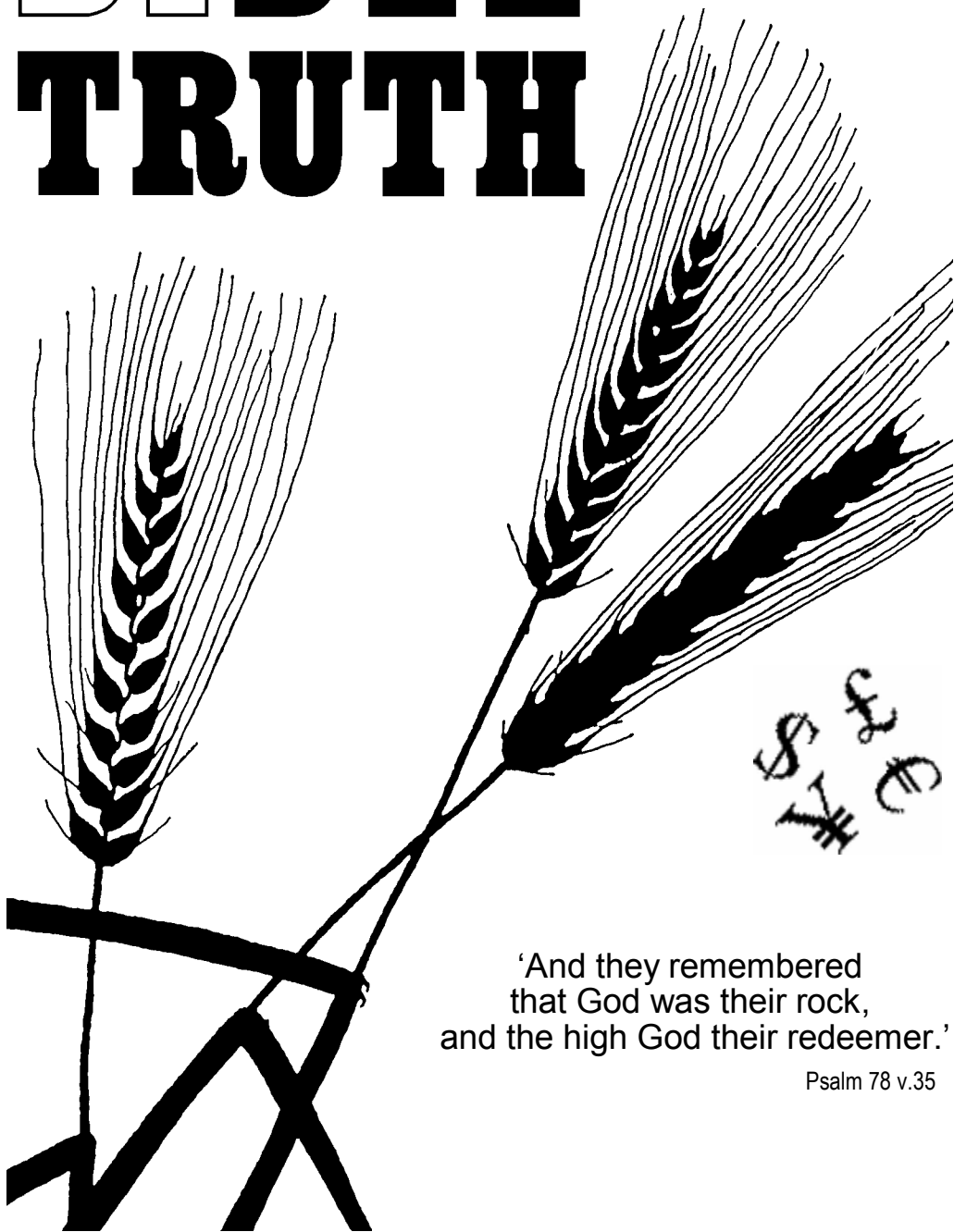


# BIBLE TRUTH

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‘And they remembered  
that God was their rock,  
and the high God their redeemer.’

