

The Spiritual Dimension: Isaiah Addresses Y2K

Y2K threatens hunger, abasement, and worse. It thereby presents what may well be the greatest test of faith that we will ever face. If our response is panic and dread, we have failed the test. Do we believe God is good and as Christian we have His favor in Christ? Do we believe God is in control of every circumstance? God is in charge of Y2K and He will use it for our good.

by Babel 2000 Group

No, it's not what you think it is. We are not suggesting that the year 2000 computer problem (Y2K) was somehow predicted by the prophet of the Lord in Judah in the late eighth century BC. Nor for that matter are we even generally of that school which finds in current headlines fulfillment of biblical prophecies. Such preoccupations, in our estimation, are not only wrong-headed in terms of biblical interpretation, they also tend to become a major distraction from the task God has left us here to do, namely to be preoccupied with His kingdom business in this world until the Master returns (Lk. 19:13).

However, it does seem that Isaiah addresses Y2K in the following sense: the prophet tells God's people how to live during times of great turmoil. Early in the period in which Isaiah carried out his ministry Judah faced the combined threat of Israel and Syria who united in an unsuccessful effort to eliminate Judah. Later it was Assyria, that super-power neighbor of Israel and Judah, who became the most prominent source of turbulence in those days. As a matter of fact, Israel was conquered by Assyria (722 BC) and taken into exile during this time, and Judah herself barely escaped the same fate. Judah endured the utter devastation of her

countryside by the Assyrians, and Jerusalem endured a harrowing siege.

But the real enemies were not the external military threats that became the focus of Judah's attention. The underlying source of the turmoil they faced were the sins of the people themselves: idolatry, hypocrisy, self-indulgence, greed. Isaiah was sent to expose those sins, call the people to repentance, and announce salvation in time and for eternity for those who trust and obey the Lord.

In the process of delivering his message the prophet expounds some principles that can guide the people of God in any day. His words are particularly fitting for those who live under a threat greater than Assyria: the political and social upheaval which is almost guaranteed by Y2K. We face the prospect of cities "under siege" and an unprecedented devastation of our country if indeed the power goes off, governments fail, the economy implodes, and social chaos results.

So what does Isaiah have to say to those who face the very real likelihood of Y2K-induced turmoil? We will try to cull out the major themes that apply to our question. We want to explore the root problem that God identifies in His people, the response God makes to this problem, and the proper response of the people to God. This will all be directly applicable to

our contemporary situation. Before we examine these particular themes, though, let's look at the overriding message of Isaiah—a theme which provides a foundation for every other lesson we find in the book.

God is God, and He is in Charge

The main message is simply this: God is God, and don't you forget it. "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God." (44:6) "To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal? says the Holy One." (41:25) God's people should not need that reminder. But invariably, when they face threats to their welfare, they tend to forget the basics. The most important thing for Judah, as well as for us, is to remember simply that God is in charge. He reigns, and we must keep Him and His ways in all our thinking as we contend with the situations and dangers we face.

When confronted with enemies storming the gate or with the prospect of food stores without food, we tend to forget that God is still God; that He controls even these events, and that our only safe passage through them is to seek His wisdom and direction during the crisis. The greatest threat to

our welfare is not the enemy we face or the circumstances that menace. The greatest danger is that we forget the Lord, the Source, Guide, and Goal of our lives.

Our greatest challenge in the months and years immediately ahead is not securing a safe supply of clean water and food. It is not finding a haven in the country away from the big cities. It is not setting aside a horde of cash and gold for the dark days that loom on the horizon. Our greatest challenge by far is to remember the great truth which most tend to forget when danger is near: God is still God and He is in control of all these events. This means that we need to get His perspective on the events and learn from Him how to respond to them. And here, too, Isaiah is helpful since he addresses these things. to God's people in times of trouble.

The Root Cause of Y2k

The first message concerns the root problem which is always the source of whatever turmoil occurs in this world. The problem is sin. In the very first verses of Isaiah we read:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider. Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. (1:2-4)

All the while, God's people were more focused on their circumstances:

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. (1:7)

But the Lord, through the prophet, begins by helping the people see the reason for the crisis they faced: their rebellion against God. As He said: "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*" (59:2) Their sins brought about the circumstances they were experiencing. The real problem was not the Assyrians; it was their rebellion against God.

