

Newsbytes

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Everyone: this first one is spot on. Excellent! MD

Prophetic Malnutrition

By Steve Schmutzer raptureready.com

How well will your car perform if you've removed one wheel? Would you sit down in a chair with a leg missing? Do you trust a plane with only three of its four wings?

These questions may seem absurd, but they each have something in common. In each case, 25 percent of something important is missing. And in each scenario, you would be at risk if you settled for less. No reasonable person would willingly choose to put themselves in these situations.

So why do we choose to regard the Bible differently than we would regard the car, the chair, or the plane? I'll pose the same question another way, but with greater relevance this time: “Why do so many pastors, teachers, and “Christian leaders” choose to ignore, revile, dilute, and misrepresent the 25 percent of God's Word which comprises the prophetic Scriptures?”

Here are a few compelling facts to consider from the The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy by J. Barton Payne:

There are 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 in the New Testament for a total of 1,817 prophecies. These prophecies are included within 8,352 verses of the Bible. Since there are 31,124 verses in the Bible, the 8,352 verses that contain prophecy constitute 26.8 percent of the Bible's volume.

So I'm being conservative here. That's actually more than 25 percent of the Word of God!

The entire Bible has prophetic themes woven throughout. It is prophetic at the very beginning in Genesis chapter 3 when the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent was foretold.

And it is prophetic at the very end of Revelation when the reign of Christ is anticipated for all eternity. The prophetic Scriptures so dominate the whole Bible that they're impossible to avoid unless one intentionally changes their gait through its pages the same way one avoids stepping on cracks on the sidewalk. Digging a bit deeper here uncovers more to think about. Over 1500 of the prophecies of the Bible are devoted to Christ's Second Coming. For every prophecy in the Old Testament about Jesus' First Coming, there are eight about His Second Coming. Christ's return also comprises one of every five verses in the New Testament.

Here's where the rubber meets the road. If the Bible makes prophecy a priority, so should we. If an emphasis of the New Testament is the Second Coming of Christ, we should make that an emphasis too. If prophetic themes crop up all the time throughout the entire Word of God, we should be seeing prophetic themes salting many of our sermons and lessons.

But we don't.

It was not always like this, and we can look at Paul's example as a case in point. We know Paul as the converted persecutor of early Christians, and as the agent through which the Holy Spirit authored most of the New Testament. We are less familiar with Paul's activities during his missionary journeys, but it's here that I want point out something important.

It concerns the church of Thessalonica which Paul visited on his second missionary journey. His time with them was brief as Acts 17:2 may suggest. He followed that visit up with the letters we call 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and now it gets interesting.

Word had come to Paul that apostate teachings had entered the young Thessalonian church, heresies which conflicted with the things he had personally taught them. Chapter two of 2 Thessalonians dives right into the problem and it concerns the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul dispenses a healthy portion of meat in this chapter, but he asks in 2 Thessalonians 2:5, Don't you remember when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

It's easy to overlook the layout of this situation, but here it is:

The Thessalonian church was new in its faith and organization. Paul didn't have a lot of time with them, but he used what little he had to emphasize the themes of prophecy. Specifically, Paul taught these early believers about Christ's Second Advent, about the Antichrist, about the Rapture, and about the Great Tribulation.

It's time for a reality check. This was a young church, right? Yup. And the believers faced external persecution and internal discord just like believers do today, correct? Mm-Hmm. And the congregation was trying to minister to the needs of those inside and outside the faith, right? You bet.

So what gives with this emphasis on prophecy? Shouldn't Paul have focused on Christian community, the love of Jesus, responsible tithing, and what it means to really care? Let's get real here, eschatology? Isn't that the fringe stuff that's not really central to our faith? Shouldn't he have emphasized Jesus since it's all about Jesus anyway?

Maybe it's the church of today that needs to learn something from the church of yesterday. Our pastors, teachers, and "Christian leaders" would be wise to take a cue from Paul. It's high time we reintroduced 25% of the divinely-inspired Word of God back into our regular diets.

