).

The motivating factor behind the change of the Passover, both in the second and the fourth centuries, was a desire for some Christians to have nothing in common with “Jewish” festivals. Is it any wonder that the texts omitting Paul’s words in Acts 18:21 originated at the time and in the very location where anti-Jewish sentiment against the observance of “Jewish” festivals was strongest?

It does appear the historical record supports the conclusion reached by J.M. Ross that the words of the Apostle Paul in Acts 18:21 were deliberately omitted from the earliest Alexandrian texts because “an early copyist did not wish to give Pauline authority for attendance at Jewish festivals” (*The Extra Words*, p. 249).

C. Why does the authenticity of Paul’s statement in Acts 18:21 matter to 21st century Christians?

Much of Christianity today relies upon the writings and the authority of the Apostle Paul for the proposition that God’s law, and by implication the festivals in God’s law, was “nailed to the cross” and is no longer relevant or binding for Christians.

Interestingly, similar charges were brought by the non-Christian opponents of the Apostle Paul in the first century. He was often accused of teaching against the Law of God, and preaching a message that repudiated the Torah. (Acts 21:21; Romans 3:8).

Indeed, in the immediate context of Paul’s statement in Acts 18:21 is recorded Paul’s trial before the Proconsul Gallio in Acts 18:12–17. The charge brought by the Jews against Paul was as follows: “This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law” (Acts 18:12).

When Paul was about to make his defense, Proconsul Gallio dismissed the charges. He did not want to become involved in a dispute regarding “words and names and your own law” (Acts 18:15). Gallio recognized that the dispute over Paul’s teachings was an internal Jewish matter that did not implicate Roman jurisdiction.

Immediately following Luke’s account of the trial before Gallio, he records that the Apostle Paul took what appeared to be a Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18). The significance of this vow in the immediate context of the accusation against the Apostle Paul is articulated by B.J. Koet in an article entitled “Why Did Paul Shave His Hair?”

Koet writes: “One can take upon oneself a Nazarite vow for several reasons. Often people do a vow in order to obtain the fulfillment of a special wish. But it also occurred as a way to show one’s love for the Torah. By taking upon themselves a voluntary obligation, they demonstrated that they were lawabiding as could be. Paul’s Nazarite vow would fit very well in this context as a proof to the reader, that Paul is indeed lawabiding. The reader of Acts will easily understand that the accusation in 18:13 are not correct” (*The Centrality of*

Jerusalem, ed. M. Poorthuis and Ch. Safrai, Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996, pgs. 138–39).

The same could be said for Paul’s statement, just three verses later, that he must “by all means” keep the coming Feast in Jerusalem. Most Jews in the Diaspora usually celebrated the three great pilgrimage feasts (the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles) where they resided (Jin K. Hwang, “Jewish Pilgrim Festivals and Calendar in Paul’s Ministry With the Gentile Churches,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 64.1, 2013, p. 95).

Mr. Hwang goes on to write: “But the Diaspora Jews, out of piety, also made a special trip to Jerusalem to celebrate one of those festivals” (*id.*). In a footnote, Mr. Hwang quotes Gregory Stevenson in *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), page 140 as follows: “Many Diaspora Jews took part in the worship through pilgrimages to the temple for religious festivals. These pilgrimages were seen as a sign of one’s piety and faithfulness and they fostered religious and social solidarity. Of course, not all Diaspora Jews were able to make such a journey; yet even if a few Jews from a particular community or synagogue made the trip, it likely created a shared sense of participation” (*id.*).

It should be remembered that Paul made the statement about keeping the Feast in Jerusalem to fellow Jews in the synagogue of Ephesus. Many, if not most of the Jews to whom Paul spoke probably celebrated the Feast that year in Ephesus. Paul’s statement that he desired to keep the Feast in Jerusalem that year demonstrated his piety and faithfulness to observing the feasts in God’s law. As with his voluntary taking of the Nazarite vow at Cenchrea, Paul’s stated desire to keep the Feast in Jerusalem that year was an implied refutation of the charge made against him in Corinth that he taught contrary to the Law of God.²

The likely defense that Paul would have made before Gallio was explicitly made later when Paul stood trial before Governor Felix: “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:13–14, NKJV).

While the Christian observance of God’s festivals is not based solely on Acts 18:21, it does present a very powerful precedent of the Apostle Paul, over thirty years after the death and resurrection of Christ, celebrating what was likely the Feast of Tabernacles. Indeed, from Acts 18:21 through Acts 27:9, there is an unmistakable pattern of the Apostle Paul observing (not always at Jerusalem) the Feast of Tabernacles (18:21), the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6), the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16), and the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9).

This demonstrated Paul’s continued loyalty to and observance of God’s Law and God’s festivals as a Christian apostle and missionary. It was his way of life in Christ, a way he encouraged the Gentile Churches to imitate as an example in their own worship of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16–17; 11:1–2).

Paul’s way of life in Christ, the Way that is clearly set forth in the Scriptures, continues to be a pattern and example for Christians in the 21st Century to follow. There is tremendous Christian significance and meaning to the festivals of God’s Law. They teach God’s plan of salvation which the Father and Jesus Christ have planned from the foundation of the world, a plan we have been blessed to participate in at this special time. We can, with the Apostle Paul, confidently and expectantly proclaim as Christians: “I must by all means keep the Feast!”

²As an aside, the chronology here suggests that the Feast Paul kept in Jerusalem on this occasion was likely the Feast of Tabernacles. Gallio entered his office in Corinth in the early summer of A.D. 51. Paul’s trial likely occurred sometime in that summer. We know that Gallio left his office early due to a sickness, and was back in Rome by October of 51 A.D. Thus, Paul’s journey to Jerusalem likely occurred in the fall of A.D. 51, right in time to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Princeton University Press, 1964, pps. 316–21).

One of the primary themes the Church of God (Worldwide and its splinter groups) has addressed when it comes to prophecy is the eventual demise of the United States (U.S.). The Church has promoted the concept that the U.S. and its primary allies (Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand) are connected to



prophecy addressing Israel (see Bill Watson's Bible study series, "Evidence the United States and Great Britain are the Birthright Recipients" at cgi.org). The Church of God International does not agree with everything the Worldwide Church taught on this subject in the past, but the main idea that the

U.S. will fall eventually just like ancient Israel still holds. As we look at the geopolitical scene in the world today, China may play a role in our eventual removal as the world's most powerful nation.

Revelation 9:13–16 describes the sixth angel sounding his trumpet and a vast army coming from the direction of the Euphrates to wreak havoc on the earth. Putting this scripture together with Daniel 11:44, which mentions trouble coming from the east and the north, some believe China might advance into the Great War at the end. We can't know for sure, but we can state unequivocally China is the primary country in the world poised to usurp the U.S. as the world's primary superpower today. Let's look at some reasons why.

Much of the following information comes from two books I recently read: *The Hundred-Year Marathon* by Michael Pillsbury and *Has China Won?* by Kishore Mahbubani. Pillsbury is the director of the Center for Chinese Strategy at the Hudson Institute and has served in eight presidential administrations. Mahbubani is a Distinguished Fellow at the Asian Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.

Before we get started we need to understand that everyone in the Chinese government does not agree with the direction Chairman Xi is taking. Just like in the U.S. government, there are various factions within the Chinese Communist Party. But with Xi as the primary leader in China today, we want to get a better understanding as to how he may be thinking.

When we analyze China, we would be unwise to categorize it as we did the old Soviet Union. Some advantages China has over the old Soviet Union in its battle with the U.S. for primary superpower status is its population, which is four times that of the U.S. The U.S. is not really competing against a Soviet style regime; China is not seeking to promote communism globally like the Soviet Union was. The Chinese Communist Party is more interested in promoting and reviving Chinese civilization. Confucius Institutes on college campuses throughout the U.S. and the world promote Chinese culture rather than communism. These educational services are funded by the Chinese government.

The Chinese are different culturally from Russians too. In their political culture, their great fear is chaos. They seek the greater good of the group rather than the rights of the individual. This tendency allows for a better opportunity for communism to build roots in China.

Also, unlike the former Soviet Union, the Chinese have become less—rather than more—involved in intervention into other states as their power has increased. From 1949 to 1976, the Chinese were very involved in supporting communist parties in Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand), but since about 1978, the support has gradually declined. China also has at times difficult relations with the two other communist regimes in Asia, Vietnam and North Korea.

The Soviets had a fear of letting their citizens travel overseas. The Chinese allow 134 million of their

Watch China!

by Mike James

citizens to travel overseas. The Soviets also had tight controls on the amount of visitors into their country. In 2015, China ranked fourth in the world behind France, the U.S., and Spain with 56.9 million international tourists.

To better understand the Chinese today, we need to look back at history over the last 200 years. In the late nineteenth century the Chinese were known as "the Sick Man of East Asia." This moniker upset Chinese intellectuals. Some of these intellectuals believe the West has dealt harshly with them.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Chinese intellectuals became fascinated with Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley and their writings on evolution and survival of the fittest. The concepts were looked at as a way for the Chinese to overcome the humiliation they experienced at the hands of the West after the two opium wars of the nineteenth century.

China's modern founding father, Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), imagined the Chinese struggle against foreign powers as a form of resisting the white race.

Mao's (1893–1976) (the first Chinese Communist leader) favorite book dealt with the warring states period in Chinese history. One big mistake by American analysts on China during Mao's time was not taking the book seriously. The book was never translated into English. Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) and other Chinese leaders read it too. Chinese high school students learn to write from a textbook of selections from *The General Mirror*. This book has many similar lessons from the Warring States era about using deception, how to avoid encirclement by opponents, and how a rising power should induce complacency in an old hegemon (superpower).

According to intelligence sources, during the Cold War, the Russians warned the United States about their concern over the true ambitions of the Chinese. The Russians believed the Chinese had a long-term plan to become the primary world power. The Russians were aware of Chinese history, which advised the Chinese to become the most powerful nation and to hide their ambition until the right time. China was planning to use the United States like they used the Soviet Union—as a tool for their own advancement.

