

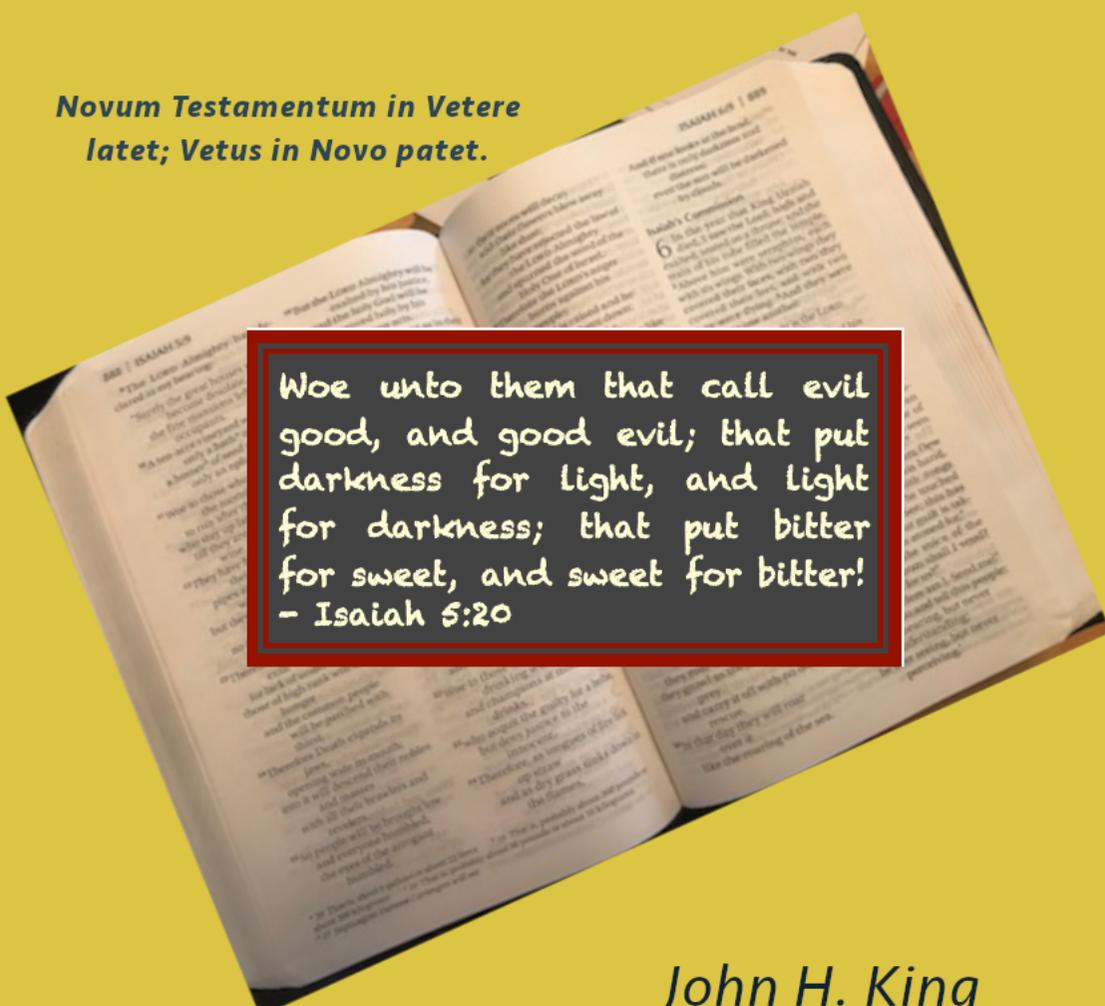
ISAIAH AND THE SIX WOES

A Cautionary Tale of Pity

with

The Prayer of Habakkuk

*Novum Testamentum in Vetere
latet; Vetus in Novo patet.*



Woe unto them that call evil
good, and good evil; that put
darkness for light, and light
for darkness; that put bitter
for sweet, and sweet for bitter!
- Isaiah 5:20

John H. King

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A Cautionary Tale of Pity

A Word from Habakkuk

John H. King

Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet; Vetus in Novo patet.

(The New Testament is in the Old concealed; The Old in the New revealed.)

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I have included in parenthesis references to quoted Scriptures instead of footnoting them for easy referral. Translations not specified are NKJV.

Dedicated to all who with repentant heart take serious the prophetic insight God has shared and which is echoed over and over in the pages of biblical history.

“People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed.” [Dr. Johnson> The real job of every moral teacher is to keep on bringing us back, time after time, to the old simple principles which we are all so anxious not to see...” C. S. Lewis. The Complete C S Lewis Signature Classics, “Social Morality” (HarperSanFrancisco. NY:2002) Page 74.

Contents

Chapter One - Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two - The Vineyard.....	9
Chapter Three - First Woe: Greed.....	14
Chapter Four - Second Woe: Profligacy.....	24
Chapter Five - Third Woe: Lies.....	31
Chapter Six - Fourth Woe: Reordering Society.....	36
Chapter Seven - Fifth Woe: Self-Reliance.....	45
Chapter Eight - Sixth Woe: Injustice.....	51
Chapter Nine - Pending Judgment.....	58
Chapter Ten - Our World.....	65
Chapter Eleven - Habakkuk's Prayer.....	77
Chapter Twelve - Culture - Supplemental.....	108

1 Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?

5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:

6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor cultivated; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

8 Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!

9 In mine ears said the Lord of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant.

10 Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah.

11 Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!

12 And the harp, and the viol, the tambourine, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.

13 Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.

14 Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoices, shall descend into it.

15 And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled:

16 But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.

17 Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

18 Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope:

19 That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

22 Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink:

23 Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

24 Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

25 Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly:

27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken:

28 Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind:

29 Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it.

30 And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

Chapter One

Introduction

It does feel like we are on the cusp of end times. The chaos, rampant sin, political unrest-all over the world-not just America. It feels surreal that these things are happening right before my eyes.
- A Friend

We imperil our own souls when we marginalize the prophetic visions in the Old Testament, when we set the Old Testament aside as a message to Ancient Israel and not us. Almost sixty percent of the Scripture by book (almost 75% by verse) is in the older record of what God had to say to *all of us*—not just Israel. Assuming this record is only an ancient literary work fails to consider the passion by which our Creator directed biblical history.

The Old Testament is also more than a theological treatise on His attributes. We should have more than an investigative interest in the end times referenced in Daniel or Ezekiel. Though we thrill at the prophecies surrounding the Savior's life and death, such a study must ask: What propelled the Father to send His Son in the first place? There is, in other words, a pulsating love that throbs behind every word in the text and we should be feeling it.

This is a study in the words and thoughts which God chose to share in the Classical or Ancient Hebrew tongue. The Grammarian, Gesenius, uses phrases such as "*linguistic coloring*," "*poetic language*," and "*peculiar words and meanings*,"

Introduction

inflections and syntactical constructions"¹ which suggest that our Old Testament has something important to tell us about God's thoughts and heart that we are cautioned not to ignore.

This is an over simplification, of course, because the language, in the vernacular, was—as is any language—constantly evolving under outside influences. Any argument I might present in favor of a given interpretation has to be thought *prima-facie*. But my concern is making no attempt at all, in prayer and in meditating upon the scripture, to extract and learn the truth buried in its mystery. We must not pass by the message thinking it boring reading or too challenging to understand or—worse—to argue, "*We have the New Testament which explains from the Old all we really need to know!*" Nothing could be farther from truth.

Isaiah chapter five is throbbing with a passionate divine interest in us and the times in which we live. Some of this emphasis is lost in translation. So, a casual devotional reading might miss it. This short booklet represents my desire to capture some of the nuances and shades of meanings that suggest urgency and importance for our world.

We might find Isaiah's use of language more of an encouragement than a scolding. I shall make an attempt at sharing what for me has brought back hope when I began to totter in my despondency over what the news media seemed to be forecasting.

Everything God says is somehow linked to a promise if He is as merciful as Calvary makes Him (and He is). Keep also in mind that there is no Hebrew word for "promise" in

¹ William Gesenius; E. Kautzsch ed.; A. E. Cowley, trans. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. (Oxford at the Clarendon Press. Oxford, England:1909) page 13

Introduction

our Old Testament.² When God *speaks*, He promises, because He does what He says! Nevertheless we love the word and it is lovable: “*Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised.*”³ *There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses*” [1 Kings 8:56]. It is worth remembering Peter’s uplifting thought that “*His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Through these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of lust*” [2 Peter 1:4].

Our World

Our world is divided; our country is divided—perhaps, fractured. Families are divided. As I write this, we might be nearer than ever to the edge of the cliff of a World War III. The debate we are asked to listen to in the media is mostly meaningless rhetoric because only God is expert in the future. If I put my hope in government, I fear my despondency will become a life sentence, imprisoned in a resignation that is without faith and without joy. Even I know that’s not what God wants of me! I must decide to trust ultimate fairness and justice to the “*Judge of all the Earth*” [Genesis 18:25] instead of a state or federal system or “*lady justice*” who might be preoccupied these days with other matters.

It is also noteworthy that world governments appear to want to do something about poverty and rising global temperatures—an admirable pursuit—but are not these matters too big for them to handle? Global equity in which

² In the modern Hebrew language the word “promise” is the Old Testament word for “trust.”

³ This is simply the word “to speak.” A merciful God who does not lie needs no special word for promising. The New Testament has a word “to promise.”

Introduction

no one remains in poverty is a description of a utopia which the evolutionary mind envisions but unrealistically. Perhaps, it is our fault for telling them they have to do something about the woes of our society, when they are not qualified. We need God! We need God because what the heart really seeks is a heaven only He can create! Self-reliance is not a biblical answer to our woes; this only prompts God to share with us His woes to encourage us to rely on Him instead. It is only in God whose love for us is genuine and wholehearted and whose wisdom surpasses man's that a hurting world can find healing.

The Rule of Inspiration

It makes sense in studying God's Word to look for relevance to this life and the culture we live in. Unfortunately modern scholarship has set this vocation aside while questioning the genuineness of the individual books of the Bible. Perhaps this might seem a noteworthy academic exercise but it holds little value for the believer who simply wants to know what God is saying to them. Sadly, a devotional study of God's Word is not the quest of the academic world.

As regards Isaiah's work, we can appreciate its historical significance and the prophecy over Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations, which the prophet shares about God's judgment and restoration. But all this leaves the larger question unanswered: what about *me*. Years ago in the pastorate this question was put to me by one believer after I attempted a, rather, scholarly lecture on the life of the patriarchs in Genesis. So, I am encouraged by the words of Dr. Brueggemann, "*The book of Isaiah is particularly generative of new waves of interpretation, each of which has been received in the*

Introduction

interpretive community as a legitimate future from the text."⁴ In other words, God still speaks to us in its pages!

God Profiled

There is a difference between profiling the God of the Old Testament and theologizing about Him. Theology tends to see God in a different light in the Old Testament than the New suggesting that after the Cross He relates differently to His creation. Many believers are dispensationalists⁵ who view the biblical record in progressive stages in salvation history. Many see Christ in a gentler role than the angry God of the Old Testament (and I guess Isaiah 5 is no help in this matter).

If I may debate this point briefly: How are we to understand the word "yesterday" in Hebrews 13:8 since whatever the Savior was "then" He remains "now" and forever? (And keep in mind that He is God!) And if we prefer to understand this to only refer to Jesus during His incarnation, does that mean He was "different" somehow in John 1:2 when "*He was in the beginning with God*"? A. W. Tozer reminds us, "*...We get the odd notion that God is showing mercy because Jesus died. No--Jesus died because God is showing mercy. It was the mercy of God that gave us Calvary, not Calvary that gave us mercy.*"⁶

Since God cannot change [Malachi 3:6] our faith, and our approach to a study of the Word, should proceed by the mantra, "*What God did (in the Old Testament) is what God does [in the New].*" We can say this because He not only never changes but He never lies [Numbers 23:19].

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, et. al. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*. (Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY:2003) Second Edition. Page 208

⁵ Dispensationalism maintains that history is divided into multiple ages or "dispensations" in which God acts with humanity in different ways.

⁶ A. W. Tozer *The Attributes of God: A Journey Into the Father's Heart*

Introduction

If God, then, behaves consistently and predictably toward His creation throughout history should not the six woes of Isaiah 5 be of interest to us, especially if we can intelligently and with an honest enquiry see Isaiah's world now in ours. We can read about the angst and anger nuanced in the words the prophet uses and ask if this has anything to say to our generation.

Although, we can see where scholarship is coming from, we must take care not to put God in stasis by our reasoning. We must not view God through academic eyes, through a robust, well-educated, intellectualism, that gives us a confidence in our knowledge of God that closes the book on discovering Who He really is. This is not what faith—trust—is all about. The very idea that we could “grieve” [cause pain to] the Spirit of God [Ephesians 4:30] suggests something about Him that, perhaps, we do not want to think about. The Old Testament's representation of His dealings with Israel are filled with passion. I guess the argument goes: because God could not repent and He could not lie or change His mind, any feelings of love, pity, sorrow, jealousy, or wrath He might be said to have must be only *anthropomorphisms* and not descriptive of real emotions⁷—whatever this is suppose to mean!

To say God's feelings are not human—we can accept—but not that they are not *real*. Martin Luther's phrase “*God striving with God*” is a realistic description of His pain when God had to fulfill the very Law He instituted that necessitated the crucifixion of His Son because we broke it (according to Paul: Romans 7:9). His pain was especially evident while His Son hung in silent agony on the Cross [Matthew 27:46]. We may need to confess that our language

⁷ John Stott. *The Cross of Christ Centennial Edition*. (InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL 2021) page 321. fnt., 39) writes, “a useful survey of patristic quotations and references is given by J. K. Mozley in his *Impossibility of God: a Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1926).

Introduction

is weak in explaining Heaven's truths, but we have a glimpse (Exodus 33:21-23)—and that is sufficient for faith (1 Corinthians 13:12).

It is unnecessary to quote Scripture that suggests that God has deep feelings and that He references them on occasion. This little booklet is, in that line of thought, an attempt at looking under the grammatical hood of Isaiah's words to see if anything is churning or if God's heartbeat can be heard more clearly. (Forgive the broken metaphor.)

The word *woe* in Isaiah's day included an element of pity which gives us reason to translate, "Woe unto them" by "They are to be pitied" thus making this chapter a cautionary tale to any and all who fall within its message. I have another way of saying this: Heed God's warnings or you will have hell to pay!

An Overview of Isaiah 5

When a nation goes the way of the 6 woes, it can't be by accident as if they didn't know better. This suggests that there must be an intelligence somehow leading them. By carrot and by stick they are being discouraged from listening to a collective conscience once thought the voice of a society's mores. Morals are no longer absolute, let alone a gift from our Creator, and consequently, are thought no longer of any value. What this all means is a breakdown of a society on many levels from domestic to judicial. Family cohesion is dissolving in the wake of more personal interests and justice becomes more political.

A Christian nation, conversely, elects a government that collectively becomes God's stewards of the national resources. The wealthier they become, the more they seek to benefit the common man and especially the poor. A government that is greedy, which is the first woe, seeks to enrich their own coffers at the expense of the poor. A greedy government uses the nation's resources to live lavishly,

Introduction

instead, which is the second woe. The nation is deceived by a leadership that exploits it into poverty while proclaiming prosperity for all. Lies! Lies are the third woe, which need the support of more lies to stay relevant. Inevitably, the coverup must be relabeled and by deception sold as the pathway to plenty.

What was once thought the right road to happiness through the biblical message of obeying God's commands is now condemned. What was once thought ungodly is now spun as the way of happiness and success. Evil becomes the good and the good, evil. This is the fourth woe. The ignorant and desperate masses are now reliant, not on God, but, on the very persons that impoverished them— this is the fifth woe. The end comes when judicial fairness is no longer. This foundational principle has corroded beneath a nation that is now crumbling into ruin. Laws now are created and interpreted only in an effort to control dissidence. Judges are no longer impartial, no longer a stabilizing force for a nation in crisis. Courts are unjust and political which is the sixth and final woe. The society has collapsed in on itself and is historically speaking slated for extinction. It has no relevance anymore as a nation.

For Israel and Judah exile was a God-sent that pulled them out of this death-trap. When they reached this point, God sent His messenger to capture their attention and bring them to a place where they could reset and seventy years hence rebuild as a godly nation. At time's end nations will no longer have this opportunity because God's Kingdom is being prepared to replace them.

Chapter Two

The Vineyard

I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. - Isaiah 5:1

Isaiah begins with a parable of the Vineyard, God's own vineyard. The story of God's vineyard¹ is both old and new but with a difference. Here in Isaiah 5 God abandons His work allowing the land to return to how He found it, a desolate wasteland.² In the New Testament He promises to trim off the dead branches and even graft in possible new growth. I must assume everyone knows the New Testament story. *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser,"* Jesus explains His own metaphor, *"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He removes; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit"* [John 15:1-2].

But unless we think God a rather severe viticulturist who seems intend on destroying in a rage what He put so much effort into, we should compare the two accounts. The stories have more in common than seems evident at first glance; for, whether God prunes a branch or prunes them all by walking away³ without a harvest, lives [vines] that do not produce good works spiritually [do not produce good grapes] are of no value to Him.

¹ :1 My **beloved** == Jehovah

² :6 I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

³ :6 I will lay it **waste**, i.e. end it, destroy it by leaving it unattended.

The Vineyard

The story of God's creation began with a garden [Genesis 2:8] and now He plants a vineyard. In the new testament the branches that produce no grapes are pruned but in Isaiah's story, the grapes produced are—Martin Luther called them—sour. But is this what Isaiah meant when he called them “worthless”?⁴ Regardless how we read it, the grapes this vine produced in Isaiah's prophecy were not edible. More to the point, they are not what God expected when He planted them—to produce a sweet red wine.⁵

Isaiah told us,⁶“God fenced it around with a low stone wall and in the center of it He built a tower, “*to protect and adorn it.*”⁷ He hewed a winepress⁸ out of stone for pressing the grapes. He “*spared no attention or trouble.*”⁹ He used a hand held hoe¹⁰ breaking up the ground about His vineyard for it was planted on the slope¹¹ of a hill, too rocky for using animals. God also cleared out the stones [verse 2] and then planted Sorek grapes, “*a choice species of vine.*”¹²

⁴ :2 **worthless**, smelly, stinking, grapes.

⁵ labrusca grapes instead of sorek grapes(פֶּזֶז, *choice vine*)

⁶ verse 7

⁷ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 161

⁸ the trough into which the juice flowed , all the more fixed and durable being made of rock or stone.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ :2 he fenced it, i.e. dug it carefully about. The word is intensified (strengthened) indicating effort.

¹¹ :1 a very fruitful hill

¹² Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* [The BDB).. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 977.

The Vineyard

This would have been a difficult task¹³ How bitterly was God's disappointment. God "looked," i.e. "waited expectantly,"¹⁴ Isaiah wrote. God's vineyard was Israel and Judah and He expected a return on His spiritual investment. He deserved worship not rebellion.

The Lord put forth so much work into His chosen people, the Nation Israel.¹⁵ Verse 7 called them "*His pleasant plant*,"¹⁶ God amused Himself with His labors taking great pleasure in what He was doing,¹⁷ which made His expectation for sweet red grapes even more disappointing.

Every miracle starting with their rescue from Egypt and every prophet sent was God tending His vineyard. He had every guarantee to expect the grapes He planted and cultivated. God tended His vine but the grapes were wild grapes. He looked after Israel. Hosea 11:1-4¹⁸ is a bit lengthy but it makes the point for us::

1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. 2 As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images. 3 I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. 4 I drew them with gentle cords, With

¹³ :2 "and also " meaning "in addition, moreover" where a simple "and" would have sufficed unless our attention was being drawn to great effort being exerted. I, once, had to dig down through clay around a septic tank six feet to locate a broken field tile and replace it before the system would work.

¹⁴ a word which means expecting, anticipating....

¹⁵ :3 **inhabitants** (the word is singular, collective). There were individuals, no doubt, who still followed God, like 7,000 in Elijah's day, but as a nation, they had forsaken Him.

¹⁶ after a word intensified meaning "delight"

¹⁷ His **delightful** plant The planting of His delight (intensified) God amused Himself with His vineyard

¹⁸ Isaiah 1:2b The LORD has spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

The Vineyard

bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.

We have a right to wonder how that could possibly be. We have always thought, “*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit*” [Matthew 12:33]. But that has become a New Covenant characteristic. In Isaiah’s time, it appeared that God’s expectations and hopes were being shattered against the rocks of a spiritual unbelief. His efforts appeared, at least for the time being, frustrated, and from the prophet’s perspective this would be an understandable explanation.

The Lord of Hosts

It seems unusual to read Isaiah refer to the vine keeper as “*The Lord of Hosts*” but is there an explanation in the first word of verse 7, *For*? There is often an exclamatory element to this word and we might translate, “Indeed, it is the Almighty God who delivered Israel, who has dotted on this nation¹⁹ as a beloved spouse and had understandably expected good grapes [a nation who would serve Him] but what did He get! C. F. Keil commented, “*The bitter deception experience by Jehovah is expressed in a play upon two words, indicating the surprising change of the desired result into the very opposite.*”²⁰ This play on words needs an explanation. Where the Lord expected justice, He found bloodshed. Instead of righteousness, He heard a cry of distress.²¹ Instead of Israel

¹⁹ In verse 1 the word beloved is found 3 times. The Hebrew word used, ‘Dodi’ is a very affectionate term.

²⁰ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 165

²¹ The last letter of the first word “Justice” is a ‘T’ in Hebrew and the last letter of the second word, ‘bloodshed’ is ‘CH’; the middle letter of the first word in the second pair, ‘righteousness’ is a ‘D’ in Hebrew and an Ayin in Hebrew in the second ‘a cry for help’ which is unpronounceable in English.

