

A Message from God

By Ronald L. Dart

I have a message from God. Don't get me wrong, I haven't had any visions, I haven't heard any voices in my ear. The message comes straight from the Bible. All I'm doing is applying it to our generation. Do you realize how much trouble we are in? What would God have to say to a nation like ours? Since there have been nations, not just one, but many before, who were just like ours and it happened that there was one that God did speak to. What did he say?

"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesied falsely, the priests bear rule by their means and my people love to have it so. And what would you do in the end thereof" (Jeremiah 5:30).

Interesting thing about this, the prophets were supposed to be the people who spoke for God. They were also the political pundits of their age. They were preachers. But the preachers nowadays have opted out of the public square. They preach to the church. The prophets went down to the city gate, the public square of that day, and stood on a platform, and preached. They gave God's judgment of society, government, and politics at all levels. People today who have God's word, retire back into the corners and shadows or go on with their churches, huddle with their people and never get out and tell society what it is that God thinks about what they're doing.

If you want to know what a real prophet was like, get yourself a good modern translations like the Living Bible, or the New Living Bible and read Jeremiah. He is dynamite.

The killer line in Jeremiah's statement is, "And my people love to have it so." So the message from God to our generation is, "Stop complaining, you are getting what you want."

What else does God have to say? What other message does he have for this generation? Well you

could go to some other prophet.

Take Isaiah 30 and verse 8, "Now go, write it before them in a table and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever." I think we are still in the same time frame covered by this prophecy. It said for a time to come and forever and ever. Right?

You have heard the old saying, that "History repeats itself." Why? It isn't complicated. Human nature never changes and neither does the Divine Nature. We keep doing the same stupid things over and over again and God responds as he always has.

What did Isaiah write in this book that God told him to write? In Isaiah 30:9-11, "This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law

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You Can't Take it With You. . .

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Freedom of Religion — Could You Lose It?

By Ronald L. Dart

Paul was concerned. It had only been five years since Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome, ostensibly because they were continually causing disturbances. Claudius was dead, and his edict had been rescinded. Nero had ascended to power, and there was a much more tolerant administration in Rome. Still, Paul had this nagging worry.

For one thing, he had no reason to believe that the Jews, now that they had been allowed to return to Rome, would be any less troublesome to the authorities than they had been. And the church was a Jewish sect in the eyes of most of the Roman world. Many, perhaps most, of its members were Jews. The Christians worshiped the God of the Jews, and many of their customs were superficially indistinguishable from those of the Jews.

As if all this weren't enough, Paul had reason to believe the Christians in Rome might be courting trouble. For one thing, Rome was viewed by many Christians as a latter day "Babylon the Great." John would refer to her as the "Mother of Harlots and abominations of the earth." The power of Rome had led to the inevitable corruption, and among Christians there was general contempt for the imperial house. Prophets and would-be prophets had been lavish in their chastisement of the great city.

What worried Paul was the very real possibility that some overt action on the part of the disciples might lead to trouble. Human lives were dirt cheap in those days. Emperor Claudius had extinguished the lives of 30 Roman senators and some 300 Roman gentlemen with so little concern that he sometimes forgot who was alive and who was dead. He had been known to send for people whose execution he had ordered a few weeks earlier only to be reminded the offending gentlemen were no more. On more than one occasion he had caused a stage carpenter or scene painter to be thrown to the lions in the middle of a contest because of some perceived inefficiency. It was not a good time to take chances.

Paul felt quite justified in writing a strong exhortation to the Roman Christians defining the relationship of a Christian to the civil government. An entire account is included for your convenience:

"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 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).

It's plain that Paul was concerned that some of the Christians in Rome might be found in the position of "resisting the powers that be." It is one thing to resist civil authority in the 21st-century United States of America, but it was quite another matter to resist the Roman emperor.

But what if the government is corrupt? Does a Christian *still* have to submit to a corrupt civil government? Bear in mind that this Scripture was written to Christians living in the shadow of Nero: a man so corrupt he even arranged the murder of his own mother. No, the righteousness or goodness of the government is not even a consideration.

