



The Collapse of Civilizations

By

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Chapter One

We can describe the long history of the human race in three words: **Warning and Lament**. That doesn't mean there haven't been good times along the way, but so much of the human experience has been filled with warnings and lamenting about bad decisions that often lead to the collapse of society.

Lessons from History

We know from historical records that as many as 30 major civilizations have collapsed during the past several thousand years (also called Societal collapse). That doesn't include the countless rise and fall of tribes and smaller people groups. Some civilizations reinvented themselves while others were absorbed into other societies.

University of Cambridge researcher and 'collapse' expert Luke Kemp defined the collapse of civilizations this way:

Collapse can be defined as a rapid and enduring loss of population, identity and socio-economic complexity. Public services crumble and disorder ensues as government loses control of its monopoly on violence. [Are we on the road to civilisation collapse?](#)

There are many books and studies about societal collapse available if you're interested in learning more about what leads to the decline and fall of a civilization of people. *The Collapse of Complex Societies* by Joseph Tainter, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* by Jared Diamond, *The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival* by Sir John Glubb, *The Rise and Fall of Civilizations: Why Civilizations Rise and Fall and What Happens When They End (The Law of History)* by Nicholas Hagger, and *A Study of History* (12 Volumes) by Arnold Toynbee are several examples.

Some historical research shows that the average lifespan of a civilization is about 340 years. Other research shows the time of rise to fall to be about 250 years (about ten generations). Some of the research into civilization collapse (known as Collapsology) shows that while civilizations are usually slow to rise, they are often quick to fall. Though decline can take many years, the “fall” may appear to be fast to those within the civilization as well as those watching from the outside.

There are researchers who believe the United States, which as a nation just celebrated its 245th birthday, is on a trajectory toward collapse. Depending on which ‘experts’ you read, the U.S. could suffer some type of collapse or major societal change within the next ten to twenty years. If that does happen, will the American society we know be reinvented from within or absorbed by an outside society. It would seem improbable that a population of more than 330-million people would just disappear. While we might think that civilization collapse is caused by external violence, British historian Arnold Toynbee wrote in his massive *A Study of History* that — “Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder.”

Based on some historical research into how long civilizations last before collapse, we find that ten generations is often the number from rise to fall:

It has been shown that, normally, the rise and fall of great nations are due to internal reasons alone. Ten generations of human beings suffice to transform the hardy and enterprising pioneer into the captious citizen of the welfare state. But whereas the life histories of great nations show an unexpected uniformity, the nature of their falls depends largely on outside circumstances and thus shows a high degree of diversity ... The life-expectation of a great nation, it appears, commences with a violent, and usually unforeseen, outburst of energy, and ends in a lowering of moral standards, cynicism, pessimism and frivolity. Sir John Glubb, [The Fate of Empires and Search for Survival](#)

Depending on how we define the length of generations (often about 25 years), the United States is in the middle of its tenth generation; statistically, close to the end of its decline and collapse as a society.

Collapse

Question: did anyone see a societal collapse coming in past civilizations? Were there any warnings? If there were, why didn't people heed the warnings? If there were no warnings, why not? Each civilization would probably have answered the question differently at the end, but historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and other researchers do see some common reasons for societal collapse.

Interestingly, for Bible students, the collapse process is spelled out in Revelation chapters 2 – 6:

- Moral and Religious decline (lack of belief in God, religious compromise, idolatry (including celebrity worship), sexual immorality, breakdown of family, overwhelming desire to be entertained by godless activities, overall moral decay etc)
- Kingdom Conquering (Physical invasion or civil/economic takeover from outside society, ruling class loses its will to rule and coordinates with outside forces)

- Deadly Conflicts (Within a society — increase in crime (especially by young people), lack of respect for law enforcement, government/political corruption and civil breakdown, economic collapse because of overwhelming debt and monetary collapse, racial divide, low view of importance of life, breakdown of middle class, large gap between rich and poor, civil war, etc)
- Scarcity of necessary commodities (e.g. drought which affects water and food supply, medical care, individual income, housing, power sources (e.g. electricity), transportation, personal defense against rise in crime, etc)
- Hunger (high cost of food, lack of food supply, poor soil for growing crops, corruption in food industry and government agencies, etc)
- Disease (Degradation of public health through corruption and incompetence, uncontrollable epidemics, pandemics, etc)
- People who believe in Christ will martyred in large numbers
- Natural Calamities (e.g. volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, fires, wind storms, etc)

Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote this concerning the moral decay of civilizations that have collapsed — “Of the twenty-two civilizations that have appeared in history, nineteen of them collapsed when they reached the moral state the United States is in now.” He wrote those words many decades ago. If the United States was in moral decline decades ago, where is it now?

Interestingly, both in the Book of Revelation and in what we know about how previous civilizations have collapsed, the people usually didn't see disaster coming. They failed to see what was in front of their eyes the entire time. While a few 'prophets' sounded the alarm, the vast majority of people in societies that collapsed were oblivious of what was headed toward them. They refused to believe they and their way of life were in danger of collapse.

Here's a summary of *The Fate of Empires* by its author. Compare the history of societal collapse to what you see in the history of your country:

- (a) We do not learn from history because our studies are brief and prejudiced.
- (b) In a surprising manner, 250 years emerges as the average length of national greatness.
- (c) This average has not varied for 3,000 years. Does it represent ten generations?
- (d) The stages of the rise and fall of great nations seem to be:
 - The Age of Pioneers (outburst)
 - The Age of Conquests
 - The Age of Commerce
 - The Age of Affluence
 - The Age of Intellect
 - The Age of Decadence
- (e) Decadence is marked by:
 - Defensiveness
 - Pessimism

- Materialism
- Frivolity
- An influx of foreigners
- The Welfare State
- A weakening of religion
- (f) Decadence is due to:
 - Too long a period of wealth and power
 - Selfishness
 - Love of money
 - The loss of a sense of duty
- (g) The life histories of great states are amazingly similar, and are due to internal factors.
- (h) Their falls are diverse, because they are largely the result of external causes.
- (i) History should be taught as the history of the human race, though of course with emphasis on the history of the student's own country.

