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Trust Bust: Why Future Troubles Are Predictable



“In God We Trust.” It is a well-known slogan that has become an accepted colloquialism almost everywhere ... both in America and in other nations. Also true is that it is generally frowned upon to post this statement in public places or to promote it in government-run schools. Yet, the phrase is stamped on perhaps billions of US coins.

Few people seem to mind. In fact, even atheists hardly object to the possibility that the phrase “In God We Trust” might rub their palms several times daily. Why this apparent indifference? It may suggest a clue to the state of our societies.

What if coins were imprinted with the slogan, “In Money We Trust”? Most people would surely object its admission, were it true, would be much too blatant. For one, our enemy doesn’t use truth and consequences as a tactical device; deceptions and half-truths are his strategy. An inconvenient truth is much more effective when it is wrapped in a lie.

Do we detect a lie?

Which slogan is closer to the truth in our day? An answer is important. As we will see, depending on the answer, Bible prophecy clearly reveals the future that can be expected both for nations and individuals. As it happens, it is a question that meets an easy answer — no opinion necessary, as Scripture and facts themselves provide a clear diagnosis. By observing the symptoms evident in our society today, we can determine whether the coins jingling in people’s pockets are speaking the truth ... or hiding it.

SYMPTOMS THAT BETRAY OUR TRUST

The Bible provides rich object lessons in the matter of trust. If we place our trust in God, then certain outcomes will follow over time. If our trust is in anything other than Jehovah, then another pattern of outcomes can be expected. The prophets of the Bible clearly stated what would be the results if the Hebrews turned from God to trust in anything or anyone besides Jehovah.

Moses admonished the people, “If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today



The conclusion is straightforward: If people forsake their trust in God and place it in their own powers and wealth, for example, destruction will follow. This consequence is repeated later in the same chapter: “But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed” (Deuteronomy 30:17–18).

that you will surely be destroyed[...] for not obeying the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 8:19–20). Other gods can be anything that displaces trust from God. In this case, as revealed two verses before, the Hebrews were warned about self-reliance. If they ever were to say, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me” (verse 17), they would be headed for tribulation. They are reminded that “the LORD your God, [...] who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today” (verse 18).

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But destruction of the people didn’t come right away; after all, God is merciful and slow to anger (Exodus 34:6). His wish is that all might repent (Acts

17:30). He first provided plenty of warnings through his prophets; those warnings were followed by harsh discipline and hardships. This pattern is observable through the entire history of God’s people (then and now). Therefore, we can view these conditions as the symptoms of our spiritual condition.

MORE TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

Other direct consequences resulting from a misplaced trust were slavery, poverty, drought, famine and national embarrassment. Moses prophesied: “Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you” (Deuteronomy 28: 47–48). Expressed in today’s language, Moses was saying, “You will become impoverished, face difficult economic times and come under foreign domination and oppression if you do not place your trust in Jehovah.” Once again, more destruction is named as the ultimate end. But here we clearly see that other trials came first.

There are additional proofs of disobedience and misplaced trust: “The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail. All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you” (Deuteronomy 28:43,45). Again we see that foreign influences begin to dominate the land. Another sign of God’s coming judgment is that the nation will become increasingly indebted to other nations.¹

Later, when the 12 tribes had split into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Jehovah used the same gentle tactics against both nations even though the evil was great. Speaking to Israel, the northern nation that did not have one righteous king, “Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins. You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword. You will plant but not harvest; you will

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press olives but not use the oil on yourselves, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine” (Micah 6:13–16). Why did this happen? Because Israel was a “wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed? Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully” (Micah 6:10–12). Elijah was sent to announce a three-and-a-half year drought during the time of King Ahab, Israel’s most wicked king. Israel certainly wasn’t trusting in God but rather in its material prosperity secured through treaties with Tyre and other foreign intrigues and false gods. We learn

here (and in other texts) that the pursuit of the good life apart from God was carried to the point of violence and oppressive commercial practices.

But again, true to His nature, God didn’t bring destruction right away. Rather, He showed the Israelites that the more they put their trust in foreign powers and material things — the symbols of opulence and maximum consumption — they would experience

the exact opposite. No amount of eating satisfied their hunger. No matter how much they attempted to store up, nothing was saved. They discovered that their trust in “prosperity” economics and materialism came up deceptively empty. The more they pushed and stimulated their nation to create wealth, the emptier their pockets became, the more insatiated their passions, the greater their foreign debts. This inverse relationship should not be surprising: “Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?” (Habakkuk 2:13). “Woe to him who builds a city with blood-

shed and establishes a town by crime!” (verse 12).

