

# Forerunner

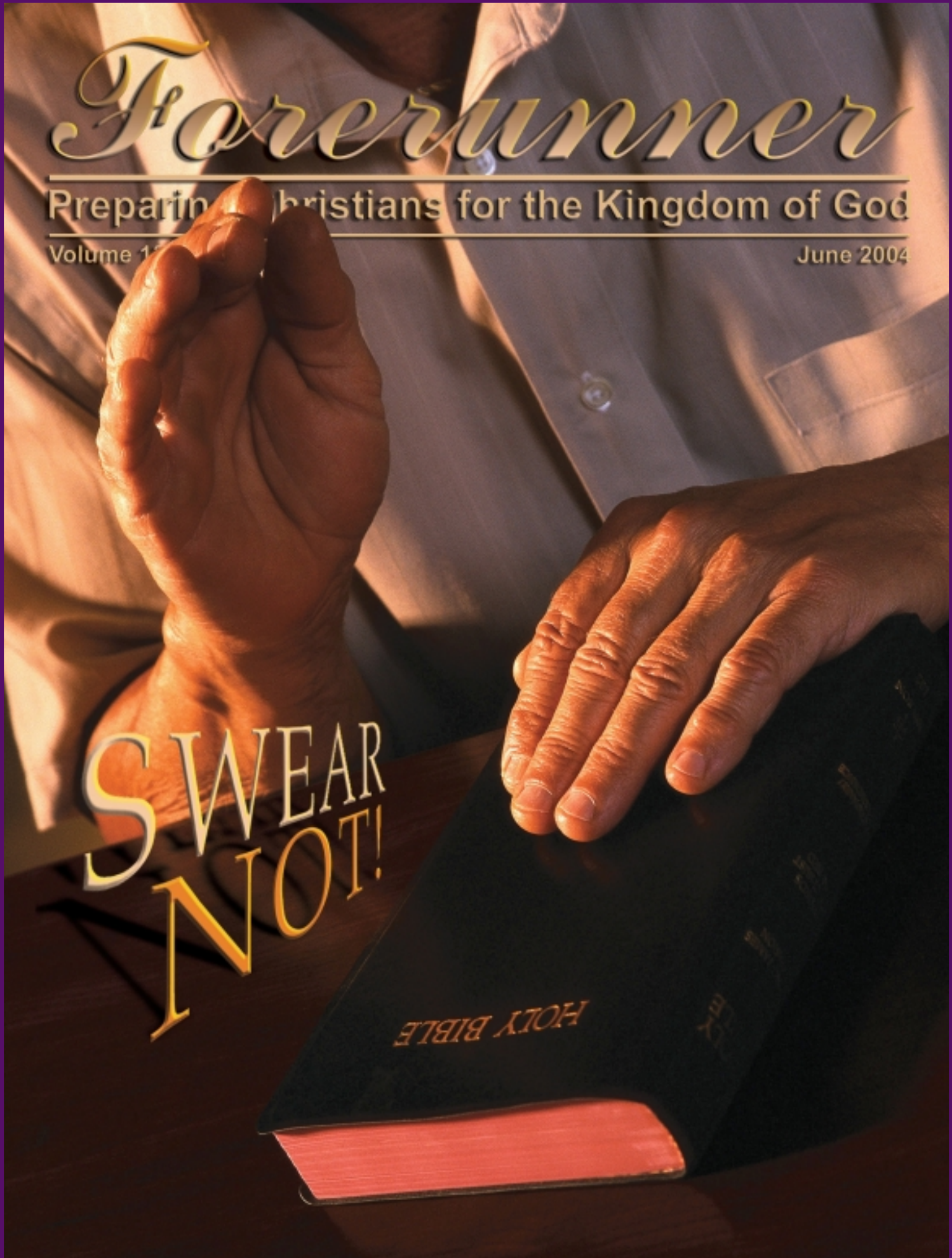
Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 1

June 2004

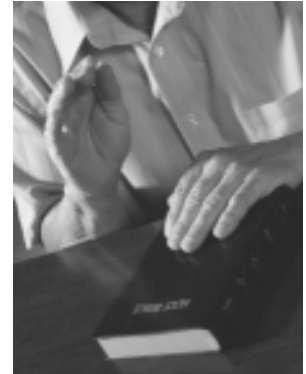
SWEAR  
NOT!

HOLY BIBLE



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## About Our Cover



People swear or take oaths for many reasons, feeling a need to involve a higher power to guarantee their words. Jesus, however, says, "Do not swear at all"! Our word should be so honest it needs nothing to back it up.

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#### Illustration/Photographs

Corbis, pg. 11;  
Artwork by Pat Marvenko Smith,  
copyright 1982/1992 -  
[www.revelationillustrated.com](http://www.revelationillustrated.com), pg. 13;  
Christopher Morris pg. 18-19

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This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

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# The Beast and Babylon

## Part Three: Who Is the Woman?

A sermon given in the spring of 2003 emphasized strongly that Jesus Christ said we would not know the day or the hour of His return because it is completely in the Father's hand (Matthew 24:36). In plain words, the specific date of His return is simply not going to be known to us. This means that any day, including the Feast of Trumpets—which most use as the end-point of their calculations—would be a speculation.

How many people have attempted to determine when that day is in spite of Jesus' plain statement? At the very least that shows a certain amount of skepticism and perhaps even outright disbelief in those researching. It is almost as if He is not taken seriously. Not long ago, a man not in the church of God commented that he believes anyone searching into this is guilty of blasphemy! Notice this episode from Acts 1:6-7:

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

Like us, the apostles were curious and excited about these things. Their question is not even specifically about a certain day because they thought the time had already come.

Christ's answer is every bit as general as their question. He tells them clearly that they are not going to know. His statement coordinates with what He says in the Olivet Prophecy, but it expands the thought to "times" or "seasons." "Times" implies periods of time, whereas "seasons" indicates a length of time characterized by certain events, such as a winter "season" contains events such as snow and cold temperatures. Therefore, He suggests that His return will be characterized by a span of time in which certain events occur.

The phrase "it is not for you to know" is a strong recommendation for them to avoid probing into these things because it would be a waste of time—they had more important things to do. His answer does not include even a hint as to the general period of the establishment of God's Kingdom.

Judging by Jesus' rather terse reply here, compared to the zealous efforts some in the church today are making, it suggests that over the years we have been making a too-determined effort to know every prophecy's precise fulfillment. Our curiosity seems to demand to know all of the *whos*, *whats*, *whys*, *whens* and *wheres* of these events. It is easy for me to understand this desire, but it is not something that appeals to me. Nevertheless, I want you to understand my approach. I look upon everyone's end-time ideas, including Herbert Armstrong's and my own, as theory, speculation. Here is why.

## Educated Guesses?

Just from the standpoint of recent church history, I sometimes wonder if we have gotten anything involving prophecy right! This is an exaggeration, of course, but we have gotten some things wrong, especially in the area of timing. Even though the Bible shows it is not wrong to attempt to decipher prophecy, experience clearly shows interpreting it is not an open book.

The angel says in Daniel 12:4, “But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.” This verse refers to the entire prophecy, which begins two chapters earlier. Although the wording is somewhat confusing, it means that Daniel understood part of it but certainly not all of it. Even though we are coming along later in time, and we will eventually know more precisely than Daniel did, what we know will nonetheless have to be revealed. The prophecy is given but not explained. This is God’s pattern.

The phrase “knowledge will be increased” is a direct reference to the prophecy itself; that is, knowledge of the prophecy will be increased. Many would seek to understand it between Daniel’s time and its fulfillment, but its message must be revealed. However, its revelation will not occur until the people of God need to understand it for their well-being and God’s glory. What are the chances it will be revealed in its fullness to any of us? My guess is: extremely small!

Not only must its message be revealed, but it will also not be revealed until the time comes that God is good and ready. God adds in verse 10 that only “the wise shall understand.” The “wise” are described elsewhere as those who keep the commandments of God (Hosea 14:9).

Moses writes in Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” God, for His purposes, chooses to keep certain things to Himself. On the other hand, He reveals a great deal about Himself in nature, revelation that is available to anyone.

In Scripture, He reveals more specific details about His purpose, character, and way. This revelation is more closed than the revelation in nature, but even so, much of man’s difficulty at grasping Scripture is not because God deliberately cloaks it, but

because of man’s enmity against Him. Jesus charges in Matthew 13:15:

For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them.

Other scriptures reveal that there is a measure of deliberateness in doing so.

Micah 5:2 is a clear example of God’s withholding some specifics contained in prophecies surrounding the birth of Christ: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” Notice how God reveals and yet withholds until the precise time is right. In this verse,

He clearly reveals that the Christ will be born in Bethlehem, the city of David’s birth, but He did not reveal the precise spot until He led the magi to Him by means of the “star.”

Much of what He chooses to keep secret has nothing to do with prophecy, such as why He does not intervene more quickly to provide what we think we need as He tests

our faith through a long trial. Yet, He clearly hides many of the specifics of future events. Why? We saw the general answer in Deuteronomy 29:29: He wants us to set our priorities according to what we have already been given. In other words, He wants us to submit to the things He has already revealed.

