

## What Will it Take

Written by David McNabb

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The debate has raged since the days of America's formation: Is it or is it not a Christian nation? It is beyond a doubt that the founders of the United States were greatly influenced by the Christian faith and the Bible. Does a strong Christian influence, both by its founders and a majority of its citizens, make America a Christian nation?

President Obama does not seem to think so. In a much criticized speech in Turkey in April 2009, President Obama said, "One of the great strengths of the United States is, although as I mentioned, we have a very large Christian population, we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation..." In June of 2007, Obama made a speech in which he said, "Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation. At least not *just*. We are also a Jewish nation, and a Muslim nation, and a Buddhist nation, and a Hindu nation, and a nation of non-believers."

Is this a fact because America is "under new management"? Was America Christian, and has now turned away? If so, when did America "backslide"?

Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli, signed by President John Adams on June 10, 1797, reads, "As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Mussulmen; and, as the said States never entered into any war, or act of hostility against any Mahjometan nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries." Whatever was meant by the statement rejecting any Christian foundation, it seems that the debate is not new.

Regardless of what you believe about the Nation's Christian background, all can agree that at no time were all inhabitants of this country Christian. At all times of American history, her citizenry was comprised of Christians, pagans, atheists, and agnostics. As such, at least from one perspective, America has never been Christian, but rather a mix of various beliefs.

Recent history has seen a tremendous surge in non-European immigration into the U.S., resulting in massive growth of the non-Christian sector of the American population. Now, more than ever, America's Christian identity is fading. The Christian majority is diminishing, and liberal indoctrination of the skewed "principle" of tolerance (which has come to mean "Christians have to be tolerant of non-Christians, or we will deal harshly with them) has

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weakened the nation's Evangelicals' ability and willingness to lead others to Christ.

As a result, Christian ministers and apologists in different media outlets are pushing harder than ever the idea that America has to get back to its "Christian roots." Historians on both sides of the aisle have got their historical proof, so that debate often ends in deadlock.

Any Christian worth his salt knows where all the answers are. They are not found in America's founding documents. They are not found in presidential speeches. They are not found in the mouths of radio commentators or televangelists. The answers are found in the pages of God's holy word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). That being said, any model for the conversion of this country, or any other, to God must be sought in the Bible.

President Obama is right, whatever America once was, it cannot be easily identified as a Christian nation, if at all. Has a nation ever turned to God? Does the Bible record any such stories of national conversion? If so, then what was the catalyst for that event?

In fact, there are several biblical examples where whole nations experienced repentance and conversion, or, at the very least, proclaimed that Jehovah be added to the pantheon of worship. The examples that come to mind most clearly are Israel, Babylon, Medio-Persia, and Nineveh.

Of course, Israel would be the most prominent example, as it was a people chosen by God, and the Bible catalogues its history. Israel, while called out by God to be His peculiar people, repeatedly strayed from the right ways and turned to idolatry. If, as some say, America began as a God-fearing, Christian nation, then Israel would serve as perhaps the best example. Time and time again, Israel would leave off from doing God's will and would serve other gods – the gods of other nations: both of the surrounding nations and of the "strangers" that lived among them in the land. Each time that they strayed, they suffered: foreign invaders, plagues, famine; all these were brought upon them by their "jealous God." Each time, Israel would buckle under the weight of its tribulation, and begin to cry out to God, repenting of their wicked ways, and asking for deliverance. When the cries of God's people would come up before Him, He would raise up deliverance for them, and they would be restored. God sent judges and prophets each time His people, which was called by His name, would humble themselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways. He would hear from heaven, and heal their land.

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What, though, did it take for national revival? Trials and tribulation, anguish and oppression: these were the things that caused God's wayward people to turn again unto Him. Every sincere Christian can proclaim America's Christian heritage from now until the Lord comes, and this wayward nation will not repent. It does not fit the model. God's word says, "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past" (Eccl. 3:15). Do not expect something to happen that has not happened before! If America is like Israel, then revival will come after a period of oppression, anguish, and loss. If Americans will turn to God as a nation at all, they will not do so until the days get very, very dark. A deeper, darker economic climate, loss of sovereignty, severe natural disasters, or some other type of calamity will precede any type of national return to Christ – according to the model of Israel.

