



Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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**Are We
on the
Gun Lap?**

February 2003 Contents

Volume 12, Number 2

- 3 PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH
The Offerings of Leviticus: Introduction
- 7 A READY ANSWER:
The Gun Lap
—Mike Ford
- 9 PROPHECY WATCH:
The Prophecies of Balaam (Part One)
—Richard T. Ritenbaugh
- 12 *Choosing the New Man (Part One)*
—Charles Whitaker
- 19 WORLD WATCH
—David C. Grabbe
- 20 BIBLE STUDY
The Parable of the Two Sons
—Martin G. Collins

About Our Cover



For years, church members have been exhorted to remember that we are on the gun lap. The Bible frequently uses the metaphor of a race to describe the Christian life. Are we coasting along or running?
(PictureQuest)

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The Offerings of *Leviticus*

Introduction

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Men marvel at the immense grandeur of the heavens and the awesome power displayed in multiple billions of stars lighting it as they silently soar through space. We gasp at its possible age, knowing that God is eternal and that He lived endlessly into the past before He brought forth His creation. The great distances involved between heavenly bodies speak of the breadth of His thinking. Everywhere we look, we see signs of breathtaking intelligence, both in the complexity and the order of His mind revealed in what He has made.

In Psalm 111:2, the psalmist asserts, “The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them.” Surely, we Christians do not take God’s creation for granted but diligently seek to know what He is like by observing what He has made. The Bible is perhaps His most accessible creation, giving written evidence of His eternal power and divinity. Each day, it is within reach, ready to be thoroughly examined. Like the towering heavens, His book is deep and broad. Great human minds have critically examined it, and thinking they have found flaws, they sometimes take it to task. However, those who boast against it are later found to have

been in error. They die, but the evidence of God in His creation continues unabated.

Paul later writes:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! “For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

God’s works *are* great—so great that our finite minds can grasp only the simpler things. Nevertheless, what we do grasp we are capable of appreciating, and sometimes we exalt in the intelligence, wisdom, and providence of our great God, thrilled that we can comprehend even a small part of His majestic mind.

The closer we scrutinize what God has made, the more perfect it appears. When we first examine manmade products, we may not see any flaws, but upon closer scrutiny, the imperfections become apparent. If we focus a magnifying glass or microscope on them, obvious imperfections leap out. The works of God, however, are different. The closer one looks, the greater the magnification used, the more wisdom, beauty, and perfection are revealed.

Multiple Uses

Reflect for a moment on how adept God is at creating materials with multiple uses. At times, it seems as though everything God creates has more than one function. Consider air. We seldom give it any thought, but we are breathing it in and out constantly. Each breath supports life because the oxygen in it goes into our lungs, and then our blood distributes it to every cell in our bodies. Yet, that same air also supports fire, which can kill us or be harnessed to serve us mightily. Do we not appreciate fire when the weather is cold? What if no air existed to support combustion or distribute heat? Besides not being able to breathe, we would have to live in cold houses, as well as without an innumerable number of items that require heat to make them.

In addition, air transfers heat to bring us warm weather, and simultaneously, it carries moisture, which falls as rain, enabling us to grow food. Moving a hand through it causes us to feel its resistance. It is so insubstantial as to appear as nothing, but the faster one moves an object through it, the more closely its molecules bunch together. When the air moves fast enough against a canvas sail, it will move a ship of great tonnage. It seems like magic because we cannot see the air that is propelling the vessel.

Air is a mass of tiny, invisible molecules. With

the proper application of a couple of laws, air will lift a huge 747 off the ground and transport us thousands of miles in a matter of hours. Thus, thousands of pounds of metal, fuel, rubber, and people fly through the sky supported by a gas so insubstantial by itself that it cannot bear even one person's weight.

In addition, air provides for the transmission of the fragrances of a savory meal, flowers, perfume—or the rank smell of garbage. It also conveys the sound of one's voice or makes it possible to hear beautiful music. No air, no sound.

This illustrates how lovingly providential and economical the mind of our great God is. By comparison, man is a vanity, a mere mortal likeness of the great Creator. Men must usually make one tool for each job he wants to do.

Much of what God creates has multipurpose use, and the closer we look, the more brilliance, majesty, intelligence, love, and power we see in what He makes. In a sermon, one church of God minister observed that a simple cell, the kind one could take from any part of the body, is about as complicated as New York City! Since he was not a biologist, his illustration may not be totally valid. However, it vividly demonstrates the vast difference between God and man.

The works of the
Lord are great,
studied by all
who have pleasure
in them
—Psalm 111:2

Using God's Multi-Use Word

God's Word is like His other creations. Like air, it too has multi-faceted uses. In fact, it seems as though its uses are inexhaustible. It does not matter whether one lives in the time of Abraham, Moses, David, Ezra, Christ, or now. Its directly stated words or their spirit will apply. God's Word is so infinite and pure that it is always valid, always true, always applicable, and always an inexhaustible source of guidance. Jesus says that God's "word is truth" (John 17:17). Solomon adds, "Every word of God is pure" (Proverbs 30:5), and David writes, "The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psalm 12:6).

Psalm 119:17-18 states, "Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep your word. Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law." The author of this psalm has the right idea. Asking God for guidance into His Word should be our request each day. Understand, however, that it is one thing to deem the Bible a great book because of its reputa-

tion—it is another to study the Bible soberly, seeking for instruction in righteousness. This we *must* do.

