



Glenn Brown

441 ½ Lark Drive
Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

Telephone 970-434-1377
Email casabrn441@gmail.com
Website www.glennbrownministries.com

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The Return of the Gods - 2

In December I began to share some insights from Jonathan Cahn's latest book.

Jonathan says that from time immemorial the "gods" have been everywhere, in every land and civilization and culture, from the god Ra of Egypt, Dionysus of Greece, Shiva of India, to Zeus of Rome. Both the Old and New Testaments identify these gods as being actual spirits. In other words, they are not just products of superstition, but they are actual evil entities, they are *demonios* or demons.

These gods possessed or ruled over many individuals and in some cases gained so much power that they ruled over states and nations. An example would be the Mayans who built huge temples and Ziggurats to honor their gods. They terrorized their neighbors and their own populations with their multiple human sacrifices.

Jonathan says that when Jesus Christ came into the world it was a cosmic event, Light had come into the darkness. Jesus cast demons out of hundreds, possibly even thousands of people, and gave this rare power to his disciples. The power of Satan had been broken. And as the Gospel spread around the world, the Light broke the power of the gods in most of the world and they slowly withdrew. He describes it as the "twilight of the gods.". They still existed in the world, but in a muted form.

Jesus warned that nations and civilizations, as well as individuals, that had been set free from demonic control could be overcome again if they turned away from the Light, and that they would be worse off than before. Note his parable in Matthew 12:42 - *When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places seeking rest and finds none. Then he*

says, "I will return to my house from which I came. So shall it be with this wicked generation."

A post-Christian civilization will end up in a far darker place than a pre-Christian civilization. A pre-Christian civilization may produce a Caligula or a Nero, but a post-Christian civilization will produce a Stalin or a Hitler. A pre-Christian nation may erect an altar of human sacrifice, but a post-Christian nation will build Auschwitz.

When ancient Israel turned away from the true God, they turned to a false trinity, three gods that embodied their apostasy. The first of these gods was -

Baal

Baal was the king of gods, leader of spirits, and he would become the chief enemy of the God of Israel. He was the god of fertility, Lord of Rain, he hurled down lightning to the earth. He was a warrior, the master of all.

Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals; they forsook the Lord God and bowed down to Baal. (Judges 2:11-12)

Baal was the embodiment of paganism. He was the anti-God, the other god, the counterfeit god. And he was a literal spirit, an entity, with intelligence and power. Baal conquered Israel because their house was empty. They had known God, loved Him, and served Him. But they had fallen away from Him and left their nation vulnerable. They got spiritual amnesia and forgot their God! *They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and Asherahs. (Judges 3:7)*

A hundred years ago America was a nation in which children were not only allowed to pray in public schools but actually led in prayer by their teachers, and where teachers read the Bible to their students. It was a nation where almost all newspapers published a summary of sermons preached in the major churches the previous Sunday; where entertainment was expected to uphold Biblical, Christian values;

where the Ten Commandments were recognized as the foundation of Western civilization.

As you know, drastic change came to our country, mostly starting in the 1960's, mainly focused on our children and our school system. Prayer was removed from public schools. Then the reading or study of the Bible was removed. The Supreme Court ruled that it was no longer legal to display the Ten Commandments in public schools and then from the public square. Major newspapers no longer reviewed sermons. Magazines and television stations no longer promoted Christian morality. A process of rewriting history began, recidivism, denying the Biblical, Christian foundation of our nation. Like Israel, we forgot God! And Baal moved into the empty house.

Baal Comes to America

A new religion arose in America - a cult of success, materialism and greed. Money is the modern equivalent of agriculture, flocks and herds, The almighty dollar replaced Almighty God. America's financial district, Wall Street, adopted the symbol of a bull. In December of 1989 a massive bull was unveiled - eleven feet tall and sixteen feet long. It weighed 7,100 pounds. It was an image, made of molten bronze, in the form of a giant beast - a bull - a sign of Baal. It stands as a permanent landmark in New York City.

(To be continued.)

Baal's Reward Awaits

A good friend, Leslie, recently called me from Tennessee. She watched the Grammy Awards this year to see what the other team is doing.

One of the big hits is "Unholy" by Sam Smith and Kim Petras. Kim is transgender. Their performance was filled with religious symbolism. Smith wore horns, portraying Satan. Petras threw himself (herself) around in a cube-shaped cage like he described seeing during a visit to hell. The backup singers and "Satan" were all outside the cage, just as he had seen.

Are these people crazy or what?

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2 Thessalonians 1:11

"I am asking God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do."

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Quote

You cannot be in a hurry and walk in love.

John Mark Comer

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Bible Puzzler

In Luke 22, Luke gives a detailed report of Jesus' conversation with the apostles in the Upper Room just before they would leave and walk to the Garden of Gethsemane. After telling Peter that he would deny Him three times, Jesus said to the apostles:

When I sent you out to preach the Good News without money or extra sandals, did you need anything? No, they replied. But now, he said, take your money and a traveler's bag, And if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one..... Lord, they replied, we have two swords here with us. That's enough, Jesus said.

What in the world was in Jesus' mind? Why did Jesus say that, and what are the implications? Stop and think about this before you go any farther.

The apostles took Jesus literally about getting a sword. Did he mean to be taken literally? They forgot that Jesus had repeatedly refused to declare himself an earthly king; that he had said "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword."; that he had taught people to love their enemies and even to turn the other cheek when appropriate; he had said "I come to give you peace"; and so on and so on.

Later, Peter used one of those swords to lop off an ear of the servant of the High Priest (a case of collateral damage since that guy was a slave, an innocent bystander). Jesus

said, "Enough of that!" and immediately healed the man's ear.

