

THE SABBATH SCOOP

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Where Is America Headed?

The blessings we once enjoyed are disappearing and are being replaced by curses!

By Gregory Dullum

America has been a bastion of FREEDOM! It has been a land of *opportunity* and HOPE! The Statue of Liberty welcomes the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of other teeming shores; those homeless, tempest-tossed people who have come here to live “the American dream.” They dreamed of having a successful career, a loving family, a dependable vehicle, a beautiful home, plenty of food and drink, and the freedom to pursue happiness and various luxuries of life.

Americans have lived that dream! Even those who think of themselves as poor would be considered RICH in many other countries of this world!

Unfortunately, being richly blessed can carry its own seeds of destruction. Blessed people tend to forget the source of their blessings—God Almighty!

Dangers of Forgetting God

Moses warned the ancient Israelites, “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God...—then you say, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’ ” (Deut. 8:11-14, 16-17).

Our early settlers and Founding Fathers were strong on obeying the Bible, but modern Americans seldom look to the scriptures to guide their lives. Most still attend religious services but they don’t obey what the Bible says. This trend began in the



Photo by NAPS

For 237 years the U.S. has shone brightly as a bastion of freedom and as an example of living by many of God’s laws. As our nation turns its back on God, we are seeing the light of freedom—and our blessings—diminish.

1950s:

“The 1950s represented a breakthrough in America’s relationship with God, when the starkly drawn denominational lines of the past began to fade. True religion was under threat, wrote historian Will Herberg in his landmark 1955 study, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. Instead, religion had been replaced with what he called a watered-down ‘faith-for-faith’s sake’ attitude, where ‘familiar words are retained, but the old meaning is voided.’ Religion now meant little more than maintaining a positive attitude in life and believing in everything you do” (*America’s Prophet: Moses and the American Story* by Bruce Feiler, 2009, p. 236).

People once *accepted as fact* that there was a God who made and sustained all things. As the theory of evolution became accepted, it *pushed God out of the picture* and people no longer saw a need to OBEY

his laws. They considered themselves to be accidents of nature and therefore free to conduct their lives in *whatever manner they chose*. As in the case of our original forefathers Adam and Eve, Americans became *gods unto themselves*, choosing *their own standards* of RIGHT and WRONG (Gen. 3:5). That, in God’s eyes, is idolatry (Ex. 20:1-3).

Turning our backs on the God who blessed us has DIRE CONSEQUENCES! Last month, we saw that in order to keep our blessings, we must obey God! What will happen to our nation if we continue down the road of disobedience to God?

God tells us his blessings won’t last forever! “And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it” (Jer. 18:9-10).

Cursed in Every Undertaking

As our nation turns its back on God, it will become cursed in *everything* it does! “But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country, cursed shall be your basket and kneading bowl, cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, and the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will send upon you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you

AMERICA HEADED?

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America Headed?

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are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness in your doings in which you have forsaken Me” (Deut. 28:15-20).

Sickness and Disease

Instead of robust health, sickness will abound! “The LORD will make the plague cling to you.... The LORD will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever... The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart.... and there shall be no strength in your hand....

“If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear the glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, then the LORD will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses. Moreover He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. And every sickness and every plague which is not written in the book of this law, will the LORD bring upon you until you are destroyed” (Deut. 28:21-22, 27-28, 32b, 59-61).

Our hospitals and doctor’s offices are filled with patients. RARE is the American who takes NO medication of *any kind!*

Cursed Food Supply

Instead of abundant nutritious food, our food will become scarce and lack life-giving vitamins and minerals!

“Cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be... the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.... And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down upon you until you are destroyed....” (Deut. 28:17,-18, 23-24).

Famine will someday become so severe that parents will eat the afterbirth of their newborn babies—and then the children themselves (vv. 53-57)!

Economically Depressed

Instead of being number one economical-

ly, we will become a great debtor nation “The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head and you shall be the tail” (Deut. 28:43-44).

