

Christianity Is A Fight! (Part 2)

Christians Must Go to War

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 25-Nov-06; Sermon #802

My previous sermon was built around the Christian's requirement to seek God. It was dedicated to showing 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 each one of them were personified, they would either be seen as a strong and crafty enemy determined to keep us from entering into the Kingdom of God, either by derailing us or stopping us completely in our relationship with God.

The most formidable and ever-present obstacle is the flesh. Human nature that remains, following baptism, hinders progress. It is a major component of the cross which Jesus said we have to bear. The carnal mind, Paul clearly states, is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, and he says it cannot be. Nonetheless, the battle against it must be fought in order to overcome its constant drag on progress toward conformity with Jesus Christ.

Paul describes the attitude in which one must fight, and he does it in very vivid terms. He says the flesh must be crucified. In another place he said that we are required to *mortify* it. And in another place he says that we must slay it utterly.

Our attitude is to be compared to a soldier ordered to take no prisoners. Is this not similar to what God ordered Israel to do whenever they were about ready to invade the Promised Land? They were to rid the Promised Land completely of its original inhabitants. They of course did not obey Him, and thus, just as God prophesied, the Israelites became comfortable living with the land's original inhabitants. They were attracted to their gods and their practices, and these became a snare, drawing them into sin.

In this message, I want to examine Israel's responsibility to God as they left Mount Sinai, after making the Old Covenant, and then what subsequently happened as they proceeded through the wilderness. The pattern and the examples shown will clearly support that this way of life under the New Covenant involves the struggles of which Paul wrote.

Israel's examples under the Old Covenant contain serious instruction for us, but we are going to begin in the New Testament. We are going to do this by turning to Romans

15:3-4. Christ is the speaker, and Paul lifted this from Psalm 69.

Romans 15:3-4 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached you fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime [that is, the Old Testament], were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

This is my foundational example right here, but I want to remind you of something Jesus said. He said, "I always do what pleases the Father." I do not know whether you are aware of it, but He said this not in exactly the same words, but in a paraphrase, at least four other times so that we would understand what, in one sense, His primary objective was in life. Without pleasing the Father He never would have been the sacrifice for our sin. He kept His eye on that goal, if I can put it that way, and did everything He could in His power to please the Father. He did this by not pleasing Himself; that is what the verse says. Rather, in serving others, He also served God.

I am going to tie this to something else. This is what a soldier does. That is the backdrop to this Part 2 of the Christian Fight. All through Part 1, I was showing how Paul compared a Christian to a soldier. We have the song "Onward Christian Soldiers." That is where the concept comes from, that a Christian is a fighter. He is not fighting against other people. He is fighting primarily against his own nature which is persuading him from time to time to obey *it* rather than God.

We also find then, in verse 4, that in order to do this it takes patient endurance to serve God in this manner. II Timothy 2:4 is one of those areas in which Paul compared a Christian to a soldier. He said it is the soldier's duty to please him who enlisted him in his service. Who enlisted us? Our Father in heaven did this, and He enlisted us into His cause, and like Christ, we are to follow through in obedience to Him.

We are going to pull some confirmation out of I Corinthians 10:6.

I Corinthians 10:6 Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

The "they" Paul refers to were the Israelites in the wilderness. Paul was again saying, like he did in Romans 15, that they are an example to us, that we should not do what they did.

I Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things [the illustrations he gave in chapter 10] happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our [meaning the Christian] admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [the ages] are come.

All these things in the Old Testament contain instruction for the Christian, and we are to look to those examples because they are telling us how human nature acts. They are showing us how God acts, and reacts as well, because He is always consistent in His actions and reactions.

In the New Testament, Christ, above all, is our example in suffering, which, as any soldier involved in warfare knows, will occur mainly in an attempt to meet the sacrifices required in our part of this warfare. Sacrificing is never easy. It is costly, and I believe sincerely that most of the time we avoid obedience because we are avoiding the pain, the discomfort, the cost of making a sacrifice, whether it is to our vanity, or whatever. It is what drives us to not obey, to make adjustments, because we want to be comfortable.

