

## The Handwriting Is On The Wall (2000)

### Leadership

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Another year has gone by, and I think there is little doubt in anyone's mind here that we are in the end time. We might have different opinions regarding how close we are to the return of Jesus Christ, but enough significant events are occurring to convict us that we are in a time that is the focus of so many prophecies. I want you to turn to Daniel the fifth chapter where this has gotten to be a tradition with me—I believe this is the fifth or sixth year in a row that I have begun the Feast of Tabernacles using this Scripture. It is where it is written that:

**Daniel 5:1-6** Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines, might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and of silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

We all understand that this is the beginning of the chapter on "the handwriting is on the wall." So the last five or six years, I have begun the Feast with a message that centers on the fact that, by custom, the phrase "The handwriting is on the wall" has become a proverb, indicating that even before an event has come to its conclusion there were clear signs we should have known what the outcome was going to be.

In this year's message, I want to take a brief look at some of our leadership's activities, which clearly indicate the times that we are living in. This year all of the Western nations, most noticeably, and the rest of the world besides, have been subject to higher than usual energy costs: gasoline, heating oil, and more. It is in the news in some form virtually every day now. Although, most Americans have been content to vent their anger spewing off at the mouth, in Europe there have been work stoppages, road blockages activated by a much more angered public. Maybe if we had to pay the price for fuel that they have to pay, we would be more excited as well.

The American media has made the sheiks in the Middle East the whipping boys, because the price of oil, crude actually, has gotten up to where it is somewhere around \$40 a barrel. And, of course, gasoline, jet fuel, and heating oil prices have risen to uncomfortable levels. That is, uncomfortable levels for *us* compared to what the rest of the world is paying.

President Clinton recently released thirty million gallons of crude from our strategic reserve, ostensibly to lower the prices, to relieve the economic pressure, and somehow mute the clamoring that was going on just a little bit. Wait until you hear "the rest of the story," as Paul Harvey is saying virtually every day.

Three stories have hit the Internet newswires in the last month or so. They contain information that you are very unlikely to hear in your hourly news broadcast on the radio or even the 6 pm national news you get over television. These stories I am going to tell you illustrate what happens, how things operate, whenever ambition overrides ethics.

The first one I am going to give you comes from the Drudge Report, the second from Middle East analyst and commentator Emmanuel A. Winston, and the third from the syndicated columnist Eric Margolis. We have to begin by understanding that there is no shortage of oil underground. The known oil reserves are enormous—almost beyond comprehension. There is a scarcity above ground because the pumping of crude from the reserves has been severely cut back.

The amount pumped can be manipulated to control oil's price. (I am not going to give you many of the details of what has been discovered, only an overview so that I can make a point.) The earliest cause of these high prices is taken from the Drudge Report, and this erupted in early June. After it was learned in late May that some Arab oil people had reported to Americans that they had been pressured to reduce pumping by President Clinton, who had brokered a deal in behalf of Western bankers, both European and American, as far back as February 2000.

The crux of the deal was this: Some of the oil producers, mainly those in the Mid-East, some of them in South America, would cut back on their production in order to allow Mexican and Indonesian producers to sell larger quantities of their higher priced oil. This was done to allow them, that is, the Mexicans and Indonesians, to make money so that they could pay back some of their defaulting loans to Western bankers.

The point is, that our president so arranged this so that Western bankers can profit from the backs of American, Canadian, and Western European oil and gasoline users through artificially induced price rises in oil products as a direct result of what he arranged.

The second one, from Emmanuel Winston, is, as far as I know, not in effect yet. It was planned though, and because of what has recently happened in the Mid-East, it has probably been dropped and will not be entered into. But even what we already know is enough to curl your hair. Listen to this.

Have you ever wondered why Ehud Barak was in such an all-fired hurry to make almost unbelievable concessions to Syria and to the Palestinians in recent months, most especially this most recent round of meetings that took place at Camp David? Well, here is why. During the most recent Camp David Accords, President Clinton promised Barak upwards of fifty to seventy billion dollars if Israel would (1) withdraw from irreplaceable water supplies and defensive positions; (2) If Israel would withdraw seventeen thousand Israeli citizens from their homes, farms, factories, vineyards, and wineries in the Golan Heights; and (3) Another seventy to one hundred billion dollars to Israel to re-deploy a complete Israeli army facing Syria on their border. In addition, another forty billion would go to Syria so that they could buy American arms. Finally, an additional forty billion dollars would go to Arafat and the Palestinians just as a gift.