When the present Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, became general secretary of the Communist Party of China (before becoming president), he gave a speech in which he used the phrase *qiang zhongguo meng*, or "strong nation dream." He mentioned 2049 as the date the dream would be realized.

The "strong nation dream" line Xi used refers to a book published in China in 2009 called *The China Dream*. The book was written by a colonel (Liu Mingfu) in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The book was a bestseller in China and addresses how China will become the world's leading power. The book addresses the competition between the United States and China as more of a track meet than a boxing match. In the end China will win the marathon.

The idea Mingfu addresses appeared in Chinese writings prior to his book. Zhao Tingyang's *The Under-Heaven System: The Philosophy of the World Institution* was published in 2005 and is gaining popularity in China today. This book talks about redesigning global structures based on traditional

Chinese ideals. The new world system is called *tianxia*, which means a unified global system with China at the top.

Chinese military hawks write extensively about an era in their history known as the Spring, Autumn, and Warring States periods. The last 250 years of this period began in 450 B.C. and ended with the seven feuding states under the Qin (the word China comes from Qin) dynasty. It was a brutal Darwinian period where warlords formed partnerships to oust one another. The goal was to become the *ba*, which roughly translates into the hegemon. The Chinese military hawks draw lessons from the warring states period to make strategic decisions today.

Most Chinese scholars thought China's past only informed its present metaphorically. These scholars lacked access to internal Chinese government documents. Many are starting to see the Chinese hawks are much more mainstream than previously believed.

The Chinese strategy is learned from the Warring States period. There are nine principal elements that form the basis of their hundred-year (1949–2049) strategy:

- 1) Make your adversary complacent and avoid alerting them to your true motivation.
- 2) Manipulate your opponent's advisers.
- 3) Be patient for the long term to win.
- 4) Steal your opponent's ideas and technology.
- 5) Military capability is not the primary factor for winning a long-term struggle.
- 6) The hegemon will take extreme action to retain their dominant position.
- 7) Never forget *shi* (deception and waiting for the right time to strike).
- 8) Use metrics to measure your status with opponents.
- 9) Always be vigilant against encirclement and deception.

According to Michael Pillsbury, who studied Chinese culture in Taiwan for two years, his teachers separated Chinese tradition into two opposite patterns: the Confucian world of benevolence and sincerity, and the ruthless world of the hegemonies of the Warring States. A well-known proverb used to sum up Chinese history states *wai ru, nei fa* (on the outside, be benevolent; on the inside, be ruthless).

A famous allegory from the Warring States period provides an important lesson the Chinese military hawks have taken to heart. The lesson is to not let your enemy know you are a rival, until it is too late for him to stop you.

The Warring States stories also teach the need to have extreme patience. Success does not come in a day, week, or year, but over a long period of time.

Some in the U.S. have thought China's strategy of stealing our technological and military secrets is just a passing phase. Many China analysts today are seeing China in a different light. Once again this stems from the stories in the Warring States period. Stealing was a strategy for the long haul.

In regard to military forces, the U.S. has relied on huge outlays for military spending over many years. The Warring States stories speak of tricking your adversary into depleting their resources by spending on their military forces. In 2011, the United States was spending 5 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the military while China was only spending half as much. China is investing heavily in asymmetric systems to counter U.S. military dominance. The Chinese weapons costs are much less than the stealth bombers and aircraft carrier battle groups they plan on countering. China knows that advancing their military to overtake the U. S. would be considered a provocation that could lead to an arms race. Instead they pay for systems that are less costly to inflict damage on our more costly systems.

Fareed Zakaria (CNN journalist) commented on U. S. military spending in 2011: "The Pentagon's budget has risen for 13 years, which is unprecedented. Between 2001 and 2009, overall spending on defense rose from \$412 billion to \$699 billion, a 70 percent

increase, which is larger than in any comparable period since the Korean War. Including the supplementary spending on Iraq and Afghanistan, we spent \$250 billion more than average U.S. defense expenditures during the Cold War—a time when the Soviet, Chinese, and Eastern European militaries were arrayed against the U.S. and its allies. Over the past decade, when we had no serious national adversaries, U.S. defense spending has gone from about a third of total worldwide defense spending to 50 percent. In other words, we spend more on defense than the planet's remaining countries put together.”

It would be difficult for America to stop this out-of-control spending because buying weapons has become locked into our political system. Weapons systems are bought due to a complex lobbying system by defense contractors who have placed defense manufacturing plants in key congressional districts in the U.S.

The Chinese are not tied to defense lobbies. Rather than try to outspend the U.S. by catching up to build 13 aircraft carrier battle groups the Chinese focus on asymmetric warfare. China has been producing land-based missiles that could cause trouble for aircraft carriers. An aircraft carrier costs billions to build. China's DF-26 ballistic hypersonic missile costs a few hundred thousand dollars. The Chinese media claim this missile can sink an aircraft carrier. Professor Timothy Colton of Harvard says aircraft carriers could become “sitting ducks” if they faced a hypersonic missile, which can fly at amazing speeds and maneuver at varying altitudes.

Chinese folklore from the Warring States speaks about a hero who overcame a more powerful foe by using a secret weapon called *shashoujian*. In English this would be translated “Assassin's Mace.” The Chinese military is devoting great resources to developing asymmetric capabilities to build an Assassin's Mace.

This term first appeared in 1995 in an article written by Chinese military strategists. They talked about China pioneering “Assassin's Mace weapons” like tactical laser weapons and stealth technology for navy ships and cruise missiles. These ideas are not just a desire; China is investing billions into making a leap in military capabilities that can overcome what the West has.

The U.S. sees conflict through military power instead of the broader strategic view of ancient Chinese thinkers. According to the Chinese writers (Qiao and Wang) who wrote, *Unrestricted Warfare*, “The battlefield is next to you and the enemy is on the network. Only there is no smell of gunpowder or the odor of blood...warfare...is increasingly becoming a matter for politicians, scientists, and even bankers.”

Chinese plans may entail striking America where it would be most vulnerable—its electronic infrastructure. The Chinese are developing Assassin's Mace type weapons that can harm our surveillance systems, land-based electronic infrastructure, and aircraft carriers. This includes electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weapons which can disable electronics over a large area by mimicking what would happen in a nuclear explosion. China is confirmed to have conducted EMP tests on various animals over the years. The Chinese are also doing research on high-powered microwave weapons. The purpose in all this is to knock out our computers, cell phones, air traffic control centers, command and control for the military, and smart bombs. This would seriously hamper our war fighting capability.

U.S. air superiority is tops in the world today. So the Chinese are trying to work against this advantage with another type of Assassin's Mace. America's military planes are equipped with the AGM-88 High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM) which protects them by locating emissions from incoming surface-to-air missiles before shooting them down. The

HARM system is one of the advantages the United States Air Force has over the world. The Chinese have already created a system of black boxes with thousands of micro transmitters that can broadcast 10,000 signals on the HARM frequency. China has yet to perfect this technology, but when it does it will give HARM the impression of 10,001 missiles coming in toward the U.S. plane. It will be very difficult for HARM to figure out which of those signals is the correct Chinese missile.

At the core of the Chinese strategy is something called *shi*, which is difficult to explain. The word cannot be directly translated into English, but a good cultural analogy would be the force in *Star Wars* movies. A pro-active leader can look for opportunities to turn events to his will. Another way to put this is to get other nations to do your work for you. Others look at *shi* as creating opportunity or momentum.

One of the most famous examples of *shi* in Chinese military writing pertains to the battle of Red Cliff in 208 A.D. The story focuses on how praiseworthy strategy emerged from deception. In the story, a less powerful kingdom in the south wins against a more powerful kingdom in the north. The story addresses how the southern leader won through a series of deceptions. The focus of the southern leader was on finding windows of opportunity and disguising his intentions.

An important factor in assessing your competition is to learn as much about him as you can. A look at Chinese history will provide us with more understanding of how China views the U.S.

Starting in 1990, China began to rewrite their textbooks depicting the U.S. as a superpower that had been trying to stifle China's progress for 150 years. More propaganda can be found in the Chinese National Museum near Tiananmen Square.

One of the permanent exhibits there, “The Road to Rejuvenation,” deals with modern Chinese history. The exhibit promotes China's resistance and overcoming Japan during World War II, but makes no mention of the dependence of the Chinese victory on the Western powers. The display promotes China's industrial and economic progress, but makes no mention of their technological progress relying on 100 agreements made with the U.S.

In conversations Mr. Pillsbury had with three Chinese graduate students while visiting the museum, he learned the students were not aware of some important moments in Chinese history. The students didn't know about the 100,000 Chinese killed by the Boxer rebels (also Chinese) during the Boxer rebellion. They didn't know about how the United States assisted China during World War II. They were also unaware of Mao's political campaign and famine of 1959–1962 resulting in the death of twenty million Chinese people or the death of millions more during Mao's Cultural Revolution from 1966–1976. These Chinese students are a product of an education that changed drastically after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 when the Chinese leader Deng aligned with the hardliners and began to rewrite Chinese textbooks casting America as the arch villain in relation to China.

In the updated version of Chinese history, John Tyler is the first American villain. According to Mao, Tyler imposed the Treaty of Wangxia (1844) on China to help the U.S. manipulate and illegally exploit China. The Chinese also teach Abraham Lincoln was a brutal, thuggish imperialist. The Chinese story on World War II now is that the U.S. strategized to pit Japan against China in World War II. A true student of history knows these stories are fake.

Tyler's Wangxia Treaty was a pro-China deal that established relations, gave Chinese ports most favored nation status, and repealed a ban on Americans learning Mandarin. Lincoln didn't have much time to think about China, but the treaty nego-

tiated under his representative was to China's advantage. The U.S. helped liberate China from Japanese control by fighting Japan in the Pacific.

China's economy is now poised to become the largest in the world very soon. In the year 2000, the U.S. economy was eight times larger than the Chinese economy. In 2018, we were only 1.5 times larger. In the 1950s China was one of the poorest countries in the world. In 1980 China's GDP was around \$70 billion. By 2011 it was more than \$7 trillion. China is now the largest producer of cars, the biggest user of energy, and the greatest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world. Most financial analysts believe the Chinese economy will soon surpass the size of the U.S. economy.