Military Defeats

Instead of being victorious in our military battles, we will suffer defeat. “The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them...” (Deut. 28:25).

The ultimate defeat will be our national captivity as our people will be removed to other lands as slaves!

“The LORD will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the LORD will carry you.... You shall beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity....

“Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of all things; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young.... They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the LORD your God has given you....

“The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other... And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD your God will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you: you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were evening!’ And in the evening you shall say, ‘Oh that it were morning!’ because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see. And the LORD will take you back to Egypt in ships,

by the way which I said to you, ‘You shall never see it again.’ And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you” (vv. 36-37, 41, 47-52, 64-68).

The Curses Are Beginning

If we look around us today, we see the beginning of these curses! The more we turn our backs on God, the more our blessings will disappear!

It’s frustrating to watch our wonderful nation go down the wrong path! God warned that it could “drive us mad” (Deut. 28:34). Is there any hope for America? Yes!

There Is Hope!

If we repent, and turn from our wicked ways to follow God, He will change his mind about destroying our nation. “ ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the LORD. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so you are in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it’” (Jer. 18:6-8).

God will continue to bless this nation if we repent: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

Our future as a nation lies before us down two different paths. We can continue down the path we are on and be destroyed as a nation. Or we can repent, return to God, and continue to enjoy God’s blessings. Which direction will we take?

The SABBATH SCOOP

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Render Unto God...

What can we learn from Christ's encounter with Pharisees and Herodians as they question Him about paying taxes?

By Gregory Dullum

When Jesus Christ walked the earth 1,982 years ago, He didn't live in a free country as we do. He came to a land controlled by the Roman Empire. Palestine wasn't the first territory that Rome had taken over.

Taxes Under the Romans

Rome acquired its first province—part of Sicily—in the middle of the third century B.C. after defeating the Carthaginians. As provinces were added to the empire, Rome took over their systems of taxation. The tax systems usually stayed the same in each territory but the money went to Rome.

Why did the Romans need tax money? Taxes were used for two main purposes: to pay for wars of conquest and to pay the administrative costs of having Rome rule over each territory.

In the area of Palestine, King Herod collected taxes as he saw fit and then paid a fixed lump sum tribute to Rome. Some Bible translations speak of taxes, others use the word tribute. They are the same thing.

The Pharisees & Herodians

When Jesus came to Jerusalem a few days before his crucifixion, two groups of Jews ganged up on Him, trying to trap Him in his words regarding taxes. These two groups were the Pharisees and the Herodians. Who were they? How did they differ?

The Pharisees were a group of Jews who tried to keep themselves pure by not associating with people outside their sect. They were not very political in their views unless politics prevented the practice of their religion. They believed Israel should acknowledge no other king than God alone and the house of David. They did not believe paying taxes to a Roman emperor was lawful.

The Herodians were a party of Jews formed under Herod the Great who held that it was right to pay homage to a sovereign if that sovereign could bring the *friendship* of Rome or *other advantages*.

The two parties disagreed on paying taxes and tribute. Yet, they joined forces against Jesus, whom they considered to be a common enemy.

The Trap Is Set

Notice what they asked Jesus: "Teacher, we know that you are an honest man. You don't worry about what people think, be-

cause you pay no attention to what a man seems to be, but you teach the truth about God's will for man. Tell us, is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor? Should we pay them, or not?" (Mark 12:14 *Good News Bible*). Note that this was a dispute *among themselves*. They asked, "Should we pay taxes or not?" They asked Christ to settle their dispute.

Did they *really care* what Jesus would answer? If Jesus said *to pay taxes*, would the Pharisees change their minds? No! If He told them *NOT* to pay taxes, would the Herodians change their minds? No. They weren't interested in *obeying* what He said. That's why Christ called their attitude "hypocrisy" in verse 15. They just wanted to trap Him in his words (v. 13).

What was the trap? If Jesus said to pay taxes, the Pharisees—and much of the population—would have become upset, because they hated the Roman occupation. If He said not to pay taxes, the Herodians would have been upset and Christ could have been accused of sedition against Caesar and the Roman government.