Psalm 78 v.35

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# *Wealth - Bitter Harvest or Eternal treasure*

by Paul Boyd-Lee



**Many people's material wealth has diminished considerably in recent months.**

This has largely been caused by properties, businesses, financial packages and so on being sold at inflated prices to those who later sold at a loss. Consequently, banks that unwisely financed these deals have run up bad debts. Governments have endeavoured to shore up these institutions but people at large will pick up the bill. So it looks as if for a while to come our taxes will finance these unjust profits. In essence the reason for the financial debacle of recent months could well be summed up with,

'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'.

Galatians ch.6 v.7

Put another way, the fruits of greed and carelessness have brought about a bitter harvest indeed.

It might be remembered that on 20 July 1957 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, at a rally in Bedford uttered the memorable phrase, 'Most of our people have never had it so good'. This comment reflected the nation's progress since the ravages of the Second World War. Food rationing had recently ended and trade was beginning to flourish again. Even so, it was an age when if something was desired it was either saved up for or a hire purchase agreement arranged to purchase it; a far cry from today's slogan for credit cards, 'take the waiting out of wanting'. When did these financial practices start to unravel and become a demand for ever increasing profits?

With hindsight it seems likely that the rot started to set in just a few years later at the time the 'Sixties' came swinging in. The Internet site Wikipedia affirms this view where it states,

'The 1960s have become synonymous with all the new, exciting, radical and subversive events and trends of the period which continued to develop in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and beyond'.

In the same decade came '*Bitter Harvest*' the name of the 'X' certificate (adults only) film starring Janet Munro & Peter Stride. It tells the sad tale of Jenny the prostitute who frequents the *Midnight Bell* pub. Bob the barman is infatuated with the woman and exhausts

his savings on her, after which she loses interest in him. The story reminds one of the prophet Isaiah who said of adulterous Jerusalem, '... Ye have sold yourselves for nought; ...'.

Isaiah ch.52 v.3

Jenny's story and Isaiah's prophecy very much sum up the state of the global economy lately.

Wealth in itself is not a bad thing except of course, '... the love of money is the root of all evil:' (1 Timothy ch.6 v.10). Unfortunately this verse has caused certain people to think that all forms of investment are a bad thing; indeed scripture teaches the very opposite. Even a parable told by Jesus, recorded in the following passage, shows that business investment is actually encouraged.

'... he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might **know how much every man had gained by trading.**

Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.

And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.'

Luke ch.19 vv.15-17

One problem arises when greed overrides justice and fair trading. In recent years this has especially manifested itself when businesses have been expected to increase profits, and particularly profit margins, year on year, resulting in consumers getting less value for their money.

### **Financial management has got out of control.**

The Apostle James, who might not be thought of as a prophet, nevertheless foresaw such times and warned people about the abuse of wealth.

'Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.'

James chs 5.vv.1-5

There are several matters of note here.

First, who was James writing to? The answer is found right at the beginning of the epistle and was none other than '... the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, ...' (i.e. the so called Lost Tribes of Israel). The financial fiasco of recent weeks, though affecting most parts of the globe, has in fact largely been caused by the decadence of Western Society and the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic people - modern day Israelites in particular. Others may well have provided the opportunity but the descendants of Israel swallowed it and are still doing so, judging by recent decisions of Prime Ministers, Premiers and bankers. Hence this warning is most apposite to the life of the twelve tribes in recent years.

Second, the phrase 'the rust of them shall be a witness against you' reminds one of Anthony Gormley's 'Angel of the North' found rusting away near Gateshead. This was set up on 16 February 1998 and is said to be, 'probably the country's most famous work of public modern art' being seen by about 90,000 people travelling past it every day ([www.icons.org.uk/theikons/collection/angel](http://www.icons.org.uk/theikons/collection/angel)). It was erected in the north of England, the country's industrial heartland, which no longer is. In fact the area is littered with the wasted substance of redundant industries. Its dimensions are worth commenting on because it stands 66 feet tall, 661 tons of concrete were used to create its foundations anchoring it to rock 66 ft below the surface. Some readers will no doubt speculate whether this series of 66 is mere coincidence! These measurements have similarity with the image set up by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon on the Plain of Dura Europa in the province of Babylon which was 60 cubits tall by 6 cubits wide.

