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Render unto
Caesar?

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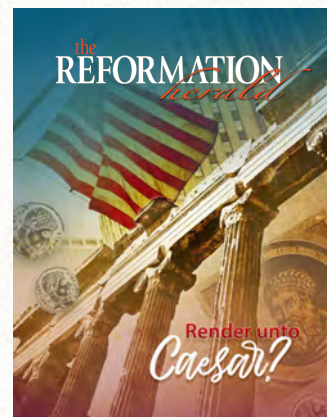
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with honest, thinking people
who fear God and are eager
to know what in the world is
going on?*

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"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—
men who will not be bought or sold."—*Education*, p. 57.

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GOLD AMID THE GLOOM

Could anyone from past generations ever have pictured our world today? Technological advances abound at breakneck speed in fulfillment of Bible prophecy, just as the prophet Daniel was told that at the time of the end, “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4). Means of transportation have certainly skyrocketed, enabling mobility to increase exponentially—and no doubt about it—knowledge has increased.

Yet what kind of knowledge? We might categorize it as follows:

1. The knowledge of God’s goodness. For example, the prophecies of the book of Daniel sealed up for millennia are today open to our understanding. The Word of God has become an open book as never before.
2. Complex engineering technologies based on sound science and human experience which typically might be used either for good or for evil.
3. The knowledge of evil.

In the garden of Eden was a tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and our first parents were warned not to partake of that tree whose very name showed it was not all evil. The fruit may have seemed harmless—but in reality the good of that tree comingled with evil. That’s why they were warned.

In recent generations, there’s been much indulging in the fruit of that tree, figuratively speaking. Currently, the rampant knowledge of evil has become a plague upon humanity. Childhood innocence has been blighted and the moral compass of our race seems to have been almost completely eradicated.

A DIRE SITUATION IN NEED OF A SOLUTION

Nearly 120 years ago, the observation was already made:

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in

their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”¹

This was the greatest “want” (or “need”) back then, and so it is today. The next few sentences are equally important:

“But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.”²

BEING BRAVE, BEING BOLD

We all admire people willing to risk their fame, fortune and even life itself for a truly worthwhile cause. The cause of God in these last days requires self-surrender and self-discipline. How does this happen? How are Christians to witness of His grace to a society darkened by immorality and discouragement?

“Trials patiently borne, blessings gratefully received, temptations manfully resisted, meekness, kindness, mercy, and love habitually revealed, are the lights that shine forth in the character in contrast with the darkness of the selfish heart, into which the light of life has never shone.”³

“Our profession of faith may proclaim the theory of religion, but it is our practical piety that holds forth the word of truth. The consistent life, the holy conversation, the unswerving integrity, the active, benevolent spirit, the godly example,—these are the mediums through which light is conveyed to the world.”⁴ May we shine as such lights in the strength of Christ! *R*

References:

¹ *Education*, p. 57.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 44.

⁴ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 307.

The King of the Jews

By Liviu Tudoroiu



For many centuries, the Hebrew nation did not have a king. God's intention had always been for that nation to be an exemplary one—thriving as a theocracy tenderly guided by the Creator's loving, benevolent direction.

The LORD declared: "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great,

that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:5–8).

Obedience to the Almighty would have ensured their prosperity even in this world. When later, in the time of Jesus Christ, the nation announced to Pontius Pilate their clear refusal to recognize Christ as their King, this was simply a repetition of a historical event from Old Testament times. In essence, the Christ of the Old Testament was rejected as King of the nation just as He was in the New.

GETTING WHAT THEY ASKED FOR

In the time of Samuel the prophet, priest, and judge, "All the elders of Israel gathered themselves

together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:4–7).

Samuel felt hurt by the determination of the people, thinking that he himself had been rejected—when in fact the Lord Jesus Christ was the One being rejected. The people were demanding a king; they were asking for a "Caesar," preferring a man above the real King of the Jews.

So, God gave them a king, "Cae-

sar." This first Jewish king was named Saul. Basically, Saul (along with many of the kings that followed him) was of a very similar character to that of Nero or Caligula or some of the maniacal Caesars that the Roman Empire was to produce centuries later.

There, under the power of that cold, despotic soul, the people of Israel suffered tremendously.

Under the reign of Saul, the people became very divided on socio-political matters. They distrusted each other. The best way to describe life in Israel under Saul's reign was misery, suffering, and intrigue.

A striking similarity was likewise to be seen in the Jewish nation at the time of Jesus Christ.

The same kind of dysfunctional relationship, the same intrigue, the same fear, and the same social disunity. Society was divided on political and religious matters—and these divisions have been fed upon, speculated upon, and abused by religious people.

In Christ's day, manipulative techniques were used by the priests and politicians to try to incriminate Him on false grounds of treason against the Roman Empire.

Although the Jewish people traditionally hated Rome with a passion, they hated Jesus even more—so they did not hesitate to carry out their plotting in the most political and supposedly religious manner.

Barabbas had been charged on three accounts—treason, instigation to rebellion, and murder—and the Roman government had put him in jail. His case was likely due to be addressed by the authorities, and in the end, his sentence would be the death penalty.

WHEN CHRIST WAS BORN

The existence of Jesus Christ, proclaimed as One born to be King of the Jews, had been terrifying news for Herod and Caiaphas. They feared that such a thing would place their position of power—which was, in fact their god—into jeopardy.

In their minds, for Jesus to be born as a king would automatically imply an invitation for Herod to

resign his governorship office immediately. An innocent inquiry had been addressed by the Eastern magi:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matthew 2:1, 2).

This simple question raised a high level of inflamed jealousy, a quiet sort of panic: "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" (Matthew 2:3).

When this question was addressed, the entire city of Jerusalem was asleep, a nation that was sleeping, using the prophecy as their pillow. Sadly, they failed miserably to understand the time of the Messiah.

They were not ready for such a surprise. This nation had to be evangelized by strangers, often called "pagan" magi, but these pagans had a more receptive spirit to the word of God than the sons of the kingdom. They were privileged to be royal blood, the spiritual "blue blood," but the choices they made led them to the point of Christ's prophecy:

"Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11).

NOW AND IN THE NEAR FUTURE

Today's society is experiencing a similar pattern of belief, and the religion of Christianity is transforming itself into a dangerous routine and formalism. It's very hard to understand why we never learn from the mistakes of others. It's very hard for us to understand why we somehow seem to repeat the same scenario in every generation. The apathy that is enveloping the world today is in danger of leading us to the fatal decision of crucifying Christ in His followers.

The words, "Where is He that was born king of the Jews?" resounds in our ears today. He is in



The words, "Where is He that was born king of the Jews?" resounds in our ears today. He is in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, of course, yet I believe the best way to envision the answer is: On the cross of Calvary.

the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, of course, yet I believe the best way to envision the answer is: On the cross of Calvary.

The most brilliant, highly educated society in the world and in Scripture—those who were the royal blood the sons of the Kingdom—have rejected their own Creator.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" are the words that have changed the entire course of humanity. "Crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him!" were the words that showed how far their world went in divorcing itself from God.

The King of the Jews was hanging on the cross for the very ones that were screaming and cursing at Him.

Today, now—our generation—is the generation in which God will fix the destiny of the world forever. Jesus is coming soon. The King of the Jews will be seen coming in the clouds of heaven. This time He will not be seen on the cross of Calvary—but only by those that crucified Him.

So, don't be in a rush to take up stones against those that love Jesus. Don't rush to cry with a loud voice, "Crucify them, crucify them" because such words will come back one day. Those words will hit home—and that's why we need to pray that the Lord will give us a compassionate spirit and an understanding and patient attitude towards the things we don't understand. *R*



By Walter Lukic

Treason Against the Roman Government

Part I

THE JEWISH GOVERNMENT IN THE TIME OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION

The greatest question in the universe is the question: What is the ultimate reality? The next most important question, closely related to the first one, is this: Who is entitled to the highest authority in the universe—the power to make laws and to rule over the beings endowed with intelligence and moral judgment—and what should be one's response to that authority? Different worldviews have offered different answers to these questions.

According to the Christian worldview, as revealed in the Bible,

the ultimate reality in the universe is God, the Creator and Sustainer of everything that has come into existence—except sin. God is an omniscient and personal Being who makes both moral and natural laws, and sovereignly rules over His entire creation. This sovereign God delegates some of the governing authority to human legislative and judicial bodies but reserves the matter of religious worship to His exclusive jurisdiction.

That same God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to this world to save the fallen human race. Jesus came to His own people, the Jews, as Israel's

Messiah. The main purpose of His coming was to reveal the character of His Father, to preach the good news that the kingdom of God was at hand, and to save His people from their sins.

When Jesus was born, His nation and their land were occupied by the most powerful empire the world had ever seen—the Roman Empire. Most Jews bitterly resented the occupying force—along with its military and its civil servants. The greatest tragedy in the history of Jewish people was not the Roman occupation, but rather the failure to recognize in the humble Galilean

teacher their long-expected Messiah. During the few years of Jesus' public ministry, the tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious and civil establishment grew to the breaking point: The national leaders saw in Jesus' life an imminent threat to their national existence and in Jesus' death the only means of preserving the Jewish nation.

Since the Jews at the time of Jesus did not have the power to pass and execute a death sentence, they delivered Jesus to the Roman governor, requesting that He be condemned and executed under the Roman law. The charges laid against Christ were blasphemy and sedition (or treason) against the Roman Empire, the capital offences under the Jewish and Roman law, respectively. The judicial treatment of Jesus and of His crimes, as alleged by Sanhedrin and confirmed by the Roman governor, are the subject matter of this article. In the first part, we will provide some background information about the Jewish state and society in the time of Christ. In the second part we will reflect on the trial of Jesus from both a religious and a legal viewpoint, and warn of the dire consequences that occur when a civil authority acts on behalf of a religious authority and enforces the laws that violate religious and civil liberties.

BEFORE THE TIME OF HEROD

For a proper understanding of the relations between the religious and civil authorities and Jesus of Nazareth, here is a brief historical survey of the Jewish state and religion in the time of Jesus. The opening chapters in the synoptic gospels (the first three gospels) introduce to us the Herodian rulers. As we read more about them in the Gospel narratives, we might be puzzled about their identity and their relationships. It is helpful, therefore, to trace the origin of the Herodian rule in Palestine and to distinguish several rulers in that dynasty. Yet, to understand the origin of the Herodian dynasty, it is appropriate to say a few words about their predecessors, the Hasmonean royal family, which served

The Persian Empire came to its end in 331 B.C. when the Macedonian (Greek) king, Alexander the Great, defeated the Persian king Darius III in the Battle of Gaugamela (Arbela).



as a springboard for the emergence of Herodian rule in Palestine.

