

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Angela Merkel's
TAFTA
Gambit

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel has an ambitious agenda for Germany's six-month term as leader of the European Union. One of her loftier goals is to create a free-trade zone linking the United States with the EU. Merkel's assertiveness is a sure sign of Germany's re-emergence as Europe's driving force.

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God's Power

Our Shield Against Apostasy

The two previous articles demonstrated that God is the Source of all power. He not only creates and rules, but He is also the Source of everyone else's power too. Within His purpose, He calls us, grants us repentance, forgives us, justifies us, endows us with His Spirit of power, sanctifies us, gives us gifts, and then sends us on our way. In other words, His gifts enable and prepare us—empower us—to be saved.

This appears to be such a neatly tied package; everything is in place for a steady, uneventful pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. Knowing this leads people to adopt such false notions as the doctrine of eternal security, commonly called “once saved, always saved.” If this doctrine is true, why does God's Word warn the Christian so often not to turn aside as so many did after Israel's release from bondage to Egypt?

The warnings actually begin in the first chapters of the Book, when God clearly informs Adam and Eve that the wages of sin is death (Genesis 2:17; see Romans 6:23). They sin and are summarily escorted out of the Garden of Eden. God then places cherubim and a flaming sword to patrol its borders, guarding the way back to the Tree of Life. The conclusion is obvious: As sinners, they are no longer welcome to have a relationship with God. Throughout the Old Testament, the warnings continue with God's almost constant displeasure over Israel's conduct.

In the New Testament, Jesus warns us to make sure we count the cost, admonishing us that anyone who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back with longing is not fit for the Kingdom of God (Luke 14:25-33; 9:57-62). Likewise, the apostles frequently appeal to Christians to

get with it, adding a sense of urgency because time is running short.

People can and do fall away. In the church experience of most of us are memories of family and friends who were part of the Worldwide Church of God. We witnessed its rapid growth in membership, as people made professions of faith, fellowshipped with it for many years, and in some cases, held positions of high responsibility. Yet, many of these have since left for other spiritual pastures, even returning to Protestant ones they had previously departed from. Others have dropped completely from sight.

How Does One Fall Away?

The record of Israel's trek through the wilderness presents a sobering witness of the kinds of trials that threaten the Christian's walk. In doing so, the Bible provides us with an unambiguous pattern of how people fall away, even to the point of showing us that—despite God's awesome power that we are encouraged to draw upon, despite His almost inexhaustible patience and mercy, and despite His sincere and urgent desire for all of to enter His Kingdom—there is a point of no return if one persists in living a life of sin.

The Bible contains vivid illustrations that warn about how apostasy happens. Luke 9:62 provides us with insight into what is often the first step: “But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’” This “looking back” is not merely reflecting to evaluate the progress made since one decided to leave the world.

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Instead, it is like Lot's wife, who looked back with a degree of longing to return to what she had left. Her life was literally on the line, and rather than being fully engaged in surviving, she placed a higher priority on life's lesser matters than on the greater one of preserving her life through God's gift of protection.

She looked back, revealing her heart still to be in Sodom, a type of the world. Her action indicates regret for having left. Success in God's way requires following an awesome vision of future glory with devoted conviction. Abraham is a primary example: He looked for a city built by God, apparently leaving his homeland without ever looking back (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16).

Once we commit to Christianity, God's calling becomes our vocation, which requires our concentrated attention going forward. A vocation is a person's regular occupation. What happens when a Christian looks back with a measure of longing is similar to someone talking on a cell phone while driving his car. He frequently drifts all over the road, swerving this way and that because, at best, his attention is split between conflicting priorities. He is setting himself up for trouble, and all too frequently, an accident occurs. A Christian cannot make a beeline for the Kingdom with his attention diverted elsewhere. We are not to be anything but *altogether* followers of the Son of God. The stakes are that high, for the fulfillment of His promise is so great.

Dramatic, sudden death, as happened to Lot's wife, will not likely happen to us if we gaze yearningly behind us. For this reason, a person who has begun to fall away will most likely take the second step backwards with hardly a pause. Hebrews 10:39 says, "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." Almost invariably, longing for the old life is followed by gradually and increasingly believing that God's requirements are too exacting and difficult.

In Jesus' parable in Luke 19:11-27, did not the man given one mina complain something similar to this when asked what he had gained with it? "Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow" (verses 20-21).

We must be prepared to put God first in all things. There will be times when this will be exceedingly difficult, especially if the surrender of a thing involves the sacrifice of someone or something deeply loved or desired. It can happen, but such occasions are quite rare.

It has been said that he who is unwilling to sacrifice everything for the cause of God is really willing to sacrifice nothing. Drawing back happens despite God's promise that every trial is measured to the exact specifications needed by the individual Christian. In I Corinthians 10:13, God promises to provide relief from every problem: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to

man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." The word-picture in Hebrews 10:39 portrays a person shrinking back from following through on the demands of faith. He is looking for an easy way out of some distasteful thing he does not wish to face. This eventually happens to us all.

A major appeal of the world's way is that it seems to be broader and easier. As Jesus says in Matthew 7:13, the easier, broader way it probably is—for a while. That deceptively effortless way draws the person ever-further from salvation, and he grows steadily weaker as he loses contact with God. The one who apostatizes thus permits himself to be drawn back.

The third step is taken when a person actually turns away. John 6:65-66 records such an occasion in Jesus' ministry: "And He said, 'Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.' From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." In this poignant scene, Jesus watched people who may have been friends leave His entourage because they could not comprehend His teaching. He undoubtedly had spoken of things of an order far higher than they were accustomed to hearing, but rather than patiently facing it, as the apostles did, they simply gave up, proving themselves unfit for the Kingdom of God. Their loyalty could not stand the strain of what may have been merely a temporary misunderstanding. They had been followers, but apparently, they were seeking for something else.

By this stage, it is still not too late for a person to grab hold of himself and move forward, but the world's appeal has become almost overpowering. Spiritual decline has reached the tipping point, and he is in serious peril.

The fourth and final step backward is illustrated by Isaiah in the Old Testament: "But the word of the LORD was to them, 'Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.' That they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught" (Isaiah 28:13).

In examining the context carefully, we see that the people being described have reached the critical point where God's Word is falling on deaf ears. It is to them just jumbled noise. In New Testament terms, they had backslid beyond the reach of repentance and forgiveness. Here, the apostate reaches the point of no return; he has earned the Lake of Fire.

The Vital Instruction of Hebrews

Most of us have a verse, chapter, or even an entire book of the Bible that resonates with particular strength to us. It inspires us or provides us with a higher degree of

understanding than other parts of the Bible. Herbert Armstrong told audiences on several occasions that his favorite chapter in the entire Bible was Ephesians 1. That chapter is indeed a tremendously humbling, meaningful, and inspiring arrangement of concepts that provides answers to a number of “why” or “how” questions.

For me, it is the entire book of Hebrews. For some reason, it draws me back to its pages time and again, motivating and uplifting me. I am not alone in this, as many authors of commentaries declare that it ranks on the very highest level. A few even go so far as to say that, if taken only on its literary merits, it is among the five greatest writings in the entire history of mankind!

I am not fit to judge such things, but I do appreciate its instruction on what God has called us to. It assesses in the grandest, most vivid way the value and importance of what God has given us, clarifying in broad, powerful strokes what we must do about it.

Hebrews’ theme is actually quite simple. It presents the superiority of Jesus Christ and the message He brought to mankind—the gospel of the Kingdom of God containing the New Covenant—to anything, any message, any person, any way of life. However, it reflects most directly on what the Old Testament records regarding Israel and the covenant its people made with God at Mount Sinai. It focuses on the Old Covenant because it was itself superior to what any other nation had until the New Covenant was first offered to those whom God is calling. No other message, then, can even begin to compare.

The outline is simple too. The first two chapters are mostly introductory, but even here the language is soaring and majestic in what it proposes. It sets the stage by showing Christ as God’s Son, seated at the right hand of the Father, superior to angels and Old Testament prophets. Through Him God has spoken.