Christ was completely innocent, and yet He suffered in His warfare more than any of us ever will. It says—and I believe it—that Christ suffered more than any man. This reveals something. In fact, in some ways it is strange. The spiritual innocence appears to intensify the warfare. One would think naturally that the better one got, the easier it would get. But we see in Christ's example, the better one gets, the harder it is going to get. We kind of know that, and in a sense works against us.

Let me illustrate this in a simple way. As we go through school—through elementary school, middle school, high school, or whatever—the higher you go... do the tests get easier, or do they get harder? They do not get any easier, and the chances are great that they are going to get harder. The higher you go in the school world, the more difficult the tests become. That is a parallel we can expect in Christianity.

We know that the Israelites under the Old Covenant did not have the Holy Spirit. They were denied the enablement that we possess for achieving what God requires. The history that God has preserved in the Old Testament provides us with clear instruction as to human nature's proclivity. Here is the theory: If you are forearmed you should be better able to meet the challenge. That is what the Old Testament is primarily there for, to forearm us for the battle that we have to fight, so we should be better prepared for whatever life happens to throw at us.

Do not forget that Paul charged Timothy, and thus us, in I Timothy 6:12, to lay hold on

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

eternal life. In modern English we really want to give that a *commanding* feel to it, because that is more literally what Paul said. He said, "*Seize it!*" Is that not stronger than just 'lay hold'? He said, "*Seize it!*" "*Grab it,*" like you are reaching for the brass ring. There is a lot of energy in what he is saying there. "*Don't follow Israel's sad example.*" The examples are there to learn, but do not do what they did. Grab hold of the brass ring, and hold on for dear life.

We are going to go to Exodus 23:20. Just make a note about where what we are going to read appears. You know what appears in Exodus 20—the Ten Commandments. And then what appears after that? The other terms of the Old Covenant. This is the last part of the Old Covenant, because the covenant is made in chapter 24. This is the last part of the agreement that they made with God. Listen to what God says.

Exodus 23:20-21 Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way, [that is, to give you guidance] and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, [meaning: do not be scared of Him; be aware, make note; He is there], and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him.

Now who alone is able to forgive sin? Guess who was in the cloud? It was Jesus Christ Himself who was in the cloud. He *is* authorized to forgive sin.

Exodus 23:22-23 But if you shall indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto your enemies, and an adversary unto your adversaries. For my Angel [My Messenger] shall go before you, and bring you in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.

Remember, this is at the tail-end of the New Covenant, and God is promising "I will cut them off." In those four verses we have a promise of guidance in a warning to obey.

Exodus 23:24-26 You shall not bow down to their god, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but you shall utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. And you shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless your bread, and your water, and I will take sickness away from the midst of you. There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in your land: the number of your days I will fulfill.

This was more specific instruction regarding the most important of all sins—idolatry. Included there are four more clear promises as enticement for them to obey.

Exodus 23:27-31 I will send my fear before you, and will destroy all the people to whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs unto you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year; lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field multiply against you. By little and little I will drive them out from before you until you be increased and inherit the land. And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and you shall drive them out before you.

Again, here are more outstanding promises telling them the manner in which He will work to enable them to take over the land. He showed here that their progress would be incremental for practical reasons; that is, lest they get in over their heads into a circumstance greater than they could handle. He then tells them generally how large their inheritance will be, and then finishes with a second warning against idolatry.

One of the points here is this. Because some have carelessly assumed, after reading these verses, that if Israel had just obeyed God they would have taken over the Promised Land without confrontation with the people already there. This is most assuredly untrue.

I want you to go with me to Leviticus 26:1-3. These verses are self-explanatory to you.

Leviticus 26:1-3 You shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall you set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LOORD your God. You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LOORD. **If** you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them

Action and reaction. You know that the first thirteen verses of this chapter are all promises that *if* they would obey, then they would receive blessings. Verse 14 begins a different section.

Leviticus 26:14-16 But if you will not hearken unto me, and will not do all

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

these commandments; And if you shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments so that you will not do all my commandments, but that you break my covenant: I also will do this unto you, . . .

