

The Time Of Jacob's Trouble

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The temperatures outside tell us we are at the peak of summer now, at least in the Northern Hemisphere. The days are long and bright, the kids are out of school, and many head to the beach or some other pleasant locale to grab some rest and relaxation.

However, in Scripture, summer can also be a season of evaluation and judgment. As the year moves from spring to summer, symbolically, we move from the time of new growth and into the time of ripening fruit in anticipation of the harvest. But the harvest God is most interested in is what His people are producing in their lives. In years gone by, His evaluation of summer fruit has brought devastating national judgment.

In Amos 8:1-2, God gives Amos a vision of a basket of summer fruit. Then God tells Amos what the summer fruit means. He says, “The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore.” It indicates the fruit of the nation had ripened, and when God examined it, He found that all of it was rotten. He could no longer overlook its corruption.

The book of Lamentations is also connected to summer because of the historical falls of Jerusalem. Of special note is the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av. Both temples in Jerusalem were destroyed on that date, some six centuries apart, which cannot be mere coincidence. Israel’s refusal to enter the Land, and God’s subsequent judgment, also occurred during summer, and tradition says this happened on the ninth of Av as well.

The 9th of Av this year is on August the 3rd. Interestingly, the Jews observe not only the 9th of Av, but also the time leading up to it. They keep what they call the Three Weeks that culminate on the 9th of Av, a time during which they remember and mourn the destruction of the two temples. As it

happens, those Three Weeks start tomorrow. So, tonight, while many Americans will take in a baseball game, with peanuts and Cracker Jacks™, observant Jews will fast to mark the beginning of the Three Weeks.

We could add that each summer has Pride Month, which is a foolish provocation of God. In Isaiah 3:9, He says, “The look on their countenance [meaning, their brazen expression—their pride] witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves.”

So, as we vacation, and go to camp, and legitimately enjoy our lazy, hazy days of summer, we should not let the deadly seriousness of our times get too far from our minds. When we remember God’s purpose, and compare that with what is happening, especially within the nations of Israel that have been blessed by God with so much, we know that God’s intervention cannot be far off.

To that end, today we will be looking at the time of Jacob’s Trouble. While it is not a pleasant topic, my intent is not to fill us with doom or gloom, but to give us some sobriety that comes from being grounded in God’s Word and recognizing the grave condition of the nations of Israel and Judah. If we truly fear God, we don’t have to fear what lies ahead because we trust that our lives are within His hands. So, as we examine what is foretold, we can test who or what we fear, and how real God is to us, and whether we truly are seeking His Kingdom and righteousness above all else, or whether we need to adjust our priorities.

Now, given that we will be looking at prophecy today, the usual disclaimers apply. Put simply, we don’t know exactly how all of this will play out, let alone when. Our primary texts today are in the Old Testament, and while some of them appear only to be for the end time, others appear to be dual, meaning they have been fulfilled once, and something like what happened anciently will happen again. But the end-time fulfillment won’t be exactly the same. History does not truly repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

So, the guiding principle is not to place too much weight on every detail. Wisdom lies in knowing what the prophecies say and how they could be fulfilled, so that as they are fulfilled, we can recognize what is taking place.

If we get stuck on one interpretation, we may miss the true fulfillment. God says repeatedly through His prophets that when something takes place, “Then [we] shall know” that He is the LORD. Our vision and perception ahead of time is always going to be hazy.

The term “Jacob’s trouble” is only found in one place. So, please turn to Jeremiah 30:

Jeremiah 30:4-11 Now these are the words that the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah. “For thus says the LORD: ‘We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. ‘For it shall come to pass in that day,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘That I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. ‘Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,’ says the LORD, ‘Nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you,’ says the LORD, ‘to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished.’

First, we need to understand to whom this is written. Verses 7 and 10 mention “Jacob,” and verse 10 also uses “Jacob” and “Israel” in parallel. But verse 4 says that this prophecy concerns “Israel AND Judah.” It is both houses, or both kingdoms, that are in view when God speaks of Jacob’s Trouble.

This is a clear indicator that the prophecy is not about events or circumstances in Jeremiah’s day. Certainly, both Israel and Judah had their troubles around that time as they rebelled against God and were sent into captivity. But when this prophecy was given, the northern kingdom of Israel

had already been in captivity for a century or so. Yet this prophecy does not refer to something in history, but to something still future.

The future aspect is reinforced by what it says in verse 7 that the day—meaning, the general time—is great, so that none is like it. It will be the absolute worst time for the houses of Israel and Judah. For verse 7, the *New English Translation* says,

Jeremiah 30:7 (NET) Alas, what a terrible time of trouble it is!
There has never been any like it. It is a time of trouble for the
descendants of Jacob, but some of them will be rescued out of it.

