

**BY DR. HERSCHEL H. HOBBS**

**on The Baptist Hour, November 6, 1960**

The Plumbline

**“And the Lord said  
unto me, Amos,  
what seest thou?  
And I said, a Plumbline.  
Then said the Lord,  
Behold, I will set a  
plumbline in the midst  
of my people Israel:  
I will not pass by  
them any more.”  
—Amos 7:8**



**T**HE CITIZENS of the United States exercise the greatest political blessing bestowed upon free man — the privilege of the free and secret ballot. But it is more than a privilege. It is a responsibility. The freedom of the ballot is not a freedom to vote or not to vote. It is the freedom to voice one's deepest convictions with respect to his wishes for his country and regarding those who shall be charged with the responsibility of rule. It is a secret ballot wherein the voter is sovereign, with no other to coerce or know.

How do you cast your ballot? This is a question to be answered only to God and in the sacred precincts of your own soul. Most assuredly I would not presume to tell you how to vote. But I would be derelict in my duty if I did not ask you to decide in the light of the Word of God. Does the

# Plumbline of God

Bible have any word for you in this momentous hour?

In the seventh chapter of Amos is recorded God's vision of a plumbline. A plumbline is a line suspending a weight by which to test the accuracy of a wall. God says, "*I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people.*" He will test the accuracy of the nation according to the blueprint of His will. How have they built the structure which God designed? But more important and personally, how have we built according to God's design for our nation? What was God's design for Israel? How had she ignored it? What is His design for the United States? How have we ignored it? We shall endeavor to answer these questions as we note, first, the design of righteousness; second, the design of service; third, the design of liberty.

FIRST, note the design of righteousness. Israel was to be a nation dedicated to the worship of the true God. But she had departed far from this purpose. While the people paid lip-service to Jehovah, they were bent upon their self-gratification. They adhered more to the Canaanite gods of fertility, both of soil and sex, than to Jehovah, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. They trampled justice under foot as they rendered legal decisions for bribes (5:12). They oppressed the poor in their pursuit of economic wealth. In their greed after gain "*they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes*" (2:6). So passionately did they seek after wealth that they panted "*after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor . . .*" (2:7). Money was king as it usurped the righteous rule of Jehovah. (page 54)

# THE PLUMBLINE OF GOD

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Our nation was founded by men and women who came to these shores in search for God. But we fear that many of their modern counterparts have become lost in their search for gold. A political analyst recently deplored the fact that a survey revealed that a majority of citizens polled had little concern for the position of political candidates with respect to the vital issues of our day. They wanted to know where they stood on matters of economic benefit to themselves. What is worse, few, if any, were concerned about the man himself. Such an attitude is reflected in the frantic efforts of rival political groups to out-promise all others.

It is not morally right to vote for a man or a party simply because of its stand on agriculture, parity, waterways, tariffs, wages, working hours or some local political plum. These may be important in their place. But they should not be given first place.

Man must have bread. But Jesus said, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4). Man has a body, but he is a soul. The fundamental power of a nation is not its factories, farms, natural resources, or markets of trade. Its basic strength lies in the righteous character of its people. Your nation is no stronger or greater than you are. That is why your character is of such great social importance. That is why your ballot plays so vital a part in the well-being of your nation. Therefore, you have no right to exercise it thoughtlessly, selfishly, or to forego its exercise altogether. Instead, you should cast your ballot carefully and prayerfully, asking God's guid-

ance that you may discern those persons and principles which more fully embody moral and civic righteousness. Then in God's sight have the courage to cast your weight on the side of righteousness.

## DESIGN OF SERVICE

SECOND, consider the design of service. From her beginning as a nation Israel was chosen of God to render a spiritual service to the other nations of the world. In Exodus 19: 5-6 God said, "*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*" To accomplish this purpose God located Israel in a strategic land. He gave her victory over her enemies, and so blessed her that she became a great nation. But Israel soon forgot her mission, and remembered only her God-given privileges.

This is seen in I Samuel 8. Israel demanded that Samuel anoint a king to rule over them. When he hesitated God said, "*Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them*" (v.7). When Samuel further warned them of the consequences of their request, the people replied, "*Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles*" (vv. 19-20). Thus Israel rejected a theocracy, the rule of God, for a monarchy, the rule of one man. Lost was

her sense of divine mission as she turned to the pursuit of political and military power. The sad sight of the Israel of Amos' day was the end result. And it was soon to pass away.

The history of the United States forms a remarkable parallel to that of Israel. To fail to see her divine roots is to ignore the facts of history. While Europe was just beginning to see the foregleams of the dawn out of the darkness of the Middle Ages, God put it into the heart of Columbus, as long before He did to Abraham to journey to a land about which he did not know. In succeeding centuries other men followed with a vision of God in their hearts. Subsequently a nation unlike any other the world had ever known was born. It emerged as a political entity just seventeen years before God put into the heart of the Englishman, William Carey, the vision of the modern missionary movement. That infant nation, under the blessings of God, is now the mightiest giant among nations. Following World War I the United States was thrust from com-

parative isolationism to become the leader of the free world.

But to what end? Is it that she might selfishly enjoy her greatness and her gain? Or shall it be to walk with heavy tread throughout the earth? Or shall it be simply to throw the balance of power on the side of nations whose records of colonialism have largely contributed to much of the world's present unrest? God forbid! Instead, may it ever be that she shall recognize her divine mission to share with the rest of the world her concept of government, her material abundance, and her faith in God through Jesus Christ. Only as she does this may she fulfill her God-given task.

