

GOD'S GOVERNMENT ON A BABY'S SHOULDERS

**By Paul Penno Jr.
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North Korean leader Kim Jung Il left the family business in terrible shape. Under his leadership over the past seventeen years, almost 10 percent of the country's population, two million people, died of hunger. North Korea developed nuclear weapons, but its people sank ever deeper into poverty and isolation. His youngest son, Kim Jong Un, educated in Switzerland, was named to succeed him but the country's future is much in doubt.

Here we come to the shortest days of the year (in the European hemisphere) when our ancient pagan forebears began to anticipate the eventual return of spring. Winter was for them a trying season; they couldn't wait until that old sun began to journey north again. When they detected the first observable lengthening of the day and the shortening of the dreary nights, they rejoiced on December 25 with a wild pagan holiday of feasting, merriment, and licentiousness.

It was a time to indulge "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, [which] is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:16). The fathers of the early church, more intent on attracting numbers of converts than fidelity to Christ, were willing to adopt pagan customs into the very life of the church.

One thoughtful writer (Lot, in *The End of the Ancient World*) says of this time: "These hordes of

Roman and later of barbarian pagans, thrust by consent or force into the bosom of the Church, debased Christian feeling. . . . These too rapidly converted masses brought to the Church insufficiently purged hearts in which the seeds of paganism, not entirely dead, thrived once more. Paganism is the weed which continually shoots up anew [in the Church]."

The conflict between superficial Christianity and the deep seated heart-love of paganism will eventually resolve itself into the issue of the mark of the beast versus the seal of God (Rev. 13:11-17; 7:1-4).

Paul laid bare the reality of all our human hearts when he said, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18). Hence it is that often during the Holidays we give in to these worldly lusts; "everybody does it" is our excuse; we stain our conscience, and instead of truly rejoicing over increased light we descend into deeper darkness. The Saviour reminds us, "Take heed. . . . lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life" (Lk. 21:34); the supposedly "Christian Holidays" are precisely that "time." It's a time to pray and to thank God for a Saviour from ourselves!

The prophet Isaiah belongs in a class by himself. Not only has he written the longest book in the Bible (66 chapters), he is our biblical Poet Laureate. And not only that, the Holy Spirit employed him to portray Christ in prophecy in the most intimate way.

We meet Jesus personally in Isaiah. The words the poet chose in chapter 53, for example, are heart-stopping. Of inspired writers of all time, Isaiah stands at the pinnacle.

But it is in his chapters 7 and 9 Isaiah confronts us with a most profound revelation of Jesus as a Baby. Not only is Jesus born of a virgin (yes, Matthew was right to quote “young woman” in 7:14 as “a virgin”), but the Baby’s name is “God with us.” The only Baby in all eternity to be both divine and human is given to “US” for all eternity. “Unto US a child is born.” All you inhabitants of other worlds who have never fallen, stand back; all you holy, sinless angels, stand back; Jesus is *ours*. We fallen, sinful mortals, *we* have Him. The Son of God! And we have Him forever.

Just knowing and believing this kills sin at its roots. (If you are still a slave to sin, you don’t yet believe it.)

But 9:6 details an almost unbelievable truth about this Baby. Even in His infancy, as soon as He was born, the “government” of the universe was laid upon His shoulders—baby shoulders. From His first breath as Mary’s Child He was set to fight in a war—the great controversy with the Enemy, Satan. If as a child, He were to “choose” the “evil” and “refuse” the “good” (as every other baby in all time has done; see 7:15; Rom. 3:23), He would have marred His record and “the government” of the universe would have fallen.

The plan of salvation was laid upon a Child. He couldn’t be allowed to wait until what we say is “the age of accountability.” He was “accountable” from

His first breath. And He wasn’t programmed to do flawlessly: He did so from human choice—“He knew to refuse the evil, and choose the good” (7:15).

Stand back, all human beings: your salvation as well as that of the throne of God was on the shoulders of a Baby.

Says the precious Scripture: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder” (Isa. 9:6, 7). The Father *gave* the Son “unto us,” not merely *lent* Him to us.

How do you think of Christ? As Someone far away in a heaven light-years distant? According to Scripture His nearness to us is clear: (1) His name is Emmanuel, “God with us” (Mt. 1:23), one with the human family, our “elder Brother.” This is not to detract in the least from His divinity, but the full truth is that He has identified with our humanity as well. (2) And that nearness to us is forever; the Gift is *given*, not *lent*. (3) The Son must endure all of our trials and sufferings, our poverty, our pain, our wrestlings with temptations both from without and from within, “yet without sin.” (4) And He must die; the only Person who has ever been born to die (we were born to live!). (5) Not only that, he must die cruelly, unjustly. (6) Not only that, He must die as One hated and rejected—more terrible than mere physical pain. (7) All that, a strong man could possibly endure—but there is one more: He must die under “the curse of God.” He was “made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13; Dt. 21:22, 23).

The death He must die is what the Bible says is the second death.