But Israel is not the only nation that experienced a national change of heart. Two such scenarios are found in the Book of Daniel. For 490 years in the land of promise, the Children of Israel never once kept the Sabbath year. Because of that disobedience, Israel was delivered by God into captivity in Babylon for 70 years, so that the land could enjoy her Sabbaths, according to the word of the Lord (Lev. 26:34).

Babylon was best known for its worship of idols, and is considered to be the place of origin of all of the false religious systems in the world today, whether directly or indirectly. That idolatry was very present in the days of Israel's captivity, as is evidenced by the writings of the various prophets of the time. In Daniel chapter 4, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the construction of a huge image 60 cubits high (about 90 feet), and 6 cubits wide (about 9 feet). Then he made a law that whenever the musicians would play, all of the inhabitants had to bow down and worship the image that he had made. Three Hebrews, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, refused to bow to the idol, proclaiming instead their unconditional allegiance to the God of Israel, and choosing rather to die if need be. These were ordered thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. When God intervened and saved the three alive (without even the scent of smoke upon their clothing), King Nebuchadnezzar was amazed. "Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon" (Dan. 3:28-30). The Gentile King Nebuchadnezzar passed a law forbidding anyone from speaking against the God of Israel because of the great miracle that God worked *in the face of oppression*.

Babylon would later be conquered by Medio-Persia (as Daniel also records), and another king

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would have an opportunity to see the hand of God. King Darius liked Daniel very much, and promoted him within the government. However, the laws of the Medes and the Persians limited the powers of the king in that, if he set his seal to a law, it could not be revoked. Because of that, several officials conspired against Daniel, and convinced the king to pass a law prohibiting prayer, except prayer directed to him. Daniel prayed to God as he always had, and was guilty of breaking the new law. The king realized that he had been set up, but was powerless. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, and once again God delivered His servant. The king rejoiced that his friend was saved, and, like Nebuchadnezzar before him, he passed a new law regarding the God of Israel. But, whereas Nebuchadnezzar only prohibited blasphemy, Darius' law **required** the worship of Jehovah. He said, "Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions" (Dan. 6:25-27).

According to the Babylonian/Medio-Persian model, national conversion came when the nation oppressed God's people, and God defended them overtly. The threat of death was real and imminent: the flames were seven times hotter; the lions were hungry. But the public, sensational demonstration of deliverance shook the oppressors, and caused in them a conversion.

Finally, we see the story of Jonah. He was sent to Nineveh with a message that God would destroy the city-state in 40 days. The king and the people of Nineveh heeded the word of the prophet. "And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:7-10).

Jesus said that "Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites" (Luke 11:30). In what way was he a sign? The Ninevites were idolaters as were all of the nations, and they particularly worshiped the fish-god Dagon. In fact, the cuneiform for Nineveh was a fish, and it is believed to be named for Nina, a Babylonian fish goddess. So, we read of Jonah's escapades as he fled from doing God's will. As we all know, he is swallowed by a "great fish," and brought to the shore, after which he went into Nineveh to deliver God's message. Now, in addition to bringing the

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message of the Almighty to a people destined to be destroyed, Jonah also had an amazing testimony which was especially significant for the people to whom he was sent. Think about it: God sent a prophet to a wicked, fish-worshipping nation, and delivered him by – a fish! They were impressed, and moved to true repentance. In the model of Nineveh, God sent His word in a way specifically tailored to get their attention, and with the threat of utter destruction.

In every case, the common denominator is the presence or the threat of suffering. In each case, God delivered his people into oppression, from oppression, or delivered to them a promise of oppression. In each case they were moved to a change of heart, and an acknowledgement of the Sovereignty of the Almighty God.

These are the models of national conversion. If America is going to experience such a conversion, and truly become “one nation under God,” it will happen as it has before. The question is: What, if anything, will cause America to turn to God? If not America as a whole, what will cause God’s people in America to turn to Him? What will it take? Are you ready for the Day of the Lord?