

at their lives and at the Word of God and point out the inconsistencies therein, as long as the priest left them alone and didn't bug them about their sin, as long as no one spoke up concerning their fallen state, as long as everyone went along to get along, the people were happy and content, but this did not mean that God was.

They were actually shocked when they lost the first battle, and even more so after losing the second battle to the Philistines. Even as a vanquished people, even as those fleeing from before the armies of the Philistines, I'm certain that some still wondered to themselves what had just happened.

'But we brought the ark of God in our midst, our victory should have been assured, we should have won this battle, maybe God is losing His touch, maybe the years have taken a toll.'

Men today have the same reaction to hardship and calamity in their life, because well, they went to church once in a while, and they wrote out a check for the 'special fund' and the 'church fund' they even donated items to goodwill, and now this has happened.

On the surface, superficially, the church of today is doing great. We're building buildings, building colleges, building universities, building recreation centers, we're innovators and pioneers in speaking volumes but really saying very little, we're geniuses at marketing and self-promotion, and through it all we think God is with us, how could He not be, until the day we have to stand and fight and realize that He has long departed.

What many today fail to realize, even many believers I'm sad to say, is that spiritual and moral decline are progressive in nature. Unless a nation actively seeks to stop its descent into sin and depravity, unless a nation actively seeks to change course and return to God, it will continue to fall further and further into the pit because it has no bottom.

'Well, it's gotten this bad, but thankfully it can't get any worse.'

These are actual words I heard passing the lips of a pastor who was lamenting the fact that the church could have done more in preventing the rapid decline of both morality and spirituality in this nation. When I asked how he had come to the conclusion that it couldn't get any worse, his only response was that he

couldn't think of anything more depraved going on than what was already going on. I shook my head and simply said, 'then you have no understanding of how evil flesh can truly be.'

Unless God has enough and calamity comes, unless the cup of God's wrath finally boils over and catastrophe upon catastrophe will begin to be visited upon our shores, mark my words, it can get worse, it will get worse, because sin knows no limits, perversion knows no bounds, and somehow, some way, the unimaginable will become common practice.

The third evident sign, the third harbinger of doom is the decline of social order.

Judges 21:25, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

When no order exists, chaos is guaranteed. In the twentieth chapter of the book of Judges we are even witness to an all-out civil war, wherein the children of Israel turned against the children of Benjamin and struck them down with the edge of the sword. These were all Israelites, just from different tribes, but because there was no order, because lawlessness abounded, brother turned against brother and unprecedented chaos reigned supreme.

Israel had no king, and as such everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Not having learned the requisite lessons that history would have gladly taught us, it is as it was, and more than ever before everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes.

More often than not one hears the qualifiers 'I feel' or 'I think' in regards to the Word of God, and most often what we are feeling or thinking is in opposition to the Bible. I've said it before, and it is certain that I will say it again, if our feelings or our thoughts on a doctrinal or Biblical matter contradict the Word itself, then we are in open rebellion toward God, worshipping idols of our own making rather than the Christ.

Oddly enough, when people feel a certain way about a given Biblical doctrine, or think a certain way about a certain passage, they are never inclined toward a more sanctified walk, or a greater degree of faithfulness and righteousness, but rather toward a widening of the narrow path of faith.

We cannot do what is right in our own eyes, we must do what is right in God's eyes, and it is man who

must submit to the authority of God, and not the other way around.

Israel refused to repent, Israel refused to live in accordance with the laws of God, yet when it came to it they thought they could force God into defending them, they thought they could force God into protecting them, and they thought they could force God into giving them victory over the Philistines.

'Let's bring the ark of God into the camp, surely that will compel God to give us victory over the enemy, it's His ark, His laws are contained therein, surely because we have brought the ark with us, our victory is assured.'

Unlike man however, God cannot be pressured into doing something against His nature, God cannot be made to overlook sin simply because we carry a trinket with us. He is righteous and holy and altogether just, and He acts and reacts in accordance to His nature.

We fall into our own snare of self-delusion if for one second we believe that we can somehow find a way around repentance and turning our hearts back toward God as a nation. Israel tried, and they failed miserably. They wanted to keep their idols, they wanted to hold onto their sin, they wanted to continue in their rebellion, but also have the protection and provision of God.

A nation in rebellion against God, cannot expect to have His protection! A nation in rebellion against God, cannot expect to have favor in His sight!

'But we have 'in God we trust' on our currency, surely that should count for something.'