Chapter 2 briefly considers what man is now compared to and what he will become through Jesus Christ. Chapter 3 introduces Christ’s mission as an apostle to the church, superior even to the great Moses. Toward the end of the chapter, Paul urges us to remember, by way of contrast, the unfaithfulness of Israel under Moses. In chapter 4, he presents Christ as superior to Joshua, who brought Israel into the Promised Land, for despite Joshua’s personal greatness as a leader, Israel failed to attain to the rest of God.

Chapter 5 begins the single largest block of chapters devoted to one subject in the epistle, showing why the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to the Aaronic and Levitical administration. This subject is of such importance that it occupies almost six chapters, finally ending in Hebrews 10:18. From that point to the end is the book’s second longest section, containing exhortations to practical application of the teaching.

Hebrews arguably contains the most powerful exhortations in the entire Bible. Why? Because so much is on the line, a Christian can lose it all if he is unwilling to pay the price! The epistle exhorts through careful reasoning and using vivid illustrations and examples. It also contains dire

warnings but shows that help is available too. It is devoted to the practical application of this tremendously compact bundle of historical comparisons, pointed doctrinal instruction, and inspiration.

The book’s time setting appears to be AD 62–66, just half a decade or so from the Roman invasion of Jerusalem under Titus and the destruction of the Temple. This invasion virtually brought to an end the Jewish nation and way of life in Palestine. The historical material, drawn from Israel’s past, plus the long focus on the Aaronic priesthood and Levitical ritual informs us that the epistle is addressed to Jews familiar with their nation’s history, theological establishment, and workings.

The form of writing is doctrinal, frequently interspersed with brief and stirring exhortations. This form of writing was prompted by the fact that these particular Hebrews had drifted into a lackadaisical way of life, having grown weary of resisting the constant pressures from the degenerate world around them. Their faith and perseverance were breaking down, and their general attitude and character were deteriorating right along with their loss of faith (Hebrews 10:36–11:1).

This neglectful deterioration is my concern. It is easy just to drift along with the ever-present pressures of this world. These pressures will neither lessen nor go away. Like the Hebrews of Paul’s day, we have the responsibility to choose, in an “end of the age” circumstance, which way we will go. God’s solution to this sort of deterioration is found in the book of Hebrews, but understanding it requires focused attention.

It is organized in the manner of Paul’s other epistles. The first part lays a doctrinal foundation, usually drawn from the Old Testament. The last part contains practical applications of those doctrines. Hebrews compares favorably with Romans and Ephesians in this format: Romans 1–11 are doctrinal, while chapters 12–16 contain practical applications; Ephesians 1–3 are doctrinal, while chapters 4–6 contain practical applications.

We lack the familiarity with and reverential feeling for the Temple and Tabernacle that the Israelites had. Nonetheless, we have an advantage over them, but only if we use it. We can understand to a far greater degree the spiritual truths contained within what was for them only the faint shadows of symbolism. Paul writes in Hebrews 9:1–5:

Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared; the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

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Add to this Hebrews 10:1: “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.”

In some ways, the Temple and the Tabernacle both resembled a house, but a very special house, since it was held to be God’s House and the very highest place of worship. They each contained two rooms separated by a heavy veil or drape, and these rooms contained furniture important to Israel’s proper understanding, and therefore, to proper worship. Every aspect of these two buildings fits a pattern, a model, established for our understanding and proper worship of God under the *New Covenant*.

On each day, the officiating priests were required to perform their duties on its exterior and in the first room, but only the High Priest was permitted into the second room, called the Holy of Holies. Even so, the High Priest could enter that second room only one time each year, on the Day of Atonement. The Holy of Holies symbolized God’s personal throne room and the place from which He judges mankind. For the purposes of this article, the drape separating the two rooms and the Holy of Holies itself are important.

In chapter 10, Paul signals he is coming to a transition because he states a significant doctrinal reality regarding a Christian’s spiritual standing, which he had briefly mentioned only once early in the book. In fact, he mentions this reality twice within six verses and three times in chapter 10 alone. In Hebrews 10:10, 14, and 29, he reminds us that we are sanctified. He reinforces this by reminding us in verse 16 that the purpose for which God has sanctified us is so that He can write His laws in our hearts.

This statement opens eight more truths regarding sanctification. They are not listed here but are revealed in others of Paul’s writings:

1. Sanctification requires cooperation with God.
2. Sanctification is the process during which we are living sacrifices.
3. Through sanctification, the legal righteousness of Christ, given through justification, becomes practical righteousness in daily life.
4. Through sanctification, Christian works come to the fore, and we glorify God by our lives.
5. The process of sanctification is necessary so that we are truly conformed to the image of Christ.
6. Through the process of sanctification, we witness for God.

7. Through the process of sanctification, we fulfill our role in the church.

8. Through the process of sanctification, we truly become holy, both legally and experientially.

As Paul is reaching the conclusion of this epistle, he reminds us of how important holiness is: “Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Once he gives this vital reminder about our sanctified status in chapter 10, he makes his transition to the next section. In this section, the patterns of the Temple and Tabernacle become important to our spiritual understanding and practical holiness.

Exhortations to Encourage Endurance

Hebrews 10:19 begins the verbal bridge that transitions from the doctrinal material to its practical application. This latter section contains arguably the most powerful exhortations in the entire Bible for us to get up and get going. If these Hebrews were not Laodicean as a whole, they were very close to it.

Overall, God is saying through the apostle, “Don’t you realize your danger? Being justified and sanctified, you absolutely cannot allow yourselves to continue in your neglectful ways. You have powerful help available through Christ, yet you are drifting away! Don’t you realize what you are giving up by your slow but steady drift into apostasy?” He had already warned them as chapter 2 opened that their neglect of their privileges and responsibilities was allowing this great salvation to slip away.

In Hebrews 10:19, He reminds them that they already have access to God, so they should come before Him with an eager boldness. This is one of our great privileges. Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden and God’s presence, but through Christ, God’s begotten children are now invited into His presence in spirit. Because the way has been prepared for us to do this, we are able to come to know God up close and personal. This is among the greatest of all blessings afforded to everyone who makes the New Covenant.

In other words, He meets with us, not outside the back or front door, but inside the house! And not merely inside the house but inside the second room beyond the veil—the Holy of Holies—where formerly only the High Priest was welcome once a year! The veil separating the rooms in the Temple was torn asunder at Christ’s death (Matthew 27:51). Nothing hinders our liberty to go boldly into God’s very throne room.

Jesus Christ Himself is “the Way” to the Father (John 14:6). As High Priest, Jesus has dedicated Himself to intercede on behalf of us sinners in our relations with God.

(continued on page 17)

ALL ABOUT EDOM

PART TWO

Among the accolades men shower on great leaders, perhaps the most honorable is “father of his country.”

Here in America, we have designated several famous Revolutionary War-era figures as “Founding Fathers,” but there is virtually no argument that one of them, George Washington, stands in a place of honor by himself. Other nations pay tribute to various key leaders in their histories in a similar way, men like Turkey’s Ataturk, India’s Gandhi, China’s Mao, North Korea’s Ho Chi Minh—even more ancient figures such as Cicero and a few of the Caesars held this title. Perhaps more than them all, Simón Bolívar can be considered the father of *six* modern nations: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Bolivia.

The Bible also designates certain men as fathers of nations, but it intends us to take this title literally: These men were actually progenitors of families that grew to become nations. Perhaps Abraham is the best known of these men. When God first revealed Himself to the patriarch, He prophesied, “I will make you a great nation” (Genesis 12:2), and later, in making the covenant with him, God expanded His promise, saying, “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5).

Later, when Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, he prophesied of their descendants becoming nations: “[Manasseh] also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations” (Genesis 48:19). In the next chapter, Jacob’s prophecy to his sons concerns itself with predictions of “what

shall befall” the tribes of Israel—families grown into nations— “in the last days” (Genesis 49:1).