There is the other side of the coin. The reason I wanted you to go to this chapter is to confirm the thought that I am having on Exodus 23—that like the promises of the blessings that are given here in Leviticus 26, the promises in Exodus 23 are conditional. They are conditional upon obedience to the covenant. Understand this principle: with God, reciprocity is to be expected.

Let me ask you a simple question. Is God going to directly bless rebellion? He would not be God if He did that. What could we expect from Him if we could disobey and He would still bless us? How could you trust Him? There is reciprocity with Him all the time because He will not bless rebellion from His people, those who know and those who understand.

Here is another question. This is more personal to you and me. Does God make growth and overcoming easy for you even though He promises us salvation? There is a promise, but what does He expect from us? What He expects from us does not earn salvation. It is just par for the course. It is what we are *expected* to do. He cannot bless people who are disrespectful of Him in disobedience when they *know* better.

Here is another question. If God would make our responsibility so easy by removing all before us that would be a challenge to us? What would there be to overcome? How could He even ask us to overcome, or demand that we overcome? No. He sets goals before us, and the challenges to achieve those goals are there.

The answer to the first question is that He does not make it easy for us. The answer to the second is that there would be nothing to overcome. If He did do both of those things, that would create "the Sunday walk in the park" scenario this world has where they say that salvation is absolutely guaranteed no matter what. It would also do something else. It would eliminate the writing of God's law in our heart because that is not achieved merely by instructing us in a school-book manner. It is achieved by the combination of instruction in a school-book manner, plus actual practice.

There is a conclusion on Exodus 23. I think it is far closer to perfect truth. When other biblical information is added to this, it states that what God promises in Exodus 23 is that He will drive out the people of the land, making it far easier than it would be if He were not in the picture at all. What is He saying here? He is saying, "*People, if I am not in*

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the picture, you are not going to drive them out at all." God is stating a comparative situation, and I will prove this to you.

In this circumstance the people of the land are symbolic of human nature. They are a type. Again, recall Romans 8:7 regarding human nature, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." When we apply that principle understanding to the totality that is here, neither could the people that Israel was going to confront be driven out of the land unless God was with them. It would be just as impossible as us overcoming human nature.

I think we should be able to conclude that Israel would have been totally unable to accomplish even what they *did* accomplish had not God been with them. How do I know that for certain? It is that Exodus 23 is not a flat-out promise that Israel would not have to go to war at some point in the conquest of the land.

We are going to string some more scriptures together. Take note of Deuteronomy 8:1-3. These are very well-known scriptures to us, but I want to lay a foundation, especially with this scripture here about the way God acts toward His people.

Deuteronomy 8:1-2 All the commandments which I command you this day shall you observe to do, that you may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LOORD swore unto your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LOORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or no.

Remember Deuteronomy was written in the last month before they went into the Promised Land under Joshua. He is telling them to reflect back on the previous forty years of what occurred. "You shall remember all the way which the LOORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, (1) to humble you, and (2) to test you, (3) to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or no."

Deuteronomy 8:3 And he humbled you, and suffered you [allowed you] to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not [they had no previous experience with that], neither did your fathers know [they did not have experience with it either]; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LOORD does man live.

God clearly tests us to see where we stand, and at the same time He reveals to us—the ones who are being tested—where we stand. Where we stand must be revealed to both God and to us, because what He is putting us through is a cooperative effort, and tests are not normally easy. Tests are a clarifying circumstance. They reveal strengths and weaknesses, and God wants us evaluating ourselves. How are we doing?

We are going to go back again to I Corinthians 10, and to verse 11, because it is quite comforting, actually, if we believe it.

I Corinthians 10:11-12 Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition [for our learning, instruction], upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

In order for a person to think he stands, he has to be evaluating himself. Right? Sure. Tests are supposed to tell us where we stand, where our strengths and weaknesses are. That is why the teacher in school gives you tests. Now verse 13 is the one that is really comforting.

I Corinthians 10:13 There has no temptation [no test] taken you but such as is common to man: [God has not put anything really unusual on us. They are common.] but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able. [He will not let us get in over our head. You do not give a 5th grade pupil a 12th grade test.] but will with the temptation [with the test] also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.