The Vineyard

living in peace following God, administering justice, God found oppression; and all forms of evil. Instead of a nation living righteously, He found a painful cry by a distressed and grieving people. And it is this oppression and the cry it occasions God now addresses in six (6) woes.

I know! ...something we have come to expect in Hebrew prose. J. P. Lange calls Isaiah "*a master of the Hebrew language.*" [John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures.* (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VI. page 7]

Chapter Three

First Woe: Greed

Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! - Isaiah 5:8

You can take that end while I'll be on this end and we can lift together. Bend at the knees 'cause it's heavy. On the count of 3: 1, 2, 3, lift, Oh! Wow! Okay, how are you doing? Let's put it down over here, carefully! Whew! You all right? Good. I wish we didn't have to move this but we did!

And what was that all about? We just lifted this "woe" out of it's historical context in Old Israel and moved it into our world because the resemblance between the two is uncanny. It is as if we have 2 different puzzles in which a single piece is identical in shape and size and we can borrow it from the one for the other to complete the picture. That is how accurately what Isaiah described was true in his day is again true in ours. If this be so and if God changes not, their woe is now ours! If this is not bad enough, consider: there are five more woes to move!

C. H. Keil, whose commentary (by now you have guessed) is meaningful to this work, begins Isaiah's prophecies under the general heading: "*Relating to the onward course of the great mass of the people toward hardening of heart.*"¹

¹ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 73

First Woe: Greed

I have dubbed this spiritual condition: *cardia-sclerosis* making it sound as serious as it really is. It was at this time in Israel's history more than any other time that more prophets warned of God's disapproval to a nation that—as I like to say—enjoyed the cookies without giving any thought to the baker. They did not reflect repentantly on the years they enjoyed God's goodness, and when He chastised them, they rebelled instead of humbly seeking mercy. In a phrase, the ingratitude and apostasy of a nation (of Israel) meant God would have to—as one might word it—aggressively attack a spiritual malignancy if there was to be restoration. This explains a Babylonian Exile. And should God not show the same concern for our world?

Perhaps their apostasy was equaled only by today's materialistic mindset that believes God is unnecessary to solve problems of sickness, poverty, and yes, even the environment, because we have modern science. For Israel and Judah there were prophets sent. "*The prophets were more active than at any other period.*"² God sent Joel and Amos and Hosea and Micah, not just Isaiah, over the span of 115 years and over the reign of six Judean kings³ ...but few were listening.⁴

Micah reminded them of the cautionary note of Moses' last will and testament, Deuteronomy 10:12, which C. H. Keil calls "*The key to all prophecy,*"⁵ and which defines Divine vengeance or judgment upon the nations. Nothing is

² C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 73

³ Bible History accessed 11/18 <https://Bible-history.com/old-testament/prophets-chronology>

⁴ Actually *two* reform movements had temporary results: (1) under Asa and his son, Jehoshaphat [2 Chronicles 17:3ff] and (2) under Joash while Jehoiada was high priest [2 Kings 11].

⁵ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 74

First Woe: Greed

more sacred to God than His covenant agreement with His people:

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...”⁶

Sounds serious! I am being glib in the hopes that some will feel disgust at merely the thought of not taking God seriously! *“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As raindrops on the tender herb, And as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the LORD...”* [Deuteronomy 32:1-3a.]⁷

Calvary

Provide me a short digression to talk about the New Covenant which Jeremiah prophesied about [Jeremiah 31:33]⁸ and which was God’s ultimate solution to His dilemma that occasioned the 6 woes we are about to review. Because God makes agreements which He cannot break, when Israel breaks them, He had to honor the conditions and provisions spelled out in The Old Covenant.⁹ So Jesus on a Roman Cross satisfied or fulfilled the Old Covenant by dying in our stead—in Israel’s stead, in the place of all mankind

⁶ Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy,

And to walk humbly with your God?

⁷ see Isaiah 2:1a

⁸ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

⁹ Deuteronomy 27 explicitly lays out what is to happen if the Decalogue is not honored.

First Woe: Greed

[Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44] and His resurrection ratified the New Covenant.

This makes Calvary the pivotal point in all history and begs the question that all must answer, “*What will you do with Jesus?*” One must be for Him or against Him, love Him or hate Him [Luke 11:23].¹⁰

Nor can we discard these 6 woes because we have appropriated Calvary—taken it to heart—and are, therefore, outside any divine judgment; for, these 6 woes will grade the true condition of the heart and, in reality, if we are not under the law but grace, what Isaiah describes in his prophecy will not describe us [James 1:27].¹¹

Covetousness & Avarice

The first woe God pronounced was against covetousness and avarice. Avarice and covetousness are not the same thing but will bring a nation to the same untimely end because both find ways to rob both the robbed and the robber who engages in such practices “*They covet fields and take them by violence,*” the Prophet Micah warned. Both Isaiah and Micah recognized the ultimate victim of a man’s greed. It is another man’s inheritance or homestead, because this is everyone’s primary investment in life. Micah observed, “... *they oppress a man and his house, A man and his inheritance.*” [Micah 2:2].

And we need to learn this word, *oppress, to practice extortion.*¹² And what is “*extortion*”? It is the practice of

¹⁰ He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

¹¹ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

¹² Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* [The BDB].. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 798

First Woe: Greed

obtaining something, especially money, through force or threats.¹³ And force can be legally sanctioned but it remains a practice deserving of God's judgment, especially when such force is perpetrated against the poor.

Remember 2008? Investors bought and sold uninsured (they didn't know they were uninsured) CDO's¹⁴. These were bundles of mortgages, which people took out on their homes, some of which were very risky. When many of these mortgage payments ballooned after a year and the homeowner could no longer make the payments, they simply walked away (moved into rented facilities). This was predictable but rich men wanted to be richer and in the name of providing everyone a home (the American dream?) they sold worthless (if not worth less) "obligations" around the world to investment banks who took the loss. Many "blame" the U.S. Government as well, which I can understand.¹⁵ We don't use the biblical word "extortion" to describe this but I think it applies. It may not have been by force but it was enforced by government mandate.

And what about covetousness and avarice?¹⁶ To *covet* speaks to an addictive need to obtain money in order to spend it. The covetous are the ultimate consumers. Even christians can fall prey to this insatiable desire. James noted that some even "[pray] *but do not receive, because [they] ask amiss, that [they] may spend it on ... pleasures*" [James 4:3]. The word "*pleasures*" from the biblical term gives us our word hedonism¹⁷.

¹³ Extortion comes from the Latin "to wrest"

¹⁴ Collateralized Debt Obligations which are bundled debts, mostly mortgages (called also, mortgage backed securities)

¹⁵ Google this if your interested.

¹⁶ see Richard C. Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 81

¹⁷ the ethical theory that pleasure (in the sense of the satisfaction of desires) is the highest good and proper aim of human life.

First Woe: Greed

Avarice is the hoarding of wealth. It speaks of a scrooge who loves to count his coins and watch the pile grow taller. The biblical phrase is the “love of money” [1 Timothy 6:10] which Paul called the root of all evil, i.e. the start of everything that is bad. Paul’s image here is a man reaching—beyond what was reasonable and necessary—for more money and losing his balance, falling from faith, and finding himself consequently in intense pain, tormented by a consuming grief. Anyone who has lost their life’s savings on a ill-advised investment knows what this is. James’ point is Jesus’ point: “*You cannot serve God and money*” [Matthew 6:24].

Isaiah characterized this investor as one who buys up as much property as possible, but all these homes and fields are someone else’s inheritance. Each home, homestead, represented someone’s future well-being. Whether this is done legally with cultural consent or not makes no difference to the prophet—nor to God!

Provision for Debt Release

In the Law Moses passed down, if a family had to sell their homestead, their inheritance, because of poverty and consequent debt, provision was legally made for them to repossess their property, home, field and all again in the year of Jubilee or every 50th year. How badly this law was observed is evident in the record of Jeremiah 34:13-17, “*Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers ... At the end of seven years let every man set free his Hebrew brother, who has been sold to him; and when he has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you.*” *But your fathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear. ... You have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbor*”

First Woe: Greed

God's reaction to the "rich and insatiable landowners"¹⁸ should be understandable. "Of a truth," the Lord spoke into the prophet's ear (a phrase in Isaiah 5:9 to indicate that the prophet knew this was God's voice and not his own musings) "*many houses shall be desolate, Great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant.*" And this is only the beginning of, to use Paul's words, "*a consuming grief.*" The prophet relates, "*For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, And a homer of seed shall yield one ephah.*"¹⁹ Or in our measurements: A man will get only 6 gallons²⁰ of wine from 10 acres of vineyard. His crop will yield a tenth of what he plants, (it will take 360 pounds of seed to grow 36 pounds of wheat). It is, of course, impossible to translate these measurements exactly into English as it would be impossible to determine the market value of such yields, but the point God wants to make should be taken into account if, as we have maintained all along, "what God *did* is what God *does*" because He changes not.

Modern Times

In modern terms, GDP would be negative with talk of recession and on the supply-side there would be inflation. But is this prophecy relevant to our times? "*The economy [in 2008] was out of kilter: two-thirds to three-quarters of the economy (of GDP) was housing related: constructing new houses or buying contents to fill them, or borrowing against old houses to finance consumption. It was unsustainable—and it wasn't sustained. The breaking of the bubble at first affected the worst mortgages (the*

¹⁸ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 167

¹⁹ According to Matthew 13:33 which speaks of 3 measures (sata or seahs == ephah) of meal or wheat which Keil calls "the usual minimum for one baking" [ibid. page 169]

²⁰ According to Josephus' *Antiquities* (viii, 2, 9) this measured a little more than 33 quarts but in Isaiah's day it probably was smaller.

First Woe: Greed

subprime mortgages, lent to low-income individuals), but soon affected all residential real estate.”²¹

Is there any reason to believe conditions have changed for the better? Can government regulations protect the homestead from being repossessed since there is no Year of Jubilee to restore a family’s financial future.

Money

Someone said, “Time is money,” a well-known mantra. The lesson here is that it is not necessary to think in terms of bills and coins. There is now some interest in “bitcoins” which is a purely electronic or computerized form of currency with a value regulated exclusively by market forces, by the price per “coin” determined by the bid and asked price set daily on the exchange. *“The gold standard is not currently used by any government. Britain stopped using the gold standard in 1931, and the U.S. followed suit in 1933, finally abandoning the remnants of the system in 1973.”²²* Some form of “currency” is important for three reasons.²³

1. Money has a *store of value*. If I used tomatoes as a medium of exchange— x number of bushels for a new car, for example—the problem is tomatoes tend to rot. But a coin, especially gold, will keep—even untarnished. We need something to “barter” with, something that someone selling their services to me (maybe to fix my furnace in the winter) will accept because it keeps its value. Notwithstanding, inflation

²¹ Joseph Stiglitz. *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy* (W. W. Norton & Company. Ny.NY:2010) Kindle Edition. page 2

²² Gold Standard accessed 11/20/22 <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/09/gold-standard.asp>

²³ Reasons for money accessed 11/20.22 <https://www.stlouisfed.org/education/economic-lowdown-podcast-series/episode-9-functions-of-money>

First Woe: Greed

- may become the rust, the moth, or the thief Jesus spoke of (Matthew 6:19-20) to subtract from its value.
2. If money is said to have value, we can keep records, bank accounts and determine personal wealth. As such it is called a "*unit of account*." We could ask a CPA to measure our wealth in terms of bushels of wheat, but this is cumbersome, because that would suggest when you go to the bank to withdraw some of your savings, the teller would have to wheel out a truck load of wheat—and where should they keep all that grain. I can see Bank America with a field of Silos out back behind the bank ...no, I can't. A bill is much easier, especially since a single dollar, a five dollar bill, a hundred dollar bill, are all the same size "paper" only with different information on them.
 3. The big reason for money is as a *medium of exchange*. There was a day when dollars in America were payable in gold or silver recognized by different colored seals on them but now every bill has a "green" seal showing that the Federal reserve of the USA is in control of the money supply. When they print a ton of the stuff it is called "quantitative easing" and when they stop printing or even take money out of circulation, they call it "quantitative tightening."

We need to know this stuff for this is what people "love" instead of God and this is why God spoke this woe in the prophet's ear.

I was privileged—and even blessed—to work at an investment firm as a programmer for 13 years in which I learned a thing or two about "money." Back in the 1990's all our coding for the computer was directed at managing US stocks and bonds. Then something called an "emerging market" was created, the new "frontier" of financial

First Woe: Greed

investing. And along with this came many new “vehicles” of investment and, something called a “derivative.” And then the market went global. I was getting calls at 3AM which was early morning in London or middle of the afternoon in Japan to maintain code we wrote back in Boston, Massachusetts that needed to be “fixed” or patched. Sometimes the users didn’t know how to use the program (at least that was a programmer’s opinion.)

Now the race is on, seemingly, not to become a millionaire but a billionaire. The latest national lottery drawing (as of this writing) was for 2 billion (with a ‘b’) dollars and one guy “won” it. Pardon me if I sound like the preacher that has lost his mind but Isaiah’s prophecy is indeed relevant! We need “money” ...but that much!?

And what is happening in the housing market currently? A 30 year home mortgage currently has a fixed rate near 6.5 percent which is too high and affects its sell value. Beyond this, I have little to add since I am out of my league when it comes to the Stock or Bond Markets. I can only offer the same caution the experts offer that you only invest money you do not need to live on and never buy “on margin”(that is: with borrowed money).

Getting back to prophecy, John wrote in the last book of our Bible this sad note:“*For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance. ... They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’”* [Revelation 18:17, 19].

Perhaps, the worst thing about greed is where it leads which is the cause of the second woe.

Chapter Four

Second Woe: Profligacy

*Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! -
Isaiah 5:11*

Wine and liquor are just the catalyst that turns a festival into a riot, that turns fun into violence, and luxurious living into debauchery. They lost any interest in controlling an appetite for pleasure and amusement to the detriment of all the needs around them, which they have the resources to care about. Living became spending all day and all their days in profligacy.¹ It isn't a stretch to say the greed that occasioned the first woe is its parent. If a man sells his soul to pleasure because he had the means to do so, greed was no friend.

Judah partied on with an open bar. They brought instruments to provide the beat for lewd dancing. Isaiah remarked, "*And the harp, and the viol, the tambourine, and pipe*" [Isaiah 5:9]. In English, please: They brought along guitars and electronic keyboards, the drum set and djembe, a few trumpets and trombones, or whatever wind instruments some party-goer might play, and the reeds like flutes or clarinets—a veritable orchestra but not to play Mozart. Oh, don't forget the wine: "*and wine, are in their feasts:*". Must

¹ .reckless extravagance and dissolute behavior

Second Woe: Profligacy

have alcohol. *"The feast"* says scholarship, *"was composed of exciting music and wine."*²

And how do we know this is not a praise service? What's so wrong about partying? This verse explains: *"but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands."* It wasn't long before it was excessive and then a way of life. Isaiah observed, *"early in the morning they ... follow strong drink; ...[and] continue until night"* [Isaiah 5:11].

There are New Testament words for this: ³"luxurious living,⁴ living in pleasure,⁵ and wasteful living."⁶ Richard Trench notes that *"In all these words lies the notion of excess, of wanton, dissolute, self-indulgent, prodigal living,"*⁷

There is a modern application of Isaiah 46:6-7, *"Some people are rich with gold. They weigh their silver on the scales. They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god. Then they bow down and worship it. They put it on their shoulders and carry it. They set it in its place, and there it stands. It cannot move from its place. People may yell at it, but it cannot answer. It cannot save people from their troubles."*

Amos says it all this way: *"Who lie on beds of ivory, Stretch out on your couches, Eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall; Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; Who drink wine from bowls, And anoint yourselves with the best ointments, But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."*

² C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 170

³ see Richard C. Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 200

⁴ Revelation 18:7, 9 στρηγιάω - *"the insolence of wealth, the wantonness and petulance from fulness of bread"* Ibid.

⁵ James 5:5 τρυφάω - *"effeminacy, brokenness of spirit through self-indulgence."* Ibid page 201

⁶ I Timothy. 5:6 σπαταλάω - prodigality, reckless spending Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. page 200

Second Woe: Profligacy

Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, And those who recline at banquets shall be removed.” [Amos 6:4-7].

Dare we even imply that this is going on today in our time! My commentary of choice reads something absolutely profound here. Catch its meaning if you can. As John on Patmos wrote, *“He that has an ear, listen up!”* [Revelation 13:9] or as Haggai wrote *“take this to heart.”* [Haggai 1:5]:

“In their joy and glory they had no sense for what was the most glorious of all, viz. The moving and working of God in history; so that they could not even discern the judgment which was in course of preparation at that very time.”⁸

They would find themselves banished to Babylon without a clue as to why or, to paraphrase C. H Keil, *“like blind, dull, stupid animals.”⁹* We can say this because Isaiah did. *“Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: [for want of knowledge]¹⁰ and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up [parched]¹¹ with thirst.”* [Verse 13].

Isaiah appears to distinguished here the elite or wealthy (the honorable) from the common folk (the multitude) but this is a distinction without a difference because God is no respecter of persons. The rich and poor,

⁸ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 171

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hosea 6:6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.

¹¹ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* [The BDB).. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 850.

Second Woe: Profligacy

that is the wealthy and the working man, alike, are, in their own fashion, engaging in a lifestyle that excludes God.¹²

(Great scholarly effort has gone into understanding the historical context of Isaiah's time, both grammatically and culturally. But it is important to me in writing that we find biblical relevance in the testimony and message of the prophet. I postulate that these six woes provide a rather vivid and accurate picture of what will necessary occasion our Lord's return and what will be revealed as the definable evil at the end of the world. As Amos observed "it is an evil time" [Amos 5:13]. Jesus, too, is praying for us [John 17:15] that God would "*keep [us] from [this] evil.*")

Then Isaiah declared that hell was making room for more and more souls [verse 14]. This could parallel Jesus' word, "Gehenna" [Matthew 5:22ff] and mean more than physical death. The gluttonous now starving and those tipping now parched with thirst. The season of riotous living comes to a quick end but while they are living it with reckless abandonment to any wisdom they remain completely oblivious to a pending personal disaster.

We don't need to search economic books for answers, nor must we take courses in social psychology to see this coming, if we are getting to know God through His Word and His Son. I like to repeatedly quote Peter, "*God has enabled us to live a pious and fulfilling life free from what the world lusts after by our getting to know the Savior Who has called us to follow Him* [2 Peter 1:3 King John Interpretation].

The translations say that Isaiah described their partying [Isaiah 5:14] as "*glory [adornment],¹³ and [a]*

¹² "Both the great men and the common people are ready to perish for want of bread and water." - Matthew Henry. The Blueletter Bible online on Isaiah 5:13.

¹³ Revelation 3:17 "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,"

Second Woe: Profligacy

*multitude [loud singing],¹⁴ and [the] roar of their reveling,¹⁵ and he that rejoices [jubilation]¹⁶ descending into hell.” Let me say this verse again [King John Translation]: “*They came adorned in party outfits and a party atmosphere, with loud singing and loud, boisterous reveling and jubilation. [thinking themselves on their way to the brothel] they were descending into Hell [Gehenna].*”*

Those who are so exulted in their own eyes, so proud of their achievements, no doubt taking credit for their good fortune, [they] shall be brought to their knees, humbled, the prophet affirmed.

Carousing

Any person who is not in abject poverty or a beggar is susceptible to the human urge to get away and party spending one’s living on alcohol and the things that amuse. Isaiah’s description of a riotous living that shows a marked disinterest in God and His moral law is not limited to the very rich. Many an average working man has stopped off at the pub, the saloon or bar before going home; and while there spent a large part of their weekly pay, if not all of it, on drinking.

Paul’s word was *reveling* or *carousing*¹⁷ in Romans 13:13 and Galatians 5:21. Peter joined the chorus of voices condemning such behavior [1 Peter 4:3]. And we might add, drinking is not necessarily an essential for participating in a

¹⁴ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB).. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 242.

¹⁵ Ibid. page 981.

¹⁶ Ibid. page 759

¹⁷ a nocturnal and riotous procession of half drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before houses of male and female friends; hence used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry

Second Woe: Profligacy

riot, but generally, such a person is subject to a number of addictions.¹⁸

Lessons from History

I want to return to that phrase “*the moving of God in history.*” Those who are observant of God’s active involvement in history and who see the hand of God in Scripture, and their own lives, are far more likely to “*redeem*¹⁹ *the time*” [Colossians 4:5]. It has been said that godliness is “*living our life with one eye on God.*”

The Lord ...Exulted ...Sanctified

It appears at first glance that “The Lord ...sanctified” is a misplaced phrase because it cannot be spoken in the spirit of a woe ...or can it! Can we not affirm that the time will come when even those who rejected the Savior will bow in humbled recognition of His eternal Lordship! “*I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*” [Isaiah 45:23]²⁰

More to an honest enquiry into why God does what He does we can appeal to His interest in being honored by His people (Israel in the Old Testament, the Church in the New Testament). Even a devotional reading of Scripture will show this. Ultimately behind every act of love or mercy,

¹⁸ Trenches Synonyms of the New Testament offers a scholarly definition of four different words used in our New Testament to describe the extravagance of drunken reveling of those celebrating the moment on their way to the brothel. see Richard C. Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 225ff

¹⁹ the word used by Paul means “to purchase, pay for, buy” treating time as a commodity which it really is, indeed. Others reckless waste such a precious resource.in rioting, etc.

²⁰ See also Romans 14:11 & Philippians 2:10

Second Woe: Profligacy

behind every act of discipline or judgment, is the desire of God to be loved and worshipped by us, His creation.

Regarding the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 Moses intercessory prayer spoke to God's desire to be sanctified and glorified among the nations and destroying Israel in the wilderness would not serve that purpose [Exodus 32:12].

