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Just ask the older folks—most of them will say the same thing: "Things ain't the way they used to be!" Times have changed and so has society. Many older folks wish we could go back the "good ol' life" we used to have — where, for many people, honesty, decency, and respect were an everyday way of life. So what happened to that "good ol' life?" Prophecy sheds some light on the matter.

### **Prophecy Reveals the Cause**

The book of Daniel explains what happened to the "good ol' life," as well as offering other amazing insights. One insight from the Prophet Daniel is that while in Babylonian captivity, he identified himself with the guilt of the sins of

Israel.<sup>1</sup> By this admission, he was saying, "We are all in this together, and we all hold a certain amount of responsibility in the matter." His prayer is one of mediation. Daniel sets an example for us, who are spiritual Israelites (Christians) in Babylonian captivity (the world) today.

In chapter two, King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream — a dream about nations that rise as superpowers and then fall. Simply put, these nations lost that "good ol' life." This prophecy is about change—change that eventually causes the downfall of entire nations. God opens to Daniel the interpretation of the king's dream, revealing the fate of four superpowers — Babylon; Medo-Persia; Greece; and Rome. While there is a definite connecting link between the demise of each of these nations, I would like to focus on the Roman Empire. This is the tale of two nations—Rome and the United States.

### **A Theory**

In a 1976 essay, *The Fate of Empires*, the famous general, Sir John Glubb<sup>2</sup>, brings out the fact that historically an empire lasts some 250 years before decadency sets in and rapidly erodes the very fabric of society.

What exactly is decadence? The dictionary states: "A process, condition, or period of deterioration or decline; decay."<sup>3</sup>



What are the causes of the decadence at the heart of the demise of great nations?

### **When Nations Die**

In his book, *When Nations Die*, Jim Nelson Black identifies ten factors that have caused the downfall of great civilizations. Mr. Black observes that in some cultures as few as three or four of these symptoms of social, cultural, and moral decline were enough to bring a society to the point of collapse:

1. Increase in lawlessness
2. Loss of economic discipline
3. Rising bureaucracy
4. Decline in education
5. Weakening of cultural foundations
6. Loss of respect for traditions
7. Increase in materialism
8. Rise in immorality
9. Decay of religious belief
10. Devaluing of human life



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### **As Seen in Rome**

The above list were the factors that ate away the fabric of Roman society.

But what does Rome have to do with us today? A lot. The rise and fall of the Roman Empire stands out to us in a startling manner, as there are many similarities between our two nations. Rome was a Republic; America is (was?) a Republic. In fact, many forms of our government come from the Roman structure. Rome was a world superpower, reaching as far north as England, to the south in Northern Africa and much of the Middle East; America is a superpower. Rome led the advance on certain technologies and architecture; America has done the same.

It was said of the early Romans: "A man was pious who gave the gods their due through worship and sacrifice, who honored his father and mother, and indeed all his ancestors, who stood by his friends, who was ready to die if need be for his country. A pious man submitted himself to things sacred, and believed unflinchingly that it was better to perish than to fail in his sacred duties." This sounds almost like America of 150 years ago, except that we had Christian rather than pagan roots. A society that is held together by such a cementing of beliefs would, and has, offered strong resistance to forces of disintegration.

Polybius, a well-known Greek historian, feared that Rome's success would eventually destroy the Roman character. "Absolute power corrupts absolutely," as the old saying goes. He predicted that arrogance and luxury would infect the Roman people, and then, "being inflamed with rage, and following only the dictates of their passions, they will no longer submit to any control," and society would destroy itself. He remembered all too well what had happened in the closing years of the Grecian Empire, as decadency had played a major factor in causing it to fall into the hands of the Romans.

### **What Happened to Rome?**

Polybius's fears became reality. Here is what happened: The nation slowly declined as wealth, power, and passion took first place in the Roman heart. Once again, society became preoccupied with sensuality. Moral decadence set in, involving adultery and homosexuality, thus a breakdown of the Roman family. Eventually Roman citizens lost interest in piety and dignity and focused on day-to-day "living" and instant gratification. Does this have a familiar ring to it?

What process played an important role in propagating the spread of moral decay? People became addicted to the amphitheater to watch — violence, nudity and sports. Citizens worshipped the gladiators who fought in these arenas. Consequently, the Romans lost respect for human life. Originally punishable by death, abortion became common, even encouraged. Violence became epidemic. Gang violence was rampant in the large cities.

