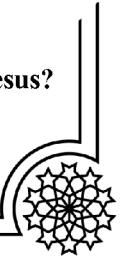




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- 

Heartfelt Fasting and Repentance

by

Roland Clarke


Insights that Inspire Hope



circumstances. But the omission of Savior takes on even greater significance when we examine how God saves people from sin.

God foretold that his servant the Messiah will “*bring my salvation.*” (Isaiah 49:6) How then did Jesus Christ bring God's salvation? He brought salvation (deliverance) by rescuing people in perilous circumstances, that is, stricken with terminal illness. Was that all he did? No he did much more. Christ also saved people who were enslaved by sinful habits and weighed down by a guilty conscience. (See for yourself by reading Matthew 1:21; Luke 7:36-48; 19:1-10; John 1:29; 3:16-17; 8:32.) You may like to take a closer look at salvation in terms of how God saves people spiritually. This is explained further in *Signposts to Paradise*.⁶

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Heartfelt Fasting and Repentance

God spoke through the prophet Joel, saying,

“Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.” Return to the Lord your God for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish. Who knows perhaps he will give you a reprieve sending you a blessing instead of this curse. (Joel 2:12-14)

How did the Israelites come so close to the brink of disaster? They were rebellious and did not heed many earlier warnings. By the time the prophet Joel came along, God was ready to unleash his furious wrath and destroy them.

The Qur'an and the Bible describe a similar ‘doomsday’ scenario where God was about to destroy the people of Nineveh. But as the prospect of impending disaster struck fear into the hearts of the Ninevites, they repented and the threatened judgment was averted.



Can a Prophet Commit Sin?

The Jewish and Christian Bible gives a straightforward answer to this question: "Yes the prophets committed sins." Muslims, however, find it very difficult to accept this answer because their leaders have taught them that prophets are sinless. However, the facts are clearly spelled out in the Bible (and indeed, also in the Qur'an).

The Bible says, "*Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.*" (Ecclesiastes 7:20) In the Qur'an we read a similar statement,

If God were to punish men for their wrong-doing, He would not leave, on the (earth), a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated term. (Surah 16:61)

Jonah was not the only prophet mentioned in the Qur'an who disobeyed God. Adam also disobeyed. Many Muslim scholars have tried to evade the conclusion that Adam committed sin. They say he merely made a 'mistake' or 'forgot' the command of his Lord. The fact is, Muslim scholars know that before eating the fruit, Adam "had been clearly forewarned." This quote is from Yusuf Ali's footnote to Surah 20:117.

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accelerated moral decline in the west and now they are also affecting many other nations.

Moreover, one of the side effects of loose sexual morals is dealing with the inconvenience of having an unwanted baby. Many people seem to think that abortion is the 'easy' way to dispense with the burden or embarrassment of having a baby. As a result, 40 million unwanted babies in America have been murdered in the last 35 years! It seems fitting, therefore, that western nations should heed Joel's call to repentance – to repent with mourning because we've turned a blind eye to mass murder i.e. by abortion!

It would be unfair, however, to overlook sins which are evident in other parts of the world, e.g. in the Middle East (and even Far East). What should we say about the deep seated bitterness and hatred that many Muslim nations (and individuals) harbor against Israel?

A certain Muslim writer, Ruslan Tokchukov, boldly voiced his opinion on this matter, noting the "brutal end" that befell "all those once-powerful enemies of the Jewish people: the Pharaohs of Egypt, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Roman Empire, the Inquisitor Spain, the Russian Tsarist Empire, the Nazi Reich." He concludes his historical analysis by noting,

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This attitude is part of the reason why God called David a "man after my own heart."

David knew the sacrifice that pleases God is "*a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.*" (Psalm 51:16)

As much as it is true that godly sorrow leads to true repentance we can also be sure that "*God will wipe away tears*" as it is written in Isaiah 25:7-9. Again we read in chapter 57 that God "*comforts those who mourn.*" The preceding verses read:

The high and lofty one, who lives in eternity, the Holy One, says this: "I live in the high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I restore the crushed spirit of the humble and revive the courage of those with repentant hearts... I will not always be angry. If I were all people would pass away—all the souls I have made. ... I will lead them ... I will comfort those who mourn, bringing words of praise to their lips. May they have abundant peace both near and far," says the Lord, who heals them. (Isaiah 57:15-19)

Rescued and forgiven?

