

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE: GOD'S FEAR NOTS OF CHRISTMAS

Part II: God's "Fear Not" For Religious Problems

(Luke 1:5-20)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

This Christmas Season, a vast need exists for God's intervention to address religious problems:

(1) Philosophers "Nietzsche and Kierkegaard believed a person could not know truth, that we should embrace the mysticism of the world and reject absolutes. We can see this influence . . . on . . . many of America's churches, seminaries, and Christian colleges." (Brannon Howse, Religious Trojan Horse, 2012, p. 21) Indeed, many times have we heard even fellow evangelicals claim that we are arrogant if we can say we know the true interpretation of a certain passage in Scripture, and that makes us tempted to wonder if we sin by being **sure** that we know the truth!

(2) Paul in Colossians 3:5b NIV called "greed" or "covetousness" (KJV, ESV) the sin of "idolatry," what is the religion of materialism, and it is a big threat to many people today: (a) A Church member recently told me of his concern that the "Biden administration . . . is harnessing U. S. Labor Department control over employer investment management to help steer workers' hard-earned money in 401(k)s and small private pensions through the risky waters of investing with the environment in mind. It's a precarious balancing act that pits individual investment control and a free-market economy against a common interest in resilient retirement income that protects already-strained social safety net programs." ("Why Your 401(k) Is Central to Biden's Climate Agenda: Explained," February 18, 2022; news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/) So, if we have a 401(k) or a small private pension, our employer is being directed by the government in the religion of greed to invest some of our retirement investments in risky climate agenda ventures! (b) Also, the U. N. plan for global control calls for "a mixture of socialism and capitalism in which socialism has the firm upper hand. The system would allow just enough capitalism to keep the middle class alive because the middle class is the milk cow of the arrangement. The global socialists want to milk the cow, give the cream to the elite, then give the rest to the underclass to keep voting the progressive politicians back into office . . . (T)he system is already at work here in the United States." (Brannon Howse, The Coming Religious Reich, 2015, p. 344) Thus, motivated by the religion of greed, global socialist elites who hold to Marxism's love of covetousness and stealing want to make economic slaves out of the middle class for the material enrichment of the elites themselves!

Need: *So, we ask, "What hope is there for troubling religious problems that we face this Christmas?!"*

- I. When the angel Gabriel appeared to the priest Zacharias in the temple to announce the birth of John the Baptist as the Forerunner of the Messiah Jesus, Zacharias experienced a religious panic, Luke 1:5-12:**
 - A. The angel Gabriel's sudden appearance by the altar of incense in the Holy Place caused Zacharias to be "unsettled; troubled" (*tarasso*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 199; William D. Mounce, The Analyt. Lex. to the Grk. N. T., 1993, p. 220, 444) so that fear "fell upon" (*epiipto*, Ibid., p. 208) him, Luke 1:5-12.
 - B. Zacharias' panic was a dread of a religious nature caused by the temple setting coupled with Israel's history:
 1. ". . . (T)here was always uneasiness among the people as any mortal approached the immediate presence of God, and every delay in his return seemed ominous (Jer. Yoma 42c)" for fear that he might have entered God's presence unrighteously and had either been slain like Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1-2 or that he had acquired leprosy like king Uzziah did when he wrongly ministered at the altar of incense! (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:16-21; Alfred Edersheim, The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah, 2004, p. 97)
 2. Also, the elderly couple Zacharias and Elizabeth were childless, what in the dispensation of the Mosaic Law usually indicated a lack of God's blessing for violating the Law (Deuteronomy 28:1-4, 15-18).
 3. Accordingly, Zacharias was startled and panicked when the angel Gabriel suddenly appeared before him as he was ministering at the altar of incense where God had once struck Judah's king Uzziah with leprosy!
- II. However, Gabriel told Zacharias to "Fear not," that his prayer for his wife to bear a son would be answered, and that this son would be the Forerunner of the Messiah, Luke 1:13-17.**
- III. Zacharias failed to believe Gabriel's message because he and his wife were elderly, so the angel Gabriel announced that in discipline, Zacharias would be unable to speak until his son's birth, Luke 1:18-20.**
- IV. Indeed, Zacharias' fear and unbelief were inexcusable in view of the insight supplied by God's Word:**
 - A. It was a once-in-a-lifetime privilege for a priest to minister at the altar of incense, and it came by the drawing of lots, what Proverbs 16:33 stated was God's doing in that day, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Lk. 1:9.
 - B. Also, there was the Biblical precedent for God's giving an elderly couple a child in the case of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:9-14; 21:1-3), so Zacharias had no Biblical reason for doubting the message of God's angel.

