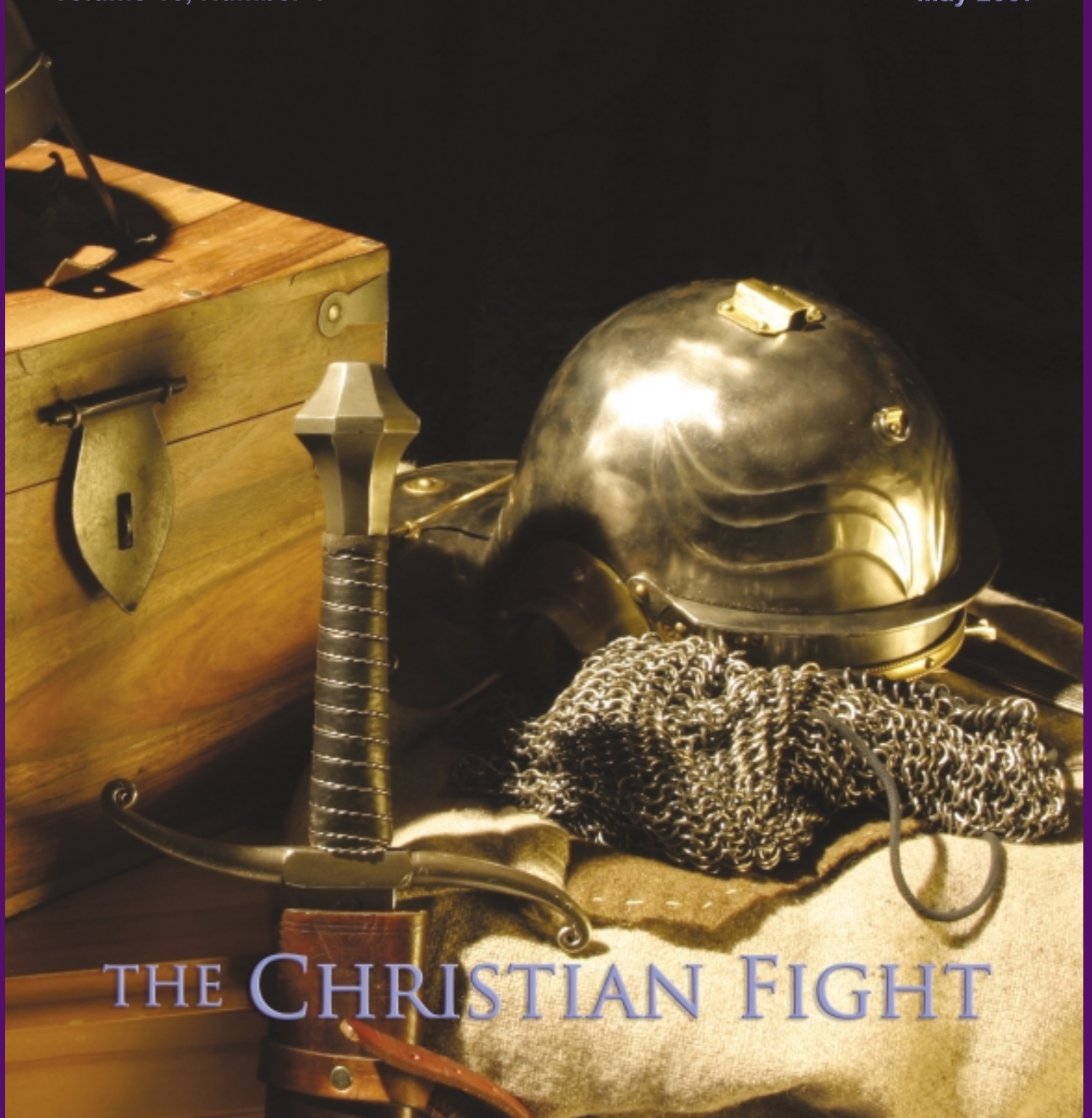


# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 16, Number 4

May 2007



THE CHRISTIAN FIGHT

# may 2007

volume 16, number 4

## 3

**PERSONAL** *from John W. Ritenbaugh*  
The Christian Fight (Part One)

## 7

**PROPHECY WATCH**  
All About Edom (Part Five):  
*Obadiah and God's Judgment*  
BY RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

## 10

My Parents Won't Let Me!  
BY CLYDE FINKLEA

## 15

**READY ANSWER**  
Building With Integrity  
BY MIKE FORD

## 19

**WORLDWATCH**  
A Perfect Storm of National Cycles  
BY DAVID C. GRABBE

## 20

**BIBLE STUDY**  
The Miracles of Jesus Christ:  
*Healing Peter's Mother-in-law*  
BY MARTIN G. COLLINS

## cover

The first-century apostles, particularly Paul, often use military metaphors to describe the struggle Christians must undergo to prepare for the Kingdom of God. Whether the subject is the armor of God or being recruited into God's army, the New Testament—as well as the Old—provides evidence that Christianity is not a walk in the park but a fight!

**iStockphoto**

Back cover: *iStockphoto*

## forerunner

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
JOHN W. RITENBAUGH

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
MARTIN G. COLLINS

**DESIGN EDITOR**  
KRISTEN M. COLLINS

**NEWS EDITOR**  
DAVID C. GRABBE

**CIRCULATION**  
DIANE R. MCIVER

**PROOFREADERS**  
PHYLLIS FORD  
CINDY HINDS  
DIANE MCIVER  
JOHN PLUNKETT

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

MARK BAKER  
TED E. BOWLING  
JOHN F. BULHAROWSKI  
BILL CHERRY  
CARL CHILDS  
CLYDE FINKLEA  
MIKE FORD  
RONNY H. GRAHAM  
WILLIAM GRAY  
PAT HIGGINS  
BILL KEESEE  
ROD KEESEE  
WARREN LEE  
DAVID F. MAAS  
BRYAN NELSON  
BILL ONISICK  
JOHN PLUNKETT  
GEOFF PRESTON  
JOHN REID  
MARK SCHINDLER  
GREG SMITH  
CHARLES WHITAKER  
BENJAMIN A. WULF  
BRIAN WULF

*Forerunner* is published ten times a year as a free educational and religious service in the public interest. Articles, illustrations, and photographs will not be returned unless specifically requested, and if used, become the property of the Church of the Great God. Comments, suggestions, requests, and changes of address should be sent to the nearest address listed below.

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.

© Copyright 2007, Church of the Great God.  
*All Rights Reserved.* Printed in the U.S.A.

## contact

**UNITED STATES:** P.O. Box 471846, Charlotte, NC 28247-1846 U.S.A.  
803.802.7075 / 803.802.7089 FAX

**CANADA:** Box 30188, Saanich Centre Postal Outlet, Victoria, BC V8X 5E1 Canada

**CARIBBEAN:** P.O. Box 4870, Tunapuna, Trinidad and Tobago

**FRANCE:** Hameau Bourg L'Abbe, La Mailleraye sur Seine, 76940 France

**THE PHILIPPINES:** No. 13 Mt. Daho, Amityville, Rodriguez, Rizal 1860 The Philippines

## web

<http://www.cgg.org>  
<http://www.bibletools.org>  
<http://www.sabbath.org>

<http://www.theberean.org>  
<http://www.truegospel.org>

# The Christian Fight

## Part One

---

The previous article, covering Christianity's requirement to seek God, explained that, once baptized, the Christian has a serious and continuous fight on his hands against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Each of these opponents represents a formidable obstacle to true spiritual growth and overcoming. If personified, they would be strong and crafty enemies determined to bar us from the Kingdom of God by either derailing or stopping entirely any growth in our relationship with God.

