

## ***The Bali Attack – a Meditation 1***

C Bouwman

Words fail us to describe accurately the revulsion we feel about the terrorist attack in Bali. We found 9/11 terrible and it touched us deeply, but at least it was on the far side of the globe. 10/12 was in our back yard. Perchance we even knew some of the victims, their families.... More, this strike points up that *we* are vulnerable, that *our* lifestyle is under attack.

Quite understandably, the Prime Minister has declared a day of mourning throughout Australia. And, in accordance with Art 66 of the Church Order, the churches quite correctly were called to a Day of Prayer on account of this tragedy. Our hearts go out to the families and loved ones of the dead as well as to the victims. We have prayed and continue to pray that the Lord will comfort and strengthen in the face of adversity, yes, will work opening for the gospel and repentance in Australia.

The media has made much of the *innocence* of the victims. That is, these were Australians just doing the normal, Australian thing: partying, drinking, laughing, dancing. The attack, then, was not restricted to the Sari Club of Kuta, but was actually an assault upon our innocent, fun-loving and carefree *lifestyle*. That hurts.

And that raises a question. Is Australia's lifestyle so innocent? That is: how does the Lord evaluate Australia's fun-loving, carefree, beer-drinking spirit? Please note: I do not say that the victims of the Bali blast were in any way worse persons than any other Australian. In the providence of God *these* persons were in the Sari on October 12. But another crowd was there a fortnight, a month before. Indeed, around Australia so many Australians were doing the *same thing* in their local clubs – and so giving expression to what has become the typically *Australian* thing to do. And is *that* so innocent before God?

I think not. I was busy the other day with Ezekiel 16, and was halted in my tracks by the Lord's words in vss 49 and 50. The passage reads as follows:

*Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.*

*And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.*

Replace the reference to Sodom with Australia – and we have an accurate description of our land today.... In a meditation on this text, then, I should like to evaluate Australia's spirit in the light of God's word. In today's installment I want to look specifically at the various characteristics of Sodom God mentions in this passage.

### **Pride**

The first term the Lord uses concerning Sodom is 'pride'. The Hebrew word translated here as 'pride' is used numerous times in Scripture of God Himself, and then it's translated as 'greatness' or 'majesty'. After Israel crossed the Red Sea, the people sang a song, and one line in this song says: "in the *greatness* of your excellence You have overthrown those who rose

against You" (Ex 15:7). "Greatness": it's the same word translated here as 'pride'. The psalmist says of God that "the Lord reigns, He is clothed with *majesty*" (Ps 93:1). 'Majesty': it's again the same word. We understand: the term 'greatness' or 'majesty' very much characterizes God, and expresses His *God*-ness, that He's over all.

This term God uses to character Sodom. In other words, God reveals that this city attributed to itself a characteristic belonging to God! Specifically, the city put itself on top of the ladder, was god to herself – and so adopted the attitude that they knew best themselves what behavior was acceptable and good.

We recognize that in this sense the term very much describes the way the average Australian responds to God. Australia as a nation acts as if there is no Creator in heaven who can tell His creatures how to live, and so set standards of right and wrong. Though the Lord God says clearly in His Word that sex belongs *in* marriage (and not outside or before), Australian society condones –and even promotes- adultery. Though the Lord says clearly in His Word that homosexuality is an abomination, Australian society takes no notice of God's condemnation of that activity – witness the recent changes in West Australian law. Though the Lord says plainly in His Word that one may not kill, thousands of unborn children are killed in our country year by year. The *root* of this behavior lies in a spirit of *pride*, of exalting the self, of assuming that we can decide for ourselves what is acceptable behavior, and so of refusing to take our place under the God-who-is-majestic-over-all.

### **Fullness of Food**

The second term the Lord uses concerning Sodom is "fullness of food." The point of the phrase is drawn out for us through the conversation Abram had with Lot back in Gen 13. Because of the strife between the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abram, Abram suggested to Lot that they part ways. Then we read this description of Sodom: "Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (...) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt...", and so Lot decided to settle on those plains, in Sodom (Gen 13:10f). The area was like "the garden of the Lord"; that's a reference to Paradise – such was its abundance, it's luxury! "Fullness of food," prosperity: Sodom supplied the easy life and the comforts that came with abundance – Paradise on earth! What gracious blessings from the God on whom all creatures depend!