Amos 3:7 gives us hope toward understanding the times we are living through, “Surely the LORD GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” Putting these last two scriptures together with examples like Daniel 12, we can deduce that He promises to reveal the understanding of prophecy on a “need to know” basis.

This does not mean we should not look into them, though, because we never know for sure whether the “need to know” time has arrived. However, until that time arrives, precise understanding is impossible. Therefore, we should receive anyone’s interpretation as theory until evidence arises to prove it.

I heard Herbert Armstrong twice proclaim that he was not a prophet. Additionally, he understood that there

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—Deuteronomy 29:29

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are no New Testament prophets in the classic, Old Testament sense of one who has direct communication from God foretelling the future. In the June 1972 *Tomorrow's World* magazine he wrote, "Emphatically I am NOT a prophet, in the sense of one to whom God speaks directly, revealing personally a future event to happen or new truth, or new or special instruction from God—separate from, and apart from what is contained in the Bible. And I never have claimed to be." Throughout Herbert Armstrong's ministry as a broadcaster and writer, he was interpreting and speculating. Like us, this left him free to make predictions, but they are not infallible. They are educated guesses, speculations based upon Scripture and the latest news events, and therefore they occasionally need updating.

Mr. Armstrong never received information in visions, dreams, or in face-to-face meetings with God. His writings on prophetic subjects are frequently peppered with words like "could," "might," and "may." Contrast that with the Bible's prophecies, which use words like "shall," "will," "most certainly," "surely," and "truly, truly." Herbert Armstrong's "prophecies" were clearly speculations partly based on what he perceived from the news of the time.

This should in no way diminish our respect for him as an apostle because he had to speculate within the same constraints as everyone else. He frequently made changes in what he anticipated would happen. I believe God used him to raise up the end-time church. He was not lying to us in his writings on prophecy, but his interpretations of them were liberally salted with speculations.

Notice what God says through the apostle John about time: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which

God gave Him to show His servant—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John" (Revelation 1:1). Add to this Revelation 3:11, where Jesus is directly quoted: "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold that fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." He says "shortly" in one place and "I come quickly" in another, and already 2,000 years have passed! Was Jesus lying?

Besides John's writings, the prophecies in the epistles of Paul and Peter are very general, especially regarding the time things would occur.

In addition, since looking into this subject more carefully than ever before, I have noticed the proclivity of people to use prophetic scriptures in a loose manner. For instance, every reference in Old Testament prophecies to things like Israel, Judah, Zion, daughters of Zion, etc., automatically becomes an end-time prophecy of the church as well.

On what authority do they do this? There is no doubt that there *are* some parallels—but *every* time? In the same manner, certain symbols are *always* believed to indicate the same real entity. However, the Bible itself is not always consistent in this regard. For example, the term "Zion," which some almost automatically interpret to mean the church, is actually used by God in seven different ways in Scripture.

The same loose usage is sometimes true of the "woman" symbol. Some will automatically interpret it as "church." However, in the Bible, in context, "woman" overwhelmingly symbolizes a physical city or nation, not a church. This is not to say a church can never be a true interpretation of "woman," but only that we must be careful and honest in context.

"Surely the LORD God does nothing,  
unless He reveals His secret  
to His servants the prophets."

—Amos 3:7

## Europe, a Fearsome Beast?

In the first two articles on this subject, the foundation was laid to show that, as conditions are today, events are not producing a Europe that has any resemblance to the frighteningly powerful Beast revealed in Revelation 13. This does not mean that things will not change. Yet, if Europe is the location of the Beast, it is very slow to form.

Right now, Europe is in political turmoil and thus divided. Many individual nations within the European Union are moribund economically, and just recently, the EU took its first real step toward a common military—a force of only 2,000 personnel that will eventually grow

to 60,000. Considering the planners' dreams for a union powerful enough to counterbalance the United States, those are very modest figures. However, at this time that is all they can afford. Germany's air force is so pitifully small that, when they had to send a small force of personnel to a peacekeeping commitment they volunteered for in Macedonia, they had to lease transport planes from Ukraine to get their people there!

In late April 2003, Germany, France, Belgium, and Luxembourg held a summit attempting to create a military alliance. Notice, however, that Italy, Spain, and Britain were not included. *BBC News* reported

even before it began that the Italians objected, saying that “any attempt to forge closer military ties would be ‘viewed by them with a very critical eye.’” A couple of days following that jibe, British Prime Minister Tony Blair castigated the four nations just as the Italians did, saying, “Such a move is destructive of NATO.” Of the remaining 21 nations that are now part of the EU, only one has reacted favorably to the summit’s proposal.

The European nations as a whole are envious of and resent America, but at this point in time, they are so dependent on it economically and militarily that all they can do is make a lot of bluster. They cannot completely back away. Germany is considered Europe’s economic engine, but things are still not going well economically for Germany and for that matter all of the European Union. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on May 7, 2004, in an article titled “Poor Economic Report: Germany falls in global economy ranking”:

Germany’s competitive position in the global economy slipped again last year. The euro zone’s largest economy fell to 21 among 60 industrialized countries in the “World Competitiveness Yearbook 2004” of the International Institute for Manage-

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ment Development (IMD).

Germany ranked 20th last year and 15th in 2002 in the Lausanne organization’s ranking, which compares the 60 most important countries and regions in the global economy, using 323 criteria. IMD calculates the index based on four main criteria, covering economic performance, government efficiency, business efficiency and infrastructure.

Government efficiency was particularly weak. Here, Germany dropped to 34th from 30th. Germany’s overall business efficiency also drew a worse grade, falling seven places to rank 34. IMD said high wages,

short working time and a lack of entrepreneurial spirit were problems negatively affecting Germany’s competitiveness. In terms of infrastructure, however, Germany ranked No. 10.

As in past years, the Lausanne researchers put the United States in first place in their overall ranking.

In this world, the economy is power. The EU is not yet showing signs that it is a union of power.

## From Nebuchadnezzar to the End Times

Relative to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2, the previous article showed that, through history, as the properties of the metal changed, so did the nation or empire represented by the metal, as well as the geographical location of the world-dominating power. Thus, its center of power shifts from time to time. In addition, Israel is likewise not geographically located where it was anciently. Therefore, we should not be surprised if the final Beast power is not wholly located within the geographical boundaries of the ancient Roman Empire.

We cannot assume that God looks at national boundaries as we do. From its location between the Tigris and

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Euphrates rivers, Babylon once flourished as a city and then as a powerful nation dominating other nations. Then, hundreds of years after reaching the peak of its power, it disappeared from the world scene. However, it has not disappeared completely because it resurfaces in the book of Revelation as an end-time entity, besides having become the biblical codename for the worldwide, anti-God system.

The Roman Empire was just one world-dominating empire within that Babylonian system. Many Semitic peoples, including the Israelites, have lived for much of the past 2000 years strongly influenced by the Roman system.

## Is Israel of No Consequence in the Last Days?

Since “Babylon” makes an appearance in Revelation, where is Israel in that book? The nation of Israel is the entity upon which virtually the entire Bible focuses. It begins in Genesis 12:1-3:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

From this beginning with Abraham, Israel stands at the fore of nearly all biblical prophecy, yet the name “Israel” appears only three inconsequential times in Revelation: Once each in chapters 2, 7, and 21.

Notice the clear implications of a series of subsequent promises appearing in Genesis:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift up your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered” (Genesis 13:14-16)

Genesis 27:27-29 is a blessing spoken by Isaac to Jacob, adding to the promises already given to Abraham:

And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said: “Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed. Therefore may

God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!”

In Genesis 28:14, God further expands upon the previous promises: “Also your [Jacob’s] descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

These promises either imply or clearly state large populations, large land surfaces spread to the four corners of earth, good geographical locations, pleasant weather patterns, rich soil, abundant mineral wealth, and Abraham’s descendants being a blessing both physically and spiritually to all nations. Do these promises not indicate that Israel is to become a major force in the world?

In Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the end times and beyond, Israel is almost always the subject. Other nations, regardless of how populous and powerful, are mentioned only as they come into contact with Israel.

An interesting contrast is that in Revelation, a book devoted almost exclusively to the end, direct evidence of Israel’s existence is sparse and vague. In it, Israel is clearly mentioned, but these instances are not expanded upon. However, as the time of the end has approached, God has revealed where Israel is, and it is indeed large and important. Its combined populations, in nations spread over much of the globe, total somewhere around 500 million people. Its combined economic, military, educational, cultural, religious, and political influence is unrivaled in the entire world. Does God just write Israel off in the most significant end-time book? No, it is there but prophetically hidden.

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**“I will bless those who bless you,  
and I will curse him who curses you;  
and in you all the families  
of the earth shall be blessed.”**  
—Genesis 12:3

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## Beginning the Search

Most biblical commentators believe that both the physical nation of Israel and the spiritual Israel of God, the church, are identified in Revelation 12:

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. . . . And

*(continued on page 17)*

## Part One

**G**od Almighty has been planning an indescribable wedding and wedding supper for His Son, scheduled “from the foundation of the world.” This will be the grandest affair the universe has ever seen! Many believers understand the elect have been invited to the wedding ceremony—not as mere guests—but as the very *Bride* of the Christ (II Corinthians 11:2)!