So God did not test Israel above what they were able. They should have been able to do. By His evaluation, the teacher was saying, "*Israel, you ought to be able to do this. I did not give you My spirit, but you ought to be able to do this.*" God judges everybody fairly, and so He did not get them in over their head.

Verse 13 shows us that God is carefully monitoring what we are being tested by so that we will not get in over our head. What He is talking about is the sanctification process, and this process requires our cooperation with God. Though our test operations are managed by God, our involvement is definitely not eliminated.

Knowing God's careful monitoring of each also helps us to understand that we are cautioned to be very careful in our evaluations of each other. Now why? Because we do

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

not know what God knows—where each person is on the course that God has set before them. We do not know where they began. We do not know how gifted they are. We do not know how far they have already come. This does not eliminate evaluation, but do not ever allow yourself to evaluate other persons so harshly that you condemn them. It may be that we did not come anywhere near as far as God expected us to come in this amount of time.

Let us go back to Exodus 23 again. I want you to notice we are going to string some things together here. We will look at one phrase in verse 22.

Exodus 23:22 I will be an enemy unto your enemies, and an adversary unto your adversaries.

There is a promise. Now to the end of verse 23:

Exodus 23:23 I will cut them off.

Exodus 23:27 I will send my fear before you, and will destroy all the people to whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs unto you.

Exodus 23:28 I will send hornets before you.

Exodus 23:30 Little by little I will drive them out.

Exodus 23:31 I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand.

There are seven promises of God, plus one command which I did not read yet, which is in verse 31, and it is a very interesting one.

Exodus 23:31 **YOU** shall drive them out.

Oh! A turn of the screw! At first it looked like, Boy! He was going to do everything, and then at the end He said, "**You** shall drive them out."

What is going on here? Is He not telegraphing that there is going to be confrontations in which we are involved? What we are looking at is the pattern that God had the Israelites

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

go through so that we can understand what we are required to do spiritually. The whole context indicates confrontation between God and the people of the land, except for that last phrase—" **You** shall drive them out." That ought to give us pause and make us realize that there is more to this than a first, easy glance might have told us.

That first, easy assumption was not how it turned out in actual practice. I am going to begin to show you, little by little, that the Israelites knew, and they knew that they knew, that they were going to have to face the people of the land in warfare. That, in one sense, should not have been a surprise to those people. If you remember the story flow in the chronology of the book of Exodus, you might remember that, in Exodus 17, God had already permitted the Amalekites to attack the rear of Israel's parade of people going toward the Promised Land, and the Amalekites wreaked havoc for a period of time, and people died.

Exodus 23:32 You shall make no covenant with them.

If God was going to drive those people out completely and totally before Israel, why would this warning even have to be given? Is that not saying, "*Hey! You are going to have contact with these people*"? Otherwise, there would have been no reason to even give them a warning about making a covenant—not do it. We will see that this is not the last time He did this. In Exodus 34:11-12, a little more time has gone by.

Exodus 34:11-12 Observe you that which I commanded you this day: behold, I drive out 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 whither you go, lest it be for a snare in the midst of you.

Exodus 34:15 Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call you, and you eat of his sacrifice.

Now think about this possible scenario. This occurs to you and me. Let us just update this a couple thousand years and put us into a little bit similar situation. What if Israel came into the land and then they began tearing down and destroying altars (which is what God told them to do), do you think the people of the land were just going to stand around and bless what they respect as important to them to be destroyed without them resisting to defend what *they* gave honor to? No way, Jose!

In like manner, when we come to believe God, and we stop observing Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and Sunday worship, and instead begin keeping the Sabbath and God's Holy Days, did not your family and friends, and employers resist and defend, to some degree, their life-long practices, and thus, in many cases, were those relationships not seriously disturbed?

Evelyn and I practically got kicked out of the family. Not her family, my family. We did not mean any harm. All we were trying to do was obey God, but my mother especially took it very hard because she saw it as breaking up the family. I can understand that. It was not our intention to break up the family. It was simply our intention to obey God. Well, can we understand that if Israel really believed God, and they went into the land and started tearing down the altars, the situation would have been intensified much, much more, because those people would have made war?

