

# And God Saw That It Was Good

*Jeremiah 44:17, 22-23; Ecclesiastes 8:11*

*With Study Questions*

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4/11/2014  
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## **Preface**

We will open with a brief reading from Jeremiah. The passage records the shallow pragmatic assessment of the people regarding their temporary well-being during their idolatry. This is followed by Jeremiah's response indicating their inevitable destination.

**The People: But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster (Jeremiah 44:17).**

**Jeremiah: The Lord could no longer bear your evil deeds and the abominations that you committed. Therefore your land has become a desolation and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day.<sup>23</sup> It is because you made offerings and because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey the voice of the Lord or walk in his law and in his statutes and in his testimonies that this disaster has happened to you, as at this day (Jeremiah 44: 22-23).**

**Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11).**

## **Introduction**

As we take a brief detour prior to our series on Revelation, I think it is worth noting that the antagonists addressed in Revelation are bad religion and a corrupt government. The disposition of the Christian and the response of God to these evils will be a common theme in that final book of Scripture. The reason I believe this is worth noting is due to two articles published by the Los Angeles Times. One published on Good

Friday, entitled *Why America's record godlessness is a good thing*<sup>1</sup>, the other on Easter Sunday, *Heaven, hell and the immortal soul*<sup>2</sup>.

This is not some prognostication of us approaching the end of human history. The deterioration of a single country, America or otherwise, should not be equated with the downfall of the King of God. At the same time, we are to be wise to our environment and respond accordingly. The Good Friday piece, perhaps unwittingly, sought to pave the way for the civil government to take charge of the welfare of humanity.

This may sound shocking to modern ears, but there are defined limitations, at least according to Scripture, when it comes to the government's responsibility to care for the people within its borders. As one former president explained, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help.'" Allowing the government to overtake all aspects of human affairs and charities is an early step toward its beastliness.

On Easter we were treated with bad religion. This OP-ED piece, it would appear, had the design of comforting those who believed the one published on Good Friday. Since the best efforts of the finest politicians cannot help us when it comes to our eternal souls, let us be assured that heaven and hell, says the author, are not founded upon reality. Even Jesus Himself, according to this professor of religious studies, did not believe in either.

## **To Whom Shall We Go?**

Well here we are, with no God to enlighten us in terms of ethics and man's responsibility to his fellow man, and no heaven or hell, in terms of a direction of the soul's eternality. To whom do we turn? One is reminded of Jesus' question of Peter. Jesus had been teaching in such a way as to lose followers (something the Good Friday article would celebrate). He then turned to the twelve and asked them if they desired to leave as well.

**But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).**

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<sup>1</sup> Why America's record godlessness is a good thing, L.A. Times, Friday April 2, 2021, A11.

<sup>2</sup> Heaven, hell and the immortal soul, L.A. Times, Friday, April 4, 2021, A19.

The associate dean who wrote the Good Friday article has a response for Peter. "Come to me, Peter. I will give the answers you so desperately seek." Of course, he didn't say it that way. He was much more "**crafty**" (**Genesis 3:1**). Again, this may all be unwitting on his part. Questioning the motives of others can be a fruitless endeavor. But being unwitting doesn't make it any less true. The author does not leave us without a god. Nature abhors a vacuum, it's been said, and this particular writer is more than happy to fill the vacancy.

At this point you may think that I'm overstating the issue. Indulge me for a moment, then you can connect at the appropriate level. One needn't read too far in their Bibles before we see God evaluating creation. Seven times in six days He makes an assessment with some form of the words "**And God saw that it was good**" (**Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31**). We generally don't make much of these evaluative statements. But perhaps we should. For who has the wisdom, power and authority to make such absolute claims, to declare something good? As you shall see, the writer of the referenced article.

After explaining the recent dramatic "waning of religious faith, practice and affiliation" we are to find solace in these words of assurance:

**This increasing godlessness in America is actually a good thing, to be welcomed and embraced.<sup>3</sup>**

It would be a strain to find darker, printed words. But in an effort to assuage the concern of readers who might perceive the self-deifying nature of this rhetoric, we are offered "rational" arguments for the amelioration of our country through apostasy. On what basis does he claim that godlessness is a good thing?