I have to be brutally honest here. I'm alarmed at the posture of the greater church towards the prophetic Word of God. In an abject display of 2 Peter 3:4, the average church today doubts and belittles the very doctrines Paul considered vital to the faith of a believer and to the health of a congregation.

Trapped within the clutches of Rev. 3:15-20, the Church today is blind to its own prognosis. It has vaccinated itself against receiving the full truth by permitting only a portion of it to have any effect.

I'm concerned that we've allowed the good to become the enemy of the best. To repeat a phrase I touched on earlier, it's common to hear, "It's all about Jesus." This is a standard line that many folks parrot when they find themselves confronted by spiritual issues that challenge their personal preferences and zones of comfort.

I'm not going to argue with the essence of that line, but I'll offer a perspective that some people who are quick to deploy it have not considered. In Rev. 19:10 it says, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Let me put that another way: prophecy is designed to reveal the full person and divinity of our Lord Jesus.

This is a problem for anyone that justifies placing prophetic doctrines on the back burner so they can "focus on Jesus" instead. It's problematic for them to say, "It's all about Jesus," because this incriminates them.

They cannot maximize their relationship with God when they refuse to wholly understand Him the way the entire revelation of the Bible intends for them to. It's like having a bunch of Facebook "friends." Saying they are your friends hardly means you share a bond with them that the discipline of a fully-vested relationship brings about. I'll come full circle here and wrap it up. The 25 percent of Scripture which is prophetic uniquely reveals the person, plans, and purposes of Jesus Christ. As such, it was divinely-intended to be a vital part of the believer's spiritual

diet. Any other choice results in spiritual malnutrition and an arm's-length relationship with our Lord and Savior.

Just as Paul realized that one's relationship with Jesus will lack a great deal of meaningful dimension if His future plans and dramatic end-time return is discounted, so we will be less effective with the good news of salvation if we do not proclaim 100 percent of the testimony of Jesus.

Official Brussels Crisis Hotline Tells Jewish Victims Israel Does Not Exist **This is why Europe is burning.**

3.31.2016 truthrevolt.com

An official government crisis hotline has been established in Belgium following the recent terror attack that killed 35 people and injured hundreds. Many of the wounded are foreign nationals, including several Israelis.

So what happens when a Jewish aid volunteer calls the crisis center to arrange transport for Israeli victims? He is told that Israel does not exist, and that the victims can instead "go to Palestine." The Times of Israel reports:

....when a Jewish volunteer called up the Belgian government's Crisis Center to arrange flying the Israeli victims home, the operator - who identified himself only by the Arabic first name Zakaria - chose to inform him that Israel doesn't exist, and insisted the victims should be sent to "Palestine."

The shocking incident, along with an audio recording of the conversation, was published in the Belgian Jewish monthly Joods Actueel.

An English transcript of the call is provided below (emphasis mine):

XXX: Good afternoon, my name is XXX, I am a volunteer in the Jewish coordination committee of Antwerp. We are contacted by persons... we have 2 persons of the Jewish community that were hurt in the attacks in the airport

Crisis Centre: Yes sir

XXX: They are prepared to be transported back to Israel. Our volunteers are busy with it and take care of everything but we received information from the hospital that we need special papers from the police that they can be released. Is this correct and to who should we ask that? Can you tell me more about that?

CC: That is effectively.. I will take a look. So ... they go back to Palestine.

XXX: Not Palestine, Israel.

CC: Yes, but that was before Palestine, of course. OK

XXX: Could you repeat that again, please? What is the name?

CC: That ... Palestine.

XXX: Can I get your name, please?

Cc: Of course, Zakaria.

XXX: And you know only Palestine?

CC: Sorry?

XXX: You don't know Israel, only Palestine?

CC: I know the Jews went to there, that Palestine received them and that there is a war between Israel and Palestine, of course. And the occupation... that's what's on the news of course.

XXX: Can you help me with the question I have, or not?

CC: Naturally, of course. Thus they go back to Palestine and ask that they could get an attestation. Voila, it is noted.

XXX: Can I have your name again, I didn't understand it well.

CC: Zakaria

XXX: Zakaria?

CC: That is correct.

XXX: Zakaria what? What is your last name?

CC: I am not obliged to give it.