As Part One showed, Esau was prophesied to become the father of a nation too. God told Rebekah, when her unborn sons wrestled within her, “Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23). Esau, being the firstborn, became the progenitor of the weaker, subservient people, known to history as the Edomites.

PSALM 83

The nations listed in Psalm 83:5-8 comprise a fairly complete rundown of the ancient enemies of Israel, and Edom, the descendants of Esau, is given primacy of place. After Edom come the usual suspects: the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagarites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, and Tyre; and Assyria joins them, specifically helping the children of Lot.

Descendants of Esau actually appear three times on this list, as Amalek (see Genesis 36:12) and Gebal (here, a region of Idumea, often confused with the Phoenician city of Gebal or Byblos) are tribes that became distinguished from the bulk of the Edomites. Evidently, these tribes struck out on their own and eventually established their own identities. Amalek, in particular, was a thorn in Israel’s side, as we will see.

Bible history, from about Genesis 16 on, records that all of these nations rose up against Israel and

prophecy watch *All About Edom*

Judah perpetually. Only very rarely did they ally with Israel for any length of time, and when they did, it was usually because they faced an even stronger, more dreaded enemy. It seems that Israel had peace from them only when they were conquered and put under tribute.

The only major nations missing from this list of Israel's persistent enemies are Egypt and Babylon. There may be several reasons for their omission. First, the context speaks of a particular historical "confederacy" against Israel, and Egypt and Babylon may not have been part of it. Second, as major powers in the region, Egypt and Babylon were generally unconcerned about Israel, or at least did not possess the visceral hatred of God's people that these other nations did. Third, the peoples that are mentioned were either ethnically related to Israel or lived in close proximity to her, while Egypt and Babylon are not related to Israel and inhabited distant realms.

Finally, as a prophecy of the last days, Psalm 83 may not consider Egypt and Babylon to represent the physical peoples that they did anciently. In fact, a physical Babylon does not seem to exist in the end time; the ancient city lies in ruins for tourists in Iraq to behold. If Egypt, a modern Arab nation, is contemplated in the prophecy, it may be included under the Hagarites, as Hagar, mother of Ishmael, was an Egyptian (Genesis 16:1). In addition, Ishmael's wife was also Egyptian (Genesis 21:21), making the Ishmaelites three-quarters Egyptian.

Nevertheless, all of these different peoples—Edom, Ishmael, Amalek, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, Tyre, and Assyria—are among the major players in the Middle East today. These are peoples from whom the Jihadists and the Islamic fundamentalists hail, making up what is known as the "Arab" or "Muslim world." Today, these people inhabit the nations of Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, etc., and the pseudo-nation of Palestine.

Psalm 83 lists a group of peoples—a confederacy—whose main enemy is Israel. Today, there exists a worldwide jihad against the West, particularly aimed at the "Great Satan," the United States, and the despised Jews, the State of Israel. The physical descendants of ancient Israel—the English-speaking peoples, the democracies of Northwest Europe, and the Jewish Diaspora—are the standard-bearers of Western civilization. The same players are still in the game!

Who has initiated the conflict over these last several years? For the most part, Islamist or fundamentalist Arabs have been the aggressors. The terrorists have mainly come from Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, North Africa, Iraq, etc.—that is, Arab nations. The philosophical or religious underpinnings for these attacks have their source in the virulent and violent anti-Western teachings of Wahhabism (spread from Saudi Arabia), militant pan-Arab socialism (cultivated by des-

pots in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, etc.), and anti-Semitism (practiced hypocritically by a majority of Arabs, who are themselves Semitic peoples, descendants of Abraham).

Where have most of the attacks taken place? Although many of them have occurred in the Middle East, they have been predominantly against Western interests. Terror organizations have targeted Western people, planes, helicopters, ships, homes, shops, hotels, and embassies—anything Western seems to be fair game to them.

For example, the bombing in Beirut against a U.S. military installation in 1983 killed hundreds of Marines in their barracks, and jihadists attacked the U.S. mainland on September 11, 2001. The State of Israel, of course, has endured a heavy share of the militant Islamic violence since its founding in 1948. More recently, Britain, Australia, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and other predominantly Israelite nations have also suffered terrorist atrocities. This in no way discounts the terrorism that has also struck non-Israelite but Western nations like Spain and Italy.

Putting Psalm 83 together with what we know about these nations' ancestries and with what we see on the evening news, these prophecies are coming to pass before our eyes!

GENESIS 36

As mentioned, Edom heads the list of Israel's enemies in Psalm 83. From the days of Esau himself, a burning hatred of Israel has been nourished among the Edomites. God says through the prophet Amos, "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever" (Amos 1:11). If any people would form and lead a confederacy against the Israelites, it would be Edom.

As the man Esau matured, married, and had children, he made critical alliances with surrounding peoples, recorded in Genesis 36. In writing this book of beginnings, Moses took the effort to include an entire chapter on the Edomites alone. He was careful to include specific details about who was born to whom and who ruled this or that area. In addition, he reminds the reader several times of his subject:

- Verse 1: "This is the genealogy of Esau, who is Edom."
- Verse 8: "Esau is Edom."
- Verse 19: ". . . Esau, who is Edom. . . ."
- Verse 43: "Esau was the father of the Edomites."

When God repeats Himself, He is usually trying to convey an important matter. He is reminding Israel not to forget that the Edomites have their source in Esau. To deal with them correctly, the Israelites would have to know who the Edomites were and be prepared for their predictable and incessant attacks—and consciously or not, the Edomites never have stopped trying to win back

what Esau lost to Jacob! Further, we today will readily recognize them by the biblical clues recorded about their forefather.

In introducing the family of Esau, Moses includes the names and derivations of Esau's wives: "Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite; Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth" (Genesis 36:2-3). Esau bound himself by marriage to the Hittites, the Hivites—both Canaanite tribes—and the Ishmaelites.

The Hittites, descended from Heth, son of Canaan, were, by far, the strongest and biggest of these tribes, possessing a huge empire that stretched from Asia Minor to Palestine, with its capital in what is today central Turkey. The "Land of Hatti" was the major empire of Abraham's time, having the commercial, cultural, and military power to influence the entire Levant.

The Hivites were a related but less numerous people living in the land of Canaan. They may be those whom the Bible calls elsewhere "Horites" and whom history terms "Hurrians," a people centered in northern Mesopotamia, who had once been a dominant people in the region. In Esau's time, they seem to have had several strongholds in central Canaan, including Shechem. Deuteronomy 2:12, 22 records that the Edomites destroyed and perhaps absorbed a branch of Horites living in Seir, taking their land for themselves.

It is now clear how close the ties were between the Edomites, the Hittites, the Hivites, and the Ishmaelites. They were all related by marriage and blood!

We find another blood-connection in Genesis 36:11-12: "And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. Now Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These were the sons of Adah, Esau's wife." The Amalekites, descended from Amalek, a grandson of Esau, fall naturally into the anti-Israel alliance. Verse 16 mentions that Amalek became a chief among the Edomites. Although the son of a concubine, he nonetheless became head of a significant tribe, which in later times distinguished itself as a ruthless enemy of Israel.

Notice, too, that Teman, since he is listed first, is probably the firstborn son of Eliphaz, who is the firstborn son of Esau. Teman's name became attached to the central part of Edomite territory, where he and his clan evidently settled. A city by the name of Teman existed not far from Petra. Habakkuk 3:3 shows the area of Teman in parallel with Mount Paran, which some consider to be a poetic reference to Mount Sinai, but it more likely refers to Mount Seir in central Edom. It is helpful to remember that some of the prophecies concerning Esau use Teman as an alternative name for Edom.

AMALEK

Though Esau himself was full of bitter hatred, and Ishmael is described as a wild man, Amalek seems to have been the

worst of the Edomite-related peoples. The Bible records that even God has a special enmity for Amalek, saying in Exodus 17:16, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." What is it about the Amalekites that turns God against them?