Obviously, in the case of a direct conflict between the Law of God and the law of man a Christian is obligated to obey God *rather* than man. In all other circumstances, however, the Christian man or woman is called upon to be in subjection to civil authority. As Paul put it, "the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."

When one understands the historical context, it's easy to understand why Paul might be concerned about someone getting hurt. Little could he know how sharply his concern was to be vindicated. Only six years after he

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wrote this warning, an event took place which was to have drastic consequences, not only for the church but for Nero as well.

On the night of July 19, A.D. 64, a fire broke out in some of the small shops and wooden sheds at the east end of the Circus Maximus. Apparently great quantities of oil and flammable material were stored there. Fed by a strong south wind, the fire spread quickly through the City of Rome. Nine days later two thirds of the eternal city lay in ashes, and countless people were dead or homeless.

Most historians agree that it is highly unlikely that the fire was set by either Nero or the Christians, but Nero was accused of setting the fire. Stung by the accusations, he immediately launched an investigation that culminated in one of the sharpest and most tragic persecutions of the church ever to take place.

Arthur Weigrel, in his biography of Nero, speculated about the reasons why the Christians became the scapegoat for this fire. It has been suggested the Nero simply picked a random scapegoat to cover up for his own guilt. Weigall, however, points to some other reasons why Nero's agents may have brought an accusation against the Christians. The Christians, while tolerated, were not in good reputation.

Seutonius refers to Christianity as "an odious superstition," while Tacitus calls it a "pernicious superstition." Even the Jews in Rome recognized that "everywhere the sect [Christianity] is spoken against" (Acts 28:22).

Some of the chief criticisms leveled against the "sect" of the Christians were that their doctrines were socialistic and anarchistic, that its members were haters of the human race who believed that the end of the world was at hand, and that all mankind, except themselves, was to go into perdition. Weigrel's judgment of the situation is particularly interesting in the light of Paul's previous warning:

"Inquiries seem to have shown that when the city was blazing, these weirdly misanthropic persons had been in a state of ecstasy, crying out that the end was at hand, that Rome, like Babylon, was being destroyed by this Christus who would at any moment appear above the smoke and flames of the conflagration to take the elect to heaven and to annihilate Nero and all his people; and it was said that when they were asked by their

distracted fellowmen if, then, they were glad to see Rome burn, they had replied that this was heaven's fiery vengeance for which they were waiting, nor would they raise a hand to extinguish the flames."

As Weigrel aptly points out, there could be little doubt that this reflected the attitude of the early church. They had been praying fervently "Thy Kingdom come" ever since Christ's ascension. Not even the most pessimistic of them could have expected an additional 2,000 years of history to ensue before the Lord's return. It's difficult to see how such a tremendous disaster as the great fire of Rome would have been seen by these fervent Christians to be anything but a fulfillment of prophecy—the beginning of the events leading to the return of Christ.

"Jesus was coming! The heavens would open now any moment, and they would see him riding upon the fiery clouds. These blazing houses, that stupendous bonfire upon the Palatine, as Nero's palace was consumed, the mansions of the mighty belching smoke and flames, the temples of the old gods crashing in ruins, the shrieks of the panic stricken crowds—all these things were just what their leaders had told them to expect at the approach of their divine Lord and Master" (Arthur Weigrel, *Nero*, page 294).

Small wonder that Nero's investigators may have concluded that the behavior of these Christians indicated that they most certainly had originated the fire. Tacitus writes:

"These persons were commonly called Christians and were hated for their enormities. The founder, whose name was Christus, had been punished as a criminal by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again not only throughout Judea where the mischief originated, but in the city of Rome also, whither all things horrible and atrocious flow from all quarters, and where they are encouraged. Accordingly, first those were denounced who confessed; then on their information a large number were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city as of hating the human race" (Tacitus: *Annals* XV 44).

Weigrel theorizes that the confession spoken of by Tacitus was a confession "that they had made no attempt to extinguish the flames, because they had believed at the time that the conflagration was the signal of the coming of Christ in glory, and still believed that it was one of

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the signs of the beginning of the end.” Whatever this case may be, Christians of Rome became subject to the most abhorrent atrocities, including retaliatory burnings.