The middle-class population in China has exploded. According to a McKinsey (consultants) report: “Just 4 percent of urban Chinese households were within (the middle class) in 2000—but 68 percent were in 2012.”

Research and development (R&D) is very important when it comes to keeping an economy going. The U.S. R&D budget has peaked and should be overtaken by the Chinese soon. In fact, China has already surpassed the U.S. in Government R & D spending as a percentage of GDP. The president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Dr. L. Rafael Reif, has observed that “China has unrivaled capacity to rapidly ramp up large-scale production of advanced technology products and quickly bring innovation to market.” Reif went on to say, “Unless America responds urgently and deliberately to the scale and intensity of this challenge, we should expect that, in fields from personal communications to business, health and security, China is likely to become the world's most advanced technological nation and the source of the most cutting-edge technological products in not much more than a decade.”

According to Lee Kuan Yew the former prime minister of Singapore and one of Asia's most respected leaders, “It is China's intention to be the greatest power in the world,” he says bluntly, “and to be accepted as China, not as an honorary member of the West.... At the core of their mind-set is their world before colonization and the exploitation and humiliation that brought.”

Asked by interviewers of a book how China would become number one, Lee said, “Their great advantage is not in military influence but in their economic influence.... Their influence can only grow and grow beyond the capabilities of America.”

Lee believes Chinese dominance is still decades away. “The Chinese have figured out if they stay with (claims of a) ‘peaceful rise’ and just contest for first position economically and technologically, they cannot lose,” he says. “To (directly) challenge a stronger and technologically superior power like the United States will abort their peaceful rise.... I believe the Chinese leadership has learnt that if you compete with America in armaments, you will lose. You will bankrupt yourself. So, avoid it, keep your head down, and smile for forty or fifty years.”

The U.S. still remains the most Christian nation in the world. But just like ancient Israel, that connection to God is fading. God punished ancient Israel for their straying from Him. We claim to be followers of the same God of ancient Israel (Galatians 3:29). I believe God's promise to ancient Israel of blessings or cursing (Deuteronomy 28) based on their obedience will hold true for us. Will China's rise be the beginning of the U.S.'s fall?

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“Bombs Away! China Launches Hypersonic Nuclear Missile DF-26 Which ‘Could Reach US Territory’ in a Terrifying Military Drill,” by Tom Michael, *The Sun*, 8 January 2020

Do We Hear the Warning?

Clearly there is a “*cultural struggle*” going on within the United States. Lines have been drawn and *two ideologies* are now violently clashing right in front of our eyes. It has erupted in our hometowns—Seattle, Portland, NYC, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Chicago, Atlanta, New Orleans, and Kansas City—all over the country—a *cultural war* has erupted! If you’re listening and watching and have eyes to see and ears to hear, you obviously recognize an enormous conflict against the “rule of law.” Never in our lifetime have we seen such *disrespect for authority* and law-enforcement and, sadly, coming from some of our own governors, mayors, and other nationally elected officials!

It’s plain, an *ideological infiltration* has presently become obvious by virtue of the groups that are causing the violence and rioting. We must keep in mind, protestors are indeed protected by the United States Constitution under the First Amendment. It clearly says its “the right of the people *PEACEABLY* to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances” when an issue legitimately presents itself. But, *emphatically*, it gives *no protection, rights, or freedoms* to *VIOLENTLY RIOT* and consequently damage and vandalize property, or loot, pillage, rape, and kill people in cold blood! We are a nation of laws; brethren, clearly our nation has forgotten our premise of “liberty through law,” and we are seeing this play out in a *disgraceful display and exhibition of disrespect for authority and the rule of law*.

Unfortunately, the United States is now reaping what it has sowed over decades of legislation that’s been designed to marginalized and reduce the importance of God, family, and country! We live in a society that has turned humanistic and secular and is determined to redefine itself as a Marxist neo-pagan hegemony—and needless to say, this is *incredibly dangerous territory* for any nation to approach for many reasons.

What is this Ideological Infiltration?

William Barr, the Attorney General (A.G.) of the United States, presented a *whistle blowing speech* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6Dn1L_UV_L8) revealing what is contributing to and behind the force we see driving some of the chaos that has been witnessed in the streets across the United States and to some extent, throughout the world. Simply stated, he went on to explain, *China* has now become a “force to be reckoned with.” I highly recommend listening at the link above as well as reading this article about China’s influence and control over Hollywood (<https://www.heritage.org/asia/heritage-explains/how-china-taking-control-hollywood>). They will help describe the *ideological subversion and infiltration* the United States is experiencing.

Xi Jinping, General Secretary of China, is determined to replace the western free market systems with their globalist ideology (“Belt and Roads Initiative” and their “Agenda 2025”). Xi is now speaking openly about the superiority of the *Chinese socialist “state capitalist” system* and how they will replace America’s capitalism with this Chinese alternate solution.

And they are well on their way with an economy that is now rated at 20 to 25 percent of the world’s GDP. This has emboldened them to affirmatively consider their time has arrived to become more

Conditions in the USA at the time of this writing have deteriorated into civil unrest and, in some areas, anarchy. Cities, government buildings, even the White House and historical statues and memorials of United States history have been targeted, vandalized, and destroyed. What are we watching? Where is this going?

by Bill Watson

aggressive! According to William Barr (A.G. of the USA), China is engaged in an “Economic Blitzkrieg” to become the dominant world power in areas of technology, A.I., and commerce, working with Russia, Iran, Europe, and other nations around the world, buying up rare-earth minerals and multiple assets to provide services and technology that collects data through their 5G networks, with hopes for the “Yuan,” or some currency favorable to China, via the I.M.F, ultimately becoming the world’s reserve currency—replacing the US dollar.

Now you may ask: So *what does all this have to do with the United States and it being “infiltrated”?* Unfortunately, many of our United States political and business leaders, university professors, and researchers and large American Corporations have been linked to colluding with this globalist movement via China, resulting in *personally lucrative arrangements and benefits* for some of these American socialists in the United States that, lamentably, serve in public office (i.e., governors, mayors, congressional members and senators, even members of law enforcement, and yes, CEO’s of American industry, healthcare, and entertainment too!). Many have embraced the Marxists tenets and, sadly, *compromised their country for personal monetary gain*. We’re seeing some of this play out by means of those civic leaders, on the state and city levels, *not enforcing* the “rule of law” within their jurisdiction. Some even appeased the rioters, like in Seattle, calling it a “Summer Love Fest”! Let me remind you, three people were killed, some were raped, and businesses could not operate, and the citizens in the “*C.H.O.P. Autonomous Zone*” felt jeopardized; all due to that Mayors 18-day delay of enforcing the laws.

The infiltration of Marxism within the United States is tragically enormous and is at the foundation

of what we have come to know as the “swamp”—which refers to those American leaders who *love their own self-interests more than country*; and whose integrity, ethics, and morals have been compromised! Some of the ideas that are being promoted by these infiltrators, like *defunding the police*, or *unregulated, open-border immigration* for example, are incredibly reckless; yet, there are some socialist congressional and Senate members and city mayors, along with multiple governors that support this! It’s just astonishing as to how they cannot see this is a *recipe for increasing crime and losing our country?*

But, keep in mind, this is a tactic right out of the Marxists Handbook, as is the destruction of the institution of heterosexual marriage, fatherhood, and Christianity, to mention a few. And if that weren’t enough, recently in Portland, Lilith Sinclair, a *trained Marxists* and *self-described* black indigenous queer (her words, not mine), non-binary femme sex worker, representing BLM at a protest, called for *complete abolition of the United States* as we know it!

In addition, thousands of convicted felons are being released from prison under the guise of “jeopardy to their health,” due to the *Chinese Communist Party’s virus* (CCP virus). And California Governor Gavin Newsome has recently reversed his opening of the state and began to close down bars, gyms, restaurants, and churches across California again! All of this is an effort to continue keeping the state and, by extension, the nation, from restarting its economies.

Why is this Happening?

The prophets have a lot to say that explains why things appear to be breaking down and devolving. Unfortunately, many American people do not consider the “voices of the prophets” relative in the twenty-first century. In so doing, as a nation we have *locked ourselves out* from understanding why, what is happening around us—and the remedies we should consider for healing our nation!

In Isaiah 10:1–2, he says; “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees and that write grievousness which they have prescribed [*selfish legislation, laws of perversion*]; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people [*their needs are often forgotten, or*



overlooked], that widows may be their prey [*corruption steals their support*], and that they may rob the fatherless [*exploit the children in multiple ways*]!

Hosea goes on to say, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge [*of God’s principles, values and standards*], I will also reject you, that you shall be no priest to me [*you will lose your favored status*]; seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children [*future generations*]. As they were increased [*blessed*], so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame” (Hosea 4:6–7). He goes on to say, “Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers love shameful things” (Hosea 4:18).

And Amos 6:3–6 adds this: “You that put far away the evil day [*we’re too big to fail, we are invincible*], and curse the seat of violence to come near [*this arrogance assures destruction to come*]; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall [*those who enjoy their luxuriating*]; that chant to the sound of the viol and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David [*enjoy their music, entertainment*]; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments [*and have plenty of things to pamper oneself with—wine and spas*]; but they are not grieved for the affliction [*breach*] of Joseph.” Clearly, this is describing a particular people that are so self-absorbed in their own wealth, luxury, and lifestyle that they don’t give any thought to the horrific suffering and corruption, selfish leadership, and hijacking of the nation as a whole. They’re completely oblivious to what is going on around them—their head is in the sand!

Paul describes these people in the last days as “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection [*aberrant behavior—perversions*], trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent [*without self-control*], fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness [*religion*], but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:2–5).

Of course, Paul spoke to his time and the prophets to ancient Israel. But, that doesn’t dismiss, as a Judeo-Christian nation we are accountable to the same God—the God of Israel—this also applies to us very directly—especially since our nation is guilty of these same transgressions and, remarkably, defines our current modern-day social condition here in North America!