The story begins as the Israelites are fleeing from Egypt, having just crossed the Red Sea, as Exodus 17:8 chronicles, "Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim." Evidently, the Amalekites had heard of Egypt's total defeat at the Red Sea and decided to take advantage of its usually more powerful neighbor's weakness. Between them and their prize, however, walked a strung out line of Israelite wanderers, who seemed to be, not only laden with Egyptian loot, but also easy pickings.

Deuteronomy 25:17-18 fills out the story: "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God." The Amalekites, not daring to take on the main host of Israel attacked the tail end of the line, where the slow and weak plodded along. Yet, as Moses notes, the Amalekites did not include God in their calculations.

Moses commanded Joshua to select men to fight, and the Israelites met the Amalekites in battle. The result of this seesaw fight appears in Exodus 17:13-16:

So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-Lord-Is-My-Banner; for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

Forty years later, when Israel is about to cross over Jordan, God reminds Israel of Amalek's perfidious act and charges them:

Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget. (Deuteronomy 25:19)

The Amalekites appear again in the well-known episode in which God instructed King Saul to carry out this command:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman,

(continued on page 16)

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GNOSTICISM?

PART THREE: SATAN'S THREE HERESIES

Scholars who define “Gnosticism” generally agree that Gnostic philosophies had their source in the Zoroastrianism and Hinduism of Persia and India, and that these ideas were brought into the West via Alexander the Great’s conquest of Persia. These Eastern thoughts blended with Greek culture, producing a heady mixture that profoundly influenced the Jews of the time and Christians centuries later.

However, the ultimate source of this “falsely called knowledge”—as well as the one responsible for perpetuating these anti-God philosophies throughout time—is, of course, Satan the Devil. Gnosticism is one of the many heresies he has used to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9). His words to Eve in the Garden of Eden bear a striking resemblance with the core of Gnostic thought and teaching:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and

you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:1-5)

In this first message to mankind, Satan introduces three heresies that he has used repeatedly throughout history. First, in verse 1, he sows seeds of doubt as to whether God can be trusted. Satan’s very first words were, “Has God indeed said. . . ?” Spoken or not, this sentiment that God is untrustworthy, and that His Word is suspect, has been a regular feature in mankind’s relationship with God ever since.

The Gnostics were no exception—in fact, they are a prime example. In its most basic sense, Gnosticism is *knowing*, but its knowledge, while sometimes *including* the Word of God, does not have it as its foundation. Instead, more than what was contained in Scripture, Gnostics valued what they experienced, what elders told them, or what they learned from “angels,” astrology, or chemistry (alchemy). Thus, we see elements of Gnosticism in Galatians: a mixture of “lucky days,” to which they ascribed spiritual significance (part of

their worship prior to conversion) and a belief, brought in by Judaizers or perhaps even an “angel” (Galatians 1:8), that justification could come by works of the law.

Judaism, though it has its *roots* in the Old Testament, sees God’s Word through the lens of Hellenism (Greek thought) and the traditions of Jewish scholars and teachers through the centuries. The Galatian Christians gave God’s Word lip service, but did not depend on it as the *source* of their beliefs and practices. If they had, they would not have returned to pagan “days, months, seasons, and years,” nor believed that justification could ever result from good works—a concept that is *read into* the Old Testament, but not actually found there.

Similarly, the Colossian Christians were affected by an ascetic form of Gnosticism that included “ordinances” (KJV) or “regulations” (NKJV) that are not found in God’s Word but were the commandments and doctrines *of men* (Colossians 2:20-23), as well as demons, the “basic principles of the world” (Colossians 2:8).

Modern Distrust of God

This same distrust of God's Word is readily seen in today's Catholicism and Protestantism. The Catholic Church holds that Scripture is only one of three sources from which its dogma is derived—the other two being divine revelation and the writings and traditions of previous Catholic saints. The Bible, while generally utilized as the source of doctrine, can be easily overridden by the words of a Pope or other theologian, living or dead. Once again, human words and traditions are considered more trustworthy than God's.

In some respects, Protestantism has a higher regard for Scripture. However, it, too, accepts the traditions of men in such beliefs as the Trinity, the immortality of the soul, going to heaven, observing Christmas and Easter, and venerating the first day of the week (which the Catholic Church rightly points out makes sense only if one accepts Rome's authority, for there is no *scriptural* authority for keeping any day holy but the Sabbaths).

Modern Gnostics who believe in "progressive revelation" have also succumbed to this first of Satan's ploys. While God *does* reveal things to us, the critical point is that what is revealed—if it truly comes from Him—will *never* contradict what He has already revealed in His Word. "God is not a man, that He should lie" (Numbers 23:19). Yet progressive revelation advocates believe that their revelations are more authoritative than the Bible, rather than complementing and harmonizing with it, making them ripe for satanic influence under the guise of God revealing something new to them. They may sincerely believe that God speaks to them, yet they simultaneously mistrust what He has already said in inspired Scripture. They tend to shy away from Bible study, concluding that they do not need it since God speaks directly to them, and if there is anything important, God will let them know.

Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." But Satan knows this too and believes that, if he can under-

mine the trustworthiness of God and the validity of His Word, he can destroy the faith necessary for salvation. Currently, the Bible's legitimacy is undergoing an intense assault. Due to popular Gnostic writings like the *Gospel of Judas* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, as well as *The Da Vinci Code* book and movie, many people are questioning why we have the Bible that we do and wondering if something in the ancient apocryphal writings, if it were known, would change Christianity as we know it. Rather than quibbling about this or that point of doctrine, Satan seems to be gunning for the whole package by asserting that the Word of God is subject to the whims of men and thus cannot be trusted. At every turn, faith founded in God's Word is being undermined.

The Second Heresy

Satan's next heresy is found in Genesis 3:4: "You shall not surely die." When expanded, this one claims that we are already immortal, so death has no real hold over us. This idea, proposed at the very beginning, has thrived throughout history. Mainstream Christianity calls it the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, while various Eastern religions contain it in beliefs such as reincarnation. Whatever its moniker, the belief that human beings possess a spiritual, *eternally conscious*, imperishable component is a major tenet of nearly every religion throughout man's history. In our modern culture, books and movies abound with examples of the spirits of the dead hovering around the living characters, giving them comfort, aid, and encouragement. It is taken as given that death is not the end; somehow, one's conscious spirit will live on when the physical body perishes.

The Gnostic belief in the dualism of flesh and spirit—with the flesh being evil and something to be freed from, while the eternal spirit was good—also originated in the lie Satan told Eve. Gnostics, in general, believed that the purpose of human existence was to return to the spiritual realm from whence all originated. Death, then, was seen as liberation of the spirit.

First, consider how this belief affects a person's attitude and way of life. When Satan undermined the death penalty for disobedience, in addition to sowing further distrust in what God says, he also blunted one of the keenest elements of human motivation, continued self-preservation. If life beyond the grave is assured, how this life is lived makes little difference. It is like guaranteeing a college freshman that he will receive a doctorate degree, regardless of whether anything is learned, any work is done, any classes are attended, or any tuition is paid. While the student may indeed expend some effort, the motivation to apply himself wholeheartedly to his education will be substantially weakened. It would be so easy to slack off and postpone catching up to some time next week. After all, if the goal is certain, why worry about the details in the meantime?

Spiritually, the result is the same. If one already has immortality, salvation, or born-again status, there is no pressing reason to resist the pulls of carnality. Resisting Satan matters little. Devoting one's life to growing and overcoming has no urgency. Sin is no big deal. Why should one study to come to know God and His truth? *Believing that one already possesses eternal life removes the urgency to live according to the desires and requirements of the Creator.* At best, all that remains is the vague guidance of "just be a good person."

