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Richard Jordan, Editor, President of Grace School of the Bible

888-535-2300 GraceImpact.org

Can America Be Saved?

WOULD II CHRONICLES 7:14 HELP?

BY RICHARD JORDAN

America feels as if it is unraveling. Even amid an era of relative peace and unprecedented comfort there is a mood of foreboding about our long-term future. It seems that our superpower nation is somehow crumbling from within.

In his recent book, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, Robert Bork advanced a very tightly reasoned explanation for what has happened to America. "Every new generation," he writes, "constitutes a wave of savages who must be civilized by their families, schools and churches. An exceptionally large generation can swamp the institutions responsible for teaching traditions and standards."

In other words, when a new generation is large enough-or, we might add, those institutions responsible for "civilizing" is weak enough..that new generation simply overwhelms the culture it emerges into. This has happened more than once in recorded history.

Bork argues that the Baby Boomers..the generation born between 1946 and 1964 were just such a generation: "The baby boomers were a generation so large that they formed their own culture rather than being assimilated into the existing one....The culture the boomers formed was, as is natural for adolescents, opposed to that of their parents." The indisputable impact of this exceptionally large generation has indeed changed the basis, the very *nature* of our civilization.

Some of our readers are old enough to remember, for example, when they first became frustrated by the music selections that were turning up on the weekly "top ten" list. It didn't take all that long to go from mild mannered, happy love songs to wildly costumed singers dancing across stage to seemingly tuneless noise as they bite heads off chickens and sing about rape, drug abuse and murder.

And where did these changes come from? From *children!* And though these children have grown older they still seem to have the taste of children because the whole culture, the whole society has changed.

While Bork's treatise is an interesting contribution to "discerning the times" in which we are living, it brings to mind a very strong statement about what happened to a people in a situation strikingly similar to America's current dilemma.

Isaiah 3 records the coming judgment of God on the nation Israel because of her rebellion. The nation Israel had gone so far downhill, had sunk so low, that it was sick to the very core (Isa. 1:6). As you work through Isaiah's eloquent description of the decline and destruction of his once flourishing nation the parallel with our own day is unavoidable:

"For, behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water,

"The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient,

"The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.

"And I WILL GIVE CHILDREN TO BE THEIR PRINCES, AND BABES SHALL RULE OVER THEM" (Isa. 3:1-4).

One by one Isaiah describes the pillars upon which a nation stands being snatched away. "*The whole stay of bread and the whole stay of water*" will dissolve into famine and economic collapse. This is coupled with a famine in national leadership as civic and moral disarray abounds: "*The mighty man and the man of war,*" the government and military leaders in whose hands the welfare and safety of the nation rests, will falter; the legal system will be so corrupted that "*the judge*" can no longer be

depended on for justice; "*the prophet*" will preach lies and deceit; "*the prudent and the ancient*" will no longer be available to make wise decisions in the government--true statesmanship will be dead.

Also missing will be "*the honorable man*" who can always be trusted to tell the truth and. "*the counsellor*" who can give wise advise. "*The cunning artificer,*" the true artist, will be gone and all that will be left will be filth.

And who will take their places as the leaders of government and society? **CHILDREN!!** With no one to "*civilize*" the emerging band of savages born each year, their society was soon to be ruled by children--not simply children in age but men who as far as their qualifications are concerned are "*children*" and "*babes.*"

Those who should be leading the nation in paths of righteousness had lost their strength of character and will to tell these children, "**NO!**"--to teach them right from wrong-- and thus as the children grow up they remain children in attitude, tastes and actions.

This, of course, leads to anarchy and social injustice. "*The people shall be oppressed*" as the "*base*"--the lowest elements of society--rise to take the reigns (v.5).

An almost present day sounding political statement is echoed in verse 6 as the people appeal for leadership to one who "*hath clothing!*" The standard for selecting the nation's leaders will have become the "seven second sound bite" accompanied by a "beauty contest."