The most formidable and ever-present obstacle hindering progress toward the Kingdom of God is the flesh—human nature—that remains following baptism. It is the major component of the cross we must bear while following Christ (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23). In Romans 8:7, Paul plainly states, "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." It is always with us, yet we must fight it to overcome its constant drag on progress toward conforming to the image of Jesus Christ.

Paul describes in vivid terms the attitude in which we must fight it. He tells us that the flesh must be "crucified" and "put to death." Our

attitude is to be like that of a soldier under orders to take no prisoners.

Did not God order the Israelites to do similarly when invading the Promised Land? They were to rid it completely of its original inhabitants, a command that they, of course, did not obey. Just as God predicted, as the Israelites became comfortable living among the land's original inhabitants, they became attracted to their gods and practices, snares that drew them into sin.

We will examine Israel's responsibility to God as the people left Mount Sinai after agreeing to the Old Covenant and subsequent happenings as they proceeded through the wilderness. Their patterns and examples support the idea that God's way of life under the New Covenant involves the struggles of which Paul wrote.

### **Examples, Good and Bad**

Israel's example under the Old Covenant contains vivid and sober instruction for us, yet we must begin in the New Testament with Romans 15:3-4:

# personal *The Christian Fight*

For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.' For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Israel's experiences in the wilderness are primary examples for our learning.

Jesus says, "I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29). He did not please Himself by serving Himself but by serving His Father and others. Certainly, Israel did not do this, yet this is what a Christian soldier must do. A soldier in an army faithfully serves to "please him who enlisted him" in the cause (II Timothy 2:4).

Paul often drew on Old Testament examples:

Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. . . . Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (I Corinthians 10:6, 11)

The Old Testament contains many patterns, examples, and types that instruct us about how human nature acts and reacts, as well as how God acts and reacts. In the New Testament, however, Jesus Christ's example is above all. He was completely innocent, yet He suffered in His fight more than any of us ever will. Strangely, spiritual innocence like Christ's only intensifies persecution, which is one theater of the Christian's warfare. However, we must expect it, for as we grow, the tests of faithfulness become more difficult. Suffering is part of a soldier's lot (II Timothy 2:3), and for a Christian soldier, it occurs mainly because of the sacrifices involved in obeying God.

We know that, as a whole, the Israelites did not have God's Spirit, thus they were denied the enablement that we possess to achieve what God requires. But the Old Testament history God has preserved provides us with clear instruction on human nature's proclivities, so we should be better prepared for what it throws at us.

Paul charges Timothy and thus us, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (I Timothy 6:12). "Fight the good fight of faith" and "lay hold on eternal life" are strong admonitions. We must seize our opportunity while it is near.

We must do likewise in following God's instruction on the Christian fight and begin by avoiding Israel's sad example.

God says in Exodus 23:20-23:

Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 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.

These are the original instructions given to the Israelites as they prepared to leave Mount Sinai. They begin with a promise of guidance, a warning to obey, and an assurance that He will cut off their enemies in the land.

Verses 24-26 provide specific instruction regarding the most important of all sins—idolatry—and includes four clear promises as enticement to obedience:

You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the LORD your God, and 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.

Verses 27-31 continue the promises:

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. 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 beasts 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 River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.

These outstanding promises tell them how He will work to enable them to take over the land. He shows that progress will be incremental for practical reasons, that is, lest they get into a circumstance greater than they can handle. After giving them a general picture of how large their inheritance will be, He finishes with a second warning against idolatry (verses 32-33).

## Without a Fight?

After reading this, some carelessly assume that, if Israel had just obeyed God, they would have taken over the Promised Land without having to confront the people already there. This is most assuredly untrue. The blessings and cursings establish a biblical principle for God's people:

*If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. . . . But 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, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I will also do this to you. . . . (Leviticus 26:3-4, 14-16)*

In a similar way, the promises of Exodus 23 are conditional. The bestowal of blessings depends upon obedience to the covenant. In covenantal matters like this with God, a Christian must expect reciprocity.

Notice this principle spoken by the prophet Azariah in II Chronicles 15:2: "The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you." Will God bless rebellion by His people? Absolutely not! He answers rebellion by removing His protection.

Consider: Does God make growth and overcoming easy for us, even though He promises salvation? Are there no battles to fight while overcoming? If God completely smoothed the way for us, what would we have to overcome? If He smoothed our way, how would He test our loyalty? Would we be prepared for His Kingdom? Of course, He does not make it easy for us. Each of our paths is designed and tempered to test us on the level of our natural abilities and gifts (I Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, each Christian's way will be difficult; each will have to fight many battles at his or her level.

If God completely smoothed the way, it would create a Sunday-walk-in-the-park scenario, eliminating the possibility of God's law being written in our hearts. When other biblical information is added to God's promise in Exodus 23, we see that what He guarantees is that He will drive out the people of the land, making it far *easier* for the Israelites than if He were not involved at all. God is comparing situations with and without His intervention.

In the analogy, the people of the land are symbolic of human nature, which cannot be made subject to God and His law, according to Romans 8:7. Like human nature, the people of the land could not be driven out without God's help. We can conclude that Israel would have been totally unable to accomplish even what they did had not God been with them.

How can we know that Exodus 23 is not an outright promise that Israel would not have to go to war at some point in the conquest of the land? Seeing several scriptures together will make this clear. First, notice Deuteronomy 8:1-3:

Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

Clearly, God tests us to see where we stand, revealing to us at the same time where our weaknesses lie. Our standing must be revealed to both God and us because His work in us is a cooperative effort with us. Tests are not normally easy; tests are often clarifying experiences, exposing our strengths and weaknesses. They are designed to reveal spiritual and moral progress or lack thereof, and in so doing should motivate growth in areas of weakness and produce confidence in areas of strength.

We can now add I Corinthians 10:11-13 to our understanding:

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 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.

An admonition is an instructive warning. It is not a "chewing-out" but a sobering, thought-provoking prod. Overall, Paul is encouraging us that God is carefully monitoring the tests we experience so that we do not get in over our heads. The sanctification process requires our cooperation with God, and He does not want to lose us through extreme discouragement.

Though He manages the operations of His creative process, His work definitely does not eliminate our involvement. Knowing that God carefully monitors each of us helps us to understand why the Bible cautions us to be careful in how we evaluate each other. God knows, but we certainly do not know all the factors working in other Christians' tests.

# personal *The Christian Fight*

In Exodus 23:22-31, God makes six promises and gives one command to the Israelites regarding their conquest of the Promised Land:

1. I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.
2. I will cut them off.
3. 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.
4. I will send hornets before you.
5. Little by little I will drive them out from before you.
6. I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand.

