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# 落

## Let Us Fall into *the* Hand *of the* Lord

GUO MUYUN

There is a popular song adapted from a poem by Yu Xinqiao. The refrain, which is also the name of the song, repeats: "In this life, if I must die, I must die in your hands." In 2 Samuel 24, God offers three disasters for David to consider and choose from: war, famine, or pestilence. David responds by saying something similar, "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord ... but let me not fall into the hand of man," meaning, "If I must die, I must die in the hands of the Lord."

We observe in the Bible that God sent disasters to punish sinful, rebellious human beings. The three most common disasters are famine, sword, and pestilence, as mentioned in Ezekiel 7:15: "The sword is without; pestilence and famine are within. He who is in the field dies by the sword, and him who is in the city famine and pestilence devour." There is also one well-known passage in Revelation 6:8 about one of the biggest disasters during the end times: "And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's

name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.” Many such Bible passages tell us that many so-called natural disasters were sent by God.

If you search history, read the Bible, and observe reality, you find that different nations have responded differently to disasters sent by God, and the differences can be huge. For example, when the ten plagues were sent to Egypt, Pharaoh would not repent, but shouted, “Stay strong, Egypt.” On the other hand, when pestilence and earthquake were about to fall on Nineveh, this city that might have been crueler and eviler than Egypt instead repented, and all the people put on sackcloth and sat in ashes.

Today’s reality reflects similar contrasting differences. As the pandemic spread outside of China, Britain worked toward “herd immunity,” with their human bodies serving as a new great wall. The United States set up a National Day of Prayer and also developed various technologies and medicines, as well as free testing for its people. Italy’s response was similar to its response during World War II—its people sang on the balconies while the government tried to copy what other countries did.

The Bible has foretold that in the end times when the last days arrive, the human response to the disasters will be even worse. Revelation 9:20–21 says: “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.” Revelation 16:8–11 says:

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched

by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

The historian Lei Haizong once said that these three disasters—sword, famine, and pestilence—were ways of natural selection for excessive populations in ancient times.<sup>2</sup> We do not need to analyze whether this comment was influenced by the theory of evolution; he was describing a fact. He further analyzed that ordinary people held to a concept of “doom” adopted from Buddhism, which had its own rationality. For example, there was a historical peasant rebel leader named Huang Chao. The people believed he was a devil who came into the world to kill cowards and starving people. Once he came to you, you were doomed to die.

As a historian, Lei proposed a concept called the “Theory of Largest Increases and Decreases,” which he claimed was the principle behind the population fluctuations across Chinese history. When the population had increased to or even beyond the saturation point, it would then decrease to the point where there would be land without men farming it and food without men to eat it.

At the saturation point, society suffered from top to bottom. Government officials became more corrupt and enforced various harsh taxes. Under the double pressure of hunger and harsh taxes, stronger members of the lower classes either gave up their land to work as merchants in cities, to become bandits, or to become vagrants and beggars. As more land was abandoned, previously fertile farmland became wasteland, with lower productivity and an increased possibility for famine. The more wasteland, the lower

the productivity. The lower the productivity, the more famine. The more famine, the more bandits. The more bandits, the more wasteland.

Such a vicious circle culminated in good people being indistinguishable from bandits—a proliferation of roving rebels. And proliferation of roving rebels led to great massacres. Finally, when one of the rebels managed to kill all the others, he became the next emperor.

After a period of unrest, someone ultimately conquered and unified the whole country. Then, all of a sudden, the supply of land and food would exceed the demand. Because the population had decreased and there were now large areas of wasteland, the population could increase without danger of famine. This ushered in peaceful times of prosperity, which lasted from dozens of years to a few hundred years, such as happened during the rule of Emperors Wen and Jing of the Han Dynasty, the resurgence of Emperor Guangwu of the Han Dynasty, the rule of Emperor Taizong in the Tang Dynasty, and the High Qing Era.

All of these were short, golden ages that were the result of the unrest and massacres of the previous dynasty. Life during these golden ages was fairly easy and peaceful, yet such ages never lasted for long. Dozens or a hundred years later, the population would again grow past the saturation point and the old tragedy would emerge again.

This was the view of Lei Haizong, and it is terrifying. For according to him, every few dozen or few hundred years, tragedy repeats itself. We are left with only one question in response: What can we do to get away from such historical patterns and curses? How can we survive these desperate situations of pestilence, sword, and famine?

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The answer lies in the story of David. Before the events of 2 Samuel 24, David numbered his people, which is similar to a census or military review. Such reviews were not wrong; they were neither moral nor immoral in and of themselves. Whether it was right or wrong to conduct such a census depended on the motive and context. Throughout his life as the king of Israel, David was generally a man who feared God and was godly and brave, but he committed two grave sins, and this was one of them.

David's motive for numbering his people was nothing more than wanting to confirm the size of his army, following the practices of the surrounding powers. He forgot that none of his numerous victories over the course of his glorious military career were won by his military power alone. In his sensational first battle, young David took one smooth stone and, with a sling, killed the giant Goliath. He did not succeed because of his superior fighting skills. No, he succeeded because God helped him. When David numbered his people, he forgot how he started.

Consequently, his numbering of the people brought disaster for them. As the saying goes, an incapable commander will bring out an incapable team. An incapable king's foolish actions brought disaster to the whole nation. But the people were not unlucky to have David as their representative. All of his people benefited when David won battles, conquered cities, and captured spoils. The king was the government and represented all of his people; he established covenants on behalf of the people with God, as well as with other nations. He could lead the people into blessing, and he could lead the people into trouble and punishment when he sinned.

As long as you are among the people, you will be represented—actively or passively, consciously or unconsciously, either by this person or by that one. There is no absolute individualist. No one can claim that they do not need a representative. One can

independently choose the person one will be represented by, and even the person chosen may not always be available as an option.

Though David committed a sin, he was fortunate a prophet came to him who represented the people and, more importantly, who spoke for God. The prophet Gad spoke in a simple and authoritative way, because in Israel where God ruled, David was in charge of the sword only, while prophets had the more authoritative voice. This prophet spoke directly to his king. What he said can be summarized as: "You have committed a sin; now there are three disasters; pick one." When Gad pointed to David and said, "You committed sin," the king did not dare to chal-

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 To fall into the hand of God resigns ourselves to providence, which is the best choice in a difficult situation.  
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 lenge him. He listened to the word of God and immediately confessed his sin. His repentance was first demonstrated by his heart striking him. Scripture says: "David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly' " (2 Samuel 24:10).

In ancient China, when there was pestilence, flood, or famine, emperors would issue an edict to take the blame on themselves and to confess that they had offended heaven. Oftentimes, it was mere lip service. Of course, they could have not imagined that their successors in later ages would be too lazy to even offer lip service to heaven. But even their edicts of self-blame were not on par with David's prayer of confession.

David's choice demonstrates his unconditional trust in God. Three years of famine, three months of war, or three days of pestilence: which would you choose? No matter what David chose, he would certainly bring death to his nation. He replied: "I am in