Solomon instructs us in Proverbs 2:1 on the necessary attitude toward it: "My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you. . . ." We should treat God's Word like treasure, as something precious. We should not treat it merely as something expensive but personally desired and used as our guide to life. Possessing it in this manner is within reach if we stretch ourselves or make sacrificial effort to have it. It is such a powerful tool that we should approach it as if it is the pearl of great price. Yet, this treasure is not something put in a safe-deposit vault and taken out only to look at on rare occasions. We are to seek it so that it can produce success and beneficial results in us. It is the most useful tool readily available to man to guide him in the most important area of life—his relationships with God and fellow man.

Verses 2-6 continue Solomon's thought:

Every
word of God
is pure.
—Proverbs 30:5

... so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

These verses add a great deal of understanding about how vigorous and persistent our efforts should be toward possessing the treasure of God's Word. The phrase "incline your ear" (verse 2) pictures a person cocking his head and cupping his ear with his hand while straining to hear—understand—more distinctly. It depicts exerting physical effort, and the word "heart" shows we must apply strenuous mental effort as well. Admittedly, God's Word is not always easy to understand. It is a tool that requires varying levels of skill to use. At times, we must research patiently and diligently in many areas of Scripture to get as comprehensive a picture of its teaching on a given subject as possible.

In verse 3, "cry out" more literally means "invite to come." It is admonishing us to be open-minded as we research its pages. Our heart easily deceives us through lifelong prejudices and biases because we have passively accepted them as true. When God's Word challenges them, we are often moved to defend them. "Lift up your voice" adds greater intensity to "cry out," showing that we should not be passive regarding these biases. We need to search into them sincerely, and if we find them to be wrong, reject them.

By reminding us that the things we consider to be valuable usually have to be laboriously dug for and brought up from the depths, verse 4 urges us to pursue the riches of God's Word seriously.

Verse 5 then introduces an exceedingly interesting and essential principle we need to know

for our growth. Proverbs 1:7 informs us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge," but Proverbs 2:5 adds that the fear of the Lord is also a goal in our search for wisdom. This is important to understanding "knowing God" because the thrust of the Bible reveals that we can only come to know Him by obeying Him, by striving to be morally perfect. The fear of the Lord is a major motivator in producing conformity to Him and His will. It helps us enormously to reverence Him deeply, and if we do, it will result in sincere obedience from the heart. In this context, the Bible essentially equates the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God.

Verse 6 confirms that God is the source of all ethical authority as well as the blessings that flow from obedience to the knowledge of Him. The preceding verses urge obedience to Him as the principle of life because it results in knowing Him. Therefore, the fear of the Lord, the knowledge of God, understanding, and wisdom are all part of the same spiritual "salad." They are inextricably linked as necessary for those who want to please God and live the abundant life He intends for His children. Though we can properly define them as technically different from one another, in reality, they cannot be separated. The glue that holds them together is obedience to what we already know while we strive to improve all of them together. Verse 9 to the end of the chapter expounds the benefits of our search for this treasure.

In Psalm 119, the author shows how many varied and distinct elements are in fact linked in order to comprise a whole generally called "the law." The same principle holds true of those elements of Proverbs 2:1-6. The psalmist asks God to deal bountifully with him (Psalm 119:17-18), so he can keep—obey—what he learned as he searched out each element. This shows that we need to consider the whole package in Proverbs 2:1-6 because each of these elements draws on the others for support while simultaneously producing fruit toward the others.

The fear
of the Lord
is the beginning
of knowledge.
—Proverbs 1:7

Biblical Imagery

II Timothy 3:16-17 proclaims, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." All Scripture is indeed inspired, but we do not necessarily find all Scripture inspiring. There are many reasons for this, but the reality

is that we tend to avoid portions of it. For some it might be the long lists of "begats"; for another it might be ancient history; and for a third, prophecy. Some parts of Scripture are more valuable to us at one time than another. However, it is certainly true that all of it is valuable according to our circumstance, and God has made it available when needed if we will tap into it. As

He says, we are to live by God's every word.

In an overall sense, the Bible is about government: God's, man's, and the self's. It shows how man rejects God's government through sin; how man's rule over others is abusive; and how man needs to learn to govern himself, or nothing will ever work for the good of all. Yet, it is also a book about faith, hope, love, and deliverance from our desperate circumstances, for each of these is important in how one responds to or uses government.

Romans 10:4 makes an important statement about what our objective in life should be: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Here, *end* does not mean "conclusion" as in "done away." If the law was done away, sin could not exist because Paul states, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Rather, *end* should be "goal" or "purpose," meaning that this verse names Christ as the object of the Bible. The law—indeed, the whole Bible—is aimed toward Him. He is its target. Paul is saying He is what the law produces; He personifies its intent.

Ephesians 4:13 adds considerably to this concept: "... till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." What a tall order! Yet, it is the supreme goal of life. He is the Standard, the personification of perfect faith, love, mercy,

kindness, government, etc. The purpose of the law is to guide us to an understanding of the height, breadth, and depth of the mind of Christ, which motivated His attitude and obedience. The law may seem to describe Him in broad strokes, but when one looks closer, beyond the mere statement of a law, we find a great deal more of His character and personality revealed.