His one command, in verse 31, is, “*You shall drive them out before you.*”

Consider what these seven statements reveal. The entire context suggests confrontation between God and the people of the land. However, the command, “*You shall drive them out before you,*” should give us pause. There is more to this than a first glance might indicate. The easy assumption that God would remove every impediment upon Israel’s entrance into the Promised Land proves false; that is not how it worked out in history. In addition, the Israelites knew for a certainty that they would have to face the people of the land in multiple confrontations.

In addition, they had already experienced a strong indicator of God’s will for them regarding warfare when He permitted the Amalekites to attack the rear of Israel’s column (see Exodus 17:8-13). That clash was only the first of an intense spate of battles in which the outcome hung in the balance on occasion. They knew that further warfare was a strong possibility.

Exodus 23:32 adds another factor that strongly hints that God would not simply drive the inhabitants from Canaan: “*You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.*” If He were going to drive the Canaanites completely out of the land before the Israelites, why would He need to make this warning? There would have been no people to make a covenant with!

Exodus 34:11-12, 15 repeats this command even more forcefully:

Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and

the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. . . . [L]est you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice.

If we take Exodus 23 and 34 at face value, the Israelites would have no opportunity to make a covenant with the people of the land because they would never encounter them to be tempted to make a covenant with them.

If the Israelites came into the land and began tearing down altars, would the people of the land have just stood around and let their revered high places be destroyed without resistance? No way! We can compare this to the confrontations many of us faced when we came to believe God, causing us to stop observing Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and Sunday worship and to begin keeping the Sabbath and God’s holy days instead. Did our families, friends, and employers give us no resistance to these changes, which severely disturbed these relationships? Did they not defend their lifelong practices?

Because they would have close contact with the land’s inhabitants, the Israelites had a choice to make: They could either compromise with the inhabitants regarding their cultures or follow God’s commands. The latter choice entailed doing things like destroying altars, which would produce intense confrontations—warfare. The evidence indicates that the Israelites expected that they would have to go to war.

## **Confrontation and Fear at the Border**

Numbers 13:26-33 sets the stage for Israel’s initial, aborted entrance into the land. This episode occurs two years after Israel left Egypt and less than one year after they began their pilgrimage from Mount Sinai.

Now [the spies] departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in

*(continued on page 12)*

## ALL ABOUT EDOM

### PART FIVE: OBADIAH AND GOD'S JUDGMENT

If repetition is the best form of emphasis, God goes overboard in the chapter-long, prophetic book of Obadiah.

Between Obadiah 11 and 14, a total of four verses, the phrase “in the day” or “on the day” occurs ten times. It acts as a kind of refrain in the prophet’s song of lamentation over the nation of Edom. It repetitiously reminds the reader or listener of a specific time when the Edomites’ iniquity came to a head, sealing their fate.

It is also a prophetic clue. The phrase functions like a series of huge billboards, each one illuminated by glaring spotlights, but rather than displaying successive lines of a ditty, like the old Burma Shave signs, these all repeat the same phrase: “in the day”! In these verses, God is essentially shouting at us as through a loudspeaker, “This occurs ‘in the day’! ‘In the day’ is when this happens!”

Earlier, in verse 8, God had introduced the time setting with the phrase “in that day.” He refers to the time when Edom’s allies betray the descendants of Esau and lay a cunning snare for them, one they fail to perceive until far too late. God informs them through the prophecy that He had had a hand in destroying Edom’s wise men, who, had they been present, may have been able to discern the trap before it had been sprung.

However, the timing in verse 8 is vague, having little supporting detail to fix it in history. Subsequent verses reiterate the fact that God has one

particular time in mind, to which He adds detail, alerting us to the fact that this day is not Edom’s day, but his brother Jacob’s day (verse 12). In addition, it is a time of distress, calamity, captivity, and destruction.

In verse 15, though, God tells us plainly, “For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near.” He has in mind a particular period of His great plan, a time when the various threads of human history, religion, culture, and thought terminate in confusion and rebellion against God, and He Himself takes center-stage to resolve the Satanic mess. Though the Edomites have gloated over Israel’s misfortune on other days in the past, it will recur most egregiously in this time of the end, causing God to decree, “As you have done, it shall be done to you. . . . No survivor shall remain of the house of Esau” (verses 15, 18).

#### A DAY OF CALAMITY

Obadiah 10 had named the Edomites’ great sin: “violence against your brother Jacob.” The four subsequent verses tick off a number of illustrations of the Edomites’ violence toward Israel, providing an expanded description of their transgression. Obadiah writes:

# prophecy watch *All About Edom*

In the day that you stood on the other side—in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem—even you were as one of them. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother, in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people in the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped; nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of distress. (Obadiah 11-14)

The prophet's first example, the only one requiring explanation, is that they "stood on the other side." This Hebraism indicates they "stood aloof," a description of their haughtiness. God is emphasizing their attitude here. Literally, the phrase reads, "stood from in front of them," a roundabout way of saying that the Edomites considered themselves too good to stand *with* them. In other words, because of their pride, they stood off to the side or in front of them, effectively separating themselves from their brother.

Their action reflected their hearts, saying, in effect, "Do not confuse us with them!" It indicates an attitude of great superiority, of haughty pride and separation. Thus, instead of standing with Israel in her defense, they stood aside and let the enemy do what it would. Edom did not behave as a brother nation should have. Even had the Edomites not been directly engaged in the hostilities against Israel, this act alone reveals that their loyalties were solidly with Israel's enemy.

The New King James Version poorly translates verses 12-14, rendering them in the past tense, when the Hebrew text relates this story in the future tense. The difference in tense transforms a castigating historical narrative into a more appropriate and stern warning against future activity:

But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; do not boast in the day of distress. Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity. Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress. (English Standard Version)

Specifically, what is the day of Israel's calamity? Jeremiah 30:5-7 provides the answer:

For thus says the LORD: "We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it."

Jesus also spoke about this distressing day in His Olivet Prophecy:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (Matthew 24:21-22)

"The time of Jacob's trouble," more commonly known as "the Great Tribulation," is a period of intense hardship and war for the people of Israel. It is generally thought that it will last three and a half years (Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:2; 12:14; 13:5), until Jesus Christ returns in power to defeat the Beast and his armies and to rule all nations (Revelation 19:11-21). According to Jesus' description, it is a time of global holocaust; if God did not intervene, all life on earth would cease!

The warnings in Obadiah 12-14 are directed toward the Edomites alive when that day arrives, perhaps not very long from now. We may have seen a precursor of the fulfillment of this prophecy, when, on and after September 11, 2001, television news programs broadcast images of Palestinians gloating and dancing in the streets in the West Bank, giving out candy, and shrieking in giddy celebration. Such a scene is likely to happen again when the Great Tribulation fully comes upon the nations of Israel.

At that time, the people of Edom may not have a great deal of power over the nations of Israel, and the prophecies do not indicate that they will. Today, their strength is limited to suicidal terrorist attacks, but they still have the ability to mock, to pillage, and to take advantage of any sign of weakness. God says in Obadiah 6-9 that He will remove their wealth, their wisdom, and their courage, but they will still be able to gloat when they see Israel fall.

## A DAY OF WRATH

The theme of the next section, Obadiah 15-16 appears in Jeremiah 25:28: "And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them,

‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “You shall certainly drink!”’” Edom, God proclaims, shall certainly drink of the wine of His wrath.