### WORLD OPINION

In 1955 I traveled through Europe and the Middle East. Everywhere was found an attitude of scorn, jealousy, or suspicion toward the United States. In Lebanon, I asked a prominent man about the attitude of his people toward France, Great Britain, and the United States. He replied,

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# The Baptist Hour

## SERMON TOPICS FOR DECEMBER

Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs

Dec. 4—"The Corruption of Power" (Micah 3:1-4)

Dec. 11—"The Corruption of Prophecy" (Micah 3:5-8)

Dec. 18—"How Shall We Face God?" (Micah 6)

Dec. 25—"The Glory of Bethlehem" (Micah 5)

See page 28 for time and station in your area

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"We hate France, despise Great Britain, and do not trust the United States." He hastened to add, "We know that the United States means well, but in her alliance with the others we see her as an unwitting partner in the suppression of our part of the world." In response to a question as to Russia, he said, "We know what the West has done to us. We do not know about the East. But we are inclined to take a chance with the latter."

Last year I made a trip around the world. Everywhere—the Orient, Europe, yes, the Middle East—I found only good will for the United States. She was regarded as the hope of the world. Naturally, I asked myself, "Why the change?" Then the answer came. Between these visits there had occurred such events as Hungary, Tibet, the Suez crisis, incidents in Lebanon, Laos, and the China-India border dispute. In all these the United States had stood as the champion of the rights of smaller nations, calling both her friends and her foes to task where those rights were violated. Free men everywhere recognized where their true friendship lies.

This is a beginning, but only a beginning. The time has come when preventive measures alone cannot suffice. With the zeal of an evangelist our nation must propagate the principles which have made her what she is—political, economic, and spiritual.

How can this evangelism best be accomplished? It is in the light of this question that every citizen should enter the sacred enclosure of the free and secret ballot.

## DESIGN OF LIBERTY

THIRD, note the design of liberty. The Judeo-Christian concept regards man in the high dignity with which God made him. He is a free soul destined to stand before God, with God

alone as the basic and final tribunal of his faith and fate. All of this is bound up in the word "liberty." We have seen that in Israel this concept had been lost in the mad rush of oppression and greed.

To one who has visited other areas of the earth, the "Stars and Stripes" flutter in the breeze as an oasis in a desert. The word "America" is a magic word embodying the hopes and dreams of underprivileged and down-trodden people. Technically, the word "America" refers to the Western Hemisphere. But in the parlance of ordinary men it means one thing—the United States. While the citizens of other nations of this hemisphere are called by their national names, the word "American" is given to citizens of the United States. Why? Because the word no longer refers to geography or nationality. It embodies a principle, the principle of liberty.

It is an historical fact that this nation was founded by those who came to its shores to escape the political and religious persecution of Europe. The Declaration of Independence begins by stating that all men are born with inalienable rights. The first amendment to the American Constitution guarantees that the political may not encroach upon the religious rights of men. It guarantees the basic liberties of a free people: freedom of worship, of speech, of the press, of assembly, and the right of the redress of grievances against the government. Freedom is not a privilege to be bestowed or removed. It is the inalienable right of every man. It is a gift of God.

But the guarantee of these liberties did not end with the adopting of this amendment. Someone has said that "eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." From the day that our founding fathers bought freedom with their blood, event to this hour the

foes of freedom have continued to press their cause, under first one guise and then another—statism, communism, or some other "ism." Not since 1781 has America's freedom been so threatened as it is at this very hour.

The one issue which towers above all others is freedom. In the holy place of the secret ballot there is but

one question for you and me. How may this freedom be best safeguarded? Who is best qualified by experience and outlook to lead our nation in preserving that which makes America unique among the nations of the earth? No other person can answer that question for you. You alone can decide, under the guidance of God.

## OPPORTUNITY RAPIDLY FADES

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of Israel. She was founded by Jeroboam I in rebellion against threatened exorbitant taxation and oppression at the hand of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. The infant nation was wrapped in the swaddling clothes of human dignity and laid in the cradle of freedom. No sooner than done, however, the nation took its first decided step away from Jehovah. In order to break his people's ties with Jerusalem, Jeroboam built altars at Bethel and Dan as substitutes for Jerusalem as a place of the worship of Jehovah. These altars were destined to become pagan altars as the people gradually went after the gods of the land. With the loss of their oneness with Jehovah came the loss of all human, moral, and spiritual values and ideals. The result was oppression, corruption, and defiance of every law of Jehovah. With the loss of her purpose of being came the end of her right to continue to be.

This is the picture of the summer fruit. The best fruit is gone. Only the poor, useless, rotting fruit remains. The harvest is almost at an end. Israel will soon be no more.

In one of the most thought-provoking articles of recent date, one of America's best thinkers described the

United States as a nation without a purpose. It caused one's mind to hark back to the Pilgrim fathers, the Declaration of Independence, the pioneers, and the Gettysburg Address. These typify a people with a purpose. They suggest geographical, intellectual, and spiritual frontiers which ever beckoned to greater endeavor and achievement. But somewhere along the line the horizons closed in, the ship that once with full sail ploughed through the waves found itself in the dead calm of a silent sea. The conquistadors stacked their arms, furled their flags, and bivouacked under the cover of night.

Gone is the purpose of being. Dimmed is the heavenly vision. Lost in the darkness is the horizon of God's beckoning will and way.

What is America offering to God today that He cannot find elsewhere in the earth? Has the best fruit been plucked? Does He come seeking luscious grapes only to find that they have rotted with age? Is our nation but a basket of summer fruit?

If so, hear the word of the Lord! *"The end is come upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more"* (Amos 8:2). The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind ex-