

MONEY: ENDS AND TRENDS

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Signs of the Financial End Times – Part III

We continue with the third installment of this topic series in which we examine twelve financial signs of the endtimes. To date, we have examined two indicators: 1, a great heaping up of wealth; and 2, hoarding ... in other words, a widening in the gap between the poor and the rich. These trends are already clearly evident today (*observed in recent decades and centuries*) as I documented in previous columns ... especially so when viewed from a global perspective. Yet, we cannot pinpoint any future events even though we can know that we are living in the very season of the imminency of Christ return.

To recall, in earlier articles, I had introduced the perspective that scripture reveals much information about the monetary and economic condition of the world in the endtimes. To be sure, scripture doesn't use the financial jargon we are familiar with today. All the same, the foreshadowing of these endtime characteristics are very clear.

With that brief introduction, we examine the third sign of the financial endtime — greed and a love of money

A World Swept With Greed

There are numerous Biblical indications that the people of the last days will be smitten with enormous, unsatiated greed ... rampant materialism, in other words. The most direct prophecy comes from Apostle Paul. In 2 Timothy 3:2, he clearly states that in the last days, "*People would be [...] lovers of money [...]*." There are other indications in the Bible that this will be so. Particularly the account of Babylon the Great found in Revelations 18 indicates just how pervasive will be an endtime fixation with trade, wealth and luxury around the world.

It is undoubtedly true that the worship of Mammon —materialism in other words — is today more unified across the world than ever before. This belief system probably has a common expression and language more so than at any other time than at the rise of Tower of Babel. The worship of the god of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the goal of its annual and continuous growth has swept the world. Monetary economics and numbers have become the new common language of this religion; computers and telecommunication systems its megaphones and highly effective conduits. The knowledge of how to stimulate economic growth and to boost output in money terms is considered the new sacred wisdom. Financial markets, investment exchanges and central banks are the new temple sites. This whole belief system is very new ... certainly so in the sense that it is embraced by a greater portion of humanity than ever before. It is a materialistic framework that has really only swept the world in the last several centuries, though its roots may go back to the 17th century. Yet, it is a process that has noticeably accelerated to blinding swiftness since the 1970s. Only in this last sliver of time since the prophetic pronouncement of Apostle Paul quoted earlier — amounting to less than 2% of the time span since his day — has this monetary materialism taken such deep root.

Today, materialistic doctrines of money and economics are finding a foothold in virtually every society in the world. Many former communistic countries (for example, the nations that were part of the economic union under the United Soviet States of

Russia, the USSR) are now worshipping at this altar.¹ The Chinese, too, in the quest for greater prosperity and world significance have bent their communist beliefs to embrace some of the “free market” principles of modern-day capitalism. Even Islamic and Hindu nations — religions that have been slow to embrace materialistic values, are coming to its table inch by inch. In recent years, gradual changes have taken place in their religious interpretations and financial systems that serve to increasingly bring them into line with the new global materialistic order. The pursuit of GDP growth, liberal trade policies, market economics, and monetarism are all policies finding a bigger global following. In many ways, this convergent path to materialism can be seen as a parallel or handmaiden to the ecumenical movement in world religions.

Many Old Testament Parallels

God detests idolatry of material things. We shouldn't forget God's responses whenever Judah and Israel became fixated with the material world whatever the manifestation — greed, a worship of wealth, the pursuit of the luxuries of foreign nations, or foreign gods of prosperity. In time God punished them severely. The Old Testament is laden with accounts of God's admonishments upon Israel and Judah spoken through the prophets. Examining these scriptures, one cannot help but conclude that the beliefs and affections of our world are alarmingly similar to these two sister nations just prior to the punishments sent from God.

The more similar the conditions to our day, the more we may gain a sense of the season of our times and the imminence of Christ's return.

Actually, conditions today may be even worse.

God was very displeased with Israel and Judah, so much so that His wrath followed in the form of a Babylonian conquest. The result was near total economic destruction. The books of the prophets tell us of the conditions that angered God in that age. When reading through these books, I am struck by how much of Israel and Judah's sins had to do with commerce, trade and economics.