XXX: OK

XXX; Thank you very much.

CC: You're welcome. Bye

Europe has been plagued with both traditional anti-Semitism and Islamic anti-Semitism so it sadly comes as no shock that even during crisis time Jewish victims are discriminated against.

When God's Hand of Restraint is Lifted

By Jill Martin Rische

April 5, 2016 www.olivetreeviews.org

NOTE FROM JAN: Jill Martin Rische is my guest columnist today. She is the daughter of Dr. Walter Martin and is a part of Olive Tree Ministries. If you think the world is chaotic and upside down, could it be that God's Hand of restraint has been lifted from us? Everything including the 2016 election is filled with turmoil. I hope you enjoy Jill's thoughts.--Jan Markell

We have been living in the last days since Jesus walked the road to Calvary and rose, triumphant, from the tomb. When Nero torched Christians in his garden and Diocletian threw them to the wild animals, early Christians saw the power of evil. It must have felt as if the world could not get any darker, and yet, it did.

Centuries passed as millions suffered through war, slavery, and brutality. The world was always a vale of tears but the rise of technology and ruthless superpowers now dwarfs even those ancient nightmares. The 21st century takes us to uncharted territory: Terrorists, lawless governments, and antichrists everywhere we turn.

The biblical family unit is under assault as never before with gay marriage, three biological parents -- even marriage to robots. The list is never-ending. Soviet dictator, Vladimir Lenin, once said, "Destroy the family and you destroy the country." It is happening now.

It feels as if the world could not get any darker, but it will...

Our hope lies in the promise of Jesus. He will come back for us and we will leave this broken world behind. Until then, standing for our faith in the age of the Internet remains a very tricky business. The physical mission field of the Church has expanded into an electronic one -- right in the middle of our living rooms.

This is the good side of technology, and with it comes the bad. Sitting in our homes, we're wounded by hostility once reserved for door to door missionaries. Basic courtesy is a lost art. People are cruel to each other through machines linked together by electrical impulses, transmitted through fiber-optic cables, buried in the floor of the ocean.

It is surreal and sometimes scary to face the facts of modern culture, to confront computer enemies who completely drop the masks they hide behind at work, school, and church. We're called intolerant, bigoted, and hateful, simply because we disagree. Sometimes, it's another "Christian" doing the name-calling. What is happening to our world?

God is withdrawing His hand of restraint...

We do not know the day or the hour, but we do know the time is short. What are the most important things in our lives? If we stood before the Lord tomorrow, would we feel ashamed? It is vital to assess our hearts -- to prioritize and strategize for the Kingdom of God -- and most of all, to pray.

The darker the world, the sooner the Lord will return. This is what drives us -- this desire to do his will, to reach those who need him, and to wait patiently for his return. "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." (Eph 5:15-16)

How shall we live in the last days?

Jesus did not leave us as orphans in this very sad place -- He taught us how to survive and thrive in the last days. His prayers point us to the power of speaking with God -- every day -- every hour. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" should be our constant plea. His Holy Spirit comforts us and His parables give us a strategy for living. The five virgins took action and came prepared. Their lamps shone in the darkness. They waited and never gave up.

Jesus built a high level of trust in a very dark world by seeing to the basic needs of those around him. He talked with people, fed them, grieved with them, and healed them.

When was the last time we spoke to our neighbors about the love of God?

When did we offer to help someone freely, with no expectation of any return? Sometimes small acts of kindness help heal the hearts of people going through painful things we know nothing about. It's called compassion, and Jesus lived it. Today it is hard to feel connected in such an emotionally disconnected world but Jesus calls us constantly to action. We are told to "Care for the widows and orphans." (James 1:27) We are reminded that faith without works is dead. (James 2:15-16)

Compassion is a noun and a verb...

It means to feel the pain of another human being and have a strong urge to do something about it. And yes, that applies to our enemies. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:27-28) Sharing our faith does not include anger. We cannot dissect someone verbally because they're rude or we disagree with them. There is no license to slam another believer, simply because our theology differs. The time is short. A crazy world needs sanity -- we must be calm and compassionate.