Total desolation

Isaiah 5:17, the final verse explaining this second woe, describes the result of God's judgment, "*Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones [rich people] shall strangers eat.*" Dr. Lange astutely calls the land, "*the ruins ... once belonged to the rich ..., places of splendor and prosperity strangers shall [dwell there]*"²¹ Nomadic shepherds will graze there sheep where once mansions, the homes of the rich, stood. Man's greatest achievements made without God, man's creative genius in the cause of scientific advancement, the greatest works of poet, sculptor, and painter now valueless because it was an earthly treasure not one secured in the eternal vault of heaven [Matthew 6:20].

When the world collapses about us it is time to reevaluate what we have been telling ourselves is truth from fiction. It is time to address the lies—the third woe.

²¹ John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VI. page 93

Chapter Five

Third Woe: Lies

Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: - Isaiah 5:18

If God cannot lie [Numbers 23:19] and if He is holy [Psalm 99:5] and if we are to be holy as He is holy [1 Peter 1:15] what might that tell us about lying?

Let me put the question another way: if trust is important in a relationship and if relationships are what any community or fellowship or citizenry is made of and the basis of trust is truth what does that tell us about lying?

“Every word of God is pure;” Solomon averred, *“He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”* [Proverbs 30:5-6]

How does God feel about lies? Well, there will be none in His coming Kingdom. *“The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness And speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;”* [Zephaniah 3:13]. What happens to the liars? *“all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”* [Revelation 21:8]. *“You will destroy those who tell lies”* [Psalm 5:6].

Seems rather harsh ..don't you think? “I guess this means that there will be no politicians in heaven,” I quip. Politicians have to be “double-tongued.” They have to

Third Woe: Lies

appeal for votes to people who don't agree on major issues. How else will they be electable? Paul, nonetheless, cautioned Timothy, who was pastoring in Ephesus at the time, not to pick deacons who didn't pass Isaiah's woe test: no greed, wine, or lying (the first three woes!) "*Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,*" [1 Timothy 3:8].

The Lie

The lie comes in many forms: *spoken untruth, hidden motives, deception, trickery, pride, hypocrisy, vanity*¹ ..to name a few. How many words of speaking suggest the lie: *flattery, lip-service, idle talk, boasting, swearing (an oath), projecting blame, gossip, slander, etc.*

Our verse [5:18] translates Isaiah's word calling it "*vanity.*" What interests us is the many translations this one word has. C. H. Keil translated Isaiah 5:18a, "*Woe unto them that draw crime with cords of lying.*"² It is interesting that one single word in the Bible can have so many different meanings, but if you look closely, you can see the relationship among these terms.

Jesus endorsed this truth with a simple formula: "*let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'* For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" [Matthew 5:37]

David wrote "*I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers.*" [Psalm 26:4]. His word "vain" has also been translated "*worthless, falsehood, deceitful, false, dissembler, hypocrite* and even, *idolater and criminal*" in different English translations and one Greek version. The CJB [Complete Jewish Bible] interprets this word to mean "*up to no good.*"

¹ The Hebrew word for vanity also means to lie when one's speech is "empty words." See also Matthew 12:37 "idle words"

² C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 176

Third Woe: Lies

Self-Deceived

We might think that the worse thing is to lie to God, but we would be wrong. Actually, we cannot lie to God [Deuteronomy 8:2; Luke 9:47; Galatians 6:7]. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, ... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* [Hebrews 4:12].

The worse thing for one to do is to lie to themselves, to be self-unaware, to lack any introspective look at their real motives or why they do and say what they do and say. Repentance is based on honest confession. And repentance is the cure, the only cure, for all that ails them, any of us, spiritually!

God Cannot Condone Lying

God will not condone lying in whatever form it takes. God is a Covenantal God, a Personal God, who wants a strong bond with His people, and lies are a solvent. Nothing is biblically more absolute. Perhaps, that is why evil and lying are synonyms. Jesus said *“Happy are the pure in heart, For they shall see God”* [Matthew 5:8] because ultimately those whose hearts are free of all forms of deception, hidden motives and lies are those who will be welcome into His Kingdom..

Perhaps, that is why lying in any form is so painfully offensive. Perhaps, this is why Jesus taught us that *“truth sets free”* [John 8:32]. By implication, lying imprisons!

Isaiah’s metaphor is one of a wagon or cart filled with criminal or sinful plans being pulled along by someone. Practicing evil is like pulling a wagon or cart full of sinful deeds by a rope of deception. The deception is the ease with which one perpetrates wickedness like pulling it in a cart instead of carrying it. Scholarship calls it a *“lying palliation,”*³ i.e. How much easier it is to deceive with a lie for support.

³ Ibid.

Third Woe: Lies

“There is a bitter sarcasm involved in the bold figure employed.” Prof. Keil wrote.⁴ They are proud of their craftiness, boasting of their deception to co-conspirators. But their plans are like a halter and they a beast of burden ignorant of what is really happening, harnessed to their sin, and therefore, their punishment.⁵

To Be Pitied

I chose to interpret the word “woe” by the phrase: “to be pitied”⁶ because this engenders in me more a sadness than a desire for God’s judgment to strike ‘em down. I might be alone in this! But they are “fools” in the sense the Bible uses the word, *“senseless with no ethical perception.”*⁷ They scorn the thought of God’s judgment instead of seeking His mercy. Verse 19 says it all: *“That say [about God], Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!”*

In other words: “I need to see it to believe it! *“Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”* [2 Peter 3:4]. *“They have lied about the LORD; they said, “He will do nothing! No harm will come to us”* [Jeremiah 5:12 NIV].⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Consider the use of this metaphor—only in a good way about God: *“I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them”* [Hosea 11:4].

⁶ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB]. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 223

⁷ Ibid. page 615

⁸ Compare Amos 5:18 “Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end *is* it for you? the day of the LORD *is* darkness, and not light.’ said in unbelief but not in derision nor mockingly.

Third Woe: Lies

The language of these scorers is revealing. They poke at God with words: “Let him come ...Let Him judge!”⁹ Their speech defines the scornful trait. They summons God to argue as if God’s words were impotent. “Let Him judge us. We’re waiting! Nothing is happening! Words ...just words! We are not afraid of anything He might do to us!”

They are to be pitied because judgment day is coming for them now as it did then for Israel and Judah when they were taken into captivity and exile.

Summary

The worse thing about lying is what it does to the person doing the lying. They inevitably begin to believe their own lies. Their scorn becomes their truth but it is worthless because it is counter to God’s truth. They not only believe their own lies but those same lies begin to change them. They make them principles by which they live not realizing that ultimately lies can never satisfy or bring happiness that lasts.

The deceiver becomes the deceived because we cannot disconnect behavior from nature.¹⁰ We cannot say and do things that are designed to hurt and remain close to the persons we are hurting. Love and hate, like light and darkness, cannot occupy the same space in the heart. Speaking lies leads to living a lie which eventually defines who we are—regardless of who we want to be.

We have come to verse 20 which is the verse on the cover. This is the fourth woe “they call evil good and good evil....” Let’s talk about it.

⁹ Isaiah 5:19 **Let** him make speed, and hasten ...and **let** the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh ...

¹⁰ Matthew 12:34 “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”

Chapter Six

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! - Isaiah 5:20

Was Isaiah's prophetic insight written for only a few individuals, perhaps, the king and his friends? Or was it written to a nation, Judah or Israel, where greed was leading to profligacy (drunkenness being a symptom) and life appeared kissed by fortune? Perhaps, as the leadership of a nation goes, so goes the nation and soon it would collapse into economic and political bankruptcy because it was spiritually bankrupt. Those so engaged were unaware that the path they walked, though years long through the reign of many kings, would end at a cliff overlooking the abyss of exile.

Judah's culture, like that of Israel's, in Isaiah's day, was characterized by greed¹ which led to a profligate lifestyle. This became a national condition. Their culture devolved spiritually to where there was little evidence in their history of the vision God had for His Old Testament Church [1 Samuel 3:1]. For us the warning was penned, appropriately enough, in an epistle written to Jewish

¹ Jeremiah 8:10 [NLT] "From the least to the greatest, [their lives are ruled by greed. Yes, even my prophets and priests are like that. They are all frauds."

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

believers, to *“pay careful attention ... to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away”* [Hebrews 2:1 NIV].

To be sure, Isaiah had been pulling back the curtain on a nation revealing their true spiritual condition. Coming to mind here is the church at Laodicea that was not impoverished but well-off financially [Revelation 3:17]. Regarding God’s Will, they were indifferent, disinterested, and unconcerned [Revelation 3:16]. Their story is for me an example of a society that has lost its way, serving mammon instead of God.

This is a pivotal moment in the life of a people whether a nation or a church. We are cautioned here to prayerfully consider what is happening about us culturally and shed the light of Scripture on it to see if the world we live in is heading toward that cliff.

Morality

Morality is the order of society and it is being reordered. Society is changing. We are observing broad changes across a spectrum of moral concerns: from the definition of family to gender identity issues in children, from the life of a fetus to legal matters over marriage. All these issues, once the domain of the church to navigate, is now the ward of the state to decide. These, however, are simply a microcosm of the massive reordering affecting the Global North countries. And these changes are not incidental but coming directly into conflict with any biblical definition of sin. Isaiah’s overall observation bears studying.

According to Sam Harris of the new atheists, science questions whether we should even be talking about morality as a real possibility. *“If religious conservatives find the prospect of gay marriage abhorrent, and secular liberals find it perfectly acceptable,”* Sam Harris asserts, *“we are confronted by a mere*

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

difference of moral preference— not a difference that relates to any deeper truths about human life.”²

The theory is: allow people the freedom to be themselves, but this, too, is a lie, because the church, for one, is not free in that regard, and children are being taught these matters as alternatives to the Bible but without being given the biblical view as a legitimate choice.

The Lexicon added, “*making bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter (obscuring moral distinctions.)*”³ C. H. Keil continued, “*Darkness and light, bitter and sweet, therefore, are not tautological⁴ metaphors for evil and good; but epithets⁵ applied to evil and good according to their essential principles, and they’re necessary and internal effects.*”⁶ Let me interpret Isaiah 5:20,

“To be pitied are those who speak of evil as if it were good, and good as if it were evil (who promote violence and what is hurtful as though it were good tidings and for the well-being of all). They hide the true nature of their deeds but claim their motives are pure while accusing others for that which they, themselves, are liable. Their rhetoric is so appealing with flattery, lies and false promises their admirers swoon over it while they convincingly discredit those whose deeds are truly beneficial. They “obscure moral distinctions,” redefining the use of words, rewriting social norms, to justify their own interests and call others villainous. .”

² Sam Harris. *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York:Free Press, 2010), 86. Kindle Edition.

³ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB).. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 608

⁴ saying of the same thing twice in different words

⁵ a descriptive phrase expressing a quality

⁶ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 177

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

Our World

In the NKJV translation we read that they “*call*” (evil, good), but that’s not the word. Isaiah said, “*speaking*” in a continuous narrative because this is the ultimate lie- to represent, spin, evil as a good thing, which makes good, evil by default. To get the nail into the board keep hammering away. To convince anyone of something they know is not true, keep harping on it—tediously persistent—and inevitably the majority of any society will support the fiction as it becomes social norm, the standard by which life is explained and happiness is defined. Social and cable media work hand in glove with government fiat and law to convince an unwary public of the change.

Whether or not people are genuinely happy by any real definition is irrelevant because people can learn to accept anything they might have found even repulsive earlier in life. And the children are most susceptible, malleable, to any cultural reformation because it is all new to them and their innate innocence and trust makes them vulnerable to anything adults want them to believe.

I have heard that Christians brainwash children in religious education but this is part of the spin. An opportunity for a relationship with the God that made them is not made possible through the brain but the heart and it is up to God to introduce Himself to any child. Meanwhile, real brainwashing occurs when children are told to accept something that is patently unnatural, like a gender reassignment procedure.

Good vs Evil

But what is “*evil*”? In the language of Scripture it runs the gamut from what is disagreeable to malignant; from sadness to abject misery; from unkind to vicious; from bad to

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

wicked; from unpleasing to most painful.⁷ When the nurse is asking you to measure your pain from 1 to 10, they want to know the level of some evil that—to speak ‘Bibleze’— is ‘evil’ing’ you.

And what is “good.” Not *what* but *Who*? [Psalm 86:5; 100:5; 106:1 ...you get the point]. Good is beneficial and works toward our true happiness.⁸ A relationship with God is “good.” I like Roddenberry’s⁹ explanation,

*“To feel the inner strength of someone for whom you were created. To realize being with him is opening up your mind and heart to endless possibilities. To hear yourself say ‘I like myself when I’m with him.’”*¹⁰

Light vs Darkness

Light and darkness, we know, cannot be compromised. When the light goes on, darkness flees. In the language of the New Testament, Jesus is light [John 9:5]. He came so that “*whoever believes on [Him] should not abide in darkness*” [John 12:46]. But this definition for anyone who does not know Him is too metaphysical.¹¹ We need to talk life if we are to understand what societal change is represented when light and darkness are swapped.

⁷ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB]. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 948ff

⁸ Ibid. page 375

⁹ Director/producer of the StarTrek series.

¹⁰ This quote is from The Next Generation Season 5 Episode 21 The Perfect Mate

¹¹ The dictionary reads, “transcending physical matter or the laws of nature: *Good and Evil are inextricably linked in a metaphysical battle across space and time.*”

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

"This fourth woe." C. H. Keil agrees, "relates to those who adopted a code of morals that completely over turned the first principles of ethics, and was utterly oppose to the law of God."¹²

Is progressive ideology introducing change in order to politically disenfranchise the Church, to wrest the power from the Church which historically has wielded great influence over society. Religion has always been a powerful force for good or evil. Separation of church and state in American no longer means that government should keep hands off the church. Now it means the church should stay out of the government's way.

Sweet vs Bitter

The language has been altered accordingly. We know "gay" used to mean something else. Back when we were kids bicycling instead of driving wherever we went, my friend and I enjoyed many hours on the road together. I must add that it was platonic even if I wrote him at times signing my letters "Your boyfriend, John".

In the case of polyamory an entire vocabulary is created to express primary and secondary relationships. Persons who are friends outside the relationship are metamours. Compersion is experienced when a polyamorous companion is not jealous of their lover's other relationships.

The charm of a monogamous relationship, of a half century marriage and the "oneness" it represents is no longer "sweet" to the taste of a society that has redefined "sweetness." Culturally, an acceptance of divorce as a solution to marital discord is now being replaced with something known as casual relations in which people cohabitate until the "feeling" of acceptance erodes or feelings

¹² C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 177

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

change. There are no longer any legal entanglements except for homosexual couples who see such arrangements economically and socially beneficial.

These are bold statements I am writing but, I think, undeniably true. In writing this, I am not recommending any course of action only that we recognize the changes which Isaiah saw back in his time. Any response is another person's book to write. I only ask Christians to have an intelligent faith and live it boldly.

Taste Perception

Where in English we use the eye as a instrument of perception ("I see!" said the blind man when he understood), in Ancient Israel it was taste, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good*" [Psalm 34:9]. Taste is metaphorically the organ of discernment¹³ as we might say, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." A more accurate knowledge comes from tasting. Solomon discovered that "*pleasant words* (spoken in a gentle voice)¹⁴ are "*sweet to the soul*" [Proverbs 16:24]. In Ecclesiastes 11:7 he wrote, "*Truly the light is sweet,*"

But what happens when *sweet* and *bitter* are swapped? What is tasted belies what is real. I can't eat filled pastries anymore because the sweetness upsets my stomach. I used to love chocolate covered cherries. I could eat half a box at Christmas time. Not any more. ...the stomach, again. In my younger days, sweet was sweet and bitter, bitter, but somehow in adulthood things got more confusing. Just because something is sweet doesn't make it good to eat. We are living in a time when we can no longer judge the nutritional value of something by taste alone. We need to get smarter. Let's drop the metaphor: we need to value the Word

¹³ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB].. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 381

¹⁴ *Ibid.* page 654

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

of God even if we think what God asks of us is “bitter.” The society we live in has been reordered and what is being promoted as right might be wrong, what is called good, bad.

Wokeness

In order to offer a new “taste” new terms have been invented. New words must be selected for the dictionary. We are going “woke.” We are told there are 76 neopronouns: *Zis, Hirs, Eirs, Vers, Ters, Eirs* etc. beside new words like: “*cisgender, intersectionality, transgender, micro-aggressions, gender fluidity.*” Gender theory is a new college discipline and almost everything now is “*virtual.*” Equity, diversity and inclusion are vital aspects of any company going ESG (Environmentally green, Socially and Governmentally Diverse). Nationalism is considered fascist. And on and on we could go pointing out the new vocabulary in a new woke First World.

*The Merriam-Webster dictionary has just gotten bulkier. On Jan. 27, it was announced that more than 520 new words and meanings were placed into their dictionary. The words and meanings provide a window into how we live, work, our language, culture and identity.*¹⁵

What once was sweet because it was a biblical message of faith, hope, love, and grace is leaving a bitter taste in the conscience of a new world that has begun to marginalize God. The percentage of Gen Z’s attending Church in the countries of the northern hemisphere is shrinking.

¹⁵ new vocabulary words accessed 11/22/22 <https://parade.com/1155266/jerylbrunner/new-words-in-dictionary/>

Fourth Woe: Reordering Society

Going Forward

It used to be that a new idea worked its way through the public's conscience and when it found acceptance there, the political powers that be would codify it because the voice of the people always translated into votes. However in today's world, a changing morality in the U.S.A., Canada, and Europe is being legitimized by government and the media *first*. This is happening through higher education, judicial opinion, and a social media that gives voice to the progressive message while silencing conservatism with government approval—to use a quote from a TV series —“what's up is down and what's down is up.”¹⁶ No referendum was ever offered, no constitutional amendment ever proposed, no vote was ever taken to hear from the people. Not yet. But did Isaiah actually prophesy all this in a single verse:? The larger question I have been asking is, Is Isaiah's prophesy applicable to modern times?

A biblically endorsed morality is no longer what the First World wants. Will this ship of state right itself or sink? This question is one of repentance which, at the time of writing, seems unlikely. The nation is trending the other way. Even if “wokeness” is being tweaked, the rough edges that no one seems to want to defend anymore, like a redefinition of what a man or woman is, are being worn off, the possibility of a national day of repentance with government support is not likely [Isaiah 22:12-14].

This is what makes the next woe in Isaiah's list so horrifyingly real. We are being informed that God is no longer needed.

¹⁶ William Shatner as Denny Crane in “Angel of Death” Season 3, episode 11 aired January 9, 2007

Chapter Seven

Fifth Woe: Self-Reliance

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! - Isaiah 5:21

I have resisted the temptation to research some of the more egregious headlines in today's news. This would probably take some time reading books and reviewing news reports with little gained because, it is reasonable to assume that, the average reader is capable of connecting the dots if they sense that, indeed, Isaiah's prophecy is descriptive of our time. Where I appear to have glanced at a few media sources, it was sufficient to point out that there is indeed, in my mind, a real connection and these 6 woes have something to say as an encouragement to the Church.

Isaiah, in this the fifth woe, writes plainly something with which Solomon concurs, *'Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil'* [Proverbs 3:7]. This monarch's fatherly guidance is a lesson not learned here because wisdom is the application of knowledge and as we already noted their world is standing on its head! What once was good from God's Word is no longer considered culturally sound and practical advice. The operative truth in Solomon's words is *"fear the Lord"* but Judah did not and this is the fifth woe.

Fifth Woe: Self-Reliance

It was this wisdom, the fear of the Lord, which scholarship rightly calls “foundational.”¹ It is not possible to define wisdom in a biblical sense any other way. The dictionary calls it “*the soundness of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment:*” but the believer’s understanding is that to this we must add “*in the Will of God.*” That was all one scholarly commentary had to offer, so I sought more feedback from another and read a single sentence: “*The Prophet pronounces the fifth woe against the proud self-deification, to which divine wisdom counts for nothing, but its own for everything.*”²

Self-reliance

We are describing self-reliance. Self-reliance is understandable when there is no God to offer options. This, in my mind, is what has caused the panic around global warming or climate change. “We must do something ...and NOW!!!” is the cry from kids symbolically desecrating works of art (they actually do no damage?) to diplomats flying around the globe in a Jetstream with a jet stream leaving a carbon footprint because they want to remove carbon footprints. And all this makes sense when you have to do something and you only have a decade in which to pull it off. Self-reliance is, perhaps, the most tortuous principle for creating stress because the peace of God is available to any who seek it ... and they are not seeking it!

(Have a good night and sleep well.)

Self-reliance is exactly the principle which God did *NOT* want us to live by. The tower of Babel (how appropriated named since linguistics was founded that day as a discipline and talking to one another sounded, no doubt,

¹ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 178

² John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VI. page 93

Fifth Woe: Self-Reliance

like so much babble) was disbanded by God because “*now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them*” [Genesis 11:6]. Translation: *Nothing will stop them once they set their mind to doing it.* And here in Genesis mankind thought to build a tower with its top in “the heavens.” In modern terms, “to reach Mars and beyond....”

Man’s greatest achievements are attributable to a materialistic science which hypothesizes that God is not needed or wanted. All the secrets of the world can eventually be unlocked and we can accomplish whatever we set our mind to *without God.*

Relationships

There is a place for living responsibly, using science to improve life, relying on the brains God gave us to make wise decisions, and the like, but a relationship with God as with anyone contradicts self-reliance. God created relationships when He gave Adam, Eve. She was to be his life-partner. Part of God’s original design was for her to be his help [Genesis 2:18]. And sadly the exact way in which they related to one another is now lost since they, we must assume, were created perfect, but we met them in Scripture since their sin.

After that forbidden meal, Eve’s relationship to Adam was redefined as master/wife. The earlier simplicity which, no doubt, defined their love for one another of husband/helper (we can again assume), was forever lost. So when a man uses a wife only to hold his tools or clean his house, he is attempting to describe the “post-Eden” relationship in marriage. We know, also, that the “oneness” (the henotic relationship) Adam and Eve enjoyed [Genesis 2:24] which speaks of absolute unity peri-Eden³ was also lost since God allowed for divorce [Deuteronomy 24:1] something He hated [Malachi 2:16].