Now, where would all this money come from? It is a foregone conclusion that such a massive amount is never going to be passed through Congress. The scheme is actually quite simple. You might call it "Clinton's foreign oil policy." Here it is. President Clinton would work with OPEC by means of a covert program to keep the price of oil at an all time high. OPEC would then set aside a portion of their income to create a slush fund that would in turn be distributed to recipients in Israel, Syria, and

the Palestinians. You understand, of course, that this would amount to a direct transfer of money from the pockets of Western farmers, automobile and truck drivers, air and rail lines, those who heat their homes with oil. This deal would never have gotten passed by either Congress, or the Canadian or European Parliaments.

There is more to the story, about how he tried something similar once before with Russia—and it worked! But this scheme was far more grandiose, much more ambitious. And there is much to the story, but that will suffice for now.

Now the third story, from Eric Margolis, is that the price is also a direct aftermath of the Gulf War. One of the world's major oil producers before the Gulf War was Iraq. Now, today Iraq has the world's second largest, and some feel the largest, reserves of oil. However, today, it is unable to sell much on the world scene because of the penalties imposed upon them as sanctions as a result of the war. If Iraq were selling, the price would come down.

I do not know whether you have been watching and listening, but every once in awhile somebody on television news will say that right now Iraq holds the trump cards. They can shut everything down. Because I think they are pumping out about two million gallons a day, but they have the capacity to pump out a great deal more. And if they withdraw those two million gallons a day from that, they can upset things terribly. The point of Eric Margolis' article was that we are still paying for the Gulf War through higher oil prices.

Turn with me to Amos the second chapter in verses six and seven.

**Amos 2:6-7** Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. That pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father will go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name."

There is perhaps no other Old Testament prophet who gives such a sustained focus to social conditions as Amos does. And what one sees in this book, if one really stops to think about what he is saying here, is not a pretty picture at all.

For purposes of understanding, a few definitions are in order. First for the word "poor." "Poor" includes, of course, those who are poverty stricken, but it cannot be limited to that group. As Amos uses it, it includes those who are *weak, powerless* in terms of influence in the community. This was almost invariably economically poor, but it includes those who were better off. People you and I would call today "middle class types." Still, even though they were not economically broken, they still did not have the influence with the elders, the judges, the business leaders, and the bankers of the village. "Poor" thus includes most of the people, the common folk, you and I, in any given town.

Next, is the word "righteous." It needs a little bit of explanation. It does not mean "blameless" or "righteous" in the New Testament sense. It simply means one who is *right*—right in his cause. And in this context, it indicates someone who is right, or who has a just cause, perhaps even in a court case.

American litigation and trial processes have become far less a search for truth than they are simply a pursuit for a victory. They have become quite corrupt. What we are looking at here in the book of Amos, in both of these cases, in verses six and seven, is the "American way of life" mirrored in it. It

is a sure sign that we are headed down the tubes. Because what Amos is talking about here largely is how those in positions of leadership—power within the community, power within the nations—are taking advantage of their position and raping those who have no power. I am not talking about a sexual rape. I am talking about the abuse of power.

What Amos is describing in these verses here is a situation in which the powerful have created conditions under which the poor must enter debt slavery. Have you been reading anything about indebtedness in the United States? You should be reading about it. In addition to that, those in their positions of power are so avaricious that they sought to bring charges against the innocent, even though they did not commit any crime, in order to get every last cent—squeeze every drop—making use of the court system to take it from somebody.

It is pretty obvious that bribery was going on and it reads here, "And they sold the righteous for a pair of sandals." Now, this could be understood to indicate that losses were entered into over things as trifling as a pair of shoes. Does that sound familiar? In North Carolina recently, in fact this just happened, a young lady entered Duke University and she wanted to be on the football team as a kicker, a place kicker. But she did not have enough leg strength to kick the ball any further than about thirty yards. So they cut her from the football team during the try-outs. She sued the university and *won*! She got a two million dollar settlement for sex discrimination when there were three or four other fellows trying out for the same position. They could all out-kick her by ten, fifteen, and twenty yards. Okay, that is the kind of thing, where people are taking advantage of the court system simply to get wealthy or rich. The powerful are playing this thing right to the hilt in the book of Amos.

What we see here in the book of Amos, is Amos condemning Israel for three things that they focused on. 1) The primary focus in life of seeking material possessions. Let us think back to President Clinton and the thing that I opened up with. "Let's make sure the bankers don't suffer any loss." They make bad loans. But, you see, they have ways of using the power of political office in order to make sure that they get paid, where if you made the same bad loan, it is gone.

2) The irrelevance of the rights of other people. Let us not worry about the poor sucker on the street who has to pay so the bankers do not lose anything. And so, you raise the price of oil, and you and I are stuck because we *have* to pay it if we are going to do our job. And, so, it is artificially raised, not by the law of supply and demand, but rather a cutting of the supply in order to make the price raise in certain areas of the world so these people can make money and the bankers. Now, you see, who gets caught in the middle? You do. It is taken off the back of the poor—those who are defenseless.