Do we realize how priceless God’s proposal is? Do we get more excited about it as each day passes? If we do not cherish the magnitude of God’s personal invitation to us, we will waste this indescribable calling and opportunity. We have heard the phrase “opportunity of a lifetime” so often that, if we are not careful, we can fail to recognize this “opportunity of all eternity.”

Some might ask, “Why does it matter?” If we can grasp the big picture of what God is offering us, we may experience the same motivation that Jesus had when He endured the shame of the cross “for the

joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2). Like Him, we can receive incentive from the anticipation and joy of what lies in our future as the Bride of the Son of God—if we endure to the end.

Sometimes men in particular find it hard to feel motivated by the idea of being a bride—even the Bride of Christ. Men need to remember that this means being His confidante, His eternal assistant, the desire of His heart. We will be His companion, helper, and the apple of His eye forever. Moreover, He is and will always be our reason to live and the joy of our lives, and His purposes and projects will be our everlasting occupation. Together, Jesus and His Bride will bring the whole world into the Kingdom of God until every knee will bow in humble adoration and worship of God the Father.

The Father has summoned each one of us to be part of this awesome, life-changing enterprise. A just-ended, reality TV show revolved around young business people vying to be the newest apprentice to mogul Donald Trump. The contestants want to win this position more than any-

thing in the world. But their aspiration is nothing compared to what God has offered us! We are being called to be “one body” with Christ, to be His eternal helpmeet. Once Christ is married, this offer will never be offered again to others. He will marry only one Bride, and that exalted position is being offered to us.

Have we really allowed that truth to sink in? Have we heard King Jesus propose? Have we received His engagement ring? Whether we realize it or not, these things have already happened!

### Adamic Types

**B**iblical themes are woven through God’s Word from its earliest to its last words. The theme of God preparing a Bride for His Son is no exception. It leaps from the earliest pages of the Bible and reappears constantly, including the Book’s final chapters.

In the days when Jesus and His chosen disciples walked the streets of Jerusalem, it was customary for a young man’s father to choose a bride for his son. Once the father selected the bride, he talked to her father, and together they decided on the bride price. The son’s father paid the price, and the woman was then free to meet the son.

We can see this theme several times in the Bible’s first book, Genesis. On the sixth day of creation, the first man Adam is fashioned outside the Garden of Eden and then placed into God’s garden, a type of God’s presence (Genesis 2:7-8). At this point, Adam, a type of Jesus the “second Adam” (I Corinthians 15:45; Romans 5:14), has no wife. God brings the animals of the garden to Adam to name them and highlight his solitude (Genesis 2:18-20).

After each day of creation, God looks on His handiwork and pronounces it “good.” In Genesis 2:18, we read for the first time that something is “not good,” as God announces, “It is not good that man should be alone.” This is a type illustrating that Jesus, the second Adam,

Will You  
Marry Me?

also needs a wife. The animals, not of the same kind as Adam, are unthinkable as potential mates, and in the same way, God must have a wife for His Son who is the “same kind” as He. At the resurrection, the saints will be changed to be like Him (I John 3:2), born of spirit and at that time incorruptible and perfect, just as Jesus is (I Corinthians 15:42-54; Jude 24). Human, fleshly bodies will be transformed into radiant spirit bodies just as Jesus has, as bright as the sun itself in glory (Daniel 12:2-3). The Bride of Christ will be of the same kind as He is.

In Genesis 2:21, God puts Adam into a deep sleep, a type of death. Only in his “death” does he find the answer to his loneliness. The Eternal opens up Adam’s side and uses part of his body, a rib, to “build” (the literal Hebrew word) him a wife, a companion and intimate (Genesis 2:21-24).

In the same way, Jesus, the second Adam, teaches us He must die like a seed of wheat (John 12:24) before He can build His church, His future wife (Matthew 16:18). On the stake, Jesus literally dies, His side is opened with a spear (John 19:34), and part of His body—blood and water—opens the way to provide Him a Bride and a Family for God. His blood cleanses His future Bride of all sin (I John 1:7) and pays the ransom price for her release (I Peter 1:18-19). Paul also mentions in Ephesians 5:26 that the church is cleansed “with the washing of water by the word.”

In addition, when He died, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51), opening the way into the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God in heaven (Hebrews 10:19-22). We can now come boldly before the throne of God because of what our Savior did for His Bride and ultimately for all mankind who accept Him.

His giving of Himself in sacrifice also pays the ancient “bride price.” We are “bought at a price” (I

Corinthians 6:20), redeemed from the wages of sin, with His own blood shed in our behalf, and we become His.

God, considered to be Adam’s father (Luke 3:38), builds a wife for Adam taken from his body, yet a separate personality (Genesis 2:22). This happens late at the end of the sixth day. Likewise, the Father will present the second Adam with His bride at the end of man’s sixth thousand-year day on earth. Currently, we are betrothed to Christ (II Corinthians 11:2).

Then, in Genesis 2:24, Moses writes, “. . . and they shall become one flesh.” These same words, as pointing to Jesus and the church, are called a “great mystery” (Ephesians 5:30-32). Adam and Eve were to be “one”—the same Hebrew word Moses uses to describe God, though more than one personality, as being perfectly “one” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus sees the church as one body (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 20). He prays that His one body of believers be one with each other and with Him in the same way that Jesus and God the Father are inseparably one (John 17:20-23).

## Old Testament Parallels

**T**here are other parallels of the marriage of Jesus and the church woven throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus’ betrothal to the church is pictured in the covenant between God and the nation of Israel (Exodus 24:1-8), forming what we now call the “Old Covenant.” Israel agreed to this covenant on the Feast of Pentecost after the giving of God’s law on Mount Sinai. Sadly, she does not take long to prove herself unfaithful as the Israelites worship a Golden Calf—a different god—just days after committing themselves to God. Yet, God proves faithful repeatedly, in spite of the Israelites’ infidelity to Him. In the end, however, God has no choice but to divorce Israel (Jeremiah 3:8), who seems unable to

stop her spiritual adultery with other gods and nations, as well as many other sins.

With the death of Jesus, there could be no claim of any ties left in the union between God and Israel (Romans 7:1-6). After three days and three nights in the grave, Jesus is resurrected and then ascends to be accepted as the spiritual Wave-sheaf, the first of the firstfruits. His ascension on Sunday after the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread, starts the count to the Feast of Weeks—Pentecost—in which seven Sabbaths are completed. After His death and resurrection, Jesus is totally free to marry—and He will be!

The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, found in Genesis 24, is very enlightening about our upcoming marriage to Jesus Christ. First, we must review the connection to Abraham and Isaac. Earlier, in Genesis 22, Abraham is willing to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Isaac is widely viewed as a type of Christ, as God offers His greatest gift to mankind—His only Son Jesus (Genesis 22:2; John 3:16).

Isaac, a grown man at the time, does not resist but is willing to be sacrificed, like Christ (John 10:17-18), before God provides a substitute for Isaac. All this takes place on Mount Moriah, the future site of the Temple (II Chronicles 3:1). The site is named “The-LORD-Will-Provide.” The ram caught in the thicket by its horns is also a type of Jesus Christ, who indeed was sacrificed.

When Isaac turns 40, Abraham arranges for a wife to be found from among his family (Genesis 24:1-4, 37-38). God is also looking for a bride for Christ from the household of God (I Timothy 3:15). Jesus must marry a wife who is of the same kind and of the same Family as He is. Therefore, because we are all children of God, and since we are of the same Family, Jesus can actually call us His brethren. We “are all of one” (Hebrews 2:11).

Entrusted with this task, Abraham’s servant goes to Nahor in

northern Mesopotamia, where Abraham's family still lives. Upon arriving, the servant "happens upon" Rebekah, Abraham's brother's granddaughter, as she goes to draw water from the well (Genesis 24:10-21). Some versions of the Bible say she was at "a well," but the Hebrew word clearly denotes a spring. Notice the potential bride is found actively working just as God's church must be "found so doing" when Christ returns (Matthew 24:44-47). The Bride of Christ will also be found drawing from pools of living water.

These events occur at the time of day called *ereb*—just as evening begins, the time around sunset. Biblically, it is the beginning of a new day—certainly a momentous day for Rebekah and Isaac. Likewise, when God arranges for us to marry His Son, it is a wonderful new day. Remember it is Jesus' Father—God the Highest—who selects the Bride of Christ (John 6:44), just as surely as Abraham, through his servant, was the one selecting Isaac's wife. We are handpicked by none other than the highest Being in the universe, and our names have been written in the Book of Life from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; 4:4). Our calling cannot be any higher or more exciting.

Abraham's servant finds out that Rebekah is the daughter of Bethuel, whose name means, of course, "house of God." Remember Jesus' Bride also *must* come from the "house of God." Rebekah is a virgin, just as the bride of Christ is seen spiritually as a virgin (II Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 14:4). As High Priest, Jesus can only marry a virgin (Leviticus 21:14).