So, this will be a time unlike what God's people have ever experienced. It will be worse than the Holocaust and the World Wars, worse than the Civil War in this nation—I mean the previous one, not the current one—and worse than the violent subjugation and enslavement of Israelites by the Assyrians and Babylonians and Romans. What lies ahead will give new meaning to Charles Dickens' phrase, "THE WORST of times."

We can correlate it with Christ's words in the Olivet Prophecy, where He says, "For then there will be great tribulation [meaning, pressure], such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). So, the worst of times had not been fulfilled in the days of Christ, or Jeremiah, or even Noah. Yet in verse 7 here, God also gives hope within the same breath that it will not be a complete end of Jacob.

We should also keep in mind that while the name "Jacob" is a way to encapsulate both houses or kingdoms, Jacob was also the name of the patriarch before his encounter with God. So, there is an implication that both houses are in a moral and spiritual condition like one who has not been visited by God. They exhibit more of the traits of pre-conversion Jacob than of humbled Israel, which speaks to the decline of their covenant relationship.

Now, this passage does not go into much detail about why Jacob is in trouble. It also does not give many details regarding the trouble itself. Instead, there are two main themes we can extract. The first is the severity, as already mentioned. The trouble is also described like a woman in labor, which we will consider later. And the second element here is God's

assurance that Jacob will survive God's chastening, and will be restored at the end.

Even though this passage does not give specifics, it does supply a basic definition for Jacob's Trouble. Verses 8, 10, and 11 show that the essence of Jacob's Trouble is captivity by foreigners, so Jacob is scattered into numerous countries, placed in a subservient status, and oppressed. If we were to correlate this time with other prophecies, we would see that there are other troubling things during and before Jacob's Trouble, but the Trouble itself is shown here to be oppression, enslavement, and captivity by non-Israelites.

We will come back to the severity of the trouble, as well as God's restoration, but first we need to understand what leads up to Jacob's Trouble, and why God deems it to be necessary. For those with eyes to see, Jacob's Trouble does not happen out of the blue. There are conditions and warnings that lead up to it.

Please turn with me to Leviticus 26, which you probably recognize as one of the blessings and curses chapters. God delivered this to Israel while they were in the wilderness to make it crystal clear that when they obeyed Him, they would be blessed, and when they disobeyed—which God knew they would do—things would go very poorly.

One of God's patterns, because of His faithfulness to His people and to His own purpose, is to give warning shots, as we say today, when there are significant spiritual problems. His desire is not to destroy but to restore. So, He warns, both through His servants as well as through events and conditions, to get His people to consider what is happening, and then consider their own ways so they can make their own course corrections. But—human nature being what it is—typically, His people fail to heed the warnings, and so conditions worsen, and God's warning events become more severe.

We won't turn to it, but you may remember the progression of calamities that God claims in Amos 4:6-12, where God says that He sent food scarcity, and He sent drought and floods. He sent mildew and blight—meaning, winds so hot they withered everything, as well as locusts to disrupt the crops. He

says He sent a plague, and He caused young men to die in battle. Next, He caused overthrow and massive destruction like He did to Sodom and Gomorra, yet the hardhearted people still would not return to Him. Finally, He said the nation would meet Him, implying a terrifying personal encounter. This is outlined and explained in the Amos booklet that John and Richard wrote in 1995, and which is being republished now as articles, 30 years later, perhaps as a second testimony.

God sends calamities to check His people and cause them to ask why. Yet the calamities are not so bad that the nation is destroyed. And therein we see human nature's perverse response to God's mercy: Because the full penalty does not fall, human nature assumes that its infractions must not really be that bad. So, it picks itself up, dusts itself off, and continues on. It does not take the warnings seriously, at least not for very long, in large part because it does not recognize God's involvement. Instead, human nature adapts and continues its destructive course.

We could make a modern list of calamities during the last 30 years, similar to Amos'. We had September, 2001, which saw the loss of 3,000 lives, as well as a stock market crash that coincided with the year of release. But the nation has moved on. In 2005, we had Hurricane Katrina, which killed almost 1,400 people and tied with Hurricane Harvey as the costliest hurricane in the Atlantic basin. The port of Southern Louisiana in New Orleans was almost closed. That port is so critical to global trade, and food especially, that Hurricane Katrina was very nearly a global calamity. As bad as it was, we narrowly escaped an even worse disaster. But the nation has moved on.