His first argument is one by comparison. Countries that have jettisoned religion for secularization (whatever in the world that might be) are the "healthiest, wealthiest and safest...enjoying...high degrees of well-being and happiness." Who can argue with such sociological, subjective ambiguities? Health can be somewhat objective. As can wealth. But wealth, as a criterion for that which is good can get us into some sketchy waters? Safety is certainly good, depending on how it is obtained. And

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<sup>3</sup> Los Angeles Times, Friday, April 2, 2021, p. A11.

what sort of hard science yields a trustworthy verdict of well-being and happiness.

Perhaps he's thinking of the nation of Oz. Everybody seemed happy there. Of course, they were constrained to ever live within the walls of the city governed by a fake wizard while being terrorized by a witch. Seriously, it doesn't require a great deal of study to realize that these "happy" nations (at least the top five or ten) also have the highest level of aborting the handicapped. All this to say, don't be too quick to bow before the altar of supposed happy nations.

After giddily presenting a few more stats of apostasy the writer realized there was yet another fear to mitigate, what he called the "bloody regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." He mentions the Soviet Union, former Albania and Cambodia. For some reasons he omits Mao from his short list of villains. The rapidity at which he dismisses over one hundred million dead is a bit disconcerting; as if the twentieth century's secular bloodbath is a mere asterisk in his otherwise sound proposal of advocating godlessness.

His argument amounts to this: those "godless dictatorships" were led by bad guys whose followers transformed into a "demagogic cult". Of course, we are far too enlightened to allow mere high-powered personality figures to have cultic power. How will we even know it if they begin to engage in demagoguery and self-deification? Perhaps by baldly and authoritatively declaring things good or evil ex cathedra. Here might be the best place to quote Aldous Huxley (with whom I have limited agreement).

**That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history.**

Nonetheless, he again seeks to comfort us. While we are asleep at the wheel, a better type of godless dictatorship will assume power, one that "emerges organically." At the risk of engaging in overuse, let it not escape our attention that Hitler rose to power legally and organically. You might ask what "organically" means. In not-so-subtle patronization terms, we are told that a people who are "better educated" and have more women in the workforce and better healthcare will find little need for religion.

Other arguments for why godlessness is good include church scandals and the lack of ability the church has to address societal needs such as homelessness and poverty as efficiently as government. I am

hoping against hope at this point that the critical reader will recognize the never-ending parade of political scandals and the utter incompetency of the government, despite a budget in the trillions, to make any significant strides in the very needs mentioned. Ironically, the bigger the government has become, the greater the deterioration of the society.

As public high school and collegiate level instructors, we learned early that the answers were in the back of the book. Similarly, the answer to this author's misguided, enthusiastic, religious antipathy is found at the end of the article. It is here that we see the rudder steering the ship. First, is his unwarranted, yet common, accusation that religious people oppose science. Science (or more accurately, scientists) are only opposed when they operate outside of their sphere. Hear Einstein on this:

**You are right in speaking of the moral foundation of science, but you cannot turn round and speak of the scientific foundation of morality...Every attempt to reduce ethics to scientific formulas must fail.**

With the cart firmly before the horse, we read of how those in a godless society will most assuredly get the vaccines (here I will say that I am not, in theory, opposed to vaccines. But do any of us wish to live in a society where the federal government forces its citizens to allow them to be inject with chemicals?). He moves then to how beneficial it would be for our ordained secular priests (my words here) to teach our children sex education.

He concludes with his own six days of creation/evaluations where his true end-game surfaces. "In the beginning, man sought to exclude the true, living, triune God from the affairs of humanity: I saw abortion, that it was good. I saw the deconstruction of husbands and wives as the basic family unit, that it was good. I saw the freedom to kill the helpless elderly, that it was good. I saw the disarming of people who might protect themselves from evil, that it was good." The only thing he doesn't lead with are the infamous words, "**Hath God truly said**" (**Genesis 3:1**)? But that was in the next article.

None of what I am writing here is an argument for the existence of the true, living, triune God. Not that I don't believe there is ample argument to be made, not the least of which is the *Sensus Divinitatis*, or the

universal sense of deity. As Calvin taught, there is no reasonable non-belief. But this is not my current point.