The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is filled with imagery. *The American Heritage College Dictionary* defines *imagery* as "a set of mental pictures or images; the use of vivid or figurative language to represent objects, actions, or ideas." The *Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder* adds, "figurative illustration, especially as used by an author for particular effects."

An artist uses oils and watercolors to communicate a concept on canvas. Likewise, we think, write, and speak in word pictures. In this sense, the Bible is God's picture book, even though it is entirely words. An image's value lies in what it communicates to the mind. For instance, water is a frequent biblical image. The image of water conveys refreshment, sustenance, cleanliness, and life to everyone anywhere on earth. When used within a biblical context, water's imagery can lead a person to greater understanding because he can meditate upon all of these ideas to discern more specific spiritual, moral, and ethical applications of what God is communicating.

For Christ is the
end of the law
for righteousness
to everyone
who believes.

—Romans 10:4

Symbols and Types

We can also call the Bible's imagery "types," "symbols," "emblems," "tokens," "similes," "metaphors," or "allegories" because they communicate instruction. However, for simplicity, these articles will employ the general words "types" or "symbols." In the Bible, there are typical persons, things, events (including ceremonies and rites), and times. In general, the majority of them are typical of Christ, some aspect of His church as a body, or of us, His brethren.

In the passage beginning in Galatians 4:21, Paul draws upon the imagery of Old Testament personalities and their relationships to provide helpful instruction to Christians: "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?" He is essentially asking, "Do you understand the instruction contained in the following episode drawn from Genesis?" Alternatively, "Do you comprehend what is in the law and its application to a New Covenant Christian?"

Verses 22-24 then add:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar. . . .

He gives us this example and then specifically tells us that what is seemingly a simple historical narrative is actually an allegory. In other words, as important as the story is in its effect on the continuation of the promises, it also has continuous application in certain spiritual circumstances. What at first seems only to be an interesting historical reference has a dual use. Much of the

(continued on page 16)

Tell me, you
who desire to be
under the law
do you not hear
the law?

Galatians 4:21

The Gun Lap

I live in Georgia, where, last month, people were standing in line for up to three hours in a futile attempt to win the Power Ball lottery (with a pot nearing \$300 million), won ultimately by a West Virginian. Yes, even though we are in the midst of a slow economy, things continue to hum along, and times are pretty good.

Does the return of Christ seem distant to us?

A few years back, I took my son Cody to get his driver’s license. We arrived 30 minutes before the Highway Patrol office opened, and a dozen people already stood in line. Since not all needed a driving test, Cody eventually moved up to third in line. He finally took his test, which lasted less than 5 minutes, at 11:15, over two hours after the office opened. In just over two hours, the three uniformed officers tested exactly two people!

By this time, there were maybe 30 people in line. Many took a day off of work, brought folding chairs, umbrellas, books, and food. No one seemed particularly upset, they shrugged their shoulders at the ineptitude and laziness, as if to say, “Whaddya gonna do?”

The same kind of reaction occurs on a much larger scale. As the “War on Terrorism” grinds away, our liberties here at home seem to be dwindling fast with no guarantees that we will ever get them back. What does the general public do? A collective shrug and a sigh of “Whaddya gonna do?” No time to worry about these small disruptions—the newest release is out at Blockbuster.

Does the return of Christ seem far off to us?

Sooner or Later?

One reason given for the changes over the years in the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) was, “We wanted to make it easier on the people.” Doing away with most of the major doctrines may have given those who went along a perceived respite, but “Noth-

ing worthwhile comes easy,” so the modern proverb says.

A proverb is simply a popular saying, a maxim, truism, or adage. A proverb commonly tossed about by the Jews about 2,600 years ago ran, “The days are prolonged, and every vision fails” (Ezekiel 12:22). When the prophet Ezekiel wrote this, he was in captivity in Babylon. The city of Jerusalem had not yet fallen, and the Jews who remained in Judea did not seem to think it would. The prophecies of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and others were slow in being fulfilled, or so it seemed. Scoffing at these men and their inspired words had been going on for so long that it had become a proverb.

Sure, some of the nation was in captivity and the armies of Babylon were threatening the remainder, but “Whaddya gonna do? This is Jerusalem we’re talking about here, God’s chosen city! Get real, we will be fine, and anyway, life goes on.” In response, God tells Ezekiel:

“Tell them therefore, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.” But say to them, “The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it,” says the Lord GOD.’” (Ezekiel 12:23-25)

Jerusalem fell just a short time later. Because “sentence against an evil work [was] not executed speedily” (Ecclesiastes 8:11), the people deluded themselves into believing prophesied events would not occur at all or would happen so far in the future as to be of no concern.

*“Let us lay aside our every weight . . .
and run with endurance the race that is set before us.”
—Hebrews 12:1*

Are we so different today? The mainstream press reminds us frequently that the U.S.—even in a slow-down—has the world’s strongest economy, yet it produces little of tangible value. However, someone cooks my burger, and I cut his grass. America no longer has an economy based in manufacturing but in service. The cars we produce are only assembled here from components manufactured in other countries. We import much more than we export. American debt is sky high, and the stock market acts manic-depressive. It is a house of cards, liable to collapse at the first strong gust of a financial storm. Yet, fragile though it may be, the house of cards still stands.