In 2008, we had another market crash in the Great Financial Crisis, which also coincided with a year of release. Again, the nation moved on. We had the Covid years, with their massive disruptions, and all the ugliness they brought out. In the last year, we had Hurricane Helene on the East Coast and wildfires on the West Coast, both of which were described in the liberal media as being "biblical" and "apocalyptic." But the nation has largely moved on. Now we have flooding in Texas that has killed over 120, with more than that still missing. Ezekiel foretells of a time when "disaster will come upon disaster, and rumor will be upon rumor." (Ezekiel 7:26). It's starting to feel that way.

The state of Israel had the October 7 attack by Hamas on the Eighth Day of the Feast in 2023, involving a massacre and horrible atrocities. Israel's death toll relative to its small population was twelve times higher than America's death toll on 9/11. It was the equivalent of 36,000 Americans dying in one day.

Each one of these events—and there are others we could add to this list—was significantly disruptive, but the nation recovered from each without any substantial change, except perhaps in policies, and to go to war when it was possible to retaliate against a human adversary. In each case, when the crisis was over, the people got back to normal as quickly as possible. But the modern nations of Israel and Judah have not returned to God.

This pattern gets to the core of why God, through whatever means He chooses, is going to “trouble” Jacob: Because when nothing else gets the attention, being tied up, taken away, and oppressed is impossible to ignore. When one is separated from one's home, one's job, possibly one's family, and one's data plan, streaming package, and other conveniences, one's priorities become clarified. A violent relocation changes one's perspective like little else because everything one's life consists of is radically upended. That's when things are finally bad enough that a nation—or what is left of it—will finally start looking up and looking for divine deliverance. The retrospective and reflective book of Lamentations could only be written after Jerusalem fell, not when times were good and life seemed “normal.”

So, here in Leviticus 26, beginning in verse 14, we see God's assurances of what He will do in response to national sin. We won't go through each one, but you might notice that there is a general progression. It starts with problems within the nation. Verse 16 mentions terror. It might include terrorism, but it generally indicates panic, or intense fear that causes trembling.

The same verse mentions wasting disease and fever, some of which our nations experienced in the last few years. Verse 16 also says Israel's enemies will benefit more from its agricultural products than Israel will, and we are seeing some of that as well.

In verse 17, national defense starts to break down, and those who hate God's people will reign over them. But notice that God does not mention nationality, only hatred. This opens the possibility that God's curse could be leaders from within Israel who hate Israelites and are allowed to reign. Verse 17 also describes fear and paranoia setting in even when there is not an immediate threat because God is no longer their Shield—by their own choice.

Verses 18- 22 describe further internal problems, including agricultural devastation and wild beasts.

Verses 23-24 show that God's purpose in this is to bring about reform. He says,

Leviticus 26:23-24 And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins.

What follows then is the sword, meaning war, as well as more pestilence, and being delivered into the hands of enemies.

Verse 27 shows God ratchetting things up even more, bringing about the desperation and depravity of verse 29, and the destruction of the false gods He hates.

In verse 31, God moves on to cleaning out the land almost completely, scattering its inhabitants and causing them to flee for their lives. It is from this point until verse 39 that we see a correlation with the "Trouble" described in Jeremiah 30, where God's apostate people are subjugated and ultimately moved into the lands of their enemies, where they face wretched conditions. But notice that this is the final step—the last and most severe act of God when every other warning has failed to cause reform. And in verses 44-45, we find an echo of God's promise that even though Jacob will be troubled mightily, it will not result in complete destruction of the nation because of God's faithfulness to His covenant. It says:

Leviticus 26:44-45 Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am

the LORD their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.’”

While this is the end of these curses, this isn't really the end. There are numerous prophecies that foretell that God's troubling of Jacob will eventually bring about repentance of this hard-hearted and stiff-necked people, of which we happen to be a part.

Now, just so Israel understood what would happen if they turned from Him, God gave a similar warning of curses to the generation that entered the land, nearly 40 years after Leviticus. The curses in Deuteronomy 28 are actually more fearsome because they add specifics that we can recognize as warning shots. And it follows the same general progression, beginning with a breakdown or unraveling within the nation that grows in intensity and culminates in subjugation.

So, please turn to Deuteronomy 28, and we will add to the picture of what God says He will do to capture the attention of His people. We will start in verse 15:

Deuteronomy 28:15-16 But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.”

No location will be safe. We could update this to, “Cursed you shall be in Los Angeles, and cursed shall you be in Chimney Rock, North Carolina”—a small town that was washed away when Helene hit the mountains. This does not mean that Chimney Rock—or Kerrville, Texas, for that matter—is more wicked than other places, only that when the nation turns away from its Creator, no place in the nation is safe (see Luke 13:2-5).