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Likewise, our first response to Y2K ought to be self-examination, as individuals and as a nation, and don't have to look far to discern it. This nation was founded upon biblical principles of civil government and upon the biblical morality of its people. Our early days were blessed because we were, for all practical purposes, a Christian nation. But we have rebelled against God. We have outlawed God from classroom and courtroom. We in our laws have called evil good and good evil (5:20). And as we recoil from the revelations of perversity among the highest leaders of the land, we must acknowledge that wicked leaders are simply a reflection of the citizens who put them into office. Surely, if any nation ever had corporate sin, it is ours. Of course corporate sin begins with individual sin, so we must be sure to examine our own hearts for signs of rebellion

against God. And what Christian can look within himself and not find ample evidence of sin?

God not only deals with the sin of His own special people, He also responds to the sin of the nations who did not have a proper relationship with Him.

The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left. (24:5,6)

So our problem in America (and elsewhere) is not the many threats posed by Y2K. Our root problem is rebellion against God. The threat of cyber-turmoil is simply a reflection of the turmoil of sin in the hearts of men and in the fabric of our society.

We live in a moral universe. The character of God determines everything. We are made in His image and have a responsibility to yield to Him and obey His perfect will. To the extent that we fail to do that, we create pain, confusion, sickness, war, famine, and death itself.

It is impossible to understand the threat of Y2K without understanding that we live in God's world and we live or die by His rules. Any trouble we face in this life is traceable to sin. God didn't make a world threatened by starvation, plague, murder and mayhem. We brought all that on ourselves. We brought Y2K on ourselves. But Y2K is not the problem—it is merely the symptom. Sin is the problem.

God's Judgment

Isaiah's second message to his initial hearers and to us is that God responds to sin with acts of temporal judgment. That is already apparent in the passages we have quoted. Con-

cerning both Judah and the surrounding nations, God was actively responding to their sin by bringing various forms of devastation on them.

George Mason, a delegate to America's Constitutional Convention, said, "As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities." Our Founders understood that God acts in history in the rise and fall of nations and in their weal or woe while they continue for His set time upon the earth. Personal sin may not always be dealt with in this life since Judgment Day will set all right, but the corporate sins of nations must be dealt with by God's providence in history.

What were some forms of judgment that God brought to pass? A first form we see in the case of Judah is a lack of good leadership.

I will give children to be their princes, and babes will rule over them... As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths. (3:4,12)

One sign that God is displeased is when He allows immature and inexperienced men, and women, to become their leaders.

By this measure it is clear that our nation is already under God's hand of judgment. Not only do we have an increasing shortage of masculine servant-leadership that invites women to fill governing roles, but we also have the specter of wicked leaders who, like children, cannot control their own bodily appetites. Such leaders also cause us to err by enacting laws that are contrary to God's law and our nation's Constitution.

A second form of judgment is a lack of the necessities of life.

For behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water. (3:1)

The marauding Assyrians threatened the very supply of food and water in Judah. But notice that it is "The Lord" who takes away these things. God was active through the Assyrians in punishing Judah for their rebellion against Him.

Should we not likewise see the Lord's hand in the events that are unfolding related to Y2K? What are the first two things that are on any-

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one's list of survival items as they prepare for Y2K? Food and clean water. Why do we have to be concerned that the supply of these necessities might be disrupted? Because of a "computer glitch"? Hardly. It is because God is punishing national sins by national calamities—and indeed worldwide sins by worldwide calamities—though the proud high-tech nations will be hit hardest by Y2K.

A third form of judgment is God's withdrawal of protection from His people. In a passage in which the Lord compares His people to a vineyard that He planted and cared for, He then describes how He will respond to their rebellion: "And now, please let

Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste." (5:5,6) The hedge or wall was a form of protection, a barrier against predators and enemies. When the Lord removed His protection, His people were subject to injury and destruction. That's how the Assyrians got access to the land and even stormed Jerusalem.

