

Church of God, The Eternal

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After the Terror: One Nation Under God?

November 2001

Dear Brethren:

Since the last issue of this *Monthly Letter* in September, 2001, events have transpired which seem to have changed the world forever. Who could have imagined the kind of terrorism we have recently witnessed against the mainland of the United States? While the possibilities of such threats were discussed before in speculative terms, Americans, for the most part, smugly felt they were impervious to the kind of violence which has long been common in other countries. But since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, that confident, insulating feeling is merely a distant memory. Even today, the next phase of this threat—biological terrorism—is only beginning to play out upon the world stage. Things are now happening so rapidly, these comments are likely to be outdated before they are even published.

In the wake of these monumental events, the United States has now engaged in a global assault on the shadowy agents of terror, assembling a worldwide coalition of governments to fight a new common enemy. Never before have we seen such a dramatic change in world politics; an astonishing overnight shift. How ironic it is that little more than a decade ago, today's leading terrorist villain was an ally of the United States against the evil empire of the time, a nation that is now our newfound ally. As major world powers now take advantage of these events to advance their drive toward global unification—through focus on a common menace—so has this same spirit of unification been born nationally within the United States, manifested in a call for patriotic oneness. How remarkable is it that a president who entered office under such controversy just a few months ago—failing even to win the popular vote—enjoys such overwhelming support today? And how incredible it is that Americans and their leaders, who are so seriously divided on issues of race, religion, and societal values, have dropped their

divisive rhetoric and harmoniously come together as a nation. How and why have these incredible changes taken place?

The Role of Fear

Fear is a powerful force. Fear drives human beings to do and accept things they would not otherwise allow in times of peace and security. On the global plane, human governments are afraid of being an enemy to this new coalition of nations, and are subsequently jockeying for favor from the vengeful American superpower, even though they harbor serious disagreements in religious and cultural ideology. In like manner on the national scene, fearful Americans are laying down their differences for a time, allowing this new threat to dominate their orientation. In response, our Congressional leaders have tabled their partisan politics for the appearance of unity behind the Commander-in-Chief; the one national leader we count on to restore our sense of safety. As we have always known but recently witnessed firsthand, there is nothing that can bring former enemies together like a new common threat to all.

How has this new fear from the stark reality of terrorism really changed us? Very often, the first thing human beings are willing to trade for safety is their personal freedom. We have all heard cautions about sacrificing civil liberties for protection, but history seems to be repeating itself as fear-induced reaction is gaining unstoppable momentum. In actuality, there does not seem to be much of a debate, as fear is now driving us like a steamroller toward a whole new era of personal restrictions, all in the name of feeling safe. Yet, as we clamor to give away our liberties in exchange for security, it behooves us to remember the words of Benjamin Franklin:

Those who would give up liberty for a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety, and will lose both.

Can there be much doubt this is now where we are headed as a nation? But more importantly, how does all of this affect us as members of God's Church in these last days, and what is really happening within the plan and purpose of God?

One Nation Under God

Although the founding fathers of this country were not called by God to a knowledge of His Truth, they seemed to understand that the very birth of this nation was an act of divine intervention. In his First Inaugural address, George Washington stated:

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invincible hand, which conducts the affairs of men, more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.

So although George Washington did not really know the God who was blessing and promoting the formation of this nation—as a fulfillment of the birthright promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—he was at least respectful of that Divine Power whose influence he had witnessed firsthand. Abraham Lincoln not only recognized the same manifestation of providence from that God, but understood the requirement of fear and trembling before Him in order to retain those blessings. From a proclamation issued March 30, 1863, for a national day of fasting and prayer, President Lincoln wrote:

We have been recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserves us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Is this not precisely what we are hearing in the rhetoric of patriotic fervor sweeping America today? Americans have been singing national anthems, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, offering prayers, and calling upon the name of God more than ever in these weeks since the terrorist attacks. But is this an indication that our nation truly recognizes the One True God as the source of our strength, wealth, and prosperity? Hardly! What we really have heard is exactly what Abraham Lincoln said existed in 1863, and is even more applicable today, 138 years later. No, we are not hearing that we are a blessed nation under God, but that we are a noble people, by virtue of our own goodness and inherent value. We have not heard that God is our progenitor, but that the American *people* have made this country great. Note the remarks of our president, George W. Bush, within hours after the attacks on September 11:

Our country is strong. A *great people* has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of *American resolve*. America was targeted for attack because *we* are the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining [emphasis ours].

