

Why Was Hebrews-Written? (Part Eleven): God Is Not Silent

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Forerunner, "Personal,"

The turmoil that arose during the election campaign of 2016 continues in the United States' government, education system, and media, even after the 2020 election. The tensions these institutions have generated have filtered out to the public, resulting in a building fear. Unsure about what to do, many people are afraid about where these tensions will lead, for they are increasingly at the mercy of that leadership. Where is the country headed? Who can be trusted? Stressed Americans continue to live with a high measure of uncertainty.

However, I do not believe this view is entirely correct. Why? This fear has always existed throughout the history of this nation, though it has ebbed and flowed. The tensions during this iteration are more elevated than in most previous election cycles because the stakes seem to be so much higher. Yet books written and published many years before Donald Trump decided to run for president contain themes concerned with a suspicious undercurrent of subversive "leadership" within the nation's capital that was more influential in determining national policies than a casual observer could see. These influential leaders' names do not appear on front-page political news stories because they do not necessarily sit in elected offices.

The investigations into Communist activity within government conducted by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s raised quite a storm. He named names, and like President Trump, he became the enemy! McCarthy's exposé of Communists expressed some of the same ideas Trump has mentioned, though not as aggressively. McCarthy and his committee were far more concerned with internal federal government policies than the global ones at the forefront now. Back then, people were concerned about the existence of what authors called a "shadow government."

Today, the American government is again firmly in the hands of what Donald Trump refers to as “the Swamp.” According to him, shadowy figures operate behind the scenes, persuaded that Washington, DC, belongs to them. Washington and New York City are the nation’s most significant power centers politically and financially.

The inhabitants of “the Swamp” appear to have determinedly counterattacked over the past four years, finally winning back the presidency and the Senate. I have been reading about “the Swamp”—though it is not always called that—for at least twenty years. It really does exist because it is the way of human beings who are enslaved by their carnality. Such people do not see God as a great Sovereign Lord overseeing His creation.

Donald Trump challenged them on their own turf in 2016. Despite his wealth and popularity, he was not one of them, and he beat them because he caught and promoted a vision the American people accepted about their nation. His vision is like the traditional one America was founded upon—and quite different from the one generally held by the human residents of “the Swamp.”

His campaign and election in 2016 alarmed them because he represented the real danger that they could lose their vaunted political and economic power in Washington and New York City. “The Swamp” is nothing more than a group of highly influential political, educational, and businessmen and -women who act as gatekeepers in those power-centers. Everybody of importance or potential importance must receive their approval to move forward in the political and economic arenas. Those who pass muster do the political labor to advance “the Swamp’s” causes.

“The Swamp” crept into American government early on and has always existed there with more or less power. It is not a rigid, legally organized political entity. But its political thinking and influence have varied, and though of late it has been mostly supportive of Democrat Party politics, it has not always been so. At certain times, they have been solidly Republican. All that really seems to matter to them is their power and what “good” they can get from the government.

It Has Always Been This Way

Will the descendants of Israel, scattered within the Western world, ever learn that it is not the president, monarch, congress, or parliament of any earthly nation that rules, but that God in heaven reigns over all? He is the One whom citizens must please with their good conduct for that nation to have the peace, prosperity, and health it desires.

During the 2020 presidential election campaign, how many people running for office or supporting a candidate said or wrote anything about pleasing God? Instead, what we witnessed is a continued erosion of that minority of the population that tries to live in the fear of God. Yes, God will stir awake the modern nations of Israel, but it is still a long way from happening because almost no one thinks and therefore acts with God in mind. There are good reasons He does not respond with peace and other blessings. A painful reckoning must come first.

One would think that, if anyone could possibly fulfill this need of a righteous nation, it would be the people of Israel, those descended from Abraham. God chose Abraham to teach his descendants through the ages in God's way of life (Genesis 18:19). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and a few others set high moral and spiritual standards throughout their lives, but the nation itself never consistently followed even their patterns of living, let alone God's.

To complicate matters, God has scattered the people of Israel all over the Western world according to His purposes. One of the results of this is that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob no longer even know who they really are—and their conduct and attitudes reveal that most do not care!

