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Top Ten Ways to Lose the Promised Land

Dorothy Bliss

(With apologies to C.S. Lewis)

Dear Minions:

I know these are discouraging times, but it's not my fault! What could I do when Jesus of Nazareth agreed to die? How was I to know that his death would atone for the sins of the world? Whoever heard of such a thing? I'm disgusted by the whole affair.

I was double-crossed – and by God himself. Here I was, feeling all elated by the blood, and the whipping, and the suffering of God's son. I mean, after all, he was no friend of ours – casting us out of people and sending us into pigs. I was ready to gloat, and no doubt about it, as Jesus approached death on a cross (one of my better inventions, I must admit). Then I heard this horrible sound – a crashing, rending, squealing that I will never, ever forget. The gates! My beautiful gates were torn off their hinges and Jesus himself came and let souls out. No one ever told me there would be such a crucial twist in the story: that this man's death would stand in for the punishment of everybody! Well I have to tell you, I will NEVER forgive him for that.

But I have been thinking (obsessing, really) about it a lot lately, and I have a plan. It's still not over. Jesus went back to Heaven where he belongs, thank Darkness, and although he is planning to come back we do have some time. We still can get a lot accomplished. The key here is strategy. We need to strike hard and strike fast. So I think we should use some of the tried-and-true methods that worked so well for us in the past.

Yes, I'm thinking of the people of Israel. I know they are God's chosen ones but, if you remember, they responded really well to our techniques before. Many of the new so-called Christians (such an offensive word!) are in fact Jewish, and so they should react nicely to my – I mean, our – plan. Others were once pagans (deserters, I call them) and we can easily capitalize on their old habits and patterns by adapting our methods.

The Israelites, if you remember, had one thing that always kept them going, always kept them coming back to God, and that was “the Promised Land:” a home of their own



Desert life, Chris Calderone

where they could live in peace and prosper.¹ Pretty sneaky of God, I think, to make a covenant with them that would provide such a powerful motivator. Of course it was necessary, for they certainly are stubborn (“stiff-necked,” Moses called them.² He was no great friend of ours either, the way he kept God from destroying Israel). Yet even with this incentive the people of Israel were constantly backsliding. Of course, that was my – I mean our – doing. We even managed to get them hauled off into exile in Babylon for a while – they actually lost the Promised Land!

One wrinkle, you say? The Christians don’t have a promised land? Oh, but they do, that’s the beauty of it. Jesus told them that he is preparing a place for them in heaven.³ To get there, all they have to do is keep doing what he told them and what his apostles teach them – and therein lays our opportunity. It’s in the persevering where humans have so much trouble.

So, without further ado, here is my plan. I call it, The Top Ten Ways to Lose the Promised Land. All you have to do is get the Christians to do these things, and they will spend eternity with us. Trust me, it will be like taking candy from a baby.

Number 10: Drink to excess.⁴ Admittedly, we’re going for the low-hanging apple (okay, grape) here. Humans love their wine! And, fortunately, they don’t seem to understand the meaning of moderation. Amos used to rant and rave about it, especially the people who would steal and drink the wine that had been paid as fines (come to think of it, I’m pretty sure that was my idea). The reason this works so well (besides being easy) is that people who are drinking are not paying attention to much else, whether farms or family. It makes them slow and stupid: perfect for our purposes.

Number 9: Be self-centered, lazy and demanding.⁵ This is one of my personal favorites. If you can get the Christians to spend all their time on themselves, they would not have any time to bother about the demands of God, and they would never realize his promises. I rather enjoyed it when Amos called the women of Bashan “cows” because they bossed their husbands around, calling for wine, (see Number 10) and did not care a fig about anyone else. Isaiah was rough on the snooty ones who only care about their looks and getting attention – they end up dressed in rags! Amos told those who were just lying around, eating, singing idle songs, and drinking that they would be the first to go into exile. So this method works, for sure.

¹ Gn 12:1-3; Ex 3:6-9

² Ex 34:5-9

³ John 14:3

⁴ Amos 2:8, 4:1; Is 5:11-12; Hos 4:11; Joel 1:5

⁵ Amos 4:1-3, 6:4-7; Is 3:16, 5:21

Number 8: Take bribes.⁶ They don’t have to be big bribes, mind you. We were able to get so much bribing going on in Isaiah’s day that the systems of justice broke down completely. If you can get the Christians to think that everybody does it (and everybody does, don’t they?), they won’t think twice about getting a little easy money for themselves on the side, and that will help build a corrupt system that afflicts the poor in particular (see Number 2). So what if God doesn’t like it? Isn’t that what we are after?

Number 7: Make political deals, especially with the enemy.⁷ This was pretty easy in the old days, as Israel had so many enemies: Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, Ammonites...there were lots of options. And wherever you have humans you have politics, so this should still work for us. So just get the Christians to think that all their problems will be solved through political alliances, and we will have carried the day.

Number 6: Lie.⁸ I probably shouldn’t say “lie,” but rather get them to “twist the truth.” The Christians will be squeamish if you suggest they lie outright, so instead, follow the example of ancient Israel: get them to say things that sound true. False prophecy was always a winner, especially because the audience for false prophecy is always so much more profitable than for the real thing (true prophecy is usually such a downer – all those calls for repentance). If you can get them in the habit of twisting the truth, they will probably end up believing their own words and doubting the words of God, and then we’ll know we have them on the downward path.

