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Heavenly Minded

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Cover Art by Simon Dewey

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Turn Again Holy Take Down The Coming Time of Trouble An Angel You Ought to Know

Dear Friends,

Recent days have brought events that have sobered us, saddened, inspired and shocked us. Surely, we are all praying for those in the areas devastated by the hurricane and perhaps you have been able to contribute to their relief in other ways as well. These things can be cause for thankfulness and bitterness yet in all cases we must turn our hearts toward our Maker in honesty and perhaps brokenness. It is something hopefully that motivates us all to extend kindness and love to those in need and to walk ever more humbly before our God. May you have His peace and comfort wherever you are and may your light shine amongst those who need it.

*In Christ's Love,
John and Darlene*



*This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.*

*Through the LORD's
mercies we are not
consumed,*

*Because His
compassions fail not.*

*They are new every
morning;*

*Great is Your
faithfulness.*

*"The LORD is my
portion," says my soul,*

*"Therefore I hope in
Him!" Lam 3:21-24*

Art: by John Dickey

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Turn Again

And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. (Gen 19:27,28)

Surely, it was a long stare of despair and grief. The smoke and stench of death filled the entire sky as he looked down upon the plain where the lush pasture and busy cities had been just the day before. Never had he been so disappointed, so crushed in heart.

What had, to this point, been an amazing walk of faith turned sour. Faith subsided in the wake of sadness. Abraham turned away.

And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. (Gen 20:1,2)

Abraham left the land of promise heading south and west of the scene of this horrific disaster. We know where Kadesh was as well as Shur so if Gerar was between them as the scripture indicates this would place it in the northern Sinai. Many map makers erroneously place it further north between Gaza and Beersheba. This location is coincident with the Tell Abu Hurayrah or Tell Haror but there is no definitive agreement among archeologists and even the ancient

Eusebius placed it further south. The point being that Abraham was headed back toward Egypt.

Now, many commentators assert that Abraham was simply falling into an old pattern in forsaking Sarah, but that doesn't take into account what had happened just before this. You see, the Lord had just visited Abraham in person. Perhaps only a few days or weeks previously, He'd eaten a meal at Abraham's camp and told him that Sarah would have his child in nine months or so. Sarah laughed in disbelief – remember? Yet, Abraham acted here in Gerar as if that promise meant nothing. It was as though he just didn't care anymore.

But God protected Sarah, and Abimelech being warned, did not touch her. Though the king bestowed many gifts upon Abraham as recompense for the error, the patriarch was exposed as a spinner of the truth. Yet, there was still seemingly no conviction. He simply made a lame excuse for his lie and in the process, indicted God as the one to blame – he said God made him a "wanderer" ...

"There is a terrible meaning in this verb wander which Abraham uses. The Hebrew word occurs exactly fifty times in Scripture and never in a good sense. It is used of animals going astray, of a drunken man reeling, or staggering, of sinful seduction, of a prophet's lies causing the people to err, of the path of a lying heart. Six other words are translated wander, any one of which Abraham might have used, but he used the worst word available." (Barnhouse)

"Abraham is also, indirectly, blaming God for the problem; when

God called me to wander from my father's house is a way of saying that God sent him out on this dangerous journey upon which Abraham had to protect himself." (Guzik) This infers that he didn't believe God would protect him.

"Also, it is interesting to see that Abraham "accepts" these gifts, when he had refused gifts from a pagan king previously (Genesis 14:21-24) because he wanted no one to think that a man had made him rich. Here, because of Abraham's compromise, he finds it hard to re-claim that same high moral ground!" (Guzik)

Wow! The father of our faith acted as though he had none and furthermore, as though he was pointing the finger at God as being to blame for his poor attitude. Why?? No cell phones. What?? Bear with me. I'm not intending to treat this serious issue lightly.

You see, Abraham dearly loved Lot. In fact, it's easy to imagine him thinking of Lot as the son he never had. It is evident that our hero of the faith took his nephew under wing after Lot's father died back in Ur. For years, they had roamed the unfamiliar land of promise together. Not long before, Abraham had risked everything to rescue his loved one from the hands of several hostile armies and just a few days or weeks ago, he had gone way out on a limb negotiating with God for Lot's preservation as the Lord was about to destroy Sodom.