Listen carefully to God's charge against Israel during the prophet Jeremiah's day. But be warned that nothing has changed since God raised those righteous men and women as examples in their times. Nothing has changed up to this very day. He says in Jeremiah 5:23-31:

But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; they have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the

harvest.” Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good from you. For among My people are found wicked men; they lie in wait as one who sets snares; they set a trap; they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit. Therefore, they have become great and grown rich. They have grown fat, they are sleek; yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless; yet they prosper, and the right of the needy they do not defend. “Shall I not punish them for these things?” says the LORD. “Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?” An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will they do in the end?

It is obvious that most of the citizens of this nation are not seeking God. In fact, we can see clear indications that many are doggedly fighting Him.

Purposeful Suppression of the Truth

In Romans 1:16-21, the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Creator God who has overseen humanity’s experiences since He created Adam and Eve, writes about His existence and authority over all humankind:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

It is difficult for an intelligent person to misunderstand what God says through the apostle. Because of the vile practices that mankind displays before Him, He is not obligated to save anybody! However, He will offer

salvation to some as He chooses because He is motivated from within Himself to accomplish His purposes.

God's existence is a truth that some dogmatically refuse to believe. Another, larger population of men and women accept that He may exist, but their acceptance of His existence does not motivate them to live by what He says. Their further commitment to Him is stalled because they refuse to accept and believe His guidance found in the Bible.

A much smaller group believes enough to study His Word and start down the path toward accepting and doing what He says. They may even believe strongly enough to commit to baptism, but for whatever reason, they lose interest, stop growing, and depart from Him and His way.

Finally, an exceedingly smaller group believes with all their heart. They are consistently committed to Him, and His cause becomes their cause in life.

American Religion Is Badly Divided

I do not believe life will calm down soon. The tensions we have been experiencing will have its ebbs and flows from time to time. In recent decades, when the Democratic Party has secured the most powerful offices in the nation, a down economy and job losses have become constant issues. Such economic problems follow Democrats like a malignant shadow.

Because of the pandemic and ongoing riots in its cities, the American people increasingly fear that it will never completely subside. As always seems to happen throughout history, Christians will ultimately be the real targets, as demonic spirits—spirits of fear—drive the uncertainty and violence. They will push fearful Americans into “patriotically” fighting for their vision of how the government should help and protect them, and they will point the finger of blame at Christians and their beliefs.

The epistle to the Hebrews was written and dispatched to the scattered Christian churches sometime around ^{AD} 65. Secular histories speak of the entire Mediterranean world erupting intermittently in internal violence from Jerusalem to Rome at the same time. Rome itself experienced a devastating fire in ^{AD} 64, destroyed a large portion of the city, and Emperor Nero found a

way to blame it on Christians. They either fled the area or hid in the catacombs beneath the city to escape the emperor's wrath and that of the Roman citizenry.

Not long after that, Rome grew weary of persistent Jewish uprisings and revolts, and in AD 66, Nero dispatched Vespasian to crush the Jews. Just over three years later, Titus, Vespasian's son and now general of the legions in Judea, prepared his army to defeat them mercilessly. He attacked Jerusalem and devastated the Temple into uselessness as a place of worship. As Jesus predicted, not one stone was left upon another (Matthew 24:2).

God allows such things to occur, or perhaps He even causes some measure of upset to exist to prepare His children's minds to experience and overcome what is coming. In our times, we expect the Great Tribulation and the Day of Lord to occur shortly, so we can think of what is happening as God's way of preparing us for the troubles ahead, and ultimately for the Kingdom of God.

It is commonly assumed that human nature contains a religious element. People want to worship a higher, greater Being, but history—especially biblical history—shows that motivation to be greatly confused. Paul writes in I Corinthians 8:5, "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords) . . ." Human beings will worship just about anything!

Most observers consider Americans to be a religious people, but the religious scene in the United States presents an extremely confusing picture. Americans cannot agree on what their doctrines should be. Mainstream Christianity is fractured into hundreds, maybe thousands of denominations, and the number is growing all the time! Without a doubt, demons have contributed a great deal to this confused portrait because Satan and his evil companions are eager to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9), especially religiously. Religion in the United States illustrates the truth of this biblical claim. Such chaos will not be the soothing balm many seek to ease us through the nation's distressing circumstances.