The Bible teaches that there *can be* life after death through the resurrection from the dead. Eternal life is ours *only* if God supplies it, and not because we possess an immortal soul:

- God tells us, "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; *the soul who sins shall die.* (Ezekiel 18:4; emphasis ours throughout). God repeats this in Ezekiel 18:20. Clearly, it is possible for a "soul" to die.
- Paul instructs in Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is *death,*" not eternal life—not even eternal life in ever-burning hell. As with

Ezekiel 18, sin incurs the death penalty. Satan, though, would have us believe that since death is not a real threat, sin is no big deal. It is only because of God's grace that we are not struck down immediately—not because of any inherent immortality within us—as the rest of Romans 6:23 explains: “but the *gift* of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Eternal life is a gift, not an inborn quality.

- I Timothy 6:16 says that God “alone has immortality”—not any member of the human race, Christians included!
- Romans 2:7 promises “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good *seek* for glory, honor, and *immortality*,” again proving that eternal life is a gift, not a right, and that immortality must be *sought* (by “doing good”) rather than assumed to have it already.
- Finally, in the “Resurrection Chapter,” I Corinthians 15, Paul explains *when* Christians receive immortality:

Now this I say, brethren, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all be changed*—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised incorruptible*, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and *this mortal must put on immortality*. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this *mortal has put on immortality*, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (I Corinthians 15:50-54)

It is not until “the last trumpet,”

when Jesus Christ returns, that the dead will be resurrected and given immortality (I Thessalonians 4:16). At this time, the saints will be changed and given new *spiritual* bodies (I Corinthians 15:49; I John 3:2). Clearly, immortality is not given until the resurrection from the dead, which does not take place until Jesus Christ returns.

That God must resurrect a person for him to continue living means that He retains sovereignty. He is not obliged to grant eternal life to anyone who demonstrates, once he has the opportunity to know God, that he is not willing to be subject to His way of life. However, by belittling the truth about the resurrection from the dead, and telling people that they already have immortality, Satan can distract them from a basic reason *why* they need to listen to God—so that they may be resurrected and continue living!

The Third Lie

The third prong in the Devil's ongoing assault on God's instructions is found in Genesis 3:5: that by taking of the Tree of the *Knowledge* of Good and Evil, human eyes would be opened—implying wisdom and enlightenment—to allow a person to know good and evil as God does. Immediately, Satan places the emphasis on *knowing*, but it is contrasted with *living* eternally. Satan proposes that mankind should be like God in taking to himself the knowledge—the definition—of what is right and wrong, asserting that this is a good thing! In contrast, the Tree of Life represents a way of living in which the meaning of good and evil already exists, and eternal life involves submitting through the Holy Spirit to that definition and the Sovereign who is its source.

Likewise, the Gnostics are those who *know*—who pursue mystical knowledge that they believe holds the key to eternal life through advancing beyond the physical and into the spiritual realm. Recall that the *Gospel of Thomas* states at the very beginning that “whoever discovers the *interpretation* of these sayings will not taste death.” Gnostics believed the key to eternal life was contained in

right interpretation—knowledge—of those esoteric sayings.

The book of Revelation expounds on the Tree of Life in two places:

- To *him who overcomes* I will give to eat from the *tree of life*, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7)
- Blessed are *those who do His commandments*, that they may have the right to the *tree of life*, and may enter through the gates into [New Jerusalem]. (Revelation 22:14)

The Tree of Life, then, is associated with a *way* of life—one that requires overcoming (growth against a standard of righteousness) and keeping (doing) God's commandments. The only ones who are allowed to partake of the Tree of Life are those who have changed themselves (with God's help, by His Spirit) to begin living in the same manner as He does. To those who submit to His standard of righteousness, then, He grants life that is both endless and of the same quality that He enjoys.

Satan, though, in addition to casting doubt on what God plainly says, and implying that God is unfair by withholding good things, offers a shortcut. He says, “You do not need to follow God's way, for it is obviously unfair and far too stringent. You can follow your *own* way. You can take knowledge to yourself of what is good and what is evil. You can be just like God in determining what is right and wrong.” Adam and Eve took the bait, and ever since, man has rejected God's standard of righteousness in favor of his own.

This third heresy is easily seen in the antinomianism (literally, “against law”) of the Gnostics, who may not have been against *every* law, but were certainly against any law—any standard of conduct or requirement of righteousness—that impinged upon *their* standard of conduct. Thus the ascetic Gnostics who grieved the Christians in Colossae held to manmade regulations of “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” (Colossians 2:20-21), while rejecting the command

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“Be ready always to give an answer . . .” I Peter 3:15

Learning to Love One Another

**“By this all will
know that you are
My disciples,
if you have love
for one another.”
—John 13:35**

In a June 2000 sermon titled “What Does God Really Want? (Part Five),” John Ritenbaugh expounded in relation to Romans 8:28 (“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”):

All the events of life, all of the things that come within our possession and as part of our responsibility, are given to us for the sake of good. They are given to us so that through them the right things can be carried through the grave. This includes what we might consider bad things. Even things like poor health can be a good thing in terms of what God is doing with us, even though on the outside it looks like it’s bad. If God is in your life, then even that sickness (though we might consider it bad), is good. It’s part of the scaffolding for building character.

From my personal experience, and from looking around the church today, it appears that many of our brethren are *not* being healed. It could cause us to ask, “Why is God not healing His people today?” Of course, we know that many people have been healed miraculously—and some from terrible diseases—yet others die or continue in suffering and pain.

Does this mean that the ones who are not being healed are more sinful than those who have been healed? Definitely not! If it were a matter of

sin, no one would be healed, “For,” as Romans 3:23 says, “all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God.” The Bible condemns all sin, so it has nothing to do with whether we have sinned more than the other fellow or not.

What then? Does God show favor to one man over another? Again, we have to turn to Scripture for the answer. In Matthew 5:45, Jesus plainly says, “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” God is no respecter of persons (Deuteronomy 10:17; Romans 2:11).

Yet, from Isaiah 53:5, we know that it is not God’s intention for man to be sick: “by His stripes we are healed.” This is a promise made in the present tense, making it always applicable. In addition, Psalm 103:2-3 encourages us, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.”

We know and obey the instruction to call upon the elders when we are sick as the apostle James says in James 5:14: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

So why are some of us not being healed?

Working Out a Plan

We seem to be witnessing an unprecedented proportion of people who have terminal diseases. Various cancers, heart disease, diabetes, and a variety of other problems cause severe trial and discomfort to the bodies of many of our brethren, stressing and devastating them and their families too. In my personal case, as I suffer pain and sleeplessness, I see the deep worry and concern—a kind of mental and emotional pain—in my wife’s eyes as she cares for me.

Has God left us alone to suffer? Never! Being a loving God, He wants us to be well and happy, and He gives us many guidelines in His Word on how to apply His wonderful way of living so we can be that way. But, to be painfully honest, how many of us have ourselves set these problems into motion long before we came to understand the revealed truth of God?

At one time or another in our lives, most of us have gone out and had a little too much fun. How many of us smoked for years, or drank way beyond what was good for us? We probably stayed up far too many nights burning the midnight oil, and it is likely we ate the wrong things, and to excess. There are many ways to injure the human body, and the consequences

may not become apparent for many years.

Nor should we forget that some people become sick through hereditary weakness, whose fathers’ sins are being visited upon them (Exodus 20:5). For others, there is no apparent reason at all for their illness, and perhaps for them not knowing why is the hardest burden to bear.

God, however, lovingly supplies a means to help us to cope with the trial of disease and to grow in character at the same time. James 5:16 says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Serious illness can force an afflicted person to develop a very real reliance on God. In addition, it also reveals a duty of the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ to pray for the sick person. Why should they do this? James 5:16 continues, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

What a wonderful assurance this is for the sick church member, who may not have the strength or awareness to do much praying, although we all do the best we can at such times. Sometimes, because of pain, nausea, lack of sleep, and many other problems associated with ill health, the suffering person is not as clear-minded as a healthy person, and he is thankful that there is another who is willing to stand by him and pray for him.

