



Pray for the Nation ~ INOI MO TE MOTU

Intercessors for New Zealand

105 Woodman Drive, Tawa, Wellington 5028, New Zealand

ifnz@xtra.co.nz www.Pray-for-the-Nation.org

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Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, and the people He has chosen as His heritage!

Psalm 33:12

The Way to make a nation great again

I was born during the second World War and I remember (just) the end of the war. I also remember the late 1940's when I started school, and the 1950's, 60's and 70's.

In those days, New Zealand was blessed in many ways. It was a time when most people called themselves Christians, and a large percentage of our population went to church regularly every (or almost every) week. Even though many of these people may not have been born again Christians, the Church as a whole was held in high regard, and Christian principles were espoused by most people and our governments.

The year after *Pray for the Nation* started, New Zealand had its highest ever, number of road fatalities (843 in 1973). This was one of the things for which we prayed over the following years, that this would decrease, and 40 years later (in 2013), it was down to 253, though it has risen over the past three years.

In my teen years, I went to a boys' college for 7 years (Forms 1-7) where we had about 700 pupils. I don't recall ever hearing of any young person committing suicide. I only ever heard of one boy who, it was said, smoked marijuana. Murder, in those days, was relatively rare – and treated as a national horror. Violence, as a whole, was also rare. Children, on the whole, were not malnourished, or physically or sexually abused.

Even though the principal of my college was an atheist (he said so at the first assembly each year), he read from the Bible and led us in saying the Lord's Prayer, although he only said the first two words, "Our Father"! He respected the general teaching of the Bible, especially on morals and the right way to live.

Very sadly, in the past years we have fallen away greatly from the moral, social and spiritual values of those days, and are now reaping what we are sowing.

President Donald Trump has said that he wants to make America great again – and that is good – except that greatness doesn't come as a result of wealth, or pride,

or military might, or power, or authority. It comes from following the Lord God, our Creator and Redeemer.

We are all fallen human beings. We lead sinful, selfish, greedy, self-centred, proud lives. We strive in the flesh for what we want. As a whole, nations have turned their back on God – they have little or no room for Him; they "don't need Him"; we can "do it my way!"

Or can we? The Bible says that the nation whose God is the LORD is a blessed nation. Do we want God's blessing for our nation? Then what is "The Way" to make our nation great again? Jesus said, "I AM the Way"; He also said, "Follow Me".

Power, authority, military might, wealth, pride, etc., are not the way to greatness. The greatest Man who ever lived came to this earth to show us the way of love and humility. Jesus came to serve, and to give His life for us. That is the way to true greatness!

The FIRST and GREATEST of all the commandments is that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. This means listening to Him and obeying (following) Him. This means honouring and respecting and worshipping and serving Him – no matter what that may cost. This means following His ways, His commands, His will – in all things!

Any Government and any nation will only know true greatness and blessing to the degree to which they follow the Lord and His ways.

And closely related to this is the second commandment – to love other people in the same way as we love ourselves. Governments and nations need to love their people and genuinely desire the very best for their people. God will reveal to us what those things are – and how to achieve them – if we will put Him first and seek His face.

Whatever country you live in; whatever leadership you have – fervently pray for your government and people, that they will follow the Lord and His ways, giving honour and praise to Him, and seeking to do His will at all times.

Then the nation will become truly great, and be blessed by the Almighty God! Then, too, that nation will bless other nations and people also.

Prayer Suggestions

OUR NEW GOVERNMENT

The voting has now ended, but we are still in a critical phase of the elections, because there are still about 384,000 special votes to be counted by 7 October (that's about 15% of the total votes), and no party has an absolute majority, so most probably a coalition will have to be formed.

At the present count, National would have 58 seats, Labour 45, NZ First 9, Greens 7, and ACT 1.

Please pray for:

- The leaders of all parties, as they enter into discussions about a possible coalition government.
- When a government has been formed, who will be its key Members of Parliament, especially in Cabinet.
- Good government – a government which will be given wisdom in all the decisions it needs to make and laws that will be passed; a government which cares for its people and will lead the nation in ways that are pleasing to the Lord.
- A government which is a blessing to our people, and other nations with which we have close associations.

THE HINDU WORLD

Over the past years we have encouraged prayer for the Muslim world (during their month of Ramadan) and also for the Jewish people. But the Hindu world is also a huge people group that need our prayers. In fact, the number of Hindu migrants to New Zealand is far larger than that of Muslims.

SIM, Interserve, and Missions Interlink (who are involved with the 30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World) are also organising prayer for the Hindu world during their season of Diwali (**8 to 22 October**). They have also produced prayer booklets, to inform and guide in prayer suggestions, those who would like to pray for the Hindu world, especially those New Zealanders who are Hindu, and perhaps friends and neighbours you may have who are Hindu.