God delivered a similar message to Judah: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it” (Haggai 1:6). Why were these words pronounced? Again, the nation’s trust was being placed outside of God and His direction. Rather than being about God’s business they were concerned with their prosperity and creature comforts: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” (Haggai 1:3–4).

UNQUENCHABLE WANTS AND QUESTS

We clearly see in these examples that the more God disallows prosperity, stable nationhood and healthy societies, the more people seek these goals without Him or actually ahead of Him.

If anything, these experiences prove the deceitfulness of other gods, of foreign affairs with unbelieving nations, of human power, and of wealth. On this latter point, the Bible expressly warns, mentioning the “deceitfulness of wealth” (Matthew



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13:22). The writer of the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes confirm the same deceitfulness: “Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (Proverbs 23:5). “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

Judah was severely disappointed when it trusted in the might and prosperity of Egypt: “Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man’s hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him” (2 Kings 18:21–22). Both Shalmaneser and Sennacherib taunted Judah with this truth. Egypt repeatedly disappointed those who put their trust in its ability to deliver them. In this picture can be seen the ultimate result of any misplaced trust in an idol or another apparent deliverer’s power or wealth. In the end, not only is the objective not achieved, an even worse outcome results — a pierced hand or worse.

We can conclude from the above Scriptures that before God brings people and nations to utter destruction because of their misplaced trust, He first allows warnings, inverse conse-

quences and disappointments. Invariably, these warnings take the form of famine, drought, scarcity (all of these being types of economic troubles), societal deterioration, declining national standing and debasement. The storehouses become empty; the cisterns run dry; the wombs are sealed up. All this occurs before the final destruction.

To the extent that these conditions can be observed in any country, we have the symptoms by which we can assess the nature of national trust. If so, what do the symptoms in America today say about trust? Is its object God or Mammon?

THE FACTS PROVING THE TRUST OF OUR DAY

We only need to review a few facts to settle the matter of whether America and other nations are placing their trust in God.

Consider these statistics about trends and developments in the United States. (Similar evidence also applies to additional countries, such as Britain, Canada and others.)

- Real wages (average hourly wages and salaries of production and non-supervisory workers in the private sector, adjusted for inflation) have been falling since 1973. Between 1973 and 1993, the real wage declined by 14 percent, though it since rose by 7

percent from 1993 to 2000, for a net change of minus 8 percent.³

- As recently as 1985, the United States was still a net lender to the rest of the world. Today, this nation’s net foreign debt now amounts to almost 30 percent of the size of the annual US economy.⁴

- Since the mid-1970s, the most fortunate 1 percent of all households have doubled their share of national wealth. They now hold almost 40 percent of all wealth, more than the bottom 90 percent of the population put together. According to the 1998 UN Development Report, the US has the highest concentration of individual wealth, roughly three times that of the second-place nation, Germany.⁵

- In the early 1950s, all households combined had total debt (including mortgages) amounting to less than 25 percent of the annual amount of national income. Today, this figure is now higher than 100 percent ... more than four times as large in relative terms. Total household financial obligations now amount to 18.3 percent of disposable income as compared to 15.8 percent in 1980 when interest rates were substantially higher than today.

- As recently as 1974, the average American household was able to save more than 10 percent of income after paying



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taxes. Today, the average household saves less than 2 percent of after-tax income. Given the wealth skew statistics already cited, this really means that today the vast majority of American families experience negative savings each and every year.⁶

- In 1960, the average US household owed debt on their house amounting to 28 percent of its market value. By the end of 2003, this figure swelled to 45 percent of value, even though the price of housing has risen much faster than household income over the intervening period.⁷

- The average wealth of retirees today is less than in the early 1980s. According to Edward Wolff, an economist at New York University, “today’s near-retirees turn out to be a little poorer, in constant dollars, than the previous generation was when it approached retirement in 1983.” The net worth of the median older household declined by 2.2 percent during the period between 1983 and 2001.

(All the following statistics are from sources published by Elizabeth Warren & Amelia Warren Tyagi, in their excellent book, *The Two Income Trap. Why Middle-Class Mothers & Fathers are Going Broke*.⁸)

- Between 1970 and 2002 there has been a 255 percent increase in the (housing) foreclo-

sure rate (more than tripled in the past 25 years), a 430 percent increase in the bankruptcy rolls and a 570 percent increase in credit card debt, and in recent years a virtual boom in real estate equity loans ... to the point of even surpassing credit debt.

- The modern married mother is now nearly twice as likely to have a full-time job as to stay home. In 1965 only 21 percent of working women were back at their jobs within 6 months of giving birth to their first child. Today, that figure is higher than 70 percent.