God seemed intent on depriving Abraham of a parental relationship. He told Abraham to send his son Ishmael away and then in what was a seemingly crushing disappointment, God destroyed Sodom and Abraham's beloved Lot. Wait a

minute, you may think. Lot was saved out of Sodom; God specifically saved him because of Abraham's intercession! (And Ishmael was fine as well.)

That's right. But, I strongly believe that Abraham did not know that until much later. No cell phones. There was no way for him to know. Recall, Lot headed like a banshee for the hills of Moab and hid out in a cave. Meanwhile, Abraham behaved, as we've discussed, like his heart was broken. He acted as though he felt that God was not Who he thought He was, perhaps He was just uncaring, perhaps untrustworthy. You see, it's quite possible that he was misjudging the faithfulness and goodness of God based upon what he could see with the eyes and his limited understanding of God's plan. The Lord was in the process of stretching his faith big-time, but Abraham didn't know that. All he could see was that virtually all the people he loved were taken from him – his brother Nahor, his mother and father Terah, his son Ishmael, his nephew/son Lot and family. And following God's leading seemed to be leading nowhere.

Maybe you can identify with dear Abraham here. I can. But know this -- that God is absolutely faithful and good in spite of what your senses and feelings may press upon you. Abraham couldn't see it but Lot was safe. So was Sarah. And just as He promised, she gave birth to Abraham's son Isaac just nine months later.

When our son, Gabe, went home to be with the Lord, a few of his friends, like Abraham, stumbled in their faith. Some felt they couldn't trust God like they'd believed. A few

were just so hurt they lost hope. But like Lot, Gabe is safe in God's care and one day they will know that.

The walk of faith is not without some stumbling along the way. We're not told how or why or when, but between this sad episode in his life and Genesis 22 father Abraham turned again toward heaven, toward the faith that brought him righteous standing with God. It likely took time, but eventually, his faith in God became so strong, the Lord could test him with the command to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah. And Abraham never flinched. He had complete trust in God. What a turn around!

In 1993 Gerald Sittser, a professor at Whitworth College was driving home from a family outing. In the car was his mother, wife of 20 years and four children. A drunk driver swerved across the center line and hit them head on. In an instant he lost his wife, his two year old daughter and his mother. In his book, *A Grace Disguised*, Sittser shares some insights from his painful journey:

"The accident itself bewilders me today as much as it did three years ago. Much good has come out of it, but all the good in the world will never make the accident itself good. It remains a horrible, tragic and evil event to me. Yet the grief I feel is sweet as well as bitter. I still have a sorrowful soul; yet I wake up each morning joyful, eager for what the new day will bring. Never have I felt as much pain as I have in the last three years; yet never have I experienced as much pleasure in simply being alive ... never have I felt so broken; yet never have I felt so whole . . . Never have I been so

aware of my weaknesses and vulnerability; yet never have I been so content and felt so strong ... Above all, I have become aware of the power of God's grace and my need for it. My soul has grown because it has been awakened to the goodness and love of God. God has been present in my life these past three years. God will continue to be present to the end of my life and through all eternity. God is growing my soul, making it bigger and filling it with himself. My life is being transformed." (Joel Smith)

Perhaps, some tragedy has impacted your walk with the Lord and you're reading this thinking, 'Maybe God's there but He's not there for me.' Perhaps, you've turned away from Him ever so slightly or even 180 degrees. You may know you're off course but agony has birthed apathy. If that's you or someone you know, take heart. Remember, you don't have a 'cell phone' either – that is, you just don't have all the facts. If you'll turn again to your heavenly Father, what looks and feels like absolute disaster will one day be shown to you in a whole new light. Don't give up. One day soon, the heavens will open and the Son of God will appear. He will make all things right.

If you've fallen away, don't be condemned. Turn again from Egypt. Do not sacrifice what God has promised upon the altar of disappointment. Turn again and know that heaven will cheer you on, God will smile, and you will know that your Savior is indeed worthy to be trusted, to be loved and followed forever.

Holy Take Down!