The kingdom of Judah was dissolved through several Babylonian invasions, the final one being the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. Following the Babylonian captivity, a good number of Jews, led by Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, returned to their homeland under the Persian king Cyrus and his successors. The Persian Empire came to its end in 331 B.C. when the Macedonian (Greek) king, Alexander the Great, defeated the Persian king Darius III in the Battle of Gaugamela (Arbela). However, shortly after Alexander's death (323 B.C.), his kingdom was divided among Alexander's four generals. Ultimately, the territories governed by the four rulers consolidated in two major kingdoms – the Ptolemaic Kingdom governed from Egypt, and the Seleucid Kingdom with the seat of government in Syria. In the Hellenistic period, the Palestine was first under the reign of the Ptolemaic kings, and from about 198 B.C. it came under the control of the Seleucid (Syrian) Kingdom.

"One of these sons, Judah Maccabeus (or Maccabee), a brave and successful warrior, led the revolt. Judah died in a later battle, and was succeeded by his brother Jonathan. However, the Seleucid king, Diodotus Tryphon, soon tricked Jonathan into attending a conference where he was subsequently captured and executed. Simon, the fifth and last of Mattathias' sons, then became the new ruler of Judea, two decades after the initial revolt from the Seleucid kingdom. This marked the

beginning of the Hasmonean dynasty. Under the Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus, Judea conquered Edom (Idumea) and forced the Edomites to convert to Judaism. Eventually, Antipas, an Edomite, was appointed ruler over Idumea and his son, Antipater, became chief advisor to the Hasmonean king. Antipater managed to establish a good relationship with the Roman Republic, which had grown in influence in the region. It was during this time that the kingdom of Judea became a Roman protectorate (63 BCE). When Antipater later led the Jewish forces to the help of Julius Caesar in his struggles against Pompey, he in turn was rewarded with Roman citizenship, freedom from taxes, and an appointment as the first Roman procurator in Judea. The high office enabled Antipater to promote the interests of his own house. Antipater appointed his own sons to positions of influence: **Phasael** became Governor of Jerusalem, and **Herod** was appointed Governor of Galilee."

THE HERODIAN RULE

Herod the Great (74/73–4 B.C.) ruled in Palestine as *basileus* ("king") of the Jews and a Roman allied king (*rex socius*). His reign commenced nominally from 40 B.C., effectively from 37 B.C., and lasted until his death in 4 B.C., which is the span of 33 years. Herod ended the previous dynasty and ushered in his own Herodian dynasty. By terminating the royal line of Jewish blood and by inaugurating his own royal authority of Idumean (Edomite) ancestry, and further, by his unorthodox ad-

herence to the Jewish religion and yet an unswerving loyalty to the Roman eagle, Herod created an enduring animosity among his Jewish subjects. From the day he became a king until his death, Herod was the Roman puppet king—both installed and closely supervised by the Roman Empire. He faithfully served the interests of that Empire and balanced those interests against the interests of various Jewish classes and his personal interests.

Historians are somewhat divided in their assessment of Herod the Great. Most scholars agree that Herod as a character was ruthless and unscrupulous. But they also acknowledge that he was an exceptionally successful builder of Judea, an efficient statesman and administrator, and a capable military commander whom **Augustus Caesar** regarded as an associate king. During most of his reign Judea experienced prosperity and her boundaries extended further than they did during the reigns of David and Solomon (including the western part of today's state of Jordan and southern Lebanon and Syria belonged to Herod's kingdom).

Herod's fame as a builder of Judea in the times of Greeks and Romans, is unsurpassed. Some of his buildings were designed for defence (like massive fortresses Antonia, Masada, Herodeion, Alexandreion). He also built several splendid new cities, notably Caesarea, Sebaste, Agrippias. As a patron of Greek culture, Herod built monuments, public buildings, even temples to pagan gods in foreign countries. His greatest building enterprise was the reconstruction and expansion of the temple in Jerusalem. The work began early in 19 B.C. and the finishing touches were put A.D. 63, only seven years before its destruction.

Herod's long rule was marked by tensions arising from two main sources—his own family, and to some extent from uncertain political winds blowing from Rome (particularly in the earlier period of his reign). He never lost a firm grip on power and never hesitated to use any means to eliminate every real or perceived threat to his supremacy.

The governor earned an infamous distinction for ruthlessly murdering even his closest family members—after accusing some of high treason. For example, Herod's eldest son, Antipater III (the son of his first Jewish wife, Doris), who incriminated his two half-brothers a few years ago, was charged with fratricide and with a conspiracy to murder his father. While lying on his deathbed Herod ordered Antipater's execution and immediately rewrote his will. Three of his sons—in addition to the many others—were killed under his command. Herod's infamy for murdering his closest relatives is attested by Macrobius, a pagan writer in late Antiquity.

The secular historians' assessment of King Herod agrees with the testimony of the sacred historians. In the opening chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, Herod appears as a ruthless and bloodthirsty villain. In chapter 2 of Matthew, we learn of an unspeakable tragedy that befell the inhabitants of Bethlehem of Judea. The wise men from the east ask of Herod the king the question: Where was the newborn King of the Jews? (v. 2). When Herod learned from the chief priests and scribes that the prophesied King of the Jews, the Messiah, would be born in Bethlehem, he sent the wise men there with an instruction to advise him of their findings. Since the honorable visitors did not return to Herod, in his paranoid fury the king issued an order that all male children "from two years and under" in Bethlehem and its vicinity be killed (v. 16). Through divine intervention, the child **Jesus** was to escape the murderous intent of the cruel tyrant. Following the "Massacre of the Innocent" in Bethlehem, Herod did not live much longer. He died in Jericho after an extremely painful, putrefying illness of uncertain cause, known to posterity to "Herod's Evil." He was buried in a castle palace, Herodium, in the Judean Desert, about 12 km south of Jerusalem.

THE HERODIAN SUCCESSION

During his lifetime, Herod was married to ten wives with whom he

had fourteen children—hence plotting Herod's family tree, and taking account of all his descendants, is not an easy task. This matter is further complicated by the custom of some Herodians to marry their relatives (consanguine marriage). It should come as no surprise to us, therefore, to encounter in the biblical records several rulers by the name "Herod."

Due to Herod's constantly changing sentiments toward his wives and children, his last will and testament was changed at least three times. In his final will that was ratified by **Caesar Augustus**, the territory over which Herod ruled was divided among his three sons. Two of Herod's heirs, Antipas and Archelaus, had the same mother, Malthace, a Samaritan woman. The third heir, Philip II, was born of Cleopatra of Jerusalem. It should be noted that on Herod's death, a deputation of aristocrats from Judea asked for the abolition of the Herodian rule in favor of a Roman governor, yet Augustus chose to honor Herod's will. Augustus was to grant roughly one half of the kingdom to Archelaus, giving him the title of an ethnarch (a ruler, lesser than king, of a common ethnic group) and the other half was divided between Antipas and Philip II as tetrarchs.

In Herod's last will, **Archelaus** (in power from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6), was designated as a king, but Augustus recognized him as an ethnarch (a ruler, lesser than king, of a common ethnic group). His territory consisted of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (biblical Edom). Archelaus is said to have had all his father's defects of character, but little of his administrative and diplomatic ability. Apart from being an energetic builder, little else had distinguished Archelaus except his tyrannical rule of about nine years. Archelaus was so oppressive that in A.D. 6, two embassies, one from Judea and one from Samaria, lodged serious complaints against him in Rome. To avoid popular revolt, Augustus deposed Archelaus and sent him into exile (Vienne, Rhône valley). **Judea obtained the status of a Roman**

province governed by a prefect (*praefectus*), later known as procurator, appointed by the emperor.

The prefect exercised jurisdiction in capital offences (*ius gladii*) and commanded a body of auxiliary troops (Roman, non-citizen military units, typically made of locally recruited soldiers). This fact was to be of significance for the trial and execution of Jesus Christ.

Archelaus is explicitly mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew 2:13–23 in the story about Jesus' parents' flight to Egypt and their return and settlement in Nazareth: "But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. . . ." (vv. 22, 23a). Archelaus' journey to Rome to be acknowledged as a ruler by Augustus, while opposed by his countrymen, might have been alluded to in Jesus' parable of the talents in Luke 19 (particularly in verses 12, 14, 27).

Philip II, also known as Philip the Tetrarch, is identified in the Gospel of Luke 3:1 as a "brother of Herod" (Antipas) and a "tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis." Josephus provides more details about the territory of Philip's tetrarchy, including in it Auranitis, Gaulanitis (today's Golan), Batanea, and the district around Paneas. This was the land which Herod the Great received from Augustus, the least prosperous part of Herod's kingdom, east and north-east of the Sea of Galilee (today's Golan and Hauran—northern Jordan, south-east Lebanon, and southwest Syria). Philip's territory was populated for the most part by Gentiles. The word "tetrarchy" in the Greek language literally means "the rule of four," or one government divided in four parts, with a different person ruling each part. The kingdom of Herod the Great was divided among his three sons, and the fourth part (toparchy of Jamnia) was given to Herod's sister, Salome (following Salome's death in A.D. 10, her part

was incorporated into the Roman province of Judea).

Philip rebuilt and enlarged the Hellenistic city of Paneas, named after the nearby grotto and shrines dedicated to the Greek god, Pan. The city became the administrative capital of his realm and was renamed Caesarea in honor of the Emperor Augustus. This city is known in the Bible as Caesarea Philippi (to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima, built by his father, Herod). At the outskirts of Caesarea of Philippi Peter professed Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16:13–20).

East of the point where the Jordan River enters the Sea of Galilee, Philip rebuilt another well-known city from the time of Jesus—Bethsaida ("Fishertown" or "House of Hunting"). Philip was a moderate and tolerant ruler, unlike his other

two ruling half-brothers. He married his niece Salome, daughter of his half-brother Philip by Herodias. This Salome was the one who was to dance at the feast of her other uncle, Herod Antipas, and there, on the advice of her mother, Herodias, ask for the head of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:6–10; Mark 6:21–28). Other than that atrocity, Philip led a relatively peaceful rule for 37 years.