Rebekah responds positively to the servant's inquiry and welcomes him to stay with her family, whereupon Abraham's servant recounts the story and offers Rebekah some jewels and new clothing (Genesis 24:53). She is invited to leave immediately and to commit to marry a man she has never seen, just as we

commit to loving Jesus, whom we have not seen (I Peter 1:8). Without hesitation, she responds, "I will go" (verse 58). Abraham's servants then take her to the groom's father's home. In the same way, God's angelic servants will find us and gather us up to meet Jesus in the air after the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:30-31).

We often fail to realize how momentous Rebekah's decision was—to leave her family, home, and her ties to the culture in Nahor. Naturally, she did not know she would become the mother of so many illustrious people—all the Israelitish people, including Moses, David, and Christ Himself. She could not grasp the full picture, but she realized enough to value the proposal and respond.

In the same way, our "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God has prepared" for us (I Corinthians 2:9), but we have similarly responded to our high calling. Rebekah goes the distance, leaving the idolatrous culture of her day just as we must (Revelation 18:4). She seeks a different homeland, looks for a different city, just as we of faith are doing also (Hebrews 11:8-10).

Isaac sees Rebekah coming in the early evening and moves quickly to meet her, just as Jesus descends to meet us at His coming. He weds Rebekah by taking her into his mother's tent to consummate the marriage (Genesis 24:65-67). Isaac loves her dearly. This is a type of our marriage to Christ. Paul tells us our mother is "Jerusalem above" (Galatians 4:22, 26), of which Sarah is the type.

Believers have been called to be one with Christ, "bone of His bones, flesh of His flesh," members of His body—His very Bride, eternal companion, helper, and confidante. There will never be another Bride of Christ, just as there was only one Eve or one Rebekah. He longs to be with us always. He invites us to sit with Him on His throne. There is no higher calling.

## The Virtuous Wife

Another marriage parallel may be found in Proverbs 31:10-31, a passage known as "The Virtuous Wife." Most have assumed this passage describes the ideal wife, but it is probably so much more than that—a description of the Bride of Christ. In this virtuous woman can be found many parallels with the church:

- Her husband trusts her (verse 11).
- She is a woman of good works (verse 13).
- She actively feeds her children (verse 15).
- She plants a vineyard, a type of Jesus' relationship with believers (John 15:1-8).
- She stands strong and does not let her lamp—a symbol of the Holy Spirit—go out (verse 18). The five wise virgins of Matthew 25 have enough oil to keep their lamps aflame too.
- She makes quality garments, a type of being dressed in righteousness (verse 24).
- She is wise, showing she understands the connection between wisdom and the fear of God (verse 30; Psalms 111:10)

One can find many more parallels to the church by studying the passage. How well do we, as members of the betrothed Bride of Christ, fit this description? Perhaps we can use Proverbs 31 to evaluate our spiritual progress.

Next time, we will examine more biblical types of the marriage of Christ and the church, along with its connection to the Day of Pentecost.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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*“But above all, my brethren,  
do not swear,  
either by heaven or by earth  
or with any other oath.”*

**James 5:12**

## Swear Not!

**F**rom the very beginning of humanity’s history, men have sought to swear by some power greater than themselves. Literature records that the ancient Greeks used to swear by their gods and goddesses—Zeus, Hera, Ares, Athena, etc.—and no doubt every culture has practiced some form of oath-taking. The Old Testament in particular provides several examples of this (see Genesis 50:25; I Samuel 24:21-22). This swearing, whether formal or casual, was intended to establish that what a person stated or promised was true, and people still follow this same practice today.

Every four years, most of us witness the oath of office given to the newly elected President. We see him lay his hand on the Bible and repeat these words: “I do solemnly swear [or affirm] that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” We may also see similar ceremonies when other governmental offices are taken, such as governor, mayor, police chief, etc. These are referred to as “swearing-in ceremonies.”

*(continued on page 21)*



# The Four

## Part Three: T

*“When He opened the second seal  
I heard the second living creature saying,  
‘Come and see.’  
And another horse, fiery red, went out.  
And it was granted to the one who sat on it  
to take peace from the earth,  
and that people should kill one another;  
and there was given to him a great sword.”  
(Revelation 6:3-4)*

**H**uman societies seem to be inherently violent. Times of peace are too soon rent and ended by conflict and war because of raw aggression, religious fervor, or pure greed. We need only to gaze back on the twentieth century—a period of astonishing scientific and technological progress—to find numerous examples of man’s penchant for violence and inhumanity.

The previous hundred years witnessed three world wars: two hot and one cold. It saw mass murders—what we now call “ethnic cleansing”—in Germany, the Soviet Union, China, Cambodia, the Sudan, and Rwanda, among others. Countless smaller conflicts nevertheless took multiple thousands of lives in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, the Balkans, Spain, Cuba, Central and South America, Israel, Northern Ireland, and many African nations. In addition, history will view the twentieth century as the period in which terrorism became commonplace.

That time also engendered the ultimate arms race that began with the tank and the airplane in the First World War, through the submarine and jet in the Second World War, and culminated with the intercontinental ballistic missile, mutually assured nuclear destruction, and the threat of space-based weapons during the Cold War. These wars spawned the development and use of chemical, biological, and radioactive weapons of mass de-

struction, in which a suitcase-sized device has the potential to snuff out the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in one blast. Nations played with the power of the atom, of magnetism, of electricity, of light—attempting to harness the very forces of nature—to find “better” ways to kill people in larger quantities.

In reality, the twentieth century was merely a magnified example of many earlier periods of man’s history. Previous centuries saw European nations fight each other to exhaustion over decades of continuous religious and political wars. Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun were real people, and their wars of conquest spread terror and death over great swaths of Asia and Europe. Rome lived and died by the sword, as did all the great empires of history. Our time is no more violent—just more efficient.

Even some of the great men of the Bible became caught up in man’s violent nature. To rescue Lot, Abraham took on a confederacy of kings and prevailed (Genesis 14:14-16). Josephus records that Moses was commander of Egypt’s armies before God called him, and he himself writes that he killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite (Exodus 2:11-12). Joshua led the forces of Israel in the wilderness and eventually conquered much of the Promised Land. Judges like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson won mighty victories. David fought so many wars and killed so many men that God denied him the opportunity to build Him a Temple (I Chronicles 22:7-8; 28:3).

Yet, the Bible predicts that the time of the end will be the bloodiest period that mankind will ever experience (Matthew 24:21-22). Thousands, millions, even billions of people will die in calamity after calamity—some “acts of God,” some “natural,” some manmade. The red horse and its rider represent one part of the manmade variety, the scourge of bloody conflict.

# Horsemen

## the Red Horse

### Symbols of War

The second horseman is perhaps the most easily identifiable of the famed Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, since both of its symbols, the fiery red color and the great sword, are well known to represent war. However, underlying this facile identification of the symbols are a few interesting details that add depth to them.

The Greek word John uses for “red” is *purros* or *pyrros*, meaning “the color of fire” (compare our words “pyre,” “pyromania,” “pyrosis”). This is not the normal Greek word for red (*eruthros*), but a more specialized term that suggests fieriness or flickering reds, oranges, and yellows like a flame. It is the same word that John uses to describe the redness of the Dragon (Satan) in Revelation 12:3 (the third and only other occurrence is in a proper name, *Sopatros Purrou*, which is strangely not fully translated in Acts 20:4). This particular color intimates heat and ferocity like an out-of-control wildfire.

The Hebrew language does not have a similar, biblical term. However, the color red or scarlet in the Old Testament frequently symbolizes blood, whether the blood of sacrifice (Leviticus 14:4, 6, 49-52; see Hebrews 9:19) or the blood of violence (II Kings 3:22-23; Isaiah 63:2-3; Nahum 2:3; etc.). Scarlet has two other interesting meanings: that of wealth and luxury (II Samuel 1:24; Proverbs 31:21; Lamentations 4:5; etc.; see Matthew 27:28; Revelation 17:4; 18:12, 16) and of sin (Isaiah 1:18; see Revelation 17:3). One could make a case that all these meanings could apply to the second seal.

The horseman’s “great sword” is a translation of *máchaira megálee*. Again, this is not the ordinary sword of war (*romfaia*) but a short sword or long knife like a dagger. Frequently, *máchaira* is the knife used to prepare a sacrifice or to slaughter an

animal for food. It is also the sword worn by magistrates and executioners. That the red horseman’s sword is “great” (*megálee*) means either that it is larger or longer than usual or that it is highly effective in doing its job. Surprisingly, *romfaia* appears in Revelation 6:8: “And power was given to [the four horsemen] to kill with sword, with hunger, with death. . . .” A “great sword,” then, is the equivalent of a thoroughly effective instrument of death.