In the Hebrew and Greek, compassion means to have mercy, to feel sympathy, to empathize with others. God is described in Psalm 86:15 as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." What better pattern of living could there be?

Jesus set the world on fire...

He touched a match to the dry hearts of men and they became consumed with passion to the point of sacrificing everything in their lives to serve him.

The world is caught up in a delusion that only grows stronger by the day. They don't need God, they don't want him, and they will make us pay for serving him. But the good news is that God can still use us to set the world on fire -- just as Jesus did -- if we renew our hearts and minds in him.

The great evangelist, Hyman Appelman, once said, "My purpose is -- my prayer is -- that GOD will use me as a man uses a match to strike fire to the heaped-up wood that you already have in your souls. GOD grant that a conflagration might start and spread wherever you go in this nation and to the ends of the earth."

Why Russia Is Rebuilding Its Nuclear Arsenal

Simon Shuster @shustry April 4, 2016

Vladimir Putin skipped the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington last week—one more sign that Russia isn't interested in cutting its arms

On Friday evening, at the end of the final nuclear security summit of his tenure, President Barack Obama took a swipe at his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, for standing in the way of nuclear disarmament. Obama's remark was pointed, calling out Putin by name, and it cast a rare bit of light on the personal clash between the two presidents on an issue that both of them see as central to their legacies.

"Because of the vision that he's been pursuing of emphasizing military might," Obama told reporters at the summit, "we have not seen the type of progress that I would have hoped for with Russia."

This was putting it lightly. Over the course of Obama's presidency, Russia has managed to negotiate deep cuts to the U.S. arsenal while substantially strengthening of its own. It has allegedly violated the treaty that limits the deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe and, in the last few years, it has brought disarmament talks with the U.S. to a complete standstill for the first time since the 1960s. In its rhetoric, Moscow has also returned to a habit of nuclear threats, while in its military exercises, it has begun to practice for a nuclear strike, according to the NATO military alliance.

But of all these stark reversions to the posture of the Cold War, nothing expressed Russia's position on nuclear disarmament more clearly than Putin's decision to skip the nuclear summit in Washington last week. Apart from North Korea, which was not invited to the talks, Russia was the only nuclear power not to send a senior delegate. The snub was no surprise. It was announced back on Nov. 5 in a statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry, which offered a curious explanation. By influencing the policies of global watchdogs like the International Atomic Energy Agency, "Washington is trying to take the role of the main and the privileged 'player' in this sphere," the statement said. In part because of this, "we have shared with our American colleagues our doubts about the 'added value' of the forum." Russia therefore saw no need to participate, the Ministry said.

A few days after that statement, the world got a more colorful reminder of Putin's position on nuclear disarmament. During a meeting at the Kremlin with his top generals on Nov. 10, he accused the U.S. of trying to "neutralize" Russia's nuclear arsenal by building a missile shield over Europe, one that could knock Russian rockets out of the sky. In response, he said, Russia would have to "strengthen the potential of its strategic nuclear forces," including the deployment of "attack systems" capable of piercing any missile shield.

As if on cue, a state television camera then zoomed in on a piece of paper that one of the generals was holding in his hand. It showed the plans for a nuclear device codenamed Status-6, complete with a curt definition of its purpose: "to create an extensive zone of radioactive contamination" along the enemy's coast, rendering it uninhabitable "for a long time."

Asked to comment the following day, Putin's spokesman claimed the image had appeared in the nightly news by mistake. But the Kremlin's mouthpiece newspaper then followed up with details. The warhead inside Status-6, it said, would likely be covered in cobalt, an element which would "guarantee the destruction of all living things" once it was irradiated and scattered by a nuclear explosion.

Vladimir Dvorkin, a retired major general of the Russian strategic rocket forces, remembers such designs from his days developing nuclear submarines for the former Soviet Union. "It's an old Soviet brainchild," he told me by phone from Moscow. But he never expected to see it revived. In the 1990s and during first two years of Putin's presidency, Dvorkin headed the main nuclear research directorate of the Russian Ministry of Defense. The emphasis throughout those years was on cooperating with the U.S. to secure nuclear stockpiles and keep them out of the hands of terrorists.