HEROD ANTIPAS—THE MAN WHO IMPRISONED JOHN THE BAPTIST

Herod's son who features most prominently in the gospel accounts is **Herod Antipas (Antipater)**. Antipas ruled as tetrarch over two provinces of his father's kingdom—Galilee (western side of the Lake of Galilee) and Perea (the eastern

Antipas received a stern rebuke from John the Baptist, whom he afterward placed in prison. Through a tragic chain of circumstances and the diabolical malice of Herodias, the great prophet of God lost his life.

Antipas did not condemn Jesus to death, but he humiliated and abused Him. And he reconciled with the Roman governor for some past grievances through Jesus' suffering and death.

bank of Jordan and northeast of Dead Sea). He stayed in power the longest of all Herodian rulers—42 years (4 B.C. – A.D. 39). His subjects informally called him “king” (*basileus*). This practice is reflected in the gospels. Mark, and to some extent Matthew, call him “King Herod” (Mark 6:14, 22, 25, 26, 27; Matthew 14:9; but in Matthew 14:1, Antipas is called “Herod the tetrarch”).

Antipas proved to be the most accomplished of Herod's sons. He was a reliable ally of the Roman emperors, first of Augustus, then of his successor, Tiberius. Like his father, he was a patron of Hellenistic culture and a great builder. His signature accomplishment was Tiberias, a predominantly Gentile city built on the west shore of the Lake of Galilee. Antipas married the daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV (9 B.C. – A.D. 40), but after about twenty years of marriage, he became attracted to his niece and sister-in-law Herodias.

Herodias was daughter of his executed half-brother Aristobulus, and the wife of his other half-brother, Philip (known as Herod Philip I, prince, but not a ruler). Herodias agreed to marry Antipas on the condition that he divorce his first wife, the Nabatean princess. Antipas' wife returned to her father, King Aretas IV, but her departure seriously damaged Antipas' relations with his southern neighbors, precipitating several military engagements. Further, for marrying the wife of his half-brother, Antipas received a stern rebuke from John the Baptist, whom he afterward placed in prison. As mentioned earlier, through a tragic chain of circumstances and the diabolical malice of Herodias, the great prophet of God lost his life.

Thereafter, Herod Antipas was soon to learn of the mighty works of a great prophet in Galilee. This news would make him fear that John the Baptist had resurrected from

the dead (Matthew 14:1, 2; Mark 6:16–18; Luke 9:7–9). Some Pharisees warned Jesus that Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, sought to kill him: “At that very hour some Pharisees came, and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ And he said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.’ ” (Luke 13:31, 32, ESV). Herod Antipas' desire to meet the great Galilean prophet will be fulfilled. Antipas was in Jerusalem for the great feast, and Jesus was there to “finish” His course. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was to deliver to Herod Antipas the Galilean preacher who claimed to be the King of the Jews. Jesus stood trial before Herod Antipas as a judge, and the ruler made every effort to induce the Son of God to perform some miracle or at least to say something in His defense. Yet Jesus remained silent. Antipas did not condemn Jesus to death, but he humiliated and abused Him. And he reconciled with the Roman governor for some past grievances through Jesus' suffering and death.

Yet he ultimately reaped the grim harvest of his dishonesty and treachery. As the saying goes, the mills of God grind slowly. In A.D. 36, Herod Antipas sustained a crushing defeat at the hand of the Nabatean king for shame he had inflicted upon the Nabatean royal family. But his judgment day was not yet over. Agrippa, the brother of his wife Herodias, soon became Antipas' nemesis, a close friend and confidante of the future Roman emperor Caligula. Following the death of Philip II, Caligula made Agrippa the king (**King Agrippa I**) over the Philip's tetrarchy, causing jealousy in Agrippa's own sister: Herodias later induced her husband, Herod Antipas, to ask of the emperor the title of king for

himself. But King Agrippa was a step ahead of them. He had already laid charges with Caligula against Herod Antipas for the acts of conspiracy to commit treason. Agrippa produced evidence: Antipas amassed a stockpile of weapons sufficient to arm 70,000 men. Caligula was convinced of Antipas' guilt and sent him into exile in Spain. All Antipas' funds were confiscated, and all his territories turned over to King Agrippa I. Herod Antipas and his wife Herodias ultimately died in ignominy—dispossessed and dishonored.

In this article we have provided a brief overview of the history of Jewish government in Palestine leading into the time of Christ. Our objective was to provide the reader with a solid grasp of the Jewish governing authorities in the time of Jesus—the reign of King Herod the Great and his successors. In the second part we propose to throw some light on the Jewish religious authorities and on the Roman government in Judea under the reign of Emperor Tiberius. This will prepare the way for the reflection on the greatest trial of all times—the trial of Jesus Christ. (*To be continued.*) *R*

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Judge Yourself

By Peter D. Lausevic

Jesus had departed and left the disciples to carry on the work of sharing the gospel that brings salvation to mankind. The gospel is not just a term to be used in sermons and lectures. It is a life-changing reality that does not just modify the character—but transforms it completely. This is why the term for conversion is the new birth, a completely new being. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). It actually demands ultimate change.

Change is something people do not like. We naturally like to remain just as we are. Sometimes we complain about our lives, but quickly we settle back to the way things are and to a lifestyle that makes us comfortable. This is why the message to the last-day people is called the message to Laodicea. “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen,

the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot” (Revelation 3:14, 15). Lukewarmness is a state of comfort desiring no change.

When the gospel message of change—or another word for this change is reform—comes to a person, there are several reactions. Some like the Jews in Berea welcome such a message. “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Others do not react so pleasantly. Instead, we are told that “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). And why is that? Because people do not like reform—a change that transforms the life into a godly character. “And this is the condemnation, that light is come

into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

And what does persecution attempt to do? To stop people from speaking about—and especially living—the truth. If Jesus only spoke the truth it would have been more tolerable. It is because He actually lived a pure life that caused both the conservatives and the liberal elements in society to get riled up. When the apostles began to share this message with enthusiasm, what was again the response of those in leadership positions? “And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” Do you think it was possible to obey such a command? “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened

them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done" (Acts 4:18–21). The response of the people shows that this was not just words. They lived what they were teaching. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

The disciples just could not contain themselves because when a person accepts salvation through the blood of Jesus, what happens to that message? "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). How did the leaders then react? "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (Acts 5:17, 18).

Why were they propelled to continue their work even after imprisonment? "The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:19, 20). This brings us to our relationship with authorities. The apostles were specifically commanded not to teach this life-changing message. Of course the ruling class did not want to believe it themselves, but as they saw the people recognizing these truths and accepting it, they were fearful for their own authority. So they brought these men before the council to answer for their disobedience. "Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28).

Why did they refuse to submit to the authorities? "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." Not only did they explain

their refusal but they accompanied that with a message of repentance to those in leadership. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:29–32). They were not reckless in their disobedience. They were constantly concerned for all souls including the persecuting power—and wanted them to be saved.

At the same time we are told to obey the authorities. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Romans 13:1–7).

We learn from the apostle Paul that we are all subject to the higher powers—and he is speaking of earthly governments. In his time that was the Roman government, and it was not always the best in dealing with civil and religious rights. In fact it was one of the most tyrannical governments ever to exist. Daniel's description in prophecy is horrific. "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth

beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns" (Daniel 7:7). And yet we are told that this power is ordained of God and that we need to respect it. How do we relate to this message and compare it with the experience of the apostles who made it clear that it was appropriate to disobey in their particular experience? In order to understand this properly, we need to clearly understand the role of governments.

THE RULING AUTHORITY

Because Adam was created in the image of God, he was given the rulership of this world. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). But once he succumbed to sin, the one that conquered him became the ruler of this world. "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19). That is the central principle of conquest. For this reason Satan is called the prince of this world. "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30).

As the prince of this world, Satan has been the one controlling most of the kingdoms on earth. "And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it." And in order to have such power, he requires worship—worship that does not justly belong to him. "If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (Luke 4:5–7). He claims to

be the sole ruler of this world and demands worship.

Giving such a boastful picture of his dominance over the nations, he does not readily show who he really is. The Bible describes him as a terrible dragon that destroys humanity. “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” This coming of Satan to become the prince of this world is not something to be desired or welcomed. His arrival brought sorrow and sadness and crying and every imaginable calamity to humanity. “Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Revelation 12:9, 12). It is amazing that when all this calamity and destruction comes we call it an “act of God” when it is Satan himself that causes all that fiendish destruction and sorrow.

Although the archenemy had usurped control and become the prince of this world, in reality this world does not belong to him nor to those whom he gives it. Actually, if it were up to him, there would be no good governments at all. Everyone would be a tyrannical regime enslaving all but those supporting the rulership of the few. And even them, ultimately he seeks to destroy. This is why we are warned about his real purposes. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

In reality, all truly belongs to God. “For the kingdom is the Lord’s: and he is the governor among the nations” (Psalm 22:28). It is the government of the Almighty Creator that rules the world and all the nations that are here. “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psalm 103:19). The reason for this is that He created all things. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). This power of creating everything gives Him a

right that no other being in the universe can have. “To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth” (Isaiah 40:25, 26).

Not only did God begin this world but He also maintains it. This is why we are able to live and work and enjoy the creation He has made. “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things by the word of his power**, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:2, 3). [Emphasis added.]

Since the Lord created all things and there is no life without Him, then it is natural that He requires—nay He deserves—our implicit willing obedience. He created what is best for us and wants us to continue enjoying the best. I am not alive without Him. I cannot have a continued heartbeat without Him. Even all that I have belongs to Him. “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10). Even my powers to obtain things in this world are due to Him. “But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 8:18).

GRANTING RULERSHIP

Even though we look at the amazing things people have done in the past to create governments, yet ultimately they have such authority because

Even though we look at the amazing things people have done in the past to create governments, yet ultimately they have such authority because God gave it to them. We may look at how intelligent Nebuchadnezzar was in developing military and political strategy to create the great kingdom of Babylon, yet he would never have anything if God forbade it.