The sword is often a symbol of God’s judgment. David writes in Psalm 7:12, “If [the wicked] does not turn back, He [God] will sharpen His sword.” In Isaiah 34:6, 8, in the context of the Day of the Lord, God combines the sword of

(continued on page 18)



# SEARCHING FOR ISRAEL

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## Part Three: The Old Covenant

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*“Indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them;  
but the word which they heard did not profit them,  
not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”*

(Hebrews 4:2)

**E**xodus 19:3-6 records a promise God made to the children of Israel encamped about Mount Sinai. Speaking to Moses, God says,

Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Exodus 23:25-31 provides the first hints of what this would mean to the people as a *nation*. God says He

will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. I will not drive them out

from before you in one year lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the [Euphrates] River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

In part, these passages frame the establishment of the Old Covenant. Moses inscribed the words God uttered in a book, the Book of the Covenant, and read them to all the people. Three times (apparently twice before they even heard the words of God) the people asserted that they would do “all the words which the LORD has said” (Exodus 19:8; Exodus 24:3 and 7). Moses confirmed the covenant by an animal sacrifice, sprinkling blood on the people (Exodus 24:5-8).

Deuteronomy 29-30 records Moses’ reiteration of the Old Covenant just before his death. Just before he died, Joshua, too, renewed the same covenant, when he called the people to Shechem (Joshua 24:1-28).

A covenant is a contract, an agreement, between two parties. When God is one of those parties, it is a very serious contract, a sacred agreement. In fact, God

looked at the Old Covenant as a “marriage” contract between Himself and Israel. Through the prophet Jeremiah, He tells Israel, “I am married to you” (Jeremiah 3:14). He considered Israel to be His wife! Almost a millennium after the covenant’s ratification, Jeremiah quotes God as He remembers the events of Mount Sinai: “the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness” (Jeremiah 2:2).

In Ezekiel 16:8, the prophet Ezekiel, quoting God, connects the Old Covenant with marriage:

When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine.

## Conditional Promises

The promises God made to the patriarchs, as recorded in the book of Genesis, bear a great deal of similarity to the promises He made to the children of Israel in the book of Exodus. In both groups of promises, God pledges to give the blessings of land, population, and prosperity. There is, however, a fundamental *difference* between the two sets of promises.

To see that difference, it helps to compare just one promise from the Genesis set and one promise from the Exodus group. Notice carefully Exodus 19:5, which summarizes the Old Covenant.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

Reminding Israel that He owns the land and therefore has the power to make good His promises, God demands Israel’s loyalty, its commitment to obey His voice. His expectation is for Israel to be faithful to the terms of the covenant. With the words “My voice,” God refers to the Ten Commandments, which He “spoke” (Exodus 20:1) from Mount Sinai, as well as to the statutes and judgments (which He also spoke to Moses) recorded in Exodus and Leviticus. God reiterates His requirement for obedience in Exodus 23:21-23. Speaking of “the Angel” He will place before Israel, He asserts:

Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the

Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.

God then commands Israel to display its loyalty to Him by shunning the false gods and religious practices of the people of Canaan: “You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works” (verse 24). In short, in the Exodus promises, the promises that entail the Old Covenant, God promises Israel protection, land, population, and prosperity in return for its loyalty to His commandments, statutes, and judgments.

Note, however, the presence of “the biggest little word in the English language” in both the Exodus 19 and the Exodus 23 passage. That word is *if*. God says He will fulfill the promise *if*. The fulfillment is dependent on some action (or complex of actions) on the part of the fold of Israel. These are *conditional* promises; their fulfillment is conditional upon Israel’s performing its side of the bargain.

The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are full of conditional promises. For example, the promises of prosperity, plenty, and power outlined in Leviticus 26:4-12 are *conditional*: The children of Israel would enjoy them only “if you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them” (verse 3). Conversely, God promises poverty, disease, famine, war, and even national destruction “if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise my statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments” (verse 14-15). To do this is to “break My covenant” (verse 15).

In the later rehearsal of His covenant, as recorded in Deuteronomy, God reiterates His conditions:

The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. . . . if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 30:9-10)

## Unconditional Promises

Now, compare these scriptures from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy with Genesis 22:16-18. This is one of the iterations of God’s promise to Abraham.

By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is

on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

God does not condition His fulfilling this promise on any expected behavior on the part of Abraham. Its fulfillment is not dependent on Abraham's *doing* something in the future. This promise, unlike the promises in the later books of the Pentateuch, is an *unconditional* promise.

Consider, as a second example of an unconditional promise, Genesis 12:7: "Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'" That is all there is to the promise. God attaches no *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts* to it at all. God simply says, in effect, "I will do it. Period."

The same could be said of *any* of the promises we looked at in the first article in this series. An analysis of Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:15-16; 15:18-21; 17:6-8; and 35:11-12 will yield this conclusion: *In every single instance, the fulfillment of the promise does not depend on any future action or behavior God expected on the part of Abraham, Isaac, or Israel (Jacob).* All of these scriptures record unconditional promises.<sup>1</sup>

In summary: God's promises to the children of Israel were conditioned upon their obedience to Him; His promises to the patriarchs were *not* conditioned by their subsequent obedience. This difference is not specious. In fact, it has broad implications:

- First, because God made unconditional promises to the patriarchs, we can be absolutely sure He *will* fulfill them. Although He always responds to individuals' faith—or lack thereof—God will not allow people's actions to frustrate His purposes. God is resolute in His commitment to keeping His promises to the patriarchs. As a result, we can be sure that the search criteria we identified in the first article of this series are firm. God will not change His mind about fulfilling them.
- Second, God's unconditional promises to the patriarchs do not preclude Him from punishing disobedience or faithlessness. God has not put Himself into a straightjacket; He still has the latitude to punish sin. Individuals, everywhere and at all times, still reap what they sow (see Galatians 6:7).

God's unconditional promises to the patriarchs meet His conditional ones to the children of Israel at these crosshairs: God never said that *all* Abraham's descendants would receive the promises. *Some* of Abraham's descendants—the obedient ones—will see God's prom-

ises fulfilled, while others—the disobedient ones—will not. Whether we speak of Abraham or of the least of his descendants living today, the promises have the same audience: The promises are for the faithful. Only the faithful will inherit the promises.

The history of the children of Israel illustrates this principle clearly: Had they been obedient, they would have inherited the land under the hand of Moses, but "because of unbelief," as Hebrews 3:16-19 points out, they did not. "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (verse 19).

This is a vitally important concept. Without violating His promises to the patriarchs, God can defer their fulfillment. We will see in a later article that this is exactly what He did. *He even tells us how long He will defer the promises' fulfillment.* As we will see, that timing factor, in itself, becomes a crucial search criterion for isolating modern-day Israel.

In the first article of this series, we saw that God promised Abraham that "kings shall come from you" (Genesis 17:6; see also 35:11). The promises God made to at least one of these kings, David, provide us with more search criteria to point us to modern-day Israel. We will look at those promises next month.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Charles Whitaker

## End Note

<sup>1</sup> In making these unconditional promises, God revealed His purpose to the patriarchs, at least in outline. It is a purpose to which God is *absolutely* committed. He will not allow anything—or anyone—to stand in the way of His executing it. A good example of His resolute determination to carry out His purposes, no matter what individuals may do or think, is an incident which took place as God was about to lead the children of Israel into Canaan.

Fearful of the indigenous population, the children of Israel refused to enter the land—refused, in effect, to believe that God meant what He said when He promised Canaan to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. In their rebellion, they even determined to "select a leader and return to Egypt" (Numbers 14:4). God's people, lacking faith, were actually trying to thwart His purposes. He was so angry with their lack of faith that He thought to "strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and . . . make [Moses] . . . a nation greater and mightier than they" (Numbers 14:12). To fulfill His unconditional promises to Abraham, God was willing to destroy an entire people and raise up another through Moses, through whom He could honor His promises to the patriarchs.

As Numbers 14:13-20 indicates, Moses dissuaded God from taking such drastic action. Nevertheless, the episode illustrates the zeal God displays in honoring His promises. He means business.

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she bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Revelation 12:1, 5-6)

The physical nation of Israel is correctly identified as symbolized by the woman by comparing the symbols in Revelation 12:1 with Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9-10. This is almost certain when combined with the fact that in Revelation 12:5 the same woman (Israel) gives birth to the "Child who was to rule all nations." Israel gives birth to the Christ, whom the Dragon, Satan, attempts to kill.

Then, however, we are told the woman, who up through verse five is Israel, abruptly morphs in verse six into the Israel of God, the church, which flees to the wilderness. How can we be sure it means the church here when no change of context indicates an abrupt transformation? Could this interpretation be incorrect? We will see more about this in a later article. Nevertheless, this at least establishes that Israel, up until the time shortly after Christ's resurrection, appears historically in Revelation. It will be very helpful, though, not to forget the original woman.

Now notice Revelation 16:17-21

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, every hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

These verses are necessary at this point because they function as the introduction to Revelation 17 and 18, which feature the description of Babylon, first referred to as "the great city" in Revelation 16:19. It is

then specified as "great Babylon," and then in Revelation 17:1, it is identified as "the great harlot." Babylon does not stand alone in this vision, as John sees other cities of the nations fall during the great earthquake.

Revelation 17:1-7 continues the description of one of the central characters of the end time:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having

in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw the woman, drunk with the

blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns."

