

The Gun Lap Is Looming

The Hardest May Lie Just Ahead

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I recently ran across the diary of Elizabeth Smith, who traveled from Independence, Missouri in 1844, with her husband Cornelius and their seven children, to their dream of a new and better life, in the Willamette Valley in Oregon.

The Smiths knew when they left Independence, Missouri that they would be facing 2,000 miles of difficult terrain, with many sharp inclines, and dangerous water crossings. They knew Indians would do all they could to run off their stock, and that they would be probably be attacked. They knew that the way would be hard, and that they would be without doctor, store, emergency assistance. They knew that they would have to depend upon themselves, and those in the train who held the same vision for help and encouragement.

Through the 2,000 miles they of course had their trials, but it was the final sixty miles that was by far the hardest and the most dangerous. I will quote here:

The train reached the Cascade range [The hardest part of the journey], in mid October. Shortly after they arrived at the Dalles, entrance to the dangerous Columbia Gorge. Here the train split apart and it was every man for himself. Cattle had to be driven down the north bank, meanwhile women, children, goods, and dismantled wagons had to be rafted down the treacherous gorge.

Elizabeth wrote calmly in her diary. "It is rainy and cold, the men are making rafts, the women cooking and washing, the children are crying, and the Indians are trading potatoes for shirts."

The rafts were forty foot pine logs lashed together.

On November 2 the rafts shoved off. All the household goods and the dismantled wagons were lashed to it. It was so unwieldy all had to work to keep it off the rocks. They made only a few miles. "It is impossible to sleep on the raft, and we clamber up the rocks and build a fire to keep warm and all night the wind blows, and the waves roll beneath.

One man Welch, and two of the Smith's younger sons had to drive their cattle along the north bank, "it ain't but 40 miles," they said. Above on the cliffs, they struggled through whitened timber, and fighting their way through mounting drifts. The provisions on the raft ran out on the seventh day. Cornelius decided to walk his way through the gorge, perhaps he might meet some Indians or settlers.

The raft made only half a mile the next day and now the raft is icing up. Finally Cornelius staggered in with fifty pounds of beef after struggling through snow and ice encrusted brush. "Welch and the boys are down below, they had a tough time in the snow. They killed the red heifer, and I grabbed this cause I knew you were starving. It don't look good." Elizabeth: "Don't worry we'll make it." They could make no headway the next day.

Elizabeth writes, "We start this morning around the portage [where they have to carry the raft], It rains and snows. I carry my babe and lead another through the snow and water up to my knees. In late afternoon the children collapse, we unhitch the wagon and the oxen transport the children

below." They lived on the beef for ten days, now there were only bones that they were sucking on. Elizabeth wrote: "I froze or chilled my feet so that I cannot wear a shoe, so must go barefooted. The whole of everything falls on my shoulder...I am not adequate to the task."

Welch came on the ninth day. They carried Cornelius who was very sick down to the boats. The others made it alone: a little woman and very thin, carrying her baby and leading a two year old, the bigger boys bringing others walked through the snow. "Look at that," Welch whispered, "she's barefoot."

On November 27, 1844, Elizabeth Smith, her husband, and her seven children made it to the Willamette Valley.

There was much more I could have read, but the point I wished to make was that the Smiths left a comfortable world in Missouri for what they saw as a promised land and a wonderful life. They had their hardships, but when they had their goal almost in sight, the way became the hardest part of the journey.

And I used their example, because I feel that we too are near the end of our journey, and it would seem the way is going to become very difficult.

We too, brethren, left a comfortable world that we knew, fit into and liked, but because of vision given to us by God the Father and Jesus Christ, we embarked on a journey that set us apart, and made us different than those around us.

Had we seriously thought of the hardships we might be facing, and how to prepare for them as we traveled toward the land and future promised us?

I think all of us to one degree or another, pictured being protected in a place of safety, observing in security what was taking place in the world around us, when in reality, we may be involved in part of, or all of what is looming on the horizon.

All of us have had to face great distress and hardship on this journey with the break up of the Worldwide Church of God, and trying to decipher where we were to go, but we are still here, and that is good, and that is what this is about!

What is it that will set the tone for these last years that are in front of us?

Revelations 12:10-12 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

Satan knows his time is short, and he is filled with great wrath.

We read that the heavens are to rejoice and all that dwell there, because Satan has been cast down. The great destroyer, accuser, liar, and deceiver, and his demons can no longer cause war in heaven, but then we are told that we who live on earth had best take care as he and his henchmen are filled with wrath.

I looked up the word "wrath," and it is interesting Satan being the power of the air, there are five words for wrath, and the one that belongs to this verse has to do with air. He moves in violent motion or passion, filled with anger, wrath, and indignation. In short he is raging as a vicious, angry, violent, storm against his situation. He has been cast down.

