

## A Contemporary Journey with the Bible Toward Community

PROCLAIMING PARTISAN VISIONS

15 February 2018

### ***Today: The Problem and Challenge***

*The Situation:* We live in a time of division and difference, of dysfunction and fragmentation. The “news” we read or watch or hear witnesses to this every day. Often the voices of both commentators and “leaders” are ideological (we’re right [“news”], they’re wrong “fake news”]), or prophetic (judgment, urging a path of justice and righteousness), or theological (claiming ultimate authority and power for a particular perspective), or apocalyptic/eschatological (the times point toward a fast-approaching “end”). *Question: Where and What is “Community” in such a time?*

*The Rhetoric and Forms.* In both written and oral discourse, this situation is filled with threats, judgments, calls to repent and turn around, paranoia, condemnation, and explanations to those disheartened that are intended to comfort or steel the oppressed and disenfranchised through difficult times. Whether in an op ed article or a protest march, motifs of battle, of siege, of struggle and of witness against the “enemy,” the “other,” are common. In all of this it is often heard that there is no community—or, perhaps, the speaker’s community is under threat or being ignored or forgotten. There is no sense of the whole, no notion of what holds us all together, of what we share, of common glue, no reason for working together, no goal we share, no mission that embraces all. These voices are heard at almost every level, from local neighborhood to city to state to nation to world. *The Question, again: Where and What is “Community” in such a time?*

*Please come ready to talk about all of this.* Partisan visions—filled with advocacy, admonitions, and judgment—are clearly an element of “community” in these times. What special characteristics, positive and negative, of community are highlighted in these visions? Is the problem that we no longer have “community,” or that “our” community is under threat, or???? If you can, please be ready to share an example or two of these contemporary partisan visions.

### ***The Bible: Parallels or Not?***

*After thinking on the issues and concerns of contemporary partisan visions, please read and think on the following biblical texts.*

**Jeremiah 5:1-9      The Utter Corruption of God’s People**

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,  
look around and take note!

Search its squares and see  
if you can find one person  
who acts justly  
and seeks truth—  
so that I may pardon Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Although they say, 'As the Lord lives',  
yet they swear falsely.

<sup>3</sup> O Lord, do your eyes not look for truth?  
You have struck them,  
but they felt no anguish;  
you have consumed them,  
but they refused to take correction.

They have made their faces harder than rock;  
they have refused to turn back.

<sup>4</sup> Then I said, 'These are only the poor,  
they have no sense;  
for they do not know the way of the Lord,  
the law of their God.'

<sup>5</sup> Let me go to the rich  
and speak to them;  
surely they know the way of the Lord,  
the law of their God.'

But they all alike had broken the yoke,  
they had burst the bonds.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill them,  
a wolf from the desert shall destroy them.

A leopard is watching against their cities;  
everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces—  
because their transgressions are many,  
their apostasies are great.

<sup>7</sup> How can I pardon you?  
Your children have forsaken me,  
and have sworn by those who are no gods.

When I fed them to the full,  
they committed adultery  
and trooped to the houses of prostitutes.

<sup>8</sup> They were well-fed lusty stallions,  
each neighing for his neighbour's wife.

<sup>9</sup> Shall I not punish them for these things? says the Lord;  
and shall I not bring retribution  
on a nation such as this?

Now the Lord is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate,  
and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest;  
as with the slave, so with his master;  
as with the maid, so with her mistress;  
as with the buyer, so with the seller;  
as with the lender, so with the borrower;  
as with the creditor, so with the debtor.

<sup>3</sup> The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled;  
for the Lord has spoken this word.

<sup>4</sup> The earth dries up and withers,  
the world languishes and withers;  
the heavens languish together with the earth.

<sup>5</sup> The earth lies polluted  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore a curse devours the earth,  
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;  
therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled,  
and few people are left.

<sup>7</sup> The wine dries up,  
the vine languishes,  
all the merry-hearted sigh.

<sup>8</sup> The mirth of the timbrels is stilled,  
the noise of the jubilant has ceased,  
the mirth of the lyre is stilled.

<sup>9</sup> No longer do they drink wine with singing;  
strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.

<sup>10</sup> The city of chaos is broken down,  
every house is shut up so that no one can enter.

<sup>11</sup> There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine;  
all joy has reached its eventide;  
the gladness of the earth is banished.

<sup>12</sup> Desolation is left in the city,  
the gates are battered into ruins.

<sup>13</sup> For thus it shall be on the earth  
and among the nations,  
as when an olive tree is beaten,  
as at the gleaning when the grape harvest is ended.

'At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. <sup>2</sup>Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup>Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. <sup>4</sup>But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase.' <sup>5</sup>He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end. <sup>6</sup>Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. <sup>7</sup>From the time that the regular burnt-offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. <sup>8</sup>Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. <sup>9</sup>But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.'

### **Mark 13:32-37      The Necessity for Watchfulness**

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup>or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

### **Revelation 3:14-22      The Message to Laodicea**

14 'And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:

15 'I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. <sup>16</sup>So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>For you say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup>Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup>I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. <sup>20</sup>Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come

in to you and eat with you, and you with me. <sup>21</sup>To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup>Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'

### **Revelation 18:1-8                    The Fall of Babylon**

18After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendour. <sup>2</sup>He called out with a mighty voice,

'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

It has become a dwelling-place of demons,  
a haunt of every foul spirit,  
a haunt of every foul bird,  
a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.

<sup>3</sup> For all the nations have drunk

of the wine of the wrath of her fornication,  
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,  
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.'

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

'Come out of her, my people,  
so that you do not take part in her sins,

and so that you do not share in her plagues;

<sup>5</sup> for her sins are heaped high as heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.

<sup>6</sup> Render to her as she herself has rendered,  
and repay her double for her deeds;  
mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.

<sup>7</sup> As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously,  
so give her a like measure of torment and grief.

Since in her heart she says,

"I rule as a queen;

I am no widow,

and I will never see grief",

<sup>8</sup> therefore her plagues will come in a single day—  
pestilence and mourning and famine—

and she will be burned with fire;

for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.'

#### *Questions:*

1. *Do you see anything shared by the biblical communities in these texts (either the ones described or the ones writing) with those espousing contemporary partisan visions today?*
2. *What is not shared? What is different?*

## **Implications for Action and Next Steps**

Together we will assess the implications of those things we share and don't share with biblical communities when thinking about partisan visions and all the conflict and difference they embrace. What has changed for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What lessons or values from the Bible are worthy of remembering and even, perhaps, capable of helping us live more faithfully and well today?