Charlie Morgan was absolutely intimidating. He was supposed to weigh in at 140 pounds but there was no doubt in my mind that he was at least 180, maybe 200. Next to him, I looked like a toothpick. As he stepped to the scales, my heart leaped as the balance arm hit the top, and then it sank when the arm settled down to measure exactly 140 pounds. 'No way!' I thought.

As with many high school wrestlers, making weight was usually a big deal and I'd done every last minute trick to get in under the limit. At this point, however, I really wished I'd just eaten a couple of quarter-pounders cause this guy was definitely going to be pounding on me! Rumor had it that he was headed for the Olympics and looking at him, with more muscle in his ring finger than I had all together, I was sure it was true.

Wouldn't you know it, this was the one and only meet that both my mom and my girlfriend came to see. My life was flashing before my eyes as the referee called us to the center mat. I looked up to see them in the stands and rather than cheering they were shaking their heads and covering their eyes. Even they knew it was going to be brutal.

The whistle blew or someone said, "Wrestle!" It's all a blur. All I know was that in a couple of seconds Charlie was on the ground and I was on top! I shook my head in amazement as did Charlie. I'd scored two points with a take-down! But just as I was wondering if I was a better wrestler than I'd thought,...WHAM! Then BOOM, BAM and CRUNCH! He settled the issue completely. I was pinned or rather spiked to the ground. I think they used a stretcher to remove my mangled body. I was SO out of my league with this guy.

So was Jacob. You recall the story from Genesis 32. But that's where the similarity ends. Unlike my own match which was over in an instant, Jacob wrestled with the Lord all night. And this is fascinating. Not that Jacob held on that long – rather that God let him. And so, in order to appreciate what happened that night, we will consider both grapplers.

Consider Jacob. What kind of a man grapples, literally, with God? When Abraham met Him, he fell before Him in worship and on another occasion prepared a feast. Isaac respectfully petitioned and worshipped. Jacob wrestled. Was it because he actually thought he could do a take-down on the Lord? Was he out of his mind? You might think that he was just scared and confused when this "Man" showed up. However, it's clear that he recognized Him for Hosea says that he wept, begging the Lord to bless him.

Perhaps that is the key. Desperation.

Desperate men don't behave all that well sometimes. And recall that Jacob had been a wrestler since the womb. Life was one long fight for him. He wrestled with Esau, with Laban, with the Amorites (see Gen 48:22) and now with the Lord. Nowhere else in the Bible do we find such irreverence with one exception – Calvary. Jacob was actually fighting with his Creator to obtain a blessing.

But, you know, many of us fight with our God for a variety of reasons. Anger, bitterness, disillusionment... and we actually 'hang in there' thinking insanely that we can win. Like spoiled little children, we can think inwardly that if we fight with Him long enough, He'll repent and see it our way; then He'll bless us. To a certain extent, Israel has been doing this with their Savior for the last two millennia. They've been at war with God over their righteousness.

And the time of their wrestling is about to end. Pointing to these last days, Isaiah the prophet said,

Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,

That her warfare is ended,

That her iniquity is pardoned;

For she has received from the

LORD's hand

Double for all her sins. (Isa 40:2)

You see, as with Jacob, He is about to humble them, to wound them in the time known as "Jacob's trouble".

Alas! for that day [is] great, so that none [is] like it: it [is] even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. (Jer 30:7)

Just as the Lord touched Jacob's thigh and wounded him, He will do the same to modern day Jacob – i.e. the nation of Israel – via the tribulation. After this touch, Jacob was a changed man and Israel will be changed as well. Jacob exclaimed that he had seen the face of God and lived. Likewise, very soon, the blinders will be taken off of the chosen remnant of Israel. Then, they will see Christ clearly and, as a consequence, live.

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (Rom 11:25)

But back to Jacob. He was at his wits end. In an effort to obey God and return to the promised land, he left the land of his uncle Laban where he'd lived for some 20 years. He was at this point a large family and prosperous, but the land of promise was still quite dangerous. His brother, he thought, might still want to kill him.

Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, "Speak thus to my lord Esau, "Thus your servant Jacob says: "I have dwelt

with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight."'"

Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies. And he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape."

Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'"

So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals. Then he delivered them to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves." And he commanded the first one, saying,

"When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose are these in front of you?' then you shall say, 'They are your servant Jacob's. It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also is behind us.'" So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, "In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and also say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp. (Gen 32:3-21)

Jacob schemed and prayed; and prayed and schemed. He was "greatly afraid and distressed." After his last contingency was in place, he retired alone across the creek and hoped to get some sleep.

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

This is so terse. Who started the tussle? Were any words exchanged? This is the only place in the Bible where this word 'wrestle' is used. It basically means to get dusty. So these grapplers weren't going at it Greco-Roman style. They were rolling around in the dirt and the dust was flying. It was a melee! Can you picture that?! God's Son getting filthy dirty in order to finally break through to Jacob.

But that's exactly what He did, didn't He? Jesus got dusty and dirty for us in order that He could save us.

...we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor 5:20,21)

What kind of God does that? He wrestles all night with us sometimes –

through our darkest, most desperate times. With dust and dirt flying everywhere, He looks in our eyes and into our desperately wicked heart with patient love. Sometimes, He'll wound us for our own good – our walk will change. As amazing as it is to consider Jacob wrestling with God, it is even more so to ponder God wrestling with him. What kind of Savior does that? A true Savior. One Who will do what it takes to demonstrate His love.

The match was over when Jacob cried out with tears for a blessing.

Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed;

He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel,

And there He spoke to us (Hos 12:4)

He was wounded; he received a new name and with it a new emerging godliness, and the sun was about to rise.

Have you struggled with God? Made your plans in desperation? The verses above say that as Jesus worked with Jacob, He spoke to us. He spoke of our desperate need and His relentless love.

Jacob had "power" with the Lord – he "prevailed" -- not because he mastered the Master, but rather because he simply held on. He fervently desired God's help and wouldn't let go.

Hold fast. Our power or standing before God is based upon our holding on to Jesus – that is, our faith in Him.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] profession. (Heb 4:14)

When the Esau's of this world approach, hold on to Jesus. When it's dark and you're alone, hold on to Jesus. When you're desperate for help, hold on to Jesus. It may cost you, it may even hurt. But hold on to Jesus. He'll never let go of you.

AN ANGEL YOU OUGHT TO KNOW

by Loren Jacobs

The modern mind cannot conceive of angelic beings. This is due in part to medieval art and literature, which relegate belief in angels to the realm of superstition. Or perhaps we like to try to explain away that which makes us uncomfortable. Indeed, there are those who would even dismiss the belief in God as mere superstition.

Yet virtually every philosopher who has recognized the God of the Bible has also believed in angels—not the cute cherubs of Christmas cards, but mighty and powerful spiritual beings who are servants of the Most High God.

In Hebrew, the word for "angel" is *malakh*. A malakh is a messenger, either human or angelic. Yet there is one malakh who stands out from all the rest. The Bible calls him simply, "the angel of the Lord."

Since the time of Abraham, our people have known about the angels of the Lord. In the Talmud he is given the name Metatarsus, which indicates a special relationship with God. One meaning of *meta* and *thronos*, two Greek words, gives the sense of "one who serves behind the throne of God." He is also known as the "Prince of the Countenance" because of the close proximity between this angel and God Himself. The implication for the malakh of the Lord is that He is, above all, the messenger of God, the one sent by God, the one who represents God Himself.

Throughout the Tanach, the angel of the Lord often appeared in human

form. He served in three ways---guiding the people of Israel, effecting miracles, and executing judgment on Israel's enemies.

He is first mentioned in Genesis 16. After Hagar fled into the wilderness to escape from Sarah, Abraham's wife, the angel of the Lord found her and admonished her to return to her mistress. He then promised to greatly multiply her descendants and prophesied the birth of Ishmael, who became the progenitor on the Arab nations.

In Genesis 22, read every Yom Kippur, it is the angel of the Lord who called from heaven to stay the hand of Abraham as he took the knife to slay his son Isaac. In Exodus 14, he was in the pillar of cloud guiding the Israelites through the wilderness after their flight from Egypt. In Numbers 22:22-35, the angel of the Lord appeared to Balaam, the non-Jewish prophet, and gave him orders to be followed.