Another common item of acquisition among those preparing for Y2K is a gun and the ammunition to go with it. This is a response to the threat represented by the potential breakdown of law and order during the Y2K crisis. It is commonly anticipated that the cities will become burning war zones if the power goes off, the welfare checks stop, and food deliveries cease. The loss of electricity itself is a major threat since it would leave millions who depend on it for heat vulnerable to freezing winter weather. Again we may ask, "Is this potential loss of protection the result of a computer problem?" Yes it is. But that "problem" is simply a means by which the Lord of history is removing His protections from rebellious men and nations.

So God's judgment may take the form of a loss of leadership, a loss of provision of basic necessities, or a withdrawal of protection from danger, to name some of the most prominent examples. Or His judgment may include all of these at once. Sometimes He lets all hell break loose (to speak accurately, not profanely).

The flood in Noah's day was one such example. Isaiah describes such large outbreaks of God's historical wrath: "*Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants... The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word.*" (24:1,3)

Y2K would appear to have the potential of being one of the greatest outpourings of God's wrath since the Flood. We can't help but notice, by the way, that after the Flood the Lord said He would not destroy the world again by water, nor would He destroy every living thing (Gen. 8:21; 9:11). He seems to have left Himself plenty of other options for some major outbreaks of judgment. And indeed, if Y2K is a worst-case scenario, it is hard to see how we will not see deaths in the hundreds of millions if not billions worldwide. It is conceivable that we could lose electricity and gas, banking, government, telecommunications, and transportation, to name the most vital elements of our modern way of life. This way of life could quickly become a way of death for scores of millions if the cities lose heat, water, food, and civil order for weeks or months. Y2K has the makings of an event that will be remembered for its devastation millennia from now.

What God Aims to Do

We have already seen that the root cause of our present and future turmoil is sin. And we have seen that God responds to sin in history with outbreaks of judgment. But let's consider now exactly what it is that God aims to do through these events. Remember our starting point: God is God, and He is in charge. History is indeed, as many have observed, His Story. So what twist in His Story is He trying to achieve when He judges the sin of nations? There is much that could be said, but let's limit ourselves to two key purposes of God recorded in Isaiah.

God's first aim in judgment is to humble the pride of men and to exalt Himself. In a passage describing God's judgment on "the house of Jacob" we read:

Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. (2:10,11)

The first sin in the garden was an act of man's proudly exalting himself above God and His word. God dealt with that by humbling man and exiling him from the Garden. At the tower of Babel men united to "make a name

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for themselves" and reach heaven by their own works, but God humbled them by confusing their language and scattering them over the face of the planet. History is the story of men proudly aspiring to want to be like God only to be humbled by the one true God who is determined to share His glory with no other (42:8).

A recent posting on a Y2K forum read: "In the early 70s there was a drawing that hung on the walls of many a programmer's cubicle. It was a circular tower made of bricks and in every brick was the name of a computer programming language such as: COBOL, Fortran, Snobol, Algol, PL/I, etc. It was entitled 'Tower of Babel.'"

The point of the illustration was that these computer languages could not "talk" to each other, but there was more truth than the artist intended. For the modern Babel tower of humanist man's proud achievements is constructed in large part out of the computers and chips that have enabled so much progress in recent decades. And it is the communication

among these computers that will be stymied by the year 2000 date problem.

God will indeed, it appears, once again humble the pride of men. When Big Brother becomes a crippled dwarf; when the pit at the stock exchange falls silent; when the Pentagon can't find its missiles, much less launch them; when the lights go out, the dial tone is mute, and the banks lose all the e-money; when the New World Order becomes a new world of disorder—then the Lord will have the last laugh (cf. Ps. 2:4). As Isaiah also said, "The LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment." (5:16)

God's second aim in judgment is to teach the world about righteousness. "For when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (26:9) Wouldn't you say the world learned a few things about righteousness at the time of the Flood? Yes, they learned the hard way, and a little late, but they learned. Likewise at the tower of Babel. The men of that day learned that God is in charge and He does not tolerate forever rebellious man's pretensions to self-sufficiency and independence.