One further thing; during October, while financiers were struggling to stabilise the world economy which some see as the resurrection of the Babylonian system, the British Museum in London was finalising preparations for opening its major exhibition entitled

'Babylon'. The show finishes on 15 March 2009, a useful date to review how global finances are faring. Incidentally, visitors to the museum's Babylonian event will pass by a large replica of Gormley's 'Angel of the North' in the foyer, pointing to his exhibition taking place simultaneously in the same museum!

Third, 'Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days'. The Last Days is a term describing the times just prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and this is indeed a fitting description for today's 'must have' society.

Lastly, James mentions 'the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth.' This well describes the injustice of cheap labour from places such as Eastern Europe and the Far East which have produced the goods that so many people have indulged in during recent years.

In conclusion, it could well be said that James was spot on in his description.

### **The root of the financial problem has not been addressed**

When the financial crisis began to unfold, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is said to have asked how did the financial institutions get into this onerous position, was it not foreseen? A good question! Of course some financiers did foresee it but others continued blissfully on perhaps hoping that all would right itself. In fact much of the fiscal mess would never have arisen had people not been encouraged into debt, be it by individuals with over-stretched mortgages or bank and credit card loans; businesses borrowing on speculated future profits; or investment managers short selling stock.

It is quite amazing that during a recent conference for improving understanding between faiths, even the Archbishop of Canterbury seemed to support overspending when he said, 'there should be just rates of interest'. It suggested that it was OK to keep on spending. Even more astounding was how, at the same gathering, he encouraged Muslims, against their religion, to start lending at usury. Martin Beckford, Religious Affairs Correspondent for the Daily Telegraph asked him on 14 October what he thought was to blame for the economic crisis? 'I was going to suggest Satan', Rowan Williams joked. Oh, how true that might be! To be fair he concluded with, 'the root problem is human greed which is not specific to any one nation ...'.

Another worrying statement came from Gordon Brown the UK Prime Minister, which was echoed by some other world leaders, saying they were 'pumping money into the markets so that the banks could lend again'. 'Spend more and lend more', said the Prime Minister, and if the banks don't do this, he will pressure them to comply. When will they learn? Next time could spell disaster.

The collapse of the present financial systems may have been postponed for a while but it is likely to be back and with a vengeance because the root of the trouble, impatience and greed leading to unsecured debt, has not been dealt with. Governments may have deferred a crisis by mortgaging us with a huge tax bill but that will not be an option next time round. In a slightly different context the Thessalonian church was warned of such things.

'For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.'

1 Thessalonians ch.5 v.3

### **What might be the outcome if the financial system declines further?**

Clues to the future are already emerging and ironically, as the first in the list shows, they are not all negative.

1. It is said that business is booming at dating agencies at least, because of women looking for new rich partners to replace former ones or husbands that have lost their jobs. In reality this shows the deplorable state modern culture is in.
2. On a national level there has been evidence of realignment of political and national interests with some nations appearing to contend for their own ends rather than working for the benefit of the whole. In the near future this could well manifest itself in such matters as reworked trade or defence agreements.
3. Relations between the UK & Iceland became frosty, when anti-terrorism powers were used to recoup money owed to UK depositors in a failed Icelandic bank. The *Financial Times* reported that 'this risked sending Britain's relations with Reykjavik to their lowest since the 1970s cod wars'.
4. Hungary and Kurdistan were bailed out of financial problems. We have yet to learn what the price for this might be.

5. Russia took the serious step of suspending stockmarket trading during the heat of the financial crisis, but to no avail. Following this the European Union caused some fuss when it looked away from Russian oil sources to elsewhere, though rather strangely, the decision seemed to ignore the gas supplies which continue to flow from that source. Russia itself has not been idle but in recent weeks mounted a special trade mission and a series of war games around the northern part of South America as well as the vicinity of the Arctic Circle.
6. The UK Government financially supported several British banks after receiving their mayday pleas. Rather curiously by the Government financing them, it now means that in effect British taxpayers have become bank shareholders. This is because in theory the Government has no money of its own and largely employs funds originally raised by public taxation. Barclays Bank has used a different approach in looking to the Arabs for finance rather than the British Government.
7. Unsurprisingly the EU floundered for days rather than forming a unified policy. However, the unprecedented drop in the pound's value against the Euro has prompted comments that the time is now ripe for the UK to enter the EU monetary system.