We have been reminded how God rescued Jonah from a near death experience in response to humbly admitting his blame. Now let us consider a key question, "Does this imply that God saved (or forgave) Jonah of his sin?" The words in his

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speaking to Arab ambassadors in Stockholm, "We plan to eliminate the state of Israel ... We Palestinians will take over everything, including all of Jerusalem."²

On another occasion Arafat explained,

Since we cannot defeat Israel in war, we do this in stages. We take any and every territory we can of Palestine ... and use it as a springboard to take more. When the time comes, we can get the Arab nations to join us for the final blow against Israel.³

Weeping and Repentance in Light of Disasters?

Was there emotional pain in America caused by the death of 40 million babies who were aborted from 1973 to 2008? Undoubtedly there was, though probably most tears were suppressed or shed in private.

Early in 2008, China and Myanmar suffered a catastrophic earthquake and cyclone which killed a total of nearly 200,000 people. Both countries saw fit to set aside three days to honor the memory of those who died. One wonders if these days of national 'mourning' were perceived by the public as a way to humble themselves and do real soul searching? Perhaps a few people felt this way but it seems this was not the official tone set by the leaders of these nations.

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Endnotes

- 1 *Our Place in the World: Road map leads to darkness* by Ruslan Tokhchukov, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, November 14, 2003. This article is available at: http://www.seattlepi.com/opinion/148208_ourplace14.html
- 2 As reported to the Norwegian daily *Dagen*, 6 Feb. 1996. This is quoted in an online article at: <http://www.geocities.com/palestiniansarelies/YasserArafatDeclaration>
- 3 From an interview on Jordanian Television, as quoted in *The Threat Inherent in a Palestinian State* by Don Feder, *Insight Magazine*, 13 May 2003. This article is available online at: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=18232>
- 4 p. 278, *Muhammad and the Religion of Islam*, by John Gilchrist. This book can be viewed online at: <http://answering-islam.org/Gilchrist/Vol1/index.html>
- 5 This article is available at: www.injil.org/clarke/savior.pdf
- 6 This article is available at: www.injil.org/clarke/signposts.pdf

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We see an amazing similarity when we compare the message of Joel and Jonah. In Joel 1:13-14 we read how God instructed the priests to “*dress yourselves in burlap and weep... Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting ... and cry out to the Lord.*”

In Jonah 3:8-9 we read how the King of Nineveh humbled himself and instructed his people to do likewise, from the highest nobility to the lowest servants. He commanded them:

wear garments of mourning and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.

What kinds of evil deeds do we see around us? (even, in our own lives?) Sin comes in various forms, including stealing, lying, greed, selfish ambition, pride, envy, outbursts of anger, wild parties, alcohol addiction and drugs, bitterness, unforgiveness, divisiveness, gossip, lust and sexual immorality.

Lust and sexual immorality can be seen all around the world but, perhaps, these sins are most evident in the pornography industry and in Hollywood. Having taken root there they have




John Gilchrist refutes the popular Muslim interpretation that Adam only slipped in a moment of forgetfulness. He writes:

Not only did God warn them against eating of the tree but we discover that Satan even reminded them of his warning while tempting them to sin. How can one possibly sustain the argument that Adam merely forgot his Lord's command? Satan's reminder aside, it is surely too hard to believe that Adam could have forgotten the one and only thing prohibited to him especially when the order came directly from God himself. Furthermore, if this was only a minor 'mistake', why was the penalty so severe - the permanent banishment of the couple and the whole human race with them from the Garden? ⁴

Aside from the issue of whether Adam ‘forgot’ the command **not** to eat the forbidden fruit, there is the undeniable fact that the Qur'an plainly says, “*Thus did Adam disobey his Lord.*” (Surah 20:121) The Arabic word *asa* - disobey - comes from infinitive *isyan* which lexically means sin.