Christ has conquered Satan, canceled all his curses, taken upon Himself your sin as well as the sins of your ancestors, was “made to be sin for [you] who knew no sin, that [you] might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). We need not suffer under any “curse” unless we choose to. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” How? Because He died on a tree (see Gal. 3:13). His cross was the lightning-rod that attracted the ultimate curse, the total that Satan could invent. Live, then, in the light of that cross!

One wise writer describes it thus: “Christ felt the anguish which the sinner must feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race” (DA 753). That “anguish” is described in Rev. 20:12-15 as the horror the lost will sense in the final irrevocable judgment. Horror worse than any physical pain could be!

The Son “given to us” must endure all that, for He must become “the propitiation for . . . the sins of the whole world,” “made to be sin for us who knew no sin” (1 Jn. 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:21).

But how could “the government [be] upon His shoulder when He is still a Baby who can’t even hold His bottle yet? What kind of responsibility must this “Child” have even in his infancy? How can He be holy and sinless as a child? Must we give Him an “exemption” from our DNA heredity?

Looking again at Isa 9:6, 7: how could “the government” be “upon the shoulder” of a Baby born

in Bethlehem? Every other baby born into this world has followed the fallen Adam in innate selfishness. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” “There is none righteous, no not one,” says Rom 3:23; 10.

If this special Baby also falls into this common land-mine of sin, that will prove that Satan is right in his great campaign against God, for he has always maintained that God is unfair to require human beings to obey His law.

Satan says it’s impossible for anyone to be both human and sinless. If the Bethlehem Baby joins all babies and yields to the constant inner urge to be selfish and throws a temper tantrum, He has lost the contest to Satan. (1) The fate of the world is upon the shoulder of this Child! (2) More than this, the fate of that God must eventually step down from His throne, for Satan would have proved that sin is stronger than God. Big business!

More than that, Christ must demonstrate that His victory over Satan is not merely His own personal triumph; He cannot return to heaven and tell the Father, “I conquered Satan Myself personally, but I wasn’t able to save the world FROM sin; the best I could achieve was to save people IN their sins.” Not good enough!

More than that, the Baby on whose shoulder rests our government must demonstrate that He can save and deliver down-and-outers, drug addicts, alcoholics, addicts. (5) But that is easy—what is *really* difficult is saving the wealthy, ease-loving, pleasure oriented people of Laodicea. It’s always harder to save those who don’t feel any need.

But that's not all: the Bethlehem Baby must do more than merely save people physically so they can ever heaven; He must reconcile their alienated hearts to God. And that is the most difficult task that God has ever had in all eternity. He can't force them.

But that's not all: Christ must woo the heart of a Bride-to-be. If any man has ever faced the challenge of winning the heart of a woman so she is willing to say "I do" forever, perhaps he can begin to appreciate the challenge Christ faces regarding His corporate church, "the Lamb's wife"-to-be, who thus far in sacred history has not "made herself ready" for "the marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-8). If Jesus at last must fail #7, all His other triumphs are nothing. What can He do?

That divine cry of dereliction on Christ's cross, "My God. Why have You forsaken Me?" is the world's moment of truth. In becoming the Son of man, the Son of God became our second Adam, the new corporate Head of the human race. When the first Adam sinned in Eden, "we" sinned in him, because each of us is "adam"—that is our name. Each of us is his fallen descendant; he could do nothing other than pass on to us his fallen, sinful nature in alienation from his Creator, destined to "perish" eternally.

From Christ's birth in Bethlehem, He lived in the sunshine of oneness with God. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government [of the world and of the universe] shall be upon His shoulder" (Isa. 9:6, KJV). But He took on His sinless nature our sinful nature that He might meet the

awful problem of sin in our flesh, sin's last lair; God sent Him "unto us" "in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, [He] condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). As our second Adam, Christ won the awful battle.

But now as Head of the human race He enters into the darkness of hell on His cross, dying our death, doing what in John 3:16 He says He doesn't want us to do—He tastes what it means to "perish." It's terrible beyond any words. We can't grasp it unless we understand Galatians 3:13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written [quoting Moses], Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Deut. 21:22, 23, KJV). Thus He was "made to be sin for us who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). For you personally, intimately—not only instead of you but as you—He dies your second death. Now in thanks what will you do for Him?

Roaring Camp was the meanest, toughest Mining Town in all the West. There were more murders and thefts than any other place around. Roaring Camp was inhabited entirely by men ... except for one woman who made her living in the only way she knew how. Her name was Cherokee Sal.

Eventually, Cherokee Sal became pregnant and gave birth to baby. She died in childbirth, and no one knew who the father might be. The men put the baby girl in a box with some old rags under her. Somehow that just didn't seem right, so one of the men rode 80 miles to buy a Rosewood Cradle. When they put the rags and the baby in the beautiful new cradle, the rags just didn't look right.

So another man rode to Sacramento and purchased some silk and lacy blankets. They men lined the Rosewood Cradle with silk and tucked the new blanket around the little baby girl. But then someone noticed that the floor under the cradle looked dirty.