Lessons from Israel

Israel is an interesting case study because they have a long history (approximately four-thousand years) and have experienced many societal collapses, yet they still exist as a people and a nation today. Somehow they have held on to their cultural heritage even though they've been conquered many times, been taken captive many times, even been without a homeland for hundreds of years at a time. They received multiple prophetic warnings, but refused to listen until it was too late. In fact, many prophets were silenced through imprisonment and even death. The leaders and people of Israel didn't want to hear what the prophets had to say. When it finally became obvious to them that the prophetic warnings were correct, it was often too late to change the outcome.

When you look at the list of list of societal collapse in Revelation, you are looking at the experience of Israel throughout its history. Yet, Israel continues to exist to this day. Why? Israel has something that no other nation on earth has now or has ever had — an unconditional covenant with God.

Israel has suffered greatly through the millennia because the people and leaders broke 'conditional' covenants with God. That means God made promises to Israel based on the people and its leaders obeying God. God warned them what would happen if they disobeyed and the people lamented greatly when God punished them for their disobedience. Not so with God's 'unconditional' covenants with Israel. That means God made promises to Israel based on His Nature and not on the people and leaders of Israel obeying God. God made *unconditional* covenants with Abraham and repeated them to Isaac and Jacob (Israel). He also made an unconditional covenant with David concerning his earthly throne that will be fulfilled with Jesus Christ sits on that throne in Jerusalem in the near future. It is because of those promises that Israel continues as a people today.

Christians are a people who share in God's unconditional promises to Israel through His Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, Christians experience their blessings in Christ through the current unbelief of Israel concerning Jesus. Paul wrote about that in his letter to the Romans.

You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree. Romans 11:19-24

Christians have had almost two-thousand years to grow as part of God's Kingdom. Israel spent almost 1,900 of those years cast out of their land because they rejected God's offer of salvation through their Messiah, Jesus Christ. However, God will bring Israel back and is bringing them back because of the unconditional covenants He made with Abraham and others. Paul continued in his letter:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins. Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. Romans 11:25-28

Chapter Two

Warnings

Historical research shows that civilizations have a pattern of rise and fall that lasts about 250 years. Some last longer, some shorter. The United States, for example, recently celebrated its 245th birthday, which would put it at close to the end of the civilization cycle. Some historians believe the United States is already showing signs of rapid decay and decline which could bring it to an end within ten to twenty years.

If that does happen, it doesn't mean everybody dies and the American land mass with its cities and population disappears. What it does mean is that life will probably change dramatically. New societies emerge and transform life in societies that collapse.

We looked at Revelation chapters 2 – 6 in the last study to see the kinds of things that often happen to declining societies — including moral and religious decline, outside kingdom conquering, deadly conflicts within society, scarcity of necessary commodities, hunger, disease and natural calamities. Past civilizations often had many warning signs that they were facing decay, decline and societal collapse. Many of those civilizations had prophetic voices that warned of impending doom, but people and leaders in those societies usually did not listen to the warnings. We find listings of some of those nations in the Old Testament of the Bible including Sodom, Gomorrah, the Hittites, the Canaanites, Edomites, Moabites, Assyria, Babylonia and others.

Some of the Hebrew prophets were involved in warning these nations of their impending doom. One interesting situation concerned the people of the major Assyrian city of Nineveh. God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn them of their impending collapse in 40 days if they didn't repent. The people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth and repented of their sin. The king of Nineveh rose from the throne, laid aside

his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes (Jonah 3). That was about 785 BC. Though the Ninevites did get a temporary reprieve from God, the city of Nineveh was sacked and burned by an allied force of Medes, Persians, Babylonians and others in 612 BC. Revival doesn't last if people don't continue in obedience to God.

[The Neo-Assyrian Empire collapsed 300 years after it was established.]

Warnings of Israel's Collapse

Israel had its own internal problems during those years. The unified Israel under King Solomon divided soon after his death (about 931 BC). Israel's division led to a Northern Kingdom (Israel) under a king who was not in the lineage of Solomon or David and Southern Kingdom (Judah) under a king who was in the lineage of Solomon and David. The new king of the Northern Kingdom did not want the people to go to Jerusalem to worship God, so he established new worship centers at Bethel and Dan and placed a golden calf in each place.

Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. 1 Kings 12:30-31

God sent an unnamed prophet to the king to prophecy against him. The king attempted to have the prophet arrested, but God withered the king's hand. The altar was also split apart and the ashes poured out from the altar. The king begged the prophet to "entreat the favor of the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me" (1 Kings 13:6). The prophet prayed and the king's hand was restored.

That was the beginning of God sending prophets to both kingdoms to warn them of impending collapse if they didn't obey Him. Some of those prophets were Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Isaiah, Joel, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Each prophet carried specific warnings for the kings, priests, scribes and people of each kingdom.

God is very long suffering, but He doesn't wait forever for people to obey Him. The Northern Kingdom of Israel collapsed when the king of Assyria defeated Israel in the late 8th century (722 BC). The Assyrian king went through the land of Samaria (Northern Kingdom) and besieged it for three years. The king defeated Israel and carried the people away to Assyria. He placed them in places like Halah, by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes (2 Kings 17). The king of Assyria then brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and Sepharvaim and placed them in the cities of Samaria to live on the land he had conquered. That introduced Gentiles into the land of the Jews. You can read 2 Kings 17:24-41 to see what happened to those people.