3) The unrestricted promotion of self-advantage. Think of President Clinton here. "Let's make sure this really makes me look good in the eyes of those who count." The great peace-maker. In Amos four and verse one,

**Amos 4:1** Here this word, you cows of Bashan, who are in the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, "Bring wine, and let us drink."

In Amos' brief description, we see a way of life portraying the women of Israel who focused on self-indulgence to the exclusion of all personal spiritual dimension and social responsibilities in their lives. These are the people who were in the position to alleviate the oppression that was going on within their communities. But rather than alleviate the conditions, they were making it worse! So, again, the poor and the needy are mentioned because these people who are being described were

thriving on the indignities and the miseries that they, through business practices, loaded on the defenseless. They were squeezing and fleecing without a qualm. The poor were losing all they had to satisfy the self-importance of the lady of the manor.

We have all had to sacrifice to some small degree in order for President Clinton to establish a personal ambition, hoping to remove the stain of his sins from the consciousness of people worldwide.

I want to show you in God's Word an ancient version of what kind of thing that we were just reading of. Let us turn back in the book of I Kings in chapter 21.

**I Kings 21:1-3** And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house: and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you the worth of in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you.!"

Now, Naboth was well within his rights according to the laws of inheritance. If you care to look them up later, they are in Leviticus 25 and Numbers 36. He had every legal right to refuse to sell that ground to Ahab even though he was the king. Let us continue with the story. Ahab got into a real funk because of this. When you read through there, you cannot help but think that this guy is really immature, practically crying, he got into such a funk about what he could not have. He is less satisfied to have what must have been a very beautiful and productive farm.

**I Kings 21:7-14** Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! [Who are you? Are you not the king? Let us take action here.] Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles who were dwelling in the city, with Naboth. She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die. So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. [And here we have professional hit men.] And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth is stoned and is dead."

You can just write this down in your notes, in II Kings 9:26. You will find that Naboth's sons were killed at the same time—so that the king could have a lust satisfied. The abuse of power.

So, Jezebel schemed with others who were beholden to the power of the government. And Naboth was bludgeoned to death. The government literally confiscated the land for its own end. If you are reading the newspapers, does that sound familiar? Any of you who are familiar with the land that has been confiscated by the federal government just in the last two or three years out West, know that

ranchers can no longer use it. They are no longer allowed to graze their cattle there any more. It is set aside for some other use.

I do not know how true this is, but you have probably seen papers circulated throughout the United States of the some thirty-five or forty people who have in some way touched upon President Clinton's life that have been, well, they have met with unfortunate accidents and they are dead. People who held key testimony, that, were they asked and were brave enough, might have been able to testify in court. The evidence may be circumstantial. I do not know. But it is very interesting that something like that is flying around.

Let's go back a little bit further in the Old Testament to I Samuel the eighth chapter, verse seven.

**I Samuel 8:7-17** And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. Now therefore listen to their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them." So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king. [Now listen to this.] And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over thousands and captains over fifties, will set them to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give to his officers and servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants.

You are the government's slaves in the United States until about mid-May, Americans. And I think in Canada it is at least until sometime in June or July before you are free of the burden of the Canadian government. God knew what was coming. He inspired Samuel to write these things down. And now what we have for human government is the most confiscatory in any culture in any country in the world, is the government that is supposedly serving us! The reality in so many cases is that we live to serve them.

It is well recorded in history. I should not have to prove it to you at all. What I have just said is true, they have almost unlimited power in any culture without the wisdom or character to properly direct it for the well being of all. And by virtue of its position, that is the government's position, it is the prime example of conduct all the nation looks to for direction.

Have you ever heard the saying of Ralph Waldo Emerson? I am sure you have because I say it to you every once in awhile because I find that it is so true. He said, "Every institution is but the lengthened shadow of one man," usually the one on the top. And that that person's conduct, that person's attitude, begins to permeate the entire institution over which he rules, or exercises authority. Are we going down the tubes or what? Do we have a great example there in Washington D.C.? And it is entirely possible that if his partner is elected President in this coming election, it may even get worse! We can

say at least President Clinton goes to the Baptist Church. The one that is coming is a worshipper of Mother Earth, of Gaia. And he is an avowed rainbow worshipper. We might be in for some very interesting times.

We have a man who is out there campaigning who lies for no good reason. I heard one man on television say, "At least when President Clinton lies, he lies about the question he is asked. This fellow lies when there is no reason to lie." And they are dumb. Who would ever believe that he invented the Internet? Why would a man ever say such a thing? You just have to wonder where his mind is.