Israel and Judah were living in heady economic times, in a fraternizing frenzy on the international political stage. They had taken up with strange and morally perverse ideologies, and were totally preoccupied with prosperity and gain in the material world. Godliness and eternity were far from the popular focus of the public arena.

The following verses perfectly capture the mood of the times: “*When will be the New Moon over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?*” — *skimming the measure boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.*” (Hosea 8:5-6) We see that commerce and making money were foremost in the people's minds. “How to get rich quick!” was a pervasive motive. No doubt, an investment presentation in the middle of the desert on the topic of how to double your money in two weeks would have pulled in big crowds in those days.

In the trample for wealth and gain, noble principles were crushed. Cheating and economic oppression were commonplace. The attitudes of business people were downright carnivorous. “*You have increased the number of your merchants till they are more than the stars of the sky, but like locusts they strip the land and then fly away.*”

¹ Russia is still experiencing severe economic problems. To date, its experiment with capitalism and free market polices has been very painful. Almost a decade into this new shift, the average Russian has still to experience any benefits.

(Nahum 3:16) They would constantly and incessantly push for productivity increases, whether through new technology or deceit. Every scrap was utilized and nothing was left for the poor. Laborers were scrimped of their fair wages, weigh scales were tampered with and labeled consumer products were sold with filler. Of course, all of these practices are evident in today's commerce. For example, hams are artificially impregnated with water to boost their weight, purchasing agents extort the sellers for lower prices. Beef is considered pure as long as it doesn't have more than a certain percentage of filler and chocolate containing 5% vegetable fat can still be called chocolate. Labor is treated as an inanimate commodity. The point of life is to make a profit, to boost the stock prices, to hoard wealth and to stake a secure claim in the material world.

Worship of Material and the Wealthy Transcends All Society

A materialistic society by necessity must be a greedy one. *"From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit."* (Jeremiah 6:13) We see that all of society was infected with burning greed. Gain had become the motive and incentive for all human action. And in the competitive sweepstakes to accrete wealth, gold diggers needed to resort to deceit. After all, if everyone was seeking gain, an advantage was necessary to succeed. One needed to be deceitful in order to win a bigger share of the pie. After a while, deceit became an accepted practice and society was "blessing the greedy." Truth was sacrificed for one shekel more.

Greed was not only limited to the heathen. The deceitful practices driven by greed found a home in the highest institutions of the land including its priesthood. *"With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain."* (Ezekiel 33:31) That doesn't sound very different from today. A significant part of the Church is teaching so-called godly principles for no other reason than to achieve greater success in gaining increase and prosperity. Scripture is studied so as to be able to apply biblical principals to get rich as opposed to the purpose of worshipping and honoring God for who He is. Christians who aren't prosperous (wealthy, both in a relative and materialistic sense) apparently don't have enough faith some seem to suggest. We are to believe that if Christians have been perfected in righteousness, we will accumulate above average wealth in a world that is governed by an ungodly financial system. Of course, that's not to say that Christians can't be wealthy (not withstanding the fact that it's harder to get into heaven that way). It's just impossible that all can be rich. And, it's even less likely that charitable Christians would be among the majority of that number.

When looking at the magazines displayed on the newsstand, it becomes very obvious that wealth and greed are idolized today. Business magazines such as *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Money*, and many others tend to dote on the rich and powerful ad nauseum. Those who have accumulated great wealth are profiled for us to envy. They are scrutinized so as to discover their secrets of success. Most of them love to see themselves quoted, and arrogantly ascribe their success to their acumen, wisdom, and possibly a bit of luck. The implied message is this: Since they're rich, they must be intelligent, noble people. The message? Greed is OK.

In conclusion, reviewing these characteristics evident today, we see the world that is accelerating towards a society that loves its money and blesses greed as a beneficial force for the "good" of the globe. I conclude that the endtime condition of greed is already fulfilled today. And, a study of scripture suggests that today's idolatry with materialism may be even more severe and pervasive than it was in Judah and Israel

prior to their destruction. Yet, we must also allow that though the world may already be commandeered by “*experts in greed*” there is no telling how much greedier and rapacious our economic and financial world may yet become.

Next month, we examine the prophetic role of gold.

Wilfred J. Hahn is a global portfolio manager and publisher of *Eternal Value Review, World Report and Market Monitor*. Contact him at www.eternalvalue.com.