THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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THE VIOLENT ARE TAKING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN BY FORCE?

Steven Wright

Think of a Sheepfold brimming with fat sheep, full of feed and of pride. They have all they need and more. They have become so satisfied, in fact, that they nomuch prefer to speak of their food in their own terms than even to actually eat the food any longer. Don't try to tell them who The Shepherd (God) favors, for He has been providing them with the food (His Word) for generation upon generation. These are the sheep inside the fold. And the fold has become their fortress. A fortress that now they cannot escape, for the leaders among them (The Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees) over the eons, have been piling the stones and twigs, dirt and branches of their own tangled ideas at the entrance of the fold so that the gate is now inoperable and their fortress is impenetrable. And they like it that way! Outside of the fold, there are other sheep, bedraggled, gaunt, and starving. Their plaintive cries as they yearn for the food stashed inside the fold, ever increasing in intensity as their numbers and their need grow. The sheep inside the fold say to those outside, *"You're baaad!" "Go! Get away from here!" "You can't have any of this food!" "It's only for us!"*

Here comes the Breaker. The Breaker tears down the gate and all of the mounded debris. The Breaker is the Messiah. Now there is a breach where there was a barricade. The hungry, determined sheep rush in. They feast! Oh, how they have longed for this! And so, they eat! As they eat, The Breaker informs the sheep that the very food (word) from the Shepherd, that the satiated sheep have had in abundance over the centuries, and which the emaciated sheep have had to do without, in fact, reveals Him to be the very son of their Shepherd, and He has come to deliver any and all of them who will follow Him to freedom. As they depart, the fat sheep that choose to remain begin immediately to reconstruct the wall.

Read **Matthew 11:1-19**. Is there a particular verse in that text that seems to be out of place or strange in the way it comes across? Look at the title of this article. Reflect upon my little story of the sheep. Focus on the second part of **Matthew 11:12**. *"Violence"* in this New Testament text is the Greek term,*"biazeti"*, which basically means, *"A force exerted"*: the intense passion required to live kingdom of Christ values in a world whose values war against such. *"The violent"* in this text is from the Greek, *"biaste"*, meaning *"someone who is forceful or resolute"*. These are not evil people attacking God's Kingdom; these are people who are so desperate to enter God's Kingdom that they are pressing through every barrier, every obstacle, every wall of resistance to lay hold of it **(Luke 16:16)**. They are not criminals or rebels, but spiritually hungry people, very intent on accessing what they need.

Jesus was not then, or now, directing his followers to acts of political violence or rebellion; He was painting a vivid picture to show that something had changed. The gates of heaven have been opened...Jesus was not advocating chaos or political upheaval, but spiritual breakthrough.

Micah 2:13 is the verse that Jesus was referencing in **Matthew 11:12**. It was an oblique sort of reference from the Septuagint Greek translation of the text. **Micah 2:13** is talking about a

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spiritual breakthrough in the context of the coming of the Messiah. The breaker, the Messiah, opens the way, and the people rush in. From the old covenant Hebrew perspective, it is a picture of a sheep pen, a fold, and *"The Breaker"*, *"Haparetz,"* comes forward, smashing the gate open. There is a rushing in and a rushing out to follow their leader, Christ the Lord, to freedom. *"Since the days of John,"* (the cousin of Jesus, the immerser), indicates when the break occurred. A breaking out of the imprisonment to Judaism and a breaking in to the Kingdom of Christ that occur simultaneously in connection with John's announcement of the Messiah. Among the Jews, not everyone was happy to see tax collectors and sinners, and especially the Gentiles, breaking in.

Jesus was not then, or now, directing His followers to acts of political violence or rebellion; He was painting a vivid picture to show that something had changed. The gates of heaven have been opened. The hungry, who have nothing to lose, the desperate, are storming the kingdom, not with swords, but with faith, with sheer determination; breaking through shame, guilt, tradition, legalism, fear, and all of the barriers which had formerly been in their way. They are rushing after their Shepherd. Jesus was not advocating chaos or political upheaval, but spiritual breakthrough, a holy surge of humanity reaching through for what had been locked away for centuries.

John was already imprisoned by the time Jesus uttered these words. John was about to be beheaded. But God's kingdom can never be subdued or opposed by human violence. The Kingdom presses ahead relentlessly. And only the relentless press their way into it! Other expressions are found in Matthew 7:13, 14. It isn't going to be easy! There is only ONE gate, and we must look for the opening that the opener Jesus makes for us. This gate is constrictive! It is precise! It is salvation through Christ alone! It is God's way! The only way that leads to salvation, **Acts 4:12**.

The breach has been made. The Good Shepherd stands waiting to show us the way. The Kingdom is open, but only the determined will lay hold of it. Are you willing to break through and follow Jesus?