Israel was not just going to march into the land and take it over easily. There were going to be things that would have to be overcome. Israel had many choices to make because they were going to have face-to-face contact with the inhabitants, and the choice was between compromises with the Canaanites regarding their culture, or following God's command and begin doing things like knocking down altars and producing these intense confrontations. It is another word for warfare. As sure as anything, it would have happened.

Let us go to Numbers 13. I am going to read a pretty fair piece here.

Numbers 13:26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.

Here is the picture. They were just about ready to go into the land, so they asked Moses if it would be all right for them to send somebody from each one of the tribes to go scout things out to see how the land lays. They were being cautious because they knew that they were in a dangerous area. And so after spending about 40 days in the land they came back, and they showed them this big pile of grapes they were carrying. You kind of get the impression there that the grapes must have been as big as oranges. Here was their report:

Numbers 13:27-30 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither you sent us, and surely it flows with milk and honey [a figure of

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

speech saying it was really productive]; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. [By this time things are beginning to come unglued a bit.] And Caleb stilled the people [because the people were getting nervous] before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

Those are interesting words there. If God was just going to go before them, why would Caleb say, "*Hey! We can overcome them!*"? He *knew* that there was going to be war.

Numbers 13:31-33 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eats up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

In Numbers 14, in the first three verses, the Israelites, hearing these speeches, reacted:

Numbers 14:4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

How quickly they forgot that in Egypt they were slaves. They had a choice to make. They would rather be slaves than to have their own land; having their own land meant there was going to be a struggle to have it. How much do men really want freedom, liberty, their own economy, their own right to have land and to use it to produce income? That is what God was offering them, and it was not going to come without a struggle.

I want you to think about this because this is what is happening to us right now here in the United States of America. We are being offered a choice. Do we want to be a free people, or do we want to be slaves, even to our own government, because our liberties are being taken away, chipped away here and there? President George Bush just

signed a horrible thing. I will tell you later what it is. He did it on October 17, 2007.

Numbers 14:5-9 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. And they spoke unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we passed through to search it is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which flows with milk and honey. Only rebel not you against the LORD, neither fear you the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

Here is the other side of the story. Caleb and Joshua were not offering an easy solution. As you can see, it was an uphill battle for them because the overwhelming majority was afraid. Were they afraid to just walk in and take over? They were afraid of warfare. They were afraid of the fight that they knew was going to occur.

Let us consider something briefly here. Note the time element in which this was taking place. This was two years since leaving Egypt, and less than one year since they actually began their pilgrimage from Mount Sinai, and before they actually came into the land.

The next time you read through this, I want you to pay attention to the sense of the terminology. "*It is a good land, but...*" "*Yeah, but...*" And, as things continued, the people became increasingly fearful, and the spies—even Joshua and Caleb—expected that there would be confrontation. The whole group—all twelve of them, even the "good report" guys, Joshua and Caleb—most certainly did not understand God's promises in Exodus 23 *literally* as some carelessly do. They *knew* that even though God gave those promises, they were going to have to go to war against the people of the land.

The underlying problem was that they did not trust that this warfare would be a cooperative effort. They, in effect, said, "God cannot do it." That was rebellion. That is why Joshua said, "Only rebel you not." They were calling God a liar. They did not trust God—that He would be with them, cooperating with them, fighting on their side against the common enemy—the people of the land—making it easier than it otherwise would have been. But nonetheless, warfare was there, and God would have been with them.

You see, this warfare was a test of their faith. They flunked. This has no practical good

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to us at all unless we evaluate ourselves and start thinking, "How many times have I backed away from obedience to God because I feared the effect of the obedience?" We all do it. We do not want the discomfort. We do not want to be badly thought of by people that we might respect. We do not want to make the sacrifice. That is why I said earlier in a sermon, "What we fear is the sacrifice that obedience requires."