Hearing God's Word

I was recently searching in my library for some quotations from famous American military and sports figures. Almost all Americans know these personalities because the nation celebrated their accomplishments. I was searching for their statements about preparing for what eventually made them famous. In my search for their quotations, I discovered my notes of Herbert W. Armstrong's final sermon, given on the 1985 Feast of Trumpets.

His sermon eventually focused on elements of what the Feast of Trumpets should mean to us regarding what we should be doing to prepare for its necessary, vital fulfillment. The sense of what he said that caught my eye was, "What do you hear"—and "hear" probably being the most significant word of his sermon—"when you are studying God's Word?" He continued:

You probably don't hear a thing, but you should understand that your mind must be active as you are studying. You do not have to literally hear the sound of the spoken words when studying, but a message and the individual word's sense can be imparted and impressed on our mind in total silence for instruction in God's Word. (Author's paraphrase.)

Hearing is essential to learning God's way of life and therefore particularly important to understanding and making good use of the content of the epistle to the Hebrews. It begins with the author signifying that the main character of his writing—our Creator—is not silent about identifying Himself.

The Creator God is clearly a communicating Deity. It is mankind that ignores Him and hides from Him. If humanity desires to worship to some degree, they worship what they desire in defiance of what the Creator says. In other words, without a calling from God, within which the Creator reveals Himself, a person's choices will overwhelmingly not align with what God *commands*. His instructions are not mere suggestions to select the one that appeals to us!

Understanding the need for a divine calling is necessary when considering the fact that Adam and Eve, who clearly saw and were instructed by their very Creator, proceeded to reject Him and His commandments. Instead, they chose something interesting that arrested their attention at the moment. They

knew who He was: the One who gave them life! Yet they rejected Him out of hand because of the serpent's lying craftiness.

Was something wrong with their hearing? No! Their ears were every bit as perfectly healthy as instruments of hearing as their eyes were of seeing. The problem, the disorder, was elsewhere: in their "heart" or mind. They did not believe what He said about death to a depth sufficient to deter them from sin.

According to Ephesians 2:8, salvation is by God's grace through faith, which God also gives. Believing God is a condition we must meet to receive salvation. That belief is based on what we hear, not on what we see (Romans 10:17; II Corinthians 5:7). We demonstrate our belief by obeying His commandments, which demonstrations we cannot fake. When it really mattered, Adam and Eve demonstrated that they must not have *heard* God when He said not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden. They had literally heard him, but it did not matter enough to them, and they sinned.

Hearing Correctly Is Essential

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery provides an intriguing usage of how "hearing" is used in God's Word. In the Bible, the editors write, the "ear is synonymous with heart and mind as an organ of cognition." Later, they note that true hearing involves actively seeking knowledge, listening, understanding, and testing to know thoroughly. The English term *cognition* means "knowing." True hearing requires effort to achieve accurate "knowing" of the Scriptures.

"Hearing" is a term of great importance to our salvation, a truth of exceeding importance in Hebrews. The epistle contains the following speaking and hearing terms: "spoke," "spoken," "word," "say," "says," "said," "heard," "testified," "saying," and others. Recall that our Creator is a communicating God, and He has communicated with humanity from the very beginning of its creation. He has never stopped communicating. He caused a Book to be written of His words, works, and the purposes He is engaged in, and He expects humans, His creations, not just to know of them but participate in them. He has sent both angelic and human representatives to speak for Him. Most important of all, as Hebrews 1 emphasizes, He sent His divine Son as a human to proclaim His message.

The following two passages contain principles we must never forget:

» Ephesians 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

» Romans 10:14-17: How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

English has a saying, “Seeing is believing.” But God says salvation depends on our hearing, believing, and putting into practice in our lives what glorifies Him. Salvation depends on how well we listen and properly use what we hear, not on what we see. None of us alive have witnessed Jesus walking on water, healing a person with a debilitating illness, restoring a blind person’s sight, or raising someone from the dead. But we have *read* of these incidents and more besides because God has given us true accounts in His Word.

Thus, Hebrews 2:1-3 gives us this crucial admonition:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him . . .

Who speaks the true words of God in our day is not terribly important; God’s words always remain true. The vital element is whether the hearer makes proper use of them.