

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

How Blockchain Could Finally Unite the United Nations

Michael del Castillo

The United Nations is a Swiss army knife of humanitarian aid.

When catastrophe strikes, dozens of agencies within the organization, founded in the aftermath of World War II, lay in wait in offices around the world, each with their own specialized role to alleviate suffering and establish peace.

But with billions of dollars at their disposal and organizational mandates that often overlap, keeping track of who needs what, and getting it to them quickly, is just part of the challenge.

Crucial to ensuring continued support, the agencies must also be able to prove that the taxpayer money donated by its 193 member nations actually accomplished its intended goals - a historically difficult balancing act.

One man, who has spent the last 25 years helping conduct this symphony of services, thinks that much of the difficulty can be alleviated by moving both the dispersal of aid and the internal operations of the UN itself to a blockchain.

For the past four months, the newly appointed special advisor for UN engagement and blockchain technology at the UN's Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Yoshiyuki Yamamoto, has been meeting informally with members of other agencies to imagine what the organization would look like if it was truly united on a blockchain.

Speaking to CoinDesk from UNOPS' New York offices, Yamamoto said:

"We started thinking about forgetting about traditional competition among UN agencies. There's no point. We are so early stage, let's try to exchange our opinions. We have a lot of lessons, let's exchange lessons. Let's see what is going to happen. This is so foundational. It's not time to compete."

Transparency challenges

Yamamoto's own exposure to bitcoin goes back to 2011 when it was little more than a passing interest. But, it wasn't until last year that he "by chance" read Satoshi Nakamoto's white paper that he started to see how an immutable, shared ledger might help align the agencies within the UN.

To demonstrate the inefficiencies of the current system, Yamamoto, the former director of the UNOPS Peace and Security Cluster, told the story of when a hospital in Kabul was so desperate for a generator that it applied to multiple UN agencies for help, only to finally receive five generators.

In another story demonstrating how difficulties proving identity have resulted in aid being diverted from its intended recipients, Yamamoto related how ID cards that entitle their owners to UN supplies have been collected by tribal leaders and traded as currency.

Exactly how much is lost to such waste is hard to say, he said, but this lack of transparency is one reason he now advocates for blockchain.

The problem is so pervasive that, in 2012, the 8th secretary-general of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, stated that corruption in the previous year had prevented 30% of all development assistance from reaching its final destination. To give some idea as to how much this loss might be, that same year, \$12.2bn in net disbursements were granted by the UN, according to the Global Policy Forum, a policy watchdog that monitors the work of the agency.

If blockchain can be implemented successfully, Yamamoto believes increased transparency could result in fewer internal disputes and more efficient allocation of resources. As a result, he argued, this might increase the willingness of donors to give money, including individual donors, a largely untapped resource at the moment.

With new donation options that might one day also include cryptocurrency itself, the end result could be more funds to help those in need.

"If ordinary people can contribute directly to the UN and the international community," said Yamamoto, "that is a completely new avenue of fund flow from rich countries to developing countries."

Baby steps

Progress towards this vision is slow, but steady.

After discovering unrelated blockchain efforts being conducted within the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and UN Women, Yamamoto reached out to get a better understanding of those groups' work. Yamamoto and these other early supporters established an informal blockchain group shortly after.

Over the following months, Yamamoto said he and other UN representatives frequented multiple Bitcoin NYC Meetups, asking about the potential benefits of the technology to the UN.

Word spread, Yamamoto said, and individual representatives from other UN organizations also expressed interest in getting involved. They agreed to meet in person approximately every other week, when an invited guest from outside the UN would discuss what it might mean if their agencies worked together on a joint blockchain initiative.

Speakers at these events have included the former CEO of ID2020 and advisor to One World Identity, Susan Joseph, and Dickson Nsofor of blockchain startup Humaniq, which last week raised \$5m in an initial coin offering (ICO).

Last month, in a published joint request for information (RFI), Yamamoto announced the informal group had grown to seven UN organizations – also including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Development Group (UNDG). The RFI set out "to identify potential partners/suppliers for the future work in the area of international humanitarian, development or

peacekeeping assistance".