He instructed Gideon in Judges 6, telling him to deliver Israel from Midian. He prophesied the birth of Samson (Judges 13), directed Elijah to Mt. Horeb (I Kings 19), and commanded King David to build an altar in Jerusalem which later became the site of the temple of Solomon (I Chronicles 21:18).

The angel of the Lord is also presented to us as an avenger of evil, a judge. When Assyria, which was one of the ancient super powers, threatened to destroy Israel (700's BCE), it was the angel of the Lord who killed the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers besieging Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35). This angel, powerful in battle, was gentle enough to succor a fleeing and

frightened Hagar in the wilderness.

This angel was perceived in a unique and remarkable way by those with whom he came in contact. In ancient times it was common knowledge that if one saw God, it meant death for the individual. God stated this directly to Moses on Mt. Sinai: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). After Hagar saw the angel of the Lord, it is recorded that she called him Lord and marveled that she was still alive after having seen him (Genesis 16:33).

Jacob reacted in a similar fashion when he wrestled with a "man" during the night. The man blessed Jacob and changed the patriarch's name to Israel. Jacob responded by calling the place of this encounter Peniel, saying, 'it is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.' (Genesis 32:30). Jacob identified the "man" as God. Later in his life, when Jacob blessed his son Joseph and his children, he said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm..." (Genesis 48:15,16). The parents of Samson, likewise, recognized the angels of the Lord to be God, "We are doomed to die!...We have seen God!" (Judges 13:22).

The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the midst of a burning bush (Exodus 3:2) but then in verse 4, "God called to him from with the bush..." When the Lord delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, the Bible says, "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light..."

(Exodus 13:21). But we read again in Chapter 14, verse 19, that the "angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them.

The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming in between the armies of Egypt and Israel" (Exodus 14:19,20). And then in verse 24 we are told that the Lord looked down on the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and cloud, and fought against Egypt! Who is involved in this pillar—the angel of the Lord or God Himself?

In Judges 6, the angel of the Lord appeared to a timid Gideon and sat down under an oak tree to initiate a conversation with him (vss. 11,12). In verse 13, we see Gideon responding, but in verse 14 something strange happens: all of a sudden it is the Lord who is seen talking to Gideon! In verse 16, the conversation continues, but in verse 20, it is the angel of God who is in conversation. The next verse relates a miracle is performed by the angel. Then Gideon responds: 'Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face! But the LORD said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die!" (Judges 6:22,23)

Are there two or three characters in this passage? One, of course, is Gideon. In verses 11 and 12 we have the angel of the Lord, then the Lord in verses 14 and 16, then the angel of God in verse 20 and again the angel of the Lord in verse 21. This writer maintains that the angel of the Lord must be the Lord God. Yet in some sense, the angel of the Lord, even though He Himself is

deity, must be distinguished from the totality of the Godhead. For in Zechariah 1:12, the angel of the Lord is seen interceding on behalf of Israel, calling out to the Lord of hosts! The Holy Scriptures have given us a paradox: The Angel of the LORD is distinct from God, yet is Himself very God!

This paradox is consistent with God's very nature. God, who is involved with His creation and interested in our welfare (Psalm 139:3, 13) is also high above (Isaiah 55:8,9). God is a vengeful God to those who flaunt His revealed will (Deuteronomy 32:35), and yet He is merciful (Exodus 33:19). God is all-important (Psalm 139), and yet He willingly "forgets" (Jeremiah 31:34, Isaiah 64:9). God is an advocate, a defender of His people (Psalm 59:1, Job 16:19), but He is also a prosecutor and judge (Psalm 50:6), Ecclesiastes 3:17). When we study the nature of God, we find paradoxes.

The angel of the Lord, God Himself, revealed Himself in a visible, personal way-taking the form of a human being.

This writer maintains that not only could the angel of the Lord assume human form, but that, in time, he took on true humanity by being born into the human race!