Polybius, being a Greek, knew what had happened to his own nation. They, too, began with a high level of morality, but eventually Greek society began to falter and drift. Materialism, sexual immorality, and self-absorption took over Grecian hearts. Homosexuality was glorified.

The stage and arts, once the hallmark of the noble Greek character, became lewd and violent.

Lacking focus and a consensus of values, the once-great culture succumbed to the Roman army.

Interestingly, as Rome became steeped in decadency, she started being attacked mainly, but not solely, by nomadic, uncivilized tribes from the North — the Heruli, the Ostrogoths, and the Vandals. These tribes were later destroyed by Papal Rome, as they were resistant to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

These details should not elude us, as the similarities with what is now happening in the US since 9/11 makes for even more striking comparisons. These uncivilized tribes did not possess stinger missiles, grenade launchers, or vast amounts of oil wealth. Yet they were mainly responsible for Pagan Rome's demise. Here is what happened:

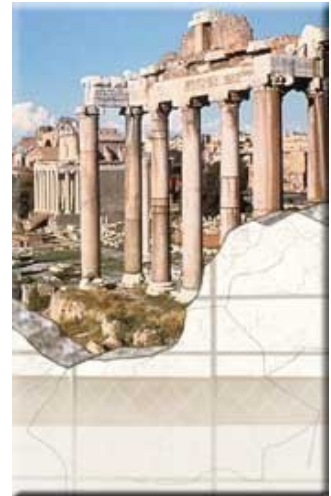
As Rome's decadency increased, judgment calls on national security were not handled wisely. The military was spread too thin, trying to hold the decaying Empire together. Attacks became more frequent from outside forces, which caused a shift of power inside the country — from that of a pagan government to a Christian ecclesiastical government as Constantine tried to win the favor of the growing Christian element. As ancient Rome faced collapse, it gave way for the rise of the Papacy. While the Empire fell, strangely enough, the religious element, namely the Roman Catholic hierarchy, still had an ecclesiastic control over nations and kings of Europe, and that, all the way up to 1798!

### **A Comparison!**

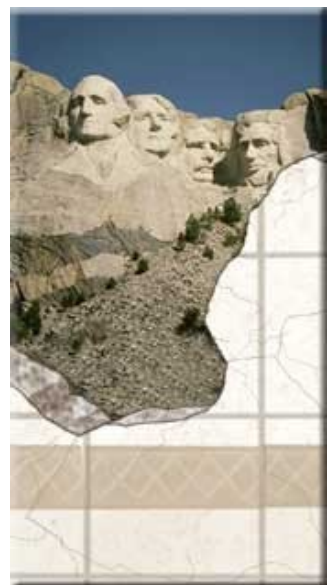
The question is: Has America come to a similar point as Rome before it fell? Let's again examine the list in Jim Nelson Black's book, *When Nations Die*. I think you will agree that America is displaying all ten symptoms at the same time!

1. Increase in lawlessness
2. Loss of economic discipline
3. Rising bureaucracy
4. Decline in education
5. Weakening of cultural foundations
6. Loss of respect for traditions
7. Increase in materialism
8. Rise in immorality
9. Decay of religious belief
10. Devaluing of human life

We do not need to cover all of these in detail, as many are obvious! We



*People became addicted to the amphitheater to watch — violence, nudity and sports*



*Nothing seems to shock us any more — from snipers to corporate theft*



know about crime in the US — just watch the news. Nothing seems to shock us any more — from snipers to corporate theft (item 1).

Also, we need not say much about the rise in bureaucracy (item 3). Even though there is much talk about reducing the size of government, it continues to grow year after year, and is more involved in our personal lives than ever before, especially after 9/11.

It is also obvious that items 5 and 6 are relevant. Recently there has been a downplaying of generally accepted traditions, such as Christmas in public schools, and nativity displays on government properties. Various groups are allowing cultural issues to divide us rather than pulling us together in unity as "Americans," with respect and tolerance for the honest views of others. We do not have the space to go into detail about these matters, yet we all know they exist.



### **Materialism and Debt**

In items 2 and 7, we find that one of the leading causes of divorce in America is due to the lack of financial discipline. Credit card and other forms of personal debt have reached all-time highs, as we live in the "we want it now" generation. Most families are plagued with enormous debts. For instance, in 1999, 74% of US households carried debt liabilities amounting to \$6.48 trillion — an average of \$25,000 per person!