Israel had the ark of God in the camp, and they too thought that should count for something. We cannot despise the things of God, we cannot rebel against His will, we cannot declare our independence from Him all the while expecting Him to be like a long suffering grandfatherly type, who just shakes his head, shrugs his shoulders and gives us what we've been asking Him for anyway.

When men attempt to remove the justice of God and the righteousness of God from among His attributes, then it is easy for them to conclude that no matter how they dishonor Him, no matter how they marginalize Him, no matter how they bring offense to Him, He must be there, ever willing to give us victory over

our enemies because His love will compel Him to do so. The only problem is that although men have attempted to remove these attributes, although they've attempted to expunge the notion of God's justice and God's righteousness in regards to who He is, and conveniently leave only the love aspect of God intact, God Himself has not changed, nor has He done away with either justice or righteousness.

Psalm 7:11-15, "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts. Behold the wicked travails with iniquity, conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made."

So when exactly is God angry with the wicked, is it just once in a while, was it just in the Old Testament days? No, God is angry with the wicked every day, and if the wicked does not turn back, if the wicked does not repent, if the wicked does not humble himself and seek the face of God, then God will sharpen His sword.

Because we have chosen rebellion rather than repentance, because we have chosen iniquity rather than righteousness, because we have hardened our hearts as God called us to turn back to Him, He is sharpening His sword, and bending His bow, and preparing for Himself instruments of death.

The harbingers of doom are evident even to the most obtuse among us, even to those who refuse to believe that God still judges in righteousness, and that His justice is perfect. Although the following might be unpopular, even politically incorrect, it is nevertheless true, we have dug the ditch into which we have fallen with our own hands, and in our rebellion we refuse to acknowledge that there is but one remedy, one way out of the pit, and that is by turning back to God.

Jeremiah 51:9, "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; for her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies."

With love in Christ,
Michael Boldea Jr.

THREE

Harbingers of Doom

I spent a good thirty minutes trying to find a title that was less fatalistic than 'the three harbingers of doom' but no other title would suffice. I then spent another hour in prayer, trying to decide whether or not I should include this article in the newsletter, since it will most likely anger some. In the end I decided I would rather have some people angry with me, than be found guilty of the sin of omission before an omniscient God.

Before I begin I want to assure you the title of this article is not meant to elicit a fearful response, but by the same token it is not exaggerated by any means. Throughout history we have seen these three harbingers of doom, destruction, catastrophe and devastation, and it would be foolish for us as wise children of God to dismiss them or pretend they don't exist just so we won't have to deal with the issue. If you sweep enough dust under a rug, eventually it becomes a hillock, and sooner or later you either remove the dust from under the rug, or do away with the rug altogether and plant an azalea bush in the middle of your living room. Although logically and reasonably it would be to our benefit to talk about the pink elephant in the room, many a preacher and pastor still refuse to do it, because to admit that for years now we have seen these selfsame harbingers within our own nation, is to admit that tragedy and calamity are not far behind. And who wants to hear that nowadays?

As the Spanish philosopher George Santayana once said, 'those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.' I would go a step further and say that the only people who cannot learn from history are the stubborn, the foolhardy, and those unfortunate souls who feel as though they already know everything and as such, have nothing left to learn.

History is a great teacher in what to do as a nation,

as well as what not to do as a nation, and so today we will journey through history, more specifically the history of the nation of Israel and see the warning signs that calamity was near, and the magnitude of the calamity once it arrived.

Israel was a nation accustomed to winning battles, or armed conflicts. They went to war with the expectation of being victorious, of conquering their enemy whether their enemy outnumbered them or not. They had become so accustomed to winning battles, they had become so accustomed to having the Lord by their side and obtaining victory, that when the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel, it was neither frightening, surprising, nor a reason for concern.

To the armies of Israel, it was just another battle in a long line of battles that they would surely win because the Lord was on their side, and if the Lord was on their side how could they lose?

1 Samuel 4:1-2, "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the philistines encamped in Aphek. Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field."

Being defeated on the field of battle was a new experience for the armies of Israel, and by the Philistines no less who'd had their clocks cleaned by the Israelites more times than they could number. Four thousand men lay in the dust, dead or dying, and as the people came back into the camp they began to question why it was that the Lord had defeated them before the Philistines.

1 Samuel 4:3, “And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, ‘Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies.’”

They did as they had purposed, they sent for the ark, the ark arrived, and when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook.