- The average two-income family today faces a 1 in 16 chance that in any given year, at least one head of the household will lose his or her job.

- Since 1976, the proportion of women receiving child support has increased 17 percent for divorced mothers and 300 percent for single mothers.

- In America today, by foregoing childbearing, a woman decreases her chances of going bankrupt by 66 percent. Having a child is now the single best predictor that a woman will end up in financial collapse.

- In 1981, the median family filing for bankruptcy owed 80 percent of the total annual income in credit card and other non-mortgage debts. By 2001, that figure had nearly doubled to 150 percent of annual income.

Many more statistics could be listed, but the pattern is clear. These are not trends that indicate the floodgates of heaven are pouring out “so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Malachi 3:10). It is exactly as the Psalmist wrote: “The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods” (Psalm 16:4).

Let’s be frank. Despite the constant propaganda that America is becoming more prosperous and successful, something is going awry. These and other statistics suggest continuing deterioration, enslavement, empty storehouses, purses with holes, declining savings, financial weakness, barrenness, beginning national debasement and the rising influence of the foreign lender. Are these the symbols of trust in God or in other things? In light of the above symptoms and principles found in the Bible, the evidence is overwhelming. These are the exact same and similar conditions prophesied by the Old Testament prophets to occur, and we see them occurring today to nations once considered Christian in character and outlook.

POINTS TO PONDER

What does it all mean? According to the object lessons found in the Bible, it can only mean this: The object of our



trust is not God but in something else. In the case of America, Canada and other nations, it is “In Money We Trust.” Because that is the case, God dictates that the opposite of what people desire should occur — that the reed should splinter and injure our hands as we lean upon it. The richest nations on earth are not exempt; in fact, these countries in particular are the most vulnerable, as they display the most dedicated trust in their cultures of prosperity, gain and commerce.

We would see very different conditions if it were otherwise. God said, “I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit” (Malachi 3:11). But that is only the case if we test Him and “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse” (verse 10) — in other words, put our full trust in Him — and He will “throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (verse 10). While this text is often used as a proof for the so-called “prosperity gospel,” it is no such thing. A trust that expects prosperity for its reward is no trust in God at all but is rather using Him to get to what is really wanted.

In God we trust? Who in our culture today truly understands the meaning of these words? I certainly struggle with the application of this truth. I admit that my first thought at any hint of uncertainty or calamity concerns my bank account and how much savings I have. We may think of our pensions, social security and other

government-provided safety nets, or how much credit line may be secured. Of course, these things can be blessings and can provide needed sustenance and material security if not luxury. Yet, in our increasingly rough-and-tumble economies, a time of rising corruption and financial violence, many are experiencing higher job insecurity, bankruptcies and other difficulties. God can become very real in such times of need and individual despondency. But what few of us in our society today have truly tested God voluntarily? Only a small number risk all for God, putting everything at His disposal as He leads us. How many today test God by bringing everything into the storehouse? Thankfully, there are still some who do. Even during the worst of times in Israel, God still had a remnant, those who did not bow to Baal.

We are not fooled by the contrite phrase stamped on America’s currency. For many nations the exact opposite is true. How do we know that this is the case? Because many of the symptoms that God declares will result from this condition of misplaced trust are occurring today. Crucially, we must remember that these are only the “gentle” symptoms. If people and nations do not hearken to these warnings God is allowing, much worse will occur: further national debasement and then ultimate destruction. Assuredly, the developments leading to these outcomes can already be discerned as well.

The only thing we can do is put our trust in God fully and

strive to understand what this truly means. God will do the rest and lead us accordingly. We can draw comfort from the truths of Scripture: “But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in his unfailling love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine” (Psalm 33:18–19). “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35–36). ^(MC)

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Lord says that if Israel obeys Him, then this will happen at the time of its future restoration. “For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you” (Deuteronomy 15:6).
- 2 Similar references are also found in Isaiah 36:6–8 and Ezekiel 29:6–7.
- 3 Edward N. Wolff. *Recent Trends in Living Standards in the United States*, New York University and Jerome Levy Economic Institute, May 2002.
- 4 US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, NIPA and International Transactions statistics.
- 5 Wealth Patterns. Part 1. <http://www.inequality.org/facts.html>.
- 6 Federal Reserve Board. Statistics taken from Flow of Funds Z1 report, June 2004.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Elizabeth Warren & Amelia Warren Tyagi. *The Two Income Trap, Why Middle-Class Mothers & Fathers are Going Broke*. Basic Books, New York, 2003.