No doubt about it, Americans are increasingly materialistic. Advertisements bombard us from every direction, advancing that true happiness comes from possessing the latest and greatest product — anything from a new car, home, or a zillion toys and gadgets, to the latest fashions. This thirst for material possessions contributes to our loss of economic discipline.

There is incredible pressure placed on everyone to acquire things we can't really afford. It destroys the family by creating a sense of dissatisfaction because of wants, or by the stress of spending more than can be afforded. We are obsessed with "getting." Such was the case in Rome — people were absorbed in their pursuit of making and spending money.

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### **Who Is Teaching Whom?**

Item 4 is very valid, as our standard of education is steadily on the decline. In many countries, getting a good education is a virtue in the minds of both youth and parents. I hope I do not sound overly negative, and I know we need to be careful of sweeping generalizations, but, who are the role models in the minds of many American youth today? Here are a few: Britney Spears, Rosalyn Sanchez, Nicole Kidman, Julia Roberts, Tom Cruise — the "stars" found among the ever changing list of musical performers and actors.

While children in other countries are being educated in higher learning — and some for warfare — many of our youth are being educated in parties, music, and watching the latest release at the box office! This also explains the rampant use of drugs and teen pregnancies plaguing our country. When I talk with teachers at our Adventist schools, they say the greatest problem they contend with is apathy. It is hard to motivate students that have "whatever" attitudes.

### **Immorality and the Media**

Items 8 and 9 on Mr. Black's "black list" mention the rise in immorality and the decay of religious belief. I fear for my children anytime we are at a place where cable or satellite TV are available. I have flipped through the stations, only to find scenes that I would never want my 15-year-old son or 13-year-old daughter to ever see, let alone watch myself. Yet some people let their children have free run of the TV and all it has to offer. As with the Romans and Greeks of old, the TV has become the modern day theater and amphitheater. Hollywood is on the top of the list for causing the decadency of our country.

The porn industry's gross revenues, through the internet, TV, videos, etc., have gone from 8 billion in 1996 to 12 billion in the year 2003. And let's face it — the advertisers all admit that "sex sells."

What would have happened a century ago if a gay and lesbian demonstration appeared in the streets of one of our major cities? I am sure some folks with shotguns would have run them off! (Intolerance, some may say, or just reactionary shock?!) Now these "alternative lifestyles" are generally accepted and permeate all of society, especially the media. Any negative comments are called "homophobic" and are "gay bashing." The gay movement is now being equated with the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Hardly comparable! Gay marriages? Gay pastors and priests? How far will this go?



*As with the Romans and Greeks of old, the TV has become the modern day theater and amphitheater*

The philosophy of the Humanist Crowley, "Do what thou wilt," seems to have taken deep root in our society, both sexually as well as religiously. As a result, many people have become numb to religion and its relevance. It astounds me that many young people I meet know nothing about the Bible and God. Through the media the sacred is looked upon in jest. I have seen a fair share of movies over the years while flying internationally on airplanes. Almost all have some scene mocking God, clergy, religious people, or taking God's name in vain. Also there are the rampant teachings of spiritualism, New Age and even the occult.

We live in a strange age where Christians defend books and movies such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, stating they are just harmless allegories! How blind some people are about blatant witchcraft being taught to children and teens (not to mention many adult followers.) The excusing of these materials by Christian readers and viewers not only shows their ignorance but testifies of our decadence! (Before becoming a Christian, I was steeped in occult books and teachings, so I am not ignorant on these matters.)

2 Corinthians 3:18 brings out the concept that by beholding we become changed. It is by familiarity with sin that it becomes less sinful.

### **No More Hot Peppers**

"No hot peppers or chilies, please," we kindly reminded our waiter, while ordering some food in a small dingy restaurant in South India.

Our order came served on banana leaves. After about five good-sized bites, the perspiration started dripping off our noses! I called the waiter over.

"We asked you not to put any peppers or chilies in our food."

"Sorry sir! No chilies or peppers," the waiter said, talking so fast he could barely be understood. "Only one for flavor."

Indians cannot bear the thought of not having at least one chili in their food, as they are so accustomed to it. As for us, who are used to more bland food, even the "one chili for flavor" set our

heads on fire!

There is a fundamental truth to this matter — plain food for a person used to hot food seems tasteless. So it is spiritually. Most people are taking in a lot of things that stimulate and excite. It is all too easy to sit back, slip into an alpha state of consciousness and enjoy whatever is on the TV. Studying the Bible or exercising the mind to meditate on spiritual matters requires a lot more effort and is bland in comparison.