We had a sneak preview in this area the other day in the form of a small tornado with winds up to 85 mph. Trees were uprooted, sheds and barns came down, and shingles came off homes.

Why will these next few years be so dangerous? Satan's goal has been to destroy God's creation of mankind. And indeed he no doubt feels he has accomplished much of this goal with the majority of peoples and nations, but with those in God's church, he has not been successful, and the time left has been shortened. Or put another way, it would seem that we are in Mr. Armstrong's gun lap.

How can we know this? By what has taken place in our nation as a result of this election, and in this nation in so many ways being a great affront to God. In the critical condition of the economy in Europe, and in the tremendous influx of Muslims that in a few short years will surpass the population of those countries Thus in fury, panic and fear, Satan will pull out all the stops between now and his imprisonment by God. He will do all he can to tear God's people apart.

I honestly think that whatever weaknesses we fight in ourselves will be intensified in this last great period of turmoil by the world around us.

Where will we be attacked? This is something I think that you have to think about.

Indeed we can be caused to fall away by giving in to the very temporary pleasures of sin and the fact that on the surface today, there does not seem to be any penalty attached to sin. And after all, where are the Two Witnesses?

Look at all that is going on, and where is God? Can He not see what is taking place, and why is He not stepping in to do something about it? Does He really care? The answer is, yes, He really cares and we had better not let down.

As on the Oregon trail, there were many physical and mental hardships. That is for us, too. We do not know what they will be, but they will be there.

If we are diligent in prayer, study, and putting into practice what we have learned, then we indeed will be like those who had sufficient oil in their lamps, and we will be accepted into the Kingdom of God. We will receive our crown, and we will have a joy like we almost cannot believe.

To me the greatest danger that we face is found in Mark 13:21-23.

Mark 13:21-23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and

wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

Matthew 24:11 states that "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."

I had a close friend who was an elder who left the church, and he began to keep Sunday. I confronted him, asking him how after all these years he could do this. Did he not know he was to keep the Sabbath Holy? His response was, "I do, I keep it holy, but I can worship God any day I wish." It is foolish logic such as this that we will be confronted with.

When the church broke up, I was amazed at how many went out and stocked their freezers with unclean food. Does this mean that because we knew these people and fellowshiped with them that we can now eat unclean food? Of course not, but the subtle influence is still there. Well, everybody is doing it.

II Corinthians 11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

These men are going to look so good, and so righteous, that we might be tempted to say, "Well, why not listen to what they are saying."

II Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

We used to read this years ago, and we used to say that we know that the Protestants are wrong, and the Catholics are wrong, blah, blah. But this is where the rubber is going to meet the road. This is serious stuff.

II Corinthians 11:15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Satan and his demons pretend to be angels of light.

Have you ever checked to see how many different churches there are today?

One site that I checked said that since Jesus Christ there have been 33,800 different churches. They had a list of those who were extant today, and I am sure that they can sound pretty convincing with their teachings. We must be on our game of knowing the truth, and this is where it belongs to us—we do this individually. We have to know what the Bible says, and we have to know what we believe and why we believe it. We cannot just be going along with the church, because the time is going to be coming, just like with Elizabeth. They were on their own, and had to load their own raft. Regarding the churches, the vast majority have a great divergence of what they consider to be true.

Amos 8:11-14 Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it. In that day the fair

virgins and strong young men shall faint from thirst. Those who swear by the sin of Samaria, who say, 'As your god lives, O Dan!' And, 'As the way of Beersheba lives!' They shall fall and never rise again.

When difficult times come upon Israel and they turn to seek God at last, He will not be there, and they will stagger as one frustrated in panic. One commentator states they will reel as if being drunk.

The printed word of God will still be in the world, but men will not be able to "hear" it.

Mark 4:11-12 And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.'

They will be searching for the truth, and will wander from sea to sea (Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea) and find absolutely nothing. To the nation it seems as if a veil has been pulled over them and they cannot find God because God has pulled away from them. Because of this, they are influenced by pagan worship.

And because of this veil the truth of God, and the truth about God will be ridiculed.

John 15:18-21 If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

To me, brethren, this end time attack to destroy our foundation, should be our greatest concern, and it will very subtle.

I do not know how many of you have read *The Da Vinci Code*. Someone gave me a copy, and I thought it one of the best, most exciting books I had read until the last few chapters where, though not proven, it was hinted that Jesus may have had an affair with Mary Magdalene producing an offspring. (Just a subtle hint. Could it be true?) The actual phrasing went something on this order: "We cannot let the truth about Jesus and Mary Magdalene get out."

I was told that after the book, one group took that hint and researched working to prove that, that offspring became the first of a ruling family in Europe. This is very subtle, but when you get enough of it you start to say, "Could it be true?"