The reason why this happened and the part the prophets played in it are important to note for the purpose of our understanding how civilizations collapse.

For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, 'You shall not do this thing.' Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the

prophets.’ Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone. 2 Kings 17:7-18

[The Northern Kingdom of Israel collapsed a little more than 200 years after it was established.]

Warnings of Judah's Collapse

Even though the tribe of Judah (Southern Kingdom) was spared, God was not happy with their behavior. He continued to send prophets to warn them of the impending collapse of Judah. Isaiah was one of the first prophets God used to warn Judah. Isaiah prophesied during the reign of four kings of Judah (approximately 760-673 BC). Micah prophesied to Judah from about 738-698 BC. Zephaniah prophesied to Judah from about 640 – 626 BC. Jeremiah prophesied to Judah from about 650 – 582 BC. Habakkuk prophesied to Judah from about 608 – 598 BC.

You can read details of the prophetic warnings to Judah from 2 Kings 19 – 25; 2 Chronicles 26 – 36; and in the writings of the prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Zephaniah, Micah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk). As you read through the prophetic writings and pronouncements, you will notice how specific the prophets were in speaking God's warnings. God warned Judah about impending doom, but also held out His Hand of forgiveness if the leaders and people would repent.

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. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment. Isaiah 1:4-6

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. '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. If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by

the sword', For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 1:16-20

Jeremiah prophesied many decades after Isaiah and God's patience with Judah was coming to an end. He warned the king and queen mother of the nation's coming collapse:

Say to the king and to the queen mother, 'Humble yourselves; Sit down, For your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory.' The cities of the South shall be shut up, And no one shall open them; Judah shall be carried away captive, all of it; It shall be wholly carried away captive. Jeremiah 13:18-19

Jeremiah summed up God's efforts with Judah this way.

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of

Jerusalem, saying: 'From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the Lord has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, 'Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.' Yet you have not listened to Me," says the Lord, "that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the Lord, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make

them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Jeremiah 25:1-11

[The Southern Kingdom of Judah collapsed a little more than 330 years after it was established.]

Chapter Three

What's the single worst thing a nation's leaders can do to their citizens? It's the opposite of what may be the single best thing a nation's leaders can do to their citizens.

Best thing — tell the truth

Worst thing — lie

The Lies of Leaders

We ended the last part of the series looking at ancient Israel and Judah in the years leading up to the two kingdoms' collapse. Assyria's King Sargon II conquered Israel, the Northern Kingdom, in 722 BC and Israel ceased to exist. Sargon deported Jews from the Northern Kingdom to many different parts of the Assyrian Empire and imported Gentiles from across the Empire to take up residence in what had been the Northern Kingdom. The armies of Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar II came against Judah in the late part of the

7th century BC, took Jews captive to Babylon and finally destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple in 586 BC. The land was left with only a small number of poor Jews to live there until King Cyrus of Persia issued a proclamation in 538 BC that allowed the Jewish people to return to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. Many Jews remained in Babylon, but small groups of Jews returned over many years to rebuild the Temple and the city.

We saw how God used prophets to warn the leaders and people of each kingdom (Israel and Judah) how they would be destroyed by outside forces. This raises a basic question about these leaders. What did they tell the people after hearing from the prophets of God? Did they tell their citizens God's truth or did they lie about it? Keep in mind that the best thing they could have done was tell the truth and the worst thing they could do was lie.

THEY LIED! They lied to God's people in the name of the Lord. They prophesied according to false gods and caused God's people to sin.

And the Lord said to me, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land'—'By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed! Jeremiah 14:14-15

And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria: They prophesied by Baal And caused My people Israel to err. Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah. Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: 'Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, And make them drink the water of gall; For from the prophets of Jerusalem

Profaneness has gone out into all the land.’ Jeremiah 23:13-15

I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal. Jeremiah 23:25-27

Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,’ says the Lord, “who steal My words every one from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets,’ says the Lord, ‘who use their tongues and say, ‘He says.’ Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,’ says the Lord, ‘and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall

not profit this people at all,' says the Lord. Jeremiah 23:30-32

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; He who eats of their eggs dies, And from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. Isaiah 59:1-5

What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, The molded image, a teacher of lies, That the maker of its mold should trust in it, To make mute idols? Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!' To silent stone, 'Arise! It shall

teach!’ Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, Yet in it there is no breath at all. But the Lord is in His holy temple.

Let all the earth keep silence before Him.’ Habakkuk 2:18-20

Keep in mind that Isaiah began prophesying to the leaders of Judah about 150 years before the Babylonians began their attack against Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah began his prophecies more than 40 years before King Nebuchadnezzar II began taking Hebrews into captivity. Ezekiel was one of the early captives who prophesied to Judah from Babylon during the time that Babylon was attacking Jerusalem. Habakkuk also prophesied during the years of Nebuchadnezzar’s attacks on Judah. They all had the same message. Judah’s leaders lied to the people. They did not tell the people what God said and invented sayings of the Lord that were not true. They did a terrible thing.

What did the people of Judah think about their leaders lying to them? They must have been furious – right?

An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end? Jeremiah 5:30-31

As hard as it may be to think that the people of Judah loved being lied to, that's a strange truth in the collapse of civilizations. It was true in Judah, in Israel and in so many of the other civilizations that have collapsed through human history. It is an astonishing and horrible thing, but it is true. People often don't want to hear the truth. They prefer when leaders lie. That means the people don't have to change their beliefs and practices. They can continue in their sin. That is until God's justice and judgment arrives. It is too late when that comes. What will people do in the end? They, the people and their lying leaders, will be dismantled and destroyed.