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6,7) (NIV)

This writer also maintains that the Old and New Testaments are intrinsically connected and make up

God's revelation to man. The claims in the New Testament portion concerning Jesus correspond to those claims in the Old Testament portion which refer to the angel of the Lord. Jesus claimed to be the supreme malakh of God. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The angel of the Lord did miraculous acts; so did Jesus. (See John 2:9, Matthew 8:3, Luke 7:11, Matthew 15:32, etc.) The angel of the Lord taught and instructed people; Jesus was called "rabbi" (John 20:16). The angel of the Lord is a judge of mankind; in John 5:22 we see "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." Is Jesus of Nazareth and the angel that wrestled with Jacob one and the same? Carefully study the Scriptures for God's answer.

Many good agencies have risen to the occasion in order to help the people of the Gulf Coast who are in great need. A coordinated relief effort by many hundreds of Calvary Chapels is one of them.

Calvary Chapel of New Orleans is accepting donations via FedEx at this address:

Pastor Kevin Cox
Calvary Chapel New Orleans
5335 Halls Ferry Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70817

Calvary Chapel in Stone Mountain, GA, under the direction of Sandy Adams, 770-736-2828, is coordinating the safe entry of teams from across the country to place you were you are needed most (i.e. Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana.)

The Coming Time of Trouble

(excerpts) by Ray C. Stedman

I would like to read for you some of the passages from the Old Testament that picture and describe that "Coming Time of Trouble." I will start with the little book of Zephaniah, (the fourth book back from Matthew). In it is a passage describing, along with many passages in the Old Testament which we could sight, the coming period of trouble known as "The Day of the Lord" or "The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord." Zephaniah 1:14-18:

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring distress on men, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord. In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

When the Bible uses a term like "all the inhabitants of the earth," though it is a frightening term, it does not necessarily mean the total extinction of the race. Other passages make that clear, that there is not coming a

time when the whole race of mankind is going to be obliterated from the earth. When he says he will make a "sudden end" of all the inhabitants of the earth, it does not necessarily imply their death. It means the destruction of all the ways of life that they have adopted, and that judgment will strike in all the parts of the earth, but not necessarily a total elimination. But that is a vivid description. Admittedly this is Hebrew poetry, and Hebrew poetry tends to paint in vivid colors. It can be in its literal interpretation subdued somewhat. It is not necessarily quite as vivid as the imagery implies. That is why I say you cannot take this as a fully literal statement. But it must be taken realistically, and that is that it does deal with a terrible day of trouble that is coming which will be widespread and will be a very painful and terrible time.

Another passage somewhat similar to that is in the little prophecy of Joel which is further back a few pages in the Old Testament. The prophecy of Joel falls in the minor prophets just after Hosea and before the prophet Amos. In Joel, beginning in the 2nd chapter, you have a prediction of "The Day of the Lord" again.

Immediately following the great passage that was quoted on the day of Pentecost by the Apostle Peter when he said the Lord would "pour out his Spirit on all flesh, sons and daughters would prophesy," etc. This is the passage from which he quoted. And it goes on in verse 30 to say, Joel 2:30:

And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The

sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. [Peter quoted that part too] And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls. [A remnant shall escape the trouble in Israel] For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat...

There is some doubt as to just where that valley is located. Some have identified it with the Kidron Valley right outside the City of Jerusalem, between the Mt. of Olives and the City of Jerusalem. However, it seems it is identified more accurately with the valley down near the little village of Tekoa. Any of you know what famous prophet came from Tekoa? That was the home town of the prophet Amos, just south of Bethlehem. There King Jehoshaphat went forth to meet the combined armies of Moab and Ammon and others that were coming up from the south against Jerusalem. As recorded in the historical books, God gave him a great victory without even a fight. God dispersed the armies, turned them against each other and by the time the armies of Israel arrived on the scene, most of the enemy was already dead, having destroyed themselves. This is what was later known to be the Valley of

Jehoshaphat. So it seems to be associated with the scene around the mountains of Judea south of Jerusalem, and here God says, "I will gather the nations, ... Joel 3:2b:

...and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations, and have divided up my land, [Notice how He insists He owns it] and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it.