Not even God? What if He chooses to allow it? Will the American people overcome the will of God by their "inherent greatness?" Although such comments from our political leaders certainly stir pride in the hearts of all Americans, as Abraham Lincoln so eloquently stated, there is lacking a recognition that the *living God* deserves the credit for all we have achieved, not the American people. And He can allow it to be taken away just as easily as He gave it. Not surprisingly, it is that very same lack of gratitude and acknowledgment which has always been the true nemesis of the people of God.

Lessons From Ancient Israel

Is there any historical example of God warning His people against taking credit for their own strength and prosperity? Indeed there is. God prophesied that once Israel received His great blessings they should be careful not to be lifted up in personal pride.

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 8:10–20).

Unfortunately, Israel did not heed the warning and proceeded time and time again to pay the price for their arrogance. God demands that He be given the glory, and none else.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23–24).

Even after God's people had rejected Him by corrupting His laws, they still held on to the history and trappings of their former glory for a time. They hearkened back to the days when God had fought for them and blessed them with great victories. They presumed to think that God was duty bound to support them, as if they had an eternal right to protection and prosperity. Remember what occurred when Israel presumed to fight against the Philistines without seeking God's counsel? In First Samuel, chapter four, we read: "And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men" (1 Samuel 4:2). At this point, Israel could have accepted responsibility for their own calamity and sought repentance before God, according to His perfect will. But instead, presuming God must still be favoring them, and the only evil was that of the Philistines, they did something else entirely:

And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again (1 Samuel 4:3–5).

Israel called upon their glorious history as God's elect, and the memories of past victories with the ark of the covenant before them, and advanced to fight again, but this time in personal arrogance. What was the result? Did God substantiate them out of a sense of duty? Was God beholden to back up their national arrogance, just because they

claimed it, marching with the ark in their midst? "And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain" (1 Samuel 4:10–11).

All of the boasting and remembrances of past victories under the protection of God did not save them in the day they rejected their Creator. No one has a perpetual right to God's favor. God blesses and sustains according to His will. And those who separate themselves from Him by repudiation of His perfect laws will not be saved in time of distress.

History Repeats Itself

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on America, a number of religious leaders around the country have called for national repentance, as opposed to arrogantly presuming God is on our side. Even though these men are deceived and do not comprehend God's spiritual laws, they certainly seem to recognize we have become a Godless society, and have utterly rejected the foundation of our Judaeo-Christian heritage. In spite of the fact our monetary currency still proclaims, "In God We Trust," we have swept God from every institution possible, and have embraced the idea that morality and goodness have nothing to do with obedience to God's law, and can be achieved without any knowledge or recognition of the true God. Unfortunately, even most of those who advocate a God-centered society are unwilling to speak the truth when it cuts against the grain of popular opinion. Two well-known television evangelists recently criticized our national tolerance of abortion, homosexuality, and many other violations of God's law as a root cause of our national problems, only to recant and apologize after receiving chastisement from the President and a backlash of public opinion. Did God's legitimate and faithful prophets—including Isaiah and Jeremiah—ever cave-in to public criticism or condemnation from the king? Truth is truth, and never subject to the notion of any man, or the whimsical mood of any human nation.

I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me: for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled. They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD. And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them. They shall go with their flocks and with

their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them (Hosea 5:3–6).

This is not a popular time to verbalize the sins of our nation and the fact we are reaping what we have been sowing as a people. But if this country has become vulnerable to the forces of evil in the world, how can we blame anyone but ourselves? We have already seen that God promised to protect and defend His people, if they were faithful to His perfect law. If then we do not receive that blessing and protection, how then can we look to anyone but ourselves for the answer?