Would you say that the inhabitants of the world are due for a lesson in righteousness? To ask the question is to answer it! If ever there was a time in which mankind needed to learn that God does not tolerate sin, that He demands righteous conduct from men, that He alone is God and will share His glory with no other, surely this is that time.

It is America in particular that needs the lesson. We are the nation that has squandered a godly heritage. We are the nation that has led the world in its idolatrous exaltation of science and technology. We are the nation that has led the world in the slaughter of its children. We are the nation that has mandated the accep-

tance of perversity while outlawing the law of God which condemns the same. We are the nation that approves as its leader a liar. When the rod of God's judgment falls, as it appears it surely will, then America will rightly be first in line to receive His blows.

But perhaps by God's grace the nation will learn righteousness once again. And given the global nature of Y2K, we might also dare to hope and pray that the whole world may, through the dark days ahead, be readied to learn some new lessons about God's justice and grace. Perhaps we stand on the verge not only of unprecedented judgment. We also stand on the threshold of a great stride forward in the advance of the gospel in the world. That would make the price of the Y2K turmoil worth it all. May it be so, may God teach the world righteousness in our day!

Paul spoke in Acts 17 of God's purpose as He works His will among the nations of the world:

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. (Acts 1:26,27)

God controls the rise and fall of nations with one great historical purpose: that men should come to know Him. Y2K may prove to be the greatest step forward toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission since the Reformation or, given the global nature of the impending upheaval, since Pentecost!

Having now considered Y2K in the light of man's sin, God's judgment, and God's great historical purpose, it is time to consider how we should respond to God's judgments in history. What is a godly response to the

Y2K threat? Before answering that question, we ought first to describe some wrong responses to Y2K. Again, Isaiah helps us find our way.

The Conspiracy Theory Diversion

The first wrong response to God's judgments in history is what we could call the conspiracy theory diversion. In Isaiah 8:12 and 13 we read, "Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread."

These verses follow a passage in which God had announced that Assyria would invade Judah. It appears that the people were latching

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onto the threat represented by Assyria, and perhaps even considered Isaiah a traitor in league with Assyria, and they discussed the threat in terms of "a conspiracy."

But they were missing the point. Instead of seeing God's hand at work in raising up an enemy to punish them for their sins, they were shortsightedly focusing on the human agents in the judgment and attempting to dissect the "conspiracy"—as if when they sorted out all the human

players in the threat they would have understood the real problem. The Lord, however, reminds them that it is not men but the Lord whom they should fear. He is the real "Enemy" behind the human threats, and they need to get right with Him.

Conspiracy theories are popular in our day as well. How many times have you heard discussions about what "they" are plotting to do? You know who "they" are: the Illuminati, the Council on Foreign Relations, the CIA, the United Nations. Now mind you, it's not that men do not plot and scheme to work their sinister plans on the rest of us. It's just that it's irrelevant. We should focus our attention on Him and not be distracted by giving too much credence to the bad guys. Satan is strong, but unintentional though it may be, he is one of God's most active agents. Remember, God is God. He's in charge.

There is a real danger that we may idolize evil. It seems that many Christians today believe the forces of evil are stronger than God and of the Lord Christ who is on the throne at His right hand. At least that's the impression you get listening to their breathless descriptions of what Satan and his minions are doing in this world. But we don't need to fear men nor demons—we need to fear God. "Let Him be your dread." Puny man cannot hurt us without God's permission.

We haven't heard too many conspiracy theories in reference to Y2K, though someone has suggested that this is all a government plot to gain total control of the economy and the citizens. Another proposes that Y2K will bring in a cashless society with implanted chips under our skin. All such theories are simply an expression of the knee-jerk inclination to believe in conspiracies. The truth is that Y2K is far more likely to result in the destruction of the government's

ability to exercise total control. Without the computers on which they have come to depend, ambitious men will not be able to enforce their dreams of domination. Y2K will liberate us, not enslave us. The conspiracy theory is a silly diversion. We need instead to think about what God is plotting through these events.