Verse 20 says,

Deuteronomy 28:20 “The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do”

In other words, the people cannot make any progress. It's like everybody is trying, but they are in quicksand. All the efforts are thwarted when people are out of alignment with God.

There is a similar cause-and-effect report in Haggai, where God describes His curse on the people's efforts. In Haggai 1:6, He says,

Haggai 1:6 (*New English Translation*) You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but are never filled. You drink, but are still thirsty. You put on clothes, but are not warm. Those who earn wages end up with holes in their money bags.

This was because the people were focused on their own interests rather than on the work God had given them to do. Their interests were not sinful per se, they just weren't what God wanted them to focus on. So, God called for a drought, a curse, on all their labor to encourage them to consider their ways and think about why they were being hobbled.

In verses 21-22, we see more references to disease epidemics, which Leviticus 26 also foretells. But let's pause here and consider some of the major events over the past 30 years that I mentioned to make sure that we spiritual Israelites do not inadvertently play the role of Pharaoh. I'll explain what I mean:

God sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, and God gifted His servants so they could perform certain miraculous works to show that He was backing them up. But Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate some of those works as well (Exodus 7:11; 22-23; 8:7). Thus, because Pharaoh had an alternative explanation for the miracles, he concluded that there was nothing special about what Moses did. The knowledge that something could be done apart from Moses' God meant that God's outworking was not the only possibility. Therefore, the warnings through Moses were hollow to Pharaoh.

Now, let's apply that principle to our evaluation of major events. The fact that we (or someone else) can come up with an alternative explanation for how something came about does not mean that God was uninvolved.

So, in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, God promises pestilence and disease epidemics as a warning to disobedient people. Now, think about the Covid years, and the unrelenting media coverage from all sides. You are all aware of the various rumors and theories about the origins of the pandemic, the way it unfolded, and various entities that stood to gain.

We have all heard that Covid was genetically engineered, and that its release could have been accidental, but it also could have been planned, either for depopulation or making a killing (so to speak) from selling alleged preventatives and cures. I've seen the collections of anecdotes, but I don't know the full reality, and I submit that none of us really does.

Even so, like Pharaoh, we have plenty of alternative explanations for a pandemic. This knowledge of how things could have happened tends to bring our focus to the realm of men, which means God slides into the background, as though the actions of men somehow chip away at God's sovereignty. They really don't, of course—His sovereignty remains. That's what sovereignty means. But it becomes harder to remember what God said He would do, and even harder to believe that He has done something, when there are magicians like scientists and reporters and countless pontificators with unverified understanding and agendas who give us explanations for how something could happen without God. It's as though God can only operate with lightning bolts and methods outside of our knowledge.

Jesus encountered something similar during His ministry. In John 7, there was a division among the people because of Him. One group said, "We know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from" (John 7:27). Their assumption was that the Anointed One would simply appear out of nowhere. But since they had knowledge of Jesus and His background, it ruled out the possibility for them that He could be the Christ. He was not mysterious enough for them, and therefore, He could not be divine. Their knowledge of Him invalidated Him in their eyes. So, they blinded themselves to the Messiah right in front of them through their preconception.

As another example from the last 30 years, there have long been rumors, if not outright accusations, that 9/11 was an inside job. I've seen various presentations and analyses, but I don't know the full reality, and I submit that none of us does. Yet notice how having alternative explanations about 9/11 tends to blunt the possibility of God's involvement. That is, if we can explain a calamity in human terms, we are less inclined to fear God.

But if we take God at His word, we should understand that His sovereignty extends over all people. He can use anybody. At the beginning of this chapter, God says that if His people diligently obey His voice to observe carefully His commandments, they will be blessed in the city. Yet He also says regarding His judgment on Israel in Amos, "If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?" (Amos 3:6). If there is calamity in the city, it points to disobedience. Some 3,000 people lost their lives that day, and the Twin Towers—the symbols of American financial dominance—were brought down. How it happened, or by whom it was carried out, is far less important than the fact that it happened to God's people.

If 9/11 was purely or simply an attack by Islamic terrorists, then it is an example of God removing His protection to allow foreigners to wreak havoc. But if some cabal within the national leadership was involved in inflicting harm on its own citizens, then 9/11 is an example of God removing His protection and giving His people over to those who hate them—meaning, evil rulers within the nation. That could apply to the Covid scenario as well: If it was planned, that does not rule out God's involvement. It means God has given over His rebellious people to those who hate them. It means the response should be to repent rather than curse the rulers who hate their own people.

