



Fresh Start

Isaiah 52:12 NIV

But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

How Does the New Year Look?

Now that Christmas has passed and all the rush of it has settled, there is a certain amount of reminiscing that happens. Perhaps these stories of Christmas will warm your heart! One woman told of her business friend's daughter who refused the gift of a "new, gold Mercedes convertible because, she told her parents, 'You knew I wanted a black one.'" Another writer had this horror story to tell. "My boss told me they had to go to the Apple store after closing to return the iPhone 8 her nephew's parents bought for the child after he cried all Christmas Day because he wanted the iPhone X." Listen to this great story. "My childhood best friend threw a three hour crying fit when her high school boyfriend propose to her on Christmas. The reason? The ring he proposed with wasn't the one she wanted." One more to help you appreciate your own Christmas Day. "An acquaintance yelled at his aunt after she gave him a \$50 Amazon gift card, demanded cash and then when his aunt refused (rightfully)—threw the card at her and left the family party. He's 40." How would you like to have those family members on your gift list?

Not everyone finds Christmas time to be a happy part of the year and in fact many aren't all that thrilled about facing a new year either. Haunting memories and traumatic experiences beat down the future for them. Recent setbacks and crushing mistakes may give the new year a certain ring of doom to it; a foreboding pinned to it. Perhaps this coming year is not exciting for you, it carries with it the same humdrum and disappointments previous years offered. Not everyone looks forward to January 1 with anticipation and enthusiasm. Some of us, and perhaps you do too, have a bit of dread as you await the coming year. It is not crazy to feel that way. You certainly aren't alone if that is where you find yourself.

Many of us made big mistakes last year. David from the Bible certainly is famous for several. One that is rarely talked about is the time he decided to use his soldiers to count how many men he had who could serve in his army. The commander of his forces was incredulous! **But Joab replied to the king, "May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?"** (2 Samuel 24:3 NIV) David would not back down and so for the next nine months Joab and his associates tramped all over Israel counting the men. Altogether there were 1.3 million potential soldiers in the kingdom. Something about his order to take the census though did not set well with David. **David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."** (2 Samuel 24:10 NIV)

Somehow David realized that his demand to count the fighting men of Israel was a grievous offense to God and he was right. **Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" (2 Samuel 24:11-12 NIV)** The choices were not good. **So, Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me."** (2 Samuel 24:13 NIV) If it was me, I would have asked if there was a fourth option, but of course there wasn't, and it would have been ridiculous of me to pose the question. We cannot say for certain what about the census was so wrong; God after all ordered a number of them (pardon the pun) when the Israelites were making their way to the Promised Land. It seems though that David was making the kingdom about himself and the ability it had to fend for itself rather than relying upon God and His power to save them. Whatever the case, this was a huge mistake of David's, publicly humiliating, and certainly he regretted it the rest of his life.

We must say that Job had a pretty rough year. So did Ruth, losing her husband and Silas being beaten within an inch of his life. Many of us still carry the scars of mistakes we have made, mistreatment we have suffered and losses that have nearly broken us. Imagine if Thomas ended the year doubting the resurrection of Jesus, Peter suffering through his denial of Jesus, Mary her fears that Jesus had gone insane, and Euodia and Synteche and their humiliating quarrel that created turmoil in the Philippian church. Your year might not have been very good, and it is certain that nearly every important person in the Bible had a pretty bad year too.

God makes a promise to us through the prophet Isaiah. **But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.** (Isaiah 52: 12 NIV) You have trailing you memories of mistakes you have made and hurts you have suffered and perhaps for you they are like a lion hunting your down into this coming year. They plague your plans and bring a certain amount of dread to the coming year. God though is your rear guard. He is the Savior of your past. There are some things that you have done that were wrong and really wrong; words that never should have come out of your mouth. Actions you took that were harmful to you or someone else. Decisions you made that are costing you dearly. Not only that, you have been hurt by others and the wounds are still tender, troubles have hit you that seem impossible to overcome. Yet God is your rear guard. He is the protector of your past and He will carry you out of it into a new day.

When the Israelites stood at the edge of the Promised Land, they had to decide if they were going to leave behind their past wanderings or enter into a new adventure. It was a fresh day, that early morning as they marched up to the Jordan River. It was a fresh start. It was not just what was before them that could keep them back; it was what was behind them too. You are at the edge of a new year and God is ready to lead you across December and into January. What lies ahead you cannot say. You do know what is behind you and it is up to you if you are going to let Christ your Savior take care of it, take it out of Satan's hands and give it a new life as a step in the right direction. Plenty let the past keep them from what God has ahead for them. Surely you aren't that sort. You believe the promise God has for you as is recorded in the old King James Translation of the Bible, **Behold, I make all things new.** (Revelation 21:5 KJV) Whatever is behind, God is making it right so that you can move forward with His creativity and insight and direction and power and forge together, the two of you, a bright and "glorious morn". Today is the day you cross the river and start fresh with Christ as your Savior leading the way.