After all that Jesus had said and demonstrated in his life, did he decide at that late date to instigate an insurrection and drive the Romans out of Israel? Obviously not. Eleven guys with two swords aren't going to overwhelm a huge Roman garrison.

Jesus did not mean to be taken literally but symbolically. Right?

What are the implications? For me it means that there might be an occasion when God says something to me that seems clear cut but is not at all meant to be taken literally. This is perplexing - - as if God is purposely setting us up for stumbling.

Would God do such a thing? He did it in this case and in other cases. See the story of the false prophet in I Kings 13 who caused a true prophet, a young man, to be killed and eaten by a lion! And the story of Balaam in Numbers 22. God told Balaam to do something, and when he did it God judged him severely.

First, we need to remember that God is God and he doesn't have to explain his reasons for doing anything. We can surely trust that God has good reasons for doing or allowing everything that happens in this world, even though there are many things that we cannot understand.

Second, when we receive what we believe to be a message from God, we need to test it by Scripture and by all that we have learned about God's nature.

Third, when "words from the Lord" are problematic, we need to check and pray with mature leaders.

One time when I was a pastor I had a dream which seemed very clear to me. God seemed to be telling me to take a certain course of action immediately. I obeyed what I thought to be God's directive, and it resulted in chaos and division in our church.

Much later it became clear to me that that dream was not from God at all, and that I responded compulsively in fear without using any wisdom or common sense. (That was my usual course of action.)

The Christian life and ministry is sown with landmines. We are in a battle from beginning to end. The enemy frequently tries to trip us up, and the Lord frequently tests us. We need to constantly remember, and I reiterate, that "God is love" and all he does or allows is part of his plan to conform us to the image of Christ.

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Big God

There are an estimated 100 billion galaxies in the universe. That's 13 galaxies for every living person. There are about 100 billion stars per galaxy. That's 1.3 billion stars for each person.

And you don't think God knows what he's doing in your life?

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BOREDOM

Are you bored? Then watch out, for you are in a dangerous place. You could do something to escape your boredom that would hurt you or hurt someone you love.

Bobby Schuler said that boredom is worse than failure and more dangerous.

Bobby said he once talked with a man who had been training Olympians for more than two decades. The man said that scores of young men and women qualified for this training. They were dedicated, and they were more or less on the same level of ability. But what separated the ones that went on to Olympic glory was the way they handled boredom.

Physical training is boring. Running, biking, or swimming for endless hours is painful and exhausting and boring. Why do so many people sign up at health clubs in January but drop out by March or April? Because exercising and dieting are painful, exhausting and boring.

I think one of the basic motivations for so much risky behavior in our society is to alleviate boredom. High-adventure travel, sky-skiing, roller coasters, spelunking and so on are designed to escape boredom and to make people feel alive. I think addictions also fit in this category: alcohol, drugs, gambling, sexual adventures. Staying married to the

same woman or man can get boring, as can going to work every day.

“How do I grow spiritually, Pastor?” “Well, son, you gotta read your Bible every day, pray a bunch, come to church every week (maybe two or three times a week), and find a way of serving people that fits you.”

But for hordes of people those things get old and tiresome, they get boring. So people switch churches, or they gradually withdraw from doing those things and finally drop out.

By the way, I think boredom is closely connected with self-pity which is a deadly, soul-destroying attitude.

So what is the Bible's answer, God's answer to this universal problem?

Of course there isn't a simple answer because the problem may have many hidden roots. But the counsel of God all the way through can be summed up in one word: **endure**. That's another way of saying hang in there, *persevere*, don't quit, don't revert to your addictions, don't go back to Egypt

Following are some verses I have picked out of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 which represent all the churches down through history:

“You have persevered and endured hardships for my name.....To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life....Be faithful to the point of death...He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death....To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden, manna....I know your deeds and your perseverance....To him who overcomes to the end I will give authority over the nations....,He who overcomes I will not blot out his name from the book of life....Hold onto what you have attained.... he who overcomes I will make a pillar in the house of God....To him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.”

It's crystal clear that God wants us to persevere to the end, even to the point of death, and to overcome whatever tries to block our way.

I admit that at times I struggle with boredom and with the temptation to slip into self-pity. Exercise benefits us in many ways including

relieving stress and tension. Since I can't exercise any more, what do I do?

First, instead of focusing on the things I can't do, I try to focus on the many ways I am blessed.. I am now 96 years old. That's nearly a century, for crying out loud! I have so many blessings: First of all, I am thankful for my relationships with God, family and friends. I'm thankful for a visiting nurse that comes once a week to help me with medications. I have the liberty of a wheelchair so that I'm not confined to a bed or chair. I can still walk short distances to my car and then to the electric cart in the grocery store. I use a walker to go into the library and still read two or three books a week. I love to read and study the Bible and to pray. I have a weekly Zoom group and this monthly Newsletter. I'm blessed to retain good eyesight and my natural beauty (which might make you question my eyesight).

I try to remember that boredom and self-pity are my enemies and to renounce and resist them. Because of hearing loss and physical problems, I don't attend church anymore, but I can watch the services online and watch excellent messages from Robert Morris, Rick Warren, Bobby Schuler and John Bradshaw. Some days I'm not in the mood to read the Bible, but I nearly always force myself to read it anyway and am then glad that I did.

I ask God to help me act like a man instead of a whining baby. I remind myself that God is with me, helping me deal with these temporary problems. I quote to myself many Scriptures. One I especially like is 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 - *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”* Is that beautiful, or what!

I am determined that with God's grace I am going to make it across the finish line without having to hide my face in shame.