The Truth of God

Even as the leaders of Judah lied to their people, the prophets of God told the truth to the leaders. As you read through Isaiah and Jeremiah, you will find God speaking truth after truth after truth. Keep in mind that Isaiah was the first to prophesy to the kings of Judah. Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk followed Isaiah in prophesying to Judah's leaders. Ezekiel prophesied as an exile in Babylonia. All of them prophesied truth and were met with opposition from Judah's leaders who would then lie to the citizens of Judah even though the leaders knew the truth.

The prophets told the leaders of Judah what God expected and what God would do if the leaders did not respond appropriately to His truth. As we know from the biblical prophets and secular historians, Judah's leaders did not respond appropriately and were either killed or taken into captivity. Josiah, the last good king of Judah, died in battle in 609 BC, shortly before the Babylonians began their battles against Judah. The last four

kings of Judah were bad and their rule ended poorly. You can read details in 2 Kings chapters 23 – 24 and in 2 Chronicles 36.

- King Jehoahaz ruled as an evil king for three months in 609 BC. The king of Egypt removed him and replaced him with his brother, Eliakim. Pharaoh Necho took Jehoahaz captive and carried him off to Egypt. Necho also changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim.
- Jehoiakim ruled as an evil king in Judah under Egypt's oversight for several years. Pharaoh Necho supported Assyria in a war with Babylonia at the same time, but King Nebuchadnezzar II defeated Assyria and Egypt and came against Judah. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Jehoiakim and deported him in bronze fetters to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried off some of the sacred articles from the Temple in Jerusalem and placed them in his temple at Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, King of Judah.
- Jehoiachin was also an evil king. He ruled for three months and ten days. King Nebuchadnezzar summoned Jehoiachin to Babylon at the turn of the year (598-597 BC)

and took more costly articles from the Temple to the temple in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah king over Judah.

- Zedekiah ruled as an evil king in Judah under Babylonian oversight for eleven years. Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king. 2 Chronicles 36 reports that Zedekiah “did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear *an oath* by God; but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel. Moreover all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, *according* to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem.”

The next verses in 2 Chronicles 36 stand as a strong accusation against the kings and other leaders of Judah and a demonstration of how God carries through with prophetic warnings:

And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As

long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was taken captive to Babylon in 586 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his army to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple of God.

2 Kings 25 contains detailed information about how the Babylonian army systematically dismantled and destroyed Judah and Jerusalem. Here's what happened to Judah's lying king:

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon. 2 Kings 25:5-7

What will they do in the end?

Chapter Four

In the last three parts of our series we have seen how civilizations collapse and witnessed two examples in Israel and Judah. Even as we saw how long God warned both kingdoms about impending destruction if they did not repent and obey the Lord, we will now see how deeply societal collapse affects both leaders and citizens.

We might want to rush to judge the leaders of collapsed societies as primarily to blame for the collapse, but citizens of those nations bear some of the blame as well. We are reminded about the people's part in the collapse of their society from Jeremiah chapter 5:

Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours' ... But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; They have revolted and departed. They do not say in their heart, 'Let us now fear the Lord our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves

for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.’ Your iniquities have turned these things away, And your sins have withheld good from you ... For among My people are found wicked men; They lie in wait as one who sets snares; They set a trap; They catch men. As a cage is full of birds, So their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they have become great and grown rich. They have grown fat, they are sleek; Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked; They do not plead the cause, The cause of the fatherless; Yet they prosper, And the right of the needy they do not defend. Shall I not punish them for these things?’ says the Lord. ‘Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?’ An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?

Let those words sink in for a moment. People who are in a position to speak for God speak falsely. People who are in a position to rule the people by God's power choose instead to rule by their own power. "And My people love to have it so." The leaders and the people share blame in the collapse of their society because they told lies and believed lies. They deceived and allowed themselves to be deceived.

The Lament

We move now from the **warnings** of God to the **lament** of His people and the true prophets. One of the hardest books to read in the Bible is also one of the most important to read. It is the Book of Lamentations. The prophet Jeremiah wrote it as part of his experience in prophesying to the Kingdom of Judah. The word lament means "loud cries, a passionate expression of grief or sorrow."

First, some background. We know from the first words of the Book of Jeremiah that Jeremiah was the son of a priest. God's Word came to Jeremiah in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon. Josiah was the last of the good kings in Judah. There were not many and he was the last. Jeremiah also prophesied during the reigns of King Jehoiakim until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, Judah's last king, and until the final carrying away of Jerusalem's captives.

It's interesting to note that the Hebrew leader and prophet Joshua warned of the coming judgment of God on the leaders and people of Judah and Jerusalem 800 years before the Babylonian destruction:

Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so

the Lord will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the Lord your God has given you. When you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you. Joshua 23:14-16

God's centuries-long warnings turned to active judgment in the last several years of Judah's history leading up to final exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah after defeating Egypt's Pharaoh Necho at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. Jehoiakim became a vassal king, but rebelled in 602 BC. when Necho was able to retake Gaza from the Babylonians. That began a war between Judah and Babylon that lasted from 601 until 586 BC. The war included two major sieges of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians finally won the war and destroyed Jerusalem.

We learn about the conflict from two primary sources: the Bible and the ancient *Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle* (also known as the *Jerusalem Chronicle*). Many of Judah's leaders, along with thousands of citizens, were forcefully taken captive. Thousands more died from violence and starvation during the lengthy sieges of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army. It was during that horrible time that the people of Judah "cried aloud" (lamented).