The reemergence of Status-6—even if more as a propaganda ploy than as an actual weapon—shows just how far relations have fallen since then. “The idea is to creep up on the seaboard of the United States and set off a massive nuclear explosion,” says Dvorkin. “It’s being revived in order to spook the West.”

Few in the West had expected to hear such spook stories again. For Americans, a nuclear arms race is the stuff of Cold War fiction. But for Russians, or at least their leaders, the world still looks much as it did in the age of the nuclear arms race.

That became clear to many of Obama’s top advisers soon after his Administration took office. During a landmark speech in Prague in the spring of 2009, Obama described his vision for a nuclear-free world. The timing and venue were both highly symbolic. Earlier the same week, the newly-elected President had come to Europe for a summit of the NATO alliance, which had just extended membership to two more formerly communist nations, Albania and Croatia, moving the military bloc deeper into Moscow’s former zone of influence.

Prague, too, had been a key Cold War battleground, and as Obama pointed out at the beginning of his speech, few people could have imagined in those years that the Czech Republic would eventually become a NATO member in 2004, standing as proof that Russian dominance of Eastern Europe was receding. “The Cold War has disappeared,” Obama told the city square packed with his Czech admirers. Yet the existence of nuclear weapons, he said, was its “most dangerous legacy.” He promised to work towards abolishing them.

The previous week, the White House had begun talks with the Kremlin on an arms reduction treaty it called New Start. But the two sides came to the table with very different ambitions. “We wanted to get rid of as many nuclear weapons as we could,” says Michael McFaul, who was then serving as Obama’s top adviser on Russian affairs. The Kremlin did not seem to share that dream. During one round of talks at the Defense Ministry in Moscow early in 2010, Obama’s Prague speech came up in some idle conversation, McFaul says, and the Russians started laughing. “They said, ‘Yeah, of course you guys want a nuclear-free world, because then you would dominate the world with your conventional weapons. Why would we ever want to do that?’”

For Russia, the Cold War had never simply disappeared. It had resulted in defeat and the loss of empire, leaving Russia’s rival of more than 40 years to dictate the terms of peace in Europe. By the time Putin took power in 2000, the only vestige of his country’s superpower status was its nuclear arsenal, which was still the biggest in the world. So he began to use it as a crutch. “Even in the darkest days of the Russian military, when they weren’t able to afford to pay their soldiers and fly their airplanes, they paid close attention to the readiness and modernization of their nuclear forces,” says David Ochmanek, who served as a U.S. Air Force officer during the Cold War and, between 2009 and 2014, was the Pentagon’s top official for force development. “Their doctrine reflected this,” he says.

In one of his first acts as President, Putin adopted a new military doctrine in the spring of 2000, one that rejected the Soviet pledge never to launch a nuclear weapon first. His reasoning was simple: only Russia’s nukes could counter the vastly superior strength of U.S. conventional weapons. So he lowered the bar for using nuclear weapons in situations “critical to national security.” This meant that if Russia ever felt badly outgunned in a military conflict, it could launch a nuclear missile to even the score and make the enemy back off. That doctrine was still in place when the U.S. and Russia began negotiating the New Start treaty.

But Putin’s position in Russia had changed. In 2008, the constitution prevented him from seeking a third consecutive term as President. So he moved over to the nominally less powerful role of Prime Minister and ceded the presidency to his protégé, Dmitri Medvedev.

Obama saw this as an opportunity. He and Medvedev had taken office within a year of each other, and Obama had made it one of his foreign policy priorities to improve—or “reset”—troubled relations with Russia. Nuclear arms reduction was at the core of this agenda, and the two leaders pursued the talks with notable warmth and enthusiasm. From behind the scenes, however, Putin and his generals set rigid parameters for Medvedev. Even with a new president, the balance of power in Russia had never really changed. “I always called Medvedev Putin’s lawyer,” says Gary Samore, who was then the White House coordinator for arms control and a lead negotiator of the treaty. “It was very clear who was calling the shots.”