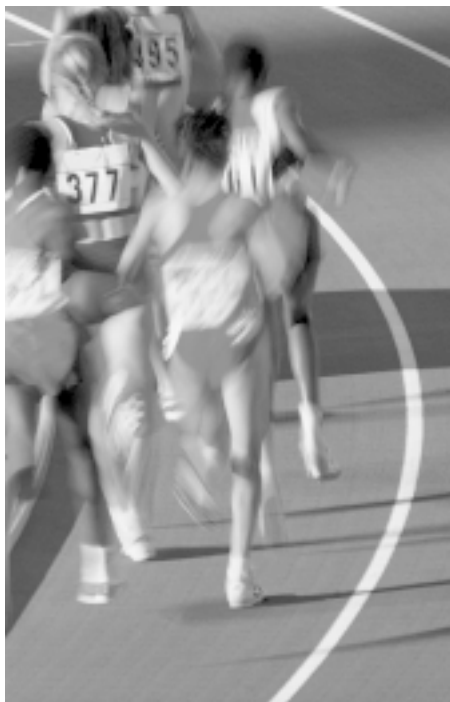
Are we like the ancient Israelites, who made sport of the prophets, failing to believe that destruction was near? What do we think when we hear a message about the coming Tribulation? Do sermons about prophecy make us uncomfortable?

Field Day

Herbert W. Armstrong often spoke of the church as being on the “gun lap.” Some may not be totally familiar with this metaphor lifted from track and field competition. I was an eager student of the sport when I went to Ambassador College. Because church youth could not participate in the “name” sports in high school (basketball and football) due to Friday night games, many of them gravitated to track, making the annual Field Day a big event. Students would participate in various races, against both each other and the school records.

The last events of the day were usually the mile events: the mile run, sometimes a two-mile run, and finally, the mile relay. These races comprised four laps around the quarter-mile track. Many times, scores were close, and the team that won the long distance events might well win the meet. Runners would be giving their all for these races.

In the mile run, as the lead runner completed his third lap, an official would fire a starter’s pistol, notifying everyone that one lap remained. The firing of this shot would always set the crowd off, yelling wildly for their favorite, and of course, the runners would reach down for that last bit of energy in an effort to win. The gun lap is only a quarter of a mile. The finish line is in sight, and the runner knows exactly how far he has to go to get there. He can expend everything he has, knowing that he can collapse on the other side of that line, his race completed.



The gun lap is a great metaphor for the spiritual race we are in—with some notable differences. We cannot physically see a finish line, and we do not know how long this last lap will last. While a runner might pace himself early in a race, when the gun lap started, he went full out. Honestly, it is very hard to have that kind of spiritual attitude all the time. We get tired, bogged down in the daily struggle. Trials beset us. Sometimes, it feels as if we are running in quicksand, making no headway, and slowly sinking. Yet, “Nothing worthwhile comes easy.” We may not see a physical finish line up ahead of us, but we know what our prize will be. That is the great motivating factor: eternal life in the God Family!

Whaddya Gonna Do?

How do we keep from developing this “Whaddya gonna do” attitude and instead, “run [not walk] with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1)? How do we avoid the “We’ve got more time” syndrome? The following three points will help to answer these questions.

First, *we must learn the lessons of history*. As Solomon says, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The apostle Peter reminds of this very thing in II Peter 3:1-4:

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the

fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”

The people mocked Ezekiel when he told them that captivity was coming. We have all heard this or that one predicting that we have five, ten, twenty, or more years before Christ’s return. Some have probably even said, “Where is the promise of His coming?” or something similar. Of themselves, these things fulfill prophecy, proving that we are in the last days.

In I Timothy 4:1, Paul says, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith.” Have we not seen this very thing happen? The firm knowledge and belief that we are in the last days can help sustain us as we “run.” Knowing that the gun has fired and

(continued on page 15)

The Prophecies

Part One

When thinking of prophecy, we usually call to mind God's prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the "minor" prophets. We may consider the great prophecies of the New Testament: Jesus' many prophecies, including the Olivet Prophecy; Paul's prophecies in I Corinthians 15, I Thessalonians 4-5, II Thessalonians 2, and II Timothy 3, among others; and of course, the entire book of Revelation. We may also recall that both Isaac and Jacob uttered prophecies, as did Moses, Samuel, David, and many others.

But do we ever consider that God allocates three chapters of the book of Numbers to the prophecies of Balaam, a Mesopotamian soothsayer?

Balaam son of Beor is definitely an oddball among the prophets. He is not an Israelite but apparently a Syrian who lived in Pethor, a town situated near the Euphrates just south of Carchemish (Numbers 22:5). His prophecies result from an attempt to curse Israel in exchange for the money and honor of a frightened king of Moab, Balak son of Zippor (verses

2-7). To make matters worse, unlike any other prophet, he leads the Israelites into sin and brings a curse upon them, succeeding in getting 24,000 of them killed.

Since that time, his name has been a watchword denoting evil and avaricious character. As early as Deuteronomy 23:4-5, he is shown as an enemy of God and Israel and degraded as a hired mercenary. Joshua positively notes his death at the hand of Israelites (Joshua 13:22), and he also repeats Balaam's overthrow by God in a list of His victories for Israel (Joshua 24:9-10). Nehemiah and Micah recall him to the people of their days as an evil man whom God defeated (Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5).