As we look at the "lamentations" of the prophet Jeremiah and the people of Judah, I want you to consider the loud cries of people throughout history who have experienced bitter suffering and great grief and sorrow because of the collapse of their society. The experience of Judah is not unlike that of societies before them or since. Humans of all ages share many commonalities no matter when or where they lived. Pain is pain. Suffering is suffering. Grief is grief. Sorrow is sorrow. May we learn a lesson for our own time as we look into the excruciating horror of another time.

Lamentations

Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations to describe the horror of what happened to God's people at the hands of the Babylonians and by their own hands.

How lonely sits the city That was full of people! How like a widow is she, Who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces Has become a slave! She weeps bitterly in the night, Her tears are on her cheeks; Among all her lovers She has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies. Lamentations 1:1-2

It's important to keep in mind that Jeremiah was an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem. He knew the pain of his people as his own pain. Jeremiah documented the judgment of God on His disobedient people, even as he shared the hope of God's future compassion.

Jeremiah's lament began before the lament of the people of Judah. God commanded Jeremiah to cut off his hair and cast it away, "and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights; for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath. For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight," says the Lord" (Jeremiah 7:29-30).

That is often the way of prophets. They feel the pressure of God's approaching judgment long before judgment day arrives. The prophet often experiences lament as they warn the people of impending doom. It's difficult to know the awful things that are coming to a society, to a civilization, and not cry out. Jeremiah knew what was coming decades before it arrived and he lamented it in advance. Interestingly, there came a point in Jeremiah's prophecies where God told him to no longer lament what would happen to Judah. As hard as it is to read, it is part of the wrath of Almighty God and a prophet must prepare for it. Preparing for the coming judgment of God does not mean that a prophet does not feel sorrow and compassion for his people, but he knows that the judgments of God are righteous and just.

They shall die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, but they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth.’ For thus says the Lord: ‘Do not enter the house of mourning, nor go to lament or bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people,’ says the Lord, “lovingkindness and mercies. Both the great and the small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried; neither shall men lament for them, cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them.

Jeremiah 16:4-6

The [MacArthur Study Bible](#) has a helpful outline for understanding Lamentations. You may find it helpful in your study.

- I. The First Lament: Jerusalem's Devastation (1:1-22)
- II. The Second Lament: The Lord's Anger Explained (2:1-22)
- III. The Third Lament: Jeremiah's Grievs Expressed (3:1-66)
- IV. The Fourth Lament: God's Wrath Detailed (4:1-22)
- V. The Fifth Lament: The Remnant's Prayers (5:1-22)

Remember

Reading the Book of Lamentations is very difficult unless you keep in mind what transpired before Judah's final days under the sieges of the Babylonian army. The false prophets lied, the priests ruled according to their own will and the people loved it that way. The leaders and citizens of Judah had thumbed their noses at God's Word and will for centuries. The majority of Judah's kings did great evil in God's sight. They led the people to worship idols and participate in sexual immorality and blatant disregard for the needs of the poor. God, through the true

prophets, warned Judah for decades. He was very specific and detailed in His warnings. He offered Judah's leaders and people a way to escape His approaching judgment. All they had to do was repent of their sinfulness and obey God. Except for a few of Judah's kings, Josiah being the last one, the leadership of Judah refused to change its evil ways.

As you read about the horrors of what happened during the sieges and final destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, remember that the leaders and citizens of Judah had received ample warning. It's not easy to see fellow humans suffering so much, but we must ask some important questions about what they knew, when they knew it and how they responded to what they knew before making accusations of cruelty against God. The Lord was long-suffering, merciful and just in all His dealings with the people of Judah.

Chapter Five

The GraceLife Blog has readers from almost 200 countries and territories around the world. Many of those countries have experienced societal collapse in the past. What about their future? What about the future of the country where you live?

According to many historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and social scientists, it takes about 250 years for a civilization to decline and fall. Social scientist Luke Kemp studied the collapse of many civilizations over a period of thousands of years and calculated the average life span of a civilization to be about 340 years. Some experts use the term “collapse,” while others use terms like “fall,” “decline” or “disintegration.” The study of civilization collapse is known as Collapsology. Civilizations can collapse suddenly or slowly. Some are absorbed into more powerful societies. Some civilizations become more primitive. Some disappear completely.

Future Societal Collapse

Most experts in Collapsology believe our world will face more societal collapses in the future. Some believe many societies are only decades away from collapse. I've read many "expert" reports and their findings and warnings are dire indeed. Many point to climate change as a prime reason for the impending collapse of civilizations. You can read an article we wrote a couple of years ago about [climate change](#). Some scientists believe there is still time for members of the global community to stop a massive collapse of civilizations around the world, while other scientists believe it's too late to stop collapse.

As world leaders and experts in a variety of scientific fields debate these issues, what should Christians think and do? First, trust God. Second, look to the Bible for answers. If God is who He says He is, He knows the future and has revealed much of it to His people.

We spent time in the last part of our series looking at prophetic warnings to Israel and Judah, warnings that turned out to be true. Lament followed warnings in the past as they will in the future. Societal collapse can be very hard on the people who live through it.

As we mentioned in an earlier part of this series, the Bible warns about impending civilization collapses during what it calls “end of the age.” Jesus addressed that question from His disciples in Matthew 24 and 25. Jesus said that nations would rise against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms. He said there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in many places. Jesus called that the “beginning of sorrows.”