If you, or your prayer group, would like to pray for these people especially during Diwali, please email the following address and ask for the number of prayer booklets you would like. 1-9 copies are \$8 per copy; larger numbers are cheaper per booklet. Please do pray for the Hindu world during this time, and, for the booklets, contact pray4hindus@missions.org.nz

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

While we encourage people to pray for their country, for the government, and their people, ultimately it is people's salvation and a true walk with Jesus, as Lord and Saviour, that is essential for a true change in society. If people's hearts are hardened towards God and His ways, people will be led by the spirits of the world, the flesh and the devil, and not by God's Spirit. We must continue to pray that God's Kingdom will come

– that people will put their faith in the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ, and become His followers (disciples). Morality, by itself, won't save us. Good works, by themselves, won't save us. Good government is good, but it won't save us. Perfect laws don't make perfect people! The Ten Commandments are a great start, but people don't keep them! Only faith in, and a following of, Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, will bring salvation and truly change people's lives. Therefore, ***we need to earnestly pray for the sharing and preaching and teaching of the Gospel – the Good News – throughout our country!***

Please pray:

- That all Christians will recognise the need for their family and friends to come to salvation – and life transformation (being born again) – in order for them to become followers of Jesus.
- That we will not neglect to pray for any of our family and friends who are not yet Christians.
- That all churches will preach and teach the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and His ways, to their people.
- For all Christians to share their faith by word, example and action; to be witnesses to Jesus.
- For all Christian organisations that have a major aim and purpose to share the Gospel.
- Please pray for – and praise God for – Christian groups as they seek to share, by different means, the way to become a true follower of Jesus.

CHILDREN

Please pray for all children who come to the Lord through the witness of a Christian home or parent, or the hearing of the Gospel at church, or through a friend, children's evangelism, and so on – that they will remain true and faithful to the Lord throughout their lives, and will not backslide through the cares of their world, the flesh or the devil seeking to draw them back into ungodly living. Pray that they will stand strong and true to the Lord all their days – including through their teenage years.

Please pray too for all Christians who have unsaved children or grandchildren – pray that these children will come to salvation and really know the Father and follow His Son Jesus Christ.

Pray that any who have become prodigals – who once knew and lived with the Father, but have since gone back into the world, sin and unbelief – will see the error and foolishness of their ways, and return again to the Father.

Please pray that we will always be aware of friends and family members who need our prayers for their salvation, or return back to the Lord and His ways – and pray for them fervently, that not one will be lost.

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His name is *J e s u s*

8. *Hebrews – the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah*

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews is the only New Testament book whose author is not known with a fair degree of certainty. The author does not identify himself, and various suggestions have been made, such as Paul, Barnabas, or Apollos. Obviously, in one sense it doesn't matter or the author would have been revealed. However, there is some good evidence it might have been Paul.

Before Paul became a follower of Jesus, he was an ardent Jewish Pharisee and a persecutor of the early Church – arresting and imprisoning those Jews who followed Jesus. In no way did Paul believe that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Then, on the road to Damascus, he had an encounter with the risen, resurrected and ascended Jesus! This encounter, recorded in Acts 9:1-19, must have had an incredible impact on his life and thinking about Jesus. From an ardent persecutor of Christians, he became an ardent follower of Christ!

Paul describes what happened after his encounter with Jesus, in Galatians 1:11-24 and Philippians 3:4b-10. He spent some time in Arabia, without even consulting with the apostles first. It seems very likely that during that time he had to totally rethink what he believed, and especially: **How could Jesus be the Messiah, the Son of God – a Prophet, Priest and King?**

In one sense, it looks as if the book of Hebrews could be Paul's "Thesis" on this subject – the revelation God gave him about His Son. His conversion involved a traumatic change from a persecutor of the early Church to one of its most ardent proponents – one who eventually gave His life for the Gospel he once so hated. How could Paul reconcile his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, with what he had always believed – the Old Testament Scriptures? Paul must have "searched the (Old Testament) Scriptures to see if these things could be so" (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). Paul had to be convinced from the Jewish Scriptures that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah – the One Who was to come.

The book of Hebrews contains 38 quotes from the Old Testament (there is *at least* one quote in every one of its 13 chapters), and these quote 60 verses in total from the Old Testament, showing how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies. Most of the first 10 chapters of Hebrews quote the Old Testament to demonstrate that God has a unique, only begotten Son (John 1:1-5, 14-18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9), whose name is Jesus (Saviour), who is God's promised Messiah (the Anointed One).

In another sense, Hebrews is Paul's "Gospel for the Jews", just as Romans is Paul's "Gospel for the Gentiles". Hebrews assumes the reader has an intimate knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, and deals with

God's revelations to the Jews; while in Romans, Paul speaks about God's revelations to the Gentiles through Creation and Conscience – see Romans chapter 1 and 2 (though, of course, the ways God revealed Himself to Jews and Gentiles are not mutually exclusive).

The book of Hebrews largely consists of demonstrating that God has a unique, only begotten **Son** (a radical concept to the Jews), God's Son's name is **Jesus** (which means **Saviour**), He is the **Messiah** (Christ), He is the **Mediator** between God and people, He is the last great **Prophet**, the last **High Priest**, **King** of kings and **Lord** of lords, ruler over the **Kingdom of God**.