The New Testament mentions Balaam three times, all negatively. Both Peter and Jude describe him as the personification of greed in using religion for personal gain (II Peter 2:15; Jude 11). Revelation 2:14 credits him with "the doctrine of Balaam," which is inducing others to sin, specifically to idolatry and sexual immorality.

Certainly, Balaam was no paragon of virtue. Yet, as unrighteous as he was, his prophecies remain in God's Word—and they are true! Why?

Background and Structure

To understand Balaam's prophecies properly, we must delve into his background and the situation at the time. Balaam himself, biblical historians believe, descended from a line of diviners whose reputation for cursing had spread over the whole region. Balak's delegation to Balaam had to travel about 400 miles to petition the soothsayer at his home (Numbers 22:5).

Scholars surmise soothsaying to be Balaam's "family business" from his wide reputation as well as the meaning of his and his father's names. *Balaam* means "devourer of the people" or simply "devourer" or "destroyer," a fitting name for someone whose livelihood depends on cursing various people(s). His father's name, *Beor*, means "burning," another allusion to destruction.

of Balaam

Further, the Bible never calls him a “prophet” or “seer” as it does true prophets of God, but it names him a “soothsayer” (Joshua 13:22; see Isaiah 3:2, where “diviner” is antithetical to “prophet”). It is widely supposed that Balaam was a *bârû*, a Mesopotamian priest-diviner, who used various dreams, omens, and auguries as part of his trade.

How do we reconcile this with his claim in Numbers 22:18 that the LORD was his God? We have two choices. The first is that Balaam, a confirmed polytheist, knew of the true God by reputation (whether by His works on Israel’s behalf in Egypt—see Joshua 2:8-11—or from local folklore, as the cities of Haran and Nahor, associated with Abraham, were located nearby) and professed devotion to Him to enhance his chances of receiving an oracle. The second and more cynical option is that he was trying to convince Balak’s emissaries that, as an intimate of Israel’s God, he had the pull to change His mind about cursing His own people, no matter what restrictions He put on him. From what we know of Balaam’s general character, the second seems more likely.

Another necessary piece of background information is that this scenario takes place in the months just before Israel’s entrance into the Promised Land. Moses was about to die, and before he did, he wrote the book of Deuteronomy in preparation for Israel’s taking possession of Canaan. In a similar vein, the content of Balaam’s prophecies reiterate the main points of God’s promises to Israel, reminding the people that God was fulfilling them before their eyes. In addition, the sequel of these events—Balaam’s suggestion to the Midianites that they tempt Israel to dally with Moab’s women and idols—provided one last test of the Israelites, to prove the faithful and purge the sinful.

Finally, the structure of these three chapters in Numbers is important. Numbers 22 consists of Balak’s delegation, Balaam’s response, the trip to Moab—during which the Angel of

the Lord blocks his path three times and Balaam’s donkey speaks—and Balak’s reception of the diviner at the border. These events, of course, set up the prophecies in the next two chapters, but they also highlight the two main themes of the story.

First, the narrative often repeats the admonition, “The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak” (Numbers 22:38; see verses 18, 20, 35). This is the condition God puts on Balaam when He allows him to go to Balak, and it is reiterated throughout the oracles (Numbers 23:3, 12, 26; 24:13). This constraint of Balaam, supposedly the world’s most powerful cursing diviner, directs the glory to God and certifies that His purpose through Israel could not be hindered.

Second, Balaam’s encounter with the Angel brings out the other theme: The supposedly “spiritual” person is often blind to what the simple see plainly. Similarly, John the Baptist tells the Pharisees, “God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8), meaning that Abraham’s real children are those who live as Abraham did (John 8:39; Romans 4:16; 9:7; Galatians 3:29). The Angel’s explanation is telling:

Behold, I have come out to stand [margin, *as an adversary*] against you, because your way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live. (Numbers 22:32-33)

Balaam replies, “I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me” (verse 34). Like the majority of people in the world, Balaam, a professing religious person, could not see God at work, not even when He was personally opposing him! Yet, the dumb donkey, a lowly beast of burden, saw God at work and deferred to Him, and by its submission, the donkey made it possible for “blind”

Balaam to see (compare Isaiah 42:18-20; Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18; John 9:39-41; Revelation 3:17-18).

This latter theme is vital to understanding Balaam’s prophecies. God gives them through blind Balaam to open the eyes of Balak, the Israelites, and Bible readers down the centuries to what His purpose is.

First Prophecy

Balak puts Balaam to work almost immediately upon arriving. The diviner has Balak build seven altars, on each of which he offers a bull and a ram (Numbers 23:1). The bull and ram are the prime animals to offer because of their value, and the number seven has a long history of being especially propitious. By these offerings, Balaam is trying to ensure his ability to bribe a curse out of God.

God, of course, will not be bribed (Deuteronomy 10:17), so He puts a blessing on Israel in Balaam’s mouth:

For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: There! A people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his! (Numbers 23:9-10)

Balaam was indeed standing in a high place of Baal at the time (Numbers 22:41), and evidently, from this height he could see the whole camp. What he saw was an immense mass of people that he could not begin to count, a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 13:16: “And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered” (see also Genesis 15:5). Balaam’s oracle suggests that this growth would continue, something Balak did not want to hear (Numbers 23:11).

In saying that Israel was “a people dwelling alone,” Balaam notes its separation by covenant from the rest of the world and to God. This recalls God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, in which He prophesies Abraham’s offspring returning to Canaan as a people (verses 13-16), and certainly, it alludes to the covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17. This separation by covenant is ratified anew at Mount Sinai: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6; see Deuteronomy 7:6-11).