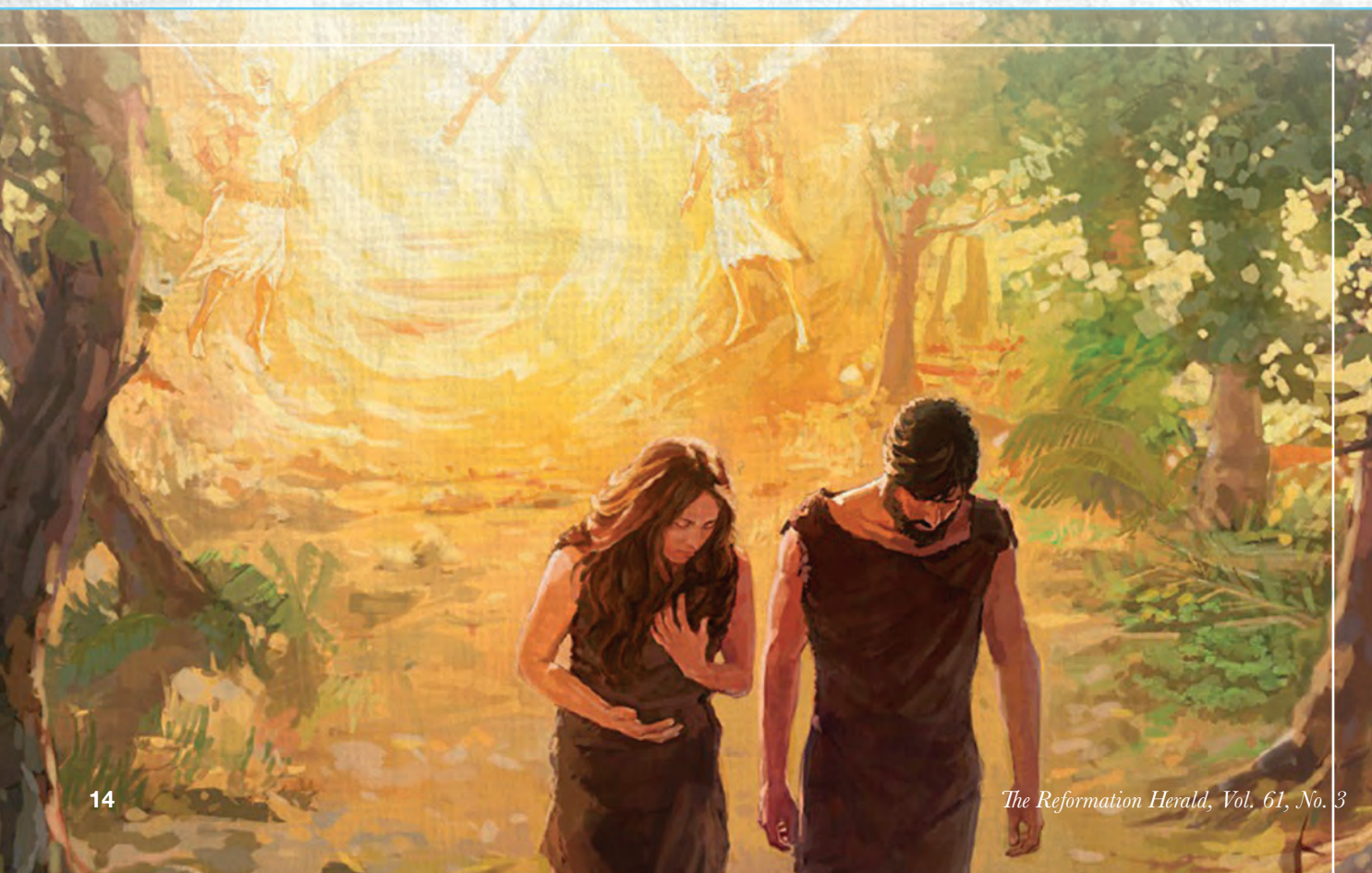


God gave it to them. We may look at how intelligent Nebuchadnezzar was in developing military and political strategy to create the great kingdom of Babylon, yet he would never have anything if God forbade it. "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory" (Daniel 2:37). Each government then needs to understand its limitations. Their power was not given by God to be unlimited and for them to demand absolute control irrespective of the will of God and His order and laws. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, when he took all that glory to himself and thought that he could do with it all that he wanted, then God had to teach him a lesson that reminded him of who the supreme king really was and who he himself must obey. "And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will" (Daniel 5:21).

The same we can see with David. God anointed him king over all of Israel. Yet he himself was still subject to the higher authority of the One Who created all things. When David commanded to kill Uriah to cover up his sin with Bathsheba, that became a criminal act even though David was the ruler anointed by God. So when Joab executed that order he was not guiltless just because he was following orders. "David's power had been given him by God, but to be exercised only in harmony with the divine law. When he commanded that which was contrary to God's law, it became sin to obey. 'The powers that be are ordained of God' (Romans 13:1), but we are not to obey them contrary to God's law."¹ We still have our individuality and are accountable to God no matter what we are commanded by any kind of authority because God's authority is still subject to God and His laws.

Every ruler has to come to the point of understanding that they are subject to a higher law in order to fulfill their responsibility appropriately as well as to fulfill the purpose of their existence. When Cyrus became the ruler of a world

empire, he recognized that authority as supreme and he willingly obeyed its command. "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up" (2 Chronicles 36:23). That is what every ruler needs to truly understand. And when we as individuals recognize that the Creator is the Supreme Ruler of the universe, that His laws are just and reasonable, then we will never obey commands that are contrary to that ultimate universal law. And any ruler that understands their role will never give a command that is contrary to that law either. With a clear understanding of that superior loyalty, when we are brought into question between God and man, the answer is simple. "We ought to obey God rather than men." And any person, any ruler, any nation that does not understand that principle will ultimately perish. "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Isaiah 60:12).



THE KINGDOM RESTORED

The rulership of this world was usurped by Satan when he tempted and overcame Adam and Eve to give up their rightful role that God had bestowed upon them when He created a perfect world. This responsibility is being restored by the plan of redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus. "And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem" (Micah 4:8). "Not only man but the earth had by sin come under the power of the wicked one, and was to be restored by the plan of redemption. At his creation Adam was placed in dominion over the earth. But by yielding to temptation, he was brought under the power of Satan. 'Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage' (2 Peter 2:19). When man became Satan's captive, the dominion which he held, passed to his conqueror. Thus Satan became the 'god of this world' (2 Corinthians 4:4). He had usurped that dominion over the earth which had been originally given to Adam."² "All who desired deliverance from his power would be set free. The dominion that Adam had lost through sin would be recovered."³

This rightful dominion God is restoring through the gospel message. "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." This original dominion will once again be given to Adam and his children. "But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (Daniel 7:14, 18).

Yes, because God is the rightful Owner, Creator and Ruler of the entire universe including this wayward world, obedience to Him is always paramount. It is up to us to know and understand His will and at the same time respect those that have temporal rulership in society and the church, but always remember that none of them can negate the will of God.

A KEY ASPECT OF THE KINGDOM RESTORED

How do we understand the difference between the will of God and our will? Many times we disagree with authority, not because we are obeying God but because we are obeying ourselves or are under the control of another power. So it is imperative in this entire subject to really know God's will. How do we do that? How do we make sure that we are hearing the right voice and knowing when to stand and when it is actually our responsibility to submit to earthly authority? "Seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:31, 32).

When the true spirit of God's kingdom is imbued in us, then a different attitude takes possession of our soul. Only when that attitude is fully in us are we able to be citizens of that eternal kingdom. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). It is true that many times we will be persecuted for our faith. However "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). We will not be trying to figure out how to disagree nor be looking for opportunities for disagreement. Instead, we will have the spirit of Christ and truly want all persons to be saved. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44, 45).

Is this our real attitude towards the world around us? Are we obeying all authority so that we can be model citizens in the church as well as in society? Are we respectful to these same authorities even when we have to disagree with them and obey God rather than men? May God truly help us to have the genuine spirit of Christ. This is the spirit

How do we understand the difference between the will of God and our will?



and attitude that was manifested in the character of Stephen who, as the stones fell upon him in his dying breath, won the heart of the persecutor.

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15. *R*)

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¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 719.

² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 115.



By N. Dobrescu

THE CHURCH AND STATE'S DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

A Complicated Relationship

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17).

PAGANISM TAKES ON A NEW TWIST

Constantine I (also known as Constantine the Great) was a Roman emperor from A.D. 306–337. It is believed that the celebrated "great man" was buried in a stone coffin flanked, like the solar disk, by tombs presumably for the apostles of Christ, and arranged radially

like a sunburst. It was hoped that through miraculously pious archeology, the remains of the disciples of Christ would all be able to be gathered together.

This ceremonial device was combined with the rites of raising dead emperors to the rank of divine creation. A clear sign of merging monotheism with decadent polytheism!

Constantine was not exactly im-

peccable (given the usual dynastic crimes) yet became a "nominal" Christian with pagan nostalgia. Scholars typically recognize his conversion as somewhat opportunistic and superficial.

In his book, *When Our World Became Christian* (312–394), the 90-year-old French historian, Paul Veyne, explains that Constantine achieved political gain by profess-

ing Christianity (although Christians then represented only 10% of the population of about 70 million comprising the Roman Empire) and from an imperial whim (to which he was entitled). His was apparently a megalomaniacal whim which saw in Christianity not only the avant-garde of history, but also a unifying element.

Self-established as a kind of “president” of the new ecclesial community, declared “bishop of foreign affairs,” but also “brother” (never “son”) of the high Orthodox clergy, Constantine was not truly converted. His baptism appears not to have marked the beginning of faith, but rather a kind of coronation which lasted several years (and to which he had no reason to submit, as *pontifex maximus*—Latin for “greatest priest”). A trend was now in place whereby the First Ecumenical Council soon after instituted Sunday rest for Christendom in honor of the pagan “venerable day of the sun.”

CONSTANTINE'S BRAND OF CHRISTIANITY BECOMES A STATE RELIGION

When, as a historian specialized in Roman antiquity, Paul Veyne manages to transform the “personal whim” of Constantine the Great into a fascinating historical turning point. He asserts that without this leader, Christianity would never have been anything but a sect—a minority merely tolerated at best, despite having the spiritual strength to renew and destroy imperial theology through its own well-organized vitality. The obedience of the masses to the emperor and the ancestral order of the multiethnic Roman Republic did not depend on the supposed “new ideology” fabricated by Constantine. Nor was it due to the subject of conversion (as a result of his famous dream about a cross in the sky accompanied by the message in *hoc signo vinces*—which means—“by this sign you shall conquer”). Constantine was sincerely convinced that he served the decree of Providence. The claim follows that our world has become nominally Christian since that time. Regard-

less of the details surrounding Constantine’s conversion, the emperor’s influence on Christianity remains a historical fact. There’s definitely a change of emphasis evident.

Due to imperial intervention, the Christian faith was promoted from the status of a minority religion to becoming a state-protected one. As a result, the number of members increased rapidly. It was only a matter of time before radical mutations took place within her ranks. While Christianity was converting the world, the world was converting Christianity. The negative effect was indisputable.