Upon the heels of the Great Tribulation comes the Day of the Lord, as Obadiah declares in verse 15. It is a time of reckoning, or as the prophet phrases it, “As you have done, it shall be done to you.” This is a biblical law. The Romans called it *lex talionis*, meaning “law of retaliation” or “law of just retribution.” In biblical terms, we know it as the “eye for an eye” principle (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-20; Matthew 5:38). Jesus says that whatever we measure out to others will be measured back to us (Luke 6:38). Paul writes of it as, “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (II Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:7-8). God says that this is how He will judge Edom in the Day of His wrath: “Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.”

He continues in Obadiah 16: “For as you drank on my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually; yes, they shall drink, and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been.” This last part can be better translated, “Yes, they [Edom and its confederates] shall drink and drink and drink until they drink themselves right out of existence.” What a dire threat! God essentially tells them that, though they may gloat at first, He will deal with them in His day of vengeance and wipe them from the face of the earth! God does not take these things lightly.

Edom may have drunk on God’s holy mountain numerous times. Edomites likely drank in feasting and gloating over Israel when Babylon and later Rome captured and destroyed Jerusalem. Perhaps they thought that the land of Canaan would finally be their inheritance. It could also be descriptive of the present status of the Temple Mount, currently held by the Palestinians, who have strict rules against the Jews’ use of the Temple area. In effect, they gloat over their ability to forbid Jews from entering and praying there, yet it is truly not theirs to regulate. God’s retaliation will be harsh.

## ISRAEL’S COMPLETE TRIUMPH

The theme for the next section is found in Malachi 1:2-3:

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? “ says the LORD. “Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.”

God’s choice is supreme. He made His sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau before either had done anything. They may have struggled in the womb, but He made His choice prior to them developing any character. He chose Jacob, and that is the end of the matter.

Obadiah writes in verse 17, “But on Mount Zion there

shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.” This verse introduces an interesting distinction: “On Mount Zion [is] deliverance,” but the end of verse 18 says, “No survivor shall remain of the house of Esau.” The destinies of these two peoples are total opposites. Whereas God loves Jacob and allows a remnant to survive into the Millennium, no one survives of Esau.

There is no way to know how absolute this pronouncement may be. Will there be, perhaps, some few Edomite survivors counted among those who are converted—who become part of spiritual Israel, in effect? Perhaps, but certainly all the proud and gloating of Edom will be completely annihilated.

Verse 18 tells us, “The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame.” “The house of Jacob” may refer particularly to Judah, and “the house of Joseph” would then refer to the rest of the nations of Israel, led by the Joseph tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. In any case, it indicates the entirety of Israel. Zechariah 12:6 contains similar language, in which the governors of Judah will be “like a firepan in the woodpile” and “shall devour all the surrounding peoples.” Edom will be one of these devoured nations.

Obadiah 19-20 simply relates that Israelites will return and inhabit the original inheritance that God promised them. This is perhaps the most difficult part of the entire book to understand. Experts in Hebrew say that words that they would expect to be in the text are missing, so they do not know exactly how the phrases are supposed to fit together. Nevertheless, it is clear that Israel will resettle the whole Promised Land that God originally gave them.

Obadiah 21 is the triumphant conclusion of this short prophecy: “Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD’s.” The book began with God saying that He is the prime mover of world events, and it ends with, “God rules all things!” As the Psalms often declare, “The LORD reigns!” (see Psalm 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1).

Herbert Armstrong, in *Mystery of the Ages* (pages 239-241), explains the “saviors” to be glorified members of God’s church. He calls them “co-saviors with Christ.” This interpretation is certainly a possibility. We should not, however, understand this to mean that born-again Christians will in any way provide for spiritual salvation as Jesus Christ did through His sacrificial death by crucifixion. Instead, it appears that these saviors rescue or deliver people; they help them not only to survive but to thrive under God’s rule.

Obadiah 21 parallels a prophecy of the Millennium in Isaiah 30:21: “Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.” These

*(continued on page 14)*

# My Parents Won't

Growing up in a religion that is different—some might say downright unorthodox—can be very difficult for young people because they do not want to be recognized as being different from others. Teenagers hate seeming odd, to say the least.

One of the doctrines and practices that sets us apart is the Sabbath. Many of our young people, especially those who attend public schools, have friends that are not associated with the church. Or perhaps they have “worldly” friends in their neighborhoods. There probably have been times when these friends wanted our teens to do things with them, such as going to parties, movies, ballgames, or malls on the Sabbath.

Usually, upon receiving such invitations, our young people look downcast and reply, “I’d love to, but my parents won’t let me.” And this is a right response because parents in the church do not want their children to do these things on the Sabbath, and their children know it.

But there is coming a time, young people, when you will no longer be able to say, “My parents won’t let me.”

## A Championship on the Line

The following is a true story about a young man who grew up in the church. Like most church teens, he was not allowed to do certain things on the Sabbath. He was a very good friend of mine back when we attended the Worldwide Church of God in Columbia, South Carolina.

He was quite young when God called his parents into the church.

Being a friendly, outgoing person, he had a good number of friends in the small town he lived in and the school he attended there.

He was also a talented athlete. In high school, his parents would not allow him to play football, but they did let him play on the high school baseball team. There was little conflict with the Sabbath because games during the regular season were played on Tuesday and Thursday nights.

But during his senior year they had a winning season, and they made the playoffs. Before them was the chance to play for the lower-state championship, but they had to win one more playoff game in order to move on. And as these things go, the game was scheduled for a Friday night.

Now our young churchgoer was one of the best players on the team, and everyone, including the coaches, wanted him to play in this game, although they knew he had never been allowed to participate in any Friday night sports activities before. So, some of his teammates came to him and told him, “You’ve got to play in this game Friday night! We need you in order to win! God will understand, and besides that, what’s so wrong with it? Surely, your parents will let you play because it’s so important that we win this game!”

He replied, “I’d love to, but my parents won’t let me!” They begged and pleaded, but he insisted his parents would never let him play in a ballgame on the Sabbath.

Unbeknownst to him, they decided that they would talk to his parents. Growing up in a small town, they knew his parents well. So they spoke

to his father, begging him to let his son play in this one game. Losing meant the end of a good season, and for the seniors, their last opportunity to play for the championship. Winning meant moving to the lower-state championship playoffs.

After listening to them for awhile, the father finally replied, “Boys, it’s not my decision to make. My son is old enough to decide for himself.”

Well, one can imagine just how excited they were, thinking that now their friend could play. Did he not say he would love to, but his parents would not let him? They went back and told the team, including the coaches, that his parents were letting him play in the game on Friday night.

When they found the young man, they jumped up and down, screaming, “You can play! You can play!”

He said, “You know I can’t play! I told you, my parents won’t let me.”

But they said, “We know, but we talked to your father, and he said it was up to you, so now you can play!” He thought they were just kidding with him, so they said, “No, we’re not kidding! Go ask your father.” So he did.

His father told him, “Son, you’re old enough to make your own decisions now. You’re going to have to choose for yourself whether you’re going to obey God or not. The choice is yours.”

## Deciding for Himself

Later, he told me that at that moment he felt as if the weight of the whole world had fallen on his shoulders. He now had to make this decision on his own. He could no longer dodge the

# Let Me!

---

issue and say, “My parents won’t let me.” He had to take responsibility for what he believed.