- C. The fact that God had kept Zacharias from the privilege of being selected by lot to offer the incense until old age circumstantially indicated that God was about to bless him in his old age, what should have prepared him to believe the Angel Gabriel's message that his long-time prayer request to have a son would be answered!
- D. God had not kept Abraham and Sarah childless until old age due to their sin, but to exhibit the power of God in superiority to the impotency of the fertility deities that abounded in Abraham's era. Zacharias should not have questioned the relative righteousness of himself and his wife since they were godly Hebrews, Luke 1:5-6.

Lesson: *Though Zacharias was terrified with religious dread at the appearance of the Angel Gabriel and he failed to believe Gabriel's announcement of the birth of Messiah's forerunner, had he followed Scripture's guidance on the circumstances he then faced, he would have rejoiced and believed God's messenger, the Angel Gabriel.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) If we face any type of religious fear, may we learn from the case of Zacharias to heed Scripture's guidance, what will exchange our fear for joy and faith in the Lord.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply Scripture's directives and guidance to the religious issues in our introduction that cause fear:

(1) Regarding whether we can expect to know for sure the correct interpretation of any Bible passage without fearing that we are guilty of pride for having that assurance, (a) Jesus in John 8:31-32 ESV assured us: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." There is no sin in being assured of knowing the truth! (b) Also, in exposing the errant belief of the Sadducees in Mark 12:18-27, Jesus used the grammatical, historical and literary contexts of Scripture to prove His point, exemplifying how we should correctly interpret Scripture. (c) Likewise, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy's Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, under its Articles of Affirmation and Denial, Article XVIII, stated, "We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship."

(2) Regarding the threat of the religion of greed that is behind the Biden Administration's directing employers to steer some of the investment moneys in their employees' 401(k)s and in small private pensions into risky climate agenda ventures, and the threat of the religion of greed that leads progressive elitists to try to make economic slaves of the middle class by taxing them for the benefits of the elitists by their application of Marxist ideology, (a) we have God's assurance that (i) He will financially help us regardless what rulers do if we keep ourselves free of the sin of greed (Hebrews 13:5-6) and (ii) work independently to maintain a good testimony and thus also not be in any material need (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). (b) Furthermore, God illustrates **how** we can work effectively for a livelihood **under negative restrictions** [like heavy taxation; government meddling in our 401(k) investments] in Proverbs 6:6-8 (as follows): (i) The ant faces the restriction of having no commander to direct it, no overseer to inspect its work and no ruler to spur it to act, direct, or organize it to provide for its livelihood, but it still initiates the effort it needs to meet its livelihood needs, Proverbs 6:6-7. (**Bible Know. Com., O. T.**, p. 916) God thus wants us to take the initiative to self-educate, evaluate and meet our livelihood needs regardless if taxes rise and the government meddles with our 401(k) investments and no government official takes adequate responsible action to act, direct, and organize toward preserving our financial wellbeing! (ii) Also, the ant must survive regardless of its physical limitation of having only warm weather months to gather its yearly food, for many ants freeze in the winter (**Compton's Ency.**, 1973, vol. Two, p. 437) and (iii) the ant's tiny size limits the amount of food it can carry in one trip. (iv) However, Proverbs 6:8 ESV claims the ant "prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest." (+) Being small and having a limited time window to work just in warm months, the ant must work relentlessly for long hours per day to gather enough food for its yearly needs! Applied to us who must build a nest egg amid rising taxes and the government's unedifying meddling with our 401(k) investments, we (+) can transfer an old 401(k) over to an Individual Retirement Account or a tax-advantaged Roth IRA that we can control in investing, or (+) set up such a private account in addition to our 401(k). (+) To fund it all, we can (-) budget, (-) reduce wasteful spending, (-) take side jobs, (-) save, (-) add more income streams [investing in rental properties, selling craft items we make, pet sitting, etc.], (-) delay retirement and/or (-) work in retirement to increase our income level so as to address our livelihood needs. The point is that we should **constantly** take the **initiative** to be **industrious** like the ant to overcome restrictions we face to earning a living!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. If we face religious fear, may we heed Scripture to exchange our fear for joy and faith in the Lord.