Notice Deuteronomy 7:2. This was 38 years later time-wise:

Deuteronomy 7:1-2 When the LOORD your God shall bring you into the land whither you go to possess it, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites, and the Gergashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you; And when the LOORD your God shall deliver them before you; **you shall smite them**, and utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them.

How can you smite somebody who is not there? No. When God was going *before* them, what we have to understand is that He would be *with* them as they fought the battle.

When statements of this nature (like Deuteronomy 7:2) are compared with Exodus 23, and Joshua and Caleb's statements in Numbers 13 and 14, it becomes apparent that the driving out was intended from the very beginning to be a cooperative effort between God and the Israelites. Israel would have war.

There is an interesting statement that Joshua makes just before he died.

Joshua 21:43 And the LOORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.

Anybody who has read through, beginning in Exodus and going through Numbers and Deuteronomy, knows that Israel had warfare. As I am showing to you now, God intended from the very beginning that there would be warfare, and Israel knew it. Did God follow through with His promise? Yes He did. As weak as Israel met the enemy, He still was with them.

Joshua 21:44-45 And the LOORD gave them rest [peace] round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LOORD delivered all their enemies into

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LOORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

God was faithful even though they were not.

For you and me, within our relationship with God, there is always a measure of reciprocity. It is sort of like this. God is up here, and we are down here. We do a little bit, and He does a lot, but we have to learn to cooperate with Him through trusting His word. What He says, He will do. This is the way it must be because love cannot be a one-sided relationship, or it will not exist for very long. This is why Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Obedience is how we reciprocate God's love to Him.

As we are learning, keeping His commandments involves spiritual warfare, because there are impediments all along the way that we have to confront. As we are seeing in these examples, the people of the land represent those impediments that get in our way. Are we going to really believe that God is with us and go forward anyway, praying to Him to back up His promises? He will back you up.

I want you to go back to Numbers 1 again. We will keep adding more and more here until hopefully you are convinced that Israel and God knew that there was going to be warfare right from the very beginning.

Numbers 1:1-3 And the LOORD spoke unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take you the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward all that are able to go forth to **war** in Israel: you and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

Drop down to verse 20. I am going to read the last phrase or two.

Numbers 1:20 ...from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war.

Numbers 1:24 ...all that were able to go forth to war.

Numbers 1:26 ...all that were able to go forth to war.

Do you know how many times that phrase appears in that chapter? Fourteen times they were told to take a census. What was the reason? So they could put together an army. I want you to see that even before they went to the Promised Land they knew they were going to go to war.

It was the first day of the second month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt. Let us go back to Exodus 19, and we will string the time element together here.

Exodus 19:1 In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.

Three months after they left Egypt they were at Mount Sinai—Year one, third month. They left on the fifteenth day of the first month. They got into Mount Sinai in the third month.

Exodus 40:17 And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up.

Here is what happened. They got to Mount Sinai in the third month of the first year. After making the covenant—Exodus 20 through Exodus 24—(and Exodus 23 occurred in there, and all those things about "I will do this, that, and the other things"), the next thing that He did, once they signed on the dotted line with their life and made the covenant with God, was to say, "*Okay. Here is what you have to do. You have to build Me a house to live in.*" And so, from Exodus 25 on, they were given the instructions, the pattern, through Moses, for the tabernacle. Moses then appointed the men God wanted to take care of things in supervising the building of it. Then they began building.

We find that by the time we get to Exodus 40, where are they? They are still at Mount Sinai. They are still at the same place where they made the covenant with God, and now it is the first day of the second year. They are still at Mount Sinai. Exodus 23 is nine months behind, and they are still at Mount Sinai. They have not taken a step further toward the Promised Land. They are already into the second year. In Exodus 40 they are in the wilderness one year and just shy of one month.

By the time we get to Numbers 1:1, what has happened? The whole book of Leviticus

has happened. On the first day of the first month of the second year the tabernacle was erected. The next thing God did was give all the instructions for the priesthood, and they began the operations of worshipping God in that house they had just built for Him. So when we get to Numbers 1:1, we find it is the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land.