Another quote from Abraham Lincoln will make this point very clear. In his address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois on January 27, 1838, Lincoln was reflecting on the great blessings we had been given as a nation, and the responsibility of the current generation to continue the preservation of those principles as a legacy from our forefathers. He advances the question of how that should be accomplished, and by whom might our liberties and way of life be threatened. He asserts that a foreign power from Europe, Asia, or Africa, "could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years." So how did Lincoln follow to describe the *real* threat to our national liberties and blessings?

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

Whether we know it or not, and whether or not our national leaders know or admit it, that is precisely what is happening today. We are slowly dying a national suicide, by the repudiation of God's laws.

Where Is Our Hope?

It is only natural to be sentimental about our national heritage, and have strong patriotic feelings for the land of our birth. No matter what country we claim for our citizenship, we all share that inherent affinity and loyalty for our homeland. But is our hope for the future dependent upon the national advancement of our country of birth? Will our true happiness and personal satisfaction come from the vindication of the United States of America in this new war on terrorism, or is our real focus on the coming Kingdom of God? If our happiness is truly bound up in the goals and aspirations of

human nations—even our own—we are in for much disappointment and sorrow. Even if these nations achieve certain short-term successes, there is no nation on the face of this earth that will be spared, when God begins to set His hand to humble humanity.

Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon *all nations*, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree (Isaiah 34:1–4) [emphasis ours].

This is a prophecy for the last days, when Jesus Christ will prepare to take possession of His Kingdom. No current nation on earth is going to be preserved in their own glory. They are all going to be brought low, and for reason.

And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For *all nations* have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies (Revelation 18:2–3) [emphasis ours].

There is no nation worthy to be called good in the eyes of God. "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity" (Isaiah 40:17). We should therefore keep this in mind as we watch the events of the last days unfold before us. It is very natural to yearn for the preservation and advancement of our homeland, but our true hope should be in the fulfillment of God's will to replace all these kingdoms with the glorious Kingdom of His Son. If this is truly where our expectation lies, we do not need to be troubled in mind when we see the prophesied destruction of our current way of life come to pass in this world.

Are we now witnessing the beginning of prophesied calamities of the last days? It certainly seems possible. However, we do not intend to add our voice to the drone of self-proclaimed prophets using recent events to focus attention on their private messages

of doom. The faithful will simply wait and watch, trusting in God to guide and protect. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. . . . Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:42, 44). Those prophecies were not written to give men the opportunity to determine specific outcomes ahead of time. They were given to provide an overall picture of events of the last days for God's faithful, that we might not be troubled when we begin to be plagued and persecuted.

We Can Have Confidence

If we are truly focused on the will of God, we need not be shaken by the terrible events to come. "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2). One of the strong indices of a people who have forsaken God is their lack of confidence and peace of mind during troublous times.

And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them (Leviticus 26:36–39).

Does this prophecy bring to mind any events that we have witnessed in recent weeks? Media reports are full of the analysis of the American state of mind in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. We are told many Americans are depressed, not sleeping well, and have changed their lifestyles and behaviors out of an unshakeable fear of the unknown. While we have all been encouraged to go about our normal lives—to demonstrate that the terrorists have not been successful in getting to us—it does not appear this philosophy is working. How many false alarms have we already seen since September 11, which have sent many scrambling, just as we read above would happen to those who forsake God? That fear of the unknown is driving those who do not have confidence in the promises of God's protection.

But we need not fear, if we are truly applying ourselves in the task of growing closer to God and seeking His perfect will in our lives.

Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles (2 Chronicles 32:7–8).

Who is it that is assured of this protection? "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). And how are God's faithful proving that they really fear Him and love His commandments?

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Revelation 2:25–29).

May you each have confidence in those promises of our Heavenly Father during these trying days, trusting in His perfect will as we move ever more swiftly toward the revealing of His Son, Jesus Christ, and that incredible day of redemption.

Your humble servant in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Jon W. Brisby