If we are reigned over by people who hate us, regardless of nationality, it is another indicator that the nation is cursed for turning from God. Either way, these events fit within the warnings and patterns of God. Neither the official nor alternative narratives should cloud our vision to God's sovereignty and promised responses to national immorality.

Just to reiterate, we are contemplating these examples to see that prophesied warning shots are taking place, but we have to trust God's words above all others to recognize the works that He promises and claims.

Let's move on to hurricanes—Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Hurricane Helene, 19 years later. Some may have forgotten the media coverage of Katrina, and others may not have been aware. But some of you will remember there were rumors and suggestions that the hurricane was steered to New Orleans through weather manipulation. Therefore, Katrina did not have to be an act of God—it could have been an act of man through technology.

The president at the time had an R after his name, and most of the citizens of New Orleans voted for the other side. The theory was that the president hated Black people, so apparently, he grabbed the National Hurricane Joystick and steered a massive hurricane precisely into New Orleans.

Now, fast-forward to last year. The guys with Ds after their names apparently had control of the Hurricane Joystick last fall, and some in the nation suspect, if not fully believe, that the previous administration steered Helene into the mountains of North Carolina to inflict damage on the voters of team R. This weather weaponization may explain why elections have become so desperate: Everybody wants control of the Hurricane Joystick. If this is the case, then I fear for any so-called Blue States with a coastline because it seems like the current president would really enjoy steering storms around and walloping his enemies.

Levity aside, mankind can do things like seed clouds to encourage rain and influence some weather patterns. We have our magicians, and they have impressive capabilities. As a result, we have alternative explanations for what happens. But the danger is that even those who have been given eyes to see will start to take their eyes off the Almighty. We must not let suppositions of how things could happen undermine what God warns He will do.

Let's think about the fires in California earlier this year. The Eaton fire, which consumed Pasadena and Altadena, was the second most destructive

fire in California's history. On a personal note, it destroyed the house my family owned when I was a young teen, along with my sister's house next door. I guess there's no going back now.

The explanations for the fires include arson, faulty equipment, too much regulation, not enough regulation, Santa Ana winds, and of course, climate change. I've seen various analyses, but I don't know the reality, and I submit that none of us does. But those explanations provide plausible deniability for God's involvement. Yet there is an incident in Numbers 11 that could serve as a parallel. I will read it to you:

Numbers 11:1 Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.

God did not record how the fire started. Maybe a young Israelite was playing with flint and steel next to his tent. Maybe a donkey kicked over a lantern. Maybe this one was a lightning bolt out of nowhere. While God does work through mysterious ways, He also works through the ordinary and the visible. He does not tell us how He did, only that He did it, and He did it in response to His people—for “mere” complaining, which was a rejection of Him.

What all these major events have in common is that they were massively disruptive to at least this nation of Israel. They also fit within the essence, if not the specifics, of what God says He will do in response to the condition of His people, both as judgments but also as warnings of worse things to come. And as we have seen, with each event, Pharaoh's magicians have made an appearance in some form to provide a human explanation that keeps physically-focused people from recognizing God's work, thus blunting the necessary fear of Him.

Let's bring this even closer to home. Down in verse 64, God warns about scattering. He gave this warning back in Leviticus 26:33 as well. In fact, outside of these chapters, God warns of, promises, or claims scattering in

over 40 places. The majority of the references are to God scattering His own people. He scatters them as a judgment, but also as a warning so they will return to Him.

Now, let's plug that into the span of recent time we have been considering. Thirty years ago is the approximate time when the scattering of the church of God kicked into high gear. And the overriding belief to this day is that Satan scattered spiritual Israel—the Israel of God. This is disturbing because it implies that Satan has greater control over the God's church than the Father and the Son do. In addition, it conveniently casts us as victims, so we don't have to ask the hard questions of ourselves and God. It is a belief that has not been thought through very well, considering that God Himself promises scattering.

I Corinthians 10:11 says the things that happened to Israel happened as examples, meaning for us. They were written for our admonition. We cannot relegate the curses just to Israel. God works in patterns, and His character and nature are unchanging. While it is true that God is doing something different with His church than He was with Israel, it is also true that the church is accountable for much more than Israel was and is, making it even more likely that God will intervene when He sees something developing that is out of alignment with Him. As Hebrews says, His chastening is a demonstration of His love.

This is still in the context of what leads up to Jacob's Trouble, and the point I am getting at is how easy it is for us—even within the church—to miss God's actions when they don't align with our concept of Him, especially when we have magicians of various types providing alternative explanations for the things that God says He will do. Our concept of God must be drawn from every one of His words and not just our favorite passages. The letters to the seven churches, written by the Head of the church, should silence any objection that it is not in His nature to chasten His church when it gets out of alignment with Him.