³ while living in Eden

Fifth Woe: Self-Reliance

Why bring this up? Simply, when God created Adam, He created him for a relationship. “*Why did God make them at all,*” reasoned Athanasius, “(if) *He did not wish to be known by them?*”⁴ The creation of Adam in God’s image and Eve from Adam’s rib (unlike God’s creative activity regarding the rest of all living things) supports the idea that God made us for relationship.

Calvary post-Eden was God’s act of reconciling us again to Himself and not just an act of forgiveness. You didn’t sign up for a salvation message, but you’re going to get one because everything and anything that has to do with God, has to do with His Son and all this pivots at the Cross! Jesus died and rose again to restore relationship and to once again restore our dependance on Him in that relationship. An attitude of absolute self-reliance is an affront to Jesus’ death on Calvary.

Self-Boasting

Self-reliance, according to Dr. Lange is self-deification or self-worship. It is self-praise.

The word “Hallelujah” is Hebrew for 3 words, “Halle lu and Jah.” *Halle* means basically “to be boastful” *Lu* is they. *Hallelu* is a command or an exhortation, “Let them boast! Boast, all you people! And *Jah* is short for Jahwah or Jehovah, the Lord. So, Hallelujah means Boast all you people in the Lord. Make your boast in the Lord! The word is said to be intensive or a stronger form because it applies to the Lord.⁵ The lexicographer says this form “deserves special notice.”⁶ It is used in Temple worship. Psalm 135:3 begins with “Hallelujah,” viz. *Praise ye Jah!*

⁴ Athanasius. 24

⁵ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB].. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 239

⁶ *Ibid.* page 238

Fifth Woe: Self-Reliance

Self-reliance does not boast in the Lord but in self. The word in the Hebrew language affixes a prefix to the word which represents our idea of "self." The message of God's word is clear that God does not treat this with indifference.

David asserted, *"The boastful cannot stand in your sight"* [Psalm 5:5]. Later he argued that money cannot buy salvation! You need God for that! *"Those who trust in their wealth And boast in the multitude of their riches, None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him"* [Psalm 49:6-7]. And the Psalmist finally contrasted man's might with God's might. Man's might turns to ruin; God alone produces good that lasts and lasts. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights"* [James 1:17]. So why brag on your achievement! *"Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually"* [Psalm 52:1]. But the Scripture that comes first to mind when God confronts man's boast of his accomplishments without God:

"Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the LORD" [Jeremiah 9:23-24].

In verse 23 the Lord identifies three areas of a man's boast: his intelligence and knowledge, his strength and virility, and his wealth. There comes a time when the enemy's strength outlasts ours, our ability to imagine a solution is frighteningly absent, and our resources are exhausted. It is time to seek the Lord!

{King John Interpretation on verse 24} "If you must indeed boast, boast in this that you know and understand

Fifth Woe: Self-Reliance

me that I, I, the Lord am He who is merciful and loving and fair and I do what is right by all mankind, and I do so because I want to, I am happy to!"

But a nation whose government has survived on its ability to deceive is more likely to reject God's way ahead. Instead they seal their fate with one final misstep, enforcing their will on a hurting populous hoping to keep their kingdom together by sheer resolve. It never works.

Chapter Eight

Sixth Woe: Injustice

*Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength
to mingle strong drink: - Isaiah 5:22*

Hubris in the Greek speaks of “*mental injury and the wantonness of its affliction.*”¹ Richard Trench called it, “*insolent wrongdoing to others, not out of revenge, or any other motive except the mere pleasure which the infliction of the wrong imparts.*”²

I think it appropriate that I give you a “heads up.” We are about to turn off the main road into a wheat field³ ..and it’s on fire! This is the sixth woe, the final woe. God has seen enough. For those who claim God is not passible, not capable of feeling or susceptible to emotion, perhaps, they are speaking from logic rather than the language of Isaiah 5. We must look at words and some poetic verse. It is a mistake to think of these 6 woes as a literary work only, well written, but just a Bible story. It is wrong to spend our time haggling over authorship and not see the

¹ Joseph Thayers. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1996) pages 633

² Richard C. Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 103

³ My wife always cautions me to get out of the “weeds” when I do a deep dive into the grammar.

Sixth Woe: Injustice

actual message—which, we can rightly claim, comes from God’s heart to ours. It is very wrong to wrap our thoughts up in a cozy theological duvet of Latin and Greek phrases which serve no further purpose than give us a sense of intellectual superiority and security. Let us not be academically comfortable. We must hear the alarm and not ignore it!

I won’t discredited scholarship! I, for one, am grateful that no scholar back in the 18th and 19th centuries had a life, so, they used the time to do some productive research in the Bible and I get to glean in their field. Learning must stimulate not just the head but the heart, as well. We need to take God seriously. God’s Word is not a religious game played by Sunday Morning contestants where the “winner” is the one who brings in more offerings or more disciples. (I apologize for the rudeness, but let’s take a chance at finding out what the rest of chapter 5 offers us.)

Unjust Judges

Many in Isaiah’s day needed a criminal lawyer. But instead found him to be a ‘criminal’ lawyer.⁴ The lawyer or judge did not practice criminal law; he was, himself, criminal! Hosea witnessed, “*They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness*” [Hosea 4:8]. They live on bribes, which in another sense is extorting a ruling for cash. Isaiah agreed that they are nothing but drunks [Isaiah 5:22] which shows they spent their ill-gotten gain on pleasure. Theirs is the worse display of hubris, of impudence and arrogance. The Theological Dictionary defines *hubris* as, “*an act which invades the sphere of another to his hurt.*”⁵ Hubris is the “pride

⁴ Jeremiah 22:17 [NLT] “But you! You have eyes only for greed and dishonesty! You murder the innocent, oppress the poor, and reign ruthlessly.”

⁵ Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), vol VIII. Page 295 “*since hubris is so broad and can denote disposition, attitude and*

Sixth Woe: Injustice

of life” which John said “*is not of the Father but is of the world.*” [1 John 2:16]. Here is the last woe God would endure. Evil has become an infestation, an infection, a malignancy, that has reached the heart of Israel’s life, the foundation of their government and the interpretation of law, the judiciary. “*From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it...*” [Isaiah 1:6].

Good people have no one to represent them in the cause of justice. “*They pervert justice for a bribe...*” [Isaiah 5:23]. Is not this the height of *hubris*? Isaiah is speaking of a judiciary that for *the mere pleasure which the infliction of the wrong imparts*” with an arrogant and insensitive mindset and being empowered to make a difference, if fair, they gratified themselves in the act of harming others. Dr. Lange shocks us, concluding, “*This perversion of the world whereby exactly bad is good and good bad, is Satanic. For if the devil became God, as he attempts to become* [2 Thessalonians 2:4],⁶ *it would happen thus.*”⁷

Here is the bottom of the moral barrel. All is now corrupt. All goodness replaced with an evil that is systemic because it is not just in behavior but in heart and character. It is not just this person or that one; it is a nation, a national mindset, a cultural norm. “[They] *sell justice in order to obtain the means for enjoying a dissolute life.*”⁸ Dr. Lange explained. Perhaps, it is still not sinking in that the keepers of justice were a nation’s only hope and they are not the persons they

conduct, sinful turning from or provocation of God, secularism, as well as vainglorious arrogance, encroachments and tyranny against one's fellows, it is very hard to fix the limits of signification ...with reference to the equivalent Hbr. [Hebrew] roots.” page 301.

⁶ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

⁷ John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures.* (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VI. page 93

⁸ *Ibid.*

Sixth Woe: Injustice

purport to be. There is no more woes to call out. This conversation is ended! *“The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, The LORD God of hosts says: ‘I abhor the pride of Jacob, And hate his palaces; Therefore I will deliver up the city And all that is in it.’”* [Amos 6:8].

They showed contempt for God’s Word. They rejected His law which included His code of moral conduct and justice. It was beneath their dignity to consider any “woe” God might utter. The Greek translation uses the word “exasperate,”⁹ i.e. they exasperated God’s Word. One English translation reads, “they insulted the Word. But the actual word means: They provoked Him. They were incorrigible and God exploded! The next verse begins, *“the anger of the Lord was kindled”* The Greek, again, says *“greatly angered”* but the best language that explains God’s reaction is from Isaiah’s own words (Spoiler alert! It is poetic but for real!): The wheat field is now ablaze!

Fire to Straw

There are two words in Greek for “ire” we must refer to and the difference between them is important for explaining Isaiah 5:24-25. The one we can translate *anger* but the other is *rage* or *wrath*. I think a study in these terms is relevant to understanding Isaiah, even though, Greek was not his language of choice. Isaiah used poetic language, perhaps, out of necessity, to catch the ear of his listener. At times, his words flummoxed even the wisest of the wise. (Some still don’t know what his 53rd chapter is all about. Sad.) Some seminarians are being taught that most of what we attribute to Isaiah, he never wrote because the language sounds in spots like the work of a post-exilic poet and not a member of the upper class from the 8th century B.C. He called Cyrus by name [Isaiah 44:28]. Cyrus reigned a couple hundred years later than Isaiah. He told us Mary would be

⁹ παρώξυναν - we get the word “paroxysm” from this word.

Sixth Woe: Injustice

only a teenager when she would give birth to Jesus! [Isaiah 7:14]. He told us God would come incarnate to save us. [Isaiah 9:6]. All true! Isaiah has been sharing from God; so, his message to Judah as well as Israel should be a cautionary tale to us because: *What God did, God does!*

Isaiah began, *“the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff”* [Isaiah 5:24]. This is more descriptive of wrath than anger. Wrath like fire set to straw quickly blazes and as quickly burns itself out.¹⁰ Origen¹¹ offered this: *“The distinction between wrath (enraged) and anger, on the one hand: to be enraged is anger fuming and quickly consumed. But anger [itself] is prolonged and vengeful (God’s judgement).”*¹² Isaiah used the actual metaphor, *“Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff... their blossom shall go up as dust... [ash in smoke]”* C. H. Keil comments, *“The tongue of fire devours stubble, which consists [in the Hebrew tongue] of four short words with three sibilant letters [the ‘s’ sound],¹³ we hear, as it were, the hissing of the flame¹⁴ ... Their root smolders in the earth, and their blossom turns to fine dust, which the wind carries away.”*¹⁵

When Isaiah told us God was angry, he gave Israel’s rejection and contempt as a reason. The Hebrew actually reads, *“The Lord’s nose was hot.”* He was snorting, He was

¹⁰ θυμος like fire in straw, quickly blazing up, and as quickly extinguished (cf. Euripides, *Androm.* 728, 729). - Richard C. Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 132

¹¹ Christian scholar and theologian (c. 185–c. 254)

¹² Διαφερει δε θυμος οργης, τω θυμον μεν ειναι οργην αναθυμωμενην και ετι εκκαιομενην. Οργην δε ορεξιν αντιτιμωρησεως - Origen in Ps. 2:5, *Opp.* Vol. li. P. 541)

¹³ The Hebrew ‘s’ and ‘sh’ sounds is the *sh* in *ששן ששן ששן ששן*

¹⁴ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII. Page 178

¹⁵ Ibid. Page 179

Sixth Woe: Injustice

about to explode in a furious display of rage. This does not suggest God “lost it.” Never! What it does suggest is that He must be feeling something like Jesus did at Lazarus’ tomb when the apostle wrote, “*He groaned in the spirit [was deeply moved with anger] and was troubled [agitated].*” [John 11:33]. The language in John’s gospel is not as vivid as Isaiah’s. Jesus was disturbed over their lack of faith. (This, in itself, should be a warning worth noting.) God was more agitated, more “troubled” because His warnings went unheeded.

You can hear the hissing of the flames, as C. H. Keil noted, in the use of Hebrew words with “S’s.” You can picture the flames lapping like tongues at the young plants turning them to ash. You can envision the root ball suddenly collapsing, sinking, in the flames (shrinking, shriveling, and then gone) until it, too, is only cinders. All of it returning to the dust from which it came.

And why must God be so furious? Because He is a mighty and holy God. Recently in an international prayer meeting one brother in his prayer called God “mighty and holy,” a rather common characterization frequently heard in prayer meetings, but music to God’s ears. It had to be pleasing and a delight for Him to hear. When a believer calls God the mighty and holy God they trust, when their prayer speaks to their faith in Him, there is no greater praise.

But here Israel who has become self-reliant seeking greedily for all things pleasurable and using lies and bribes to support such a life-style, there is no thought of the holiness of a mighty God. If God were just holy but too impotent to act on it, the nations of the world might never know what He was thinking or “feeling.”¹⁶ But He is both. His desire for true justice is an aspect of His holiness and He is mighty enough to react in ways men describe as wrathful. A better word might be “jealous” [Exodus 20:5; 34:14]. But

¹⁶ I use the word “feeling” knowing that the passibility of God is a theological issue worth studying.

Sixth Woe: Injustice

regardless the theology, a holy God powerful enough to do something about sin, will not stand back and do nothing!

Today?

Do judges take bribes today? Is it possible for a judiciary, in a collective sense, to be so corrupt as to get God's attention and incur His displeasure? The prophet has outlined for us the 6 steps of degradation that describe a nation devolving into chaos. For the believer there is always hope because there is faith [Hebrews 11:1], and there is faith because God is "holy and mighty." If this is the end time, and we have reason to believe it is, Isaiah in poetic verse reassures us that God knows and He is on His way [Luke 21:28].

Chapter Nine

Pending Judgment

Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. - Isaiah 5:25

The map of this prophecy in Isaiah 5 leads inevitably to destruction. The signposts along the way are well marked with 6 woes:

1. greedily seeking money and power for profligacy
2. living luxuriously on the resources of the poor and then
3. learning the political art of deception, false promises and lies, and eventually
4. misrepresenting what should be obviously wrong as right, convincing the ignorant and the intellectually weak that money is influence and influence, power, and those who possess these are strong leadership, but they are leading the unwary into disaster.
5. Replacing God leads ultimately to
6. living under a law code that is designed only to make the rich and powerful richer and more powerful and the poor, even poorer.

The prayers of those so abused are eventually heard by God and this castle in the sand is washed away in a tide

Pending Judgment

of Divine judgment. *"The banishment of the entire nation is represented as the consequence of the sins of those greedy and riotous men,"* wrote Dr. Lange, *"waves of destruction shall roll on to the utmost periphery and thus seize [all]."*¹ C. H. Keil agreeably chimed in, *"...the denunciation of punishment bursts out with such violence that a return to the simple exclamation of 'woe' is not to be thought of."*²

Asaph wrote, *"But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another."* [Psalm 75:5]. God must again and again bring governments down until governments recognize their calling under God to support the poor, widows and orphans, and allow others to live unmolested. Government must become God's servant if God is to bless their efforts. When they seek power on their own, God will always confront them. We are told 3 times for added emphasis, *"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble"* [Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5]. Self-reliance is pride, the biggest lie of all which God will always oppose. This remains equally true whether it is a nation, a church, an organization, a family unit or just an individual in their own little world.

Jeremiah years later repeated Isaiah's warning,³ *"Hear this message, you foolish people who have no sense. You have eyes, but you don't really see. You have ears, but you don't really listen. ...But the people of Judah are stubborn and have turned against me. They have turned aside and gone away from me. They do not say to themselves, 'We should fear the Lord our God'"* [Jeremiah 5:21, 23-24].

This is not an easy tale to tell. Even if we clothe it in the gentler language of a Bible story, it is doubtful we would

¹ John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VI. page 94

² C. F. Keil et al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 179

³ see Jeremiah 5:1ff "Roam through the streets of Jerusalem. Investigate; search in her squares. If you find one person, any who acts justly, who pursues faithfulness, then I will forgive her. "

Pending Judgment

share it with a child. Even “The International Children’s Bible” cannot accurately represent Isaiah’s thought and still rate his comment ‘G’ for young ears:

*So the Lord has become very angry with his people. And he has **raised** his hand to punish them. Even the mountains are frightened.⁴ Dead bodies **lie** in the streets like garbage.⁵ But the Lord is **still** angry. His hand is **still raised** to strike down the people.*

The Christian Standard Bible [CSB] correctly reads this prophecy as a past occurrence. “*the LORD’s anger **burned** He **raised** his hand against them and **struck** them; the mountains **quaked**, and their corpses **were** ...in the streets.*” Dr. Lange interpreted this as “*facts of the past [that] float before his [Isaiah’s] mind ...regarded ... as proofs of [God’s] wrath.*”⁶

“*God raises a banner for the nations far away.*” Isaiah added [verse 26]. Not just one nation and not one time only in the history of the world, but as often as it is required of God to address the oppression of the rich and powerful, of governments and kings.

The Hebrew word “oppression” means *extortion* which is a criminal taxation. Ezekiel’s evaluation of Judah’s history might be revealing, “*The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy and unlawfully exploited the resident alien*” [Ezekiel 22:29 CSB].

God’s advice to the wise, “*Place no trust in [extortion], oppression, or false hope in robbery. If wealth increases, don’t set your heart on it. God has spoken once; I have*

⁴ see Amos 1:1 and Zechariah 14:5 - earthquakes

⁵ see 2 Chronicles 28:6 which speaks of decomposing bodies, viz. offal.

⁶ John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VI. page 94

Pending Judgment

heard this twice: strength belongs to God,” [Psalm 62:10-11 CSB]. “He [God] allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their behalf: [Psalm 105 14 CSB].

God’s Vineyard [Verses 1-7]

Recall, Isaiah began this chapter with a metaphor: God is destroying His vineyard. But now the prophet adds, *“his hand is stretched out still”* [5:25]. Why does Isaiah say that He is still punishing them? Perhaps, the judgment of God is thorough [Isaiah 5:13-17]. Dr. Lange explained, *“something still greater is coming.”*⁷ There would be an exile.

He must do all He said He would do if they disregarded His Law, His Word [Isaiah 5:24]. It is foundational in understanding God He has always been and will always be a *Covenantal* God. And according to the agreement set down [Deuteronomy 27-29] God, Who cannot lie, must fulfill the Law.

Jesus’ crucifixion was, in fact, in fulfillment of Law—not just prophecy [Matthew 5:17]. We say that He took our punishment. God punishes nations. Nations can experience God’s blessing but not if they go the way of the 6 woes! Also, there will be a final judgment [Mark 6:11]. The prophet is describing a Divine judgment. Just knowing it as a possibility should dissuade a nation from going down this road. But a world that either does not know God or thinks since Calvary God could never react this way fails to take seriously our most cherished mantra: *What God did, God does.*

War

Sometimes a warring nation carries God’s national flag and not that of their own country. God called them after

⁷ Ibid.

Pending Judgment

the manner in which He calls the bees to swarm.⁸ When they come, it's God's blitzkrieg.⁹ When God judges a nation using another nation, He prepares them.¹⁰ Even their bows are bent. These are body length bows which the bowman strings by securing one end with his left foot¹¹ and bending the bow a little to string. Their horses have hard hoofs, not shod but bred for war. The sound of their chariots collectively produce a sound like a tornado.¹²

*"The lion roars¹³ when eager for prey; and such is now the war-cry of the bloodthirsty enemy."*¹⁴ Wrote C. H. Keil. The prey is Judah, but Isaiah never mentions Judah by name. The gloom and doom of this prophecy perhaps made such a directed pronouncement painful to make, but, notwithstanding, "what God did, God does" and so any nation that walks the path of the 6 woes can expect likewise. The lion's roar is a low growl¹⁵ they make as they eat the prey. It is like the ocean's roar, waves beating the shoreline

⁸ **26** And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly:

⁹ It is reasonable to understand the 7 vials of Revelation to be swiftly executed bringing a swift end to this current epoch because there is no one left who will repent. [Revelation 16:11].

¹⁰ **27** None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken:

¹¹ The Hebrew says that the bows are trodden.

¹² **28** Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind:

¹³ **29** Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it.

¹⁴ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 184. The word "roar" is onomatopoeic in Hebrew. Transliterated: shaw'ag.

¹⁵ The Arabic use of this word is used to signify greediness. [Keil page 184].

Pending Judgment

during a storm when the sky is dark, covered with rain clouds.¹⁶

A Cloudy Thought

Verse 30 ends this chapter with these words *“behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened”* which challenges the most discerning. In the original the words read, *“Pay attention to the earth: darkness is tribulation and light is darkness in her rain clouds.”* Scholarship sees in this verse that *“Grace tries again and again until at last the measure of iniquity is full, and the time of repentance past.”*¹⁷ The sky breaks and a few rays of sunlight peek through and then the clouds gather together again and the sky is dark. *“Tribulation and light; tribulation and light... until the season for listening is ended.”*¹⁸

Dr. Lange explained, *“like surges of the sea, therefore, raging and roaring, shall the enemy fall of Judah.”*¹⁹ Then he references Job 18:6 [ICB], *“The light in his tent will become dark. The lamp by his side will go out.”* Or Joel 3:15 *“The sun and the moon shall be darkened,²⁰ and the stars shall withdraw their shining.”*

¹⁶ **30** And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

¹⁷ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII Page 185.

¹⁸ compare Isaiah 21:12 “The watchman answered, “Morning is coming, but then night will come again. If you have something to ask, then come back and ask”

¹⁹ John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VI. page 95

²⁰ Scholarship also notes that the word “cloud” is related to the word for utter darkness, a point made immediately obvious to me., though it may not be significant here.

Pending Judgment

An interesting possibility in Isaiah's poetic description in using light and darkness brings us back to the 4th woe. Their light is darkness and so God makes it so, totally and permanently.

Chapter Ten

Our World

What God did, God does.

Taking a long, hard, look at the record of evil is very difficult to do. We prefer love stories, or at least, a crime drama with a satisfying ending. The story of the 6 woes is not a romance novel but a piece of reality.

I remember a time when I was part of a bridge crew for the New York State Thruway Authority. I was a painter; but before we could paint a bridge we had to clear the rails of debris and especially *spiders*. One bridge I worked on had a spider building her web—one—under each corner where the cross rail and side rails met. After I squashed a dozen or so spiders, I began to be sick to my stomach. There is, apparently, a limit to how much violence we can contend with, even killing spiders. And yet, I needed to clear this parapet.