It is interesting to notice the way this is gradually revealed through the book of Hebrews:

- God has a **Son** – first mentioned in 1:2.
- His name is **Jesus (Saviour)** – God's Son is not named until 2:9.
- He is the **Messiah** – first mentioned in 3:6. "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah", which means "the Anointed One".
- He is the **Mediator** of the new Covenant – 8:6.
- He is referred to as **Prophet** in 1:1-2; **King** in 1:8; **High Priest** in 2:17; **Lord Jesus** and **Jesus Christ** in 13:20-21.
- Jesus is given more than 20 titles or names in Hebrews!

Notice that the writer *first* refers to God having a Son! (1:2). *Then*, after 22 verses, he mentions His name – Jesus (2:9). *Finally*, after 37 verses, he says (3:6) that Jesus is the Messiah (Heb.); or Christ (Gk.). This was revolutionary: God has a Son; He was born into this world; His name is Jesus; and He is the promised Messiah! (that is, the Anointed One – see Psalm 2:6-8 and Daniel 9:24-27).

Interposed in this revelation concerning the Messiah, Hebrews has several warnings to believers concerning the days in which they live. The book was probably written sometime before the fall of Jerusalem and the final destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, because this is alluded to in Hebrews 8:13. It is interesting to note that while Jesus died, rose again and ascended to Heaven in 30 AD, God allowed one generation (40 years) to pass until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD – there was no further need of the Temple or sacrifice for sins, for the Son of God, the Messiah, had died and paid the full price for the salvation of all who believe in Him.

The early Church faced severe persecution and parts of Hebrews were written to encourage Jewish Christians not to give up their faith and go back to Judaism. The Romans tolerated the Jews as long as they kept to their Temple and synagogues, and obeyed the Roman law, but the Romans were threatened by the rapidly growing Church and the spread of this "new religion". Christianity was, of course, the continuation of God's revelation through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel) and

his descendants, and the fulfilment of God's promised Messiah, whose name was **Jesus**.

In times of oppression, especially, Hebrews speaks of "better things"; and superlatives like better, higher, superior, greater, beyond, etc., occur 15 times in the book – for example, we now have a "better Covenant" than the Old Covenant. See 1:4; 7:7, 19, 22, 26; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:35.

The theme of Hebrews is that Jesus the Messiah is absolutely supreme and all-sufficient as the One who reveals, and is Mediator of, God's grace. He is the full and final revelation of God. It is also a call to all Christians, to hold firm to their confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

It was written principally to the Hebrews (Israelites) to show that the Law in the Old Testament (Old Covenant) has been fulfilled through the life and death of Jesus, Who raised up a New Covenant which far exceeds the Old.

So, Hebrews shows from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah; far above all angels, principalities and powers; Son of God and Son of Man, in Whom we put our faith, and through Whom we have salvation.

People who wrote books of the Bible didn't necessarily write them over a short period of time; and others may have added to them (e.g., after Moses' death!

Deuteronomy 34). So, Hebrews 11 & 12 are different from chapters 1-10, and chapter 13 is different again. The last chapter may have been written by Paul later – it is much more like Paul's other letters – or it may have been written by another apostle. *It is, of course, still divinely inspired!*

QUESTIONS

1. What totally changed Paul's thinking about the Old Testament Scriptures and the Messiah?
2. In the OT, the people who were anointed were either kings, priests, or prophets. What was unique about Jesus' anointing?
3. Why does Hebrews quote the OT so much?
4. How do the books of Hebrews, and Romans, differ in their presentation of the Gospel to Jews, and Gentiles, respectively?
5. Why is there no further need for another physical temple to be built in Jerusalem?
6. Why, after Pentecost, did the Romans persecute Christians rather than Jews?
7. What are some of the "better things" that Christians have today, compared with OT times?

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PRAYING FOR OUR LEADERS

As we wait for the formation of a new Government, please pray through **Psalms 33** – praying for, and about, the things mentioned in this Psalm:

Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous, for praise is fitting for those who are upright.

Praise the LORD with the lyre; make melody to Him with the harp of ten strings.

Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

For the word of the LORD is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness.

He loves *righteousness* and *justice*; and the earth is full of the steadfast *love* of the LORD.

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host was made by the breath of His mouth.

He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; He put the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.

The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He frustrates the plans of the peoples.

But the counsel of the LORD stands forever; the thoughts of His heart to all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, and the people He has chosen as His heritage.

The LORD looks down from Heaven; He sees all people.

From where He sits enthroned, He watches all the inhabitants of the earth – He who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds.

A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.

Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him – on those who hope in His steadfast love – to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and shield.

Our heart is glad in Him, because we trust in His holy name.

Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in You.

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This monthly *Prayer Letter* is also on our website: www.pray-for-the-nation.org/monthly-magazines.php