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THE GOD OF NATIONS

Tad Morris

On June 28, 1787, the statesman Benjamin Franklin was speaking to George Washington and the other delegates of the Constitutional Convention when he said:

> *"And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? or do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth-that God governs in the affairs of men. I therefore beg leave to move-that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business..."*

Indeed, God does govern in the affairs of men. There is no authority, government, people, or nation that escapes the divine supervision of our Creator. This is not an Old Testament phenomenon, but rather a universal principle that applies to all people in all places for all time. God is always directing the government of nations. For example, **Romans 13:1**: *"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."*

This passage means what it says: governing authorities – whoever they may be, wherever they may be, and whenever they may be – are appointed by God. It may appear as though authorities come to their position by virtue of family lineage, democratic elections, or even revolutions. The Scriptures say, no, God is ultimately orchestrating the rise and fall of secular leaders. How He does this is incomprehensible, but the fact that He does do it is undeniable.

We need to be reminded of this principle from time to time, as did the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. His pride and the ensuing humiliation are described in **Daniel 4:30-32**:

> *The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you [...] and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.*

Things are not always what they seem. Nebuchadnezzar

might have claimed his right to the throne by virtue of his lineage, being the son of Nabopolassar, the previous king. In reality, Nebuchadnezzar's rise to power was the result of divine providence, which is infinitely beyond our comprehension. God can operate in any form of government, in democracies or monarchies, like Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's fall reminds us that the kingdoms of earth are not created by men, they are not sustained by men, and they are not even for men. The kingdoms of this Earth are created by God, sustained by God, and they are for the purposes of God. This principle is emphatically confirmed in **Jeremiah 27:5**: *"It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me."*

Most of us are comfortable with this principle as long as we like the leading authorities. But when the leaders are unapologetically evil, then we hesitate. How could God possibly be responsible for giving this person their position of power? The entire Bible testifies to the fact that even evil leaders have a place in the eternal plan of God. Consider Pontius Pilate, one of the great villains of the Bible. **John 19:10-11**: *"Then Pilate said to [Jesus], "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."*

How does this all fit into the plan of salvation? Paul explained God's motives in Acts 17:24-27:

God, who made the world and everything in it [...] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us...

Nations rise and fall. Governments rise and fall. People come, and they go. And all of this is for one divine purpose – so that the peoples of this Earth will seek the Lord. Something about the organization of the nations through time has been perfectly suited so that people will seek their Creator.

Is it possible our great nation was providentially created by God? It's more than possible; the Bible says it's certain. God creates nations, and he destroys nations. We love this country, but it is nonetheless a secular kingdom under divine supervision. It has a purpose in the plan of God. When that purpose is fulfilled, this nation, like every other nation, will fall.

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JUST PASSING THROUGH

Thomas Dennis

[The following article was first published in 1974, and it is worth reprinting for our consideration today.]

The life of a Christian in this sin filled world is in so many ways comparable to a journey through a land where we are strangers and pilgrims. **(I Peter 2:11)** We have different ways than the people among whom we sojourn. Our interests, our aims, our manner of life, our very speech and dress are so different, for our citizenship is in Heaven; we are indeed an holy nation, a peculiar people. **(I Peter 2:9)** We are constantly surrounded on every side by enemies of our King, and we can expect their attitude toward Him to influence their thinking toward us. Each step of the way we must take with care, knowing that our destruction is the aim of the adversary. **(I Peter 5:8)**

We pass the time of our sojourning here in fear. **(I Peter 1:17)** Ours is a mission to tell everyone of Jesus and His saving grace, but this is made more difficult because to so many the preaching of the gospel is foolishness. **(I Corinthians 1:18)**

We are pressured to conform to them that surround us, but we have been instructed otherwise. **(Romans 12:2)** People oft times think it strange that we do not engage in the things they so commonly accept, **(I Peter 4:4)** but we have a duty to perform, shining as lights in the world. **(Philippians 2:15)**

Since the duration of our stay here is brief, we avoid getting overly involved with the things of this world, especially with any thing that would burden us down and hinder us on our way or deter us from our course. We avoid driving our stakes too deeply here in the camp ground, knowing full well that we'll move on in the moring.

"This world is not my home, I'm just a' passing thru. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue..."

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Blessed Are the Dead

Sister **Myra "Jane" Downey** of the **Bloomfield, IN** congregation entered her Lord's rest on May 1, 2026. Your editor remembers well her quiet spirit as she taught the children for several years during the midweek bible study.

Here and There

The **S. Fairfax Church of Christ** in **Bakersfield, CA** was delighted on April, 19 to welcome **Nathan Ramirez** into the Lord's family when he confessed faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized.

A number of congregations plan to host meetings throughout the summer. We commend their efforts and encourage our readers, as you make your summer plans, to consider participating in these edifying and uplifting opportunities.

Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love your salvation say continually, 'The Lord be Magnified!'

Psalm 40:16

Special Meetings

2026

May 23-24.....Murray Rd, Lee's Summit, MO
May 30-31.....Prince Rd High School/College Study
June 13-14.....Vandalia, IA
June 29-July 3.....Midwest Bible Campout
July 26-31.....One-Week Meeting, Riverside Rd, Ozark, MO

Additional details for these and other upcoming meetings can be found by visitiong the Gospel Message website. You can use the QR code below to navigate to the relavent page.

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