“The persecutions of the Smyrna period (2nd of the Seven Churches of Revelation) had tended to strengthen rather than weaken the church. Astute politician as he was, Constantine recognized that the persecution policy was a failure. While on the battlefield Constantine claimed to have had a vision in which he saw a cross with the inscription, ‘in this sign conquer.’ Taking this to mean that he should embrace Christianity, he ‘baptized’ his troops by marching them through the river, and had them write the Greek initials for Christ on their shields. He soon began to pass laws favoring Christianity over other religions, and by AD 321 heathen sacrifices had been outlawed as well as work on Sunday. Gifts were made to the clergy, and great churches were erected in Rome, Jerusalem, and especially in Constantinople, the new capital of the empire.

“Besides favoring the ‘true believers’ with funds from the royal treasury, Constantine organized church councils to deal with heresy, took an active role in the decisions made, and banished and persecuted those who were declared heretics. Thus the union of church and state was established, which would be the model both in the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox Church and in the western Roman Catholic Church until the Reformation over 1000 years later. ‘The imperial church came into existence, and a policy of imperial interference was fully developed. Departure from official orthodoxy had become a crime.’

“For the official church it seemed like a dream come true. They were finally not only legal but favored, so that they could get on with the mission Christ had given them to preach the Gospel in all the world. New ‘believers’ were pouring into the church, and the wealth and power of the empire were at their disposal to create the kingdom of God on earth. They never dreamed of what a corrupting effect the union of church and state would have, or what kinds of heresies the half-converted pagans would bring with them into the church.”¹

LAITY VS. CLERGY—AN EXAGGERATED DETACHMENT

Being a Christian in Constantine’s time had ceased to be a challenge—it had become an advantage. It was fashionable to embrace the religion that the emperor had accepted. And religious leaders were the biggest beneficiaries of the new policy. They received honors as the highest officials of the empire. Annual stipends were offered to them by the state in exchange for church service, thus benefiting from a special status.

What was once a vocation had become a profession. And so it remained. As a result, one of the most radical transformations of the Constantinian era was the creation of an ecclesiastical caste that usurped the priesthood of all believers and the right of every believer to serve God.

Under the influence of Greco-Roman culture, the Church installed a system of hierarchy revolving around the head bishop.

The process of change began shortly after the death of the apostles. For example, at the beginning of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch called in his pastoral letters for the parishioners to “look upon the bishop as a heavenly father.” The equality that Christ had preached turned into subordination.

During the same period, Clement of Rome was the first Christian writer to disconnect between the leader from the common Christian. He used the word “layman” for the first time. Tertullian continued the process of redefining relations between

Christians, introducing the term “clergy.” Under these conditions, he could no longer be surprised that the Christian religion was to change direction, abandoning the path laid by the apostles.

THE DIFFICULTY OF RECOVERING THE PAST

The historian Charles Odahl, a specialist in the life of Constantine the Great, claims that the emperor sincerely believed that God had given him the mission to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity. There are certainly arguments to support this belief, just as there are arguments to the contrary.

The motivation of the imperial support given to Christianity matters less than its effects. And most were not positive.

The strong distinction between clergy and laity was one of the worst mistakes. Theologian Karl Barth has suggested that the term “layman” is even harmful to religious vocabulary and should be removed from Christian terminology.

The changes were so profound that even the religious reform of the sixteenth century failed to regain the collective dimension of the priesthood of all believers. Although conceptually, Luther brought the theology of the church back to the apostolic period in terms of the relationship between clergy and laity, in reality the practice continued to persist. The distinction between

clergy and laity disappeared from the vocabulary of the reformers, but the excessive order and authority of those who were considered called to the service was maintained.

“FAST FOOD” MAINTAINED BY THE CHURCH

In the book *Pagan Christianity*, the American sociologist George Barna claims that the transformations of Constantine's time allowed the professional clergy to obtain a priority role, while the laity watched, becoming mere spectators. In the opinion of the sociologist, the influence that came from the time of Constantine was so strong that not even today's Protestantism has managed to return to its original apostolic form.

Thus, Protestant worship is corrupted by the tendency to regard worship as the work of the pastor. What remains for most lay people is to be limited to a very passive role, which is not conducive to spiritual growth.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the separation of believers into clergy and laity has done more harm, in the sense of undermining New Testament authority, than most heresies, says British researcher James Dunn.

This is demonstrated by the phenomenon of “McDonaldization” of churches. “Going to church these days can be like a fast-food meal. It may be quick and tasty. But it will not satisfy the soul.” The RNS [The

Regulatory News Services] editor who supports this idea finds only the natural result of a mechanical reporting to church.

Participation is missing. The parishioners who come to church as a fast-food restaurant are the first to be accused. But their attitude is not the result of pressure from society. Even churches maintain a system that has proven bankrupt for centuries. But the score learned is too appealing and far too popular to be abandoned. As a result, the layman sat comfortably in the back seat.

SEPARATION OF POWERS IN THE STATE

“Separation of powers” is a phrase used in the political field, created and used for the first time by the French political thinker Charles de Secondat (1689–1755), Baron de Montesquieu. According to this model, state power must be divided into different compartments with separate and independent powers and responsibilities in order to avoid any form of absolutism. Moreover, state power is kept in balance through mutual controls (balance of power), thus protecting citizens from possible despotic actions of the state. French King Louis XIV (1638–1714) went down in history as a symbol of absolutism through the famous words, “*L'État, c'est moi*” (The state is me).

Separation between church and state is a classic principle of modern



With the nominal conversion of Constantine to Christianity, a trend was initiated whereby the First Ecumenical Council instituted Sunday rest for Christendom in honor of the “venerable day of the sun.”

law and is found in most Western democracies. In practice, the meaning of this principle varies and depends on the particular historical context of its occurrence or on the legal practice specific to each country, which gives it its true meaning.

STATE/CHURCH SEPARATION—CASE STUDIES

The separation of church and state is part of the "rule of law," a concept developed by the English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704). Following the principle of the "social contract," Locke states that the state has no legitimacy to control the conscience of the individual. Freedom is a natural right that must be respected by state authorities. Such an approach, which provides room for tolerance and mutual respect, would form the basis of the United States Constitution a few decades later.

Even the phrase "separation of church and state" is not explicitly found in the United States Constitution. Instead, there are three references that stipulate the relationship between religion and the state. The first reference, Article VI, section 3, states that no religious condition should be imposed as a criterion for holding a public office. The following two constitutional references are found in the first amendment. The second reference is in the so-called "establishment clause," which guarantees that the government will not pass any law on the establishment of a particular religion. The third reference is known as the "free exercise clause" and guarantees that the state will not enact any law prohibiting the free practice of religion. Therefore, in the American model, the state is neutral and equidistant from religion, without being, instead, indifferent to the religious issue or antagonistic to it. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."²

Not all democratic nations have regulated the issue in the same way. In France, for example, the state is declared secular, but the situation is different in some key respects from that in the United States. The French law stipulating the secular character of the state is the expression of the ideology of the Third Republic (1870–1940), which was the longest-lived political regime after the famous revolution of 1789. Secularism must be understood in the spirit of the French Revolution, which shared an obvious anticlerical (or even anti-religious) attitude. In 1794, by a decree of the National Convention, the budget by which the state subsidized the (Catholic) church was abolished. This decision was later confirmed by another decree (of February 21, 1795), which stated, in the second article, that "the Republic will not pay any cult." With little variation, this attitude is maintained in France to this day.

It is remarkable that only in 1905 was the separation between church and state explicitly proclaimed in France. Currently, there is no state church in the French Republic, but freedom of conscience is ensured and freedom of worship is guaranteed, without them being paid or subsidized.

Secularism is therefore defined according to context and historical background. The reforms imposed by Atatürk (1881–1938) brought Turkey among modern states precisely through the clear separation of politics from religion. Thus, in Turkey, religious communities are placed under state protection, without their interference in state affairs or political activity. The preamble to the Constitution, as amended in 2001, states: "Sacred religious feelings shall absolutely not be involved in state affairs and politics as required by the principle of secularism."³

In the European context, it is quite difficult to define the secularity of a state because there is no standard model. For example, if secularism were defined by the non-involvement of the state in the financing of cults, what status would Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, Romania (etc.) have, which

support the Church with funds from the state budget? Then, what can be said about deeply democratic states (such as the Scandinavian ones), which continue to have a national church by law? Or what about the constitutional restriction that does not allow the king to have a religion other than the "official" one (such as Lutheranism in Sweden or Anglicanism for the British monarchy)? Next, we will highlight the basic elements of the concept of secularism and the separation of church and state.

A SOURCE OF CONCERN FOR SOME

In some religious circles there is a preconception that the separation of church and state is the application of secular humanist ideals with an atheistic tone. For example, Wallace Amos Criswell (1909–2002), an American Baptist pastor, states: "I believe that all the recent fuss about separation of church and state 'is a figment of some infidel's imagination.'"⁴ A similar position is shared by Pat Robertson, "the mogul of Christian media," stating in the 1980s that the words "'separation of church and state' are not in the U.S. Constitution, but were in the constitution of the Soviet Union, church-state separation was obviously an atheistic, Communist idea,"⁵ suggesting that this principle is the fulfillment of an atheist Christian goal.

For the Christian right, the separation of church and state is an embarrassing element, considering that, in a state populated by Christians, the state cannot be other than Christian. There is, therefore, a confusion between the church's mission of evangelization (i.e., the Christianization of individuals) and that of socio-cultural domination through political instruments.

In the end, society creates the state (and not the other way around), but the role of the state is precisely to protect society, which is essentially a mixed multitude. For this reason, the state will protect both the small and the big, the many, but also the few. In this context, while we can speak of a

predominantly Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant society, we have no way of approving the concept of an Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant state. And the reason is that all those who profess a faith other than the majority, or those who do not profess any are also citizens of the state who must represent everyone equally.

The democratic concept of the separation between state and church has in view, on the one hand, the clear distinction between the two—and on the other hand, the reaffirmation of the state as a state and of the church as a church. First of all, regarding the “common good,” the state has different working tools from those of the church, hence the need for separation. The attempt to impose religious dogmas through state force led to the atrocities of the medieval model. The reverse, the attempt to impose state policies through the church, illustrated the harmful nature of totalitarianism. Second, we are talking about reaffirmation because there are things that religion (the church) cannot and should not do in place of the state, just as there are things that the state can never do in the name of religion. A religious principle or custom must never become the subject of laws—the laws of the state cannot take into account whether a certain citizen is a practitioner of one religion or another. Seen in this way, the separation was not to bother, but rather to help.