What did Jesus do?

Jesus' Reply

"He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, 'Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it.' So they brought it. And He said to them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' And they said, 'Caesar's.'" (Mark 12:15-16).

The denarius (called a "penny" in *KJV* was the size of a U.S. penny) and was equivalent to a day's wages. On the obverse side was the face of Caesar Tiberius, who ruled during Christ's life. The inscription read, "Tiberius, Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus." (An enlarged view of this coin can be found on the next page.)

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (vv. 15-17).

The Meaning of 'Render'

Jesus used a different word than the Pharisees and Herodians. He said "render" instead of "pay." *Nelson's NKJV Study Bible's* footnotes on the account in Matthew 22, say, "In responding to His opponents, the Lord changed the verb they used from 'pay' (v. 17) to render, which

literally means 'to pay back.' Christ's followers have an obligation to earthly governments and to God. Believers today are citizens of a heavenly kingdom and strangers and sojourners on the earth. It is believers' responsibility to obey the laws of the land until it becomes sinful to do so. When the two realms are in conflict, Christians are to follow God" (p. 1617).

A modern version of the story could go like this: We Americans ask Jesus if it's lawful to pay taxes or not. Jesus replies, "Show me a dollar bill." We pull a dollar out of our wallet. "Whose image is on this bill?" Jesus asks us. We reply, "Washington." He then tells us, "Render unto Washington the things that are Washington's and unto God the things that are God's." We send our tax dollars to Washington—not the man, but the city, Washington, D.C.

We receive a lot of benefits from our government: national security and defense, education, good roads, police protection, library usage, etc. It is our duty to render—to pay back—our government for the services we have received.

We must pay our taxes, but we must not stop there. Jesus didn't. He added, "Render unto God the things that are God's." What do we render to God? How do we pay God back? What do we owe Him?

Render What to God?

How did the Pharisees and Herodians know to send tax money to Caesar? Jesus didn't say the words, "Pay taxes." He asked whose *image* was on the coin. The coin bore the *image of Caesar*, and the Jewish leaders knew to *send tax money to Caesar*.

What *bears the image of God* that we should render unto Him? "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them' (Gen. 1:26-27).

WE bear the image of God! Our *entire being* was made in the image of God. We owe *our entire life* to God. We pay God back by dedicating our *entire life to his service*. We must love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30).

If we don't dedicate *our entire lives* to God, we are *ignoring* Jesus in the same manner that the Pharisees and Herodians ignored Him. We don't want to be *hypocrites* as they were! Let's render to God our entire lives—our heart, soul, mind and strength!



Denarius, actual size

JOHN THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED

John and the other disciples listen as the Jewish religious leaders attempt to trip up Jesus with his words.

By Gregory Dullum
Part 11

People Don't Believe Christ

Jesus Christ had made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, very likely on a Friday evening after sunset, which was the beginning of the 10th day of the first month (Abib) on God's calendar.

After looking around, He had returned to Bethany. On the next morning, He and the disciples returned to Jerusalem. He cursed a fig tree on the way because it bore no fruit. He went into the temple and overturned the money-changers' tables. He then became a little melancholy as He thought about the sacrifice that He was about to make four days later. God spoke some encouraging words to Him that most of the crowd around thought was only thunder.

Jesus again spoke of his impending death and resurrection. The Jews didn't understand—they remembered scriptures from the Old Testament that said the Messiah would rule forever (Isa. 9:6). How, then, could the Messiah be killed? (John 12:34). Christ tried to explain it to them, but their eyes were not opened to the truth (vv. 35-41).

Nevertheless, some of the Jewish leaders believed Christ. They didn't let anyone know, for fear of being put out of the synagogue. John describes these people in his Gospel: "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (v. 43). We must be careful we don't fall into the same trap.

When Saturday evening came, John and the other disciples followed Jesus out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, and they spent the night in Bethany (Mark 11:19, Luke 21:37).