He called his teammates and coaches together and told them he would *not* be playing in that game Friday night. He made sure they understood that it was *his* decision not to play on the Sabbath, not his parents’ decision.

Each young person in the church will one day reach a time when he or she can no longer say, “My parents won’t let me.” What will our young people decide? There will be times when things will seem to be right in their eyes, and they might think, “What’s so wrong with doing this?” There will be times when they will just not understand why God commands His people to do certain things.

Kevin Trudeau, author of *Natural Cures “They” Don’t Want You to Know About*, is not affiliated with any of the churches of God. He does not even mention God in his book at all. However, he mentions something about the Sabbath, of all things, although he does not specifically call it “the Sabbath.” In the chapter, “How to Never Get Sick Again,” under the heading, “You Must Reduce Stress,” he writes, “Rest from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown.” Then he gives us a reason why: “Each week the moon cycles are in position to promote healing and rejuvenation in the body. Resting during this time promotes the optimal rejuvenation of your cells.”

Perhaps he is on to something. God certainly established the seven-day week at Creation and set an example of Sabbath-keeping for us by resting

on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3). Setting this twenty-four hours apart each week will certainly benefit us physically, mentally, and emotionally, if only by reducing our stress! Jesus tells us in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” Everything God commands of us is for our good!

Yet, even though keeping the Sabbath provides a physical benefit, God does not intend us to consider it to be of primary importance. The most important benefits we receive from keeping the Sabbath are spiritual and have to do with maintaining and improving our relationships with God and with those who believe as we do. In other words, God definitely wants us to be healthy (III John 2), but even more, He wants us to be close to Him. This is the sort of principle we need to remember when we have to defend our keeping of the Sabbath, just as my friend was forced to do.

## Basic Principles

But when similar circumstances arise, though the doctrine or practice might be different, it will be helpful to have a few basic verses memorized to give us guidance in choosing what the right thing to do is. The first one is Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” We can rationalize all we want to about why we should do this or that, but if our reasoning is based on falsehood, the result will still be the same. If what *seems* to be right runs contrary to God’s instruction—particularly His Commandments, which summarize the Bible’s basic standards

in ten understandable laws—it will eventually lead us to ruin and death.

This same principle of man’s way leading to destruction is so important that it is mentioned again in Proverbs 16:25. We live in a worldly system that is designed by Satan to entice and deceive us into thinking that sin is not so bad. Thus, when we begin to rationalize, that is, to attempt to justify with reasons of our own, we need to remember the warning of this verse.

The next bit of Scripture we should commit to memory is Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” “Lean on” is used here in the sense of relying upon or trusting someone or something for help or protection. The object of our secure trust is the Lord, a most reliable object of confidence!

When we lean against a wall or on a cane, we trust it to support us. If it should fail to do its job, we will fall to the ground and perhaps be hurt. In a figurative sense, in times of distress we lean on members of our families or friends; we rely upon them for encouragement, support, help, or protection. In this verse, “lean on” functions figuratively. Relying on our own understanding is compared to leaning on a cane that cannot bear our weight; it is unreliable for support. It is dangerous for a person to rely upon mere human wisdom or understanding because it is likely to fail him.

Acknowledging the Lord in all our ways means keeping Him in mind in every event of our lives. Godly living

*(continued on page 14)*

# personal *The Christian Fight*

(continued from page 6)

the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.”

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once, and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.” And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

The story continues in Numbers 14:4-9:

So they said to one another, “Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.” Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: “The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them.”

Notice the spies’ timidity even at the beginning of their report, and they become increasingly fearful. If, because of God’s promises in Exodus 23, they did not expect confrontation, why do they show so much trepidation? Even Joshua and Caleb expected confrontation. They most certainly did not understand that God’s promises in Exodus 23 would be fulfilled without them having to lift so much as a finger to gain the land. They knew they would have to make war against the people of the land.

The underlying problem was that they did not trust that the warfare would be a cooperative effort. In effect, they believed that God could not do it. They did not trust that God would be with them, cooperating with them and fighting on their side against the common enemy, the people of the land. Joshua and Caleb knew there would be combat, but the difference was that they were confident that God would fight for Israel and against the Canaanites.

Numbers 33:51-53 adds a defining element:

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.”

Deuteronomy 7:1-2, written and delivered by Moses during the last month before Israel entered the Promised Land, confirms the earlier command:

When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, . . . seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.

When we compare statements like these to Exodus 23 and Numbers 13-14, it becomes apparent that, from the very beginning, God intended the driving out of the people of the land to be a cooperative effort between Him and the Israelites. That Israel would have to fight is beyond question.

## **Sanctification Requires Reciprocity**

Within our relationship with God, a measure of reciprocity always exists, even though our part is but a tiny percentage of the overall amount. It must be this way because love cannot be one-sided, or the relationship will not exist for very long. This is a major reason why Jesus says in John 14:15, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Obedience is the way we reciprocate His love toward us.

Notice in Numbers 1:1-3, 20, 22 several interesting statements made as the Israelites began the longest part of their trek through the wilderness:

Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. . . . Now the children of Reuben, Israel’s oldest son, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers’ house, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above, all

who were able to go to war. . . . From the children of Simeon, . . . all who were able to go to war.”

This phrase, “all who were able to go to war,” appears 14 times in this one section! What is the significance of God commanding a census to be taken of all males twenty years old and above and able to go to war? Obviously, God wanted Israel to comprehend the size of its army. God was preparing the Israelites for the *certainty* of warfare with the people of the land.

Notice the precise dating in verse 1: It was “the first day of the second month, in the second year” following their flight from Egypt. Exodus 19:1 tells us, “In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.” The giving of the law, then, occurred three months after they left Egypt. Exodus 40:17 adds another time marker: “And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up.”

Thus, after receiving the law and making the covenant, God gave instructions concerning the Tabernacle, and it was constructed. It was erected on Abib/Nisan 1, the first day of the first month, of the second year. At this point, the Israelites have now been out of Egypt just two weeks shy of a full year. Once the Tabernacle had been erected and was in operation, God gave to Moses all the instructions in the book of Leviticus, and the priesthood began to put the ceremonial practices into operation.

In Numbers 1:1, thirteen more months have passed, and Israel is still at Mount Sinai. However, their stay is soon to end. The events of Numbers 13 and 14 did not take place until near the end of this second year after leaving Egypt. Therefore, before the Israelites even began the serious part of their trek to take over the Promised Land, the initial preparation for their being forged into an army, a force intended to fight against the people of the land, had already taken place.

They fully understood that Exodus 23 was not an unconditional promise that God would fight all their wars for them. They knew they would not just walk into the land and take it over while hornets maddeningly buzzed around their enemies’ heads!

## **Do Not Follow Their Examples**

Hebrews 10:37-39 admonishes us:

“For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in Him.” But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Israel feared the warfare that they knew would confront them when they stepped over the border—and they drew back. Their drawing back in fear was a serious sin, as Numbers 14:9 shows. Drawing back in fear or failing to enter the fray is on a par with rebellion because it is a rejection of God’s Word, a despising of His promise.

Numbers 14:27-32 reveals a chief part of Israel’s sin and its resulting evil fruit:

How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, “As I live,” says the LORD, “just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, who you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.”

