

URBAN CURRENT

Notown

"Hubris, racial tension, myopic politicians, and the woeful auto industry brought this iconic American city to its knees."

So begins the one-year *TIME* magazine project back in 2009 titled "Notown," chronicling "A Year Long Look Inside the Once and Future Detroit."

Detroit is "... the city that was once the living proof of American prosperity ..." declared the opening piece, written by Detroit native Daniel Okrent. The city's population was almost two million in the 1950s. It was the fourth largest city in the U.S. Times were good; neighborhoods were bustling. In 1960, Detroit had the highest per capita income in the U.S.

Fast forward to today. Population has been halved. The city's economic engine sits up on blocks in an abandoned backyard. More than half of Detroit's land is now vacant, with 78,000 homes sitting abandoned or falling apart. Unemployment is 28.9 percent. In 2013, the city had \$18 billion in liabilities. More than 34 percent of households in Detroit are on food stamps.

All this despite billions of dollars in public and private investment over the past 20 years, including two stadiums, a river walk, three new casinos, thousands of new hotel rooms and loft and apartment units, and the \$50-plus million to fight the blight by demolishing more than 4,000 vacant homes. Then there is the \$100 million in federal funding from troubled asset relief program Hardest Hit Fund.

Tim Stanley opines in the *Telegraph*, under the headline "DETROIT BANKRUPTCY," "This is what happens if you vote Democrat for 51 years ... bad policy, i.e. the unions helping to price the local car workers out of the global market as a big contributing factor to Detroit's demise."

And let's not even get started about the state of public education in Detroit. You will recognize the usual players: Democrats, unions,

and humanists all superintended a system meltdown.

Hughey Newsome chronicles, in the *Daily Caller* in July 2013, "racial rhetoric used to conceal ongoing corruption."

Does anybody want to talk about the breakdown of the family as a contributing factor to the overall demise? At the end of 2012, of the 264,000 households in Detroit, only 24,000 or nine percent were married-couple families with children under 18. Another 78,000 households, or 29 percent of the total, are families headed by women with no husband or father present in the home. Of these, almost 44,000 have children under 18. In one year, 75 percent of the babies born in Detroit were born to unmarried women.

To all my "Save America" friends, I ask: If Christianity cannot save Detroit, why do you think it can save America? To those who think, "Detroit? Good riddance!" I point you to God's determination regarding Jonah and Nineveh.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Jesus cried, not many years before the complete destruction of the capital city of Israel. And Jesus mourned Jerusalem's demise. What has the Christian response been to Detroit's deterioration? What has been the American Christian response to the demise of cities across America during the last half of the 1900s? Has this response been biblical? Has it honored God? Has it glorified Christ? Can we preach the message of Christ without the heart of Christ? Should we not mourn the various expressions of depravity's march?

Michael Carter, a member of our church, grew up in Detroit living there into young adulthood. He watched disheartedly as the middle class, and then the working class, left the city. Families moved to the suburbs; city services deteriorated. His parent's house, never burglarized in 30 years, has been broken into three times since 2003. Growing up in the great Tabernacle Baptist Church under the pastor-

ate of the famed Dr. Frederick G. Sampson, Michael witnessed his church lead in preaching and living the gospel, providing education and support for families with early childhood programs in various community empowerment efforts. Carter grieves the condition of his home city.

"Oh Detroit, Detroit." Haman Cross has pastored Rosedale Park Baptist Church in Detroit for over 30 years. Smack dab in the middle of the perfect storm of 50 years of political corruption and economic sea change, he watched the city sink in a deep blue sea. Born and raised in Motown, Cross draws a parallel between the experience of those in Jerusalem during the time of Jeremiah and others of the exiled generation and those in Detroit. There was a remnant in Jerusalem. The city was not just their home, it was their heart. They also knew the city to be the heart of God. Cross is among a remnant grieving over the city of his heart. When there was opportunity to return, he points out, Nehemiah was determined to go back and rebuild. He cites a dozen or so young people from his own congregation who now have masters or doctoral degrees who have a burning desire to be a part of the rebuilding of Detroit.

Detroit has a significant place in the story of Baptist Bible Fellowship. As I write this, preparations are being made for the fall national meeting in this needy city.

Like determined dandelions bursting out of cracked pavement, a new Detroit is sprouting. To what degree will God's people be a part of the unprecedented opportunities?

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