Notice also that this Beast has seven heads and ten horns. This is the same beast as shown in Revelation 13:1-2, but what is added is the woman, the great harlot riding the Beast, shown in a position of control much like the rider of a horse. She is identified in verse 5 as Mystery, Babylon the Great.

For her to be riding the Beast, there must be some relationship between the two. In fact, each, the woman and the Beast, are part of the same general system, the Babylonish system. However, right up front—because one is depicted as a woman and the other as a beast—God is indicating two distinctly different sets of characteristics, personalities, or approaches within the system.

As depicted in Revelation 13:2, the Beast consists of

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"Now a great sign appeared in heaven;  
a woman clothed with the sun,  
with the moon under her feet,  
and on her head  
a garland of twelve stars."  
—Revelation 12:1

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judgment with the idea of sacrifice and slaughter:

The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made overflowing with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. . . . For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.

Even to His own people, if they do not obey Him, God promises, "I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of My covenant" (Leviticus 26:25). Like this horseman, "the sword of the LORD shall devour from one end of the land to the other end of the land; no flesh shall have peace" (Jeremiah 12:12). Clearly, the purpose of the great sword given to the rider of the red horse is to inflict violent death on masses of people in divine judgment.

## Wars and Rumors of Them

As if there never was any intent to obscure the meaning of this figure, John's description of the red horse says matter-of-factly, "And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another" (Revelation 6:4). This second seal plainly represents conflict, war, destruction, and bloody death.

Of course, this parallels the second point in Jesus' Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 24:6-7: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." The wording implies an expected increase in conflicts due to the stresses of the time leading up to the end. In other words, amplified contention is a precursor of the end time.

His comments specify wars between nations and kingdoms, but John's description in Revelation 6 expands this out to "people . . . kill[ing] one another." This suggests that this horseman not only deals in mass destruction in civil, border, and world wars, but also in smaller conflicts down to individual murders. Thus, the second seal also covers rising violent crime, gang activity, mob hits, assassinations, family feuds of the Hatfield-



McCoy variety, and personal disputes that turn violent.

In saying "wars and rumors of wars," Jesus seems to be saying that some wars will be threatened yet not fought. This is not the sense of the Greek, however. The word translated "rumors" (*akoē*) is the common Greek word for "sense of hearing" (in the active sense) or "report" (in the passive sense). Jesus really means that we will hear the noise of war with our own ears and we will also hear reports of wars occurring elsewhere. In other words, wars will be taking place all over the world!

Immediately, He cautions us not to let such reports trouble us; that is, He tells us not to let the constant wars cause us to panic. Typically, if a person becomes panicky, his fight-or-flight response kicks in, and his brain shuts down. Our Savior wants us to keep our wits about us because "the end is not yet." Regrettably, war is a natural, human activity, so an abundance of war and violence is not by itself a definitive sign of the end. Certainly, the end time will be one of terrible warfare, but many other factors must fall into place before we conclude that we are living at the close of the age.

Jesus then specifies that "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Looking at this from today's perspective, we might think He is repeating Himself, but He actually makes a





distinction between ethnic warfare (“nation” = *éthnos*)—wars between different peoples—and political warfare (“kingdom” = *basileia*)—wars between realms or nation-states. Oftentimes, the former are civil wars within a nation comprised of various ethnic groups, such as the former Yugoslavia. The latter, then, are what we call international conflicts like the recent Gulf Wars. Jesus’ distinction tells us that war is the norm both within nations and between them.

## Relentless Aggression

It is interesting to note that the second seal is introduced by “the second living creature saying, ‘Come and see’” (Revelation 6:3). Revelation 4:7 gives us the order of the living creatures as lion, calf, man, and eagle, so the living creature that introduces the seal of war is probably the calf. Just as the first seal’s introduction by the lion presages the white

horseman’s prime characteristic of ferocious pursuit of prey, so does the calf foretell the red horseman’s main trait.

The calf, young bull, or ox, as translations variously render it, is known for its staying power and strength (Numbers 23:22; Psalm 144:14; Proverbs 14:4; Hosea 4:16). An ox can pull a plow or wagon or turn a mill all day for days on end without complaint. Some have been known to work and work until they die from exhaustion. Rarely will one make its frustration or weariness

known. A calf or ox will just keep going—a relentless, untiring worker.

We are to consider the red horse and his rider along the same lines. In this vein, they compose a picture of inevitable, unceasing, untiring, insatiable warfare. Perhaps we are to think of them in terms of a wild ox, as God describes it in the book of Job:

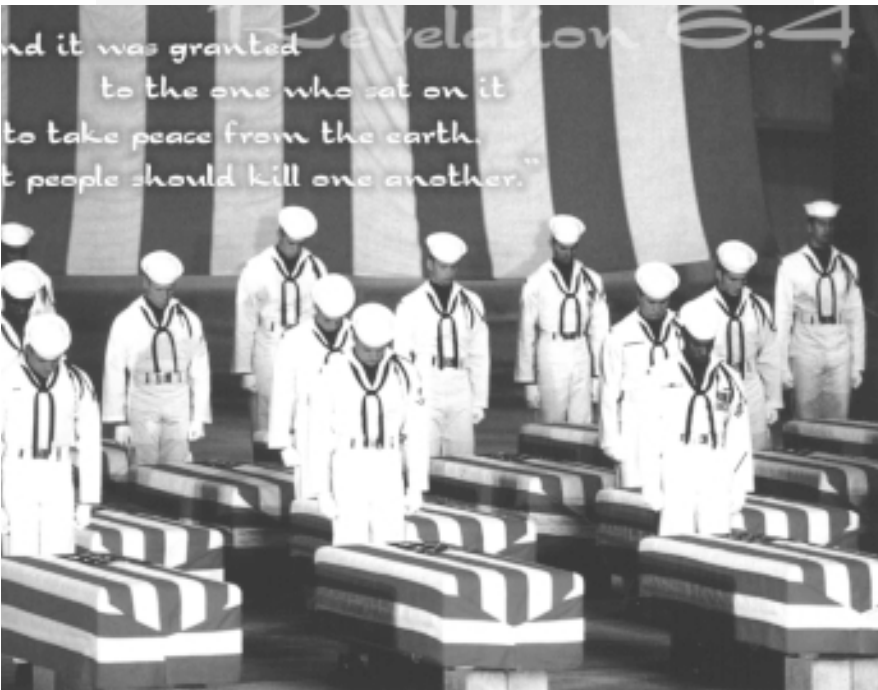
Will the wild ox be willing to serve you? Will he bed by your manger? Can you bind the wild ox in the furrow with ropes? Or will he plow the valleys behind you? Will you trust him because his strength is great? Or will you leave your labor to him? Will you trust him to bring home your grain, and gather it to your threshing floor? (Job 39:9-12)

A wild ox cannot be trusted to do its domesticated cousin’s chores; he is just as likely to charge and gore anyone who tries to yoke him! Likewise, David cries out, “Deliver Me from the sword, . . . from the horns of the wild oxen!” (Psalm 22:20-21). Isaiah 34:7, a skipped verse from a section quoted earlier, uses the same imagery: “The wild oxen shall come down with them, and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust saturated with fatness.” Though the ox can be a placid, indefatigable worker, a wild ox can be a gory terror!

The red horseman, with its fiery red horse, great sword, and relentless aggression, is a fearsome symbol of unremitting, intensifying, uncontrolled, horrific conflict. God intends this figure to instill terror in mankind in the hope that he will repent of his enmity and be saved from its destruction and death (II Peter 3:9-13).

## Sudden Destruction

Currently, the United States and its allies are fighting a multi-front war against Islamic terrorists. Russia is likewise waging off-and-on battles with similar groups along its southern border. Of course, Israel has never stopped fighting the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and Golan Heights. While not at war, many European nations are on edge, wondering when their peaceful societies will be torn by Islamic unrest just as Spain recently experienced. In Africa, insurgents are battling a handful of legitimate governments and terrorizing their fellow citizens in the process. Beyond these, the whole world is on alert against potential acts of deadly terror.



The world is not a safe place. Conflict in hot wars, violent crimes, or personal disputes can break out in an instant. In the context of the end time, Paul cautions:

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (I Thessalonians 5:2-3)

Peace and safety can be shattered in a mere

moment if one is caught off guard. Paul says, however, that God has not called us to the kind of judgment brought at the edge of the red horseman's great sword but to salvation through Jesus Christ (verse 9). We can escape it if we "watch and be sober" (verse 6), that is, if we are spiritually alert and serious during these unsettling times leading to Christ's return.

As terrifying as he is, the red rider is followed by another lethal horseman—one whose job is to "take care of" those who survive his brother's bloody onslaught.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

**PERSONAL ►**

**The Beast and Babylon**

*(continued from page 17)*

the strongest parts of a leopard, bear, and lion. Unarguably, these three animals are vicious, wild beasts, and each is a very powerful animal that a woman on her own would ordinarily be no match for.

Obviously, a human woman would approach life and its events differently than an animal. Yet, the woman is riding the seemingly super-powerful beast. She, at this juncture in the prophecy, is the one in the position of strength and therefore is superior, greater, more powerful, and more influential than the Beast.