Jesus told His disciples that His followers would be hated, persecuted and killed for His name’s sake. Jesus said many people would be offended and would betray and kill each other. False prophets would rise up and deceive many people. Lawlessness will abound and the love of people will grow cold. Jesus said the Gospel would be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, “and then the end will come.” You can

read the rest of Matthew 24 and chapter 25 for more specifics about what Jesus told His disciples concerning the future collapse of human civilizations.

The Lord also instructed the Apostle John to write what he saw in a vision of that future time. Here are some of the things that will happen as civilizations begin to collapse before the return of Christ.

From Revelation chapters 2 – 6:

- Moral and Religious decline (lack of belief in God, religious compromise, idolatry (including celebrity worship), sexual immorality, breakdown of family, overwhelming desire to be entertained by godless activities, overall moral decay, etc)
- Kingdom Conquering (Physical invasion or civil/economic takeover from outside society, ruling class loses its will to rule and coordinates with outside forces)
- Deadly Conflicts (Within a society — increase in crime (especially by young people), lack of respect for law enforcement, government/political corruption and civil

breakdown, economic collapse because of overwhelming debt and monetary collapse, racial divide, low view of importance of life, breakdown of middle class, large gap between rich and poor, civil war, etc)

- Scarcity of necessary commodities (e.g. drought which affects water and food supply, medical care, individual income, housing, power sources (e.g. electricity), transportation, personal defense against rise in crime, etc)
- Hunger (high cost of food, lack of food supply, poor soil for growing crops, corruption in food industry and government agencies, etc)
- Disease (Degradation of public health through corruption and incompetence, uncontrollable epidemics, pandemics, etc)
- People who believe in Christ will be martyred in large numbers
- Natural Calamities (e.g. volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, fires, wind storms, etc)

God will allow these events to occur to people and civilizations on earth. Revelation 6:4 reads – “Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.” But it doesn’t end there.

Revelation chapter 8 reveals how God will judge the leaders and people on earth at the opening of the “seventh seal,” which will be a prelude to seven angels sounding trumpets of doom on the earth.

- Angel One – Vegetation Struck
- Angel Two – Seas Struck
- Angel Three – Waters Struck
- Angel Four – Heavens Struck
- Angel Five – Smoke and Locusts from Bottomless Pit
- Angel Six – Four Angels Released from Euphrates River
- Angel Seven – Proclamation of the Kingdom

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying 'We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth.' Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail. Revelation 11:15-19

The impact of what the angels unleash on earth will be devastating for leaders and people living at that time. Will the people repent?

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Revelation 9:20-21

Even as people cry out in anguish (lament), they still will not repent of their evil and rebellion against God.

That's followed by Seven Bowls of God's Judgment.

- Bowl One – Loathsome Sores
- Bowl Two – Sea Turns to Blood
- Bowl Three – Waters Turn to Blood
- Bowl Four – People Scorched with Fire
- Bowl Five – Darkness and Pain
- Bowl Six – Euphrates River Dries Up
- Bowl Seven – Earth is Shaken by Earthquakes

That's followed by the sudden collapse of a civilization called Babylon the Great (Revelation 18) and the Return of Christ to destroy the armies of the world and establish His earthly reign (Chapter 19). Once Jesus is enthroned in Jerusalem, He will rule the earth with "a rod of iron" (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 12:5; 19:15).

And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelation 19:14-16

A New Civilization

What Jesus will do when He returns is establish a New Civilization – God’s rule on earth. Then, just as Jesus taught His disciples to pray, God’s will will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. For a period of a thousand years, a millennium, Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit and will not be allowed to deceive the nations until the thousand years are finished. During that Millennial reign, Jesus will clean up the earth and rule with righteousness and justice for all the peoples of the earth. Those who were martyred for their witness to Jesus and for the Word of God and did not worship the beast or his image or receive his mark on their foreheads or on their hands will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

Once the thousand years is complete, Satan will be released from the bottomless pit and attempt a global coup against Jesus. The devil will go out to deceive the nations and gather them together to battle. They will surround Jerusalem to wage war against the Lord, but fire will come down from God out of

Heaven and devour them. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet are and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Eternal Civilization

The Lord's defeat of Satan leads to the final judgment of humanity.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the

second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15

The final judgment leads to the establishment of the eternal civilization.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'" Revelation 21:1-4

Revelation chapters 21 and 22 describe this everlasting civilization in detail.

Civilizations that are currently on earth will one day be destroyed and replaced by God's Kingdom on earth. We don't know the exact time, but it's close.

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Matthew 24:37-39

Chapter Six

The warnings are dire and the laments will be loud. God has warned civilizations and the people who make up those societies about the result of their disobedience and rebellion toward Him. Yet .. people and their leaders continue to this day to rebel and refuse to repent.

Nearing the End of the Age

As we saw in the last part of our series, we are nearing the end of this age. The time for Christ's return to earth to establish His reign and a new and eternal civilization are close. According to what Jesus said in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 and what the Apostle John saw in his visions of the future in Revelation, the end of earthly civilizations will not end easily or peacefully. The people will lament greatly when God's justice roles down upon them.

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? Revelation 6:15-17

And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound! Revelation 8:13

And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. Revelation 9:5-6

So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. Revelation 9:16-18

Can you imagine the lament (crying out) of people around the earth as God's judgment is poured out on the planet? Certainly people would respond by repenting of their sin and rebellion. Right?

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.
Revelation 9:20-21

That's amazing! Even under the outpouring of God's wrath, people on earth during the Tribulation period will continue to sin and worship demons and idols.