So, if we don’t repent and turn our situation around and reconcile with Him, we will incur the wrath of God at some point. Notice again: “And what will you do in the day of visitation [*He does fully intend to visit our nation with His judgment*], and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will you flee for help? and where will you leave your glory? Without me [*God*] they shall bow down under the prisoners [*captured by an enemy*], and they shall fall under the slain” (Isaiah 10:3–4).

Over and over God warned His people. And those of us in North America, the United Kingdom, and those nations associated with the British



Commonwealth are indeed *being warned today* by signs and the voices of the prophets. It is up to us to preach the gospel and teach them—the church and unconverted among us—to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

If we desire more time to continue God’s work, it is incumbent on all of us to *become more active in the public square* with advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ about the Kingdom of God. It’s imperative we add our voices to the narrative around us in hopes to connect with others God is calling and waking them up about the real threats and risks the United States—along with the rest of the world—is contending with. *This is our commission*, and that means all of us—“all hands on deck!” Christ has commanded [*enjoined, charged, mightily concluded*] this (Matthew 28:20)! These are the days when Christians need courage to *stand for truth, liberty, and what they believe in*, adding their voice to the conversation with their family, friends, and the general public about these uncertain times we’re living in today! Because if we don’t, we will lose our country through “*pacifistic default*.”

True Progressivism is Relentless— but so is God!

Our Father and Savior are, unquestionably, optimists! They believe in mankind’s potential and were willing to take an incredible gamble for the priceless benefit of extending to humanity access to all they have, including entrance into the *dimension of immortal life* as a glorious spirit being (Romans 8:15–23)! They are fighters for that which they believe is right and true. They stand strong as pillars of marble *putting light on the evil of the world*. Let’s keep in mind, even the apostle Paul exercised his Roman right as a citizen of Rome to be heard—to take opportunity to enlighten; and God opened a door, which led him to Caesar’s House!

It brings to mind, the words of Solomon, which express this exact sentiment quite plainly in the book of Proverbs—notice: “They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law [*you and me*] contend [*meddle, stir up, strive to anger*] with them” (Proverbs 28:4). “A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well” (Proverbs 25:26). And of course the words of Jesus Christ when He said, “...now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent

take it by force.” Clearly, letting us know it’s not an easy pursuit for those of us aspiring for eternal life as an immortal in God’s Kingdom.

We are expected to stand in the face of the wicked and not falter, regardless of consequences, but instead, explain the reason for the hope that lies within us (1 Peter 3:13–17). Again Paul showed how this works, when he attempted to hold those accountable by again exercising his *civic right* as a Roman citizen. Notice: “But, Paul said unto them, they have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily [*no way*]; but let them come themselves and fetch us out” (Acts 16:37). Paul was holding them accountable for what they did unfairly!

The “*Cancel Culture Marxists*” that are now attempting to destroy the United States and dismantle all that it represents, making it out to be something evil and cursed, need to be countered. These are “*Cultural Marxists*,” followers of Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) and Saul Alinsky (<https://www.steelonsteel.com/saul-alinsky-rules-for-radicals/>). They believed “*infiltration*” was key to the success of conquering a nation. Their tactical plan was to enter every and all areas of civil, cultural, and political activity. To “*infiltrate*” and change the hegemony by “*incrementally influencing*” all levels of its educational, entertainment, business, media, and arts communities—every layer of the social structure—over time, decades if necessary. And that’s exactly what they have done! And we are seeing that play out before our eyes!

Admittedly, it was a long term plan, but in time, perhaps a generation later, eventually this type of “*Cultural Marxism*” would succeed and turn the nation into a socialist nation that is willing to *concede to a globalist structure* with the rest of the world! This *insidious tactic* has proven fairly successful over the decades, as can be determined by what we’re seeing manifested today in the streets of some US cities—and, unfortunately, *despicably approved* by some city mayors, state governors, Congress and Senate members, and even some judges within our judicial system. It’s incredibly disappointing and treasonous at its core to the country they claim to love!

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But there is Good News!

But, there is good news in a couple of areas. **First and foremost**, God is still on His throne and we are undoubtedly operating within His defined plan as He continues to steer our world to the time of Christ's return to this planet. All of us can be *encouraged, knowing this* is part of the reality we are in.

But additionally, here in the United States, we have a Constitution that allows us as U. S. citizens to “*push back*” and challenge the surrounding evil and government overreach and draconian measures that infringe upon our *GOD-GIVEN* rights and freedoms, if we should think and feel so inclined! Disappointedly, we sometimes fail to recognize that **unique to the United States, as citizens** within its laws—we are *entitled to exercise a redress* of differences we might have with the government, if we

should not agree with a “policy” or “piece of legislation” being advanced or passed into law. And there is *no shame in exercising that “civic” right if* one should choose to get involved.

So, often we fail to discern the United States' Constitution was designed to *permit public challenges* from its citizenry when those concerned perceived evil or government encroachment was occurring. This is exactly why Benjamin Franklin answered the woman the way he did when she asked, “What do we have?” And He said, “a Republic ma'am, *if you can keep it.*” Clearly, this comment was an indication the documents underscoring the United States government were “open” enough to *afford both bad and good to occur* if those who were governed (the people) became over zealous with power, or inattentive or lazy toward their civic duty and responsibilities! It brings to mind the words of Thomas Jefferson when he said, “Educate and inform the whole mass of the people [*the whole*

nation].... They [*the people*] are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”

Yes, we have a remarkable “providential nation” that has been blessed in resources, allowing so many of us to be the beneficiaries for the enrichment of our families and lifestyles. God has bestowed much upon the United States, and it has shared its wealth with many of the impoverished nations around the world in so many different ways.

So, *brethren lets pray and hope* as we celebrate God's Kingdom this year during the Feast of Tabernacles that God will move on the hearts and minds of the people of the United States to rise to the occasion to secure our sovereignty and wealth for the continuation of service to the world as the “balance of power” the United States has played for so long—thereby assuring us, God's church, *additional time for advancing the good news of God's salvation program* for the sake of those He continues to call into His

Protestant evangelicals believe the Torah, or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), the so-called Mosaic Law, is no longer in force.



They brand it as legalism. According to them, it is no longer necessary to actively obey all of God's statutes and judgments because we are saved by grace, not by works. They say Jesus replaced it all with His love; that He already did every-

thing for us. They make an exception, though, with the Ten Commandments. They believe the Commandments are still to be obeyed, except for the Fourth Commandment, or the keeping of the Sabbath. They do recognize one day of worship, but they designate it as Sunday, without disallowing work or labor and even earning one's keep during that day.

The main scripture these evangelicals espouse to defend their doctrinal belief is Ephesians 2:8–9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (ESV).

However they do not usually quote verse 10, which specifically states works are still necessary. And James said, “Faith without works is dead, being alone.” Evangelicals consider the Old Testament passé, or no longer in force, even if it is a major portion of the Bible. But the apostle Paul says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16). The English Standard Version translates the passage this way: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

It is virtually impossible to be a Christian without manifesting works. The Bible teaches salvation requires both grace and works. Forgiveness comes from God, and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is our responsibility—and the prime component of this is faith. Works do not connote legalism, but are simply the means by which a Christian manifests his or her faith. Repentance and obedience to all God's commandments, and loving service to others, as well as striving hard to make use of all the talents God gives us, are all works.

The Pharisaical norm of Talmudic lists of do's and don'ts connotes legalism, for the Pharisees made the keeping of God's law onerous or burdensome, partic-

ularly with so many restrictions regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. They did not teach the keeping of the spirit of the law, but only rigorous application in one's actions.

Is it legalism to rest and worship God on the Sabbath? To enjoy listening and being uplifted by church sermons and sermonettes? Fellowshiping with like minded Christians? And enjoying wholesome meals and church activities? Is it legalism to obey God's dietary laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, promoting salubrious dietary practice and protection from various physical ailments? Is it legalism to avoid celebrating pagan holidays because they are rank idolatry or promote worship of false gods in heathenish ways? Is it legalism to keep God's holy days, which picture God's master plan of salvation for mankind, the purpose by which we were created? We could go on and on—you get the point.

Grace presupposes faith (Ephesians 2:8), and faith is manifested in works. Works are not only one's actions, but also one's thoughts and one's words.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.... By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Hebrews 11:1, 3).

Through works, we manifest the fruits of the Spirit, that we do so because we believe in God and want to obey Him, and that we are cognizant of His power and His truthfulness, that He is capable of fulfilling His spiritual promises. Through works Christians show they are real Christians, that through their deeds they are striving to achieve their goal of eventually possessing eternal life.

In addition to keeping God's commandments, statutes, and judgments, works also require doing good to others, providing for their needs according to the resources God gives us.

Matthew 12:33: “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (ESV).

Matthew 19:16–17: “And behold, a man came up to him, saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is

good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (ESV).

Matthew 25:34–36: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (ESV).

When one receives the Holy Spirit, the nature is gradually being transformed, from corrupt human nature to a godly Christian one.

Matthew 9:16–17: “No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved” (ESV).

New wine is the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit is placed into a new wineskin, a new creature in Christ is formed. The old wineskin is corrupt human nature; it is disposed of.

James 2:14–17, 24, 26: “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.... You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (ESV).

Faith therefore is manifested in deeds. Grace is God's gift of mercy, by which Jesus' sacrifice clears us of guilt from the sins we have committed. And this forgiveness requires action on our part—that we bear fruit.

Galatians 5:16–18: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (ESV).

Galatians 3:22–24: “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” (ESV).

In keeping God's commandments—the spirit and the letter of the law—Christians show that works are an outgrowth of faith, grace being God's free gift of mercy and pardon for our sin. “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:56–57 ESV).

How many angels make a legion?

QUESTION: From the book, *Angels and the Spirit World*, p. 15, angels supported Christ and His followers. There is a reference to “twelve legions of angels.” How many would that be?