The other day on the radio came the news that the Bible was wrong on the date for the Garden of Eden. Some brilliant person found the Garden of Eden existed 2,000 years prior to the one in the Bible. This is why I say that if you do not know, and I do not know, what we believe and why we believe it, we will fall for this kind of thing.

These hints of new truth will be presented from here on out, thus brethren, we had best have our foundation proved regarding the word of God.

II Peter 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

These false teachers seem to be in line with the truth at first, but while their teaching may seem to be correct, they covertly retain false doctrines.

The phrase "Who privily shall bring shall bring in damnable false heresies" means, "To lead by the side of others," or to lead along with the truth. It will not be overt. Thus, while our mind is trained on other subjects and is off guard, some wrong principle would be entered into the conversation and pretty soon before we know it we will say, yes that makes sense.

When the church first formed in California we had 65 people leave us, and over the most ridiculous thing: the calendar controversy. They started the Feast on three different days. You would think that somebody would have said, "This is stupid." The group started the Feast on three different days, and ended them on three different days.

It has been the history of the church over all the years that false teachers have arisen and formed schisms. And they are very much destined to arise now, and in these approaching years. Could not God have kept them out?

Why did He not?

I Corinthians 11:19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

God observes the stable and the solid members versus the restless, ambitious, and dissatisfied. This is why there will be occasional divisions.

God will see to it that we are all tested, and we must persevere in the truth.

Luke 21:17-19 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls.

This is what we have to do, persevere. Just like they did on the trip, we cannot let down.

We are warned in Matthew 24:4-5, and in the first of the six seals in Revelation 6:1-2, to take heed that no man deceive you, for many shall come bringing false information, and Satan with false teaching being pictured on the white horse, has gone forth to conquer. We have to realize that this is coming, and why we have to know what we are to do, and what we believe.

Regarding religious teaching, what are we to do?

Revelation 2:2 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

In short they did not just accept those that said they belonged to God, they tested what they said, taught and did, against what God set forth as the correct standard.

I John 4:1-7 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

I think for a long time many of us said, "Oh well, whatever the minister says is fine." We tend to think, "Well, I am in the church and they will teach me what I am to know." But this is a time, brethren, that we have to know what we know. We have to prove what we believe, and we have to stand on that. When others come to us with other doctrines, we have to know what is right.

I John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

Jesus Christ came as a man, He allowed Himself to be killed, to be the perfect sacrifice for us.

I John 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

So He says prove, and do what is right, and do the truth.

Many claim to be filled with God's Spirit, but even if an angel comes, test him with the measuring stick of the truth.

We live in a very difficult time. This is what is coming on all of the world.

Daniel 12:1 At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.

Daniel 12:4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

Many commentaries think that people will be running around the world preaching the Bible and things like this. But there is another meaning to this as well, and that is that things are going to be so confusing, and man is going to be so busy trying to stay on the computer, and to do all of the things that we do in this world. We will be swamped over and over, but we have to find peace, find a simpler life. The book *Future Shock* talked about the time that we have now. We are so busy we cannot see straight, we cannot focus on the right things. He said find a comfortable place, bury yourself in it and stay there. Do not get caught up in all of the things that are going on. Just do your job and draw close to God.

Jude 3-4 (ADAM CLARKE PARAPHRASE) Beloved brethren, when I saw it necessary to write to you concerning the common salvation (as it is for Jew and Gentile) my mind being deeply affected with the dangers to which the church is exposed to from the false teachers that are gone out into the world, I found it extremely necessary to write and exhort you to hold fast to the truth you have received, and to contend for that only faith, which by our Lord and His apostles had been delivered to the Christians.

Just what is our job?

Proverbs 4:23-27 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.

He said put a guard on your heart with all diligence because from it comes all you allow and do. Guard your heart and all that you let come into it.

Keep your mouth with all diligence, because as it states in James 3:2-13, the tongue is the most ungovernable member of the body, and having wisdom in your speech in the time that is coming is going to be most important. Guard what you say. Think what you are saying before you speak it.

Just as the runner looks toward the goal, look to Jesus Christ the author and finisher of our faith in all you do. Keep your eye focused on Him. It is going to be essential, brethren, it really is.

Always consider the path you are going to tread. Walk circumspectly and let your ways be rightly established. I only had to walk through a mine field once, and I tell you, you are really careful where you put your feet. This is what we have to do be careful where we allow ourselves to go.

Turn not to the right or left from the law of God, always working to remove your way from any evil.

As the Smith family approached the Dalles and the Columbia gorge, they knew they faced the most dangerous part of the trip. Just a few more miles and their dream would be fulfilled. Not to push on would mean death as they had nowhere else to go, and Elizabeth with her confidence and courage told all, "We can do it."

Brethren, we can too.

Jude 17-25 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