Perhaps they weren’t paying attention in Sunday school class, perhaps they had forgotten the lessons their parents had taught them, but Israel was getting excited over a symbol, when the substance thereof, had long departed. Yes, they shouted, they worked themselves up into a lather, the earth shook, and the Philistines were afraid, but this did not change the outcome of what was about to transpire.

The Philistines knew their enemies well, they knew that the same God that had struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness, was the selfsame God that was presently in the camp of the Israelites. What they didn’t know however, what they couldn’t possibly know because even the elders and the priests hadn’t yet figured it out, is that what they had brought into the camp was nothing more than a fancy box, because the glory of God had departed.

Even though they were afraid, the Philistines knew they had no choice but to go into battle, and after a pep talk of sorts they did just that.

1 Samuel 4:9-11, “Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men and fight!” So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas died.”

By any definition what had just occurred was an unmitigated disaster. It was a catastrophe of epic proportions, made all the more vivid by Israel’s exuberance at seeing the ark of God come into the camp, then losing thirty thousand foot soldiers, on top of the four thousand they’d already lost, the sons of Eli,

and the ark itself to the Philistines.

So what brought about this astounding defeat of Israel’s army? What brought this catastrophe upon a people that God Himself called His own? Could they have prevented this from happening? Were there warning signs that what they believed would be an easy victory wouldn’t turn out as such?

Yes, this defeat could have been prevented, yes the warning signs were evident, and if the watchmen had not been distracted by other things, if the watchmen had not stopped watching, perhaps this catastrophe could have been averted.

No, God was not busy with something else; no, God was not on hiatus; no, God hadn’t confused His schedule and forgotten that Israel was about to go to war with the Philistine army, God had departed, because those who were to be His people were acting like anything but, and those who were supposed to uphold the virtues of righteousness and holiness were as defiled as the godless Philistines they thought God would deliver into their hands.

For those with eyes to see the warning signs of impending doom were clear. These signs are just as evident, and clear today, if not more so than they were in the days of old, and once again, only those who choose to ignore them can pretend that all is well, and that there is no reason for concern.

So what were these three signs, these three harbingers of doom that were so evident?

The first evident sign, the first harbinger of doom was the decline of the spiritual, or of spirituality, among the people. Preceding this great catastrophe the people had given themselves over to idols, they were worshiping graven images, they had mixed with the people that surrounded them and adopted their traditions, their proclivity for sin, as well as their gods. In essence the people of God had assimilated with those of the world and the outcome was a hideous amalgam of the sacred and the profane, a people who still believed that God was with them even though His glory had long departed their midst.

Even after all these years of studying the Word of God, it still amazes me that although the fear of the Lord had long ceased to exist among them, although reverence for the things of God had long ceased to be

evident, although the keeping of God’s statutes had long ceased to be practiced, the people still believed or at least assumed that God was with them, and that they would be victorious over their enemies.

Judges 17:1-3, “Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, ‘The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears and here is the silver with me; I took it.’ And his mother said, ‘may you be blessed by the Lord my son!’ So when he had returned the eleven shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, ‘I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you.’”

This is just one of many examples of how convoluted the people’s thinking had become, how polluted and contaminated their hearts were, how impure and tainted their spiritual lives had come to be, that there was no longer a delineation between the Lord, the one true God, and the idols they were worshipping.

Here is a woman who by her own words had dedicated the silver which she had previously cursed to the Lord, then offers it up that a carved image might be molded from it. Lest we forget the first commandment that God gave to Moses is that the people have no other gods before Him, yet here this woman was having an idol molded of her silver, all the while dedicating it to the Lord. She was doing as unto the Lord, something the Lord hated, and commanded against, yet in her mind it seemed reasonable, and even something worth bragging about.

This is what happens when we attempt to blend, to amalgamate, or to meld the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, and mindsets of the world with those of the household of faith. No good can come of it. Compromise as the church might, there will be no tolerant and all-inclusive utopia, wherein the perverted, profane, and blasphemous will walk hand in hand with the righteous, the sanctified and the holy. The only thing that will occur is what has occurred in the past. We will become a bane in the sight of God, a stench in His nostrils, and the recipients of His well-

deserved wrath.

Another thing that occurs as a direct result of spiritual decline is that the people begin to look for teachers who will tickle their ears, who will not convict them of their sin, and who will not preach the righteousness of God.