Point to Ponder

The article *A Dialog about the One True God*⁵ points out how Ulema have omitted the title Savior from the list of 99 beautiful names of Allah. The main emphasis of that discussion was to show that God saved certain people in perilous




a part of the Christian Bible about God cursing those who curse the Jewish people."

Then he says that "the entire world history seems to confirm [this]. Now, whether you are religious or not, whether you call it God's law or the law of history, you have to agree that not one nation that persecuted Jews had escaped very bad consequences. I don't think this law has an exception for the Arabs or any other Muslims."¹

Tokchukov's warning was written in 2003 prior to the rise of Ahmadinejad and his repeated threats to "wipe Israel off the map." Have any Muslim leaders risen to the challenge and been courageous enough to condemn such genocidal threats? If these Islamic nations do not heed Ruslan's warning, these seeds of hatred will fester and eventually reap the whirlwind (as prophesied in Zechariah 12 and Joel 3).

Obviously the hostility and violence committed by radical Muslims is sinful, but what about deception and lies? Consider how so-called moderates, like the late Yasser Arafat, mastered the art of duplicity. The world is well aware how Arafat earned the Nobel Peace prize after solemnly agreeing (in English) to honor the Oslo Peace Accord (1993). However, what is not known so well is what happened barely 3 years after signing this accord. Arafat revealed his real agenda while




prayer of confession imply that Jonah was forgiven by the Lord.

We read that Jonah "*remembered the LORD*" and promised to "*offer sacrifices ... For my salvation comes from the LORD alone.*" (Jonah 2:7-9)

Looking at Jonah's experience we cannot say his salvation only involved being rescued from death. It also related to his disobedience, i.e. being forgiven of his sin. The critical situation from which Jonah was delivered was not morally neutral. Jonah was blameworthy so he needed to be forgiven of sin as well as rescued from death. It makes sense, therefore, to understand that forgiveness was part and parcel of Jonah's experience of God's salvation.

We must also bear in mind that Jonah was an Israelite and, as such, he lived under the Mosaic Law which required sacrificing animals for purification from sin. The law required anyone who committed sin to sacrifice a sin offering.

Indeed, the Scripture says, "*according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.*" (Hebrews 9:22) Jonah had disobeyed God's command so it is hard to imagine him making a thank offering without first sacrificing a sin offering!



Some readers might ask, "What gives us the right to ask this kind of question?"


It is precisely this concern that Jesus Christ raised when he addressed a group of people who were talking about the brutal killing of some Jews while they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. Christ asked them:

"What about the 18 people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will perish, too." (Luke 13:4,5)

Jesus taught that humility and repentance are a fitting response when people are faced with a great tragedy.

Genuine tears can be an indication of sincere repentance. According to the Bible and the Qur'an Jonah was humbled as he experienced deep distress or agony. The Bible tells us he "*cried out to the Lord in [his] great trouble.*" (Jonah 2:2) Likewise, the Qur'an says that Jonah "*cried out in agony*" ... "*We listened to him: and delivered him from distress*" (Surah 68:48; 21:88).

Another biblical story (as recorded in the Qur'an) described how Adam "*landed in misery*" after being seduced by the Devil (Surah 20:117). Furthermore, according to Islamic tradition Adam and Eve



wept in repentance for 40 years, after which they were reunited with each other.

Sorrow and Repentance

What does the Bible say about sorrow and repentance? It emphasizes that "*the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation.... But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.*" (2 Corinthians 7:9-10)

When Adam and Jonah disobeyed God they suffered serious consequences. King David also faced serious consequences when he sinned against the Lord. We read his prayer in Psalm 30,

"O Lord my God, I cried to you for help and you restored my health. You brought me up from the grave O Lord. Sing to the Lord, all you godly ones! Praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a life time! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.... You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, that I might sing praises to you and not be silent..."

Seeing the humility of Jonah and David reminds us of a hadith that says, "Every son of Adam is a sinner and the best of sinners are those who repent constantly."