The soothsayer’s final words are a wish that he, a Gentile having no part in the covenant, could be included under it. The “righteous” are those who keep the terms of the covenant, which is obedience to God. His words of blessing may allude to Genesis 12:3, where God promises Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you.” If he cannot join them, Balaam at least desires the blessings that come from blessing them!

Second Prophecy

Balak tries again, taking Balaam to a field atop Mount Pisgah, where he could see only the outermost part of the camp (Numbers 23:13). His rationale for this is that Balaam could not curse Israel while faced with the mystical power of the whole people. If he could see just a part of Israel, the odds would be more even and a curse more likely. So, the diviner again offers a bull and a ram on seven different altars (verse 14).

In both the first two prophecies is an interesting phrase: “God [or, *the LORD*] met Balaam” (verses 4, 16). This is a very personal and close form of communication. How God met him is unknown, but it is obvious that he knew God was present and giving him the words to speak to Balak (verses 5, 16). In the next chapter, the narrative says explicitly that “the Spirit of God

came upon him” to inspire his next prophecy (Numbers 24:2).

We have a hard time understanding why God would work this closely with such an evil, unconverted man yet never appear to us or even seem to inspire us with fitting words, a skillful reply, or an instruction on what to do in a difficult circumstance. However, we must understand that God was in this man making a great witness of His power and glory. As hard as he tried, not even the most famous diviner of his day could curse God’s people, and the word of Israel’s blessings and their prophesied conquests gave notice that God’s plan would go forward despite the efforts of the surrounding nations. Thus, for its impact, God deigns to speak through an unworthy vessel.

Balaam’s second oracle declares:

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a King is among them. God brings them out of Egypt; he has strength like a wild ox.

For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, ‘Oh, what God has done!’ Look, a people rises like a lioness, and lifts itself up like a lion; it shall not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain. (Numbers 23:19-24)

In the first paragraph, the soothsayer admits his powerlessness before God. Since at least the days of Abraham, God had been foretelling

what He would do for His people, and there was no way He would renege on it now that it was about to unfold! On such a pivotal part of His plan, God would not be forced or cajoled to change His mind.

The first half of verse 21 has had many wondering how it could be true, since the entire account of Israel in the wilderness is a sad commentary on how sinful Israel was! The idea here is not that God does not see their sin—the Pentateuch is full of God’s observations about their iniquities—but that their wickedness has not reached the point that He would be persuaded to curse them.

Certainly, He would not be bribed into cursing His own people by their—and thus His—enemies! For, as the verse goes on to say, He is with Israel as their King! Why would He curse His own kingdom and people? And why, after going to the trouble of leading them out of Egypt with such a strong hand (verse 22), would He allow them to be defeated just before reaching their destination? This interpretation becomes clear in verse 23: There would be no sorcery or divination against Israel because of what God had done for them.

The final verse highlights Israel as a lion, a symbol of regal power and predatory mastery. This is an allusion to Jacob’s prophecy concerning the tribes of Israel in Genesis 49:9: “Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?” In this case, Judah stands for the whole nation (as it later came to rule all Israel in David). A nation often resembles its leadership—and vice versa—so it can be said that under God’s inspiration Balaam saw Israel through the lens of the royal tribe of Judah. This is especially interesting in light of the description of God as Israel’s King in Numbers 23:21 and the upcoming prophecy of a great King to come.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Choosing the NEW MAN

Part One

Have you ever noticed how many different men God mentions in His Word? Not fellows like Adam, David, John, and Paul, but the *outward* man and the *inward* one (II Corinthians 4:16), the *inner* man (Ephesians 3:16) and the *natural* one (I Corinthians 2:14). Men like the *first* man (I Corinthians 15:45,7) and his cronies: the *foolish* man (James 2:20), the *corruptible* man (Romans 1:23), the *wretched* man (Romans 7:24) and the *dead* man (Revelation 16:3). Or, men like the *Second Man* (I Corinthians 15:47) and His friends: the *righteous* man (I Timothy 1:9), the *perfect* man (Ephesians 4:13), the *devout* man (Acts 10:2), the *just* man (Acts 10:22), the *wise* man (James 3:13), the *prudent* man (Acts 13:7, KJV), the *good* man (Acts 11:24) and—more difficult to see—the *hidden* man (I Peter 3:4).

Do not forget those three men God mentions scores of times: *every* man, *any* man, and *no* man! In addition, there are many, many more—just in the New Testament. In fact, a Bible study organized around any of these men can be quite profitable.

But for now, we will focus on just two men, the *old* man (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9) and his counterpart, the *new* man (Ephesians 2:15; 4:24; Colossians 3:10). The apostle Paul, more than the other New Testament writers, places quite a bit of stress on them—they really deserve our study. Our approach will be to focus on the new man and discuss the old one only incidentally.

God Creates the New Man

Paul makes this clear when he tells us that God “*create[d]* in Himself one new man from the two” (Ephesians 2:15). Writing about reconciliation, he defines these *two* men in verse 11: physical Israelites (the “Circumcision”) and Gentiles (the “Uncircumcision”). Just two chapters later, he reiterates that God created the new man; he commands Christians to “put on the new man which was *created* according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Finally, this time in his letter to the Colossian and Laodicean Christians, Paul makes the same point; he tells us to “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of [God] who *created* him” (Colossians 3:10).