Now this is a major reason why, in the Bible, God concentrates his recording of the history of Israel through the kings. The king was a microcosm, in many cases, of what was going on in the nation. One exception to that would be whenever Israel had a good king. It is an awful lot easier for people to copy that which is evil, which is bad, because that is the tendency of human nature to follow bad examples. It is awfully difficult to get people to voluntarily give their lives over to doing that which is right merely on the basis of an example! And so when you have a good king, like David, it does not mean that the rest of the country is necessarily following his example.

Do you understand that when Josiah took over that he had to practically put the country under martial law in order to restore the proper worship of God? People put on a façade in order to earn some brownie points with Josiah. And then, as soon as he was dead, things really fell apart in a hurry, because the latent people came out immediately.

God concentrates on the king because they are a microcosm of the general conduct of the nation. And the people in the nation look to the king, and those in positions of leadership, for the conduct that they should use in their lives.

Let us turn to Isaiah 59. I will give you one more bad example. Isaiah and Amos lived pretty close to one another, but Amos came before Isaiah by about twenty years. And Amos prophesied to the northern ten tribes whereas Isaiah prophesied to Judah. Isaiah began his prophesies about twenty years after Amos was done.

**Isaiah 59:1-8** Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; he who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

Verses five and six here, I think are especially interesting because Isaiah uses some colorful language there to explain how hard people work at sinning! That is what he means there, "They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web." Do you see how hard a spider works to weave a web? And then he

begins to get into the fruit of their work and the effect, or the spin-off, of what they are doing. If you look at a spider's web, all of that intricate and detailed planning and protracted labor that they go through to devise and hatch their schemes will in the end give them no profit.

Just before we came here to the Feast, a spider wove a web just outside of our garage door. The spider was about two inches in diameter. And the central part of the body of the spider was about a half an inch in diameter—beautiful black and yellow markings all over its back. I have no idea what kind of a spider it was. But I tell you that web was a work of art. I kid you not. It was beautiful, symmetrical, and that thing worked so hard to get that up there. Not every part of the web was woven in exactly the same way. The central part, where the spider was, all of the little spokes in it were much closer together. And the whole thing was tied together with a zigzag going across it. Well, we were waiting for "Charlotte" to give birth to a lot of little babies, but you know what? Someone knocked that thing down. And all of that labor and all of that beauty was gone and the spider too. We do not know what happened to it.

Well, that is kind of what Isaiah is talking about here. He is talking about how hard evil people *work* to produce evil. But the same thing that happened to our spider, God is saying, is happening to these people. They might appear to you and me, on the outside, to be successful. They have names. Everybody knows them. Their names are in the newspaper and people are writing about them. But their lives are not what we might think they are. And they are not producing the things in their lives by their evil schemes because they run dead into one of God's laws.

You know, a person may get a certain coarse delight out of putting things over on others, but all the progress they get is really in dissipation, cravings that they are slaves to, eventually poverty, shame, loss of self-respect. And they will be found—I guarantee this—like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, naked and ashamed, because one cannot avoid that "whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:8) That is why he says, "Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works." Can you imagine if somebody was clothed in a spider web? It would not cover very much, would it? That is what he is talking about there. That kind of clothing will not wear. It does not wear with God. Because as Paul says in Galatians 6:7, "Don't be fooled. God cannot be mocked."

Let us finish this sermon in Micah chapter four.

**Micah 4:1-4** Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge among many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

There is a new world coming. This Festival is dedicated to keeping us in mind of it and our part in God's plan. This Festival is part of our preparation, and therefore, we are here with purpose—to *rejoice* because this world and its ways are ending. We do not know how soon. We do not know whether we will live out until the time that it actually comes to an end. But if we remain faithful and



we keep on growing, we are going to be there and be a part of that government that is going to spread peace all over this earth.

That is going to make it possible for the poor—meaning the weak—of the world to have good lives and not have what they worked for and earned taken away from them and given to somebody who has schemed and cheated in order to be able to get it and made use of power that another cannot fight against. And it is going to continue as it is now and to get worse before it gets better. But a new beginning is not all that far off. And the kinds of things which we see in the prophets and in our cities and towns are going to be a thing of the past.

Now, we are here to learn to fear God too—to rejoice and to fear God—and to grow in a deep and abiding and awesome respect for the wisdom of His way, the love that He has shown us, in providing us the forgiveness of sin, for knowledge of His purpose, and for the sureness of His promises. So while you are here, do not forget *why* you are here. And make sure you make use of it, glorifying God in everything you think, say, and do.