

Consider Your Ways!

© 2010 Tony Garland

I. The Context

- A. The southern kingdom of Judah had just undergone judgment having spent 70 years captive in Babylon.
- B. As predicted by Isaiah, when Medo-Persia overthrew Babylon (as recorded in Daniel 5), King Cyrus permitted the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple, but only a relatively small group had returned.
- C. Encountered opposition to their plans to rebuild. Concluded that it must not be time to rebuild and progress languished.
- D. As the delay lengthened, the people busied themselves with their own pursuits and priorities.

II. Haggai 1:1-11

- A. In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.'"" Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, "[*Is it*] time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple [*to lie*] in ruins?" Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages [*to put*] into a bag with holes." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. [*You*] looked for much, but indeed [*it came to*] little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that [*is in*] ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of [*your*] hands." (Haggai 1:1-11)

III. Symptoms Of God's Judgment

- A. Working hard without results.
- B. A series of couplets:
 - 1. "You have sown much, and bring in little;
 - 2. You eat, but do not have enough;
 - 3. You drink, but you are not filled with drink;

4. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;
 5. And he who earns wages, Earns wages *to put* into a bag with holes." (Hag 1:6)
- C. Out of step with God
1. Violating or ignoring God's principles for how to live
 - a) "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little" (Hag. 1:9)
 2. God *actively* interferes with their productivity (a curse)
 - a) ". . . and when you brought it home, I blew it away. . . ." (Hag. 1:9)
 - b) "For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of *your* hands." (Hag. 1:11)
 - c) "I struck you with a blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me," says the LORD (Hag. 2:17).
- D. Misplaced priorities - focus on self rather than God
1. "[*Is it*] time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple [*to lie*] in ruins?" (Haggai 1:4)
 2. "[*You*] looked for much, but indeed [*it came to*] little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that [*is in*] ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house." (Haggai 1:9)
 3. Calvin

" . . . they were guilty of ingratitude towards God; for private benefit was by every one almost exclusively regarded and there was hardly any concern for the worship of God. Hence the Prophet now reproves this indifference, allied as it was with ungodliness . . ." [Calvin]
 4. Hearts set on their own gain
 5. Idolatry: placing self ahead of God
 - a) The same problem which led to the captivity in the first place!
 - b) "Then they shall know that I [*am*] the LORD, when I have made the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed. As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' So they come to you as people do, they sit before you [*as*] My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, [*but*] their hearts pursue their [*own*] gain." (Ezekiel 33:29-31)
 - c) How many boom/bust cycles will it take before Israel would learn? Before we will learn?!

IV. The Cause

- A. Out of touch with reality: forgetting God as the Source of all blessings!
- B. Extensive passage in Deuteronomy 28
 1. Primarily applies to God's promises to Israel if she remains in obedience as His chosen nation.
 2. Yet some of the principles, I believe, apply to any nation or individual which truly seeks after God.
 3. Listen to the "blessed" repeated over and over!
 4. Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: Blessed *shall you be* in the city, and blessed *shall you be* in the country. Blessed *shall be* the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed *shall you be* when you come in, and blessed *shall you be* when you go out. The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe *them*. (Dt 28:1–13)
- C. God is the source of all good things. When He blesses: the water flows, the buds blossom, the cow gives its milk, the bees produce honey, the womb yields its fruit, the rain waters the ground, financial gears are lubricated, and true prosperity results!
 1. But we increasingly operate in an environment where God is being shoved out of our plans and ignored as the source of our prosperity—which we now pursue on our own terms as if His world is somehow disconnected from Who He is and what He has said!
 2. Historically, God has always responded to this error the same way: by removing His blessing and sending a curse to bring us up short, to force us to see the impossibility of being blessed apart from recognizing Him as the source of all blessing.

V. The Cure - "Consider Your Ways!" (vv. 5,7)

- A. Literally, "set your hearts upon your walks"
 - 1. "hearts" = feelings, thoughts and emotions
 - 2. Think about what you are doing!
 - 3. God isn't fooled by what we say—even though we ourselves may be. Our actions tell where we really are!
 - 4. We "do" that which we "believe."
- B. "Walk" - God wants us to "walk our talk."
 - 1. Talk is cheap – isn't that what Isaiah and Jesus taught?
 - 2. Jesus, speaking to hypocrites of His own time:
"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with [*their*] lips, But their heart is far from Me. . . .'" (Matthew 15:7-9)