Fig Tree Withered

On Sunday morning, Abib 11, John and the other disciples returned with Jesus to Jerusalem. As they passed by the barren fig tree, the disciples noticed it had dried up from the roots (Mark 11:20).

The disciples were astonished to see a tree that had been healthy the day before now withered and dead. Peter said to Christ, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away" (v. 21). Christ used this to teach his disciples a lesson about having faith when praying (vv. 22-26).



Photo by Greg Dullum

This is a copy of a "tribute penny" or denarius that Christ used when asking the Jews whose image was on the coin. The obverse side (shown enlarged) has a laureate bust of Tiberius. The inscription reads, "TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS," meaning, "Tiberius, Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus."

Jesus' Authority Questioned

Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple and taught.

John and the other disciples watched as the chief priests and elders approached Jesus and asked by what authority He was doing these things (Mark 11:27-28).

Jesus answered their question with a question. He said, "I will also ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: the baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me."

They reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'from heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' " —they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." Jesus replied, "Neither will I tell by what authority I do these things" (Mark 11:27-33).

Christ then told three parables: the parable of the two sons (Mat. 21:28-32), the parable of the wicked vinedressers (Mark 12:1-12) and the parable of the wedding feast (Mat. 22:1-14). All of

these had lessons for the Jews who were listening (Mat. 21:31, 43, 22:11-14).

Pharisees Try to Ensnare Jesus

Certain Pharisees and Herodians were sent to try to ensnare Jesus in his words. They asked Jesus if it were proper to pay tribute to Caesar. Jesus asked for a coin and then asked them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They replied, "Caesar's." And Christ then told them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This caused everyone to marvel at Jesus' words (Mark 12:13-17).

Jesus Teaches About Marriage

Sadducees, who didn't believe in a resurrection, asked Jesus a question regarding the resurrection. They told a story of seven brothers. The first took a wife but died, leaving no children. Each, in turn, then took her as his wife and died, leaving no children. They asked Jesus, "in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be?"

Jesus said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (vv. 24-25).

Does this mean everyone will look alike after the resurrection? Will husbands and wives go off in separate directions and not be together for eternity?

Marriage will not exist after the resurrection because it was NOT made for God-beings. It was instituted for humans. It was intended to create nurturing families in which children were to be born (fulfilling God's command to "Be fruitful and multiply"—Gen. 1:28). Resurrected beings will not marry, for there will be *no need to procreate sexually*.

In addition, our families were intended to teach us (by example) about God and his family. And since we will be full spirit members of the God family, there will be no need to live in separate marriages that represent God's family. We will TRULY be *one big family!*

Although we will be given new bodies composed of spirit instead of flesh (1 Cor. 15:35, 50-53), we will be able to *make ourselves appear* as we did in the flesh. For example, after his resurrection, Jesus



Photo by Greg Dullum

The widow's mite was a very small copper coin. The obverse side (shown) has an upside-down anchor representing the naval strength of the Seleucid Empire. It is surrounded by the words, "King Alexander Year 25." In the upper right are the letters LKE which mean year 25. Although this was a very small coin, Christ said the widow's two mites were worth more than larger contributions, for they represented the widow's whole livelihood.

could make Himself appear just as He had looked in the flesh, nail holes, spear hole and all (John 20:24-28)! At other times, Jesus appeared in a form unrecognizable to those who knew Him (John 20:11, 14-15). So while there will no longer be marriages, resurrected humans will be able to appear as they looked when human—as men and women. And although there will no longer be marriages, it makes sense to me, that if two people develop a close, loving relationship in this life, they will be allowed to work together as partners for eternity in the next life.

Jesus then jabbed at the Sadducees' lack of belief in the resurrection. He said, "But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken" (Mark 12:26-27). The multitudes were astonished by Christ's teaching, which left the Sadducees speechless (Mat. 22:33-34).

Greatest Commandment

John and the other disciples continued to watch and listen as the Pharisees came at Jesus again.