Clearly, God *creates* the new man in His own image. This is an important starting-point in understanding what Paul means by the term *new man* for two reasons:

It strongly argues against the false doctrine that Christians are “born again” when they “accept” Christ. While various denominations hold somewhat different beliefs, a common thread is that the new man, as well as the *inward* (II Corinthians 4:16) and *inner* men (Ephesians 3:16), are metaphoric designations for the same thing, a *spiritual entity which resides within Christians*. This entity, they submit, is an invisible, ethereal, eternal being that is the product of the spiritual birth Christ mentions in John 3:3-8.

In short, Protestants believe that the new man is *born* within Christians at the time they are “born again.”

A twig this is not! It is a misunderstanding of a major truth in God’s Word. It leads those who subscribe to it into one error after another. Later, we will show how this misunderstanding of the new man’s nature leads some to believe that, once they “accept” Christ, they are saved then and there forever—that is all there is to it.

For now, notice how Protestant theologians use this misunderstanding to support another lie—that heaven is the reward of the saved. They interpret Christ’s statement to Nicodemus that “[N]o man has ascended to heaven” (John 3:13) to mean that no *natural* man (I Corinthians 2:14) or *old* man (Romans 6:6) has done so. While they correctly understand these two men to represent the unconverted person, they incorrectly believe Christ was not speaking of the new man. They believe that the new man, whom they confidently proclaim resides within them as a separate spiritual entity, ascends to heaven when they die, there “to be with the Lord.” In other words, they understand Christ’s words in John 3:13 to refer to the “old man” only.

This simply does not square with Paul’s teaching. He sees the new man as created, not born. In fact, not even once does he refer to the new man as born—much less “born again”! The Greek verb translated “create” or “created” in Ephesians 2:15; 4:24; and Colossians 3:10 is *ktizo*, **not** *gennao*. *Ktizo* can mean “to create” (or as a noun, “creator”), “to form,” “to make,” “to found,” or “to fabricate.” New Testament writers use *ktizo* only fourteen times, and never does it refer to or even imply birth or conception. The idea that the new man is *born* is not consonant with the Scriptures as a whole.

However, God’s use of *ktizo* tells us something vital about the new man. The most specific sense of this Greek verb is “to found *originally*.” *Ktizo*, whose stated or understood subject in Scripture is *always* God, refers to “the founding of a place, a city or colony” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

Consider this nuance of meaning as it relates to the new man. A newly founded city or colony is almost always small. If it matures, it will be through the continued efforts of its founder and its rank-and-file citizens over many years. The imagery is important: *The new man, when first established in us by God, is immature and inexperienced.* As we will see later, we have a responsibility to *cooperate* with God, the new man’s founder, to ensure that he grows and matures.

The fact that God creates the new man is

important for a second reason: **It argues that the term *new man* is synonymous with *new creation*** (KJV, “new creature”). Paul uses this term in Galatians 6:15 and II Corinthians 5:17. We will look into these two passages later.

The Renewal of Our Mind

Let us turn our attention to a second truth about the new man. Once created in us by God, how does the new man mature and grow?

Remember, Paul refers to the new man in Colossians 3:10 as a man “*renewed* in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.” “Renewed,” translated here in the passive voice, comes from the Greek verb *anakainoo*. It means “to make new” in the sense of “to make different.” The new man is *different* from the old one in that he bears the image of God!

Paul uses a similar verb in Ephesians 4:22-23, where he asks that “you . . . be *renewed* in the spirit of your mind.” That Greek verb, *ananeoo*, again translated in the passive voice, means “to renew” or “to renovate.” Through years of living Satan’s way of life before conversion, our mind grows corrupt; even the best parts of it become “like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

The apostle provides more details about this renewal process in Romans 12:1-2. Here, he uses the same phraseology—the renewal of a person’s mind—in a context that makes his meaning crystal clear: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The noun “renewing” (*anakainosis*) is related to the verb *anakainoo*. Like *anakainoo*, it carries the sense of renovation to a *different*, rather than a younger, state. This attests again that the new man is different from the old.

We have noted that Paul uses the verb *renew* in the passive voice in Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:22-23. In Romans 12:2, the gerund *renewing* is also part of a passive structure, “be transformed.” A “problem” of the passive voice is that it does not tell us the actor of a verb, except through the use of an optional prepositional phrase. For example, “The stone was thrown,” although a complete sentence, does not tell us *who* threw the

stone unless we tack on the phrase *by John*.

We know the renewed man is different from the old, but who is the actor? Who does the renewing Paul mentions so often? God? Humans? Angels? Romans 12:1-2 tells us:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

In verse 1, Paul issues a call for action: He pleads for us to present ourselves to God as holy. In verse 2, he tells how, in a general sense, we must do this. We become holy by transforming our mind through a renewal process. In saying this, Paul establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between our mind's renewal (cause) and our transformation (effect). Renewal causes transformation.

Notice something else about verse 2: In it, Paul is doing far more than just telling us *how* to be transformed; he is exhorting us to carry out that transformation. God does not renew our mind! If God, by fiat, simply caused us to be transformed by renewing our mind, we would need to take no action whatsoever. God would simply renew our minds, and as an effect of His action, we would be transformed. If that were how it worked, Paul's exhortation to us would be useless, senseless, and illogical.