Here they are at the beginning of the second year, and all those things from Exodus 12 up to this point have been done in one year's time, and they still have not left Mount Sinai. So you see, Exodus 23 was already a year behind them, and when they got to the Promised Land, which was about nine months later (actually a little bit less than that), the second year was almost completed. How much longer do they have to be in the wilderness? Forty years. It was their punishment for not trusting God. They knew that they were going to have war, and they refused to fight.

Hebrews 10:37-38 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

One of the responsibilities of Christian life is similar to the responsibility God gave to Israel, because Christianity involves warfare. It is not warfare against people. It is a spiritual war against our own nature, which is constantly rising up to keep us, to intimidate us, and to threaten us with war.

Israel failed. They failed to trust God, and they drew back from the warfare. That is what they did in Numbers 13 and 14. Every one of those people who drew back was condemned to die in the wilderness. Everybody over the age of twenty died. They were held responsible for their failure of faith, and they died without ever reaching the Promised Land, even though when they failed, they could probably see it off there in the distance. That is a sobering warning to us.

What God requires of us is that we be willing to fight human nature, knowing that He will be with us, and to trust Him. It does not mean that we are going to succeed every time. There are going to be tests that we do not pass at first. But, we can be sure that even if we do not pass it at the time, if we made the effort at the time, then we have at least earned the right, the respect of God, and He will bring it back around and we will fight that thing again until it is overcome. He is patient in dealing with us, and He wants to see us go into His kingdom as conformed to the image of Christ as we can possibly be. So, are we going to follow what the Israelites did and draw back, or are we going to be willing to make whatever sacrifice is required of us, face up to it, screw up our courage

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

(or whatever we want to call it)—do it; make whatever sacrifice is demanded?

This drawing back is a very serious sin. In Numbers 14:9, Joshua called it rebellion. He said, "Do not rebel." Drawing back in fear, failing to enter into the fray, is on a par with rebellion because it is a rejection, the despising of God's word and His promise. You can put down Numbers 14:27-35, and then to confirm this you can look up Deuteronomy 20:1-4 where it is confirmed there.

Numbers 14:9 Only rebel not you against the LOORD, neither fear you the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LOORD is with us: fear them not.

Numbers 14:27-35 How long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, says the LOORD, as ye have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward which have murmured against me. Doubtless you shall not come into the land concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years and bear your whoredoms until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which you searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall you bear your iniquities, even forty years, and you shall know my breach of promise. I the LOORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

Deuteronomy 20:1-4 When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and a people more than you, be not afraid of them: for the LOORD your God is with you, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when you are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people, And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, you approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be you terrified because of them; For the LOORD your God is he that goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.

Hebrews 10:37 tells us not to draw back. Hebrews 13:5 says to us:

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have: for he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Where in the world do you think Paul got that idea? He got it out of the same place that I got it. Those Israelites feared people. They said, "There are giants there. The Anakim are there. They have walled cities." That is what they feared. They feared people, and people can be pretty fearsome. I do not mean to say that they are not. The fear is in us of them because we think God is not big enough.

Our warfare is different from the Israelites', but the principles involved within it are similar. Obedience to God provokes warfare even though it is not intended on our part. As serious as Israel's responsibilities were, ours are many times more because eternity is involved, and it is part of this way that cannot be avoided. If we fail to join the fray because of fear and sacrifices involved, we will not be prepared for the kingdom. And like His promises to Israel, the promises of His cooperation still stand. They are there. That is why we read in Hebrews 13:5. "I will never leave you, nor forsake you. I will be there."

I think I have told you before that this is an amazing promise, because the way Paul wrote Hebrews 13:5, it can be translated into English with five negatives: "I will never, never, never, never, never leave you." I think he gets the point across, because the Israelites feared that God would not be with them, and so God had Paul write this in such a way that he added emphasis upon emphasis upon emphasis so we would understand that He will never leave us alone, and that He will always be protecting our back, and even going before us as well, so that we can win those battles.

We will not win every one, but there is enough patience and mercy in Him that He will bring us right back after He repairs us a bit and right into it again in order to overcome it, so that we can pass on into the next grade and get a harder test. Is that not encouraging? It is, because it is part of that developmental process.