I wrote a couple books about Calvary with an emphasis on all the blessings that come to us when by faith we accept Jesus' crucifixion for what it really was, for our salvation. But I didn't rewrite Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" because it is too "true-to-life." (My wife won't watch this movie, even though, it is probably quite accurate historically.)

Isaiah's 6 woes are a prophecy, I would guess, few believers have read—even devotionally. Even I never

Our World

focused on them during each devotional reading of the Bible. Before studying for this booklet, I had no recollection of them, either individually or collectively. I only knew that the first 39 chapters of Isaiah were characterized by the word “woe.” But I had no recall as to why. It had something to do with Israel, not me. How short-sighted and wrong I was!

Throughout this study, I have been asking if the 6 woes were interdependent—whether or not they were linked together and whether or not they led to the Babylonian Captivity for Judah. It is also important to ask if we follow the same path as they, how might we end up? Will these 6 woes lead to a Divine judgment that spells the end of any significance to us as a nation? Will the nations of the global north walk right into a tribulation and the end of time, as we know it? These are legitimate questions because God still oversees His creation, He completes whatever He starts, and He has no favorites that can escape the same punishment others have experience under the same circumstances unless they repent. These 6 woes always lead to judgment.

But a better question might be, what will be the condition of our world at the return of Christ? How can we believe that somehow God finally has had enough with sin and wants to end it? Is God a cat playing with us as mice; only now, He goes in for the kill as if He is tired of us? To this question we answer with a resounding, “No!” When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, He made a deal with Abraham that for sake of 10 righteous in those cities, He would spare them; but there were not 10. The finality to all history will come when God cannot find *one* [“*they repented not,*” Revelation 16:9].

It is important to ask if we live now in a world that once knew the blessings of God. God planted a vineyard. He planted an arbor of sweet red grapes, but have we turned out to be wild and soar grapes of no value to Him? Is He about to tear down His tower and the wall that is our protection from foxes [Song of Solomon 2:15]? America and

Our World

the free world was only great because of God! Are we about to discover this? Is He planning to walk away. There is a biblical word for this: *Ichabod*, God's Glory has departed [I Samuel 4:21].¹

1. Love of Money

Whether a nation or an individual, the biblical message of Isaiah is the same. And if there is a sequence or order to the 6 woes, it is reasonable to caution, "Stay free from the first woe, the first temptation, and the rest cannot follow." The first one, greed, covetousness, or avarice is a desire to obtain money above what is needed whether just to hoard it as wealth or to become the quintessential consumer because there are so many expensive toys to buy. One Sunday, The Pastor shared this maxim with his congregation,² "*Life isn't about money.*" If we believe this and can find purpose in life that does not occupy our time and energy in the sole quest for money, we should find ourselves on a good path to avoiding the other woes.

A nation must find other means to control the lust for wealth because, in a very real sense, the political leaders control the purse strings of the country through regulations and laws. In the U.S. Constitution, Article II, Section 4, a president can be removed from office if convicted of "bribery." There are three emolument clauses in this constitution to deny anyone elected to federal office from using that office for personal gain.³ In addition, the President is not authorized to spend any money not appropriated by Congress.⁴ Despite these restrictions many national office

¹ The departing Glory was the story of Ezekiel's prophecy.

² Preached Sunday AM, 11/27/22.

³ Article I, Section 6, Clause 2: The Ineligibility Clause

Article I, Section 9, Clause 8: The Foreign Emoluments Clause

Article II, Section 1, Clause 7: The Domestic Emoluments Clause

⁴ Article I, Section 9, Clause 7:

Our World

holders in the U.S.A. are quite wealthy according to *The Center for Responsive Politics*.⁵ Some congress men and women “...have millions of dollars invested in politically influential industries that they also regulate, such as real estate, banking, pharmaceuticals and energy,” the center said.”⁶

Paul taught that “*avarice is the root of all evil*” [1 Timothy 6:10]. Every English translation calls it love⁷ which can not be far from what Paul meant since Jesus reminded us that no one is able to make money their master and still claim to love God [Matthew 6:24]. Is it possible to have a romantic attraction to money? I love my wife of 54 years (as of this writing) and I would miss her if she were not here with me.

When the market crashed in 2008, due to subprime rates ballooning, I lost a chunk of my investments but I did not miss the money in the same way. Most investments are virtual funds (capital we didn’t need to live on that could be risked) and any increase was just on ledger paper or in a computer’s database. I didn’t miss the loss. But some people did! Their investments were watched like a child playing in a busy street and those investors worried as if a Stock Market crash was the end of life. Some lost retirement money, and some of those were now too old to make it up through further investing. If they were believers in Christ, they hopefully remembered that God is over all aspects of our lives. But should God be jealous of our interest in money?

And what about persons in government? Leadership or government officials that focus more on personal wealth, and not the well-being of the country—and especially the poor—are feeding their own passion for riches which Isaiah

⁵ On Congressional wealth. accessed 11/27/22 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-congress-wealth/get-elected-to-congress-and-get-rich-study-idUSN1330776120080313>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Latin is cupiditas, desire.

warned has God's undivided attention. They are susceptible to the next woe but the caution remains, "Stop now and go no further down this road!"

2. Love of Things

Jesus urged us to "*lay up treasures in heaven*," adding the reason, "*where your treasure is, there will your heart be...*" [Matthew 6:20-21]. But we live in a time when consumerism and purchasing power capture our interest, culturally. What child gets only one Christmas present? Speaking of which: we imagine a good Christmas is one with plenty of money available for gifts. (Wasn't this our Savior's birthday? Probably not on most minds any more.) We mortgage homes to send our kids to colleges they probably shouldn't be attending. The electronic store is a man's toy store as women used to frequent the clothing outlets (My wife still does). We invented a phrase "window shopping" that occupies our minds when we are despondent over having little extra cash to shop with. We live in a time when what Graham Ward⁸ called "commodification" or everything is a "thing," something which can be given a price or value, something we want to purchase. "*We have produced a culture of fetishes or virtual objects.*" Ward wrote, "*For now everything is not only measurable and priced, it has an image. It is the image which now governs what is both measured and priced.*"⁹ Nicholas Boyle in his work, "*Who Are We Now?*" called it "*...the fiction*

⁸ The Rev'd Dr Graham Ward is Professor of Contextual Theology in the department for Religions and Theology at the University of Manchester and one of the Directors of the Centre for Religion and Political Culture based there. His books available from Blackwell include *The Postmodern God* (1997), *The Certeau Reader* (1999), *True Religion* (2002), and *Christ and Culture* (forthcoming). On Postmodern Theology accessed 11/27/22 <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/The+Blackwell+Companion+to+Postmodern+Theology-p-9781405127196>

⁹ Graham Ward Ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*. The Christian Difference, or Surviving Postmodernism. Introduction: Where We Stand. (2005). Page xiv

Our World

*by which the global market commends itself to us and encourages our participation in it ... the human self is purely a consumer. ... there is nothing outside the market....*¹⁰ Collectively we have become a “consumer price index” that measures how healthy the economy is, and as goes the economy, goes life itself.

There is something terribly wrong with this picture! Greed and avarice have made us dreamers of material possessions and not dreamers of heaven. If things which God never wanted us to hold unto are that necessary to make us happy, we have forfeited our spiritual birthright for a bowl of pottage [Genesis 25:30-34].

Things are only blessings we should value when God can use them to benefit our faith in Him. As said earlier, the blessing is accepting the cookie directly from the baker. We should not be dreaming of having sweets He does not prepare for us.

When our leaders are consumers with no thought of how God would use a nation’s resources to bless the poor, the widows, and orphans but enrich their own lives with things: mansions, cars, jewelry, clothing, *ejudem generis*,¹¹ they are leading us astray!

3. Delight in Lies

The Old Testament employs 4 different words commonly translated lie, liar, vanity, worthless speech, deception, falsehood, etc. Collectively they are found 230 times which gives a clear understanding of what God thinks of lying. I, too, find it impossible to establish any friendship with or even want to listen to someone who lies. Solomon

¹⁰ Nicholas Boyle *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998). pages 153–4. See the essay by Stanley Hauerwas in this volume which treats this book in more depth.

¹¹ a Latin phrase that means “of the same kind.”

Our World

knew God hated lies [Proverbs 6:17, 19]. Zechariah reminds us there will be no such thing in God's Kingdom [Zephaniah 3:13].

Some politicians lie with impunity. Within the chambers of Congress in the U.S.A., at least, they have immunity and within the public sphere they have concluded it as part of their job to find a way with words to convince voters they are the best choice.¹²

Lies are employed often to harm someone's reputation or in the language of our day to "cancel" them. When David became "king" there were those not happy with his divine appointment to the throne. *"They only consult to cast [me] down from [a] high position;"* David complained about lies told about him, *"They delight in lies; They bless with their mouth, But they curse inwardly"* [Psalm 62:4]. *"The righteous are obnoxious to the wicked, and the main object of their fury."* Charles Spurgeon commented on this Psalm, *"The elevation which God gives to the godly in Providence, or in dispute, is also the envy of the baser sort, and they labor to pull them down to their own level."*¹³ Spurgeon added, *"To lie is bad enough, but to delight in it is one of the blackest marks of infamy."*¹⁴

The link between believing a lie and living a lie goes without saying. For Isaiah, Judah's fear of the Assyrians and their lack of faith and confidence in God's protection, made the lie of Egyptian help more believable. *"The people tried to throw off the yoke of Assyria; not with confidence in Jehovah,*

¹² Gaslighting is a common modern practice to brainwash individuals into believing as true what they know is not true: to manipulate (someone) by psychological means into questioning their own sanity: *in the first episode, Karen Valentine is being gaslighted by her husband.* [from the storyline of the film Gaslight (1944), in which a man psychologically manipulates his wife into believing that she is going insane.]

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David.* (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 1084

¹⁴ Ibid.

Our World

however, but in reliance upon the help of Egypt.”¹⁵ C. H. Keil explained.

Isaiah’s warnings went unheeded to Judah’s detriment. “...Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.” [Isaiah 59:4]. “For we have made lies our refuge, And under falsehood we have hidden ourselves...” But Isaiah knew Egyptian help was a false hope and a lie. In the prophet’s metaphor: “The hail will sweep away ... lies, And the waters will overflow the hiding place.” [Isaiah 28:15, 17].

Lies can be deadly especially when a kingdom is being built on them and the leaders are deceived or deceiving. “And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies?” God questioned His people through the prophet, Ezekiel, adding, “ ... Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life” [Ezekiel 13:19, 22].

A man named Agur is credited with compiling chapter 30 of the Proverbs. Mr. Agur is a self-acclaimed stupid man not to be classed as a scribe because he confessed he knew so little about God. He only knew that his faith was in God [Proverbs 30:5]. Notwithstanding his self-abasement, no wiser prayer were ever prayed, nor ever more relevant: “Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches — Feed me with the food allotted to me” [Proverbs 30:8].

God’s people must block out the media noise that are lies and that have a satanic tone to their message, that sound as reliable sources of truth but which incentivize violence

¹⁵ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol VII. Part V. “Book of Woes” Page 1

Our World

and kindle fires of hate. Jeremiah prophesying of the disaster that was about to descend on Jerusalem, made clear the link between the prophets' lying and the violence that was pending. He compared the beloved City of David now to Sodom and the cities of the plains in Lot's day. *"Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah."* [Jeremiah 23:14]. Evildoers are emboldened by a leadership that lies.

4. Love of Pleasure

Can we connect lies with social change, and is social change a euphemism for a culture becoming more immoral? We argue, perhaps prima-facia, that this is what Isaiah called his 4th woe and this is what is happening in our world, in the global north in our day. Deception's connection with social change in time may be less obvious. When an individual or a government official chooses to deceive for personal gain, it is for personal pleasure and that, in the adult world, speaks to a moral issue. *"They commit adultery and walk in lies,"* Jeremiah just told us.

The lie here is never simply a misspoken word but an intentionally hidden motive that by its vary nature must stay out of the light. It lives in the darkness in which it was conceived. Deception is a heavy burden to bear, though. It eventually breaks the confines of its imprisonment. In time, if a number of people are living it, it will show itself as social change.

A desire for immoral pleasure is often hidden behind a deception of self-justification but it would rather be free to express itself openly. Morality is redefined in the process and, as noted already, this is the foundation society is built upon. The "lie" is that if something is socially acceptable or culturally sanctioned and not illegal, it is a matter only of

Our World

choice. And since God is marginalized, His will is not considered. “*And like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, And they do not know Me,’ says the LORD*” [Jeremiah 9:3]. They are “*...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*” [2 Timothy 3:4].

Some social change can take years before it is evident as if it evolved in some natural way and was not engineered by the personal interests of a minority. Society is then given the public acceptance this minority sought for all along. The global north, for example, now accepts gay relations including marriage as not just legal but “biblical” even though it is *not* of God. Single parent families, no dad living at home, casual sex, an elevated divorce rate, to name a few, and now even pedophilia (in some places) is becoming more and more “life as we know it.”

5. Love of Self

Civilized mankind is becoming “*...lovers of themselves....*” [2 Timothy 3:2]. These 3 words in English are 1 word in Greek. Let’s set aside what it does *not* mean.¹⁶ It is not self-sufficiency or contentment with one’s current provisions. These are good.

The “*self-willed*” person has a lack of concern about others, an insensitivity to another’s needs or pain. “*Self-loving*” is our word selfish meaning to provide all things first and foremost for one’s own pleasure and ease. [A look ahead: hubris does the same but by causing pain to others in the process.] “*self-willed*” [Titus 1:7] persons lock others out in their effort to please only themselves, while at the same time as “*self-lovers*” enjoying all the comforts afforded them within the privacy of their own mind and world.

¹⁶ Richard C. Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) Section xciii

Our World

I described them as self-reliant, not because they are creative or industrious when in need, but because they purpose to keep God out of their affairs. They do not want His help. They don't know the benefit of prayer. I think it reasonable to see these same individuals as "self-lovers," too, since they do not see themselves as instruments of God's goodness to others but as self-providers and protectors of their own bounty.

A government that sets itself up as all-powerful—or seeks to be more powerful—and has no reliance on God because it does not follow His desires in the matter of those in need within its domain, is a government that loves itself and it is one step away from the absolute exercise of that power for personal gain.

6. Hubris

If there is a link between the first 5 woes and the 6th Hosea wrote about it: *"You have plowed wickedness; You have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, Because you trusted in your own way"* [Hosea 10:13]. *"He who does not punish evil,"* Leonardo da Vinci concluded, *"commands it to be done."* And we are talking now about the judiciary, the last bastion of hope for a nation. When the judges are corrupted, the nation is in an identity crisis. More than physical boundaries, the fairness in the administration of its laws define it.

"Do you judge fairly ... No, in heart you practice injustice; ... you clear a way for the violence..." [Psalm 58:1-2]. Solomon agreed, *"If a ruler pays attention to lies, All his servants become wicked"* [Proverbs 29:12].

In short, *"....perilous times"* [2 Timothy 3:1] have come. A time of lawlessness which can only be understood in the language of Scripture as a nation without God! A search for words like "unruly, unlawful" yields no results, perhaps, because this idea is contained in the biblical word,

Our World

unrighteousness, “*violent deeds.*”¹⁷ And these are often linked to judges who corrupt justice.

I see this as hubris in its most devastating and cruelest sense. It is a nation gone off the rails, gone absolutely wild with a selfish rage, stealing, rioting, destroying, hurting....

¹⁷ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB].. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 732. [לִּפְעוּלָה]

Chapter Eleven

Habakkuk's Prayer

The just shall live by faith - Habakkuk 2:4

What Isaiah prophesied in his 5th chapter, Habakkuk now foretells of the approaching disaster. What was threatening Judah in Isaiah's day of an Assyrian captivity will soon come to pass with the Babylonians. But there is a comfort in the words of him whose name means "to embrace." As Luther translates "*as one embraces a weeping child .. To quiet it with the assurance that if God will it shall be better soon.*"¹

Zephaniah

Zephaniah, a contemporary of Habakkuk, confirmed Isaiah's vision of his final woe, which we have identified in this work as "*Injustice*": "*Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; that leave not a bone till morning.*" [Zephaniah 3:3].

"Without any allusion to particular historic relations..." C. H. Keil wrote, "*Like Isaiah, he [Habakkuk] is much more independent of his predecessors, both in content and form, than any other of the prophets.*"² This suggests, in other words, that this prophecy has more than one fulfillment of a nation's

¹ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 53

² Ibid.

Habakkuk's Prayer

decline under godless governance. C. H. Keil concurred, "... the attempt to interpret the threat of judgment in ch ii (chapter 2) by applying it to particular historical persons or facts, has utterly failed."³

A Prayer of Comfort

But more than all this, Habakkuk is in prayer. The first 2 chapters of his prophecy, Habakkuk is in conversation with God. The prophet is burdened. He appears flummoxed as to God's seeming silence in the face of such an immediate need for His intervention. It sounds a bit like Martha at Lazarus' tomb wondering why the Savior was delayed [John 11]. And yet neither He nor His Father is ever late in addressing the burdens or pain that seems near overwhelming at times. Nor is He indifferent to our questions, the pre-conceived ideas we have that shape our theology. There is much for us to learn and God knows when and how to teach us. God does hear our cries and His silence is never a "No," but because His response always has eternal significance. As when calling forth a dead Lazarus from his tomb that would lead to Jesus' inevitable crucifixion, everything God does in our world is done with eternity in view. Nothing God does should ever be thought of as temporary.

Habakkuk's entire prophecy is a prayer, which in the final chapter begins to take on a different perspective on what is happening in his world. Regardless how we feel, prayer always changes the heart for the better.. The power of prayer is not always to move God in our need to do something which we are so sure He must do. Prayer serves more to move us: to a more lively hope, to a greater faith, to a more extended love, and to a more enduring peace.

H a b a k k u k b e g i n s , " O L O R D , h o w l o n g . . . ! ? " [Habakkuk 1:2] but after praying he comes to a

³ ibid page 54

Habakkuk's Prayer

place of rest from all anxiety and fear: *“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills”* [Habakkuk 3:18-19]. The true power of prayer!

A God of Covenant

Scholarship calls Judah *“the degenerate covenant nation”*⁴ God is a covenant God which in Habakkuk's time was the “Old” Covenant. How comforting for us to know that since Calvary, we have been under the “New” Covenant and grace. Yet in some sense, Habakkuk saw it on the horizon of time. His comment on “faith” [Habakkuk 2:4] is now ours [Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38].

Because God shows no favoritism, what held true for Judah should be a lesson to the Church. *“Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted”* [1 Corinthians 10:6]. *“...the prophecy rises immediately ... to a view of the universal judgment upon all nations.”*⁵

The Spiritual Condition in Judah

Since Habakkuk is conversing with God, his prophecy becomes a look into what prayer should be about. The prophet begins with a cry for help, which is understandable for 2 reasons worth noting:

1. Because God is a merciful God. *“Let us therefore come boldly [with unreserved frankness] to the throne of grace,”* The writer to the Hebrews encouraged all of us, *“that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* [Hebrews 4:16]. *“When you call then the*

⁴ Ibid. page 53.

⁵ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 54

Habakkuk's Prayer

Lord will answer," Isaiah instructed Israel [Isaiah 58:9], ["even while you are still speaking," the Greek translation adds], "*when you cry out, He will say, I'm here!*" And that is the second reason:

2. Because God is present [Matthew 28:20]. The New Jerusalem will be designated "Jehovah Shammah" [Ezekiel 48:35, The Lord is There]. We must read Hebrews 13:5 and 6 together: "*be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* He will not leave us! We have no need to be anxious about the conditions we live in because the Lord is here, with us; "*So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."*

Habakkuk is crying out for God's help⁶ because of violence, [Habakkuk 1:3] all levels of violence: including injurious language and harsh treatment.⁷ In Isaiah's time they were oppressing the poor, pointing the finger in ridicule and spreading vicious rumors [Isaiah 58:9]. The abuse is both physical and mental.⁸

[My interpretation of 1:3-4] "*For what reason, Lord, must I look on such sorrow and hardship caused by such violence and havoc.*⁹ *All about us is strife and hostility. Your law is never*

⁶ The Hebrew term used means not just to cry out in pain or misery but specifically *for help*.

⁷ Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB]. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing . Peabody, MA.:2015) page 329

⁸ Ultimately, Solomon said of wisdom, "*He who sins against me [wisdom] wrongs [does violence to] his own soul...*" [Proverbs 8:36]

⁹ Two words often together (Amos 3:10 "plundering and looting"; Jeremiah 6:7; 20:8) meanings malicious conduct intended to injure another. see C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 56-7

Habakkuk's Prayer

followed. There is no justice.¹⁰ Evil surrounds like an enemy those who follow You; Justice is distorted.” Isaiah 5:20!

I found it difficult to keep my mind focused on the historical reference generally taught in explaining Habakkuk’s experience. The princes, judges, and prophets in Judah and the surrounding nations may have been liable for such atrocities perpetrated on the poor of their citizenry in the selfish pursuit of wealth and power but my mind keeps breaking free from its moorings and drifting over into my own world. If I am right in this, I must clearly make it a matter of prayer as the prophet did. To think we are doing nothing to change things unless we march or speak up or out in a political forum relegates prayer to a place of triviality, if not worthlessness. God forbid! Prayer does change things because the God we pray to changes things and He said, *“I’m here!”*

It might not appear obvious but Jesus cannot raise the dead until first they are *...dead!* And God cannot bring a nation to repentance until they have fallen far enough into the abyss that they seriously decide to *“look up.”*

God’s Response

The Lord’s response to the prophet’s anxiety was a promise—not just a future promise, but what Habakkuk would observe being fulfilled. But like those in Jesus’ day, he could miss it [John 1:10-11] unless his faith was strong enough to embrace it. Admittedly, Habakkuk 1:5 stood out as an exciting call to faith. [My interpretation: *“Pay attention and you will be greatly amazed! What I am going to do now you might not believe if it were just told you, but you will see it for yourself!”*]

¹⁰ “There is no ...righteous verdict...in the civil [or] political [sphere].” see C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 57

Habakkuk's Prayer

What may cause some to disbelieve that God was behind the Chaldeans arriving to escort Judah into exile was the terrifying way history was unfolding. *"It was alarming¹¹ [dreadful] and frightening"* [Habakkuk 1:7].