A Christian Response

How should Christians respond now and in the future? Fortunately, we don't have to wonder what to do – no matter what your particular [interpretation of the end times](#). Everything we need to know about how to live through tough times, even the collapse of civilizations, is found in God's Word. Everything. Many of the Bible studies and special series on the GraceLife Blog and [Faith & Self Defense Blog](#) are designed specifically to

help Christians with their walk in this world. Many of our series are [available as free eBooks](#) that you can download to read, print or share. Please use these as resources in any way God leads.

One of our newest series is titled *Living Christian In 'This Present World.'* It's a study from Paul's letter to his friend and ministry partner outlining how Christians can live in a troubled world. We will share a link to an eBook at the end of this series.

Here's part of Paul's letter that is central to our response as Christians in this present world:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these

things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you. Titus 2:11-15

The grace of God brings salvation to us. It teaches us that we should deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. That's the right response in what Paul called "this present evil age" in his letter to the Galatians (1:4). We need to remember that this world is not our forever home. We look forward to a "better, that is, a heavenly *country*" (Hebrews 11:16). Jesus told His disciples that the world would "hate" them because it "hated" Him first (John 15:18). The Apostle John wrote "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13). John also wrote:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 1 John 2:15-16

Given that the world hates us and we're not to love the world, you may wonder why we're still here. Jesus addressed that beautifully in His garden prayer before He was arrested:

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. John 17:14-19

Jesus sends us into this present evil world just as the Father sent Him – with a special purpose. Jesus suffered and died for sinners. He rose for sinners. Our purpose is to tell sinners the story of Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection – the Gospel. Our purpose is to make disciples and teach them to observe everything the Lord has commanded us.

As Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
Ephesians 2:8-10

We do not work for our salvation. It's a free gift from God who created us in Christ Jesus for good works. Many people get those confused. Ours is not a gospel of "do," but a Gospel of "done." There is nothing we can "do" to save ourselves. Salvation is by grace through faith, "and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." However, after we're saved we learn that God prepared something long ago for us to do that is very special to Him. God created us in Christ Jesus "for good works." We do not work "for" God's acceptance. We work "from" God's acceptance. Big difference.

Once we understand the basics of the Gospel of Christ and the salvation of our soul, we are ready to live godly in this present world. We will be able to respond properly because we will have the proper understanding about life. Proper belief (orthodoxy) leads to godly living (orthopraxy).

Living Godly

Let's look again at Paul's direction to Titus for what to teach the Christians in Crete:

- Deny ungodliness
- Deny worldly lusts
- Live soberly
- Live righteously
- Live godly in the present age
- Be zealous for good works

Living a godly life begins by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. We cannot love this world and the things in this world. It doesn't mean we hate the people in the world because that's who we're called to serve. What it does mean is that we don't love the world system. We don't become attached to the things of this world. If we do, we won't want to let go of those things. We need to put our hearts and minds into the things of God – into that heavenly country that is far better than what we have here and now. Once we have let go of the things of this world, we are ready to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, this present age. We will then be zealous for good works, which God prepared for us to do when He created us in Christ Jesus.

We invite you to read through the *Living Christian In 'This Present World'* series in the coming months to learn more about how to do that.

The Opposition

We've already seen that this world hates us because it hated Jesus first. Did you know that the world is just one-third of the powerful opposition to our living godly in this present age?

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. Ephesians 2:1-3

Our opposition is our old “friends” – the world, the flesh and the devil. All three were our supposed friends before God saved us. They hate Jesus and they now hate us because we belong to Jesus. However, that doesn't mean they won't try to woo us away from our devotion to Christ. In fact, that's exactly what each one does.

Much of what we read in the apostolic letters concerns the battle we have with the world, the flesh and the devil. If they can't have us any longer, they'll do everything they can to make us ineffective in living for Christ in this present evil age. The world, the flesh and the devil will oppose our living for Christ every hour of every day for the rest of our lives.

That's why Paul wrote these words:

... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— Ephesians 4:14-15

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it

is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Ephesians 5:8-13

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:15-17

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your

feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:10-20

Resources for Christians

The best resource for Christians is the Bible. It is the Word of God and Jesus said we should live “by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). You may already have a favorite Bible for reading and studying. If not, we have written [a guide to Bible translations](#) for your use. You may also want to purchase a good Study Bible. There are many, but I recommend several including *The MacArthur Study Bible, Second Edition* and *The Jeremiah Study Bible*. The *Chronological Study Bible* is also helpful if you are interested in reading the Bible in chronological order. If you have a special interest like apologetics or archaeology, you can also find good study Bibles that include excellent information on your interest (e.g. *Archaeology Study Bible*). A key in selecting a study Bible is to check out the publisher and primary article and note authors carefully. There are many poor study Bibles on the market today.

One of the best books you can read about the subject of spiritual warfare is *The Christian In Complete Armour* by William Gurnall. It is available in a [single cloth-bound edition](#) of 1240 pages or a [three-volume paperback set](#). I highly recommend it as one of the best investments you can make as a Christian.

Chapter Seven

We come now to the final part of our series and what may be the most difficult part for us to read. That's because it's about us.

We've read about the collapse of past civilizations and how God has dealt with Israel and Judah through the millennia, but it's one thing to read about other people going through a societal collapse and read about you and your family and friends going through it.

That's what we're going to look at in this final part. How do we live godly in this present evil age if that means we live through the collapse of the society we've known as home for our entire life?

Warning For America

Though we have readers of the GraceLife Blog from almost 200 countries and territories, the vast majority live in the United States of America. There are many warning signs that the U.S. is headed for some type of societal collapse. Experts in a field of study known as *Collapsology* differ on some specifics, but seem in agreement that every civilization will eventually collapse. Some historical research shows that the average lifespan of a civilization is about 340 years, with the time of decline to fall to be about 250 years. The United States is 245 years old as a Republic, but has a history which goes back many years before July 4, 1776.