D.N., Florida

ANSWER: In Matthew 26:53, Jesus says that all He had to do was ask and His Father would give Him “more than twelve legions of angels.” How many angels are in a “legion”? Jesus probably had in view the “legions” of soldiers that made up Roman armies. A legion consisted of at least 6,000 soldiers, so a legion of angels would be at least 6,000 of them. Therefore, “more than twelve legions of angels” would be **more than 72,000** angels!

Jesus made this statement after a disciple drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. The disciple was attempting to defend Jesus when a crowd led by Judas seized Him to take Him away. Paraphrased, Jesus was saying, “You should know by now that if I need deliverance from My enemies, all I have to do is ask My Father, and He will send an *army* of angels—so why are you drawing your puny little sword? Besides, relying on the sword is a good way to get yourself killed.”

Jesus’ larger point was that the Kingdom would not come in the time or manner the sword-wielding disciple expected it to come, and that what was happening to Him was a necessary step in the unfolding of God’s plan and purpose in the redemption of Israel and of all mankind.

Are all body piercings wrong?

QUESTION: I have a comment on the body piercing question. According to Leviticus 19:28, it is wrong to pierce any part of the body. Just as the Bible mentions how Jezebel used to dress with makeup and earrings. Take the time and think about the symbolism of nose ring and other jewelry in different religions. Remember that the children of Israel also used the golden jewelry to make a golden calf—Isaiah 3:16–26.

Circumcision was ordained by Elohim. Piercing was not. The Bible also says that a woman must not wear anything pertaining to a man—pants/trousers. Women must also cover their heads while praying or prophesying—1 Corinthians 11:5.

Think about the contents/ingredients that are in some makeup, jewelry, etc. We must not be like people that are in the world!

L.B.M. (sent by e-mail)

ANSWER: Leviticus 19:28 refers specifically to making cuttings in the flesh “for the dead.” This refers to cutting the flesh as a part of a pagan (and probably superstitious) practice. By the way, that would include circumcision if in fact the circumcision was done to honor or appease some pagan god. We know for sure that circumcision was practiced in Egypt and elsewhere, but not for the same reasons God had in mind when He commanded it for Abraham and his offspring. So what is condemned here is any cutting of the flesh, including circumcision, that is directly connected with pagan religions or superstitions.

In Exodus 21:6, a Hebrew servant who loved his master and wanted to continue serving him after his six years of service had expired could do so. His master was to “bring him to the judges” and “pierce his ear with an awl.” The piercing was for publicly identifying the man as a permanent servant. From this we can see that Leviticus 19:28 does not condemn *all* piercings irrespective of purpose.

You also brought up the wearing of jewelry. Wearing jewelry, *in itself*, is not sinful. God’s own description of His love for Jerusalem suggests that He doesn’t think so, either. Notice Ezekiel 16:10–14:

“I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave

Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with **ornaments**, put **bracelets** on your wrists, and a **chain** on your neck. And I put a **jewel** in your nose, **earrings** in your ears, and a beautiful **crown** on your head. Thus you were **adorned with gold and silver**, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth.... You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,’ says the Lord GOD.”

Here, the jewelry (including the nose jewel and earrings) and fine clothing are used by God Himself to symbolize His own splendor. It seems extremely unlikely that God would have created this picture of Himself adorning Jerusalem with ornaments, bracelets, earrings, etc., had He considered the wearing of these things to be sinful.

Isaiah 3:16–26 does not condemn jewelry or in any way suggest that God opposes the wearing of it. What God opposes is the haughtiness, or prideful spirit of the “daughters of Zion” (verse 16). They were using their jewelry and their perfumes and their fine clothing to express themselves in this unholy way, but there is nothing inherently evil about those items, and there is certainly a proper use for them. There is nothing wrong with a woman wanting to look her best. There’s a huge difference between that and the haughty spirit described in this passage.

You mentioned men wearing clothes that pertain to women, and vice versa. Deuteronomy 22:5 states, “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.” This commandment forbids cross-dressing. The Israelites were to respect the symbols of gender differences, just as we should—and generally do—in our modern society. But the principle is violated only when a person wears clothing items *specifically* designed for and identified with the opposite sex. Pants made for women do not pertain to men, and certain types of clothing, especially work clothes, are not necessarily gender-specific. These items were not in view when that command was given. The command refers to things made specifically for women or specifically for men. It does not mean there can never be any article of clothing that may be used by both sexes.

Paul’s meaning regarding head coverings has been debated since time immemorial. Are all women, at all times, and in every place required by divine mandate to wear a head covering when they pray or prophesy? Or do Paul’s instructions apply more narrowly than that?

Let’s begin with Paul’s own words: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of

Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered” (1 Corinthians 11:3–6).

Verse 3 is the key. This passage is about making sure that the behavior of men and women in Christian assemblies is consistent with the God-ordained chain of authority. God the Father is the head of Christ; Christ is head of the man (husband); and the man is the head of the woman (wife). The head covering, *in that society*, was a symbol of authority (verse 10). By wearing it, the woman was sending the message to others that she was under the authority of a husband. Therefore, if she prays or prophesies (participates in a public worship service) with her head uncovered, she dishonors her head—her husband. And by dishonoring her God-appointed head, she dishonors God. But this is true *only* in a culture where the head covering signals submission.

In our society, a head covering—whether a hat or scarf—does not symbolize submission and signals nothing regarding marital status or the chain of authority. A woman, therefore, is free to fully participate in worship services with or without a head covering.

Is the Kingdom here, or isn’t it?

QUESTION: I stumbled upon your article on the kingdom of God here (<https://www.cgi.org/is-the-kingdom-of-god-here-now>). It is an interesting take on the debate, as I have read so far from others from different sides on the issue. I wonder what you make of Jesus’ prophecy in Mark 9:1 where He stated that the kingdom would arrive in the lifetime of some of the disciples. Thanks.

A.B. (sent by e-mail)

ANSWER: The article you refer to states that the Kingdom of God will be established in its fullness in the future, but it also affirms that there is a sense in which the Kingdom was present in the ministry of Jesus and continues to be present today.

In the time of Jesus, the Kingdom of God was present in the Person and ministry of the King of that *future* Kingdom (Matthew 12:28); and since Jesus promised He would continue to be with His disciples until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20), there is a sense in which the Kingdom continues to be present in the world. In fact, one could say that, since the time of Christ, the Kingdom of God has been “breaking in” through the continual process of the making of new disciples who are tasting “the good word of God and powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5). But it’s important to distinguish the Kingdom in its present “embryonic” form from the ultimate, eschatological Kingdom. If Christ doesn’t come at some point in the future and establish the world-ruling Kingdom of God upon this earth, then there is no sense in which the Kingdom is present today. But since He will come and do precisely that, there is a sense in which the Kingdom is now present in the world.

In Mark 9:1, Jesus may be referring to the Kingdom in its embryonic stage, perhaps specifically to the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, when the ministry of Jesus, King of the Kingdom, would continue in a powerful way through the agency of the apostles. Or—more likely,

I would say—Jesus may have been referring to the *Transfiguration*, which occurred six days later (see verses 2–9). Not all the disciples, but only Peter, James, and John, saw the *glorified* Christ conversing with Moses and Elijah. *This was a preview of the future Kingdom of God.* The previous verse (8:38) refers to the time of Christ’s coming to establish the Kingdom on this earth, but 9:1 refers to a *glimpse* of that future kingdom—and that’s what the Transfiguration was, a glimpse of the future Kingdom, with Jesus, in His glorified state, accompanied by Moses and Elijah.

Was all the grass burned up, or not?

QUESTION: Just finished a Bible study with my group in the neighborhood and the question arose about how to interpret Revelation—literally or symbolically. Nonetheless, one person said that it would be hard to take a literal interpretation if you compare verses like Revelation 8:7 and Revelation 9:4, where 8:7 says all the grass was burned and 9:4 they (those released from the abyss) were not to harm the grass. If all the grass was burned why then would they be instructed not to harm what isn’t there? Your thoughts?

T.H., Texas

ANSWER: A “literal interpretation” is the exegetical method that enables the interpreter to understand the *literal meaning* of a given text. If, for example, you read the description of the “Lamb” in Revelation 5:6, you’ll seek to understand the *literal reality* behind this obviously symbolic description. But to do this, you simply *must* take textual genre into consideration. The book of Revelation is made up of a series of visions, each of which is rich in symbolism. It is clearly not of the same textual genre as, say, the book of Acts. If one doesn’t recognize this, one will never be able to discern the literal meaning of any of Revelation’s visions.

So I support the “literal interpretation” of biblical texts. But it’s important to distinguish “literal interpretation” from interpreting *literalistically*. An example of the latter is when a person reads a highly poetic description as if it were a newspaper report or historical account. It simply doesn’t work!

Here’s an example:

Isaiah 14:4 states, “You will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon.” Notice first that this is a “taunt” (a figurative parable, proverb, or poem), not a news report or historical account. Second, note that it concerns “the king of Babylon,” who was the chief representative of an oppressive power. Then if you just read through the chapter, you’ll see that it is highly poetic and loaded with symbolic language. We find trees—cypresses and the cedars of Lebanon—talking to one another about the absence of the king’s axmen (verse 8). If we interpret *literalistically*, then we will conclude that trees are (or were) conscious entities and can (or could) communicate with each other. But if we seek to discover the *literal meaning* of the text, then we’ll recognize this particular textual genre for what it is and come to the understanding that this simply means that the king is no longer obtaining the finest wood to build his magnificent palaces—in other words, the king and his kingdom are coming to ruin.

If we take into account the different kinds of texts we find in Scripture, then that will go a long way toward helping us understand what the various authors of Scripture were trying to convey to their audiences. Since Revelation is made up of visions containing highly symbolic descriptions, we should not read it as if it were giving us precise figures on how many, how long, or what percentage. We should not just automatically assume (or rule out) that all its references to “the earth” (which could be translated “the land”) necessarily refer to the entire planet.

With this in mind, how would you understand Revelation 9:4?