My current point is that writers such as this depend upon readers to thoughtlessly critique the truth, value and very existence of God, while suspending their critical analysis when it comes the words before them. This author would have us boldly cheer the attempted extraction of God from human affairs through our ability, as rational creatures, to identify folly. But when the same scanner is placed upon the papyrus of the L.A. Times OP-ED page, it fails miserably. In other words, feel free to critique the Almighty with every ounce of your intellectual acuity, but when it comes to what I'm writing, thoughtlessly imbibe. Trust me!

The bottom line is you will have a god. It would do you well to figure out who that G(g)od will be! Now, more than ever, we need a generation of Christians who heed to the teaching of Solomon.

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10).**

Now, more than ever, we need a generation of Christians who heed the teachings of Jesus.

**Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16).**

Interestingly, in all of his arguments about the benefits of godlessness, he never once mentions heaven or hell. To be sure, the truth of heaven and hell would recolor his entire story. Perhaps the editor thought Good Friday would be the appetizer and Easter would present the good news of the main course.

Just in case Friday's readers thought to themselves, 'What about the afterlife?' let not your soul be troubled, there is no afterlife. Even Jesus didn't believe in it. Enter the religious enemy of God's people. This particular antagonist is a "professor of religious studies" at a university in North Carolina. Rest assured I have little to say about this "**hidden reef**" this "**waterless cloud**" (Jude 12).

One quote from his article is sufficient. Keep in mind, this is published on Easter!

**Christians around the world believe that on Easter, Jesus was raised from the dead and taken up to heaven to live with God. They also believe that when they die, their own souls will go to heaven. The great irony is that this is not at all what Jesus himself believed...Jesus did not think a person's soul would live on after death, either to experience bliss in the presence of God above or to be tormented in the fires of hell below.<sup>4</sup>**

There are no references given for his conclusions regarding what Jesus did or did not think. Perhaps that is understandable, since it is not a book but an OP-ED piece. Nonetheless, this level of adulteration when it comes to God's word mirrors that which the Apostle John recognized as coming from the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 2:7).

Did Jesus think there was a hell? Assuming what He said is what He thought:

**And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell (Mark 9:43-45).**

In the event that you think Jesus is not speaking about actual hell. He gives a definition.

**And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:47-48).**

Jesus also taught,

**And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).**

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<sup>4</sup> Los Angeles Times, Sunday, April 4, 2021, p. A19.



And,

**You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell (Matthew 23:33)?**

**But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him (Luke 12:5)!**

**But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire (Matthew 5:22).**

I will stop here out of respect for time and sheer willpower. Suffice it to say that this professor is a liar. Before I am accused of obsessing over hell, as if it be a symptom of some psychological/theological disorder, I can't think of a more loving thing one can for another than to warn them of the reality of those torments. And how does this speak to Jesus, who endured hell on our behalf?

Be wise and be cautioned! Despite the rabbit trails and assurances of those who are **"Saying, peace, peace! When there is no peace"** (Jeremiah 6:14), it is unavoidable that you (despite what you may call it) will have a god and **"Blessed is the nation"** any nation, or any person **"whose God is the Lord"** (Psalm 33:12). Truly does the Proverb say, **"Where there is no vision, the people perish"** (Proverbs 29:28), keeping in mind here that the word **"vision"** *hazon*, means prophetic word, or the word of God.

Let it be our prayer that the soul-damning, infectious homilies erupting from today's popular periodicals will be recognized as the blather that they are. Let us pray that the affliction recorded in Amos, does not continue to fall upon us.

**"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land – not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11).**

## Questions for Study

1. Who are the antagonists in Revelation? Do people always have an accurate assessment of their own condition? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. To what extent does the government have responsibility for the welfare of its citizens (page 3)?
3. In what way does the writer of the first article exercise self-deification (page 4)?
4. What arguments are made to show godlessness is a good thing? Discuss merits of these arguments (pages 4-6).
5. What appears to be the genuine motive behind this article (page 6)?
6. Is it possible to live without a god (page 7)?
7. Did Jesus think there was a hell? Why is the doctrine of hell important (pages 7, 8)?
8. What should be our prayer when it comes to “the words of the Lord” (page 9)?