That raises the question about how soon we might see America's decline and fall. Some experts believe the United States has been in decline for decades. They point to a variety of indicators to support their belief. Some of those indicators are similar to the ones we looked at from the Book of Revelation in previous parts of this series:

- moral decay
- decline in belief in God
- religious compromise
- idolatry (celebrity worship)
- increase in crime
- government/political corruption
- civil breakdown
- severe economic stress
- overwhelming debt
- racial divide
- breakdown of middle class
- increasing gap between rich and poor
- scarcity of necessary commodities
- increase in disease (e.g. pandemic)
- attack on Christians
- natural calamities

The experts may be right. America may already be in decline, headed toward eventual collapse. Some point to the 1960s as a major trigger point for events that pushed America's decline. I was a teen and young adult in the 60s and remember it as a

time of both great promise and great upheaval and change. Looking at the list above, I can see why some experts would point to the 60s as the beginning of decline in America.

It can also be helpful to look to other nations across the globe to see what they think about America's past and future. [Recent polling](#) in the European Union (EU) found that a majority of Europeans believe America is politically broken and will be overtaken by China as a global power within a decade. Keep in mind that's what our global "friends" think. You might imagine that America's enemies are licking their chops at the thought of a societal collapse in the United States.

You may remember the meeting between top diplomats from China and the United States earlier this year. China's Yang Jiechi told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken that "many people within the United States actually have little confidence in the democracy of the United States." Many in the global community saw that as a warning shot across the bow from China to America. Those kinds of events throughout history have often preceded societal collapse of a nation from an

external source. If a country has external and internal pressures pushing decline, the end may come sooner than later.

Depending on which experts you read, the United States could suffer some kind of societal collapse within this century. Some say it could happen by 2030, some by 2050, some by 2100. Experts disagree whether the coming collapse will happen suddenly or “grindingly,” which would a painful ending to the country that continues over a longer period of time.

Christians Surviving Societal Collapse

Christians are in a unique position during a societal collapse. Christians have been a people of God for two thousand years, surviving many societal collapses around the world. Our uniqueness comes from our connection with the Creator of the universe. We know from God’s Word that all of the civilizations of this world will eventually collapse and that Jesus Christ will rule and reign first from the earthly Jerusalem, then from the New Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation chapters 19 – 21). Christians will rule and

reign with Christ throughout eternity. That's why I said we're in a unique position.

For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. Revelation 5:9-10

However, being in this unique position doesn't mean we won't suffer along with the rest of the people in our country as it goes through collapse. If you've talked with Christians from countries in the world where Christianity is a forbidden religious belief, you know how our brothers and sisters are suffering now. Even as they trust in God and ask for our prayers, they still lament at what persecution has done to them, their families, their churches and their country. It's not an easy time to be a Christian in most countries in the world. As the Apostle Paul wrote – "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Christians are human, which means that the way any societal collapse affects humans will also affect Christians. Christians around the world are suffering greatly. Many have been arrested, tortured and even killed. Many have lost their jobs and homes. Church buildings have been destroyed; pastors arrested and murdered. I personally know some Christians who are living in jungles away from their villages, receiving financial help from Christians living in the United States and other parts of the world. What will happen to them if America collapses? Some of them have told me they are praying that God spares the United States because of the great support Christians here have been for their brothers and sisters around the world.

That's where we must go to our default as Christians. God wants all of His children to **live by faith**. Remember, living as a child of God has never been by sight. If we trust only in what we see, we can easily fall into despair and deep lament. If we trust in the invisible God, in what we cannot see, we have the evidence we need to walk through any situation one step at a time.

God Knows

God knows what we're going through. He knows what we will go through in the future. Nothing surprises the All-Knowing God. Jesus said this to His disciples two millennia ago:

*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.
Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.
Matthew 10:16*

Jesus knew exactly what kind of response His Gospel would receive from the world, the flesh and the devil. Jesus knew Christians would be persecuted. Jesus knew Christians would suffer in this world. What He prayed to His Father was – “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15).

God also knows what we should be doing while we're still alive on the earth. He has gifted His children and given them ministries and spiritual energy to accomplish the goals of those ministries. He's given us work to do and that work is [making](#)

disciples of all nations. Whether things are going well where we live or poorly is not something that should impact whether we do what God has called us to do. In fact, it is often as Christians go through the same tough times as unbelievers that our light shines brightly for the world to see.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Philippians 2:14-16

That seems pretty clear, doesn't it? Stop complaining. Stop disputing. Become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generations, "among whom you shine as lights in the world." We need, we must, let our lights shine in the midst of the crooked and perverse generations where we live.

Those are our marching order. That's how we will survive anything this world throws at us. We must prepare and train to be the people God has called us to be.

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of

the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Love Will Keep Us Together

Let brotherly love continue. Hebrews 13:1

Christian love is what keeps us together – really. God’s love for us, our love for God, our love for family and brothers and sisters in Christ, our love for our neighbors, even love for our enemies. God has given us the key to staying close as a Christian community – love.

It’s biblical, historical and just common sense that Christians need to stay close. The world, the flesh and the devil hate Jesus Christ and us. They are our enemies, not our friends. At all times, but especially in tough times, Christians need to stay close. That has in the past and will in the future get us through any type of societal collapse.

Here's what I mean:

- Stay close to God
- Stay close to worship
- Stay close to prayer
- Stay close to the Word
- Stay close to truth
- Stay close to wisdom
- Stay close to family
- Stay close to fellow Christians
- Stay close to friends
- Stay close to sinners
- Stay close to God's purpose for our lives

Stay close and we'll make it through ... together.

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