"But when the Pharisees heard that He

had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together" (Mat. 22:34). A lawyer tested Christ by asking Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'" (vv. 36-40).

Even the 10 Commandments can be divided into two parts; the first four teach us how to love God and the last six how to love our neighbor.

The lawyer agreed with Christ's answer (Mark 12:32-33). No one dared ask Christ any more questions (v. 34).

Having silenced his critics, Christ asked them a question: If Christ was to be the descendant of David, why did David call him Lord? (Mat. 22:41-45). The scribes and Pharisees dared not answer, because they denied that Christ was God (v. 46). The common people thought it was funny to see Christ leave the religious leaders speechless (Mark 12:37).

In his last public discourse, Jesus solemnly denounced the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Mat. 23:1-39).

The Widow's Mite

After this long discourse, Jesus sat down against the temple treasury and watched the rich make big donations while a poor widow cast in two mites (the Greek word is *leptas*, very small copper coins).

No longer teaching the multitudes, Jesus told his disciples, "I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had, her whole livelihood" (Mark 12:41-44).

Olivet Prophecy

As John and the other disciples followed Jesus out of the temple, they couldn't help commenting about the magnificent beauty of the structure (Luke 21:5).

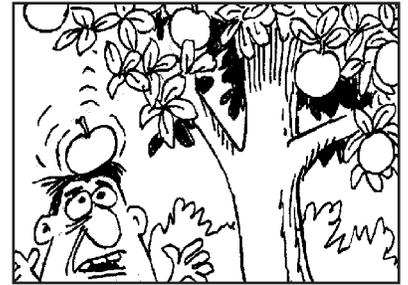
One of them—very likely Peter, since Mark mentions the incident in his Gospel and he later was a disciple of Peter—said to Jesus, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" (Mark 13:1).

Jesus' reply was to Peter and to them all: "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (v. 2, cf.

JOHN

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Fun Fact



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS

Most fruit trees require anywhere from five to eight years from planting to first harvest.

Witerature

Wit and wisdom to complement the truths of the Holy Bible can be found in secular writings.

Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand, Signet, 1996, pp. 787-788.

Lying Is Wrong

"People think that a liar gains victory over his victim. What I've learned is that a lie is an act of self-abdication, because one surrenders one's reality to the person to whom one lies, making that person one's master, condemning oneself from then on to faking the sort of reality that person's view requires to be faked.... The man who lies to the world, is the world's slave from then on.... But there are no white lies, there is only the blackness of destruction, and a white lie is the blackest of all."

Prov. 19:5, 21:28; Rom. 6:16

Quotable Quotes

"Make it a point to do something every day that you don't want to do. This is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain."
—Mark Twain

"All experience is an arch, to build upon."
—Henry Brooks Adams

Memory Scripture

"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the seventh day and hallowed it."
—Ex. 20:11

John

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Mat. 24:2).

The group left Jerusalem, crossed the Kidron Valley, and rested upon the Mount of Olives. Four disciples came to Christ and *privately* asked him when the temple would be destroyed and when the end of this age would come (Mark 13:3). Those four disciples were the first four disciples whom Jesus had called to follow Him full time: Peter, Andrew, James and John (Mark 1:16-20). They had been with Christ the longest. They wondered how much longer it would be.

Jesus knew the destruction of the temple would not come until A.D. 70—39 years into the future. Some of them would be dead before it happened! And the end of the age would not come for about 2,000 years! If He had told his disciples the straight facts, they probably would have let down their guard and lost their zeal for the work which lay ahead.

Instead, Christ worded his reply in such a way that people from that day to this have thought they were living in the last days! He gave them signs to watch: religious deception (Mat. 24:4-5, 11, 23-26), wars and rumors of wars (vv. 6-7), famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places (v. 7), tribulation and martyrdom (vv. 9-10), and a time of lawlessness (v. 12). He mentioned that the gospel would be preached to all nations and then the end would come (v. 14).