### **Some Bible symbolism is worthy of note here**

Even though many churchgoers seem to be oblivious of the interpretation of symbols used in prophetic scripture, it is somewhat heartening that journalists seem to be up to speed with understanding their meaning. This is evident from newspaper cartoons where full use is made of the concept, 'one picture tells a thousand words'. So be it the Soviet Union depicted by a bear or nations of the Far East by a dragon, the news media have got it right.

Early in October 2008 the UK Prime Minister guaranteed personal bank deposits up to £50k. This caused the public in the days that followed to hurriedly spread their surplus funds and queues of people could be seen in banks whilst trying to shift their deposits. Things though had changed since the days of the Big Five and by now High Street banks were few in number. It was found there were only three sizeable ones left to choose from which were not a subsidiary of some questionable parent company. The three were -

- HSBC - Who are they, people asked? The Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation is the answer, they are owned by Eastern nations - the dragon.
- Lloyds Bank, known by its symbol of the black horse.
- Barclays, recognised by its emblem of a white eagle on a blue background.

Do these have any significance? Perhaps they do. The sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation describes a book with seven seals. The third seal majors on a 'black horse' its rider having a pair of balances in his hand (ch.6 v.5). In theological circles this is seen as being symbolic of economic unrest. How well it fits the emblem of Lloyds bank!

Later on, the Apocalypse records a woman (Israel) being given two wings of a great eagle to fly into the wilderness (ch.12 v.14). In olden days the wilderness was seen as the outskirts of, or beyond, the Roman Empire. Hence it is equated with Britain, the US and other places which their populations migrated to. It is appropriate then to see one of the remaining banks in these Islands having this logo.

To wrap-up, these bank emblems, particularly the black horse and eagle, look decidedly prophetic at the moment.

### **The Beast System & its mark**

A matter of Bible symbolism to do with commodities and trade is the Beast system which arises in Revelation ch.13. It is a large subject where space precludes describing it in any detail here but it must be touched upon in the context of this article because it says,

'... he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name'.

Revelation ch.13 vv.16-17

There is no escaping the fact that this would dramatically affect world trade. On the face of this, at least, the future harvest looks awfully bitter.

The fact should not escape notice that many of the current teens to 40s generation bear marks in their bodies reflecting the culture of the age within which they live. Hence tattoos, jewellery piercing many public and private parts of the flesh, implants, patches,

tagging, and so on. It would be quite natural for them willingly to incorporate some intrusion into their bodies if they believed it was fashionable or improved their lot in some way. This being the case, the time has now been reached when an indelible mark on their hand or forehead in order to have purchasing power, is hardly likely to be any big deal to them. To others though it is still likely to be an anathema. Thus to a remnant of people the leading question is, will the Beast System encompass the whole earth, or more to the point who might it avoid?

On the first question the answer must be No, at least. This is because a few chapters later on, John the Divine's vision gives us confidence that it will not.

'... I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.'

Revelation ch.20 v.4

So this shows that some will remain unmarked and, notice that, they will live and reign a thousand years with Christ. That is eternal treasure indeed!

### **Where does this leave us? Are we at the end of the age?**

Many past exponents of Bible prophecy predicted a time, prior to the Second Coming, when there will be unprecedented economic collapse with a corresponding failure of society as we know it. Few amongst them, if any, said what that scene might look like in detail. The impression given was that when it happens it will avoid us and so there is no need to consider it. Some people think the Lord will return at that moment and thus it would be futile to plan for it anyway because He will take charge of the situation.

This begs the question of, will He return at that precise time and if not what conditions might need to be faced?

The fact is that even if a few days passed between the collapse of society and the return of the Lord, the situation could swiftly become untenable and life threatening. If this were the case we might not be around to witness His coming anyway. The good news is that Scripture tells us otherwise, for example,

'... he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, ...'

Revelation ch.1 v.7

So clearly people will be around to witness this momentous event. In fact, if a number of months or years elapsed it would allow actors who will play out the final drama to come on stage as well as other events to be fulfilled.