Up until this time, Christians enjoyed a remarkable degree of religious toleration—even freedom—in Nero’s Rome. It is sobering to reflect that they themselves might have been partially responsible for the loss of that freedom—and the loss of life that ensued. It’s a crying shame they were not persecuted for preaching the Gospel or for keeping the Commandments of God. They may well have committed the common blunder of setting dates for prophecy, or they may have been exclusivist in their doctrinal stance. It’s not even beyond the realm of possibility that some of them had been involved in political activism and may have made enemies.

It is clear from the way Paul expresses himself in Romans 13 that his “doctrine of duty” to the civil government is just as relevant for those of us living in the 21st century as it was for the Christians living in the first century. Paul was not merely taking an expedient action where this doctrine was concerned. He was dealing with a basic principle of Christian doctrine—a principle that would have application in any age and in any time.

The abuse of religious freedom can lead to serious erosion of that freedom no matter when or where a Christian finds himself.

The Burden of Being Free

As Malcolm Muggeridge put it, “No people, it is safe to say, in all history have been so specifically and lavishly certified to be free and in the full enjoyment of all their human rights as the Americans.” How true it is.

Yet Muggeridge saw a new serfdom taking shape in the world at large which he felt was setting a pattern for the future. He said, “I have never doubted that a key to our present discontents is simply that the burden of being free has come to seem too heavy to be borne, and that, consciously or unconsciously, willfully or under duress, the prevailing disposition is to lay it down.”

What a great tragedy it will be if, in the final analysis, the prophesied persecutions and martyrdoms of the Great Tribulation will be brought about in part, not

so much as a result of the zealous practice of doctrine and belief, or even from preaching the Gospel as a witness, but from overt acts of blatant hostility against state or federal agencies, directly contrary to the sacred Word of God.

How tragic that modern-day Christians seem intent, in some cases, on repeating the mistakes of those who died in merciless persecutions centuries before.

The blessed gift of freedom carries with it an enormous burden of responsibility. Don’t lay it down.

Note from Ronald L. Dart December 22, 2004

“And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15).

Mind you, these people had not ceased to be religious. They had their worship services, they had their religious holidays and their special days of assembly, but the whole thing had become hateful to God. It wasn’t that there was anything wrong with worship. But when you hold up your hands to God, they had better be clean. All of their worship of God was vain and offensive to the God they thought they were worshiping. Jesus himself said that it is possible to worship God in vain, and Jerusalem had come to that. The remedy?

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 1:16-20).

What you are doing has consequences, said God to Jerusalem. When you start rotting away from the core, you invite aggression by your enemies. Sometimes, it sounds like Isaiah has been watching our cable news.

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of the LORD: Which say to the seers, Don't see, and to the prophets, don't prophesy to us right things, speak smooth things, prophesy deceit. Get out of the way, turn aside out of the pack, cause the holy one of Israel to cease from before us."

Stop telling us what God says because we don't want to hear it! These were people of the lie. We are no better than they were. We don't want to hear the Law of God either. This started a long time ago with the theologians who decided that the Law of God had been abolished, done away, nailed to the cross, rendered powerless, no longer operative, or however they like to state it. This set men free and the law of unintended consequences came into play. We were left without any standard of right behavior, except what we legislate for ourselves.

Why don't the preachers tell us the truth? Because we told them not to, didn't we? We didn't want to hear it, did we?

Think about this, the preacher has a family to take care of. He has children to feed and clothe. All they have done is to tell him what they hired him to tell you. Why should you expect anything more? Are you going to sit there and listen to the preacher, week after week, who makes you feel uncomfortable by telling you about your sins, telling you what you've done wrong, calling on you repent? Are you going to put up with that? Not many churches will. That's why their preachers don't do it.

Verse 15 of Isaiah 30, "For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and you just wouldn't have it."

The message of the prophet to us is age old. The liar lies to himself first and when he begins to believe his own lies he becomes morally blind and the next step is to hate anyone who tells him the truth that would destroy his shabby house of cards.