Here are my thoughts on it: The passage really has nothing to do with whether or not there is any “grass of the earth” that could be harmed. The point here is that these are not ordinary locusts that do the things ordinary locusts ordinarily do—eat up (“harm”) vegetation. Rather, these are “locusts” from the “bottomless pit” (the habitation of the vilest of wicked spirits), and their mission is to torment the ungodly. This is the first of the three “woes” and is a part of the divine judgment that will be poured out on the ungodly just before the Second Coming. The object of this and the “woes” to follow is not merely to make the ungodly suffer, but to (hopefully) bring them to repentance (cf. verse 20).

Now, what about Revelation 8:4. Does this verse tell us that all the green grass on our planet will be burned up?

Remember, John is describing what he is *seeing* (or *has seen*). When he says, “and all green grass was burned up” (Revelation 8:4), he is describing what he *saw* in the vision. He is not necessarily saying that all the green grass of planet earth was burned up, just that all the green grass *he saw in the vision* was burned up. This is not necessarily a global scene. The trumpet judgments lead up to the fall of the “great city” (11:7–8, 13), which may be understood as the worldly system’s seat of power, so it is quite possible that the destruction described here has geographical limitations.

In any case, the answer to your question lies in understanding the *literal meaning* behind the highly *figurative* description of “locusts” instructed “not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

What does Jesus look like?

QUESTION: I don’t know who the author was on page 16 of the *International News* [Vol. 40, No. 1 issue] entitled “Odd Bible Facts”—you may not know. He says there is no description of Jesus in the Bible. There may not be a description that goes along with his beliefs, but Revelation 1:12–15 gives a description of the Savior, and the churches teach this was a description of Him in spirit form, but John recognized Him. Daniel 7:9 describes Him as having hair like wool. This is not a description of the color but of the texture. Early in his life, along with Joseph (yosafe’ in Hebrew and Iōsēph in the Greek) and Mary, they lived among black people in Egypt.

W.R., Tennessee

ANSWER: The statement you refer to reads, “While there are no descriptions of Jesus in the Bible, the image of Him with fair skin, light hair, and blue eyes is most likely incorrect and reflects the cultural influences of European Christians. Christ most likely had more Middle Eastern features.” The writer was obviously referring to Jesus as He appeared during His earthly life and ministry. And he is correct—the artwork depicting the Savior with fair skin and blue eyes reflects the imagination of European artists. This is not unusual. Other peoples do the same thing. Ethiopians depict Him with features similar to their own. Asians depict Him with Asian features. Down through the ages, Jesus has been depicted in a variety of ways by different peoples living under different cultural influences.

Revelation 1:12–15 is a *vision* and is filled with *symbolism*. The “loud voice” symbolizes power and the importance and certainty of the things revealed through the Source of the voice. The white hair symbolizes wisdom, dignity, and honor. His brightly shining face symbolizes His glory and deity. His flaming eyes and the sword from His mouth show Him as judge, ruler, and conqueror. *No part of this*



Joseph, Mary, Jesus, and the first-century disciples are depicted as black in the iconography of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This is not surprising. Christian artists tend to give biblical characters features that resemble their own.

vision has *anything* to do with race, skin color, hair texture, or anything of the kind!

Remember, there are other descriptions of Jesus in the book of Revelation. Here’s one that hardly resembles the description found in chapter 1:

“And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (Revelation 5:6).

Would anyone claim that “this is what Jesus looks like”? *Of course not!* So why insist that the depiction of Revelation 1:12–15 tells us what Jesus literally “looks like” in His heavenly glory?

You say that the Daniel 7:9 description of the Ancient of Days’ hair (“like pure wool”) “is not a description of the color but of the texture.”

Let’s read the verse and see if your claim is supported:

“I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire.”

“*Pure wool*” is wool that has all foreign matter removed—no dirt or discoloring stains. Daniel is not describing hair texture; he is saying that God’s garment and His hair were white, just as snow and pure wool are white. The emphasis here is on *pure whiteness*, not texture. The white clothing and hair symbolize righteousness and wisdom—a most fitting symbol for this visionary description of *divine judgment*. The Ancient of Days—THE MOST WISE GOD!—judges in RIGHTEOUSNESS.

This vision, like the vision of Revelation 1:12–15, has nothing to do with the inane question of which race God resembles most, as if “race” pertained to God.

In your last comment, you claim that Joseph, Mary, and the young Jesus “lived among black people in Egypt.” The biblical account says nothing about the race of Joseph’s Egyptian neighbors, and we know that a mixture of people lived in Egypt throughout its long history. Indeed, there were black Africans from the south who lived in Egypt (and in many places throughout the Roman Empire), but Jews and ethnic Greeks, among others, dwelt there also. In fact, by the time of Christ, Alexandria was home to more than 150,000 Jews.

So given the diversity of the Egyptian population and the fact that the largest Jewish community of the Diaspora was located there, the new Nazarene arrivals would have “blended” right in. It is quite possible they had relatives there who greeted them and were happy to welcome them as guests in their home.

Masses of people have grown exasperated from the constant barrage of bleak forecasts, the interruption of our pastimes, and the removal of spontaneity from our itineraries. Recent protocols and countermeasures have



altered how we go about our daily routines. Some have griped at the cumbersomeness of implemented precautions that have gradually been suggested, mandated, or adopted into our daily lives.

In addition, these concerns run parallel to other social cataclysms that have erupted. Numerous people recognize how much things have gravitated from what we once knew and were accustomed to in our daily routines. The collateral damage from each one of these points has touched us all in some manner, leaving many to contemplate, *When will things go back to normal?*

These very same sentiments have been expressed countless times by those etched in the pages of the Bible. Job, whose experiences are often seen to be the epitome of hardship, reminisced about when his life was more favorable. Chapter 29 in the Book of Job finds Job pinning for how things used to be:

“How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone on my head and by his light I walked through darkness! Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God’s intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me, when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil” (Job 29:2–6, NIV).

How prolonged Job’s troubles were is uncertain. Throughout his ordeal, Job wanted his life circumstances to go back to normal. However lengthy, countless others in our day can relate to Job and his reversal of fortune. Today, a myriad of people are eager to revert back to a pre-Covid standard of life. They all have a yearning to resume their daily routines without inconvenience and consternation. They are hopeful for things to return to normal.

Ultimately, Job’s fortunes were reversed but only after he gained a degree of introspection concerning how he related to God. So we too must take opportunity to take inventory of our thoughts, our interactions with each other, and our approach to God, as we await a return to normalcy.

Another figure of the Bible who has been waiting for things to return to normal is God Himself. The entirety of the Bible is essentially one soliloquy of God’s innermost thoughts expressing God’s anticipation for things to return to normal. Our longing for things to return to normal is based on the frame of reference of our own experiences and our human longevity. However, God’s frame of reference stretches beyond ours. In God’s purview, God has observed firsthand the ramifications of sin. God has witnessed the schisms that took place in the culture of the angels and mankind when the respective parties broke away from practicing righteousness. In turn, God looks forward to a time where things return to normal and his righteousness is practiced by all.

God established the order of things from the start and therefore set the standard for what normal would be by way of morality and habitat. We observe God presenting Himself as the architect of the world in his interrogation of Job:

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4–7, NIV).

Here we find that God’s creating the earth prompting an elated response by the angels. It is seen at that point in time that a unity among the angels existed, and they were in accordance with what God was doing. Among this multitude of angels was Satan, who held a prominent role in the delegation of God’s protocols. God recounts His impressions of Satan through Ezekiel.

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: You were the seal of perfection,

Wanting God’s Normal

by George Roper

Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone *was* your covering:
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes
Was prepared for you on the day you were created.
You *were* the anointed cherub who covers;
I established you;
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.
You *were* perfect in your ways from the day you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you.
By the abundance of your trading
You became filled with violence within,
And you sinned;
Therefore I cast you as a profane thing
Out of the mountain of God;
And I destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the fiery stones” (Ezekiel 28:11–16, NKJV).

Initially, Satan walked in accordance to God’s ways. However, he became corrupt and his behavior pivoted from God’s way of outward concern for others to that of self-interest. This change in ideals demonstrated itself in Satan’s thought process and his outward actions. God confides some of the devil’s internal musings to Isaiah.

How you have fallen from heaven,
morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!
You said in your heart,
“I will ascend to the heavens;
I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon.
I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.”
But you are brought down to the realm of the dead,
to the depths of the pit (Isaiah 14:12–15, NIV).

Satan, having sinned, resorted to a different code of conduct and ethics. His ensuing behavior created dissension amongst the formerly undivided community of angels. The effects of Satan’s discord resulted in his expulsion. In the book of Revelation, referring to the devil metaphorically, it is said that Satan drew a third of the angels with him (Revelation 12:4). Christ recalls how the devil and his colluders were outcast.

He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18, NIV).

Satan and the faction of angels that followed him, once found themselves singing for joy at the creation of the earth and being supportive of God’s pursuits. Now, this contingent of fallen angels works to subvert man’s relationship with God. This role is shown in the book of Revelation.

“The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (Revelation 12:9, NIV).

The insolence of Satan and the demons notwithstanding, God proceeded to take steps to develop and nurture man in the environmental confines of the earth (Psalm 8:3–8). As such, the earth was refurbished to achieve that purpose. We find God at work in making the proper setting for man in the book of Genesis.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1–2, NIV).

The Hebrew verb translated ‘was’ may also be rendered as ‘became’. Rendering verse two as, ‘Now the earth became formless and empty...’ The bible asserts that the earth was not initially made in a formless and empty state but rather it became that way. God’s original intentions are detailed in Isaiah.

“For this is what the LORD says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other’” (Isaiah 45:18, NIV).

God clarifies that his rendition of the earth was not created to be empty or in chaos. It may be inferred that the behavior of Satan and the splinter of angels that followed him had an adverse effect on the surroundings. Nevertheless, God gave attention to a dilapidated earth and restored it.

After preparing the earth, God moved to reestablish His law-abiding government through Adam. Had Adam and Eve obeyed God, their compliance would have set the precedent to replace Satan’s ineffectual governance. Restoring a God centered system of living that had been abandoned prior by the devil and the fallen angels (Jude 1:6).