It must be emphasized, however, that the plea for a secular state should not be confused with the plea for atheism. A secular state is not and should not be an attack on the religious life of a country because, in essence, a secular state should not favor or oppose the presence or practice of religion. Religious affiliation or non-affiliation is only a freedom exercised by the citizen and should never be monitored or regulated by a particular public institution.

WHAT IS THE POSITION OF A PRACTICING CHRISTIAN?

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) captured a key point: “Jesus came to establish a Spiritual King-

dom on earth; which, by separating the theological from the political system, led to the State’s ceasing to be one, and caused the intestine divisions which have never ceased to convulse Christian peoples.”⁶ The concept of a Christian state is not supported by Jesus Christ, who stated emphatically, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

On the other hand, in the Old Testament social practice, the separation of the religious from the political was already affirmed. The covenant between God and His people was intended to be a direct one and no state structure or iconographic sign should mediate it: hence the initial lack of adherence of the people of Israel to the political structures specific to the time, to which he constantly felt the need to limit. In fact, from the very beginning we find in the law of Moses a distinction between judges, military leaders, and priests. Therefore, even the so-called Old Testament theocracy functioned on the basis of the “rule of law.”

“For Christians, mediation has definitely happened in the person of the incarnate Word. (...) No person or institution should or should not occupy this intersection of the human with the divine. The Son of Man occupies this space historically, and must remain vacant among men until the end of history.”⁷

Secularism means, of course, that religion should not seek to control the state and the choice of a religion or the choice not to be religious should be free. It also means that the state must allow religions to continue their activities and not suppress them. A secular state is, in essence, a democratic state, which allows freedom of faith, promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence of different citizens in terms of economic status, political or religious choices.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION TO COME TO AMERICA?

In 1888, Ellen G. White predicted that politically active Christians

would succeed in changing America’s Constitution and in securing a law enforcing Sunday observance. In her monumental book *The Great Controversy*, she writes: “It will be declared that men are offending God by the violation of the Sunday Sabbath, but this sin has brought calamities which will not cease until Sunday observance shall be strictly enforced.”⁸

Ellen White goes on to foretell that “Sunday observance shall be enforced by law.”⁹ But what of those who dissent? What of the Muslim? The Jew? The atheist? She writes that “all who refuse compliance will be visited with civil penalties” she writes, “and it will finally be declared that they are deserving of death.”¹⁰

In recent decades, some secular voices on the matter attest to the swiftness of such legal developments, which “have surprised even Vatican officials who helped bring them about.”¹¹ Ellen White had concluded similarly as early as 1909, remarking that “the final movements will be rapid ones.”¹²

TEARING DOWN THE WALL: DO THEY KNOW WHAT THEY’RE DOING?

Church and state will unite to enforce religious practices. A spiritual decline, natural disasters, social chaos, and economic difficulties lead up to this Church and State union. If the devil wanted to unite people religiously, what vehicle might he use? What vehicle did he use in 4th-century Christianity? It was the travesty of the forced conversion of Constantine. Is our government likewise influenced by the churches today?

“The Sunday movement is now making its way in darkness. The leaders are concealing the true issue, and many who unite in the movement do not themselves see whither the undercurrent is tending. Its professions are mild and apparently Christian, but when it shall speak it will reveal the spirit of the dragon.”¹³

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan nominated Associate Justice



William Hubbs Rehnquist to serve as the sixteenth chief justice of the Supreme Court, in which role he served until 2005. The chief justice began to question separation of church and state jurisprudence and argue in favor of an accommodationist viewpoint. Accommodationism argues that government may assist religion in the public sphere, provided that it assists all equally. This is not a full establishment of religion, but it is certainly opposed to a separationist viewpoint. Rehnquist referred to the separationist doctrine as a myth and to the wall of separation as only a metaphor based on the Danbury Baptist letter (October 7, 1801) and not founded upon legal jurisprudence. He perceived what he believed to be inconsistencies regarding the Court's interpretation and application of separationist jurisprudence. Prior SCOTUS jurisprudence decided each church and state case on its individual merits and recognized that each case varied in its unique character.

The following statements are telling illustrations of secular, Protestant and prophecy-founded viewpoints on the future of church and state alignment.

SECULAR STATEMENTS

"The 'wall of separation between church and state' is a metaphor based on bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be rankly and explicitly abandoned." (For-

mer Chief Justice William Hubbs Rehnquist)

"The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous document for self-government by Christian people. . . . We have enough votes to run the country. And when the people say, 'We've had enough,' we are going to take over."¹⁴ (Pat Robertson)

"The only hope for revival in America is legislative reform." (Tim LaHaye)

"Victory is not a matter of if, but when." (Jerry Falwell)

AS CLEARLY FORESEEN BY E. G. WHITE

"Our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government."¹⁵

"When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result."¹⁶

"Those who are making an effort to change the Constitution and secure a law enforcing Sunday observance little realize what will be the result. A crisis is just upon us."¹⁷

"Sunday observance shall be enforced by law."¹⁸

If we truly want to declare our allegiance to God's kingdom, then

we must lay down the Roman sword and take up Jesus' cross—His symbol of nonviolence, humility, service, and peacemaking—and follow Him in finding new and creative ways to live His love in this power-hungry, violent, materialistic age. As we strive to do this, the seventh-day Sabbath can be a weekly reminder of whom we worship, and in whose kingdom our heart lives. The Sabbath gives us the opportunity to step aside from the domination system, aside from Constantine's empire, and remind ourselves that we live by a different set of values, and bow the knee to another Lord. *R*

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THE END OF THE FREE WORLD

By David Zic

In the course of human history, freedom has not been the natural state of mankind. Our understanding of freedom is relatively new, existing for only a few of the last couple centuries—and even then only for a fraction of the population of the world. Free societies recognizing personal freedoms and liberties owe much of their societal norms to the principles that emerged from the Protestant Reformation.

Today it is often difficult to explain to those living in the “free” world that the concept of freedom is not universally understood. It is even more difficult to explain that their freedoms are being taken right from under them, and that they are increasingly willing to give up their freedoms. The prophetic record makes it clear that this will continue to happen until, blinded by their corruption, the last vestiges of freedom will be taken away. This world speaks of freedom, while mocking

the will of the Creator. “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:19).

While there were some examples of partially free societies even in times of antiquity, our concept of a self-governing free people was really made possible when the United States was formed as a republican and Protestant country. Republican in that it honored no king. Protestant in that it accepted no religious authority of the state that attempted to intervene between a person and their God. The Declaration of Independence, released July 4, 1776, declared that “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Rights given by the

Creator can only be taken away by Him.

And yet the time comes when we will be marked as free or in bondage. “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads” (Revelation 13:16). So, if prophecy tells us that these freedoms will not always be here, how do they go away? Are they taken away? Do we give them away?

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

The western system of freedom is an elusive thing. It is predicated on the notions of free and equal access to the institutions of government, free and equal access to capital and private property, and free and equal access to education and information. All three of these basic notions of a free society are currently under assault, and yet there seems to be no alarm over what is happening.

Every great society has collapsed. Daniel showed to Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of his vision in Daniel chapter 2, that civilizations would rise and fall, and no matter how much the great king tried to prevent it, Babylon did fall. Babylonian civilization collapsed from its own pride; the Medo-Persians fell from an overburdened centralized system of authority; the Greeks fell as their home peninsula reached maximum population entropy and could not sustain its own population; the Romans fell from internal corruption and decay. Our western free society is quickly following in their footsteps, seemingly having learned nothing.

The last great world empire, Rome, gives us a lesson on how this comes to be. In 1776 Edward Gibbon released the first part of his work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This detailed history has been the basic text for the study of societal decline and collapse. But did Rome ever truly collapse, or did it just transform from one system to another?

The small salt trading post along the Tiber River would eventually come to dominate a territory that stretched from the British Isles to Persia and encompassing the entire Mediterranean. Originally ruled by a series of kings, the Romans eventually threw out their last king, and formed a republic to govern their city state. While not a democracy in the sense we would understand today, the republic did provide for a government with rotating leadership that allowed participation of the citizenry in combined decision-making. Consuls were elected to serve for one year, and restrictions were placed on how many years needed to pass before they could be elected again, to ensure no kingly power would arise. For the majority of the time of the republic there was no standing army, and when a military campaign was launched it was composed of land-owning men who provided their own armor and weapons.

The republic survived by bringing in resources from surrounding territories and nations. The conquest

of new lands brought wealth, but also an ever-expanding territory to defend. New conquests meant new enemies and the expenditure of more and more resources to defend the frontiers. Once the republic grew beyond the Italian Peninsula, soldiers needed to spend more and more time away from the families and their farms. A consul elected to serve their year in office might spend that whole year or more away from Rome on a military campaign, be it offensive or defensive. To take care of matters at home, and to administer the growing territory, a bureaucratic system of administration began to take hold. Standing armies were needed. More stability of executive leadership was needed to oversee a national expansion project that was clearly more than a year long.

As Roman society became more dependent on the importation of food from other lands, it became increasingly important to conquer new territories and control the flow of goods, especially of essential commodities like grain. Centralized control allowed for what was perceived to be more efficiency—but the people had to give up some of their liberties, rights and freedoms for the greater good. Complex taxation systems were introduced to both fund these massive projects as well as to control **who** could produce and consume and **what** they could produce and consume.

Charismatic leaders saw that they could sway the masses into letting go of some of their personal freedoms in exchange for free grain (the Gracchi brothers being a prime example). Others saw that controlling a standing army would be to their personal benefit (Marius, Sulla, Pompey and Julius Caesar among the most prominent). There was resistance to these men of influence taking power for themselves, and a period of civil strife ensued. The ultimate result of these internal conflicts finally ended with the establishment of the empire. There would now be a highly centralized power structure—but to keep the others happy they would still pretend to be a republic. To the very end of the Roman Empire the sym-

bolic senate remained, a vestige of its original self.

Eventually the resources needed to maintain the empire could not keep up with the actual needs. The enemies became too numerous and the loyal Romans too few. Invading cultures brought with them new ideas, new ideals, and new ideologies. The empire splintered and a series of nation states arose in its place. And yet, Rome lived on.

No longer a kingdom, a republic, or an empire, the central power remained, and Rome became a church. It still held power and great sway, and a religious authority held the very souls of men in its grasp. A religious empire emerged and the world was swept into the dark ages.

SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION TODAY

We find ourselves today at just such a moment of transformation. You would be forgiven if you thought the description of Rome was actually a description of the United States. A people throws out their king, sets up a republic, and now proceeds to be led astray by charismatic leaders who use the very instruments of the state to subjugate them and slowly but surely take their freedoms. All that remains for the United States to follow fully in the footsteps of Rome is the establishment of a religious order to fully control the people and take away the last vestiges of liberty.

Comparing the history of Rome to that of the newly emerging United States in 1891 Alonzo T. Jones published his book *The Two Republics*. As long as 130 years ago, already those who studied the prophetic record could see what was being prepared. The oppression recorded in the 13th chapter of Revelation was already being fulfilled. Jones' parallel history of these two great nations shows how similar their trajectory was, and continues to be.

COMPLEXITY AND THE END OF FREEDOM

In our days, the study of societal collapse has been led to a great de-

gree by the work of Joseph Tainter. A secular archaeologist, Tainter studied the collapse of pre-European indigenous populations in the Americas to see how civilizations fell. For the secular world, Tainter's *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, published in 1988, became the seminal text in the study of societal collapse. "Civilizations are fragile, impermanent things," Tainter wrote.

All the world seems poised for a cataclysmic event that will end society as we know it. Apocalyptic dystopias dominate the viewing screens as people prepare for zombies to take over the world, not realizing that they have become the zombies. In recent years societal collapse including the concepts of environmental sustainability, have become the objects of extensive scholarly research. Not willing to accept what Scripture has outlined, scholars seek to keep this present world in place. Princeton University now has a research program in Global Systemic Risk, Cambridge University has a Center for the Study of Existential Risk.

Anthropologists are now joined by historians, social scientists, complexity scholars and physical scientists who have turned their attention to the dynamics shaping the broadest scope of human history. All seem to echo what Tainter already established. Society is getting more and more complex, and in every past civilization when the society reached the point of unsustainable complexity, it collapsed.

Complex societies create complex institutions. The more complex these institutions are, the smaller the number of people who can access them. There are too many attempting to access the same institutional norm, and control mechanisms outside of those peoples control are implemented.

A simple example of complexity overtaking a society dominates our current debate on free speech and social media. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., have amassed greater and greater user numbers. Everyone was speaking "freely" until there were too many competing ideas. Now these corpo-

rations, which are not democratic entities but beholden to their shareholders, were pressured to limit what could be said on their platforms. The corporations then took it upon themselves to become the arbiters of what would be "free" speech and what would be controlled, limited, or banned speech. The complexity of the system overburdened the simple ideal of free speech.

As the angel's holding back the winds continue to pull back, we will see and more and more that the complex institutions of our Western civilization will not be able to stand. The resulting degradation of the family, the society, and even the natural world around us will be massive. Fewer and fewer resources will be available and the competition for these resources will lead many to give up their personal liberties in exchange for security. Whether it be manmade devastation like war and poverty or natural disaster such as pestilence and environmental degradation, a strain is being placed on Western civilization as never before.

CASE STUDY: EGYPT

We can see in the history of Egypt what happens to people when they are faced with a lack of access to resources. Initially the population were mostly subsistence farmers, each with their own lands and personal freedoms. But the history of Egypt shows a highly complex and controlled society developed with a god-ruler, in this case the Pharaoh, as its end result. How did this happen? A famine caused the social structure to change.



STEP 1

The people gave all their personal wealth in exchange for survival. "And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house" (Genesis 47:14). All the control of currency now rested with the state.



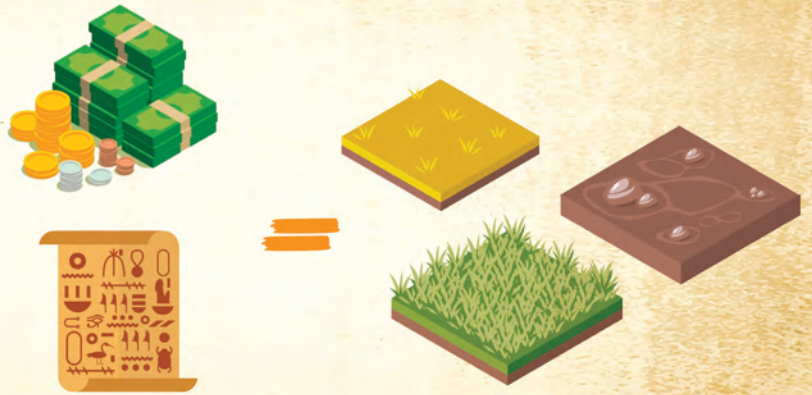
STEP 2

Once the state controlled the currency system, it then gained control of the means of production. "And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail" (Genesis 47:16). The people could generate their own income from their cattle. Now without this, they had no means to generate revenue and were further dependent on the complex state for their needs.



STEP 3

Without the cattle, it was impossible to work the fields. "And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's" (Genesis 47:20). Once there was no more private ownership of the land, only one thing was left . . .



STEP 4

The people were now without any freedoms and liberties. It was not just the land they sold for food, it was themselves also. "Buy us" they implored Joseph (Genesis 47:19), together with our land. Now without any personal property, without any means to produce themselves, and with no economic value of their own, their final liberties were taken away. "And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof" (Genesis 47:21).

Using this case study as an example, and remembering that the loss of freedoms recorded in Revelation 13 are economic (no buying and selling) we can see that the U.S. is almost at the point of all loss of personal freedoms. Step 1 was passed August 15, 1971 when President Nixon declared that the US currency could no longer be converted to gold, depriving it of any real value. Step 2 of having people lose the means of producing their own wealth was passed by the end of 2012 when the U.S. government, federal, state and local, sent money to 53.4% of the population. Since 2012 there have been more people dependent on the government than

actually contributing to the economic production of the country. Step number 3 is fulfilling before our eyes. American household debt hit a record \$14.6 trillion in the spring of 2021, according to the Federal Reserve. Individuals are giving away their actual value for things that have no value. How long till the citizenry are willing to do whatever the authorities want, only if they will feed them? If the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that people are almost ready for that. We are but one major crisis away from losing our last liberties. They may even pretend to keep the institutions of liberty in place, but the substance will be gone.

FREEDOM IS A GIFT

There can be no true freedom without a personal relationship with the Creator of freedom. The further this world goes from the operational structure set down by the Creator, the less freedom it will have. The law of God was given not for His benefit but for ours. A society that would honor the moral law of God would have liberty and freedom. The society that casts aside the Creator will profess a sense of freedom, but it will not be real. "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:25). *R*

Why Am I Here?

By Barbara Montrose

[Emphasis supplied throughout.]



From the time we are children—especially in most of the world where public education is compulsory—we long to be free. How many tender, young eyes peer through a classroom window with longing desire to run freely in the breeze, wholeheartedly taking in the fresh air rather than be stuck for so many seemingly endless hours, days, months, years sitting behind a school desk.

The thought comes to the growing mind: “What is the meaning of life? Besides studying so long to become a productive member of society, why am I here—what is the purpose of my existence even after graduation from all this required school?”

Our physical life—including later on, our livelihood to support ourselves—is not the purpose of life. At times if we are in danger and are compelled to run to save our life, that life is not the reason for our existence, either. Even some heroes in the Bible felt pressed to save their own life in an emergency. In a moment of weakness, the brave and bold prophet Elijah fled in anguish

from the terrorizing threats of murderous Jezebel. Finally, as Elijah was hiding in a cave, the Majesty of Heaven quietly spoke to him with the gentle question, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9). After asking, “What are you doing here?” the Omnipotent One then issued to a now-humbled Elijah a series of special assignments that furthered the kingdom of God. Could going forth to carry them out feel risky? Possibly so. But Elijah’s life had meaning and purpose again—and when the Almighty assigns a mission, His powerful might accompanies the missionary.

Faced with terminal illness, Hezekiah pleaded with God to grant him more time on this earth.

But a longer life on this fallen planet, while desirable, is not really the most worthwhile aim we can have. Our priority should be to fulfill the purpose entrusted to us by the One who created that life.

As Bible believers, we understand that the best end-goal and purpose is to submit our human will

to God’s divine will. The more we try to save our life for selfish purposes, the more we are inclined to make faulty compromises that will disappoint our heavenly Father and ultimately spoil our joy and jeopardize our eternal salvation.

Jesus makes it clear: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?” “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it” (Luke 9:24; 17:33).

The truth about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness:

How can the average agnostic person take a leap of faith to benefit from the gospel?

Three simple desires—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—

are typically something everyone craves. How can they be achieved?

This issue of *The Reformation Herald* magazine speaks much about liberty—so let's look here a little deeper into life and the pursuit of happiness:

It's interesting to observe how much the Ten Commandments—the holy law of Jehovah, promote happiness. Each of these directives is actually a promise, a promise of peace in the heart made new by the creative power of Jesus Christ, through whom the entire universe was made out of nothing. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by **his Son**, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, **by whom also he made the worlds**. . . . Through faith we understand that **the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear**. . . . This is **the covenant** I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, **I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them**" (Hebrews 1:1, 2; 11:3; 10:16).

The **strength** God gives for obedience is available right now! Why? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . As many as received him, **to them gave he power** to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:1, 12).

Jesus explains that He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The life He led on earth marks a path for human beings to follow. The **way** He leads by both His teaching and example is the right way, the key to happiness.

As for reality, Jesus exemplifies honesty itself. Every human being has flaws, but, as the Son of God, Christ did not; His character was without blemish. The "fact checks" from Him are 100% pure, through and through. In today's world full of **misinformation** resulting from mistakes often made in human frailty, as well as rampant **disinformation** with a malicious bias intending to deceive, Jesus is a re-

freshing contrast without peer. He is, in fact, **Truth** itself.

As for **the Life**, the Scripture reveals, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man" (John 5:26, 27). Jesus explained, "**I am** the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

LEARNING FROM THE FOLLY OF SOLOMON

In society right now, many people—even most—seem to be anxious and troubled. Multitudes are perplexed by all the evil that is happening; many minds are wondering why they even exist in a world with such dismal prospects.

The traditional, biblical family unit has long been a source of comfort and solace—but as more breakdowns are occurring, the sense of loss is felt. Even the secular world is recognizing this. Those to whom family has been an important source of solace, now suffer disappointment and discouragement from the estrangement. As another factor, some experts are seeing issues involving loss of motivation too often connected, for example, to the increased legalization of marijuana use as well as vaping and other forms of intemperance. As so many people are dazed in a zombie-like stupor, they have lost their zest for life.