A week after the RFI was published, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank announced they would be organizing the information in a way that caters to "the needs of the multinational development and humanitarian community". The request deadline was also extended to 4th June.

One of the early supporters of the inter-agency blockchain initiative, WFP financial officer Houman Haddad, described the cooperation between initiatives in an interview with CoinDesk, saying that developing the technology collaboratively could help "harmonize" humanitarian global aid.

"We are in discussions with everyone we can be in a discussion with," said Haddad, adding that the aim is to involve those parties in the "design and development" of the project, rather than just build a system and later tell them "use it".

On the table

Since the informal group of UN agencies first met, blockchain activity in the organization has grown. But, as the participants make clear, the meetings are still very informal, with independent work still largely driving the progress.

In March, UN Women partnered with Innovation Norway; in April, the WFP revealed its first large-scale ethereum project; and, earlier this month, the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (Cefact) proposed writing a pair of white papers focused on technical and business implications of blockchain.

Most recently, the group of UN agencies exploring blockchain had its regular meeting on Thursday, 4th May, including invited guest speakers from Microsoft, ConsenSys and the Estonian government's e-Governance Academy.

"Rather than I become the messenger," Yamamoto said, "I wanted them to explain for themselves to the other UN attendees."

Though the event was closed to the media, Yamamoto told CoinDesk afterwards that approximately 10 representatives of the UN were present, including for the first time two from the UN Secretariat.

The group is currently at the earliest stages of exploring multiple blockchain consortia models, including the Enterprise Ethereum Alliance and Hyperledger. Concerned about committing to a specific blockchain too early, Yamamoto said participants are keeping an open mind.

"All options are on the table at the moment," he said.

God's Next Catastrophic Intervention

terryjamesprophecyline.com

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un continues to fire off missiles that fail shortly after lifting off. But there are enough successes to portend a time when he can arm them with nuclear devices to kill hundreds of thousands. The ayatollahs and military of Iran continue on course to produce deliverable nuclear weapons to rain upon the hated Israel. Russian president Putin becomes more bellicose by the day, sending his bombers near America's Alaskan shores. He has fighter jets buzzing American aircraft within twenty feet in some cases.

Syrian dictator Assad continues to inflict genocide in the region, no doubt causing Israel's military to consider preemptive action to protect the Jewish state.

China, despite some minor, peaceful overtures to President Trump and America, continues to build its military and new bases in waters that are considered international rather than Chinese territorial waters. ISIS and the many Israel-hating terrorist entities continue to plan and carry out murderous assaults around the world.

This is a time that there is a cry for peace and safety, while there seems little peace upon the planet.

Our president is going to the Middle East to have a go at formulating a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians—a thing many diplomats of every stripe have tried but failed to achieve.

Everything in regard to those geopolitical exigencies seem to point to just how near this generation is to the time of Tribulation, the final seven years immediately preceding Christ's Second Advent. But, those represent only one side of the equation that makes up the signals we are to look for in being watchmen on the wall as Bible prophecy fulfillment draws near.

While the volatility and violence that will be part of end-times indicators are certainly something to consider, Jesus painted a much different picture that will be on the scene when He next catastrophically intervenes into the affairs of fallen mankind.

We know that the Bible—that God's prophets—never contradict one another. If we search deeply enough and long enough, we will see the interconnectedness and the absolute integrity of prophetic truth. So, how, as God's Word says, does Paul's prophecy, "evil men and seducers will [get] worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," comport with Jesus' own words about the moment He will next break in upon this rebellious world?

How does, for example, the Lord's own declaration make sense? He prophesies that people will be buying, selling, marrying, and building—doing all the things of everyday life. How does that declaration not conflict with the Revelation foretelling twenty-one devastating judgments given to John on Patmos?