Within the same chapter in Judges, there is yet another telling interaction between the man from the mountains of Ephraim named Micah, and a young man from Bethlehem, who was a Levite, and from what the Word tells us, a wanderer of sorts, going from place to place, and residing temporarily wherever he could. As it happened his journeys took him to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah.

Judges 17:9-10, “And Micah said to him, ‘where do you come from?’ So he said to him, ‘I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to sojourn.’ Micah said to him, ‘Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes and your sustenance.’ So the Levite went in.”

If it were not so tragic, one would think that the preceding interaction was the beginning of a bad joke.

‘A stranger walks into a house, and the master of the house wants to make him a priest!’

Perhaps there was still some spiritual figure in Micah’s life that spoke the truth to him, perhaps there was still someone who was willing to point out the inconsistencies, so what he did was create and finance his own ‘yes’ man.

‘I’m going to pay you, I’m going to clothe you, I’m going to feed you, you better say what I like to hear, you better tell me I am the apple of God’s eye, and that I am blessed coming and going, and that my cup is going to be pressed down, shaken together and running over. You’d better say soothing things to me, you’d better tell me how good and noble I am, because I’m holding the purse strings buddy, I’m the one paying your way. Just keep that in mind before you go spouting off ‘words from the Lord’.

How, is what is happening today in most churches any different than what Micah did with the young Levite?

‘No, we don’t care if you weren’t called to the ministry, nor do we care that you know nothing of

the Word of God, or even the paramount importance of Jesus Christ, or even that Jesus is the only way to salvation, you have the look we’re looking for, you have a great smile, and our polling suggests that you seem trustworthy to senior citizens and women between the ages of thirty five and fifty six. We’ll pay you well, buy you nice suits, get you a mansion for a parsonage, and all you have to do is crack a few jokes, speak in platitudes, avoid controversial topics like hell, or Jesus, or repentance at all cost, and make us feel good about ourselves. If we have a deal, sign on the dotted line.’

Solomon was right; there is nothing new under the sun, just the same old perverted human nature that attempts to supplant God, reinventing the same old schemes and tricks to keep their hearts from being convicted, and one of the best methods of doing this, is knowing that the person who’s supposed to be your spiritual leader is well in your pocket, indebted to you, and so comfortable in his current existence that he would not dare rock the boat.

The second evident sign, the second harbinger of doom and one that one could argue is a direct result of the first, was the decline in morality, or of a moral standard.

We read of the moral decline of Israel in the Word of God, and often times one must stop and wonder if it was truly the people of God that were being described. The sins and immorality that they gave themselves over to would make even the most hardened of souls blush, committing openly, sins that God both abhorred and detested, and still does to this day.

A traveler journeying from Bethlehem to the remote mountains of Ephraim, stopped in a city called Gibeah to lodge for the night. An old man seeing the traveler sitting by himself in the open square, offered him a place to stay, as well as food and drink.

Judges 19:22, “Now as they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, ‘bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!’

The story just gets worse from there, with the man’s concubine being abused until the morning,

dying on his threshold and being cut up in twelve pieces, but I think you get the point of the moral decline that Israel found itself in.

Perversion, depravity, sin, all these were arbitrary terms to the people of that time, just as they are to the people of our time, and if it felt good, then they did whatever felt good, and because it felt good, they reasoned to themselves, it couldn’t be wrong or sinful. The pleasures that satisfied today, no longer satisfied tomorrow, and so the appetite for perversion continued to grow until men were surrounding the homes of their neighbors, beating down the doors wanting to do unspeakable things to their guests.

A nation reaches the height of its spiritual and moral decline when the priests, the preachers, the pastors, the elders, those who ought to be the spiritual authorities of the time likewise descend into sin and depravity.

1 Samuel 2:12, “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord.”

Who were the sons of Eli? The sons of Eli were priests in the house of the Lord, those who were to be the mouthpieces of God and bring offerings before Him. Yet they were corrupt, they did not know God, they abused and profited off of those who came to bring offering to the Lord, and even lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Because of them, because of the sons of Eli and their great sin before the Lord, the men abhorred the offering of the Lord.

1 Samuel 2:22-24, “Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So he said to them, ‘why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord’s people transgress.”

Two chapters later, in 1 Samuel, Israel gets conquered by the Philistines, the ark of God is taken, thirty four thousand soldiers die, as do the sons of Eli, and Eli himself upon hearing of the catastrophe that had befallen the Israelites.

Throughout their descent into lawlessness, throughout their journey from sacred to profane, never once was there a self-analysis, never once did they look