Yet, Adam and Eve chose a course apart from God that would embark mankind on a “learn by trial and error” odyssey (Genesis 3:6–24), necessitating God to come as a man, live a sinless life, and offer His life to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. This is further explained in the Book of Romans.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—But the free gift *is* not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many” (Romans 5:12, 15, NKJV).

Christ’s sacrifice has paved the way for mankind to be reunited with God, culminating in becoming the spirit-composed children of God. This occurrence accompanies the reestablishment of God’s government upon the earth after an extensive hiatus, paving the way for a return to normalcy (Revelation 10:6–7). Through personification, Paul explains how badly even the creation wants things to return to normal.

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now” (Romans 8:19–23, NKJV).

Just as we long for things to return to normal in an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty. So, too, God desires for things to return to normal according to His point of reference, commencing with Satan becoming compromised, to the ensuing dissension among the angels and the separation of man from God by sin. God has gone through painstaking efforts in directing things back to normal. We are to share in God’s ambitions. The normal that we desire should be the norms that will accompany the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:31–33), rather than the norms associated with the cares of this world. The normal that we should crave far predates functioning without a facemask. It predates the horrendous aches and the tremendous pains that have accompanied the learning curve of life that mankind has chosen to take. That normal is the embodiment of God’s way of life in a literal societal structure. The culmination of God’s patience and all His hard work is shown in the final chapter of the book of Revelation.

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’” (Revelation 21:1–4, NKJV).

We too should look forward to God’s plan coming to fruition. For indeed, God wants nothing more than for this process to come to completion so that things may return to...normal.

Is Anybody Listening?

There appears to be a growing mood of indifference toward holding people accountable for their actions. It would seem because the wicked prosper, it now pays to be crooked. And since it would appear evil prospers, cynicism and distrust is increasing throughout the world. What can we expect and do at this point?

by Bill Watson

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I'm not quite sure, maybe it's just me, but recently it seems the circumstances we find ourselves observing are "seething" with unnecessary agitation. Don't get me wrong—I'm not suggesting dismissing the reasons for *legitimate* concerns and issues, but some of the civil discourse exhibited by so-called political leaders, community organizers, and government operatives frankly leaves a lot to be desired.

It seems there's more "deflection" of subjects going on than you can shake a stick at. In the course of public debate, "deflection"—or *distraction*—is a common strategy used to keep the attention and focus elsewhere; in other words, keeping the subject off any topics, evidence, or leads that may point to the truth about the matters under scrutiny. It's very grievous and disappointing to see such disrespect for the rule of law by those entrusted—the political administrations, lawmakers, and law enforcement agencies—to protect the integrity and truth of the hegemony.

Some will claim there appears to be "other things in play" that are not meant to be understood, or plainly seen by the public. Clearly, this leads to questions about *why*. Could it be so certain "players" can benefit from the ruse?

Obviously for some, this fuels all kinds of conspiracy theories because there are just too many loose ends. These unanswered questions compound the circumstances into suspicion and distrust toward those in leadership or investigative roles, thereby causing many to doubt the results or conclusions allegedly representing the truth of the matter. The Kennedy assassination of November 1963 is a good example of this, and there is doubt surrounding the Warren Commission's final report that many suspect is not accurate, and is *purposely* disingenuous to protect a conspiracy "cover-up" to kill the President of the United States.

Currently, there are people claiming the moon landing was a hoax, that 911, the Sandy Hook, as well as Las Vegas shootings, are all suspected to be "false flags" and not what they appear to be. Some have said the Bergdahl prisoner exchange and the 911 Bengasi, Libya terrorist attacks were the result of something far more nefarious at work, as are the questions surrounding the "Uranium One Deal," which resulted in the United States surrendering 20 percent of its uranium supply to Russia, of all things, and without a whimper. How does that happen? Who agreed to that arrangement? What was the logic behind this decision, and who signed off on it?

Clearly, many of these items and issues deserve the attention of those responsible for upholding the law and commissioned to investigate and ferret out the truth. This is why they were elected—so if there was something illegally done, or if personal gain was obtained at the expense of the nation's well-being or

national security, then those perpetrating these crimes would be held accountable for those actions.

However, it seems even the "mainstream media" is *indifferent* to finding out the truth. The investigative reporting of years ago seems to be M.I.A. This is very disappointing!

What has happened to the affection for "liberty through law"? What's happened to the *vision*, *respect*, and *will*, to protect for God, family, and country? Who has beleaguered the world into thinking it's not important to include God in our culture, and *Christian* integrity and character doesn't matter? No one, it appears, is held accountable for mitigating these serious breaches of national trust!

Where's All This Leading?

If it feels good, do it. If you're not with the one you love, love the one you're with. Freedom is just another word for having nothing left to lose. These are just some of the phrases that have helped our growing humanistic society become what it is today. These lyrics from past songwriters have been the *type* of words influencing our youth for many decades. And it has grown worse—much worse—and we're now seeing the fruits of these ideas, feelings, and outlooks come to fruition. It isn't pretty!

The rhetoric has accelerated: *Pigs in a blanket, fry them like bacon.* This has been a past slogan of the *Black Lives Matter* movement toward law enforcement. Additionally, rappers are singing lyrics that are sending messages of violence and disrespect.

Notice Anderson Paak in *The Weekend* album: *We on 16th ridin by the police station, we might make a pork rind out of pig, bro, somebody tell these m*** f*** to keep their hands off me, I aint a m*** f*** slave, keep your chains off me, F** the black cop too, that's the same fight.* Notice this about women from the same guy: *Put Molly [date rape drug] all in her champagne, she ain't even know it. I took her home and I enjoyed that, she ain't even know it.* He also has some things to say about President Trump: *I fantasize shooting Trump down, a shot for every black man who got gunned down.*

Even Madonna, some months ago at a rally in D.C., said she is angry and has thoughts about blowing up the White House. This kind of speech just adds to the anger and frustration. And though she spoke in context to illustrate non-violence, after lacking her comments in vulgarity, it became very clear she was all about *agitating* rather than suggesting solutions for what she thought were the problems.

Over and over we see hypersensitive expressions wrapped in hyperbole's passion all designed to aggravate and exacerbate the protesting *Antifa* crowds for effect. This is the goal of anarchists who have become the "village idiots" of elitists like George Soros and others, who support his *Open Society Foundations*, which is nothing more than supporting the globalist agenda so prominent among the progressive rich.

However, many additional causes are now driving the cultural and political movements within the United States, Canada, and Europe. There seems to be no end to the multiple sources of political action, conflict, and terrorism—you can hardly keep up with it.

Assuredly, the trends are worsening. The legaliza-

tion of laws directly *opposed* to God's Word reflects the ongoing departure and purposeful abandonment of the God of Israel.

Eventually, this trajectory will merit His attention and *corrective intervention*! Why do I say that? Because that is His pattern!—especially for those nations who adopt Him as their God—and history proves the United States has done just that from its beginning. Historically, its culture was originally based on both the Old and New Testaments! It has tried to be a Judeo-Christian-based society, though admittedly, it has "missed the mark" in many ways.

Notice what God says through the prophet Jeremiah, when warning the House of Jacob and Judah in the 6th century B.C., keeping in mind Jacob (Israel) did not exist at this time—they had been conquered by the Assyrians 120+ years *before*: "Declare this in the house of *Jacob*, and publish it in *Judah*, saying, ...But this people has a revolting and rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone [away from God] ...Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. For among my people are found wicked men [very selfish leaders, extortionists, and liars, ungodly people]: they lay wait, as he that sets snares: they set a trap, they catch men [they defraud and bribe, frame, and unjustly blackmail for self gain] As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit [they are involved with all kinds of nefarious activities]: Therefore they are become great, and waxen rich [Many have assumed leadership positions with average wealth, but leave office as multi-millionaires off the backs of the people]. They are waxen fat, they shine [they become empowered, enamored with themselves, and often become narcissistic and egocentric]: yea, they over pass the deeds of the wicked [they hold no one accountable, because too often they are the beneficiaries of the wickedness of others, i.e., collusion]: they judge not the cause [they are not interested in the truth], of the fatherless, yet they prosper [they exploit and use the children, e.g., pedophilia, trafficking, child slavery, and prostitution]; and the right of the needy do they not judge [they don't care for the poor except to execute advantage for their own selfish purposes].

"Shall I not visit for these things? says the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this [yes, God is on a countdown to hold these leaders and people accountable for such unconscionable evil]? An astonishment and horrible thing is committed in the land [yes, God is outraged over what He sees and what is being legalized and accepted as normal—as He was with Sodom and Gomorrah]; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means [the ministry is not doing its job; they concern themselves with money and appeasement, being politically correct]; and my people love to have it so [the people love those who speak the soft things, things that entertain and make them feel good]: and what will you do in the end thereof" (Jeremiah 5:20–31)? And that is the question indeed! *What will we do?*

Unfortunately, many people think since judgment isn't swift, God is okay with what is going on. This couldn't be further from the truth! However, we are told about this very thing. Notice: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, there-

fore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Throughout Psalms 10, David asks why God allows the wicked to take advantage and be benefited. He illustrates what evil the wicked participate in and makes the observation that because God’s intervention to stop the wicked is not immediate, he is encouraged to *continue* (Psalms 10:6, 13). Yes, because evil seems to go unpunished swiftly, the wicked continue in their ways. They become *emboldened* since they’re not punished immediately.

Why do we think that is? Does it make any sense? Or is God negligent in His ways—derelict of duty to swiftly move in and break in pieces the evil ones involved with this kind of wicked activity?

These are all good questions, and if we want answers, it requires us to know God’s objective in using this delay tactic. And this can be understood by knowing His *patterns*, which were displayed when handling ancient Israel. Keep in mind that before both Israel, to the north, fell to the Assyrians, and Judah, in the south, fell to the Babylonians 120-plus years afterwards, God sent prophet after prophet warning them to forsake their sins, or judgment would come. This is a plain indication God is very patient with His people. All of us involved with the Christian walk can attest that this is an *admirable* characteristic and *welcomed* attribute of God’s! I’m sure we’re all agreed His patience is greatly appreciated!