Merely Trying to Fix the Problem

The second wrong response to God's judgments in history is an attempt merely to fix the problem and alleviate the threat. This approach, like the last, tends to leave God out of the picture. When Judah was threatened by Assyria they sought help from Egypt rather than from Him. His response:

Woe to those who do down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!" (31:1)

Making an alliance seemed like a reasonable plan to counteract the Assyrian threat. The only problem with that solution was that it was not God's solution. As a matter of fact, it became a way to "add sin to sin" (30:1) To their previous rebellion, God's people added the sin of responding to His discipline by just trying to escape the discipline. Assyria was not the problem and Egypt was not the solution. Their sin was the problem and the Lord was their solution.

Most everything you read about Y2K is about going down to Egypt for help. You read stories about software solutions, management solutions, programmer solutions, merger solutions, government-mandated solutions, financial solutions. But we have yet to read the story that suggests that the solution is to return to the

Lord God. Not that this would fix the computers. But computers are not the main problem. Sin is the problem and returning to the Lord is the solution. Whatever happens with the computers is comparatively irrelevant next to

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those issues. For now, our nation is adding sin to sin, merely trying to fix the problem, relying on an army of programmers and tons of money in a vain attempt to turn away God's hand of discipline. If God does not get to us by Y2K, He would find another way. There is no escape. God is God, and He is in charge.

You and I probably are not involved in fixing code in mainframe computers or replacing embedded chips, but we also are tempted to make this wrong response to the Y2K threat. We, too, may merely try to alleviate the threat. The other constant theme among the Y2K Internet subculture is that of preparation. There are whole Web sites devoted to survival. There are forums given over to personal Y2K planning: food storage, alternative energy sources, non-hybrid gardening, do-it-yourself medicine, relocation to the country, etc.

As we will see shortly, preparation is an entirely proper response to Y2K, but it is fraught with temptation. The danger is that we will become preoccupied with our preparations for survival, as if we could assure our own security through perilous days. We are tempted to make an idol of our preparations, of our money, of our food stores, of our generators, of our secure country location. But these are all worthless if God does not bless us. And if He is after us with His discipline, He can find us in the country as well as in the city; He can spoil our food supply and short circuit our generators.

It would be better to be physically unprepared for the Y2K threat and yet have our faith intact than to be prepared to the teeth without the Lord. The worst that can happen if we are not prepared physically is physical death. The worst that can happen if we are not prepared spiritually is that we lose our soul. Jesus said. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matt. 16:25,26)

Physical survival is not the first goal of the Christian confronted with Y2K, though that survival is seriously threatened. The godless make physical survival their highest priority. The Christian's highest priority is to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." (Matt. 6:31-33) Survival ought not be an end in itself. The question is, "What are we surviving for? What will we do after we survive? How will we exhibit God's righteousness and establish God's kingdom during and after Y2K?" That is all that really matters, whether we live or die in the process. So much for the wrong responses to the Y2K threat. Let's move on now to consider what exactly are the right responses.

The Most Important Preparation: Repentance

We have already seen that Isaiah in the very first words of his book identified the root problem of sin among the people of God. He also in that context identified the most important response that godly people can make in times of turmoil. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.... 'Come now, and let us reason together', says the LORD, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'" (1:16,18)

Since God is the God of history and brings temporal punishment for sin in history, and since Y2K is quite clearly a punishment (it's not a blessing!), then the most important response that we can make to the Y2K threat is to repent of our sins, personally and corporately.

One great temptation for Christians at this moment of time is to be so aware of the sins of our nation that we forget our own sins. But repentance must begin with me, and with you. Without personal repentance there can be no national repentance. We must realize that it is the failure of Christians to uphold God's moral standards that has led to the spiritual downfall of our nation. The reason we have such public wickedness in America today is because we have had private wickedness among Christians for generations.

The sin may be the quiet idolatry of money and success. It may be the neglect of spiritual leadership in the home. It may be the violation of marriage covenants. It may be fornication and adultery, or the less visible lusts of the heart. It may be gossip, or bitterness, or jealousy. It may be a simple but destructive neglect of worship and prayer.