Again we recognize that the phrase "fullness of food" very aptly describes our land today. Not only do we have supermarkets with an abundance of food; we also have homes with abundance of luxuries – be it in clothing for all weather conditions and activities, be it kitchen appliances, be it entertainment units, be it cars and caravans and boats. Fullness of food: the God who gives food to whom He wills gives so much material wealth to us Australians!

### **Prosperous Ease**

The third term the Lord mentions about Sodom is "abundance of idleness," or, as we can better translate the phrase, "prosperous ease" (ESV). The point is that there was not a cloud in the sky to give the people any anxiety. They had peace and they had prosperity, and so could be unconcerned as they enjoyed the abundant food God gave. A good mix of work and leisure time, of sweat and beer, of seriousness and laughter..., a fun-loving and carefree way of life. So Australian....

### **Poor and Needy**

The fourth characteristic God mentions of Sodom is not so flattering. Says God: "she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." With the words 'poor and needy' the Lord does not refer simply to those who had nothing, the down-and-outers of society. The term used here for 'poor' describes first of all the person suffering some kind of disability or distress, and that

includes one who is socially in need of protection. The two angels came to Sodom one evening but the people of town did not take them in for the night; only Lot the newcomer did. And when night fell the people of Sodom surrounded Lot's house with the demand to have those two men to satisfy their lusts (Gen 19). That refusal to grant hospitality illustrates the attitude caught in the Lord's words in our text: they did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. Instead of supporting and assisting those with any needs, they abused the vulnerable – and so demonstrated a radical lack of love for the neighbor and an equally radical infatuation with themselves and their own desires.

How well has Australia strengthened the hand of the poor and needy? Every year thousands upon thousands of refugees from the corners of the earth knock on Australia's doors for assistance, a home, freedom. But we permit only some few thousand refugees per year to enter our land. While *they* have poverty and hunger, *we* have fullness of food; while *they* have oppression and insecurity, *we* have prosperous ease. They knock on the gates of our land, and we tell them to go away....

Every year Australians conceive innumerable children. Each child is vulnerable, 'poor and needy', dependent on mother's love, father's protection. But tens of thousands of children are aborted in our land each year.... Australians strengthen the hand of the poor and needy? No, as a nation we fall so far short of God's holy standard.

### **Haughty**

The next characteristic the Lord mentions of Sodom is 'haughty'. The term refers to being smug, having high thoughts of self, arrogant, snobbish. That is: from the heights of their prosperity and ease the people of Sodom looked down upon the needy around them, and scorned them. They knew themselves better, superior; why then bother with the riffraff.... To put the same thought in different words: they thought much of self, thought only of self, saw the other as there only for the sake of the self.

I can't help but think again of our attitude to refugees.... Western culture (not just Australian) also has a large superiority component in it, despite its blatant immorality....

### **Committed Abomination**

The final characteristic God mentions is that the people of Sodom "committed abomination before Me," says God in vs 50. The 'abomination' referred to here is specifically their sexual sins, self-gratification at the expense of another. Various passages of Scripture describe their homosexual lusts in disturbing terms (Genesis 19; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7).

I need not say much about immorality in Australia. The recent changes to state laws re homosexuality, the divorce rate of our land, the numbers of teen abortions, the nightclubs of Northbridge, Kings Cross and ... Kuta say enough.

### **Consequence**

At the end of vs 50 the Lord describes the consequence of Sodom's iniquities: "Therefore I took them away as I saw fit." We know the details from Gen 19. The outcry of the city had grown great before the face of the Lord (vs 13), and so God "rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah" (vs 24), destroyed these cities from the face of the earth. And our thoughts go to Bali....

In a second installment I hope to reflect further on this passage of Scripture and what it says about Australia's health.

## The Bali Attack – a Meditation - 2

---