Jesus mentioned that his people would flee when they saw the “abomination of desolation” standing in the holy place (vv. 15-20). This abomination of desolation has been understood to mean a great army surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-21).

There will be a time of great tribulation (vv. 21-22). It will be followed by heavenly signs (v. 29) and then Christ will appear in the sky for all to see. There will be a great sound of a trumpet and all of Christ’s followers will rise to meet Christ in the air (vv. 27, 30-31).

Jesus warned Peter, Andrew, James, and John that no one knew the day or the hour of his return, except the Father. And yet, if they kept their eyes open and watched the signs, they would know when they were getting close (vv. 32-36). In spite of that, his coming would be at a time when people wouldn’t be looking for Him to come (vv. 38-42).

They were told—as we are today through these recorded words of Jesus—“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (v. 42).

(To be continued!)



U.S. Supreme Court Bolsters Gay Marriage

“In a pair of major victories for the gay rights movement, the Supreme Court on Wednesday [June 26] ruled that married same-sex couples were entitled to federal benefits and, by declining to decide a case from California, effectively allowed same-sex marriages there....

“The vote in the case striking down the federal Defense of Marriage Act was 5 to 4, and Justice Kennedy was joined by the four members of the court’s liberal wing. The ruling will immediately extend many benefits to couples married in states that allow such unions, and it will allow the Obama administration to broaden other benefits through executive actions....

“By formally declaring anyone opposed to same-sex marriage an enemy of human decency,” Justice Scalia said, “the majority arms well every challenger to a state law restricting marriage to its traditional definition [of a union between a man and woman]” (“Supreme Court Bolsters Gay Marriage With Two Major Rulings” by Adam Liptak, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, June 26, 2013, pp. 1-2).

God condemns homosexual activity (Lev. 18:22). In ancient Israel, those who practiced such an abomination were to be put to death (Lev. 20:13). Those who practice homosexuality will not be allowed into the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9). Homosexuality was one of the sins rampant in Sodom and Gomorrah, and was a reason God destroyed those cities with fire and brimstone (Gen. 18:20-21, 19:4-11, 15-24). God is a just God; He would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and allow the U.S. to remain a nation if it commits the same sins to the same degree.

The U.S. is fast becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. Unless the people of America repent of their sins and return to God, they too will suffer national destruction—not from fire and brimstone—but from an attacking army and national captivity (Lev. 26:27, 31-35).

National captivity must take place before Christ returns—for immediately after He returns, He will free the cap-

tives (Isa. 10:20-23; 11:10-13, 16; 35:10).

Europe Outraged When U.S. Caught Spying

“Damage from the disclosures of the United States spying on its European and Asian allies spread on Monday [July 1], threatening negotiations on a free trade agreement, hurting President Obama’s standing in Europe and raising basic questions of trust among nations that have been on friendly terms for generations” (“Outrage in Europe Grows Over Spying Disclosures” Steven Erlanger, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, July 1, 2013, p. 1).

God used the ancient Assyrians to take ancient Israel captive in 721 B.C. He will likely use modern Assyria (Germany) to take modern Israel (U.S. and British Commonwealth) captive (Isa. 10:5-7). This time Germany will be leading a 10-nation European beast power, the seventh and final resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire (Dan. 2:40-44, Rev. 17:9-14).

This spying incident could be a wedge to help create division between the U.S. and Europe—currently allies, but predicted by prophecy to become enemies.

This Disease Has No Cure

An insidious airborne fungal disease called coccidioidomycosis (or “cocci” for short) has been labeled by the Centers for Disease Control as “a silent epidemic [and] is striking more people each year, with more than 20,000 reported cases annually throughout the Southwest, especially in California and Arizona. Although most people exposed to the fungus do not fall ill, about 160 die from it each year, with thousands more facing years of disability and surgery” (“A Disease Without a Cure Spreads Quietly in the West” by Patricia Leigh Brown, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, July 4, 2013, p. 1).

The spread of disease (pestilences) is one of the signs we are nearing the end time (Mat. 24:3, 7).