VI. Consider Your Ways

- A. Fasten your seat-belts: this is not going to be pretty.
- B. Let's consider some of our ways *as individuals*.
 - 1. Finance
 - a) Unbridled materialism
 - (1) Mindshare on shopping, bargains, willing to drive anywhere if the price is right.
 - (2) Materialism plunging us into unbiblical levels of debt.
 - b) Violating contracts.
 - c) Robbing from others through default.
 - d) We've imbibed society's victim mentality: it's someone else's fault, not mine!
 - 2. Time
 - a) Too busy to focus on God.
 - (1) For some, the pursuit of money and success has eclipsed their pursuit of God.
 - (2) Others find different places to spend their time: hours watching television or movies, surfing the internet, or texting and talking on the phone.
 - (3) Regularly attend a Bible study? Read through the Bible in a year! You must be joking!!
 - b) Church is optional.
 - (1) Growing number of Christians completely out of fellowship.

- (a) From external appearances, these can sometimes appear to be most zealous for the Lord.
- (b) They say they love God, but their works deny Him: they are disobedient and deceived. Obedience is better than sacrifice (1S. 15:22).
- (2) Irregular and inconsistent participation in the local church.
 - (a) Inability to build a consistent foundation of understanding, both for adults and especially for their children.
 - (b) This peace-meal "catch it as you can" approach to learning about God virtually guarantees a stunted Christian walk.
 - (c) Church is "just another optional activity" if we aren't busy or don't happen to feel like sleeping in.
 - (d) Much of what constitutes church grown today is found among congregations which have retooled their priorities to minister to the selfish felt-needs of the society. How can we draw people by focusing on what they want?

"Conversations," theology-lite, hook them and attempt to hold them through entertainment, lots of fast-moving activities, visuals and media.
 - (e) Lacking the fruit of the Spirit associated with consistency and staying power: longsuffering (or patience), faithfulness, self control. Where is faithfulness? Where is self-control to be found among Christians of today?
- (3) The result: church-goers who call themselves "Christian" but embrace a world-view which is increasingly out-of-step with the teaching of their professed Lord, Jesus Christ.

3. Nevertheless, bless me God!

- a) "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Have you come to inquire of Me? [As] I live," says the Lord GOD, "I will not be inquired of by you."' (Ezekiel 20:3)

C. Let's consider our ways *as a nation*.

1. Education

- a) Educator John Dewey, a signer of the Humanist Manifesto, got his way: the religion of atheism (secular humanism) now reigns supreme over the educational institutions of the land.
- b) Teachers and coaches cannot even implicitly acknowledge the supreme creator without threat of disciplinary action or even law suit.
- c) Students are indoctrinated in evolutionary dogma – where there is ultimately, no purpose in life. Then they are told to "go forth and do great things!" This is irrational.

- d) Evidence of intelligence and design in nature is deemed to be “non-science” and therefore inadmissible in the classroom—never mind the fact that such evidence is associated with all technical engineering endeavors.
- e) Teachers and administrators increasingly saddled with pushing paperwork and offering diverse programs while performance on foundational subjects declines.
- f) Students are taught moral relativism: it is quite acceptable to have the wrong answer so long as one can explain how the incorrect answer was arrived at.
 - (1) The result: students who’s confidence is out-of-step from their inability.
 - (2) They feel great about themselves, but are increasingly unable to function in a credible way in society.
- g) A generation brought up with an entitlement mentality which is on a collision course with the reality of the marketplace.
- h) We are not doing our young people any favors!

2. Media

- a) FCC: the complete loss of moral restraint in relation to violence, sex, and language.
- b) The unprecedented exposure of minors to violence, premature sexualization, and even sexual predation.
- c) Where conservatism can be found, it is all too often an ailing conservatism.
 - (1) A shallow moral conservatism intensely promoting a religious patriotic zeal which is increasingly disconnected from the essentials of repentance, grace, and redemption and the true knowledge of God.
 - (2) Schizophrenia of supposed conservative sources of information promoting lewd and licentious programs and columnists.
- d) Technology is enabling ever higher-definition, ever more realistic images and sounds. But instead of blessing us by its godly potential, it is increasingly used to underwrite and distribute morally offensive material to inappropriate target audiences in ways that are difficult to monitor or control.

3. Medicine

- a) Health crisis looming due to an increasingly obese population.
 - (1) An increase in food-related disorders, often manifesting psychological unease which is aided and abetted by the view promoted by secular science and education that we essentially live a purposeless existence.
- b) Abortion and euthanasia: taking God’s prerogative over life into our own hands.
 - (1) Are we soon to be following in Sweden’s path where, as of 2009, sex-selection abortions are now legal?¹

¹ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/03/11/the-scandal-of-gendercide-war-on-baby-girls/> accessed 20100508.