That is, how does such a not-unpleasant set of circumstances like Jesus describes using the days of Noah and of Lot not contradict the Olivet Discourse? The Lord's words there describe conditions so horrific when Christ comes back that no flesh would be saved if He did not return at that moment (Matthew 24: 21). The only answer to why there are these diametrically different prophetic descriptions—that of business as usual and that of the worst times of human history—is, of course, wrapped up in the apostle Paul's foretelling.

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

The pre-millennial, pre-tribulation view of Christ's return is the only view that answers the big questions about the apparent contradictions.

God's next catastrophic intervention into the affairs of rebellious mankind's evil doings will take place in two phases. The first involves the "mystery" Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15: 51-55. All born-again believers who have died or are living will in one stunning moment be translated into supernatural bodies and instantly appear with Jesus Christ above planet earth.

Jesus tells that at the time of that event—the Rapture—things will be relatively normal for most living on the earth. As a matter of fact, I believe His words tell that it will be business even better than usual.

I will expand on this greatly in my next book which, God willing, will be available late this year.

The second phase of Christ's Second Coming will, of course, be that moment when He comes back with all the saints to put an end to man's most terrible war—Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-12).

At that time, the earth will have been devastated by war and God's wrath. Again, Jesus said that all flesh would die if He didn't intervene at that moment.

God's judgment will begin, Jesus said, the very day He is next "revealed." That will be at the Rapture, when all the earth will know there has been a tremendous event that made millions simply vanish. Like in Lot's day, God' judgment will begin that very day, Jesus says as recorded in Luke 17:26-30. God's wrath won't begin until the covenant of Daniel 9:27 is confirmed. But judgment will begin immediately, we are told by the Lord, Himself.

It will be a catastrophic intervention right from that twinkling-of-an-eye moment!

I believe we, as watchmen, should be observing the times to see if there is in the near future a noticeable upswing in national and international economies—this in conjunction with considering all the traditional signals that the Bible describes.

Babylonian Ways :: By Nathele Graham

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Babylon is synonymous with paganism and evil. It had its beginnings soon after the Flood of Noah when evil once again began to take hold in the hearts of men. Nimrod was the leader among those people who were easily led away from God. These heathens wanted to build a tower in Babel to reach to heaven.

"And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:4)

God saw what was happening and confused their language in order to stop this united force that tried to build a tower to heaven. There are many Babylonian practices that remain in our culture today, and Christians need to separate from them. The way to do that is to know God's Word and hold it in authority over the way we live.

God confused the language and people were scattered, but rebellion against God continued. There were a few people who honored God, but others embraced idol worship, false gods, pagan lifestyles, human sacrifice, and other abominations.

In the southern part of Babylonia was a city called Ur, which was a center of moon worship. Pagan ways abounded there and the voice of the one true God was obscured. Ur is where a man named Abram, later known as Abraham, lived. His family was a part of the idol worship that took place there, but God called him out of that pagan culture to establish the nation of Israel.

“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Before Abraham could be of any use to God he first had to leave the pagan culture behind and move away. The same is true of us today. How many who claim to be Christians cling to pagan ways? You can be of no use to God while you embrace Babylonian ways. Are you living a life of sexual immorality? Is it more fun to have friends who smoke a little marijuana and party rather than attend worship services?

Like Abraham, you need to leave friends and family who reject God. Repent and turn away from the sins you embrace and then allow God to accomplish great things through you. Abraham would eventually have a son named Isaac, and through him the nation of Israel came to be. If Abraham had continued to embrace Babylonian ways he couldn’t have fulfilled God’s perfect plan.

Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, had twelve sons who established the twelve tribes of Israel. In time, Jacob and his family faced a famine and were forced to relocate to Egypt where they found food and prospered. Egypt wasn’t in Babylon, but the same paganism abounded there. They had a god for this and a god for that and it was a heathen culture. God had changed Jacob’s name to Israel, which means “God prevails.” God always will prevail.

As time passed, the Israelites grew in numbers and became a threat to Pharaoh. His way of limiting the Israelites number was to kill male Hebrew children. God did prevail and preserved Israel. A male child was hidden and was found by Pharaoh’s daughter who raised him as her own. Moses was raised in the pagan Egyptian culture and schooled in their ways, but God would use him to lead the Hebrews from captivity. First, Moses had to leave Egypt. He had to leave the pagan ways behind and travel to where he was able to hear the voice of God.