Deuteronomy 20:1-4 provides encouragement for all of us who, perceiving the spiritual parallel, recognize the responsibility God requires of those who have made the New Covenant with Him:

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, “Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

As further encouragement, Hebrews 13:5-6 helps us steel our resolve against our spiritual enemies:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

Our warfare is different from what the Israelites faced, but its principles are similar. Obedience to God provokes

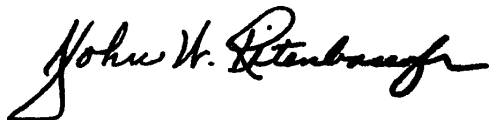
# personal

persecution, confrontation, and resistance from others, even though offense is totally unintended on our parts. Far more seriously, it awakens demonic spirits to intensify their attempts to throw us off the track, and perhaps above that, it stirs our remaining carnality to continue its attempts to break our will to keep us from overcoming it.

It is helpful to remember that, as serious as Israel's responsibilities were, ours are many times greater because eternity is involved. If we are to succeed, the Christian fight is an element of God's way that we cannot avoid. In the New Testament, the word translated as "overcomer" can just as easily be translated as "conqueror," which more strongly suggests warfare. If we fail to join the fray because we fear the sacrifices that will be involved, we will not be prepared for God's Kingdom. We can take heart, however, because His promises of cooperation in the fight, just as He promised to Israel, still stand.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

In Christian love,



# prophecy watch

(continued from page 9)

saviors will assist Jesus Christ in delivering people from a way of life that is contrary to God's perfect way. They will help the nations to learn peace and righteousness, a way that produces loving harmony between brothers.

Zechariah 14:1-3, 5, 9 ties in beautifully with the last verse of Obadiah:

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. . . . Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. . . . Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You [Him]. . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth.

When Jesus Christ returns, He comes with His saints—the saviors of Obadiah 21. They, along with Jesus Christ, will come and “judge the mountains of Esau.” As part of God's government, their job will be to help govern the entire earth. This is the essence of the Kingdom of God, a time when mankind—even the Edomites, should any survive—will finally submit to God's rule.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

---

## My Parents Won't Let Me!

(continued from page 11)

is not to be confined to the Sabbath, for God is involved in each moment of each day. His instruction covers our lives from waking up in the morning to going to sleep at night. He wants us to remember Him all the time and to trust and obey Him to guide our conduct in everything we do.

That “He shall direct your paths” suggests that God will “smooth” or “make straight” the road of our lives. This is a promise that God will go before us and remove many of the obstacles from our path. He wants us to be successful, so if we trust Him and follow His instructions, He will lead us forward, sweeping many of our potential problems to the side. How encouraging!

### Enjoy Your Youth!

As Solomon begins to wrap up the book of Ecclesiastes, he writes, “Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes, but know that God will judge your motives and actions” (Ecclesiastes 11:9, New English Translation).

God wants young people to enjoy this exciting time of their lives and to be happy. But, being God, He knows that youthful ambitions and energies can get a person into trouble. Such troubles have happened many times to young people in God's church. Thus, with His encouragement He gives a gentle warning: As

young people follow their impulses and desires, they need to realize that God will evaluate all they think and do against His teaching.

This applies equally to all of us in all age groups. We must seek joy and happiness within the boundaries of God's moral standards. He promises to bring us into account for all our activities (Romans 2:5-11).

Regarding the young man in the story, he is currently an ordained minister in one of the churches of God. The decision he made not to play ball on the Sabbath was probably the most pivotal decision of his life. And so it will be with any young person when he or she can no longer say, “My parents won't let me.”

—Clyde Finklea

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

# Building With Integrity

**“The righteous man walks  
in his integrity;  
His children are blessed  
after him.”  
—Proverbs 20:7**

As a young boy, my first love was baseball. I played the game every chance I got. I followed the sport via newspaper and radio. My brother and I devoured the box scores in the paper each morning, replaying the games in our minds and memorizing statistics. I fell asleep at night listening to the Minnesota Twins on WHO in Des Moines, Iowa. Though it was a bit strange for a boy from Tennessee, I was a fan of Harmon Killebrew, who played for the Twins.

While my brother felt that Hank Aaron was probably the best hitter the game had seen, I went with Ted Williams. By the time I became interested in the game, he was managing the old Washington Senators. Despite never having had the chance to see him play, I learned a great deal about his career. During his time on the field, he won six batting titles—and that includes losing four and a half years serving in World War II and the Korean War as a fighter pilot. If he had not lost those years during his prime, he would doubtless have surpassed Babe Ruth’s home run record.

In 1941, he ended the season with a batting average of .406, a feat never duplicated since, and he retired with a lifetime batting average of .344 (most major leaguers average less than three hits in every ten at bats). In 1959, when he was 40 years old and closing out his career with the Boston Red Sox, he batted under .300 for the first time in his life. He had suffered from a pinched nerve all year, but did not use it as an excuse. Still, even with the sub-par year, he was the highest paid player in the game, making \$125,000 a year.

For the next season, the Boston front office sent him a contract for the same amount. Years later, Williams reminisced about this situation:

When I got it [the contract], I sent it back with a note. I told them I wouldn't sign it until they gave me the full pay cut allowed. I think it was 25 percent [it was actually closer to 30 percent]. My feeling was that I was always treated fairly by the Red Sox when it came to contracts. I never had any problem with them about money. Now they were offering me a contract I didn't deserve. And I only wanted what I deserved.

He cut his own contract by almost 30 percent, \$35,000! Are there any professional athletes today with that kind of integrity?

### **Standing in Integrity**

*Roget's Thesaurus* defines *integrity* as "honesty, uprightness, moral soundness, principle, character, decency, and righteousness." Certainly, what Ted Williams did was honest and upright, principled and decent. Another definition for *integrity* is "a refusal to engage in lying, blaming, or other behavior to evade accountability."

Based on these definitions, integrity is in short supply, not only in the sports world, but also in all walks of life. How often do we hear of or encounter someone who is dishonest, immoral, unprincipled, and unrighteous? Such contacts occur far too often these days.

In the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, an epistle that was also circulated to other Gentile congregations, he exhorts them to be the unified, spiritual body of Christ. Wherever they might be, they were all members of His Body. In Ephesians 6:10-14, Paul speaks of standing firm against the scheming of Satan:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness. . . .

He continues, listing the various pieces of our spiritual armor. However, notice the number of times in these few verses that we are exhorted to stand. We must hold our ground as we fight against the pressures of Satan and this world. In verse 11, Paul tells us to "stand against" the Devil's tricks. In verse 13, he encourages us to prepare "to withstand in the evil day" and "having done all, to stand." In the next verse, he concludes, "Stand therefore" and put on the armor that God can supply.

There are two things to notice here. First, we are to stand firm. Paul does not instruct us to be agile or swift of foot. To the contrary, he advises us not to move; we are to stand on a firm foundation, as it were. We are to be securely grounded, rooted and unmoving. A person living a life of integrity is not shifty, but has solid convictions rather than preferences that vary with circumstances.

Second, Paul details the armor we need to "take up." He lists several pieces of "the whole armor of God," but "the breastplate of righteousness" deals mostly closely with integrity.

