

# Understanding The Times

By Glenn A. Lucas

*This article is from the October 5, 2007, Mission Moments newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions. Permission is given to copy this article for distribution within your own congregation. Please credit the author and the Center for U.S. Missions in Irvine, California, [www.centerforusmissions.org](http://www.centerforusmissions.org). For more information, contact the Center at 949-854-8002 x1780.*

*“men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do”*

1 Chronicles 12:32

I've always been fascinated by the brief but poignant description of the sons of Issachar as men who “understood the times *and* knew what Israel should do” [emphasis added]. It's fascinating because the description is attached to the men of Issachar in a list of those who came to David at Hebron to turn over the Kingdom of Saul to him (1 Chronicles 12:23). Other tribes that are listed have descriptions that include their bravery or prowess in battle. Only the men of Issachar are given the distinction of having understanding and knowledge.

The men of Issachar understood the turbulent times the Kingdom of Israel faced during the transition from Saul as king to David. They knew and understood the challenges of being surrounded by Israel's enemies. Further, the men of Issachar must have understood the world context in which Israel existed and the culture clash the monotheistic Israel had with the polytheistic and idolatrous cultures surrounding them. Knowing what to do in that context was vital for the survival of Israel. Consider, whenever Israel lost its way and compromised her values (covenant with God) or worse abandoned them altogether she fell into disarray and subjugation. She in essence did not understand the times nor know what to do. Israel's history is replete with this loss of understanding and knowledge followed by a time of drifting further away from God. But God by his grace always calls Israel back to understanding and knowledge.

Today, Christian leaders, like the men of Issachar, need to understand the times and know what the Church should do. We need to understand that we are in a battle for the souls of those whom Satan holds imprisoned behind the gates of Hell whom we as the church are called to rescue by the grace of God. We need to understand that the enemy does not tire nor grow weary. He will not quit the battle nor forsake his mission. He holds people prisoner as he always has through false promises, distraction and deception.

We need to understand that it is a myth that most people being held by Satan are miserable, hurting, broken, anxious or in despair. The opposite is true. Most are happily going to hell even if they don't know it or believe it. They have good lives. They are healthy. They have loving relationships with family

and friends. Their level of stress is no greater or lesser than most people they know. They have a sense of the spiritual even if they are not religious. They are good people. Satan allows them temporal satisfaction to distract them from eternal truth.

We need to understand the times. More and more people have negative impressions of the Christian Church in America. That truth is to be expected. Jesus tells us that people will think and say negative things about his followers (Luke 6:22; Matthew 10:22). We need to understand that many people think one religion is as good as another in our pluralistic society. We need to understand that right and wrong are shaped very often by the volume of people doing a behavior and those accepting or apathetic about it. We need to understand that politics and politicians are not the friends of the Christian Church. We need to understand that we live in an unchurched culture.

We need to understand that the many distractions and opportunities in peoples' lives today mean they are juggling many things at once, job, family, friends, church (if they attend) and recreation. We need to understand that most people are sprinting through life today. They make short term commitments and are often distracted even from those.

We need to understand that even as busy as they are most people want their lives to be meaningful and make a difference. They are motivated by hope, help and home. We need to understand that most people are not looking for a new challenge, greater commitment of time, energy or money. Reason is not a strong motivating factor for them. We need understand that we live in a time of instant gratification and quick abandonment.

In short we live in challenging times and the church exists in the midst of a challenging culture but when has this not been true? Like the men of Issachar we need to understand the times AND we need to know what the Church should do.

The Church should hold on to the truth of God's word. The Church should hold its doctrines and values and not confuse them practices and forms. The Church should learn as much as it can about the times and contexts in which it exists today.

Churches should form and execute strategies to effectively share the unchanging gospel with people who desperately need it even if they do not know it. Churches should learn their communities and become a part of and not apart from the them. Churches should look for new opportunities to start new churches in the midst of unchurched people. Churches should move beyond what is comfortable and safe.

Churches should plan and execute ministry that understands how valuable peoples' time is to them. Churches should simplify their ministry to be

intentional about making disciples, nurturing them to maturity and sending them out into service.

The Church and churches should be like the men of Issachar understanding the times and knowing what to do. We should trust Jesus when he says, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)

## Questions for Reflection

1. What does your church do to understand the times?
2. How is your church intentionally and strategically executing effective ministry designed to make new disciples?
3. How are disciples nurtured to maturity of faith in your congregation?
4. How are disciples released into God's service in your congregation and beyond?
5. How often does your church expect a person to be present at church in a given week? How many ministries does your church ask people to participate in during the course of a month?
6. Are your ministries, Bible studies and programs designed primarily for sprinters or marathoners?
7. Does your church seek to motivate people more with challenges, commitment and reason or opportunities to make a difference, make connections and inspire hope?
8. What is one thing you can do to get a better understanding of the times in which we live?
9. How will you help your congregation be effective in proclaiming the gospel in today's world?