Then in a very dramatic, prophetic, poetic passage in verse 9 comes a very stirring challenge to the armies. Joel 3:9:

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am a warrior." Hasten and come, all you nations round about, gather yourselves there. Bring down thy warriors, O Lord. Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. And the Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is

a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

Many have taken these passages to be a picture of spiritual judgments, desolations, poverty, etc., but it is clear, I think, from the many passages in other parts of Scripture as well, that these are to be taken with both a spiritual application as to what happens to a mind and heart which turns away from God and destroys itself by idolatry and immorality and also with a literal fulfillment in the coming "Great day of the Lord." Scripture everywhere speaks of this coming time of trouble, "The Day of The Lord;" the day of the Lord's wrath; the day when he will settle his controversy with the nations, and it is impossible to read either the Old or the New Testaments without running into this repeated theme. There is coming a day when God is going to settle accounts with the earth. We love, of course, the preaching of the "Grace of God." And God is a God of grace, but grace never sets aside the necessity for a final settling of the accounts of those who refuse to avail themselves of God's grace, and this is that time when among the nations of earth God will bring forth his judgment.

In Matthew 24:21 he says:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

Never will be. Worse time of trouble ever seen on earth. When you think of the terrible days of the holocaust in Europe when 6,000,000 Jews were put to death, you can see how terrible time this must be since it is a worse time than that, and our Lord says and if those days had not been shortened,

no human being would be saved.

Isn't that amazing? Here is the prediction of the Lord himself that there is going to come a time when the population of the earth will be threatened, when the extinction of the race will be possible, and when unless God intervenes it will happen. He says, "If those days had not been shortened." Who will shorten them? God himself. He alone has power to do that. Jesus said to his disciples, "The times and the seasons are not for you to know but the Father had put them in his own power and he governs in the affairs of men." "...but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."

We do not know how much shorter they are going to be made, but in mercy God is going to see to it that man does not destroy himself from the face of the earth. Now, that is a very remarkable passage.

I refer now to only one more out of many passages that deal with this issue, but in the Book of Revelation you have a number of extensive passages that describe this terrible time of trouble, "The Great Tribulation," and I will share with you, at this point, one from the 6th chapter, the opening of the 6th seal. John, you remember, saw a book sealed with seven seals, and, as the Lamb took the book and opened them one-by-one, terrible events happened on earth. When he comes to the 6th seal he records these words. Revelation 6:12:

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the

stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?"

That is a very vivid summary of what is coming on the face of the earth. One question, among others, which we have to ask is, "These judgments produced by man; are they nuclear forces turned loose in this nuclear age creating worldwide catastrophe among the nations or are they natural powers released by God, such as, in the past in limited ways, have occurred on our planet, i.e., volcanic eruptions, great earthquakes, even perhaps the shifting of the continents?" Most scientists agree there was a time when the continents drifted apart, still are drifting in fact, and that much of the trouble in California is caused by one plate rubbing against another deep in the surface of the earth, and by the continents moving, floating on a great ocean of molten rock, creating many of the earthquakes. Will this time of trouble be a time of natural disaster when perhaps volcanic eruptions occur in widespread areas or when even meteors or stars fall upon the earth?

I think you see a combination of forces like that. It seems to me, in looking at these passages, that you have both possibilities taking place. Man is allowed to work his worst upon himself through the terrible powers of nuclear fission and fusion which he has discovered and, perhaps, combined with an invasion from outer space. I am not talking about Star Wars. I am talking about perhaps the near approach to our solar system of a visitor from space, a comet, a meteor, another planet about to collide with ours.

Whatever you may think of the discoveries of Immanuel Velikowski, the Russian scientist, who startled the scientific world in the earlier decades of this century with several books, one of which was "Worlds in Collision." He documented from many, many sources around the earth, that in the past there have occurred such near approaches of planetary bodies to the earth that have greatly disturbed the gravitation of earth and have created tremendous tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, upthrusts of whole levels of land, disturbances in many ways on the face of the earth, and we may be coming to something like that again. There is a passage in Luke, Chapter 21, verse 26 that strongly suggests this. Luke says that *"men's hearts shall fail them with fear"* as they look at the things that are coming to pass on the earth, at the waves and the seas roaring. It is highly suggestive of terrible natural disasters. So, I think the passages suggest that we have both of these forces at work.



Art: *Be Not Afraid* by Greg Olsen