Paul was mindful of the Lord's words to Habakkuk when in his utter frustration the Jews in Antioch continued to be entrenched in unbelief over the Gospel message and that Jesus was indeed the Christ. Going forward, He would bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.¹² He repeated the prophecy here, *'Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.'* [Acts 13:41]

God does not want to work in the shadows of our faith where we cannot see Him [Amos 3:7]. He brought Abraham into confidence [Genesis 18:1ff] which gave the patriarch the opportunity to intercede for his nephew's safety.¹³ But if prayer is not a vital part of our living and a priority, because of our anxiety, and the many lies that echo about us from those who do not know God, we could miss the blessing of knowing that God is answering prayer.

Our faith should be excited in the prayer chamber when we hear in our heart God say, *"Look! You're going to be amazed what I am about to do for you. You'd have to see it to believe it if it were not for your trust in me."* We do not need to know details—only, that He is faithful [John 14:1].

¹¹ "Alarming, dreadful" like the crocodile's teeth [Job 41:14]

¹² Acts 13:46 "Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles."

¹³ Genesis 18:17 "And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,"

Habakkuk's Prayer

Judgment Must Come

Evil is not forever [2 Thessalonians 2:6-7]. Judgment must come. The Lord told Isaiah, "*I cannot endure iniquity*" [Isaiah 1:13]. We are told, God was patiently putting up with all this wickedness before Christ came [Romans 3:25] but now commands all people everywhere to repent [Acts 17:30]. "*I will punish the world for its evil,*" The Lord promised the prophet [Isaiah 13:11]. There is no contradiction here—only time. And risking a philosophical moment, C. S. Lewis reminded us in the context of our prayers that God is not in time.¹⁴

First there must be the harvest of souls. James calls out those who have lived for themselves and not for God [James 5:5-6]: "*You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have murdered the just; he does not resist you.*" [Woes 1, 2 and 6.] This sounds quite Isaiahic, prophetic. And then, James encouraged the faithful believers, "*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*" [James 5:7-8].

Habakkuk and all Judah were living under the *Old* Covenant of God; we are under the *New*. The work of God in his day was more historic. Now it is more personal. God, then, asked a nation to represent Him to the world. God's primary goal is now to conform us to the image of His Son [Romans 8:29]. Then in Habakkuk's day God's Word was written on tablets of stone; now it is engraved upon the believer's heart [Jeremiah 31:31-34]. Then God worked on their behalf; now his work is *in* us [Philippians 2:13]. God's approach then was national and He chastised Israel and Judah. Now salvation is on an individual basis and His

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis on prayer accessed 12/09/22 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/36112-almost-certainly-god-is-not-in-time-his-life-does>

Habakkuk's Prayer

judgment is apocalyptic.¹⁵ For those carried off into the coming 'exile' there will be no return [Revelation 14:11].¹⁶

Habakkuk's Hope

The arrogance of the Babylonians was unnerving [Habakkuk 1:10-11]. The Babylonians attribute their military successes to their own strength as their god. Their victories are either attributed to their god or '*their strength is their god.*' [CSB]. Either way, it is an affront to God's power like Goliath's arrogance, who "*cursed David by his gods*" [1 Samuel 17:43].

Habakkuk, notwithstanding, is confident and hopeful that God will not permit His people to perish. The prophet's argument is that a Babylonian exile is an instrument of God's judgment and it is not Babylon's strength that brings victory. "*...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*" Paul reminded us [Ephesians 6:12]. "*Man proposes but God disposes,*" the saying goes. [Ezekiel 26:3; Proverbs 16:9; Isaiah 10:5-6; Jeremiah 10:23].

Habakkuk prayed, "*Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction*" [1:12].

We will not die! This is God's correction! Habakkuk's hope rests on 3 truths:

¹⁵ "*From the time of the exile onward the coming of God to judgment is represented no more in the form of a theophany, but in that of the apocalypse.*" [J. P. Lange calls Isaiah "*a master of the Hebrew language.*" [John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures.* (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VII. Book of Habakkuk, page 7]

¹⁶ I am told, that the writing over the Gate to Hell, according to Dante, reads, "*Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.*"

Habakkuk's Prayer

1. Jehovah is *my* God, Israel's God [Song of Solomon 6:3] not because we chose Him but because He chose us. [Psalm 65:4; John 15:16]. John Calvin astutely taught, "*Therefore, whoever desires to fight bravely ... let him first settle the matter with God himself, and, as it were, confirm and ratify the treaty which God has set before us, namely, that we are his people, and He will be a God to us in return.*"¹⁷ The god of the Babylonians is not God! Jehovah is *my* God! *My* God is always victorious in battle!
2. God is Holy. He is "*The absolutely Pure One who cannot look upon evil.*"¹⁸ God, because He is Holy, He will mercifully honor His commitment in covenant to judge or punish evil. Jehovah's name means "*the absolutely constant One, who is always the same in word and work*"¹⁹ He is "*...from everlasting...*" [Habakkuk 1:12]. "*...even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.*" [Psalm 90:2].
3. Correction or chastisement might be indeed painful but God administers this unto His own children [Deuteronomy 8:5; Hebrews 12:6]. When David, probably because his faith was weak—unexpectedly and without cause—was in need of serious correction, he pleaded with the prophet, "*Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man*" [2 Samuel 24:10-14].

¹⁷ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 63

¹⁸ Ibid. Page 64

¹⁹ Genesis 2;4 calls God's creation, in NKJV, a 'history' because on this week science was set in motion for man later to discover.

Habakkuk's Prayer

When Habakkuk maintains, “we will not die.” he was not pleading with God to spare them, but affirming his faith that God chastises those He has chosen and whom He loves. And chastisement does not kill but revives and brings us back to God.

Our Rock

“O Rock, You have marked them for correction.” [Habakkuk 1:12].

He is a *Rock*, “an unchangeable refuge of His people’s trust.”²⁰ In Deuteronomy 32 Moses employed this sobriquet, “a Rock” 4 times.²¹

“Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.” What profound truth is sung and celebrated here! What an empowerment to faith! What a confirmation of Who God is! If you cannot find the words to pray when, like Habakkuk, you find yourself in crisis, *sing this song!* It will speak for you.

Waiting on God

“I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart” [Habakkuk 2:1].

As Jesus delayed 4 days before raising Lazarus from the grave, God often shares with His prophets—and us—promises that are not immediately fulfilled. There is no value in foretelling something that is about to occur. Then, the prophet should simply *forth* tell it. But faith works best when we must wait on God; so, Habakkuk is determined to stand upon his watchtower, station himself in the fortress of prayer, and keep an eye on God to see what He will say in answer regarding his anxious concern (translators use the word ‘complaint’) [2:1]. Habakkuk was impassioned about what troubled him (an aspect of prayer we are encouraged to

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 18, and 37 Verse 4 put to music is an old chorus.

Habakkuk's Prayer

voice before the Lord) but was it a *complaint*? Anyway, now it is time to pause, to wait on the Lord for His response.

Habakkuk is *not* waiting on God to *do*; he is waiting on God to *answer*, to speak to his heart an assurance only God can offer. He has found his prayer chamber, his secret place, where he must wait in silence [Psalm 46:10] and a sound-proof place, spiritually speaking, where the many voices which—no doubt—encircle his world—noise which the Greeks call *grumbling* but in Hebrew is *speaking vanity* in Isaiah 58:9—are *not* heard. Habakkuk's *watchtower* is his place to listen for the still small voice in which God characteristically speaks [1 Kings 19:12]. He calls this place his *fortress* or *tower* because a place of prayer is an entrenchment, a bulwark, a rampart, or a defense against anxiety and fear, as well as, the many thoughts of the frightened and the optimist who think they know what God is going to say. But we will wait on God to say it! Psalm 91:1 reads "*He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*" The word "*dwells*" speaks of where we live. It is our habitation. Our prayer chamber is a constant place of retreat where we spend the night, the word "*abide*" while terror roams the streets of our world. That shadow you see in the dark, my child, is God's comforting arm!

"*The figure [of a tower],*" says C. H. Keil, "*is taken from the custom of ascending high places for the purpose of looking into the distance (2 Kings 9:17; 2 Samuel 18:24), and ... express the spiritual preparation of the prophet's soul for hearing ... [from] God.*"²² "*Looking into the distance*" in Paul's epistles speaks of *persistent expectation*, a lively hope [Romans 8:19; Philippians 1:20]. We wait on an answer from God because we *expect* Him to answer.

²² C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 68-9

Habakkuk's Prayer

Habakkuk will not trust his own judgment or perception of things. He waits to see what *"He will say"* [2:1]. This is not a soliloquy. This is a conversation *with God!* This is prayer!

Habakkuk's Complaint

Some like to call Habakkuk's discourse a complaint because he asked why evil goes unpunished, but I caution against using a term that would accuse God of injustice or contradiction. Of these, God is incapable [Numbers 23:19]. Furthermore, complaining as a rule is a disquieted heart not a still one waiting on God's answer. But above all this, prayer is asking God for His mercy and not a checklist of grievances we would blame Him for. When the NLT [The New Living Translation] among others uses the word "complaint" it seems harsh. Even scholarship implies that Habakkuk was complaining, that the prophet was *"dissatisfied with the divine administration."*²³

According to The NKJV [New King James Version] Habakkuk 1:12 reads, *"when I am corrected"* interpreting the prophet to be saying that he knows there is something here for him to learn. The Greek translation says when he is convicted.²⁴ Does not this word in John 16:8 simply refer to the Spirit's guidance? If so, prayer is His classroom.

What does all this really mean and can it provide us with some insight about prayer? Perhaps, God reads the passion in the words, not as accusatory but simply a hunger after His justice [Matthew 5:6]. Does God respond only to broken hearts or can our words also be persuasive?

God is about to share with Habakkuk in a vision what He, God, wants public. Habakkuk 2:5-19 is a list of 5 woes very similar in meaning to Isaiah's 6. God is about to

²³ Ibid. Page 69

²⁴ ἐπὶ τὸν ἔλεγχόν μου. The King James says *"When I am reprov'd."*

Habakkuk's Prayer

speak and if I may interpret verse 2:20, “*God now appears in the Temple to be worshipped; but the nation has created gods of gold and silver [money], and wood [idols] that have now enraged Him. You could hear a pin drop!*” [Revelation 8:1].

Were I in a boat with the Savior on a lake in a storm, I hopefully would never have awakened Him to ask if He really cared whether or not I might perish [Mark 4:38]. I prefer Matthew’s understanding of the moment: “*Save us, Lord; we are perishing*” [Matthew 8:25]. Matthew asked Jesus to be merciful, not a complaint, per se, to which the Savior responded with a lesson in faith and a calmer lake.

Prayer should be a time to ascertain God’s burden and find ourselves in sympathy with *His* heart. I think Habakkuk did.

Regarding Habakkuk’s *watchtower*, the prophet testified, “*I ... set myself on the rampart,*” [2:1]. My interpretation: “*I remained in my guard house [what a beautiful description of prayer!] and made it my mission²⁵ in this place of protection [from all other voices] to keep alert for what God might tell me.*” This idea, in itself, testifies to the fact that the prophet knew how to pray and that prayer was a part of his life.

Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus in the fifth century AD, called attention to Asaph’s thought in Psalm 73:16-17: “*When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then [I] understood...*” Theodoret, then, interpreted Asaph’s words, “*And there, says the prophet, will I remain ...[and] standing upon [the] Rock .. upon which God placed ...Moses, [I will] watch with a prophet’s eyes for the solution of the things that I seek.*”²⁶

²⁵ The Hebrew word carries this idea in Job 1:6, “to stand before”

²⁶ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 69 see fnnt.

Habakkuk's Prayer

God's Answer

"Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry." [Habakkuk 2:2-3].

God's answer was not something He was planning to do but something He wanted Habakkuk to do [2:2]. In modern language, "Broadcast this prophecy in a blog, so that, anyone can read it and understand it." He must make this truth readily available to all without price that all might be warned. As C. H. Keil explained, "...denoting the great importance of the prophecy, and the consequent necessity for it to be made accessible to the whole nation."²⁷ This is not to be taken literally but to be understood as a message that must be promulgated and heralded as God's final Word and act on the matter of idolatry and the woes listed in chapter 2 [including the woes of Isaiah 5].

The prophecy "*pants*" to come quickly to its end. (Not the prophet, the *prophecy*.) "*True prophecy is animated ... by an impulse to fulfill itself.*"²⁸ The NASB95 [New American Standard Bible, 1995] reads, "*It hastens toward the goal*" Perhaps, this is for Habakkuk's encouragement that God is actively involved in answering his prayer.

Then He adds, "*This vision is no lie,*" i.e. There is no deception here. There are those who think this could never be, who question, "*Where is the promise of His coming, For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation*" [2 Peter 3:4]. We are creatures of time, creatures in time, which means we tend to associate things that are close in time. To see one thing as a consequence of

²⁷ Ibid. Page 70

²⁸ John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VII. Book of Habakkuk, Page 22

Habakkuk's Prayer

another—or to believe the prophecies—some need the events to occur concurrently, or at least, near in time. This is a limitation of reason and why faith must take over. God is eternal and a single day or a millennium makes no difference to Him [2 Peter 3:8].

When Jesus assured His disciples that His crucifixion was not the end of their relationship and that He was working on the design and construction of the New Jerusalem so they could join Him in His kingdom, He added, *“If it were not true, would I have told you?”* [John 14:2] Some translations see Jesus’ question more as a simple comment, but either way, was it necessary to clarify to them that He was no liar? Not at all. Jesus, was simply assuring His disciples, and us, that He has left nothing out that is vital to faith. God sometimes shares the “hard” stuff. He shares all that we must know to accept our experience, be it blessing or persecution, knowing we are following Him.²⁹

If the vision carries or is not fulfilled immediately, as might happen,³⁰ *“wait for it.”* Actually the word means *“long for it!”* In Psalm 33:20 the Psalmist is describing those who seek God’s help in crisis and he includes himself, *“Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.”* Clearly, we should understand they are not just waiting for Him but also longing for Him. *“He will surely be there on time and never late!”* God is always on time *“... to help in time of need”* [Hebrews 4:16]. We are not just waiting for some event to take place; we are waiting on our Lord, longing for His coming.

The “not-so-obvious” truth here is that this is by divine design. God is not busy elsewhere. Waiting on the

²⁹ see Matthew 5:10-12; Revelation 2:10

³⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:17 *“we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds”* Every generation of believers should assume He is returning during our lifetime. See also 2 Peter 3:9 *“God is not slack concerning His promises...”*

Habakkuk's Prayer

Lord is good for us! It is good for faith! It is good to develop a desire for God that eclipses all other interests and puts Him in the center of our world and thoughts. We are much like the 16 year old that wants their driver's license and a car to go with it. But a wise parent has them wait a few years and let the desire simmer awhile. When it finally happens, they appreciate all the more and treat the gift with a care that shows a level of gratitude that an entitled 16 year old child may not be mature enough to have.

Living By Faith

"Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith" [Habakkuk 2:4].

This verse may be only a truism to some—especially those whose knowledge of biblical terms makes it rather obvious. But we can still ask: whatever did it mean to Habakkuk and what should it mean to us? Even though, as puzzles go, the pieces fit neatly together: pride *is* sinful; so, a humble reliance on God or trust in Him must be the right way to live.

Whoever translated this verse into Greek³¹ understood this verse differently which was later read by Paul, *"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him"*³² [Hebrews 10:38]. This is not exactly what it said in Hebrew, but maybe this is what it meant: *"If one draws back, i.e. they do not believe the prophecy but live in denial of its message, God, will not be pleased with them."*

Dr. Lange understands *faith* to mean *"laying firm hold upon and standing firmly upon the word and promise of God."*³³

³¹ The Septuagint or LXX

³² ἐὰν ὑποστειλῆται οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐν αὐτῷ ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται

³³ John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol VII. Book of Habakkuk, Page 23

Habakkuk's Prayer

And this makes sense in both testaments, Old and New. So faith is standing firm upon the promise(s). *Standing firm? "Adherence ... to the Covenant of God."* says scholarship.³⁴ For Habakkuk who lived under the Old Covenant, the just are those who lived by the Talmud, its 615³⁵ precepts. But we are under grace [Romans 6:15]. *One who believes or trusts in God believes His word, this prophecy. They will live a righteous life.* They are contrasted here with persons who proudly rely upon themselves alone instead of on God in the moment of decision.

Our prayer life defines our relationship with God and relationships are always built only on trust—our faith in God. There are 2 principles here which are incontrovertible:

1. Faith is trust in God which defines our relationship with Him which is only possible through prayer.
2. Trust in the Lord is reliance on Him.

According to chapter 2, if a nation's leaders live for wealth [2:5, 9] and plunder their citizens [2:6, 10], or they by taxation or extortion enslave their citizens into debts [2:7] they cannot pay, or they drug others in order to rape or abuse them [2:15-16], or they shed blood or mistreat the innocent through injustice [2:8] and mistreat animals [2:17], or they teach or promote the teaching of lies [2:18], expect a visit from God in judgment!

We have many reasons here to live by faith and live a life of prayer.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ I added 2 so the numbers would match the Scripture reference.

Habakkuk's Prayer

The Proud

Four more times in Scripture, God clarifies that He hears the prayers of the humble.³⁶ And four additional references are spoken by the Psalmist and Isaiah that God honors the contrite of heart.³⁷ *“Though the Lord is on high,”* David wrote, *“Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.”* [Psalm 138:6]. God is not close to the proud, nor should He be. He finds pride offensive, empty thoughts and lies, *“Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord”* [Psalm 16:5]. Charles Spurgeon waxed eloquent on the subject. *“To a Cain’s sacrifice, a Pharaoh’s promise, a Rabshakeh’s threat, and a Pharisee’s prayer, the Lord has no respect. ... Proud men ... dare to criticize their Maker: but He ... will keep them at arms length in this life, and shut them up in hell in the next.”*³⁸ Proud hearts are playing with “fire.”

“His soul is not upright!” He is self-deceived in his arrogance and hubris.³⁹ Until we in total humility and utter dependence on God, value His mercy and wisdom, prayer has little or no meaning to us. Here is the first Beatitude, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”* [Matthew 5:3]. Here is where everything godly begins, every blessing, every provision of grace, every act of honest devotion. Here is where faith starts. *“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith”* [Romans 1:17].

³⁶ Proverbs 3:34; 16:19; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

³⁷ Psalms 34:8; 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2

³⁸ .C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David.* (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol II. page 1303

³⁹ Behold, he that exalteth himself, his soul is not right in him” [Ecce quae effert se, non recta est anima ejus in eo]. see C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 72

Habakkuk's Prayer

Living by Faith

Living by faith understands the value of prayer. Perhaps, it is worth repeating: If we are persons of faith (Christians) we are persons who cherish a growing closeness and relationship with God, because faith is trust and trust is foundational to a healthy relationship. And relationships cannot be built on this foundation except through communication, dialogue, conversation, listening and talking ...with God, *prayer*. No prayer life makes Christianity merely an exercise in religious ritual and not a life-changing work of God within. We must learn how to pray.

Habakkuk's Faith

Habakkuk's conversation with God revived the prophet's faith. When he began this discussion, Habakkuk expressed a genuine anxiety over the obvious spiritual decline in Judah. The prophet's theology correctly claimed that God finds what was happening in his beloved nation to be abominable. God's disgust didn't seem reflected in God's forbearance, however [Romans 3:25]. The prophet was understandably confused because we only learn the heart of God in prayer. In this conversation with God, the prophet will receive clarification for his faith.

Prayer brings revelation and Habakkuk learned while conversing with God that God was not uninvolved but the divine plan was to discipline Judah in the form of a Babylonian exile. This caused the prophet to reevaluate his own perspective. Judah's evil was systemic. Even the root of the tree, to use a biblical metaphor [Isaiah 5:24] was rotted. Israeli jurisprudence was corrupted by bribes, extortion and partisanship.

The Just Shall Live By faith

"The just shall live by faith" [Habakkuk 2:4] was God's response to Habakkuk's anxious heart. Faith calms the

Habakkuk's Prayer

turmoil within when storms appear on the horizon of our thoughts. Faith always speaks peace to the restless waves of a thousand dangers threatening to capsize our lives. But "*The just shall live by faith*" is more than just a description of genuine faith [Hebrews 10:38]. "*The just shall live by faith*" is also a warning [Romans 1:16-18] that salvation comes no other way.

Habakkuk understood being 'just' to mean 'living a righteous life' in God's sight and that meant obeying the Mosaic Law. The NIV translates "*The righteous person will live by his faithfulness.*" But then the translator wrote a footnote: "*Or faith.*" Here is a footnote that has deserved the right to be part of the main text: Faith and faithfulness are in biblical language the *same word*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "*...faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.*"⁴⁰ Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient can be called a person of faith.

Well, the Law was written into the first covenant with His people [Deuteronomy 28-31] put to verse by Moses [Deuteronomy 32:1-43] for memorization. "*These are not idle words ... they are your life!*" Moses urged obedience [Deuteronomy 32:47]. Nothing has changed—with one exception: the covenant is *new*! We are now under grace:⁴¹ "*no one is justified ... by the law in the sight of God ... "the just shall live by faith"* [Galatians 3:11].