Now, switching back to physical Israel, Deuteronomy 28 is filled with distressing details, and we are not going to go through them all—just one

more. From what we have already seen, it is clear that there is an increasing intensity, and the trajectory is toward the nation losing its own power and coming under the power of foreign nations.

The last curse we will focus on is in verse 25:

Deuteronomy 28:25 The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth.

I have been guilty of not taking this seriously—of looking through human eyes rather than the eyes of faith. That is, I've seen the military rankings of the nations, and how the U.S. outspends the next handful of nations combined. The U.S. has incredibly advanced weaponry, and 128 military bases in 50 countries. North America is guarded from invasion by massive oceans, which the U.S. controls. Through human eyes, the U.S. would surely win any contest. There are only a couple of competitors, and they are still quite some distance from being able to match the U.S.

Yet God's word here should outweigh all those advantages in the minds of His people. God says He will cause the Israelites to be defeated. The size and the advanced weaponry are irrelevant. When God fights for a nation, they win. When God fights against a nation, they lose. That is the conclusion of the whole matter.

Again, God does not say how He will do it. The Egyptians had equipment failure—the wheels came off their chariots. A violent storm destroyed the “invincible” Spanish Armada and spared England. In another conflict, torrential rains liquefied fields, swelled rivers, and stalled the advance of the German army. (Those last two happened even before climate change.) The modern state of Israel experienced numerous miracles during its founding in 1948, as well as in subsequent wars when they were attacked and outnumbered. God has intervened on behalf of the Israelitish peoples countless times, both in Scripture and in more recent history.

But verse 25 says God will also perform miracles against the Israelites when their iniquity becomes full. This has happened in the past:

Judges 2:14-15 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

God says that He sold the Israelites into the hands of their enemies. He had redeemed them—He had purchased them—from Egypt, but now that they had turned from Him, He sold them to those who would plunder them until such time that they repented. This is not the only time God uses this terminology of selling. It says this several more times in the book of Judges (Judges 3:8; 4:2; 10:7), and also in I Samuel 12:9 and Joel 3:6. So, we find another pattern of God when dealing with a rebellious people—He sells them.

The first time this is mentioned is in the Song of Moses, where Moses prophesies what happens when God is against a nation. I will just read it to you:

Deuteronomy 32:30 How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had surrendered them?

God may not have intended this to be an exact formula, but just as an exercise, the U.S. has 1.3 million active-duty military personnel. But if two will put 10,000 to flight, those 1.3 million could be made to flee by a mere 260 when God fights against a rebellious nation.

So, looking at military matchups and defense expenditures, and how quickly another country could challenge the U.S., as I have been guilty of, is an exercise in futility at best, and a lack of faith in God's word at worst. The metric that truly matters is whether a nation is pleasing to God or displeasing. Everything else is noise. As God said through Zechariah, it is not by military might or strength of arms that things are accomplished, but by His Spirit.

The curses teach us just how hardheaded and stiff-necked the people of Israel are, and how readily they will shrug off God's warnings, adjust to a degraded circumstance, and continue striving for life on their terms rather than God's. Again, this is why Jacob's Trouble is necessary. These chapters point out how resilient carnal human nature is, and how unyielding God's people have become, such that God must finally break them through servitude for them to repent.

Please turn back to Jeremiah 30.

Now we can see how the enslavement mentioned in verses 8, 10, and 11 fit within Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The verses here show Israel and Judah at their most troubled, when they are entirely powerless, and we can infer from God's patterns that Jacob will have gone through many other warnings before God determined that nothing else would cause them to turn.

We skipped over one of the primary descriptors of Jacob's Trouble, which is found in verse 6. I will read it from the *New English Translation*:

Jeremiah 30:6 (NET) Ask yourselves this and consider it carefully: Have you ever seen a man give birth to a baby? Why then do I see all these strong men grabbing their stomachs in pain like a woman giving birth? And why do their faces turn so deathly pale?

One explanation of this verse put forth relatively recently is that this is referring to biotechnology that will allow for a womb transplant into a man, such that a biological male, with surgical alteration, could give birth. But that misses the essence of what God is portraying here. He is saying that since it is obvious that men cannot give birth—that is part of what makes us men—then why does He see every man (and not just some confused, post-operative individuals) holding their bellies and turning pale like they are in labor?