As the negotiations moved ahead, Samore saw the Russians advancing two core priorities. Most of their nuclear warheads were still deployed in static, Soviet-era silos dug into the ground, and these could easily get taken out if

the U.S. were ever to launch a surprise attack against Russia. "They were very vulnerable to a pre-emptive first strike," says Samore. What Russia needed most from the New Start treaty was a chance to get rid of this vulnerability and regain nuclear parity with the U.S. "Their priority first and foremost was to limit our capabilities," he says, "and to buy time for the Russians to go through their strategic modernization program."

Obama was prepared to allow that. Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. security concerns had shifted away from the threat of nuclear war with Russia. The bigger American fear was the possibility that Moscow would let some of its nukes fall into the hands of terrorists, says Ivo Daalder, who served as U.S. ambassador to NATO during negotiations on the New Start treaty. "Russia as a military security concern wasn't really on the agenda," Daalder says. "The focus was really on cooperation."

In particular, Obama needed Russia's help on Iran, whose nuclear program the West did see as a major security threat. "So to me there was a very clear quid pro quo," Samore says. "We very consciously and deliberately were prepared to give the Russians strategic parity in exchange for cooperation on other key issues, Iran being the most important." Both sides got what they wanted. In the spring of 2011, Obama returned to Prague to sign the New Start treaty with Medvedev, and that same day, Russia agreed to support another round of Western sanctions against Iran. The pain of these sanctions proved instrumental in getting Iran to give up its nuclear weapons program four years later, perhaps Obama's most notable foreign policy achievement.

On paper at least, the New Start treaty also looked impressive. Both sides agreed to cut their arsenals of long-range nuclear missiles in half and to reduce the number of warheads by around three-quarters. But in practice, the New Start treaty allowed Russia to scrap many of its old silo-based missile systems while pushing ahead with a wholesale upgrade of its broader arsenal. "The treaty does not prevent you from modernizing," says McFaul, who went on to become the U.S. ambassador in Moscow from 2011 to 2013. "In terms of parity, they felt like they needed to modernize, whereas we didn't feel that way."

It will still take Russia at least until the end of this decade to complete its nuclear modernization program. But it is off to an impressive start. Moscow is building a new generation of long-range nuclear bombers, truck-mounted ballistic missiles and nuclear-armed submarines. In the past two years, Russian officials and state-run media have routinely boasted about the fruits of these efforts, often under giddy headlines like this gem from the Sputnik news agency: "Rail Phantom: Russia developing invisible death trains with nukes."

This seems far from the spirit of Medvedev's term as president, which ended in 2012 with Putin's return to the Kremlin's top post. The New Start treaty, Medvedev told me in mid-February, "was a great achievement in Russian-U.S. relations, and it was good for the international situation." Later in our interview, he added: "It's a shame that things began to take a different path after that."

In the foreseeable future, Medvedev said, Russia would have no choice but to develop weapons like Status-6 to balance against the enormous advantage the U.S. enjoys in conventional arms. (Washington spends more than seven times as much on defense as Russia, which will have to cut its military spending this year, thanks largely to a shrinking economy.) "Isn't that scary? Yes, it is very scary," Medvedev told me, referring to these weapons. "If hundreds or thousands of such missiles are used in an attack, the consequences will be just as devastating" as a nuclear strike.

This point came back to the essential paradox of Russia's position on nuclear weapons. It is the very real feeling of weakness and vulnerability that makes Russia cling to its most destructive and dangerous arms. And until Russia's leaders are made to believe that the U.S. does not wish them any harm, Obama's vision of a nuclear free world will never be realized.

Obama admitted as much at the nuclear security summit in Washington. "It is very difficult," he said at the closing news conference, "to see huge reductions in our nuclear arsenal unless the United States and Russia, as the two largest possessors of nuclear weapons, are prepared to lead the way." From the start of his tenure, Obama tried to take that lead, likely believing that the Cold War had, as he put it, "disappeared."

But his most important partners in this effort saw things differently, says Samore, his former adviser. "To some extent Obama didn't appreciate how the level of Russian paranoia and fear of the United States continued to permeate their defense and security establishment," he says. "For them it was so old school. He just didn't see it." By now, as he prepares to leave office, Obama most certainly does.