Jehovah Shammah.⁴²

But now the prophet knew God was not uninformed or indifferent to what Isaiah called His "vineyard." As Isaiah learned in prayer. While Isaiah was bearing his soul, pouring

⁴⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. "The Cost of Discipleship" (New York, NY: Touchstone Edition, 1995), Page 64

⁴¹ 613 laws is now Romans 6:15. Recall we added 2 to 613 to recall this reference, 6:15.

⁴² The final words of Ezekiel's prophecy: *The Lord is there.*

Habakkuk's Prayer

out his heart, to the Lord, God blurted out, “*I am here!*” And God *was* there, with Habakkuk. Just the prophet’s conversation with the Lord would tell him that. But at last he knew what this meant. The God who creates, judges and saves will never be only an observer (Deism is not a correct view of God. Our God is immanent.)

God’s Burden

So, the Lord began to set Habakkuk free from his fears and his misconceptions. When he began to talk with the Lord, his *burden*⁴³ was interpreted by many, understandably but incorrectly, as a complaint. Still misconstrued by Habakkuk was how he felt and why. If his prayer is indeed prophetic, as is reasonable to interpret, Habakkuk’s burden must be *God’s* [Ezekiel 12:10; Zechariah 9:1; 12:1; Malachi 1:1].⁴⁴ Here is the difference between theology and prayer. Our theology is talking *about* God while prayer is talking *to* Him. And it is in this conversation that His concerns are made clearer and ours less in focus [John 3:30].

A New Perspective

It is also here that the prophet heard God speak to His heart words that not only would comfort him but open his eyes to another reality, what God was, indeed, up to [Habakkuk 1:5]. God’s reality may walk us through a valley of shadows, shadows that suggest all kinds of dangers, but we are on our way to a mountain pasture where His sheep may graze in peace [Psalm 23]. God does not spare us the harsher truths that often await us on our journey to higher

⁴³ The NIV translated this word “prophecy” and the NKJV reads, “oracle” but the Hebrew is the word “burden” or what is carried. אָמַרָה

⁴⁴ See also Jeremiah 23:34, 36, & 38. The Lord’s burden or what He “carried” within His thoughts and heart were always expressed in words. Thus it is frequently understood as an oracle or prophecy or simply “The Word of the Lord.” But lost here might be the serious “weight” God gives to His concerns regarding His people.

Habakkuk's Prayer

ground. Truth frees; it frees us from anxiety knowing God knows! [John 8:32]. It is not coincidental that our happiness is a product of our fellowship with Christ's sufferings [Philippians 3:10] or accepting the same persecution our Master experienced [Matthew 5:10 -12]. It is in prayer our eyes our opened to this other reality, this other interpretation of our circumstances, of life itself in Christ [1 John 5:11]. And even if Habakkuk could not say all this before Calvary, there is that prophetic glimpse into a higher, divine, purpose behind what was about to happen in Judah when God chose Habakkuk to join so many other prophets to warn them of God's imperative to repent. God would not give them up [Hosea 11]. The Old Covenant called for chastisement [Isaiah 53:5] and until Christ would come to accept this "punishment"⁴⁵ for all; for Judah there would be an exile in Babylon.⁴⁶

Habakkuk's Prayer

"We take away the foundation and destroy the very nerve of prophecy," scholars caution, *"if we restrict its fulfillment to the*

⁴⁵ "The question whether and for what reason this penal substitution was necessary is neither raised nor answered in the Pauline episodes. Paul except the fact that Jesus has died the death of the accursed and that he is thus the Initiator of new fellowship with God. He states this fact, but does not speculate on its necessity. Nevertheless, the punishment of sinners, as he sees it, is not merely threatened by the curse of the Law; it is already initiated, if not completed. Thus there can be no new divine fellowship for those who are accursed, i.e., for those who stand under punishment, except by way of penal substitution." - Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), vol I. Page 451

⁴⁶ Life tends to fall apart for the believer who yields to the tempter [Psalm 119:21]. But it is best to understand this as a chastisement and not a curse [Hebrews 12:6]. Interestingly enough, the word "curse used in this Psalm and in Deuteronomy 28:15 following is a synonym of the word for "blessing"

Habakkuk's Prayer

*Jews.*⁴⁷ What God did, God does! It is time to pray for our nation, too! *"I urge then,"* Paul encouraged young Timothy in his ministry [because a spiritual battle is being fought, Ephesians 6:12, but only by prayer and not marches or arms],⁴⁸ *"first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people"* [1 Timothy 2:1 NIV].

Prayer is in a most literal sense petitioning the King of all kings and this should make us mindful not just of what we ask but of Whom we ask it. *"Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him"* David advised [Psalm 33:8]. Habakkuk begins, *"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord"* [3:2]. And now it is easy to ask, *"Lord, do it again!"*

Habakkuk had a prayer life. It is through prayer we learn of God—prayer, not "signs in the heavens" [Matthew 16:1]. Habakkuk, it is doubtful, would have carried the title, *prophet*, otherwise. Even the Exodus and a celebrated yearly Passover would have been mere ritual and triviality except for a true knowledge of the God Who ransom Israel in that act [Isaiah 43:3]. That knowledge is revealed by faith: and that faith comes only through prayer.

"Lord, do it again!" This is my interpretation of Habakkuk's prayer that God would be awesome again; that Judah would experience God's mercy again because God *is* merciful. That's His shtick! That's Who He is—a merciful God [Psalm 116:5].

⁴⁷ This wording was taken from Gerhard Kittel. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), vol I. Page 450 where the topic of God's curse was being discussed.

⁴⁸ "then" or "therefore" connects this instruction with a recognition in 1:18 of a spiritual battle that must be fought on his knees.

Habakkuk's Prayer

The Simplicity of God

If you tend toward theologizing the words of Scripture, Habakkuk's next words should occupy volumes" *"in wrath remember mercy"* [3:2b NIV]. Scholarship maintains,

1. *"First, all of his attributes are in the background of all of his actions; He is at the same time or in the same action both just [judgment] and merciful."*⁴⁹ *"He is gracious, compassionate, and righteous."* (Psalm 112:4)
2. *"Second, all of his actions will exhibit a unity and consistency worthy of perfect agency."*⁵⁰ *"God is not a man, that he might lie, or a son of man, that he might change his mind. Does he speak and not act, or promise and not fulfill?"* (Numbers 23:19)

As Habakkuk observed, God's wrath is an act of mercy! But how is this to be understood? Scholars refer this to the Simplicity of God by which is meant *"...two kinds of consequences follow for his actions."*⁵¹ But what exactly does *wrath* mean? The Greek translation calls it *"a controlled anger."* A good example might be Jesus cleansing the Temple. It was Monday, the day after Palm Sunday,

Divine Anger

'Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus went directly to the Temple. Once again, the Sacred Zone needed to be swept clean (Mark 11:15-17⁵²). This cleansing differed in some

⁴⁹ Adonis Vidu. *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2014) Page 248

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

Habakkuk's Prayer

respects from that at the commencement of our Lord's ministry. Now the money changers had to be forcibly driven from the Temple Court, for, the Master's earlier admonition unheeded, they had completed turning the prayer chamber, where even Gentiles could come to approach God, into a den for thieves. It is not difficult to see why Jesus no longer referred to the Temple as "My Father's House." The avarice of its keepers had defiled it to the point where it could no longer be identified as the "House of God." At the same time, in the tradition of a Phinehas (Numbers 25:11⁵³) or an Elijah (I Kings 19:10⁵⁴) the Savior defended the honor of God for Whom the Temple was erected and to Whom it had been dedicated. More than this, the time had come to make clear the issues. A cursed fig tree only served to illustrate the spiritual fruitlessness of His own generation (Mark 11:12-14⁵⁵). The priests had exchanged godliness for greed. The Temple, except perhaps in the memory of a few, no longer represented the place where men meet God, the House of Prayer, a Court of Repentance. In another sense, even before Titus, the Roman Emperor in 70 A.D. would dismantle its great stones, its own people had dismantled the great principles for which it stood. Its destruction forty years hence would, in a way, confirm this.⁵⁶

⁵³ Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal.

⁵⁴ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

⁵⁵ The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

⁵⁶ Taken from my own work, *"The Crusade For the Souls of Men: The Gospel Story: When God Walked Among Us. Study Guide"* (3rd edition. Lulu Publishing, 2021)

Habakkuk's Prayer

There is always an element of mercy even in God's rage (the Hebrew term used). God was agitated. Isaiah used the word, "provoked" according to the Greek translation of Isaiah 5:25.⁵⁷ William Temple maintained God never has "*gusts of feelings*"⁵⁸ but He is passionate about holiness. Sin will not enter His heaven. Jesus came and died, simply, to deal with it and put an end to it [Daniel 9:24]. Even in our lives, while we are in prayer, God is dealing with our weakness in temptation and nothing could possibly speak more to His mercy than this!

God is Marching On

*"He now goes along as He went along in the olden times."*⁵⁹ Habakkuk learned. The NIV reads, *"He marches on forever."*⁶⁰ And this is what has been apparent to anyone who has learned God in prayer. God does what God did. So, it is evident to all true believers in Christ that God must inevitably deal decisively with a world of evil. Before we decided to wait on God's response to a nation culturally corrupt, we lived with a self-imposed anxiety. But prayer changes things, changes us and changes our understanding of things. History is not a repetition of unlearned cruelty of man to man. History is now a part of prophecy. History is not man with man, alone, but man with God. History since Calvary is the world's response to the Cross.

It is a shame that life gets so complicated if we attempt at explanations or if we wish to make the right

⁵⁷ see Page 53.

⁵⁸ William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 269. cp. John Stott. *The Cross of Christ Centennial Edition*. (InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL 2021) Page 322

⁵⁹ C. F. Keil C et. al. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1978.) Vol X Part 2 Page 102

⁶⁰ Habakkuk 3:6

Habakkuk's Prayer

choices on our own. Prayer simplifies things because we leave the design of our universe to God. He planted the Garden of Eden; all we have to do is enjoy the flowers, if we learn how through those endless conversations we should be having with Him. Habakkuk's world, the terrible things that were happening in Judah, like Isaiah's Israel, was collapsing in on itself because as John Yoder,⁶¹ in a study of Christian ethics, correctly observed, "*people ... use violence in the name of fostering justice.*" But, he astutely understood, "[they] *are not as strong as they think.*" True, but this is unimportant—something we learn about "on our knees." This is probably another reason why we leave the prayer chamber more at peace than when we entered it. John Yoder continued pointing out the truth worth learning, "*One does not come to that belief by reducing social process to mechanical and statistical models, nor by winning some of one's battles for the control of one's corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the resurrection of the slain Lamb.*"⁶²

Before Calvary, Habakkuk, and Isaiah, had to grasp this truth by prophetic inspiration and trust God, then, that the Savior would someday show up in their world—as we now know He has to die on a Roman cross. And now we wait again for Him to show up in ours at His second coming. Everything still is comprehended by faith in prayer. Nothing has changed for us.

And nothing has changed for God, He is still marching on!

⁶¹ Ward Graham Ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology. The Christian Difference, or Surviving Postmodernism. Introduction: Where We Stand.* (2005).

⁶² John Howard Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1, 1 (1998), pp. 43–61.

Habakkuk's Prayer

Habakkuk Sees God's Glory

Habakkuk called his prophecy, "a vision" [Habakkuk 1:1 NLT]. He described how he felt in verse 16 *"I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled."* His experience had to parallel that of Ezekiel at the brook Kebar.⁶³ Moses testified of a similar experience when he accepted the Law from the hand of the angel.⁶⁴ These were not the only times God's glory overwhelmed the few who witnessed it. When Jesus was transfigured before three of His disciples and the Father interrupted the pretentious ignorance of a young Peter, three apostles in training had a vasovagal syncope episode from sheer terror of it all. In plainest terms, they were spiritually unprepared for the glory of God both seen and heard [Matthew 17:6]. They fainted and needed the Savior's touch to recover. Isaiah testified, *"I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ... Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone"* [Isaiah 6:1,5]. John on the island of Patmos could say, "Amen!" [Revelation 1:9-17].

For the few who may have experienced such a glorious presence of God while in prayer, something real and powerful must have been revealed to them about the magnificence of the God who choose to meet with them. It has to be overwhelming, realizing a visitation by the One who created the vastness of space and the marvel of life. To say God's humble servant is outclassed does not begin to explain anything about such a heavenly encounter.. When the Savior, which at the time appeared so human, told Peter, the seasoned fisherman, where to cast his net for the largest

⁶³ Ezekiel 1:28 "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake."

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 33:2 "The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints"

Habakkuk's Prayer

catch of his career, “he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*” [Luke 5:8].

But the benefit for Habakkuk of this movie with sound that filled the screen of his soul must have been similar to Job’s when God interrupted four theologians who thought to analyze Job’s agony. “*Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.*” God spoke with authority [Job 38:3]. When God was through dressing-down three arrogant know-it-alls who seemed to have all things figured out, Job responded (clearly understandable) “*I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth*” [Job 40:4]. There is a stillness in prayer that reveals to us so, so much, about the God we serve! [Psalm 46:10]. There are times when His glory seems to fill the temple of our souls and we sit or kneel or lie prostrate before Him in absolute silence with barely the sound of our breath audible in that total stillness. And this is good because He is God and it is time for Him to speak and for us to listen and learn!

Prayer Changes the Heart and Perspective

Habakkuk now sets his heart’s thoughts to music—worship music. This is how it should always be. Some of the most painful experiences in life have somehow translated in powerful messages of God’s love and care;⁶⁵ such as:

It is Well with My Soul: written by New York lawyer Horatio Spafford and inspired by a family tragedy, after four of his daughters died in a steamship accident. It is remarkable that as he dealt with his grief, his faith never faltered.

Abide With Me: written by Henry Francis Lyte, Vicar of Brixham in Devon, had the idea for this hymn when he was in Wexford visiting a dying friend.

⁶⁵ Hymn stories. accessed 12/24/22 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5631YF2bXcw38YRnjzLm681/more-about-the-hymns>

Habakkuk's Prayer

Amazing Grace: written by John Newton, a former captain of slave ships who found faith after a violent storm at sea.

Just As I Am: written in 1835 by Charlotte Elliot as an expression of her own faith in God, despite many worldly anxieties.

My Jesus, My Saviour: (Shout To The Lord) written by Darlene Zschech. It is said to have been written at a difficult time in the composer's life, with the line 'shout to the Lord' being a depiction of her holding onto her faith as a source of support.

O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go: written by George Matheson who became blind at a fairly early age and this caused him much hardship and suffering. The hymn has become a particular favorite of those whose lives are touched by tragedy and loss, but who understand that they are held in the arms of a loving God.

Fanny Crosby's hymns, such as: *Safe in the Arms of Jesus; Blessed Assurance; Savior, More Than Life to Me; and Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior* are examples of what God can pen when the strings of the heart are plucked and the music of the soul is set to words. Fanny Crosby saw more in her physical blindness than perhaps we do with our sight.

And now there is Habakkuk's Song, played to guitar and/or violin, or piano, stringed instruments [Habakkuk 3:19 the postscript].

My Rendition of Habakkuk 3:17-18 as a Sonnet:

The land is parched. There is no bill of fare,
The fig tree without bud, the empty vine,
The branches of the olive trees are bare,
No fruit to eat, no oil and no wine.
The shepherd's watch is on an empty pen,

Habakkuk's Prayer

No cattle lowing, vacant is the stall,
No sacrifice to make for sinful men,
No offerings to give to God at all.
And yet it is of worsen times no sign
For all my hope rests in His promise given
Upon His Word let all the faithful dine.
We'll feast anew someday with Him in heaven.
I'll sing aloud His mercies and applaud
The joy of my Salvation and my God.

Chapter Twelve

Culture - Supplemental

As missionaries, we live in a culture not our own. - David Joannes

Our world is changing but, sadly, trending toward a dystopic end. The only hope for the U.S.A. Canada, Europe (The Global North) to arrest this slow but discernible dissolution of our society is the Church. We must remain stalwart in our conviction that Christ alone is its salvation. *"The Gospel is the answer to the world's greatest need."* This was the Church's missionary vision in 1910 and must be ours, too. *"It ... rests on what we recognize as an act of God... We believe that men are made for Christ and cannot really live apart from Him. ... Christ is our motive and Christ is our end. We must give nothing less and we can give nothing more."*¹ [Acts 3:6].

We are watching cultures throughout the Global North regress into a more primitive, nativistic form. Humanity's greatest achievements, the monuments that mark the path of a civilization that boasted of its history, of its science, and thousands of discoveries, are now being culturally dismantled in the name of a "greener" future. Culture is morphing into something which some think demonic.

One definition of the word "culture" is *"the attitudes and behavior characteristic of a particular social group."* A society

¹ Francis M. DuBose ed. *Classics of Christian Missions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), page. 343ff.

Culture - Supplemental

is defined by its culture, as the way of thinking or feeling about some aspect of life or how healthy relationships are defined within the community. In the Global North social norms or mores are now being re-evaluated. Perhaps, this is democracy on a most basic level. If the public says some lifestyle or change is good, it is "good."

As an example: We live in a time of an emerging drug culture which has legalized recreational cannabis. Many drugs are doctor prescribed. *"The fastest-growing drug problem in the United States ... is prescription drugs, and it is profoundly affecting the lives of teenagers,"* informs the Substance Abuse And Mental Health Services Administration.² Peyote, an hallucinatory drug, illegal in the U.S.A., can be used in religious ceremonies of the Native American Church.³ Hallucinogens from "magic" mushrooms, are giving users—a so-called—"spiritual" experience.⁴ This is why I have generalized Paul's admonition to the Ephesian Church, *"And do not get drunk with wine [or any drug], for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit"* [Ephesians 5:18]. The warning is to avoid foolishly trying to escape your world by massaging the brain asleep because the stress level is painfully high. Allow the Spirit of God to put you at peace! The Spirit's high is real and any believer who so waits on God is motivated by a genuine divine love not a false romanticism.

Society is being tampered with by government fiat, judicial opinion, and legislative law, and the change is not in line with Scripture or the desire of God for His church.⁵ A

² prescription drug use accessed 1/2/23 <https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/rise-prescription-drug-misuse-abuse-impacting-teens>

³ peyote accessed 1/2/23 [.https://www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-473/peyote](https://www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-473/peyote)

⁴ hallucinogenic drugs accessed 1/2/23 <https://www.science.org/content/article/mapping-psychedelic-brain>

⁵ The ACLU has a long history of defending the LGBT community. We brought our first LGBT rights case in 1936. The ACLU's LGBT rights

society always has the collective right to disown something previous generations may have esteemed. So monogamy, for example, is no longer considered even natural in human relations. There is a growing outcry in North America and Europe, in the name of personal happiness and freedom, to throw off the shackles of religiosity and experiment with other life-styles, such as casual relations. The movie industry has for years been pushing this idea, making sex a drawing card for viewers. Slowly LGBTQ relations have been introduced through this medium until today it is all prime time stuff.⁶

If a society disavows an absolute morality which, by definition, cannot be altered, or if they no longer believe in a personal, immanent, Divine Being, Whose wisdom should be followed, it is inevitable that such changes will occur. In other words, it will never be by accident or coincidence that a generation will adapt a moral code on principle alone. The principle *is* the code and it is highly influenced by a changing culture. This is, perhaps, a which came first scenario: the chicken or the egg, the custom or the culture that accepts it as a social norm? But nonetheless, we must recognize our culture being altered, reconstructed, before our eyes. We, who are traditionalists or “Boomers” can see it clearly and it is not good.

According to Insider News, *"It's commonly believed that half of all marriages today end in divorce. It certainly feels that way, as headlines are filled with famous couples parting ways. But it hasn't always been this way. In fact, divorce was once taboo."*⁷

strategy is based on the belief that fighting for the society we want means not just persuading judges and government officials, but ultimately changing the way society thinks about LGBT people." - accessed 1/2/23 <https://www.infoplease.com/us/gender-sexuality>

⁶ cp. taken from Season 9 of the TV series “Bones” <https://fb.watch/hOCwBlvUrQ/>

⁷ divorce rates accessed 1/1/23 <https://www.insider.com/divorce-rate-changes-over-time-2019-1>

Culture - Supplemental

The UCLA School of Law, The Williams Institute, conducted a survey of 2,000 questions across 90 countries to feel the social pulse toward gay rights and LGBTQ concerns in general. *"Available evidence indicates that the position of gays and lesbians in societies and the legal status of homosexuality have undergone notable changes in recent decades."* the report learned. For example: *"In Great Britain, the percent saying that sexual relations between two adults of the same gender were "always wrong" fell from 64% in 1987 to 22% in 2012 (Park & Rhead 2013) and in the United States approval of gay marriage climbed from 11% in 1988 to 48% in 2012 (Smith & Son 2013)."*⁸

We are talking *morality*. Morality is the order of a society, and our society is changing. We are observing broad changes across a spectrum of moral concerns and mores from the definition of family to gender identity issues in children, from the life of a fetus to legal matters over marriage. All these issues, once thought the moral and ethical domain of the church to navigate, has now become the ward of the state to decide. *"If religious conservatives find the prospect of gay marriage abhorrent, and secular liberals find it perfectly acceptable,"* Sam Harris of the four horsemen of atheism asserts, *"we are confronted by a mere difference of moral preference — not a difference that relates to any deeper truths about human life."*⁹

Cancel Culture

Cancel culture would eventually and expectantly show itself as a legitimate movement in society. Also known as call-out culture, cancel culture is a contemporary phrase referring to a form of ostracism in which someone is thrust

⁸ LGBTQ survey accessed 1/1/23 <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/public-attitudes-intl-gay-rights/>

⁹ Sam Harris. *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York:Free Press, 2010), 86. Kindle Edition.

Culture - Supplemental

out of society.¹⁰ This is a euphemism for hate; a cultural justification for silencing dissent or ridding society of any sub-culture that does not approve and champion the norms of the society at large. The current culture is going “woke” and it is inevitably being confronted by the true spirit of the Christian church. Wokeness has, already, in many ways broken past the boundaries of morality as taught in the Word of God. But my generation got all this started in the early 1970’s, sad to admit.