While this symbol may seem unusual, it is actually used frequently throughout the prophets, both for Israelites and Gentiles (Psalm 48:6; Isaiah 13:6-8; 21:3-4; 26:17-18; 66:7-11; Jeremiah 6:24-25; 13:21; 22:23; 49:24;

50:43; Micah 4:9-10; 5:3-5). Incidentally, in one place, God even describes Himself as crying out like a woman in labor after holding His peace, and finally unleashing His wrath (Isaiah 42:14).

So, this is not talking about errant biotech “advancements.” When all the references are taken together, the underlying theme is one of extreme intensity. When we exclude the singular reference to God, we can add other elements that apply only to people and nations, such as anguish and turmoil. Pain is obviously a significant factor. For those of us who have not experienced childbirth, I have heard that the pain approximates that of passing a kidney stone. Your mileage may vary, of course.

But we can add other emotions and states, such as fear and distress. It can include weakness because of exhaustion, as labor drags on and the energy reserves are depleted, giving way to a wavering heart and doubts about survival.

Another theme of labor that we can apply here is that once it begins, it cannot be stopped. It is too late to change course. There has been a lengthy lead-up to this time of intense distress, and once the time arrives, you must go through it. There is no avoiding it.

As another way to understand this, think about that feeling of dread, like a rock in the pit of your stomach, when you know you must face up to something you would rather avoid. Maybe you were caught by your parents in some infraction, or called into the principal’s office. Your stomach ties knots around the boulder inside, and an overwhelming sinking feeling that the game is up washes over you. Whether or not we literally clutched our stomachs, we’ve had that feeling in our gut of fear, of dread, of knowing that that which we have greatly feared is coming to pass, and nothing can stop it.

Now, think of that as it applies to the nations of Israel. Somewhere in the national subconscious, there will be a recognition that something has been growing, that a time of trouble had been ahead, but now the day of reckoning has arrived. The previous warnings have been forgotten or ignored, and the trouble kept growing until the labor began. It quickly becomes evident that

nothing the nation possesses can forestall this trouble—not its might, its wealth, its advantages, its ingenuity or resourcefulness. The nation must go through powerlessness and subjugation. Life will never return to normal.

We spent quite some time considering why Jacob's Trouble is necessary, and now we will turn to look at what God intends for it to produce. The word translated "trouble" carries some of the same themes as the intensity of childbirth, such as distress, anguish, adversity, affliction, as well as tribulation. Remember that Jesus foretold of a time of great tribulation. What is more, in several other places, this word for trouble is specifically used to describe a difficult birth (II Kings 19:3; Isaiah 37:3; Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; 49:24; 50:43). This means that there is at least a hint of the theme of childbirth even in the name, Jacob's Trouble. It is the time when Jacob goes through great travail and anguish, but God brings a remnant through and delivers them from their captors, and a birth happens, as we will see.

There are many prophecies that depict the restoration of Israel and Judah after their time of trouble. They foretell of cleansing when God makes atonement for them, regathers them into the Promised Land in a Second Exodus, and makes a New Covenant with them. We will only touch on a handful, but together, they paint a picture of a humbled and repentant people who are finally ready to have the relationship with God that He intends. As we go through these, remember that there may be a duality. I will leave it to you to study the possible applications. Again, the important part is to know what the prophecies say and some possible fulfillments so we can recognize God's word when it comes to pass.

Please turn with me to Daniel 12:

Daniel 12:1 At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.

So, a time of trouble unlike anything before it, but Daniel's people will be delivered.

Daniel 12:4-7 “But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.” Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?” Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

We are living through a time when knowledge has increased and is still increasing. But the duration of the fulfillment is given here as being a time, times, and half a time, which equates to 3 ½ years, or 42 months, or 1260 days, which are all mentioned in other places.

Now, let’s consider verse 7. This verse has been used in reference to what happened to the church of God, and it could fit—to a degree. However, remember the context here, which is the physical nation. Israel was and is holy, not in the sense of being righteous, but in the sense of being set apart by God. The “holy people” is an accurate label for Israel.

In addition, the power of the church is not something that can be shattered. Rightly understood, the power of the church is not simply preaching. The power of the church is Jesus Christ and His Spirit. That power can never be shattered. But the power of the physical nation certainly can be, and that fits exactly with the curses and numerous other prophecies. The physical nation will be completely powerless at the end, so the only recourse is to fully turn to God.

Please turn to Jeremiah 50:

Jeremiah 50:4-5 “In those days and in that time,” says the LORD, “The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; with continual weeping they shall come, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces

toward it, saying, 'Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that will not be forgotten.'

Israel and Judah are in a state of mourning, certainly because of personal loss, but also because of their previous state and now their repentance. So, they are trying to find their way to God and to make a perpetual covenant with Him.