All the while God is working out a wonderful plan for all of us as we stand with our brethren in sickness, whether we are the “patient,” the worried relation, or the person giving moral and spiritual support from far away. An amazing thing begins to happen: A bond—a relationship—forms. And God can often work through these bonds to bring about real love, understanding, encouragement, and growth.

More Blessed to Give

For those who have never been critically sick, it may be hard to imagine what the ill person is going through, and one may even hesitate when it comes to praying for him. However, this should not be an obstacle. Paul instructs us that we can go before our loving Father and admit this, asking Him to help us pray more effectively. He knows everything, and His Holy Spirit will make up for our lack of understanding, if we are willing to ask in faith. The apostle writes in Romans 8:26, “Likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

So what are we to learn from these things? What do we say to people who are suffering day in and day

out, having their very lives altered because they have fallen sick and have not been healed?

Firstly, we have to recognize that God is sovereign and that His will and Word are final in our lives. No matter how bad it gets for any of us, He expects us to submit to Him—to say, “Your will be done,” and to mean it.

This takes faith, which is one of the main character traits God is creating in His children. When all else looks as if it has failed, when it appears as if even God has deserted us, He expects us to have enough trust and confidence to know that is not true. We can place supreme reliance on His promise in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” He never breaks faith with us (I Corinthians 1:9).

Secondly, when His children pray for one another, they show that they really care, and God can use this to great advantage. For many who are sick or have been enduring sore trial, it is the hand that reaches out that illustrates or demonstrates God’s tangible love toward them.

Just to receive a note, an email, a card, or a phone call is so encouraging and uplifting. A painful, terrible, dark day can be turned all of a sudden into sunshine, and even if it is just for a moment, the pain can dim and thankful prayer and praise can be offered to our loving Father for this gift, as small as it may seem. These little things mean so much to people who are cut off from others due to their illnesses, and just the fact that someone took the time out of his or her busy schedule to get in touch is so appreciated. It can make a huge difference to an afflicted person’s day.

No one can truly imagine what someone else’s pain and suffering is like, and that can make it difficult for a person to pick up the phone, send an email, or make any sort of personal contact. However, I know from experience that if the sender of such a communiqué receives as much encouragement as the recipient, then the former will be quite well-rewarded. In this vein, Paul quotes Jesus in Acts 20:35 as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Our teenage son died some years ago, and I remember that on the first anniversary of his death, my wife and I were feeling very low. Yet, when I opened the mail, there was a thinking-of-you card from a young teenager who had been one of my son’s friends. True, it caused the floodgates to burst, but it also helped us to heal a little that day. So, our loving concern should not stop with the sick, but should continue within us to reach out to those who have lost loved ones and are now alone.

Reaching Out

In I John 3:11, the aged apostle John, the one whom Jesus loved, tells us, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” *Webster’s Dictionary* attempts to define biblical love by describing it as “the fatherly concern of God for humankind and man’s devout attachment to God,” as well as “the unselfish, loyal, and benevolent concern for the good of another.”

Consider also Amos 3:3: “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” How does this apply to the present situation? With a unified willingness to understand and obey what Scripture demands of us as Christians, we can all walk together. Just because some are healthy—maybe they have never had an illness in their lives—does not mean they cannot try to understand and empathize with their ill brethren. With the help of God’s Holy Spirit, which will make up for what any one of us lacks, the healthy can reach out and make a difference in a sick person’s life.

When an individual reaches out to another who is suffering, it uplifts and encourages so much that God’s Spirit has an opportunity to work with them both, as well as to bring about comfort and a feeling of brotherhood to the ill person and to fan the flames of loving concern in the other. These glowing embers of God’s love, brotherly Christian love, help the Family of God to form fuller, deeper bonds of unity and purpose.

This is not the only way God works to cultivate His love in His people, but where there is sickness and suffering, God can take advantage of the circumstance to teach us to love each other, a command He gave to His end-time church, and to walk together as brothers. Moreover, it also provides Him the opportunity to judge who really does love the brethren.

I have made many good friends through people reaching out in lovingkindness to me during my ongoing illness. I have never met most of these people, yet their love, kind words, cards, and emails keep me company in the long, lonely hours of the night. Their love has encouraged me to try a little harder the next day or has prompted me to be of good cheer and not become disheartened. It is inspiring to know that someone, a brother or sister now and in the time to come, is pulling for me and wanting me to succeed.

Above all, I know God sees these loving efforts being made and responds, pleased with our growth. He desires that we make a difference, and in reaching out, we learn to love one another—and in this world, that is making an uncommon difference.

—Geoff Preston

prophecy watch *All About Edom*

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infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” (I Samuel 15:2-3)

However, despite winning the battle, Saul did not follow God’s instructions completely: “But Saul and the people spared Agag [king of the Amalekites] and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed” (verse 9). God sent the prophet Samuel to tell Saul that He had rejected him as king, as well as to execute Agag.

Obviously, some Amalekites escaped Saul’s army. Five centuries later, as recorded in the story of Esther, an evil man named Haman plotted genocide against the Jews in Persia during the reign of Xerxes. Haman was “the son of Hammedatha the Agagite” (Esther 3:1), probably directly descended from the Amalekite king Samuel killed.

These accounts relate the sort of trickery, terrorism,

and underhandedness that the Amalekites seem to use perpetually. One can only conclude that these tactics are passed from generation to generation, becoming a hereditary trait. God has recorded these episodes to indicate to us how Amalek historically treats Israel. If a confederacy is formed against Israel, the Amalekites will be a part of it, and they will be eager to use any means to bring her down.

Other prophecies about Esau appear in Numbers 24:18; Isaiah 21:11-12; 34:5-7; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Daniel 11:41; Joel 3:19; and Malachi 1:2-5. The book of Obadiah contains the longest continuous prophecy against Edom, which will be covered in Parts Three and Four. From these different perspectives, God gives His people a complete picture of the Edomites: what they have done and will do in the end time, and what punishment they will receive for what they have done.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

GNOSTICISM

(continued from page 12)

to “rejoice” with food and drink during the God-ordained festivals. Similarly, mainstream Christianity will (rightly) use portions of Leviticus and Deuteronomy to point out God’s abhorrence of abortion and homosexuality, but will claim that the same law is “done away” when it comes to the Sabbath and holy days. They have taken to themselves the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, establishing their own standard of righteousness.

A core issue of the Bible is whether we submit to God’s governance or try to form a government based on our own perception of what is good or what works. God’s way results in eternal life, but it comes with the obligation to submit oneself to God. It requires keeping all of His commandments and overcoming our human weaknesses that do not rise to that standard. Satan, conversely, seeks to persuade us to do our own thing and to usurp God’s prerogative in defining right living. He encourages us to be enlightened, to have our eyes opened, by doubting God and rejecting His way.

The Highest Virtue?

These three heresies, each subtly undercutting God’s truth and plan for mankind, have been recycled since Creation, effectively continuing the separation from God begun in the Garden of Eden. Certainly, Gnosticism incorporates these foundational falsehoods, but they also exist in every anti-God system of belief, organized or not.

An area where the wrong approach to knowledge becomes apparent is in love toward God and toward fellow man, and especially toward our brethren and families. The Gnostics tended to disdain those who were not as “enlightened” as they were. Knowledge and understanding were their currency, and they assigned value to people based on what they *knew*, a practice completely contrary to God’s way of outgoing concern.

In writing against Gnosticism, the apostle John, both in his epistles and his gospel, emphasizes God’s love toward us and our obligation to love the brethren. Similarly, Paul writes, “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (I Corinthians 8:1), and that

even if he understood all mysteries and all knowledge, but did not have love, he would be nothing (I Corinthians 13:2). He also warns Timothy about self-centered people who are “always learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Timothy 3:7).