Whatever our sins, we must call them what they are, stop making excuses, wash ourselves in the blood of Jesus, and put away the evil once and for all. If you are making your list of Y2K survival items but have not made your personal list of specific sins for which you have to repent, you had better stop and do a reality check right now. Do you think God will bless your survival plans if you have not repented of your sins?

And please remember that repentance is not mere sorrow and mental assent that sin is evil (2 Cor. 7:10), it is a change of mind, a change of

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direction which bears the fruit of changed behavior (Matt. 3:8). You ought to be a different person as you head into the year 2000.

Beyond our personal confession of sin and repentance, we also have a responsibility for corporate confession. We are part of a nation that is under judgment. Who is to cry out to the Lord for mercy if not God's people here? When Nehemiah went before the Lord to prepare for his great min-

istry of restoring the people of God and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he cried out,

[I] confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments...which You commanded Your servant Moses. (Neh. 1:6,7)

Nehemiah confessed his own sins, but also the sins of his extended family and of the nation as a whole. Likewise, we should be the priests of our families, churches, and nation. We should be those who stand in the gap in prayer and confession during these crucial days. If we will not do this, what hope is there for a redemptive outcome to Y2K?

Isaiah identified "a very small remnant" (1:9) which the Lord had left in Judah. It is the remnant who survive. But they survive because they are the ones who heed God's call to repentance and get right with Him. We should by all means aim to be the surviving remnant, but we should aim first to be the repentant remnant.

Hiding from the Brunt of God's Anger

Although we don't want to become "survivalists" whose highest priority is physical preservation, it is a godly work to prepare to survive, so making preparations for survival is the second proper response to Y2K. "Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the LORD comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain." (26:20,21)

This passage identifies the context as a time of historical judgment, a time when the Lord, after patiently

waiting for repentance, finally decides to pay back wicked men for their sin. (By the way, it is interesting to note that the cause of the Lord's anger is, among other things, the slain of the earth. We should meditate on the millions of slain unborn in American this past 25 years, those whose blood we have tried to hide, and consider how much "indignation" God has stored up for us as a nation when He finally moves to "disclose her blood.")

God waits for a while, sometimes a long while, giving men the opportunity to return to the Lord (2 Pet. 3:9). But "the day of the Lord" comes at last. Men seem to get away with ignoring Him and thumbing their noses at Him for so long, but He finally "comes out of His place" to punish the rebels. Surely we are in the early stages of such a visitation.

God's people are not supposed to be gluttons for punishment. They are to accept hardship as God's loving discipline of His children (Heb. 12:7), and they are called to be among the first to repent, but they are also encouraged to escape the brunt of God's judgment to the best of their ability. The image presented by Isaiah is one of a family going into the house, into an inner room, shutting the door, and hiding from the mayhem which God's outpouring of wrath is producing outside. It is presented as a temporary action ("for a little moment"); God's people are not permanently on the defensive. Normally they are on the offensive against the gates of hell and the devil himself. (Matt. 16:18; James. 4:7) Another way to say it is that sometimes the way to be most effective in the ongoing work of God in this world is to take a defensive posture.

As the sons of Issachar were commended as those "who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32), so we today must exercise discern-

ment about our times. If it appears that it is a period of God's indignation, then it is time to hide ourselves and our families to the extent possible. There is a time for godly people to run and hide, and if ever there were such a time, we are living in it.

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The Lord no doubt has

You see, there are seasons to God's actions in history. In normal times the priority is to mix it up with the world, not by way of compromise but by way of ministry, as salt and light, to be a leavening influence for the Gospel (Matt. 5:13-16). But when the abnormal moment comes, the moment of God's wrath on a big scale, it is time to hide for a while, so that we will live to be salt and light on the far side of the ordeal. God preserves a remnant, and the remnant are those who know when to go into hiding.

Of course, even in the "hiding" phase, there will be plenty of opportunities for ministry, and we are always and everywhere to be the aroma of Christ (2 Cor. 2:15), but there are times when that ministry is a by-product of our attempting to insulate ourselves from God's wrath.