Most soldiers in Paul's day wore a breastplate, and even today, the most basic protection offered to police and soldiers is the armored or bulletproof vest! The Roman breastplate, primarily made of bronze and backed with leather, was worn around the chest, protecting the heart and other vital organs. In Paul's spiritual analogy, the breastplate guards the heart, the seat of our attitudes and emotions. In other words, if we are to stand firm in the truth, our heart must be protected!

Interestingly, the translation of the New Testament by J.B. Phillips renders “the breastplate of righteousness” as “integrity your breastplate.” Paul instructs us to protect our heart, our love, and our emotions with a breastplate of integrity! As part of the equipment each Christian needs to stand firm in the spiritual war we have been recruited to fight, we must fasten integrity right across our chests to provide protection. What happens when a soldier takes off his breastplate? He opens his soft abdomen to attack; he is unprotected! Spiritually, the heart becomes vulnerable, apt to be turned away.

### **Whole and Sound**

As mentioned earlier, the basic synonyms of integrity are “honesty,” “uprightness,” “moral soundness,” “principle,” “character,” “decency,” and “righteousness.” It is a given that all Christians must possess these attributes, and we have all heard or read many sermons and articles on them. Since we all need to add them to our characters, we can consider integrity, not only as a trait that individual Christians need, but also one we need to bind us together as a unit.

*Integrity* has a second meaning, relating to the wholeness and soundness of a structure. Buildings are often described as having integrity, meaning that it has structural soundness, that it is strong and dependable, as well as complete, whole, and undivided. In Ephesians 2:19-22, in the Phillips translation, the apostle Paul writes:

So you are no longer outsiders or aliens, but fellow-citizens with every other Christian [*the saints*, NKJV]—you belong now to the household of God. Firmly beneath you is the foundation, God’s messengers and prophets, the corner-stone being Christ Jesus himself. In him each separate piece of building, properly fitting into its neighbor, grows together into a temple consecrated to the Lord. You are all part of this building in which God himself lives by his Spirit.

We stand on the Christian lives of those who have gone before us. Those who have died in the faith, the saints who await their resurrection from the dead, form the foundation on which we stand, along with Christ, the Cornerstone. If we live our lives with integrity, then we too become an integral piece of the Temple.

Paul’s main intention in Ephesians 2 is to let Gentile converts know that they have equal privileges with Israelite converts. Whatever his origins, each individual forms a separate piece of the “building,” and all fitted together provide a habitation for God. The building metaphor is equally appropriate for us. Each of us comes from a different social and ethnic background, education, life experience, and so on. In order for us to become part of the Temple, a place where God dwells, integrity must reside in our characters.

Continuing the metaphor, each of us is fitted into the proper place. If a building is constructed of solid pieces—no rotted or bowed wood, no rusted metal, no inferior materials of any type—and if it is erected on a solid foundation, the result is a structure with integrity. The apostle Peter also uses the building metaphor in I Peter 2:1-5:

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

A building block or stone, used to construct a spiritual house or a temple, must be sound. It must itself have integrity. If the stone is weak, it will crumble or crack easily,

endangering the whole building.

In Ephesians 3:17-19, we break into the middle of Paul's thought:

. . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts [protected by the breastplate of integrity] through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Notice that he mentions being “rooted and grounded,” which is again the idea of standing firm on a solid foundation. What happens if some portion of a structure is constructed from inferior material? What if a support beam fails? Not only could the roof fall in, destroying the building itself, many lives could be lost as well.

### **A Fit Habitation**

Believe it or not, Ted Williams has a remote connection with such a situation. In Boston, Massachusetts, a tunnel runs under Boston Harbor to Logan International Airport, and it has been named the Ted Williams Tunnel. It is part of a gigantic, \$15 billion construction project called “The Big Dig.” On July 11, 2006, twelve tons of concrete ceiling panels collapsed onto the roadway underneath.

It seems that a steel tieback, holding a 40-foot section of ceiling, gave way, letting the concrete slabs loose. A woman, just married, on her way with her new husband to pick up relatives at the airport, was crushed in an instant. She had probably never given a thought to traveling the tunnel and the surrounding roads, built with governmental oversight and loaded with problems.

Reports about the tragedy and the subsequent investigation show that deception and fraud were—and continue to be—common problems on this project. The state of Massachusetts, having filed over 200 complaints against the project's design and construction contractors for leaks, cost overruns, quality concerns, and safety violations, is planning to sue them for \$108 million. How ironic that there was such a horrible lack of integrity in the construction of the Ted Williams Tunnel!

The tunnel lacked structural soundness, strength, and unity; it was not reliable, complete, or whole. The lack of integrity originated in those responsible for the shoddy materials and workmanship. While one contractor may have had the integrity to do the job right, using sound materials and proven construction methods, another may not have. Without each piece being solid, complete, and fitting in with the other parts to form a unified whole, a structure with integrity cannot be built.

The same applies to Christians. Solomon writes, “The righteous man walks in his integrity” (Proverbs 20:7). Each of us is responsible for developing the skills God has blessed us with into the character or the integrity we need as His children. If we each operate with honesty, uprightness, moral soundness, principle, character, decency, and righteousness, then we will fit together as a Temple with integrity, a suitable habitation for God.

Knowing these things about integrity, we may better comprehend Paul's meaning in Ephesians 2:19-22, quoted earlier, but this time from James Moffatt's translation:

Thus you are strangers and foreigners no longer, you share the membership of the saints, you belong to God's own household, you are a building that rests on the apostles and prophets as its foundation, with Christ Jesus as the corner-stone; in him the whole structure is welded together and rises into a sacred temple in the Lord, and in him you are yourselves built into this to form a habitation for God in the Spirit.

—Mike Ford

---

## A Perfect Storm of National Cycles

Poet and philosopher George Santayana is famous for his observation, “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” His timeless words go essentially unheeded, though, for the history of any given people is usually one of repeating cycles. Modern nations—despite considering themselves “progressive” and thus too advanced for consequences—are no exception to this. The historical crisis cycles of the United States, Europe, and Russia appear to be converging, and set to plunge the Western world into a new violent storm of chaos.

For the last six centuries or so, the American and British peoples have followed a predictable cycle that contains a national crisis roughly every 90 years. The American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Great Depression/World War II are the three most recent crises that threatened both economic ruin as well as possible national collapse. These crises were *existential* threats. In their 1997 book *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, historians William Strauss and Neil Howe predicted that, based on the cycles of history, the next crisis would begin somewhere around 2005-2008, and would be resolved—if possible—around 2025. Whether the authors were a few years late (and the crisis began on 9/11) or the beginning is just over the horizon is still yet to be determined. But barring America’s sudden comprehension of the “lessons of history,” it is on track to face another major national crisis quite soon.

European dynamics are also beginning to shift. Strategic Forecasting’s Peter Zeihan notes, “In 2007, the last of the post-Cold War generation of Western European leaders will move on, heralding a fundamentally new era for all of Europe” (“Jump-starting European History,” April 24, 2007). The major European powers—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—are all experiencing leadership changes that signal fundamentally different political goals and environments. Zeihan continues:

The three most powerful European leaders of today—Schroeder, Chirac and Blair, all of whom led their respective countries for the bulk of the post-Cold War period—are leaving office more or less at the same time. These men also stand out as arguably the three major European leaders most supportive of European integration. . . . Their collective departure heralds the demise of the integrationist impulse in Germany, and the re-emergence of more traditional balance-of-power politics.