What Are Real Prophets Concerned About?

"The word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, show mercy and compassion every man to his brother: Don't oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart" (Zechariah 7:8-10).

This is the constant message of every biblical prophet. This is what the New Testament tells us is true religion. The real prophets are not interested in satisfying your curiosity about the future. They are concerned with how we treat one another. And that's what God's concern is and that's what controls his desire to keep us safe or let us get hurt.

Zechariah 7:11-14, "But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it happened, *that* just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts. "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate."

When people think they want prophecy, they do not know what they're asking for! They don't really understand that the prophets were telling people how to live their lives in the presence of God.

You have God's Word. It may be on your coffee table or on a shelf in your bookcase. Take your Bible and read it.

A Famine of Hearing the Word of God

Amos 8:11-12 is shocking. I have read it so many times and I think about what he says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it."

This is because you just keep rejecting what God says, and sooner or later, it isn't there to be heard. You have rejected it, and the man who might've given or spoken it to you, finally threw up his hands and walked away and said, "What's the point, they're not interested in hearing a word that God has said."

We have all turned down the wrong road. And after all this came down around Israel's ears, and most found themselves in Babylonian captivity. One of their

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most righteous men prayed a prayer of repentance for all of them and he, Daniel, a most righteous man, prayed a prayer of repentance for Israel and included himself among the sinners that brought it on.

So what are you and I supposed to do about this? On the grand scale, there's not much we can do. But on the personal scale, *we can live the life*. We can listen to the words of the prophets. We can respond to them personally, and we can try to keep out from under the power of sin.

Do you want a message from God Almighty? Here it is, "Execute true judgment, show mercy and compassion every man to his brother, oppress not the widow or the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor and let none of you even imagine evil against his brother in your heart" (Zechariah 7:10).

Be faithful to God. That's the message. Request your *FREE* CD of *A Message from God* by Mr. Dart.

Book Review: 100 Bible Verses by Robert J. Morgan

By Linda Benton

Robert J. Morgan's book, *100 Bible Verses Everyone Should Know*, contains a collection of many of the best-known Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. This book also gives an overview of the reasons for memorizing God's Word and reviews the benefits of doing so.

Some of these benefits to Scripture memorization are:

- Clearer thoughts
- Healthier emotions
- Eternal optimism

In this book Scriptures are sorted into different categories, dealing with different topics important to Christians such as worship, obedience, joy and the first and second comings of Jesus Christ.

He reinforces the importance of writing these scriptures on our hearts and minds. These days it is so easy to look up a Scripture on our Smartphone, Ipad, laptop, or home computer that memorizing Bible verses just doesn't seem so important. Yet we are told in Proverbs 7:3: "Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart." Having the Scriptures in our memory makes them more portable than any device. It means that the Word is always with us.

The Prophet Amos warns us that there will be a famine of the Word (Amos 8:11, 12). It is significant that we prepare for this and not take our instant access to the Bible for granted.

We have spent 2015 reading through God's Word chronologically. This has been a wonderful journey and it is exciting to be wrapping up our reading project this month.

In light of Amos' prophecy, the benefits of memorizing Scripture, and a desire to obey God, let's focus on writing God's Word on our hearts this coming year. To participate in this 2016 project just request our *FREE Born to Win* Scripture cards each month, and/or request a *FREE* copy of the Scripture memorization CD that can be played at home or in your vehicle.

Reading Robert Morgan's excellent book could be very helpful. You can purchase a copy of it from CEM for \$12.95, you can also buy it from www.robertjmorgan.com, www.amazon.com or www.christianbooks.com and it is available online in an ebook format.

January 2016 Scriptures for Memory

The Beginning*

Genesis 1:1
Genesis 1:26
John 1:1
John 1:14
John 3:16
Colossians 1:16

Salvation*

Romans 3:23
Romans 6:23
Romans 5:8
Romans 10:9
Romans 10:10
2 Peter 3:9

* These topic headings and some of these Scriptures are from the book, *100 Verses Everyone Should Know*, by Robert J. Morgan.

Born to Win

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That the man of God may be proficient and equipped for every good work.