The next thing you knew, a few of those big, tough men got down on their hands and knees and scrubbed the floor until it was spotless. Of course, then the walls and the ceiling ... and the dirty windows looked awful. So they washed down the walls and the ceiling, and they even hung some clean white curtains on the windows.

Things were beginning to look a lot better. But they soon realized they had to give up their carousing and fighting. After all, the baby needed a lot of sleep, and babies can't sleep during a brawl. Besides all that, the baby didn't like angry voices or frowning faces. So the men started smiling and talking in pleasant, cheerful tones. And, since babies shouldn't be left alone, they set the cradle by the entrance of the Mine and one of the men stayed next to her while the others worked.

Then somebody noticed how ugly the mine entrance was. So they planted some flowers and made a small garden near the cradle. And as they worked, the men looked for shiny little stones that they could show to the baby and watch her gurgle and coo. But when they held the stones down near her, they saw that their hands looked black and dirty. And they didn't want to scare the little baby with their scraggly hair and wild beards. Pretty soon

the general store sold out of soap and shaving gear.

The baby changed everything. And that story gives a small picture of the way the Son of God can transform our lives. Has the Bethlehem Baby changed your life?

Has anyone sent a card to Jesus? We've sent them to each other, perhaps hundreds of them. Has anyone wished Jesus a happy day?

You say, "How foolish! You can't send cards to Jesus! No postal service reaches Him."

We may send Him a card. Most of the time cards seldom mean very much, but occasionally they are filled with a lot of news updating on the goings-on in the family that you haven't heard throughout the year. But isn't it time we got around to wishing Jesus joy by thinking of Him and sympathizing with His feelings.

It's not fair to be wishing everybody else joy, and not to think about Him—i.e., about His feelings. I'm not talking about putting Christ back into this time of year, as so many do these days. Christ has feelings, like we do. Since, supposedly, this is a time to remember His birth into the world, isn't it right and proper to think of Him and what would make Him happy.

One of the most precious expressions in the Bible is the backward prayer, "Master, you eat." John 4:31. Almost all the prayers the Lord receives in His communications center are the opposite: "Master, give us something to eat!" God is thought of as mankind's great Santa Claus. "Thanks, Lord, for what You gave me yesterday. Now, for today I need

this and that. And thanks again for keeping me in mind! Amen.”

The Master rarely hears a prayer like this one—a prayer in reverse gear: “Master, *You* eat, because we can sense that *You* are hungry. *You’ve* had a long, hard journey today, and it’s hot and dusty. Look, we’ve been to the shops in town and bought bread, butter, milk, raisins, figs, almonds—a tasty safari feast. Master, we’ve been thinking about *You*, and we understand how *You* feel. We know it’s no fun to be tired and hungry. *Master, You eat!*”

How does Jesus feel? God is the great Gift Giver to many people. He gives you anything He feels like, if you’ve been a good boy or a good girl. Most prayers are quite like these children’s letters asking for a whole list of things.

Have you thought of a gift for Christ? I don’t mean a dollar on the tree, but “Master, eat.” What did He reply? “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34).

I asked a certain person this week what he would like most for—“joy of seeing a certain loved one turn to Christ.” Jesus would like that too. The joy of seeing all turn to salvation.

During the dark days of the Civil War, the President suffered pain such as no other President before or since. Lincoln’s nature was sensitive, tender. He extended kindness to others, fairness, sympathy, generosity. His soul was tortured by the passions, hatred, and agony of the war. He loved the South, as he loved the North. During the summer of 1864 Lincoln’s fortunes were at their lowest ebb. The Nation was sick of war and

bloodshed. The radical elements in North and South wanted peace at any price, but Lincoln knew if slavery was not extinguished, all would be in vain. The public tide turned against Lincoln. He had given his strength, his life for the nation which now abhorred him. The newspapers now called him a gorilla because of his appearance. His party was facing certain defeat. Even Lincoln expected defeat at the polls. Clouds of suspicion and resentment arose against the White House over the mismanagement of the government and the war. “Get him out!” Here was a brave, good man, misunderstood and unappreciated.

What would Lincoln want for Christmas in 1864? Victory. The lifting of the cloud from his administration?

There is cloud of suspicion against the government of God. The world has dark misapprehension about Him. Millions are persuaded that God has mismanaged the civil war of the universe. One third of the angels, and a vast majority of earth’s inhabitants are at war with God, at enmity against Him. They would vote Him out of office if they had the power.

The heavenly sanctuary is something like the White House in America with the seat of God’s government in the great controversy with Satan and sin. Until the sin problem is solved, until civil war caused by sin is ended, and the world and the universe reconciled, the great heart of God cannot find rest.

“Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (Daniel 8:14).

Christ wants to come again and bring an end to sin. But He cannot force His people. We talk about the nearness of the end with the “signs” all around us of this and that. But COL 63 says, “When character of Christ is perfectly reproduced in His people then He will come to claim them as His own.” That’s all that stands between us and the second advent. Christ wants to come. He will come anytime we really want Him to.