- (2) When our developing health crisis fully flowers and resources become scarce, what role might euthanasia play in channeling care away from the elderly toward other "higher-priority" patients?
- c) Pushing aside all limits in regard to artificial birth technologies.
 - (1) Reproduction outside the context of marriage between a man and a woman.
 - (2) Sacrificing the unborn on behalf of scientific experimentation, possibly leading to organ harvesting of the innocent.
4. Military
 - a) Rejection of National Day of Prayer leader over truthful comments concerning Islam.
 - (1) Franklin Graham, this year's honorary chairman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force and son of the well known evangelist Billy Graham, had been scheduled to speak at the Pentagon for an official National Day of Prayer event. But, just two weeks prior, he was disinvited by Pentagon officials after complaints were made about his statements concerning Islam.
 - (2) An estimated 80 percent of those enlisted in the U.S. armed forces identify as Christians² yet the military pussy-foots around the obvious association between Islam and the motivation of our most recent attackers.
 - (3) Meanwhile, our military is mired in armed conflict within two Muslim nations exporting terrorism fueled by Islamic ideology.
 - b) Christian chaplain's rights to pray in the name of Jesus is under fire.
 - c) Mixing of women and men (and homosexuals) in compromising situations of warfare, away from families, in close quarters, often lacking in hygiene, for extended periods.
 - d) How long can a fiscally irresponsible nation fund a world-class military?
5. Government
 - a) Courts of the land are rapidly purging the very Judeo-Christian principles upon which the country was established and guided to its position as a world power.
 - (1) Undermining the Biblical definition of marriage and enshrining homosexuality as a civil right.
 - (2) The criminalization of Biblical truth concerning the nature of sin. (Recently, a British street preacher was arrested for simply including homosexuality among a list of activities which the Bible declares to be sin.³)
 - (3) Meanwhile, the institution of the family has fallen upon hard times—its demise both outside and within the church—hastened by the selfishness which characterizes our culture.

² <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/05/06/who-will-be-tested-next-the-dilemma-of-franklin-graham/> accessed 20100508.

³ <http://www.bible-prophecy-today.com/2010/05/its-getting-dangerous-out-there.html> accessed 20100508.

- b) Ongoing bestowal of most-favored nation status on a communist nation with repressive political and religious policies.⁴
 - (1) Intolerance of all political dissent, lack of freedom of religious practice.
 - (2) China's one-child policy has been implicated in an increase in forced abortions and female infanticide.
 - (a) In some Chinese provinces, there are more than 130 baby boys for every 100 baby girls. The culture places a premium value on sons, and girls are considered an economic drain.⁵
 - (3) Troubling reports concerning the practice of harvesting organs from prisoners and political dissidents and selling them on the black market.
 - (4) MFN: motivated by pragmatism (money, big business, what works) over principles (what do we as a nation believe and endorse?).
 - (5) As we continue in our moral compromise, day-by-day, China becomes the head and we become the tail.
 - c) Fiscal suicide - irresponsible violation of basic principles of money management.
 - (1) Printing money from thin air: devaluing the existing money already in circulation.
 - (2) Bailing out institutions and, in some cases, captains of industry at the cost of those who have handled money responsibly.
 - (3) Undertaking enormous debt for the next generation spelling the end of prosperity for years to come.
 - (4) Devaluing the hard-earned savings of those who planned one day to retire.
 - (a) "He who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6).
 - (b) What is the bag with holes called? "Social security," "medicare," "IRA," "401K."
 - (5) The facts on the ground would seem to indicate that the United States is even now a debtor/slave nation although it hasn't fully dawned on us yet—we still seem to be swaggering on the global stage under the pretense of being a world power.
- D. Nevertheless, bless our nation God!
- 1. If we continue on this path, what is God's response likely to be?

⁴ <http://www.fas.org/man/crs/92-094.htm> accessed 20100508.

⁵ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/03/11/the-scandal-of-gendercide-war-on-baby-girls/> accessed 20100508.

- a) Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: "To what purpose [*is*] the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies-I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing [*them*]. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, (Isaiah 1:10-16)
- E. Unless we, as individuals and as a nation, wake up, consider our ways, and repent, I'm convinced we will face a repeat of Israel's experience when Phineas' wife, at the capture of the Ark of God by the Philistines and at her departure upon the birth of her son, declared: "Ichabod . . . the glory of the Lord has departed . . ."

VII. Resources