This is interesting because the Jews today do not recognize the gospel message or the New Covenant that Jesus offered to His disciples because they do not accept Him as the Messiah. Contrariwise, mainstream Christianity, as a generality, calls Jesus, 'Lord,' but does not do the things He says. It believes it is already under the New Covenant, but adamantly resists having His laws written on its heart, which involves doing them. So, both those viewpoints will be shattered so the proper one can be constructed, one that both keeps the commandments and has the testimony and faith of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

Please turn to Isaiah 66:

Isaiah 66:6 The sound of noise from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the LORD, who fully repays His enemies!

So, this is about God's retribution on those who oppressed His people.

Isaiah 66:7 "Before she was in labor, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child.

That sounds like the vision in Revelation 12, where a woman gave birth to a male Child who was to rule all nations.

Isaiah 66:8 Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children.

Notice that the imagery and the time have moved forward, and now it is not just a single Child to which Zion gives birth, but to children—plural. A whole nation is born at once, and the context is the future restoration of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 66:9-10 Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?" says the LORD. "Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?" says your God. "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;

Drop down to verse 20, which foretells of Gentiles carrying Israelites back to their land:

Isaiah 66:20 Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.

Please turn to Jeremiah 31. This appears to be within the same flow as chapter 30, where we began with the description of Jacob's Trouble:

Jeremiah 31:1-4 "At the same time," says the LORD, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people." Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him rest." The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.

As God promised, Jacob will be saved out of the Trouble, and God will pour out His grace and restore the nation.

Jeremiah 31:9-12 They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn. “Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’ For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the LORD for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all.

So, God will lead Israel and cause them to follow Him. And even though God will sell Jacob as part of his Trouble, God will also redeem Jacob. He will buy back the nation once more. And while these terms of buying and selling are ones that we may balk at today, we must remember that this is talking about the benevolent Creator. A nation with any kind of sense will recognize the incredible blessing of being owned by God, especially when it has experienced a taste of what it is like not to have God caring for His possession.

Even so, God does not leave the relationship as just one of Owner-and-property. Hosea describes the restored, future relationship in chapter 2:

Hosea 2:14-17 “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. “And it shall be, in that day,” says the LORD, “That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer call Me ‘My Master,’ for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more.

We will look at one more passage that shows the change that God will bring about through the coming time that is unlike any other. Please turn to Zephaniah 3. Verse 1 shows what God is and will be working with until the restoration:

Zephaniah 3:1-2 Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! She has not obeyed His voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the LORD, she has not drawn near to her God.

Fast-forward to verse 8, which is when God really begins to intervene:

Zephaniah 3:8-15 “Therefore wait for Me,” says the LORD, “Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering. In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.” Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more.

So, the King will chasten Israel, but the good result will be an obedient people, fully yielded to Him.

Now, probably somewhere in the back of your mind is a question about how we might avoid all of this. And the simple answer is that there are no guarantees. The hope that many have latched onto is in the letter to Philadelphia, which says that some will be kept from the hour of trial that is coming upon the world. That is conditioned on their perseverance beforehand, as well as having kept His word and not denied His name. The picture emerges of faithful, obedient, persevering Christians who are not afraid to live and speak of their faith.

But that must be compared with the letter to Smyrna, the suffering, persecuted, physically poor church about which Jesus has nothing negative to say. He tells these most-faithful Christians to be faithful until death, and He will give them the crown of life. Their faithfulness does not exempt them from tribulation. Instead, their unjust tribulation proves their faithfulness.

Luke 21:36 is another verse frequently repeated. In it, Jesus says, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Many have taken it to mean to watch world events and pray for deliverance. But we now understand that watching relates to our own condition, and that the praying does not consist of daily prayers for escape, but instead indicates those who are in constant contact with God. The admonition is in the context of not getting caught up in the cares of life. It is a warning concerning what fills our hearts.

Yet the bottom line is that if we have truly surrendered our lives to God, then we will trust that He knows what is best for us. That could be physical deliverance until Christ's return and our change. It could be tribulation for the sake of mercifully working out what remains of our carnality. It could be martyrdom because He knows what we are made of as a result of His work, and that we will make a faithful witness of Him before the world. That's all for Him to decide.

But the question for each of us is whether the command to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" is an accurate description or summary of our lives, or whether it is just what we know to be the right words. We should consider whether it would be a true epitaph for us, agreed

to by all who know us—most importantly, God. He knows our intentions and motivations and the games we play better than we do. If it is true of us, then the timing and manner of our death, and what we experience before it, is of little consequence. If we are fully reconciled and committed to God, we can agree with Paul when he says, “...if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.” (Romans 14:8)