To the Gnostics, knowledge was the highest virtue, since they considered it the path to spirituality. They sought the “divine” inside themselves through self-knowledge; they were caught up in an all-important search for the self. They did not need Jesus Christ as Savior, Redeemer, or High Priest, but *only* as a spiritual Messenger who would instruct and enlighten. This approach or philosophy cannot but make a person self-centered, and selfishness lives at the root of all strife within relationships.

For Christians, right knowledge *is* extremely important, but that right knowledge will never contradict faith, hope, and especially love. Ultimately, knowledge will come to nothing (I Corinthians 13:8), but faith, hope, and love will remain (verse 13).

—David C. Grabbe

personal *God's Power: Our Shield Against Apostasy*

(continued from page 6)

In John 17:19, in His prayer the night before His crucifixion, He says, “. . . for their [His disciples’] sakes, I sanctify Myself.” He set Himself apart to the shedding of His blood for us and to His position as our High Priest.

The phrase in Hebrews 10:20, “through the veil, that is, His flesh,” refers to what He did as a human to make this access to God possible. When He was flesh and blood, He died for us so that we, like Him, could go directly into the Holy of Holies. Spiritually, His death pierced the veil.

Thus, the first thing Paul lays out in this transition is a three-step trigger to prime the Hebrew Christians’ latent memories so they will be armed with foundational incentives to rouse themselves spiritually and start moving forward. In verses 22-24, he makes three exhortations.

First, “let us draw near.” In other words, get moving! He says, “Take advantage of this privilege of coming before God, and believe without doubting, knowing your sins are forgiven and remembering that God is faithful and merciful to forgive.” Recall that in the performance of their duties, the priests had to wash their hands and feet before entering the holy place. This is why Paul mentions water. He is alluding to the Hebrews’ need to become clean. He urges them to repent of their lackadaisical attitudes and to meet with their Maker in prayer.

Second, he commands them to “hold fast your profession.” Paul uses a similar phrase five times before this. Apparently, lackadaisical drifting was a particularly common problem for them. He wants them to show by their conduct that they believe in what God has promised in the resurrection from the dead. In short, he advises, “Remember your conviction in the awesome hope of our calling.” These people were allowing the world to get them down; they were succumbing to a “what’s the use” resignation. They were not busy confirming their souls. Paul exhorts them to continue, to persevere in the grace God had already shown them, not wanting them to waste it by failing to look ahead and be persistent. He presses them to yield to God and to allow themselves to be reassured that He is faithful to His promises.

Pay special attention to the third exhortation in verse 24. The word “consider” is very emphatic. He urges them to think upon and to strive for unity by giving conscientious care to each other. He wants the Hebrews to give special attention to their brethren’s circumstances, trials, temptations, weaknesses, and needs. They need to “fire each other up” to promote love for God and for each other and to carry out our common responsibilities. Christians do this by setting a good example, by occasional suitable exhortations, by acts of kindness, and by expressions of appreciation.

Notice that as this exhortation begins, Paul calls upon the “big three” Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love. These would form the foundation of what the Hebrews must do if they were to reverse their slide toward the Lake

of Fire. These virtues must be implemented because they affect the quality of a person’s relationship with God. Because a Christian has God’s Spirit, these virtues are already part of him. However, each individual must himself choose to use them to turn his life around; no one can do this for another. Of course, it is understood that God is always there to help a person do this.

A Jarring Warning

We have now reached one of the most solemn and fear-provoking sections of Scripture. We need to understand that this passage is written to Christians, not to the world, and what it threatens is facing any Christian who does not choose to believe that God is serious. God is *thundering* at His own children because some of them have become insipidly blasé about what He has done for them and have ignored the help that He makes so readily available to them.

This does not mean that everybody who heard this message was in that perilous spiritual condition. It was given, however, against the backdrop of some having already departed from the church, and it uses them as examples of what not to do, for the purpose of warning the others about what those who left are facing. To determine just where he stands, each person has to examine himself in light of Paul’s instruction.

Yet, some who heard this message had regressed so far that they were on track to *apostatize*, which means “to depart from the faith.” This subject is Paul’s major motivation for writing the letter. He first introduces it as early as Hebrews 3:12: “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” “Departing” is the Greek word *aphistemi*, meaning “to remove” or “to instigate to revolt.”

How far had people departed? Hebrews 10:25 gives a clear indication by Paul’s use of the word “forsaking” regarding assembling on the Sabbath. The Greek word means exactly this: Some of the Hebrews were not missing just an occasional Sabbath service but had abandoned attending Sabbath services entirely for extended periods, if not altogether. This accounts for the strength of the apostle’s message.

A similar passage in II Peter 2:20-22 reads:

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

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Peter speaks of apostasy here. He says it would have been better had they never known the way of righteousness rather than know it and then turn from it. Jesus said of Judas that it would have been better for him not to have been born (Matthew 26:24). The same end faced those who had forsaken assembling together on the Sabbath.

I Timothy 1:19 contains a vivid illustration of apostasy, saying that an apostate makes shipwreck of his faith in God. Having escaped the world, he returns to it and soon finds himself on the rocks, being beaten to death by the waves of life. As mentioned earlier, a person does not apostatize in one giant leap. Just as the Israelites obtained the Promised Land step by step, so apostasy occurs step by step. One goes forward, the other backward. If the backslider takes appropriate action, he does not have to lose his faith.

The first thing to note in Hebrews 10:26-27 is the word "sin." Paul is not speaking of sin in general but the specific sin of apostasy from the faith they once knew and professed. The apostasy he has in mind is not so much an act but a state brought on by many individual attitudes and sins, reproducing the original, carnal antagonism a person has toward God before conversion.

Some commentaries insist that the Authorized Version is not quite correct in translating the term in verse 26 as "willfully." These argue that the Greek word, *hekousios*, will not permit this translation. It appears only one other time, in I Peter 5:2, where it is translated as "willingly." The commentators insist that it should be rendered "willingly" in Hebrews 10:26.

The American Heritage College Dictionary supports their conclusion. To do something *willfully* is to do it purposely or deliberately. The commentators say all sin is done purposely because human nature is set up to do so, even though weakness, ignorance, or deception may be involved as well. To do a thing *willingly* is to be disposed, inclined, or prepared to do it. Its synonyms are "readily," "eagerly," "compliantly," "ungrudgingly," "voluntarily," and "volitionally." This sense is contained in the context because, by the time a person reaches the apostate stage in his backward slide, where he has forsaken God and His way, he has *no* resistance to sin.

The sinner is deliberately, even eagerly, determined to abandon Christ, to turn away from God and His way, having completely become an enemy once again. He sins with barely a second thought, if with any thought at all. He sins automatically, as there is none of God's Spirit left to constrain him. His conscience is totally defiled; he has forsaken God.

Awake to Salvation!

Who is in danger of committing this sin? All who have made a profession of faith in Christ but are now neglecting their salvation.

The message of Hebrews is that it does not have to be

this way. If the person takes heed and stirs himself awake, if he truly seeks to overcome and grow once again, if he returns to being a living sacrifice and seeking to glorify God, if he truly denies himself and takes up his cross, if he keeps God's commandments to live life as a Christian, he will *not* apostatize.

He may fall back from time to time, but as long as he repents and honestly seeks God when sin occurs in his life, the sin is readily forgiven. I John 1:9 confidently proclaims, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." John 14:23 assures us that as long as we are keeping His Word, we are safe.

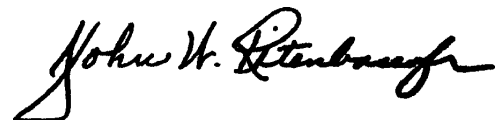
Hebrews 12:5-10 explains that God is faithfully working in our behalf, even chastening us if He sees fit, to get us turned around and headed again in the right direction and attitude. He does this faithfully because He does not want to lose us. Christ died for each child of God, thus each child He loves—and He loves them all—represents a substantial investment. Christ did not die in vain for anybody. In Hebrews 13:5, He charges us with the task of putting to work His promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

II Peter 2:4-9 provides us with a stern and yet encouraging exhortation:

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.