Decadency creates apathy. "Boring" or "Whatever" are words that are often heard from young people when it comes to family worship, church, and spiritual matters. Why? Because they have become used to the fast pace of TV and other entertainment. How can family worship compete with the likes of these new hi-tech graphic animations seen on the X-Box or PlayStation II, or the science fiction sagas, murder mysteries, or other latest releases at the movie theater? How can reading/studying the Word of God or books like *The Desire of Ages* or *The Great Controversy* compete with the likes of Hollywood? Many Christians would not go to the bar or allow their children to cuss, smoke or drink, or wish their children to associate with these types of things, yet they bring these very things into their homes via the TV, cable, satellite dish or rented movies.



## An Apathetic Dilemma!

*How can the church compete with 60 to 100 satellite channels on the television, let alone sporting events, car shows, shopping with friends, eating out, etc.?*

Why is it so difficult to get people to come out to meetings at the church? Why is evangelism faltering in the "good old USA?" Why is it hard to get people to commit to the mission of the church? It can be summed up in one word — decadence. Decadence creates apathy, a desire for self-gratification — for something new and stimulating. How can the church compete with 60 to 100 satellite channels on the television, let alone sporting events, car

shows, shopping with friends, eating out, etc.?

*There is a fundamental truth to this matter — plain food for a person used to hot food seems tasteless. So it is spiritually.*

And what is it that so often divides churches and causes "Christians" to argue among themselves? Is it not over worship style and church standards? Should our focus in worship be entertainment based or biblically expository based?

Is it no wonder that the types of church services that pack people in are loaded with entertainment style worship? Benny Hinn is a good example. He has an exciting show — a rock concert, a lot of action-packed healing and prophesying, all in one! No wonder, despite many false prophecies made by Hinn, he still packs auditoriums around America.

Is it best to give the people what they want? Or is it better to give them what they need? I am not justifying dead church services, but nor should we give license to catering to the entertainment hungry elements of society. What is really needed is a deep searching of the heart — conversion, repentance, and reformation — all of which can only be found in a true, bonded relationship with Jesus Christ. The simplicity of the Word needs to be preached. I have a hard time seeing the meek and lowly Jesus parading around on stage with a headset on, screaming some mantra-type song, and putting on a "grand show" for an audience. Nor do I see Him leading out in a funeral styled worship service!

Worldly entertainment is just what the dictionary says:

"1: the act of entertaining; 2: Diversion or amusement. (The archaic form of 'amuse' means 'To delude or deceive.')"<sup>4</sup> Could it be that in our indifference we are being self-deceived?

Let's be honest. Decadency and its curse affect all of us more than we want to admit. We are

surrounded by it. We are bombarded with it. We struggle with it in our homes and churches. The words of Jesus come burning home, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil." John 17:15. It takes effort to change our tastes from the superficial vanities of this life to more rewarding character building elements for the life to come, but it is worth it.

## The Backlash

As stated earlier in this article, as Rome fell into decadence, it began to be attacked by nomadic, uncivilized tribes from the North. These tribes caused the Romans much heartache, thus giving way to the change of Pagan Rome to Papal Rome. Why? It was an attempt of Constantine to try to heal his faltering nation. He became a Christian for political means, and then legalized Christianity in hopes of bringing Rome back to its prominence as a world power. Rome's national power subsided, but its ecclesiastical power grew.

I will strongly suggest that we are quickly coming full circle. This is the tale of two nations — Rome and the United States. Roving, nomadic terrorist groups are attacking us. These menacing groups could be the catalyst to change this pluralistic society around to a Christian nation again. That sounds good, right? In fact, much of the content of this article is being preached about by leading Evangelical Christians. They agree — America is on the downhill side of decadence. Their answer? To bring this country back to God and what it stood for 200 year ago. Sounds good! But wait. What happened with Rome? It became the Papacy, and thus an intolerant religious power. And what of us? Could a religious backlash cause religious intolerance here in our country? Time will surely tell.

[1](#) See Dan. 9:3-6

[2](#) Sir John Glubb (1897- 1986) was a legendary British commander of the old Trans-Jordan and Arab nations and was knighted by the Queen of England. Ironically, he was stationed in Baghdad for several years.

[3](#) *The American Heritage Dictionary.*

[4](#) *The American Heritage Dictionary.*



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