The replacement of Chirac by Nicholas Sarkozy is particularly noteworthy, as the latter is the first Prime Minister of the Fifth Republic of France who does not adhere to the ideology of Charles de Gaulle—that Europe exists as a platform from which France can fashion itself as a world power. The pro-American, pro-market Sarkozy is far more interested in domestic reform than in consolidating and projecting power internationally. This change is highly significant because of a repeated European cycle, as Zeihan explains:

European history is a chronicle of the rise and fall of its geographic center. As Germany rises, the powers on its periphery buckle under its strength and are forced to pool resources in order to beat back Berlin. As Germany falters, the power vacuum at the middle of the Continent allows the countries on Germany’s borders to rise in strength and become major powers themselves. Since the formation of the first “Germany” in 800, this cycle has set the tempo and tenor of European affairs. A strong Germany means consolidation followed by a catastrophic war. . . . For Europe this cycle of German rise and fall has run its course three times—the Holy Roman Empire, Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany—and is only now entering its fourth iteration with the reunified Germany. (“The Coming Era of Russia’s Dark Rider,” April 17, 2007)

While the European and American cycles synchronize, Russian history appears to be turning toward a crisis as well. The Russian cycle is one of national catastrophe, involving an existential threat (such as its defeat in World War I and the Soviet collapse) that uproots the current social order. Russia typically emerges from the chaos into a second phase under the aegis of a “white rider.” Unlike Western heroes who bring wealth and freedom, this figure provides more basic Russian needs: civic stability, consistency, and strength. Vladimir Putin, the current “white rider,” has for good or ill been highly successful in centralizing power, organizing the nation’s energy assets, and stabilizing Russia. However, his term ends next year, at which time Russia will likely enter the next phase.

The third phase occurs when the white rider gives way to a “dark rider,” a leader who is not held back by idealism. A pragmatist, he is willing to act without regard to moral concerns. Josef Stalin, the “Vasilys,” and Ivan IV (known as “Ivan the Terrible”) were all incarnations of such a dark rider. Says Zeihan:

Under the rule of the dark rider, Russia descends into an extremely strict period of internal control and external aggression, which is largely dictated by Russia’s geographic weaknesses. . . . Once the dark rider takes the state’s reins, he acts by any means necessary to achieve Russian security. Internal opposition is ruthlessly quashed, economic life is fully subjugated to the state’s needs and Russia’s armies are built furiously with the intent of securing unsecurable borders. That typically means war: As Catherine the Great famously put it: “I have no way to defend my borders except to extend them.” (*ibid.*)

Major shifts are simultaneously underway in the United States (and in the larger “Anglosphere,” as columnist Mark Steyn calls it), in Europe (particularly France and Germany), and in an awakening Russia. The next few years portend tremendous upheaval, as history relentlessly repeats itself.

—David C. Grabbe

---

WORLDWATCH

## The Miracles of Jesus Christ

### *Healing Peter's Mother-in-law*

After worshipping God in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, Jesus Christ and at least Peter, Andrew, James, and John went to Peter's home to relax and eat. When they arrived, Peter's wife's mother was bedridden with a fever, providing Christ an opportunity to perform another act of mercy (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39). This healing occurred on the same Sabbath that He exorcised the unclean spirit, revealing His authority over evil (see the March-April 2007 Bible Study: "Exorcism in a Synagogue").

Jesus was supreme over all that God granted Him, and the Gospel accounts illustrate this by showing His power over disease. After Peter's mother-in-law's friends and relatives had spoken to Jesus about her condition, He performed the miracle of healing directly and completely. She was so wholly restored to health that she could immediately attend to and serve her guests!



1. How does this incident shatter the claim that Peter was the first Catholic Pope? Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38. **COMMENT:** The mention of "Peter's wife's mother" proves that Peter was married. His wife was likely still living, as Paul later asks in I Corinthians 9:5, "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" This indicates that several of the apostles were married during their ministries.

Erroneously, Roman Catholics claim Peter to be the rock on which the church was built, the vicar of Christ, and the first Pope. How can they maintain, then, that it is wrong for "priests" to marry? If this were a sin, why did Christ not immediately reject Peter as an apostle, since he had a wife? It seems incredible that the Catholic Church would teach that Peter was its "first Pope," a model to all his successors, yet forbid its priests to marry despite his being a married man!

Priestly celibacy is specifically contrary to New Testament teaching (I Timothy 4:1, 3). Paul instructs, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, . . . one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (I Timothy 3:2, 4-5). Scripture makes no objection to God's ministers having a wife. As Hebrews 13:4 declares, "Marriage is honorable among all."

2. What important fact does Luke's account add? Luke 4:38. **COMMENT:** It is probable that Peter's wife's mother (likely a widow) was living with them. The family and their friends were quite concerned by her fever-stricken condition. Aware of the miracles Christ had begun to perform, they pleaded with Him to intervene on her behalf.

Yet, only Luke, a physician, adds the vital fact that she had a *high* fever. A doctor in Jesus' day would have noted the degree of fever to assess the severity of the patient's illness. Luke would have made careful inquiry into the details of the situation before recording his account. Thus, his testimony to the miraculous power of Christ is more reliable and thus of great importance, especially to new converts and skeptics.

3. Why does Christ rebuke her fever? Luke 4:39. **COMMENT:** When Jesus went into the room where the elderly lady lay, Luke writes, "He stood over her and *rebuked* her

fever," another detail Matthew and Mark omit. Was he addressing some hostile power? On another occasion, He rebuked the raging wind and water to end a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Luke 8:24). "Rebuked" in this verse is the same word used in Luke 4:35 and Mark 1:25, where Jesus "rebuked" the demon during the exorcism in the synagogue. The word means "to censure or admonish." When Jesus rebuked something, evil was present, and His example instructs us that evil must be condemned if real healing is to occur.

There are times when the solutions to our problems may require rebuke or strong admonition. No one enjoys being on the receiving end of a rebuke, yet if sin has caused the problem, it must be rebuked before repentance can happen. In a larger sense, the world desires peace, but few are willing to punish evil. The attitude toward evil today is not that of condemnation but of toleration.

Even so, not all sickness is caused by sin (John 11:4). At times, God permits sickness to provide an opportunity to bring glory to Himself and His Son.

4. Why does Christ touch her hand? Matthew 8:15. **COMMENT:** An important aspect of the miracle is manifested as Jesus lifted the woman by the hand, and the fever left her. The laying on of His hands (see Hebrews 6:2) was something He did often. He even touched lepers, though the Gospels never mention Him laying hands on a demon-possessed person. Through His hands flowed the power of the Holy Spirit, producing immediate restoration to health.

Another feature of this miracle is the way He infused full strength into the woman, enabling her to serve her guests. Her recovery did not include a period of weakness and exhaustion, which usually follows a high fever, but she at once became energetic and full of health. The restoration of her health must have encouraged great gratitude, which manifested itself in service to Jesus and the others there. This sets a pattern for all who are healed, both physically or spiritually: They should use their new strength to serve God and His people with thankfulness (I Thessalonians 5:18). Peter exhorts, "If anyone ministers [serves], let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 4:11).

—Martin G. Collins