Moses fled Egypt because he had killed an Egyptian and he ended up in Midian, located in the desert north of the Arabian peninsula. There he married the daughter of Jethro and he tended his father-in-law’s sheep. In this land, far from the pagan culture he was raised in, Moses heard God’s voice call from a burning bush.

“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.” (Exodus 3:4)

God knew his name and who he was, but Moses could only come to know God after he left Egypt. With God’s help he led the Israelites out of captivity and eventually they entered the land that God had promised to Abraham. Both Abraham and Moses had been raised in very pagan circumstances, but they left the evil behind and followed God. If you call yourself a Christian then you need to leave the paganism of our culture behind and cling to God.

After the nation Israel entered the Promise Land, time passed and they became a great nation. There

were times over the years when they turned away from God and He judged them. One of those judgments came at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who besieged Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and took many captives. Nebuchadnezzar had ordered that certain children be taken to the king's palace, and a youngster named Daniel was one of them.

“Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.” (Daniel 1:4)

Daniel was schooled in Babylonian ways and could have chosen to embrace the pagan life there, but even at a young age he loved God. Instead embracing the evil of Babylon, Daniel chose to be separate from them and he bowed and prayed towards Jerusalem daily. He did this in spite of the fact that the Temple had been destroyed. Because he didn't embrace the pagan lifestyles and pagan worship, Daniel was able to serve God by interpreting dreams, reading mysterious handwriting on the wall, and he was given an amazing prophecy describing the end times.

Daniel lived in Babylon, but didn't allow Babylon to live in him. We can learn a lot from studying Daniel's life and seeing how he put God Almighty above all else. This is what every Christian should do. We have the Bible to guide us and the Holy Spirit indwelling us so there should be no room in our life for Babylonian ways.

Paganism didn't stop in the Old Testament. Most of the letters contained in the New Testament were written to congregations located in pagan cities, such as Ephesus and Corinth. These letters encouraged the Christians there to stand firm in their faith and reject the pagan practices around them.

The Corinthians seem much like Christians of today. Instead of following the straight and narrow path they tolerated sin and that sin was corrupting the congregation. We live in a pagan world ruled by the prince of the power of the air, but like Daniel we can't allow the pagan ways to live in us.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

The answer is “None.” If you yoke yourself in partnerships or friendships with non-believers you embrace pagan ways.

“And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” (2 Corinthians 6:15)

Belial means “worthless or wicked” and is another name for Satan. If you claim to be a Christian then you should never enter into any partnership with non-believers. If you've entered these relationships prior to you becoming a Christian then you need to stand firm on Christ and not allow compromise of your faith.

“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

The Holy Spirit indwells Christians and if you're yoked with Babylonian ways then you're taking God with you into sin.

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

Yes, brothers and sisters, come out from among them. We are living in the last days and as we draw ever nearer to the Rapture, Satan tries harder to deceive people. Times are getting perilous.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

This sounds a lot like today and it will get worse. As we draw near to the end of time the Babylonian ways grow stronger by the day. Instead of honoring God, Christians are becoming more tolerant of sin and evil because most don't even know what the Bible says. They are schooled in Babylonian ways, but not in God's ways. God's Word isn't an outdated book of rules and regulations, but a guide to a way of life that pleases God.

We have God's Word to teach us to judge between His ways and Babylonian ways, so don't let anyone accuse you of being judgmental. Sin is to be rejected and the sinner is to be witnessed to in order to bring them to Christ. Don't yoke yourself with unsaved sinners but stand firm upon God's word.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

If you follow God's ways then you're on the right path. We make a choice whether to follow the strait and narrow road or the broad path that leads to destruction. The broad path follows Babylonian ways.

Whether we live in Babylon, Egypt, Rome, or the United States of America we choose which path we follow. When God is rejected, Babylonian ways are embraced and that leads to eternal destruction.

God bless you all,
Nathele Graham