What is the remedy for the dark cloud that has figuratively blanketed the inhabitants of the globe? Many still find some measure of fulfillment in their work—whether it be what they do to earn a paycheck or otherwise.

Some try to fill in an empty void by acquiring material things. Having more resources might provide you with more options in life, but the reality is that possessions do not bring peace. How often do we hear of some rich, famous person whose life is empty and meaningless. A prime example is king Solomon, renown throughout history as the

pinnacle of wealth. But how did this great monarch bemoan his experience?

Even with tremendous riches he had amassed, Solomon testified, "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards: . . . I got me servants and maidens: . . . I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem. . . . And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, **all was vanity and vexation of spirit**, and there was no profit under the sun. . . . Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. Therefore **I hated life**; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Ecclesiastes 2:4–12, 15–17).

Not only material things! Solomon became very lustful as well. The Bible says he took to himself 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. After indulging himself with so many, many attractive and alluring women of various sorts, he finally concluded, "**Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain**: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). How rare to find either a man or woman that truly fears the Lord. Without that, the promiscuous lifestyle even of monarch was not found to be a satisfying venture.

Solomon's life was empty in its pursuit of earthly things as its highest good. The altars he erected to

heathen gods served only to teach him how vain is their promise of rest to the soul.

The problem of Solomon certainly repeats itself with many today. The king of Israel finally regained his love for life by turning to the God of his fathers—the God who, at the beginning of his reign, had been his God.

With that decision, he came to a conclusion for himself as well as making the earnest appeal to the rest of us: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. . . . Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13, 14).

“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28).

INTERESTING STUDIES CONFIRM BIBLE TRUTH

It has been observed that doing something for someone else with no prospect of compensation can be a significant source of life’s meaning. The more you own, the more your things own you—yet for the acts of kindness you freely give to others, you receive an abundant return.

Modern research indicates that a sense of mission for others improves one’s ability to flourish in life and promotes physical and mental health.

“Researchers analyzed data from 40 published papers and found evidence that volunteers had a 20 percent lower risk of death than non-volunteers. In addition, volunteers had lower levels of depression, increased life satisfaction and enhanced well-being.”¹

Further studies have found that practicing compassion—in making a positive difference in someone else’s life—we gain a blessing for ourselves as well. What are some little ways we can do this on a daily

basis? This is a biblical principle—yet here are a few points that even secular experts acknowledge as key to sound mental health and well-being:

1. Being supportive of others. It’s not good to flatter people in order to try to make them like us. But all need a word of encouragement sometimes. All of us like to have some assurance that what we have done is somehow valued by others. So, when you tell someone else you appreciate something good that they have done, you actually feel better, too!

2. Having compassion for others’ mistakes. All of us feel embarrassed when we make a mistake. But notice how much better you feel when someone at least understands that what you did wrong was not by evil intent, malice, or stupidity. So likewise, when you comfort someone facing their own faults, you feel better, too.

3. Making a positive difference in someone’s life. Taking a friend to lunch, giving a little gift, letting someone merge ahead of you in traffic or in a grocery line—simple little acts of self-denial such as these actually bring a blessing to yourself, too.

4. Making constructive comments to others. Society today painfully reeks of criticism, gossip, and slander. Our words are powerful, for good and for bad. But by thinking of something positive to say about someone, we can escape the trap of tearing people down.

5. Avoiding doing anything that would be harmful to others. When faced with a verbal attack, silently walking away is often the best remedy to the situation.

6. Avoiding being self-centered. Those who are preoccupied over

themselves and the impression they’re making on others are missing the real beauty of social interaction. We are designed by God to serve, not to be served. Life’s greatest pleasure is found in service to our fellowmen.

7. Avoiding doing things that are unhelpful to others. Besides benefiting others, developing a constant mindset of helpfulness does wonders to boost our own morale.

One of the very best books to be found on mental health is a two-volume set entitled, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, by Ellen G. White. This inspired work is a powerful testimonial of how to put principles such as these into practice in the most effective way.

The Lord knows best. For example, the overall concept of the benefits of practicing compassion brings to mind the ancient words penned by the prophet Isaiah as he unveils the plan of our Creator:

“Is not this the fast I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, **and thine health shall spring forth speedily**; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward” (Isaiah 58:6–8).

WHAT ABOUT IF, I MYSELF, AM SICK? HOW CAN I MANAGE TO PUT THESE IDEAS IN PRACTICE?

“Good deeds are twice a blessing, benefiting both the giver and the receiver of the kindness. The consciousness of right-doing is one of the best medicines for diseased bodies and minds. When the mind is free and happy from a sense of duty well done and the satisfaction



No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry.



of giving happiness to others, the cheering, uplifting influence brings new life to the whole being.

"Let the invalid, instead of constantly requiring sympathy, seek to impart it. Let the burden of your own weakness and sorrow and pain be cast upon the compassionate Saviour. Open your heart to His love, and let it flow out to others. Remember that all have trials hard to bear, temptations hard to resist, and you may do something to lighten these burdens. Express gratitude for the blessings you have; show appreciation of the attentions you receive. Keep the heart full of the precious promises of God, that you may bring forth from this treasure, words that will be a comfort and strength to others. This will surround you with an atmosphere that will be helpful and uplifting. Let it be your aim to bless those around you, and you will find ways of being helpful, both to the members of your own family and to others.

"If those who are suffering from ill-health would forget self in their interest for others; if they would fulfill the Lord's command to minister to those more needy than themselves, they would realize the truthfulness of the prophetic promise, 'Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily.'"²

WHERE IS THE SOURCE OF SUCH COMPASSION FOUND?

It's found nowhere on earth. It comes from Heaven and is freely offered to us through the power of the Omnipotent Creator who made the universe out of nothing:

"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the

light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

"The glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which 'seeketh not her own' has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.

"In the beginning, God was revealed in all the works of creation. It was Christ that spread the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. It was His hand that hung the worlds in space, and fashioned the flowers of the field. 'His strength setteth fast the mountains.' 'The sea is His, and He made it.' Psalm 65:6; 95:5. It was He that filled the earth with beauty, and the air with song. And upon all things in earth, and air, and sky, He wrote the message of the Father's love.

"Now sin has marred God's perfect work, yet that handwriting remains. Even now all created things declare the glory of His excellence. There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of life without which neither man nor animal could live; and man and animal, in turn, minister to the life of tree and shrub and leaf. The flowers breathe fragrance and unfold their beauty in blessing to the world. The sun sheds its light to gladden a thousand worlds. The ocean, itself

the source of all our springs and fountains, receives the streams from every land, but takes to give. The mists ascending from its bosom fall in showers to water the earth, that it may bring forth and bud.

"The angels of glory find their joy in giving—giving love and tireless watchcare to souls that are fallen and unholy. Heavenly beings woo the hearts of men; they bring to this dark world light from the courts above; by gentle and patient ministry they move upon the human spirit, to bring the lost into a fellowship with Christ which is even closer than they themselves can know.

"But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. 'I do nothing of Myself,' said Christ; 'the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.' 'I seek not Mine own glory,' but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life."³

Let us therefore join in that circuit of beneficence and thereby enjoy infinite purpose and meaning in life! Amen. *R*

References:

¹ <https://www.webmd.com/balance/news/20130823/volunteering-may-make-people-happier-study-finds>

² *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 257, 258.

³ *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 20, 21.

Northern Ethiopian Union



We praise the Lord for the good news from the Northern Ethiopian Union. On March 10, twenty-two souls were baptized in Ambukuna.



National Youth Convention, Romania

A National Youth Convention took place in Romania from March 25–28, 2021. This year, the event took place online under the theme “I Fell in Love,” and the theme text “Many waters cannot quench love ...” Song of Songs 8:7.

With the Lord’s help, this event provided space for important discussions with our teenagers, young people, and newlyweds. Interactive question-and-answer sessions discussed adolescence, friendship, making use of God-fearing trustworthy advisors, understanding marriage and family life. The music of a beautiful choir greatly enhanced the event.



Bush Camp in Australia

The brethren in Australia have held the first in-person inter-state event in over a year! We praise God that members and friends from South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland could join to worship together, encourage each other, and enjoy the lovely New South Wales countryside. This was the first inter-state event held in Australia in more than a year due to COVID-19 restrictions. The NSW Conference sponsored the event, under the theme, “Christ Our All in All.” Around 150 souls were present on Sabbath.



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MOVING? Please let us know.

Doing the Right Thing Alone

It's not always easy when you're the only one. . . .

Daniel, Hananiah, Mischael, and Azariah were children of the tribe of Judah. The king of Babylon had kidnapped them from their families and taken them to the land of Shinar.

Can you imagine how hard it would be if you were stolen from your home and family, and taken away to a strange land? The people in Babylon spoke a different language and ate different foods. These boys probably really missed their parents, their home, their language, and their country!

Normally, when someone is kidnapped, they are treated very badly. Yes, these four boys were treated badly, but they were also given some special treatment. The king thought he was being nice to them by giving them what he thought was the very best

food and the very best training. But why? He did this so that later they could become smart leaders to help him in his nation. Sometimes people think they are doing us a favor, but it isn't always something good. To start off, the food that the king wanted to give them was a problem.

Why? The king had flesh meat and wine to drink. The kinds of foods served probably cost a lot more money than what the regular people ate. But the king was willing to share all this with the four boys from Judah, so he thought he was being nice to them.

But are flesh meat and wine good for our bodies? No! The boys knew that if they would eat and drink those things, their minds would get mixed up and they would not be able to think straight. Their bodies would not work as well. Is it a good idea to be mixed up when you're in a strange place? No! You need to be able to know what you're doing. In a hard place, you don't want to be eating and drinking strange things that will make you feel sick, either!

Daniel and his friends decided not to eat and drink those wrong things, no matter what. They knew that our bodies belong to God and that we need to obey His laws if we want to be healthy and feel well.

So, Daniel very nicely told Melzar, the one in charge of him, to make a test. For ten days, the four boys would eat only plant-based food and pure water to drink. Then after the ten days, Melzar would see if they were still healthy or not.

When the time passed, Melzar was so surprised! Daniel and his friends were much healthier and they knew their studies better than all the others in Babylon. The story had a happy ending!

So, be strong—even when you need to do the right thing alone. God will bless you; God will take care of you. Never be afraid to do the right thing.—
BHM.