Some Christians who are living in denial, unwilling to accept that their whole way of life is threatened by Y2K bravely talk of remaining in the cities to minister during the crisis. It is

ironic that Christians who have so failed (as we all have) to be salt and light during recent decades, as our nation has slid into greater and greater wickedness, suddenly feel a great urge to be salt and light and to stand in the teeth of the storm as witnesses. No doubt God will call some to minister in the worst of times and places, but many who imagine themselves "called" to such a ministry will find themselves simply among the first to be destroyed by God's wrath, victims of their own lack of discernment.

Not that everyone can or should flee the cities, though that may be the single most significant step anyone can take toward survival. "Hiding" can take many different forms. Any step you can take to isolate your family from the world system which is about to be judged is a step toward hiding. Take steps to become independent of the power supply system, of the food supply chain, of the water supply system, of the banking system. To the extent that you are disconnected if and when these systems fail is the extent to which you will have fled to safety and protected your family.

Act in Faith, Not in Fear

So repentance is the most important response to God's judgment in history, but preparing to endure the judgment is also part of a godly family's plan. We come now, finally, to that response which must underlie every other response that we may make to the Y2K disaster: a deep and enduring trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God. In Isaiah 26:3,4 we read, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength." Perfect peace in the midst of unprecedented national turmoil? Yes, because the source of

peace is not changing circumstance, but the unchanging God.

Jesus and His disciples were in their little boat on the sea when a great windstorm arose, began to fill the boat with water, and threatened to sink it. Jesus, however, unlike his panicky disciples, was asleep in the stern. They awoke Him and asked with agitation if He did not care that they were dying! After rebuking the wind—"Peace, be still."—He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mk. 4:40)

The disciples' fear was very reasonable under the circumstances —if God was not good, and if He was not in control. Fear results from the belief that circumstances are out of control and that bad things may happen to us. But for those who know God as their God through Jesus Christ, circumstances are always under control, His control, and nothing bad can happen. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Even bad circumstances serve a good purpose and are not ultimately threatening. That is why the Holy Spirit through Paul could give the command not to be anxious:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6,7).

Anxiety is a normal response to a threat, but Christians can and must choose to cast their anxiety on the Lord, knowing He cares for them (1 Pet. 5:7). As they give thanks for the blessings they already have received, and as they make request for what they lack, they rise above their threatening situation. They then gain peace, an irrational peace from the perspec-

tive of circumstance, but a real peace from God who cares for His own and who arranges everything for their ultimate welfare. Paul practiced what he preached when he said,

"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:11-13).

Y2K threatens hunger, abasement, and worse. It thereby presents what may well be the greatest test of faith that you will ever face. If our response is panic and dread, we have

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failed the test. Do you believe God is good and that you have His favor in Christ? Do you believe God is God and controls every circumstance? Then He is in charge of Y2K and He will use it for good for you. That does not mean you will not go through times of peril and loss, and even death. It just means that you, too, can find contentment in any and every situation. You can have a peace from God that is an anchor for your soul even in the midst of extreme danger.

So before you race around storing up food and provisions, cast your anx-

ety on Him who cares for you. The Lord no doubt has a lot of purposes for Y2K, but surely one of His chief purposes is to purify the faith of His children and teach them to rely on Himself alone.

Are you freaking out at the looming Y2K disaster? Yes, it's bad all right and could prove a disaster for your family, despite your best preparations. But get a grip! God is God, and He is good. No matter what happens we can handle it through the strength Christ gives. None of us is planning to live forever on this earth anyway. Our goal while we remain here is simply to live in a way that honors Christ.

Y2K will test the faith of those who profess Christ as Savior and Lord. Many will prove to have a shallow faith that buckles under the weight of the trial. May your faith and mine be found strong in these days.

Y2K appears to be a worldwide upheaval in the making. We seem to be in the early stages of an outpouring of God's wrath against proud, rebellious man. We must repent. We must prepare. And in all our preparation, we must trust in our one sure Refuge.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.... The LORD of host is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (Ps. 46:1,2,7)

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