The angels says in Revelation 17:9-11:

Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

These verses set the beginning of the time element of this prophecy. The woman sits on seven mountains. A mountain symbolizes a larger nation, as Isaiah 2:2 shows: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills [smaller nations]; and all nations shall flow to it." The number seven, combined with the symbol "mountains"—signifying "kings" or

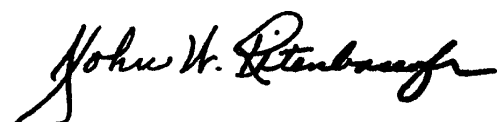
"kingdoms" as verses 9 and 10 show—indicates a perfect or complete sequence of seven kings.

We understand that the seven mountains are the last seven revivals of the Roman Empire. The woman is shown riding the Beast during the days of the sixth revival in the sequence of seven (verse 10). Did she begin her ride during the sixth revival or has she been riding the entire time? Nothing in the prophecy directly suggests she was riding them any time before the prophecy itself indicates.

The prophecy is only showing the end-time Beast has seven forebears, the seven revivals of the Roman Empire. Verse 11 states, "The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eight, and is of the seven." This indicates the end-time Beast stands on its own but has its roots in the previous seven. The woman will clearly ride the eighth Beast that is of the seven for a time.

Herbert Armstrong appears to have been correct in teaching that the sixth revival and king began with Garibaldi in Italy and continued through the rise and fall of Mussolini and Hitler. That revival ended with the defeat of the Axis powers in Europe in 1945. We are living in the very weak and brief period of the seventh revival of the Beast. More to come.

In Christian love,



*(continued from page 11)*

We often do not consider this subject until we fall into a situation in which we are required to take an oath. In most cases, it is when we must take an oath “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” in a court of law, or in making a sworn deposition in an attorney’s office.

I was once a character witness in a murder trial, in which a teenage boy was tried for stabbing another boy while under the influence of drugs. Before being called to testify, I told the bailiff that I would not swear but would affirm that my testimony would be true. When I was “sworn in,” there was no disruption in the courtroom; the bailiff simply asked me to affirm that I would speak the truth.

Another time, I witnessed a truck-motorcycle accident, and in this case, I had to make an affidavit in an attorney’s office. The unfamiliar situation caught me off guard, but I quickly informed the clerk administering the oath that I would affirm my truthfulness, not swear an oath. There was no further trouble.

God wants us to think about swearing by His name, not just in court situations or legal matters, but in everyday situations too.

## Jesus and Oaths

**W**hy are we not to swear by God’s name today when we clearly see examples of swearing in this fashion in the Old Testament? Abraham makes his servant “swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth” that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the daughters the Canaanites (Genesis 24:3). In another example, Bathsheba reminds David that he swore to her “by the LORD your God” to make her son Solomon his heir (I Kings 1:17).

An Old Testament prohibition on swearing is found in Leviticus

19:12: “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, neither shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.” The gist of this command is that one should not use God’s name to support an oath that will not be kept. Here we begin to understand why we are not to back up what we promise with God’s name.

Notice, however, Jesus’ amplification of this verse in Matthew 5:33-37:

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.” But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No.” For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Commentator Adam Clarke writes on verse 37:

That the Jews were notoriously guilty of common swearing, for which our Lord particularly reprehends them, and warns his disciples against, and that they swore by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem, by their head, etc., . . . their own writings . . . amply testify.

He shows that the Jews would also swear by the prophets, the books of Scripture, the Temple, the altar, the lamb, the Temple’s chambers, the Temple’s dishes, the sacrifices on fire, the moon, stars, the sun, their hair, their beard, and on and on. Yet, he goes on to quote what he calls “one of the holiest of their precepts relative to swear-

ing”: “Be not much in oaths, although one should swear concerning things that are true; for in much swearing it is impossible not to profane.” Would that they had heeded it!

But what about Christians? Should Christians use oaths?

In verse 33, Jesus plainly states the Old Testament law: that we perjure ourselves in making an oath we are not planning to keep. In like manner, how often do we hear someone say, “I swear to God” after making a mild declaration—as if that makes their promise or statement true?

Another commentator, Albert Barnes, adds:

It appears, however, from this passage, as well as from the ancient writings of the Jewish rabbins, that while the Jews professedly adhered to the law, they had introduced a number of oaths in common conversation, and oaths which they by no means considered to be binding. . . . So long as they kept from swearing by the name Yahweh, and so long as they observed the oaths publicly taken, they seemed to consider all others as allowable, and allowedly broken. This is the abuse which Christ wished to correct.

Adam Clarke on verse 33:

They dishonor the great God, and break His commandments who use frequent oaths and imprecations, even in reference to things that are true; and those who make vows and promises, which they either cannot perform, or do not design to fulfill, are not less criminal. Swearing in civil matters has become so frequent, that the dread and obligation of an oath are utterly lost in it.

*“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.”*

Certainly, taking an oath in court has become fundamentally meaningless.

Yet, clearly, Jesus tells us in verse 34 not to swear *at all*. This is hardly an ambiguous statement. It is puzzling to see how many commentators, supposedly religious men, do not take our Savior’s absolute statement in the way He spoke it. Many make an exception for swearing an oath of truth in legal matters, but Christ’s words “at all” are a definite, across-the-board prohibition.

Adam Clarke concludes in his comments on this verse, “The best way is to have as little to do as possible with oaths. An oath will not bind a knave nor a liar; and an honest man needs none, for his character and conduct swear for him.” Years ago, men only needed a handshake to seal a deal. The Bible holds up as an example to us the righteous man of Psalm 15; the one who will dwell on God’s holy hill always fulfills what he promises.

Jesus tells us how we should approach situations in which others would use an oath: Simply give an affirmation—a “yes”—or a negation—a “no.” Nothing more should be necessary from an honest person. A straightforward person has no need to equivocate. As the cliché runs, “Say what you mean and mean what you say.” Anything else, Jesus says, flirts with sin.

## A Higher Standard

The apostle James repeats his Elder Brother’s command in James 5:12: “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.”

How James addresses this to his audience tells us he considers it an extremely serious matter. His use of “above all” suggests that we should be especially careful on this point. It

is as if he is saying, “Make sure you catch this point because it may be the most important one.” Swearing oaths is not a trivial matter!

In the Old Testament, taking oaths by God’s name was more prevalent—even commanded (see Deuteronomy 6:13)—but God holds those He has called out of this present, evil world to a higher standard. The ancient Israelites were carnal human beings whose behaviors had to be constrained by statute. Knowing they would swear oaths, God directed them to take them honestly and only in His name, thus regulating and elevating the practice.

Christians, though, are to follow God’s law, not just in the letter, but also in the spirit, a more in-depth and encompassing charge. The standard that has been set for us is that our word should always be true. Paul writes, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25; see Zechariah 8:16).

Our Savior puts it even more strongly in the form of an admonition: “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36). Because God is with us, every word that we speak is spoken in God’s presence and thus should be true, making oaths unnecessary.

As God’s people, we are to represent Him in honesty and obedience and reflect Him in our conduct in every way. Because of this, we do not need God’s name in an oath to back up our word. Therefore, a Christian should simply say “yes” or “no” according to what he honestly believes to be true, even in legal matters. As Jesus says, anything we try to add to the unvarnished truth is Satan’s handiwork (see John 8:44). In short, a Christian’s word should be his bond.

## Other Angles

We can look at the swearing of oaths from a number of different angles. For instance:

- Adding God’s name to an oath or promise does not obligate God to act on our behalf. Have we ever considered whether God even desires to be the Guarantor of what we say?
- This scriptural instruction does not imply that oaths or vows are of and by themselves sinful, but God certainly wants us to consider what we are promising and our ability to fulfill it *before* we speak the words. Solomon warns: “Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5:2).
- We human beings are often powerless to fulfill even our strongest intentions. Thus, God commands us not to swear in His name in any oath, as failing to fulfill it would be taking God’s name in vain (Exodus 20:7). In essence, we would be including God in a lie, misrepresenting Him and His perfect truthfulness.

At first, swearing oaths may seem a minor matter, but it touches on some vital spiritual issues, such as God’s integrity, honesty, and judgment. Jesus Christ thought enough of this subject to make it part of His Sermon on the Mount. We would do well to remember that making a solemn promise under God is binding, and He will expect us to perform it. Thus, the scriptural advice, “Above all things, my brethren, do not swear.”

—John Reid

<http://www.worldwatchdaily.org>

## All in the Family

The dictionary defines *nepotism* as “favoritism shown to a relative (as by giving an appointive job) on the basis of relationship.” One of the much-touted reforms of America’s Progressive Era during the early twentieth century was the overthrow of nepotism. Progressives replaced the “spoils system” with a civil service system. Under the spoils system, the winner of an election installed his friends and family in appointed positions. The civil service system attempted to avoid the abuse inherent in the spoils system by allocating government jobs based on merit, not kinship. The idea was to use open examinations to identify the best person for every position, through fair competition. One gained his position by *what* he knew, not *who* he knew. So, nepotism, and the dynastic power structures (the political machines) it built, faded away in America.