Counter-Culture

Doris Kearns Goodwin, the historian, wrote about President Johnson’s vision of “*The Great Society*” which he introduced in a speech at the University of Michigan in 1964 as his solution to the “*irrational discontent*”¹¹ that was spreading like wild fire. The conflagrations that blazed literally across the nation only symbolized a society burning. I was in my late teens and early twenties and I knew something wasn’t right when I, a white boy, was warned about taking my usual walk to church—3 miles—through the black neighborhood. I did it anyway because in my first year of high school the black lads were my closest friends.¹²

None of what was going on around me made sense but it was happening.¹³ Riots were numerous in the nations

¹⁰ Cancel culture accessed 1/1/23 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancel_culture

¹¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York:St. Martin’s Press, 1976), Chapter 8. p.210.

¹² I have re-connected with one of them on Facebook.

¹³ Injustices against blacks and women—against any group—should be addressed. Politicians, who are a nation’s leaders—I agree with Goodwin—are not creative thinkers. They “*respond .. to movements.*” *ibid.* Goodwin. page .212.

Culture - Supplemental

cities—including Buffalo, where I lived. “...urban insurrections ... plagued the country in the hellish 1960’s...”¹⁴

“*The May riots,*” opined Michel de Certeau in August 1968, following the riots in Paris, “*had left in their wake the sense of a cultural trauma and the explicit feeling of powerlessness.*”¹⁵

We were the counterculture generation opposed to more things than just the war in Vietnam. We became the voice of civil rights, freedom of expression—and among others—the poor. Ours was also a sexual revolution, sex outside of monogamy. In protest public nudity carried the visible message of our discontent. How can a president not do something about what Goodwin called “*gradually emerging currents in American awareness—the sense that we were losing control of our own society.*”¹⁶

Polls revealed widespread disenchantment among American youth. In 1970– 1971, one-third of America’s college-age population felt that marriage had become obsolete and that having children was not very important. The number identifying religion, patriotism, and “living a clean, moral life” as “important values” plummeted. Fifty percent held no living American in high regard, and nearly half felt that America was “a sick society.” In this setting, many young Americans no longer saw any reason to heed established conventions about sex, drugs, authority,

¹⁴ Buffalo riots accessed 1/2/23 <http://www.detroits-great-rebellion.com/Harlem-riot.html>

¹⁵ Graham Ward. *Postmodern Theology* (University of Manchester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008), xvi.

¹⁶ Doris Kearns Goodwin. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. Chapter 8. p.212.

Culture - Supplemental

clothing, living arrangements, food— the fundamental ways of living their lives.¹⁷

Our generation was severing the bond with past traditional ways of thinking. In the thoughts of parental alarm, the fear no doubt was that we were tossing away any lingering concept of God. Religion proved too weak to hold us to our social moorings in such a storm. As I see it: society lost faith in the church and soon would lose faith in God, too.¹⁸ For some of us, like myself, this is culture shock!

Culture Shock

*“Satan, [is] a ... student of culture,”*¹⁹ David Joannes cautions. Therefore, we are, he wrote, *“called to be students of culture”*²⁰ as well. Jonathan English artfully pointed out that *“...we live in a culture not our own. We need to be students of the culture that we are in and also students of God’s Kingdom culture.”* He cautioned, *It is easy to slip into our host culture and operate by such natural means that our Christian impact becomes passive and powerless. We need to be aware of the spiritual strongholds around us so that we can point to a different Way of life.”*²¹

Whether Satan employs the unchristian mindset that culturally embodies popular thought or Satan is the author of the evil that we find culturally systemic, is pointless to argue. *“The Bible clearly tells us,”* David Joannes continued,

¹⁷ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American culture, Society, and Politics* (New York:Free Press, 2001), (Kindle Locations 625-631).

¹⁸ cp My work, “Challenged: Living Our faith in a Postmodern Age” self-published, Lulu.com, 2016) pages 217-219

¹⁹ David Joannes *The Mind of a Missionary: What Global Kingdom Workers Tell Us About Thriving on Mission Today* Kindle Edition Page 171

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ David Joannes *The Mind of a Missionary: What Global Kingdom Workers Tell Us About Thriving on Mission Today* Kindle Edition Page 171

*“that there are regional rulers of darkness over each geographical location. The enemy is a master at assembling the history, strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies of a particular place, and successfully disrupting the ... worldview of the said culture’s inhabitants.”*²² Satan’s desire to disrupt the mission God has entrusted us with is apparent. We are not losing our minds when opposition seems to appear from nowhere against some of the simplest expressions of Christian love, or our thoughts wander somewhere we think faith would never take them. It is, indeed, a spiritual battle [Ephesians 6:12].

But not everything is culturally “bad.” Paul advised *“if possible”* [I like these two words in Romans 12:18] live in peace. He sought for a *“common ground”* [1 Corinthians 9:22 NLT] *“... doing everything [he could safely and reasonable do] to save some.”*

A friend of mine who pastored in a suburb of Chicago came east to take a church in the farm country of Central Pennsylvania where the work day began at 4 AM (rising to milk cows, etc.) and the day was spent with hard physical labor followed by a relatively early supper and bed. Everyone, doubtless, owned a truck to be able to negotiate the mountain roads in the winter snow. (Chicago was not any of this.) The mindset of this community—needless to say—differed greatly from that of his pastorate in the more urban environment. These were 2 vastly different subcultures, something, any pastor knows well after they accept a calling to their second ministry. There is always some adjustment needed to find the “sweet spot” where their ministry can be most effective. Too bad I didn’t learn this until 25 years had come and gone and with it ministries in 7 different communities. I discovered also that persons in Massachusetts are very different from the citizens of the Keystone State. I had my favorites, to be sure. But is this not what service to our Lord and His body is all about? David

²² Ibid. Page 169

Platt wisely observed, *“Missions is the overflow of a life in love with Christ.”*²³ And whether we thought of it or no: the Global North is now a mission field! Staying true to the message but being able to interpret it in cultural terms, in the language of the community you are in, without compromise, is what ministry reduces to in its purest form. The mechanics such as carpet color or how well the sound system works or the size of the building are incidental. It is the Gospel that packs a punch [Romans 1:15; 1 Peter 1:5].

On his website Tobias Issara blogged, *“We live in a globalized world where Christians in the West are more resourced and informed than ever but care less and less about God’s global mission. ...Secularism has invaded our faith, and Christian churches have lost their missional edge. We’ve become cultural Christians and are more concerned with ... interests like Super Bowls, Sunday services, personal security, freedom of expression, and status quo spirituality. We don’t actually want to change the world for Jesus because we are comfortable with just being in it.”*²⁴

Ouch!! Our garments are soiled with wokeness?

Wokeness

And what exactly is a woke culture?

The dictionary defines woke: *“alert to injustice in society, especially racism: we need to stay angry, and stay woke.”* Wokeness is a new social construct, a new normal, a mindset that calls for justice and equity, the elimination of poverty, and a higher standard of living for inner city blacks. This sounds most noteworthy, but the way wokeness attempts to achieve these goals seems ill designed to accomplish them.

²³ David Platt, David. “Matthew 26: 1-16–Urbana 15.” Posted by InterVarsity TwentyOneHundred on Vimeo, December 30, 2015. Video, 34: 31. <https://vimeo.com/150364821>

²⁴ Asian Rough Rider, “10 Reasons Why Mission Matters in a Post Millennial World,” June 1, 2017, <https://asianroughrider.com/2017/06/01/10-reasons-why-mission-matters-in-a-post-missional-world/>.

Culture - Supplemental

"In a culture that's grown accustomed to denouncing unequal opportunity while demanding equity for all, privilege is a sour motif." David Joannes maintained, "Thus, secularism's clarion call requires the dismantling of societal constructs that empower certain people at the disenfranchised expense."²⁵ He explained, "But without a moral compass or standard of absolute truth, the secular approach to remedying injustice is doomed from the outset."²⁶

We have yet to describe the adage, *"The Gospel transcends culture"* but we can begin by noting that our calling in Christ and the culture we live in are, in some respects, mutually exclusive realms. If we were to represent each by a circle, they would not intersect or overlap. There is no Venn diagram²⁷ to represent the relation of the one to the other. The Gospel message and the power of God to save is representative of the holiness of God and holiness by definition teaches that we are separated unto Him. We do not *belong* here. *"Your life is hid with Christ in God"* [Colossians 3:3]. Our culture is *heaven*. We are citizens *there!* [Philippians 3:20]. And yet we are here and asked to find those areas of commonality with the inhabitants of our present world that not only present no compromise to our witness but might even become the doorway to sharing God's truth.

Discussing wokeness, we should recollect John 15:19 where the Savior spoke of our message and ministry: *"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."* But how might we interpret the Savior's prayer for us (a prayer He continues to pray, Romans 8:34] *"My prayer,"* Jesus asked His Father, *"is not that*

²⁵ David Joannes . *Gospel Privilege: The Unearned Advantage That's Meant for Everyone* Kindle Introduction

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ A Venn diagram is a widely used diagram style that shows the logical relation between sets, popularized by John Venn (1834–1923) in the 1880s.

you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." [John 17:15, 18]. We are encouraged to revise the popular phrase 'in, but not of' in this way: 'not of, but sent into.'

The big thing to avoid is "carnality."

Carnality

This provides meaning to Paul's frequent use of the term, *carnal*.²⁸ The dictionary simply calls this being "under the control of animal appetites."²⁹ So, I concluded it had a lot to do with hormones and basic needs,³⁰ [Romans 7:14] but that is too simplistic because some of our animal instincts are necessary to survive as a person and as a species. God designed the body (the flesh and its appetites) that way.

So, we might redefine the word carnal as "the old man" to be distinguished from the "new man," human nature when it conflicts with the work of the Spirit within us. [1 Corinthians 3:1, 3-4]. We should not be living as depraved Adams and Eves. Rather we must follow the path of Divine Wisdom and the Spirit's guidance. [2 Corinthians 10:4].

²⁸ There are 7 references in 6 verses. in Paul's letters to Rome and Corinth. Carnal in Greek is σαρκικός - pertaining to the flesh. But in some scripture scholarship prefers the spelling σαρκινός or what our nature is "made of." The difference can be illustrated using the word "stony" instead of "fleshy." a 'stony' place is one where the stones are many,

a 'stonen' vessel would be a vessel made of stone. So, one word means to exhibit the deeds of the old nature, the other means in essence the old nature.

²⁹ Joseph Thayer. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon. Hendrickson Publishers, 1996) Page 569

³⁰ My doctor says I have the testosterone of a 30 years old. I no longer think this "carnal.'

Culture - Supplemental

Richard Trench taught, “*carnal lusts are lusts which move and stir in the ethical domain of the flesh, which have in that rebellious region of man’s corrupt and fallen nature their source and spring.*”³¹ I thought his word “ethical” astutely observant. Again, to simplify: Paul isn’t talking about being tender with your spouse or eating a good steak and salad or needing rest for one’s labors, although all these relate directly to the needs of the body. Paul is saying that although we are *in* the world we are not to be *like* it. He told the Corinthians [1 Corinthians 3:1] —not that they *were* carnal—unsaved—but that even as believers they were *acting* that way. They were acting like spiritual children! Selfish, possessive, fighting.

The Galatians were even biting one another: “*But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*” [Galatians 5:15]. It is this devouring that reminded me of “cancel culture.” And it is Trench’s word “ethical” that told me we were in the *moral* sphere of conduct. We are watching the culture in our world change—and not for the better—because ethics and morals are no longer following a divine pattern.

For the believer this is culture shock. It is a period of adjustment to an unfamiliar world which Jesus cautioned us about and which we must never endorse or emulate. When in Rome *don’t* do as the Romans do! Believers have a relationship with God and others of like faith, and that relationship must be nurtured like any living thing. Carnal acts are poisonous to it! Much like small doses of arsenic or lead that weaken or sicken the body over time, it might be a while before we notice that our prayer life has all but disappeared (maybe reduced to an “Amen” after a congregational prayer in church). It may be a while before we realize the Bible is dusty, before we, in retrospect, notice that our joy is in things and not Him, and we cannot

³¹ Richard Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) Page 273

Culture - Supplemental

remember the last time we thanked God for anything! We are probably missing a lot of church, too.

Living in this culture but maintaining our witness requires a faith that is resolved to go on notice with our world that we are not of it. Many of us prefer to hid behind ignorance and silence because it is less confrontational that way. But we must guard against this. *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”* [1 Peter 5:8].

Transcending Culture

It is important to understand that the Gospel message is not the property of any culture. It is God’s! Dr. David Platt defined a missionary as *“a disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church, to cross geographic, cultural, and/ or linguistic barriers ... among unreached peoples and places.”*³² “Cultural and linguistic barriers”? We always interpreted this to mean “foreign” places and languages. We might argue that all this talk of culture relates to foreign missions where the missionary and the inhabitants do not speak the same language.

Au contraire! Words even in the *same* language may not have the same meaning within differing *local* subcultures. Our message has been explained for many generations in ‘evangeleze’ in a language that in woke terms makes no sense.

For example: What is sin? *“Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today,”* lamented Bishop Fastiggi,³³ *“is that men have begun to lose the sense of sin.”* When I was growing up the joke

³² Dr. David Platt. Mission Precision: defining Missionary, Radical, June 12, 2017. <https://radical.net/podcasts/radical-podcast/you-need-biblical-mission/>

³³ Robert .Fastiggi. *The Sacrament of Reconciliation: An Anthropological and Scriptural Understanding*. Chicago, IL. Hillenbrand Books, 2016

Culture - Supplemental

was “Jesus saves green stamps.”³⁴ They misrepresent “faith” as a belief in what cannot be seen or proven (because God is not real to them: Hebrews 11:6). To them, grace has to be essentially a form of entitlement, a right, because we are all equal in their minds. (But it is: **God’s Reach At Calvary Extended.**) Happiness, in a woke world, is based on individual choice (They do not know the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7). You get the idea.

“In the traditional sense,” wrote Herbert Kane, *“the term missionary has been reserved for those who have been called by God to a full-time ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6: 4), and who have crossed geographical and/or cultural boundaries (Acts 22: 21) to preach the Gospel in those areas of the world where Jesus Christ is largely, if not entirely, unknown.”*³⁵ [Romans 15: 20]. Well, The Americas and Europe are now mission fields and every christian living in these countries needs to consider themselves a missionary!

Because our message is outside culture (it is not on the school’s curriculum) the temptation is to keep our faith to ourselves and live in peace, but wokeness does not want our silence; wokeness wants our approval and support. In the movie, *A Man For All Seasons*, the idea of silence is open to interpretation.³⁶ Thomas More uses silence as a tool to protect himself and his family, believing that silence is truly neutral.³⁷ By speaking, he knows he will incriminate himself, whereas by keeping silent he hopes to remain innocent in the eyes of the law. Unfortunately, to the king, silence is not neutral; it is both malicious and (eventually)

³⁴ Stamps collected to reduce the cost of items similar, perhaps, now to coupons.

³⁵ J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Baker Book House, 1975). . From David Joannes. *The Mind of a Missionary: What Global Kingdom Workers Tell Us About Thriving on Mission Today*.

³⁶ Taken from <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-man-for-all-seasons/themes/the-meaning-of-silence>

³⁷ Qui tacet consentire videtur is Latin for “Silence gives consent.”

treasonous. Moore was executed. The idea of silence can easily be manipulated by those in power.

But whereas the traditionalists and “boomers” keep their heads down and furtively slip through the cultural scene, younger folk, the GenX’s, Millennials, and GenZ’s are conforming. Dr. Solomon Asch, Polish-American Gestalt psychologist and pioneer in social psychology,³⁸ found that *“The tendency to conformity in our society... is a matter of concern.”* Asch observed. *“It is so strong that reasonably intelligent and well-meaning young people are willing to call white black.”*³⁹ [Recall Isaiah 5:20].

David Joannes alerted, *“The force of our present-day social milieu still influences conformity and often leads to groupthink. While the vox populi [the opinions or beliefs of the majority] contains positive attributes, the subtleties of social influence tend to elicit lethargy rather than positive deviant behavior. In many ways, conformity impedes emphatic missional living.”*⁴⁰

Questions

Can we just say “Jesus loves you” and leave the larger questions about abortion and LGBTQ behavior up to God? To what extent does the lifestyle culturally endorsed and promoted *hinder* the Gospel message? We have come to accept “divorce” as a cultural expression that does not contradict the Gospel message. Many pastors are in that number. We have accepted tattoos and body rings and pink hair, why not men wearing dresses or holding hands? There are now “safe spaces” where no one judges any difference in

³⁸ Conformity accessed 1/2/23 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Asch

³⁹ Solomon E. Asch. Opinions and Social Pressure, *Scientific America* 193, no. 5 (November 1955), <https://www.scribd.com/doc/249982831/Asch-1955>

⁴⁰ David Joannes. *The Mind of a Missionary: What Global Kingdom Workers Tell Us About Thriving on Mission Today*. Kindle version. Page 87

Culture - Supplemental

appearance or behavior as long as everyone does it in their own space and does not encroach upon another's. Yes, the old white man is not allowed in, but this probably is not his world, anyway.

Should the church ignore all this in the name of “gospel transcendency”? An anthropologist to a college class on anthropology that I attended told the delightful story of visiting a tribal chief somewhere along the Amazon River. He brought a gift for the chief's wife: a tee shirt. She came out of an inner chamber in their tent not knowing he was there and turned red face when she saw him. She scurried back inside. He was embarrassed because she was bare-breasted. She was obviously shamed. With his apologies, he offered the gift of the shirt to the chieftain for his wife, which the chief took to her. A few minutes later, she came out to greet the anthropologist. She had cut two holes in the shirt to free up her bosom to the tropic air. But she was now wearing her nose ring—the reason for her embarrassment. How would a missionary tell this story? It looks like western cultures have encouraged civilized tribal woman to wear shirts now. Is that not important?

What I am asking is: What aspects of culture are to be considered in conflict with the absolute moral code of God? And what aspects can we let slide? It is maintained that salvation frees the sinner from the sin, that if LGBTQ behavior is not holy, salvation means that they will no longer practice such behavior. So, I ask: If LGBTQ persons are warming to the Gospel and seeking the Savior, are they allowed to take communion? Can they serve in church office?

Whatever we believe, may it not be a vote of condescension to cultural prerogatives, social norms, or wokeness. The Gospel is not the voice of the people; it is not a democratic document. The Gospel is the voice of God which must be believed and followed.

Isaiah

Returning to Isaiah's 6 woes, these are not about the cultural changes in social and domestic relations. The six woes are not, per se, about sex or gayness or men in dresses. The woes outline a social neglect, lies and injustice which the poor endure in the elites' personal interest in good times, wealth, fame, and power. So, why talk about wokeness if this is indeed an ideology that shows a greater concern for the poor?

Well, wokeness in name only champions the cause of the poor. Walter Brueggemann called the 4th woe God's pronouncement against "*hypocrisy and self deception in the contradiction between deed and Word.*"⁴¹ He labeled our verse 20 in Isaiah 5 "*distorted behavior*"⁴² ... *Jerusalem ... so self-indulgent that it can no longer see reality beyond its own short-term benefit.*"⁴³ Now I must quote the good professor because I need someone to join me in saying what must be said as a clear warning to God's Church:

*"The point is perhaps the use of euphemism in public discourse that disguises what is in fact reality, as in the current talk of our society where in 'downsizing' means unemployment, 'opportunity' means the unrestrained, unregulated power of the strong, and 'law and order' means a vengeful defense of the status quo. The distortion may be a lack of any reference point, resulting in confusion, or it may be deliberate deception done to obscure what is going on."*⁴⁴

It is not the social aspects alone of a woke ideology that concerns God; it is the *moral* side of things that God addresses throughout Scripture. Take a step back from the

⁴¹ Walter Brueggemann. *Isaiah 1-39* (Westminster John Knox Press. London: 1998), Page 53

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. Page 54

⁴⁴ Ibid.

world we live in and take an honest look at what is happening and how all this impacts the church. We cannot deny that there is a general movement away from God's Word. The Global North, in the name of freedom of expression, scoffs at those aspects of holy living and behavior commensurate with following the Savior. The Hebrew has a good word for this,⁴⁵ translated "to despise, with head raised loftily, to disdain with a careless disregard." It associates with a word meaning "repulsive, abhorrent, disgusting, loathsome" [Isaiah 49:7; Amos 5:10]. That's what the so-called civilized world thinks of God and His Word. This is Isaiah 5:20.

Modern cultural ideas allow for hormone theory for children, the convenient availability of pornographic literature online as well as a liberal representation of nudity in movies, an inordinate interest in body imagery and eroticism, the expansion and encouragement of gambling through multiple media, extended single parent (fatherless) families, casual sexual relations and homosexuality. None of these are biblically endorsed or endorsable. Wokeness in a divisive way discourages the nuclear family and paternal leadership in the home and in society.

I have begun a rereading of all of Isaiah beginning at the beginning starting with Walter Brueggemann's commentary on Isaiah. Here is how he began:

"The book of Isaiah provides a large rereading of historical reality that is strikingly pertinent to the current condition of Western culture. The displacement (and subsequent exile) is a credible way to characterize Western culture, given the collapse of traditional certitudes and the demise of covenantal social infrastructure.⁴⁶ Western culture now faces a displacement that it may indeed be expressed as an exile. And like the book of Isaiah,

⁴⁵ The word הִרְבָּ

⁴⁶ infrastructure (see Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*

Culture - Supplemental

*serious people are now disputatiously engaged in a struggle for the shape of the future. ... one can read through the concrete particularity [in Isaiah's time] into our own time and place, for it turns out that our time and place is much like that time and place. Believing people, moreover, dare to imagine that the same Holy One who acted in that time and place in disruptive and embracing ways still continues to disrupt and embrace even now."*⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Walter Brueggemann. *Isaiah 1-39* (Westminster John Knox Press. London: 1998), Page 6-7

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