

Forecasting spiritual turbulence

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HAWKINS, Texas—How many of you have encountered frustrations, distractions (good or bad) or outright grievous trials? How many of you have learned to expect a higher frequency of problems right around the holy-day seasons, or perhaps even on a late Friday afternoon before the weekly Sabbath?

It is interesting that a set of events that often accompany the holy days is some of the most violent weather patterns of the year. As far back as I have been keeping the holy days, I've learned to expect violent pockets of turbulence.

My first Pentecost in God's church more than four decades ago was accompanied by a killer tornado that slammed into the community where our family was living in Waseca, Minn. Fortunately we were staying with some brethren in St. Paul, 80 miles away, and did not witness the disaster.

I recall the following fall wind turbulence at a Feast site in Big Sandy when wild wind currents from an East Texas thunderstorm ripped out two heavy metal poles holding up the meeting tent.

I recall many times during the Feast having to pray for the brethren at Jekyll Island, Ga., because a killer hurricane was headed right toward the coast. On the Day of Atonement in 1985, Hurricane Gloria slammed into the Florida coastline.

Spiritual metaphors

The high frequency of killer storms and periods of turbulence provide sobering spiritual metaphors. Over the years I've learned to brace myself for turbulence at very specific times.

The most disastrous trials I have encountered both physically and spiritually have occurred around the fall and spring holy days, including health problems, job-related problems, family problems and out-of-the-blue legal problems.

Some people have lost jobs because of the holy days. Some people have lost close family members through untimely death before the holy days. Brethren have reported major car problems, minor annoyances, attitude problems, material distractions and temptations (perhaps pondering whether to buy a house or a car). Perhaps we have a series of traffic tickets or problems with the IRS.

It has been around the Passover that I have more than a half dozen times over the years written in my journal: "Lord, this time You've given me a mountain too big to climb." Sadly, it hasn't been that long ago that I've written those exact sentiments.

There are many veteran church members who should have been aware of Satan's modus operandi by now and become wise to some of his devices. But, unfortunately, a brief period of spiritual turbulence caught them off guard.

On the lookout

Does God expect us to be prepared for times of spiritual turbulence and take precautions accordingly? Let's take a look at a few familiar scriptures in this regard.

First, we are warned to be on the lookout for possible danger and take precautionary steps.

"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished" (Proverbs 22:3).

In 1 Peter 4:12 the apostle Peter seems to be chastising us for our naiveté about Satan's devices: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you."

A common denominator I've found over the years in people (including those who had been close friends) who have drifted from God was that they did not take the power of Satan seriously. Any of us who make that mistake are the people most vulnerable to having to endure unsettling trials.

Clear warnings

Paul describes our adversary in Ephesians 2:2 as the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience."

Satan's propensity to stir up air currents is discussed throughout the book of Ephesians, such as the turbulence described in Ephesians 4:14 where God's family is warned not to let itself be tossed around in a violent cyclonic doctrinal upheaval.

In the discussion of Satan's wiles in Ephesians 6:11-12, Paul suggests that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places.

Our very atmosphere is surcharged with pockets of meteorological and spiritual turbulence. Before we discover how to safeguard ourselves against spir-

itual turbulence, perhaps we should consider the factors in meteorological turbulence.

In various venues in the past, I have written about tornadoes. I have suggested that “when moist, warm air collides with cold, dry air, the imbalance forces the cold and warm air currents to spin.” Tornadoes could be considered miniature hurricanes, cyclones, or typhoons. All of these meteorological phenomena occur during the peak of the holy-day season.

Likewise, when our exuberant updrafts of Feast fever and anticipation Of God’s holy days are met by satanic downdrafts of chilly air, we can be caught in a sudden vortex of depression. Through this sudden change of pressure, Satan can dredge up the debris of problems so intensely that we can’t see through the funnel cloud of worldly problems—and, when it rains, it pours.

Vicious cycle, depression and turbulence are all metaphors borrowed from meteorological observation.

Change in pressure

One of Satan’s most predictable techniques is to destabilize a Christian at critical pressurization and depressurization stages—before and after the holy days. The prince of the power of the air hates these days. If he can’t get us to stop keeping them, he can put us in a bad attitude, or at least distract us while we keep them.

Satan invariably works with pressure changes within us. The sudden onset and buildup of pressure at the beginning of the holy days and the sudden let-down at the end of the days are equally potentially hazardous. It’s like trying to ride a motorcycle through the intense Southern California Santa Anas (which I’ve done several times even though I generally try to avoid them).

The cyclist has to make an adjustment leaning against the cushion of such wind currents. If the gust should stop suddenly, the biker could lose his balance and topple onto the freeway.

Similarly, the post-Feast letdown at the conclusion of each holy day, including the weekly holy day, could put the Christian in a state of disequilibrium. How can we make sure that we keep a state of equilibrium and stability as we navigate through the storm fronts before and after each holy-day season?

Barometric sensor

Meteorologists keep a continual watch on atmospheric pressure with the aid of a barometer. A Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a barometer as an instrument for determining the pressure of the atmosphere and hence for assisting in judgment as to probable weather changes and for determining the height of an ascent.

Dean Mohr, an maintenance man for a G-3 jet aircraft, mentioned to me years ago that a pilot doesn’t fly into a storm front if he can help it. A pilot

must constantly consult weather-depiction maps, indicating where the storm centers and the wind currents are coming from.

Sometimes the front is too wide, making it necessary to fly over the top of it. The G-3 was equipped to do this up to 46,000 feet, maintaining constant cabin pressure by bleeding compressed air off the engine. A barometric sensor maintains sea-level pressure up to 45,000 feet.

In smaller aircraft, like the one in which I once flew from Dallas to Big Sandy, we had no choice but to go right through the top of a menacing East Texas thunderstorm.

Spiritually speaking, most of us have probably weathered the pre-Feast turbulence. We need to expect some degree of turbulence no matter what precautions we have taken in prayer, Bible study and meditation. All the positive thinking in the world won't help us avoid a little post-Feast letdown.

Regular chores

We have to be especially watchful that the excitement, the extra opportunities to serve our brethren and the general change of our normal routine don't inspire us to let down on the basics. Ushering, singing in the choir and participating in Family Day don't exempt us from our regular spiritual chores.

The excellent sermons and the upbeat attitude of our brothers and sisters will not make up for sloppy prayer and Bible study. We approach a low-pressure cell as we come off the natural high of this feast season. Weathermen are sometimes wrong, but I forecast that in some people's lives there will be an unsettling period of post-Feast depression as they reenter their normal routines.

You can't escape from all the effects of this letdown, but you can equalize your cabin pressure by keeping your eyes on God's Word and activating an extra supply of God's Spirit as the pressure changes. In Ephesians 6:10-17 Paul urges us to put on pressurization gear to combat the spiritual bends. Ephesians 6:18 gives us some valuable barometric advice:

- We must pray always.
- We must be watchful.
- We must persevere.

The U.S. National Weather Service generates a weather map four times an hour. Are we that constant in prayer and meditation?

The last part of verse 18 encourages us to pray for the protection of each other. We're all in this together. Part of the rites of passage in building character and becoming a member of God's family is weathering spiritual storms.

You know the old maxim: Forewarned is forearmed. With proper vigilance, we have less of an excuse to be caught off guard.