All this because Israel had forsaken the Lord, not wanting Him involved in their lives--their government, courts, boardrooms, schools, homes and personal lives. So far had they departed that they brazenly display their sin and "*hide it not*" (v. 9).

Such was a society ripe for the judgment of God--a judgment which Isaiah warns was soon coming:

"As for my people, CHILDREN ARE THEIR OPPRESSORS, AND WOMEN RULE OVER THEM. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.

"The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people.

"The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof..." (Vs.12-14).

COULD ISRAEL BE SAVED?

What was Israel to do? Could she be saved? God's words to Solomon foresaw this dilemma:

"And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

"If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;

"IF MY PEOPLE, WHICH ARE CALLED BY MYNAME, SHALL HUMBLE THEMSELVES, AND PRAY,AND SEEK MY FACE, AND TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS; THEN WILL I HEAR FROM HEAVEN,AND WILL FORGIVE THEIR SIN, AND WILL HEALTHEIR LAND" (II Chron. 7:12-14).

Before we yield to the popular notion that this passage is somehow a formula for America's survival, notice that this intervention (for blessing or cursing) was for a *specific people*, Israel; at a *specific time*, under the law; for a *specific purpose*, to bless for obedience or punish- for disobedience. (Notice also that Isa. 3:1 clearly states, "*The Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah.*" This was not simply the result of bad decisions on Israel's part but rather a *divine intervention of judgment*. Lev.26 and Deut. 28 record the terms of the covenant between Israel and Jehovah. These were the "curses" they had contracted to receive because of their disobedience)

In a seeming "concern for society" too many have for too long been too willing to ignore the facts and take passages which refer to another dispensation and apply them to society today, thus *perverting* God's revealed program for today. This is not only true of Modernists and Liberals but, shamefully, also of Fundamentalists and Evangelicals as well.

No matter how often it is quoted, no matter how sentimental the appeals based on it, the simple facts of God's Word cannot be changed:

1. Today, in the current dispensation of grace, God has temporarily set aside the nation Israel and does not recognize the Israelites in their former (and future) status as His chosen people (Rom. 11:11, Gal.3:27-28).

2. Today is not a day of the law but the day of grace (Rom. 6:14).

3. Today God is not blessing based on obedience to the Law but on the basis of grace--by believing the gospel of grace and thereby being placed into Christ Jesus and made "complete in Him" (Col. 2:10).

II Chron. 7:14 has nothing to do with God's workings during the present dispensation. While it had exactly the right instruction for Israel—"My people"-under the law—"If...then"-it cannot be simply torn from its dispensational context and made to apply to us today. Such spiritual larceny is only to *dishonor* God's Word and do despite to His program for us.

WILL AMERICA BE SAVED?

What are *we* to do then? If America is in such an obviously similar situation to Isaiah 3 but *without* the promise of II Chron. 7:14--*will America be saved?*

The honest answer is that we do not know. As Bork indicates, the verdict is still out. One thing is certain: America's future will be determined by the basic decisions that we as a people make concerning the fundamental issue of what constitutes reality, what we recognize as truth. And this is where we come in!

While the Body of Christ can and should be a *restrainer* of evil, we must recognize that we are not going to *change* the course of this world. Too often we have forgotten--if we have known at all--what the Bible actually says about the society in which we live:

"[Christ] gave himself for our sins, THAT HE MIGHT *DELIVER US FROM THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD, ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD AND OUR FATHER*" (Gal. 1:4).

"...KNOW YE NOT THAT THE FRIENDSHIP OF THE WORLD IS ENMITY WITH GOD? WHOSOEVER THEREFORE WILL BE A FRIEND OF THE WORLD IS THE ENEMY OF GOD" (Jas. 4:4).

".....THE WHOLE WORLD LIETH IN WICKEDNESS" (I John 5:19).

"...in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2).

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God..." (I Cor. 2:12).