Well, not quite, says Steve Sailer in his article “Revolutionary Nepotism” (*The National Interest*, Winter 2003, page 149). George W. Bush is the son of a president, the grandson of a senator, and brother of a governor. Once elected, he ensured that Colin Powell’s son, Michael, became Chairman of the FCC, and that Senator Mitch McConnell’s wife, Elaine, became Secretary of Labor. “The children of Antonin Scalia, Dick Cheney and Strom Thurmond also benefited” from nepotistic appointments.

The other side of the aisle knows all about nepotism too. The Kennedy clan’s dynasty is too extensive to rehearse here. Its most recent addition is Arnold Schwarzenegger of California. Or, consider Chicago’s major, Richard M. Daley. He has enjoyed five terms in office, one shy of his father’s six.

Writes Sailer:

Powerful men’s sons and, increasingly their wives and daughters, are succeeding to political leadership with a regularity reminiscent of the

feudal days of old Europe. In 2002, for instance, Senator Frank Murkowski was elected governor of Alaska and promptly named his daughter Lisa to take over his seat in the U.S. Senate.

In this regard, Nancy Pelosi (House Democratic leader); Elizabeth Dole (North Carolina Senator); Mitt Romney (Massachusetts Governor); and John E. Sununu (New Hampshire Senator) have all benefited from relatives in high places.

Nepotism is common around the world. North Korea, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Morocco, the Congo, and the Philippines are all “led by the children of former heads of state.” Then, of course, there is Iraq’s infamous—and now liquidated—Qusay and Uday, sons of Saddam. Gamal Mubarak will probably succeed his father, Hosni, in Egypt.

At lower echelons as well, kinship plays a key role in governments, especially in failed or failing states. These lands are filled with organized criminals and terrorists who tend to be organized “around blood ties, because the highest level of trust is found within families.” Family-mafias flourish in the former client states of “the Soviet Union, the Balkans and now Iraq.” Normal police activities are particularly ineffective against such kinship organizations; the chance of planting a spy in them is slim indeed.

These people are often immigrants, who organize around family lines for protection in a foreign, and often hostile, environment. That is why America experienced Italian and Irish mafias in the past. Particularly predatory today is the Kosovo-Albanian mafia.

Americans have buried their heads ostrich-like in the sand, pretending that nepotism does not exist at home and is not much of a factor in the world at large. Wrong. Sailer explains:

Cousin marriage is remarkably common from Morocco to parts of India. . . . Half the married people in Iraq are wed to either a first or second cousin (versus under 1 percent in the United States). These “consanguineous” marriages strengthen family loyalty. If you arrange for your daughter to marry your brother’s son, your grandson and heir will also be your brother’s grandson and heir, so there is no need to fight over who inherits the family land or herd. On the other hand, cousin marriage undermines loyalty to the state and society, which is one reason why Middle Eastern countries teeter between anarchy and tyranny.

Internet commentator Randall Parker agrees:

Consanguinity is the biggest underappreciated factor in Western analyses of Middle Eastern politics. . . . Extended families that are incredibly tightly bound are really the enemy of civil society because the alliances of family override any consideration of fairness to people in the larger society. Yet, this obvious fact is missing from 99 percent of the discussion about what is wrong with the Middle East. ([www.parapundit.com](http://www.parapundit.com))

Whether Americans want to admit it or not, family counts! Blood is thicker than water. While Americans alternately forget the importance of family and bluster over the evils of nepotism, we in God’s church should remember that God’s Kingdom will be ruled by one and only one Family. God will bring “many sons into glory” (Hebrews 2:10), where they will rule the universe. Then, government will forever be “all in the family!” ■

NEWS AND TRENDS  
Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:13)

# BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLES OF LUKE 15 (PART THREE)

The purpose of the three illustrations in Luke 15 is to justify Christ's conduct in receiving sinners and to show that to rejoice over their return is good and proper. In the first, that of the lost sheep, the lost one is viewed from man's perspective—as one who suffers and therefore needs salvation. In the second, that of the lost coin, the lost one is viewed from God's perspective—as one whom He is eager to find. In the third, the prodigal son is viewed from both man's and God's perspective—as one who “came to himself” (verse 17).



1. What is the younger son's core problem? Luke 15:11-16.  
**COMMENT:** The younger son shows a lack of respect for authority and deference to his elders. His central problem is pride, just as it was the root of Satan's failure (Isaiah 14:13). He finds out that shame and destruction follow pride (Proverbs 11:2; 16:18). In his disrespect for authority, he thinks primarily of himself, totally disregarding how it affects others. His request for his inheritance is not to benefit others but to pursue pleasure—especially entertainment (Proverbs 21:17). As a result, his unwise actions bring him to the point of despair and a re-evaluation of his life.

By demanding his share of his inheritance before his parents' deaths, he shows that he looks upon God's gifts as debts rightfully owed to him. Impatiently, he demands his share immediately. People today constantly, selfishly, and arrogantly press their rights rather than fulfill responsibilities. Many will not wait until marriage for sex but seek it now. They do not want to work for wealth but gamble to get it immediately. Sadly, they will also wait a long time before taking care of their spiritual needs—and then only when brought to despair (II Corinthians 6:2; Ecclesiastes 7:8).

2. What enticement alienates the prodigal son from his father? What does the far country represent? Luke 15:13.

**COMMENT:** The far country symbolizes forgetfulness of God (Deuteronomy 8:11, 14, 19), the condition Paul describes as “alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:17-19). All the dissatisfied young man wants to do is to satisfy his senses and desires. After disillusionment, destitution, and degradation, the prodigal, feeling no longer worthy to be called a son, decides to ask his father to make him one of his servants.

The far country is the place people go to remove themselves as far from God the Father as possible. It represents the world, the place where evil flourishes, where it is the norm, popular, and acceptable. In it, the perversions of society—lying, adultery, abortion, homosexuality, and many others—are tolerated and even celebrated (I John 2:15-17).

The far country signifies the abode of the ungodly, those with whom the prodigal son feels most comfortable. The righteous cause him discomfort because he cannot over-drink, smoke, cuss, or tell dirty jokes when he is with them. The godly stifle him because he feels pressured to produce the fruit of self-control. The far country is the state of mind that is enmity toward God (Romans 8:7).

3. What results when the prodigal son “came to himself”? Luke 15:17-24.

**COMMENT:** Scripture pictures sinfulness as a path of folly and

The son becomes lost because he deliberately, willfully, and consciously strays. Guilty of inexcusable defiance and overconfident in his own capabilities, the prodigal son nevertheless eventually reconciles with his father, bringing him great joy. In the self-righteous, coldhearted elder brother, Jesus exposes the utter lack of love and compassion in the Pharisaical attitude toward those whose sin is conspicuous, and who, therefore, need gentle guidance and forgiveness rather than harsh judgment.

madness, and repentance as restoration to sound-mindedness. “When he came to himself” is commonly applied to a person who recovers from being deranged. Jesus indicates that the folly of the younger son is a type of insanity, as it is with all sinners: A kind of madness is in their hearts (Ecclesiastes 9:3). They are at odds with God, indulging in evil obsessions, contrary to their better judgment. Vincent's *Word Studies* explains, “This striking expression—came to himself—puts the state of rebellion against God as a kind of madness. It is a wonderful stroke of art, to represent the beginning of repentance as the return of a sound consciousness.” Misery and desperation may stimulate reason in a sinner when he comes to himself. Once the younger son comes to realize his distorted and unrealistic view of himself and humbly repents, he can be restored to sonship (II Corinthians 7:10-12).

4. What is the older son's central problem? Luke 15:25-31.

**COMMENT:** The older brother represents the Pharisaical attitude that resents God's interest in sinners—the same attitude in the early church that looked suspiciously at the inclusion of Gentiles. His self-righteousness manifests itself in jealousy and envy. Today, the elder son is like those who, in self-righteousness, shun brethren who do not live up to their standard of righteousness (Proverbs 20:6; Galatians 6:3; Titus 3:5). Such people do not realize that their self-righteousness is as the filthy rags of the prodigal son (Isaiah 64:6).

5. What is the important message of the parables of Luke 15?

**COMMENT:** The word “lost” in Luke 15 is not related as much to the condition of what is lost as to the agonizing effect upon the one who lost it. In the first illustration, the shepherd, who seeks his lost sheep as if it is the only one he possesses, suffers more than the straying sheep. The woman deeply feels the loss of her coin, which, of course, is without life and feeling. Her poverty requires that she find it, so she searches diligently for it.

Finally, the father feels a depth of agony neither of his sons can share; he is heartbroken over the loss of his younger son. Though he still has another son who has no desire to leave home, his father's heart goes out to the missing son in spite of his willful wickedness. God has like compassion for those who are lost in sin.

The three parables are linked in the recovery of the lost. In the first, Christ, as the good Shepherd, lays down His life to save lost sheep. In the second, He works through His church to call sinners to repentance. And in the third, the Father receives His children back after they have gone astray (Ephesians 2:1-8). Our merciful, loving God desires that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.