The Pattern God Continues to Use

Many prophets were sent to both Israel and Judah over a period of decades, of which some came and went without any of their prophecies occurring. And because those prophecies didn’t happen *immediately*, the changes (repentance) they proclaimed necessary to avoid God’s judgment didn’t happen. The people didn’t believe—they didn’t listen! So they didn’t change.

Consider the prophet Amos who lived and preached in the 8th century B.C. during the reign of Jeroboam II. This was about 10 to 15 years *before* Tiglathpileser invaded northern Israel. When it did happen, that invasion was the first of four, spanning over approximately 65 years, which led to the complete collapse and destruction of the northern 10-tribe nation, called Israel. (Judah remained intact in the south.)

However, Amos, who came after the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and perhaps overlapped with Joel and Jonah, was sent primarily with three objectives. *First*, to proclaim judgments of the surrounding nations of Israel. *Second*, to indict the nations of Israel to the north and Judah in the south. And *third*, to announce the future blessings of Israel rebuilding the waste cities for habitation and the planting of vineyards and gardens—described futuristically as a time of peace. But interestingly, the prophecies of Amos—everything he stated and warned about—didn’t happen while he was alive. Instead, he died without anything he said coming to pass! He was a prophet without validation in that regard.

Furthermore, this was a time of great affluence and wealth for Israel. Oh, there were rumors of war and unrest, but for the most part, it was a time of peace. So why was Amos claiming such “doom and gloom” during a time of wealth, prosperity, and peace? Why in the world would he be talking about rebuilding the waste cities when Israel’s cities at this time were in good shape and filled with energy and commerce? I’m sure it just didn’t make good sense to many of the Israelites at the time. Sadly, nobody was really *listening*—they dismissed him as irrelevant! And probably, some considered him just an old false prophet—a big “bag of hot air”—as they stretched out on their beds of ivory and enjoyed their summer homes.

Yet God was giving them *fair warning*. Notice

chapter 6. Throughout this chapter, Amos indicts ancient Israel for being no better than the Gentile nations around them and for luxuriating in their wealth, but without any real interest in protecting what God had provided them—their land, affluence, and freedom. Notice: “...Ye put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near [you think you’re invincible, too strong to collapse, but by doing that you’re causing the decline to come upon you]; (you) that lie upon the beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock [enjoying your wealth]... That chant to the sound of the viol [enjoy your music]... That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments [and your soft lifestyles];” (Amos 6:1–6). But now notice the last part of verse 6: “but they are not grieved for the affliction [breach] of Joseph.”

This last statement is very clear about God’s assessment of Israel’s condition, His displeasure. As a matter of fact, He is disgusted with their “elitist” selfish attitude, which now has translated to *indifference* for the health and well being of the greater whole of the nation. Israel was being led by self-centered narcissists who used the wealth of the nation for their own self gain and promotion—a very similar condition that presently has emerged into the light and is recognized as infesting the United States and United Kingdom with an enormous amount of poisonous *corruption* embedded deeply in the leadership of government, education, and law enforcement.

Amos proceeds to announce: “Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed [they will be visited by God and taken down]. The LORD God has sworn by himself, says the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city [the capital, Samaria, symbolic of the nation] with all that is therein” (Amos 6:7–8). Read on and listen to what Amos warns Israel about until he finally, once again, pointedly states: “But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, says the LORD the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness” (Amos 6:14).

This never occurred during Amos’s life. That’s right! He died and went to the grave, never seeing or knowing what he said ever came to pass. I’m sure it’s safe to say, the people of his time were relieved when “the old man” died. I’m sure his message of “doom and gloom” was not very popular among the people of his own nation during this time of affluence and relative peace. Yet God used him to warn them of the impending judgment coming, due to their sins. But sadly, *they didn’t listen!*

A Modern Day Warning From the Prophets

Throughout the Christian community today, many will claim there is no real prophetic value to the writings of the prophets—instead, it rests only in the *historical* significance and lessons we can learn from the mistakes ancient Israel made with God. But is this true? What about all the writings of circumstances and conditions that have not yet happened? So many prophecies plainly claim, “...in the *latter days* you shall consider it” (Jeremiah 30:24). Also, in Genesis 49, notice: “And Jacob called unto his sons... Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the *last days*” (Genesis 49:1). That is a prophetic statement! And there are so many more. (Write for our *free* booklet, *Can You Understand Bible Prophecy?* for a more comprehensive explanation.) What many people don’t realize is that 30 percent of the Bible is prophecy, with many of those eschatological prognostica-

tions targeted for the last days. This is why many find prophecy so fascinating!

To understand how this works, it’s important we recognize prophecy is often *dual* in description and application. What I mean is, prophecies consist of announcements of both thesis and antithesis; type and anti-type, or a prior, more immediate fulfillment that will be repeated in kind or type in the latter day. This method, combined with figures of speech, metaphors, analogies, and poetic writings that are often symbolic, is liberally spread throughout the prophecies of your Bible. Many prophetic writings happen to be used and understood in this manner.

Though many prophecies were fulfilled when the Assyrian invaders pillaged the northern ten tribes, conquering and capturing them, and taking them out of their homeland—it was also only a foretaste of a much bigger “latter day collapse” of modern day wealthy and affluent nations that have a similar relationship with the God of Israel and who were sifted through the nations between *then* and *now*.

Notice what Amos says: “Behold the eyes of the LORD God are upon the sinful kingdom [any sinful kingdom], and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving [except] that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says the LORD. For lo, I will command, and I will sift [shake, or scatter] the house of Israel among all the nations [they will migrate, set and scatter], like corn [wheat] is sifted [shaken] in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth” (Amos 9:8–9). Then, in the Millennium, when the tabernacle of David is raised, Israel will come out of captivity to build the wasted cities and inhabit them in peace (Amos 9:11–15). Both houses, Judah and Israel, will be reunited at this time, and King David will be resurrected and rule under the direction of Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 30:9–11; Ezekiel 37:15–28).

Unfortunately, what most don’t understand, nations who claim the God of Israel to be their basis, their foundation, of moral and religious clarity and equivalency, are *accountable* to Him. The United States and the United Kingdom, along with many of the Commonwealth nations of the West, have a lot to answer for, since they have been weighed in the balances and found wanting when compared to His expectations. Jeremiah is also very clear about warning these nations that God will visit for the transgressions committed. Notice: “For I am with you says the LORD, to save you [Israel—both Judah and Israel]: Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you [lands of captivity], yet will I not make a full end of you [God will not utterly destroy Israel]: but I will correct you in measure [He will be fair, but you will be held accountable], and will not leave you altogether unpunished” (Jeremiah 30:11).

Notice Micah says something that makes no sense for his timeline, since the Assyrians were actively invading Israel during his lifetime, resulting in captivity and removal. Yet, he says this: “And the remnant of Jacob [a nation historically connected to Israel] shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest [it shall be strong among other nations of the world], as a young lion among the flocks of sheep [it can also be sensitive and charitable]: who, if he go through [this remnant of Israel], both treads down, and tears in pieces, and none can deliver [if this lion unleashed all its strength, none could deliver you from it]. Your hand shall be lifted up upon your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off [its military prowess will be superior to the nations of the world]” (Micah 5:8–9).

What is it we’re reading here? The Scriptures indicate a remnant nation with historical roots connected to the Israel under siege at this time by the Assyrians, would, in the latter days, be strong again among the nations of the world; but be brought down due to its

abandonment of God and its sinful ways (Micah 5:10–15).

These people, however, at the return of Christ, will be reconciled back to Palestine at the beginning of the Millennium to be established as the nation of Israel that the Gentiles will look to as an example—the light on the hill! Notice what Jeremiah says, because this has *never happened*—yet it is written for our understanding, that we may know.

Notice: “Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travails with child together; a great company shall return there” (Jeremiah 31:8–11). Keep reading—this has yet to happen! It is the description of a *future exodus* that will be greater than when Israel came out of Egypt (Jeremiah 16:14–15; 23:6–8; Isaiah 27:12–13; 11:11–16).

So What Does This Mean?

The obvious conclusion is, a nation of Judah and *another* considered by God as carrying the name of Israel, *exists in the latter days*. This becomes unquestionable, since both houses are notably identified distinctly from each other. Clearly then, we must realize *all* of Israel, *including* the Jews presently in Palestine, are going *back into cap-*

tivity. This will be Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). Notice what is said: “For, lo, the days come, says the LORD, that I will bring **again** the captivity of my people Israel [but, at this time Israel does not exist. They went into captivity 120+ years before this writing. Israel never returned from their original captivity. So, how can they come into a second captivity?] and Judah [Judah was going into captivity by the Babylonians at the time of this writing. Yet the prophet is claiming they will go into captivity again!], says the LORD; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it” (Jeremiah 30:3).

Also, keep in mind the prophet Joel substantiates this about Judah by proclaiming in the *latter days* Judah and Jerusalem shall have captivity brought on them again (Joel 3:1). Let me remind us: a nation of Judah exists today, but known to the public as Israel—which they are, but do not represent *all* of Israel.

This is a *direct warning* to those nations embracing the God of Israel, which the United States and the United Kingdom and its Commonwealth nations do—that they will be conquered and taken into captivity, *again*, in the latter days. Upon the return of Christ, they will be regathered, forming an exodus that will minimize the

original exodus from Egypt. Then, millions of refugees—physical human beings—from these former historically connected nations of Israel, will be guided back to Palestine to build the waste cities and rebuild Israel under the direction of Jesus Christ, King David, and the Spirit-born family of God (Zechariah 14:1–9,16–19). They will reconstruct the nation of Israel to become that light upon the hill for all nations to look to as a model. And from there, the law of God will begin to cover the globe as the sea covers the seabed.

At that time “...the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High [Spirit-born sons of God], whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:27). This will be a time of restitution of many things, and will prepare the world for the resurrection of the *rest* of the dead at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20:4–5)! God wants as many of us as possible to be there with Him, helping to reinstitute His values and laws—the very government of God. So, we need to be courageous and determined, because the times are upon us to be spiritually equipped for the storm ahead. **I hope you are listening!**

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