### **Can anything be learnt from past Climaxes of history?**

At times of momentous events in the past, history shows that life did not usually come to an abrupt halt. Though it may have become uncomfortable it was often in full swing as the following three examples show.

1. Just prior to the fall of the Babylonian Empire is an appropriate time to look at because some people see the end of the Babylonian System as being imminent. Ancient Babylon was overthrown by the Medo-Persians at the moment that its king, Belshazzar, and all the nobles were celebrating the fall of God's Holy City Jerusalem with feasting and drinking from the temple vessels (Daniel ch.5). There are several relevant matters to note here.

In the first place, God's servant Daniel, who interpreted the 'writing on the wall' at the feast, survived the fall of the empire to become the 'First of the Presidents' in the empire that followed. Further, a few years later, in Queen Esther's time, there were so many inhabitants of the empire (Jews) worshipping Jehovah that steps were unsuccessfully taken to exterminate them. All this shows that God's people survived and even triumphed in the new regime.

Then, it was Cyrus a later king of the new empire that ordered the repatriation of Jews and rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem. So the fall of Babylon brought about returning some of God's people to their homeland. It might further be deduced that the fall, in our day, of the Babylonian system could result in God's people being spared and returned to their land, thus paving the way for a later rebuilding of the temple.

2. At Jesus' birth all but a few souls were ignorant of this magnificent event. Even the Jews of the land, though knowing full well where and probably when he would be born, had neither made preparation, nor were watching for it. Jesus himself taught that just prior to his return the scene would be likewise; people will be living much as normal. As he said,

‘But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be’.

Matthew ch.24 vv.37-39

In other words, life continued unchanged to the moment when the flood terminated it. Further, Jesus taught it will be likewise when He returns.

3. God makes provision for those that follow Him. A good example of this was shown by Israel’s deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. At that time the tribes had been separated from the Egyptians to the land of Goshen. Whilst they were there, and amidst the plagues that struck, a time of thick darkness, a darkness ‘which may be felt’ engulfed the Egyptians for three days (Exodus ch.10 v.21).

In this event there is a distinct parallel with the prophecy of Joel (ch.2) who writes of the coming of the Lord being accompanied by thick darkness and gloominess.

In summarising, not only did an incomparable darkness envelop the ungodly, but God caused his people to dwell in places of safety before the Exodus from slavery. Two familiar texts from the prophets call Israel in the Last Days to do likewise.

‘... Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.’

Revelation ch.18 v.4

‘Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.’

Isaiah ch.26 v.20

So the call is to come out and to come in, with a likely outcome of Israel being separated from the rest of the world which will be in darkness. No doubt this darkness will be both natural and spiritual as it was in the days of deliverance from ancient Egypt.

The key question is, will the Israel peoples heed this call to separation? If so, just maybe, God will be merciful and they will escape the dire consequences of a future economic meltdown resulting in famine, dreadful disease and the like (see Matthew ch.24).

## **Pointers to God's treasure**

The conclusion of James' message to the twelve tribes about gaining the wrong treasure was.

'Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.'

James ch.5 v.8

We would do well to heed these wise words of instruction directed to those living in the Last Days. However challenging the world around us may become, patience is paramount.

It has been said that because we are so close to the return of the Saviour then the work of spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom is complete? Is that so? No, we have been given the precious seed of the Word of God to sow, and are still being granted time to spread this Kingdom Gospel to unbelievers. In fact Jesus urged us to do it, for this is the Great Commission. Also, the kingdom we preach is eternal and a treasure to look forward to.

The Bible refers to Israel as being 'a peculiar treasure' unto God (see Exodus ch.19 v.5, Psalm 135 v.4). Truly, they are redeemed by the blood of Jesus and as such God will not neglect them.

Finally, there is hope for all mankind because the letter to the Corinthians actually implies that, regardless of those who are descendants of Israel, every individual contains God's treasure within them.

'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us'.

Whatever situation we may have to face, readers take heart for it continues,

'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;'

2 Corinthians ch.4 vv.8-9

That is a treasure many in this world could do well to possess and those who are aware of it have a responsibility of sharing it with those who are not.

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