Number 5: Sleep around.⁹ It’s just human nature! So what if their law forbids it? They can’t help it! At least that’s what you need to get them to believe. And it gets them into trouble with God, so that’s all for the good. Amos got all upset just over a father and son “lying” (if you know what I mean) with the same woman? Hosea and others often portrayed Israel as an unfaithful wife, so obviously God frowns on that behavior. But the Christians may be hard to tempt, as Jesus raised the bar on this one, telling them it is wrong even to look at a pretty woman with desire. Help them see no one can be expected to live up to that standard. The mother of Jesus, Mary, is a powerful example of purity. But if you can get them to disbelieve the virgin birth, that will help. Even better: start a rumor that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were lovers. Get someone to write a novel about it; people always believe what they read.

⁶ Amos 5:12; Is 1:21-23, 5:23

⁷ Amos 8:14-17; Ez 11:1-12; Is 30:1-5; 31:1-3

⁸ Hos 4:1-2; Ez 13:1-7; Jer 23:9-40

⁹ Lev 20:10-21; Amos 2:7-8; Hosea 4:14; Mt 5:27-30

Number 4: Commit murder and other acts of violence.¹⁰

I think ancient Israel might be a little tough to beat here. Ezekiel describes a land “full of bloody crimes” and cities “full of violence.” We can only hope! The fact that Jesus allowed himself to be killed rather than fighting back and killing others doesn’t bode well for our success on this method. But it is still worth a try.

Number 3: Oppress the righteous, including the prophets.¹¹

Nobody likes a know-it-all. I used to find it pretty easy to get people to ignore or harass the old prophets. We made Amos seem like a hick from the sticks; then it was easy to get people to dismiss him. Hosea we painted as a definite nut case: I mean, marrying a prostitute just to make a point? You have got to be kidding me! The Christians have – oops, had – John the Baptist. He was just as eccentric as the others, wearing animal skins and eating insects, and angering people by telling them to repent, so we were able to get him killed. Whenever someone tries to live a good, clean lifestyle, make fun of them. Good people are easy targets for the weak-minded: exploit that fact.

Number 2: Oppress the poor.¹²

Now we are really hitting home. God loves the poor; he is the self-appointed protector of this miserable class of humanity, God only knows why. If we can get the Christians not only to neglect but also to oppress the poor – well, we’ll have it made. No Promised Land for them! It should be easy, as there are so many poor people and so many options for oppressing them: pass laws that favor the wealthy, steal property and make it look legal, blame poor people for their own problems, force people off their land and into cities, don’t share your food with the hungry, ignore the pleas of widows, neglect orphans...well, I could just do this all day. As a matter of fact, I think I will.

Number 1 (drum roll please): Worship other gods.¹³

It is one of the first rules that Lord-It-Over-Everybody made: “Thou shall have no other gods before me.” A simple, straightforward commandment – and it has been broken a million times. It was easy to separate Israel from God in the old days; there were lots of nations around who worshipped idols. All we had to do was put them in the way of Israel, and without thinking about it too much they adopted those ways. Keeping

¹⁰ Amos 3:10; Isa 1:21-23, 5:7; Ez 7:23-24

¹¹ Amos 2:6, 12, 5:12, 8:14-17; Mark 6:17-29

¹² Amos 2:6, 4:1-3; 5:11, 8:4-10; Is 3:14-15, 10:1-2; Ez 18:1-4; Mt 5:5, 25:31-46

¹³ Amos 2:4-5, 8:14-17; Is 2:6-8, 3:8; Hos 1:2, 2:11-13, 4:12; Ez 8:7-12, 8:16-18, 14; Jer 3:6-10; 2 Kgs 22

them selfish, drunk, and cheating helped too, especially when we made sure that the pagan religions promised wealth, wine and women!

The Christians may require a more nuanced approach. All of the methods I’ve given you above will help: the Christians will start worshipping themselves, their money and their comforts, and they will start twisting the truth, cheating on their taxes, and oppressing the poor. Some of them will even feel so guilty about it that they give up and never go back to God (make sure that they don’t). I suggest, however, that we also keep them from gathering together for worship: that way they will start to forget what they have and who God is, making it much easier for us to put other potential gods in their way. And without encouragement from each other, or teaching that is consistent with the faith, they will start to drift. The sacraments, designed by Jesus himself to give his followers the strength to hang in there, are a huge barrier for us. So do whatever you can to keep them from receiving these. And finally, keep them from hearing or reading the words of God! Remember, when the Book of the Law was lost for so many years, the people of Israel fell into all kinds of idolatrous practices; I was not a happy camper when that was found again, believe you me.

In closing, now that I have given you so much hope, I do need to insert a word of caution. God loves people, although I have never been able to figure out why. He is merciful beyond reason – he showed that time and time again with the Israelites. They sinned over and over again, and yet he keeps taking them back. In fact, a main beef of mine with the prophets was that they always held out hope. Not content with doom and gloom, they pointed the way back to God.¹⁴ Now we have to worry about Christians preaching what they call the “good news” of God’s salvation. This is bad news for us, never forget that. (Be sure to use method Number 3 on those people.) In addition, the Christians even have extra help: an Advocate to intercede for them, comfort them and guide them into truth (actually God himself in another form, which I don’t think is exactly fair).¹⁵

So be on guard: work fast and work hard. The days are short and time is of the essence. It’s possible we are on the losing team,¹⁶ but let’s take as many people down with us as we can. And remember – I will be watching you.

-- The Lawless One¹⁷

¹⁴ Ez 18:5-9; 33:48; Jer 3:14-16; 30:33; Hosea 11:8-11; Ps 37

¹⁵ John 14:23-28, 16:7-15

¹⁶ Is 25:7-8, 19; 27:1

¹⁷ 2 Thes 2:8-10

Dorie Bliss is working on her MA in theology/spirituality. She also has an MA in sociology and loves exploring the complex relationships of systems and people, especially in the Catholic Church. Dorie and her husband Bert live in St. Joseph, MN.