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom THE WORLD IS CRUCIFIED UNTO ME, AND I UNTO THE WORLD" (Gal.6:14).

The Body of Christ is *not* here to reform the world system, solve the problems facing society, inaugurate social justice, etc. While true believers can and should have a powerful impact for good wherever they are, we are *not* going to improve the world system about us. In fact, part of our task is to testify to the fact that the world is not going to be made acceptable to God but rather as the age progresses will grow worse, morally and spiritually, until Christ comes to put down man's rebellion and establish His reign.

The Church is here to save men *out of* this world system, to deliver men *from* "the present evil world." *This is the way to make our ministry relevant to the realities of our time.* We are not here to save the wreck man has made of society. We are here to save perishing souls from the wreck doomed to destruction.

Tragically, when needed most the Church has become totally irrelevant and ineffectual in the culture of our day as it flounders in confusion. Seemingly aware of its impotence, movements abound to seek social and political power in order to gain attention to causes dear to it. Yet for all the effort in everything from political action to new, contemporary methodologies, the world about us rushes forward largely untouched by the truth deposited in our care.

Why is this? What is the problem? Answers abound: lack of prayer, absence of real separated living, indifference to the lost and the task of world evangelism, disregard of the felt needs of those about us, etc. But wait: These are really the *symptoms*, the *results*. What is the *core cause*? It isn't really that difficult to identify.

Departure from God's message and program for our day as revealed through the epistles of Paul--this is the real root of the trouble. My friend, just as it was departure from Moses' law that constantly got Israel into trouble, with the Church it has been departure from Pauline truth. Just as surely as the dispensation of the law was committed to Moses, so surely was the dispensation of grace committed to Paul (Eph. 3:1-9).

Only when the Church returns to God's program for today will it be able to fulfill its true role as "*the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3: 15). This is the true path to the revival so desperately needed and the only avenue that can lead to another *genuine* spiritual awakening for our nation.

WHERE WE FIT IN

Will America be saved? We do not know. *Can*, America be saved? *YES!* But not without a basic change in course.

America does indeed stand at the crossroads. Decisions made during the next few years will set the course for our nation's future well into the 21st century. A spiritually healthy, vibrant Church has a vital part to play. This is where those of us who rejoice in the rightly divided Word fit in, for only by recognizing God's program for today will the Church be up to the task.

The Body of Christ, of course, belongs to the Lord and in the wider sense is His responsibility. Each of us, however, has a part to play in its functioning. It is true that there is much we cannot do, but the fact remains that there is much we *can* and *should* be doing.

The greatest single thing you and I as believers can do for our generation, for our nation, is to have Christ live through *us* in our own everyday lives. As we study God's Word and learn sound doctrine, as we testify of Christ and live in obedience to Him, the Word takes root in our hearts and produces genuine spiritual growth.

When Christ lives through us personally, our families will be impacted; as He lives through our families, our communities will be impacted; as He lives in our communities, our state, nation and world will be touched by truth.

And it is the understanding of the message of God's grace to us in Christ that will motivate and empower us in reaching out in every possible way to every possible person with the good news we have to proclaim. For the lost we have unconditional love and forgiveness in Christ to freely offer. For believers ensnared in religious bondage we have the freedom and purpose of "Christ in you the hope of glory." For all those bound by sin's fetters we have deliverance and victory in Christ. For those whose hearts desire to serve the Lord we have the Word of His grace which is able to produce the godly edification that results in a maximum capacity for service.

NOW IS OUR TIME AS NEVER BEFORE !!!

We have an unprecedented opportunity to be engaged in the real work of the ministry --to *expose* and *win* people to Christ, *build* them in the faith, *train* them to minister effectively and then *send* them to repeat the cycle of spiritual reproduction with others.

As *you* walk by faith in obedience to God's Word to us, as to *you* live godly in Christ Jesus in the details of your daily life, God is active in *your* world! May the love of Christ constrain us all to so live that others may know the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. This is what our generation, our nation, our world needs most!