Peter is urging us to keep on keeping on! Those who apostatize are those who look back, who are drawn back, who turn back and fall back. Apostasy is simply the renunciation of the truths of the gospel, its promises, and its duties after one has been convicted by its truth and made a profession of it. But power belongs to God. It is His expressed will to use it to prepare us for His Kingdom. Do not let salvation slip away through neglectful non-cooperation.

In Christian love,



A Trans-Atlantic Free-Trade Agreement?

In September 2006, German Chancellor Angela Merkel began promoting the idea of a free-trade dialogue with the United States during her term at the head of the European Union in the first half of 2007. In January, she met with President George W. Bush to discuss such an economic arrangement. Known as TAFTA (Trans-Atlantic Free-Trade Agreement), such an “Atlantic Bridge” would bind EU and American trade policies in much the same way as NAFTA has brought together the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. TAFTA would create an economic powerhouse consisting of roughly 800 million citizens and over half of the world’s gross domestic product—roughly \$24 trillion out of a global total of around \$43 trillion.

Such economic integration would be attractive to both parties because of its potential to offset some of globalization’s negative effects. Currently, both the U.S. and the EU are feeling the imbalance of low-wage, newly industrialized nations (like India and China) inserting themselves into international economics. This disparity is the cause of the “outsourcing” of manufacturing and certain services from Western nations to countries where it is cheaper to do business—such as moving call centers to India and manufacturing plants to China. While this may make sense from a strictly economic standpoint, it takes a heavy toll on the national fabric as local factories close down and employees of transnational corporations are forced to contend with cultural and linguistic differences.

A free-trade agreement between these economic heavyweights would allow for a measure of “cultural protection” by leveling the playing field. TAFTA could dictate terms to any nation wanting to do business, and thus artificially change the economic costs of outsourcing manufacturing or technical services—relatively low right now—so that hiring local workers would end up being cheaper, operating local factories would end up costing less, etc.

The hurdles to implementing such a free-trade agreement are far from trivial. For starters, getting the 27-member EU to agree on anything is no small feat. Such a trans-Atlantic free-trade zone has been proposed before, but the idea was scuttled largely because of what France would have had to give up—namely, its policies of agricultural subsidies. If Chancellor Merkel is to be successful in getting the EU member states on board, she will likely have to approach the issue by requiring the U.S. to adopt a number of Europe’s “regulatory structures”—meaning the U.S. government would become more of an economic regulator instead of ostensibly letting the “free market” take its course.

This may be a hard sell for the United States, which sees its strong economic growth—especially in relation to Europe’s—largely as a product of *not* adopting such European-style regulatory structures. However, in past discussions the U.S. has generally been favorable to such a free-trade arrangement because of what it sees can be gained.

However, there are reasons to believe that the interest in TAFTA goes beyond simply economics. During her January visit with President Bush, Chancellor Merkel made it clear that her goal is to try to heal the rift between the U.S. and Europe that has emerged since the war in Iraq began. The traditional security understanding between the two has weakened during the military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the never-ending “peace process” between Israel and its neighbors, the nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea, and the resurgence of Russia. The historical allies have differing economic and political interests in each of these unstable situations.

Yet, if a financial understanding and agreement could be reached—one that both parties have an interest in maintaining, if for no other reason than that it would control over half of the world’s wealth—it could begin to bring their deviating political and security/military perspectives closer together. Money talks, and such a large amount of money might smooth over the current trans-Atlantic disagreements. While neither TAFTA nor a sudden burst of mutual adoration between the U.S. and the EU will happen immediately, it is reasonable to expect movement in this direction soon.

—David C. Grabbe



The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Nobleman's Son

The healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54) is thought to be Jesus' first-recorded miracle of healing.

In Jerusalem, He had accomplished some extraordinary miracles, which, though not documented, must have produced significant results, for the apostle writes that "many believed in His name when they saw the signs [or *miracles*] which He did" (John 2:23). Christ's miraculous ministry no doubt caused a stir among every level of society.

In this miracle, a nobleman from Capernaum asks for Jesus' intervention on behalf of his dying son. This worried father journeys to Cana to seek the help of a proven performer of miracles whose fame was rapidly spreading, and Jesus obliged him, seeing his faith. Only John notes this occasion, indicating how particular he was in what he chose to record of Jesus' life and work. He probably selected his material based on the valuable spiritual lessons they provide for Christian development.



1. Can human faith relieve or heal suffering and affliction? John 4:46-50.

COMMENT: The nobleman must have had a bud of faith, for his urgent need moved him to seek Christ. At least a glimmer of faith was necessary to believe that, if he could only convince Jesus the Healer to go to his dying child, his son would be healed. This first example of Jesus' healing miracles is important, as it emphasizes the link between miracles and faith. Those who desire to be healed or to have a loved one healed must exhibit faith.

Jesus miracles of healing are instructive in that they give us kinds and actions of faith. By refusing to go with the nobleman, Jesus emphasizes and illustrates the potency of strong faith. Another time, Jesus teaches that a miracle is not the cause of faith as much as its reward (Matthew 9:22). Belief in Christ as Healer leads people to faith in Him as Savior.

We all desire divine intervention when we are in dire need; "there are no atheists in a foxhole," it is said. Though the nobleman's human faith was limited and weak, it was still real. Jesus helped him to develop it, leading to deeper belief. However, no matter how strong our faith is, if it is in a wrong object, it will do nothing to relieve suffering, but if our faith is properly directed, despite being weak, it will bring deliverance and comfort. Note, however, that faith itself does not relieve affliction, but the power of the One in whom we believe does.

2. Is God limited to how and where He can heal? John 4:51-53.

COMMENT: The distance between Capernaum and Cana is over twenty miles, yet by the exercise of His will, Jesus healed the dying boy by His word alone. The nobleman may have expected his son to recover gradually and progressively, but the cure was immediate and complete. The Gospels show that Jesus had no set formula for performing His miracles except to glorify the Father by them, yet His miracles were not done haphazardly. He sometimes commanded the sick to be brought to Him, but at other times, He healed without seeing them. He could heal by either word or touch. Sometimes He asked probing questions, but occasionally, He would act without discussion. In these many

different scenarios, we can learn a variety of lessons.

The nobleman's grief contained a bud of faith, but he revealed its limits when he mentally limited the Christ's power to His immediate presence. The desperate father had just enough faith to believe that wherever Jesus was present, disease could be cured. So, fearing the loss of his son, he implored Jesus, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" (verse 49). He did not realize and understand that He could heal just as easily from a distance as on the spot. Jesus' observation, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe" (verse 48), is thus a mild rebuke. The nobleman fell short of truly believing the assurance of Psalm 107:20: "He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."

3. What affect may our faith have on others? John 4:53.

COMMENT: Following Jesus' assurance that his son would live, the nobleman never doubted again. The text gives no indication of an emotional reaction or that he pressed Jesus for instructions; he simply started his return trip to Capernaum. He accepted Jesus' word that his son was healed, and apparently, this knowledge comforted him to the point that he felt little need to rush home. The bud of faith that led him to Christ came to full blossom as he left Jesus.

When the nobleman is met by his servants with the wonderful news that his son had been healed at the exact time Jesus had said he was, the miracle is seen to have had a double effect—the sick boy was healed of his deadly fever, and the father was convicted of his belief in Jesus. In order to have faith, we must believe that Jesus' words are true. Too often, we possess a vague faith, a blurred longing for His promises to be true. In reality, we must cling to what Jesus says like a man gripping a cliff face over a deep chasm.

The conviction of the father and the startling result of Jesus' miracle helped to begin the process of conversion of the nobleman's entire household. Convinced that Jesus was the Christ by personally witnessing this healing, they had the opportunity to grow in their belief to full faith if they continued to seek and believe Him (Colossians 1:21-23).

—Martin G. Collins