No, *we* are to renew our mind. As we do so day by day, we invariably experience a transformation of character, such that we become less and less "conformed to this world." It comes as no surprise, of course, that growth to holiness requires effort on our part. The apostle Peter issues a call for holiness in I Peter 1:16, "Be holy, for I am Holy" (see Leviticus 11:44). Notice the context. Peter says we are to be "holy in all [our] conduct" (I Peter 1:15), that is, our way of life. How? "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts [those of the old man], as in your ignorance" (verses 13-14). Clearly, Peter exhorts us to become holy by changing our conduct. In following chap-

ters, he specifically defines holy conduct for servants, wives, and husbands.

The relationship between holiness and conduct is not just a New Testament teaching. The Old Testament says the same thing. For example, Leviticus 19 clearly connects the holiness we are to seek (verse 2) with our conduct. The chapter outlines the moral and ethical conduct God requires of holy people in a number of areas, such as business and sexual matters.

Of course, all this does not deny or belittle the part God plays in our individual growth to holiness. Notice Romans 12:1 again. We attain holiness "by the mercies of God." In reality, God has a huge role to play. As we showed before, God establishes the new man in the first place. We could never do that. In addition, He provides vital help on a day-by-day basis through His Holy Spirit, a vital role, as Paul makes clear when he reminds us that God "saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

How We Renew Our Minds

The most basic way in which we renew our minds is by obeying God's law, the perfect reflection of His character and nature. Notice how consistently Paul describes the new man in terms of the behavior and conduct God expects from him. In fact, wherever Paul broaches the subject of the new man, a discussion of a Christian's proper moral and ethical conduct is never far away.

For instance, Paul says in Titus 3:8, "This is a faithful saying . . . that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works." Here, only three verses after his discussion of the mind's renewal by the Holy Spirit, Paul stresses the importance of good works. He takes the same approach in Colossians 3:10, commanding us to "put on the new man," and just two verses later, he begins to tell us how that new man should act: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering . . ." (verse 12). Here, Paul begins a discussion of Christian conduct that continues almost to the end of the book.

However, it is in Ephesians 4 that Paul most clearly connects the new man with Christian conduct. He begins his discussion by contrasting the old man with the new. Notice how he defines the old man in terms of conduct—our past way of life: "Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man" (Ephesians 4:22).

Paul uses the same terminology in Romans 6:6,

associating the old man with a Christian's past lifestyle. He reminds us "that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Just a few verses later, Paul states the effect of the old man's death in terms of conduct: "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body" (verse 12).

In Romans 6, a lengthy discussion of baptism, Paul does not break his train of thought by elaborating on the way of life of the old man nor of the new. He elaborates on both ways of life elsewhere. Yet, in verse 4, he makes a significant overview statement, exhorting us to "walk in newness of life."

What is this new walk of life? In Ephesians 4:24, Paul commands us to "put on the new man," and in the very next verse, he begins to give instructions in a Christian's moral and ethical conduct: "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor" (verse 25). These instructions continue virtually to the end of the epistle.

Paul uses this opportunity to define precisely what he so beautifully summarizes as "walk[ing] in newness of life" in Romans 6:4. For example, he appeals to Christians to avoid irresponsible anger in Ephesians 4:26, to turn from stealing (verse 28), and to shun "corrupt communication" (verse 29). Notice how often he uses the word "walk" in Ephesians 5: "walk in love" (verse 2); "walk as children of light" (verse 8); "walk circumspectly" (verse 15). He is describing the walk of the new man.

The Christian walk, the way of life of the new man, is a pervasive theme of Ephesians. Even in its first three chapters—the so-called "doctrinal" ones—Paul contrasts the walk of the old man with that of the new. In Ephesians 2:2, he speaks of our past conduct, "in which [we] once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience."

But, if Satan works with the old man, God works with the new one, whom He created: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (verse 10). Paul introduces the "Christian living" section of the book (Ephesians 4-6) by beseeching us to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Ephesians 4:1).

The new man walks the walk of a Christian, obeying God's law. He conducts himself according to God's Word.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Charles F. Whitaker

(continued from page 8)

the return of Christ is imminent should prod us to keep moving. We should also make a point of not allowing ourselves to become distracted by the naysayers—their opinions will have absolutely no effect on the fulfillment of prophecy.

Second, ***we must not confuse our priorities.*** There is nothing wrong with making a good living by hard work and improving one's situation in life. The apostle John says in III John 2, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." However, he also writes, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15).

If our focus is truly on God, the financial blessings will come, and we can enjoy them. However, we must not make the pursuit of money a higher priority than it should be. We must continually examine ourselves, getting rid of anything that reeks of Laodiceanism (Revelation 3:17). We can always spot that attitude in someone else, it seems, but can we see it in ourselves? As the prophet Amos says to ancient Israel, "Woe to you who are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1). His words apply equally well to us today.

Third, ***we must live by faith.*** Many of the changes that occurred in the WCG involved removing faith from our spiritual arsenal. If one's boss requires him to work on the Sabbath or risk termination, he needs to exercise no faith if Sabbath observance is no longer required. No faith is needed to face the children's teachers to explain why they would be out of school for two weeks to attend a religious convention when the holy days are done away with! If one is once saved, always saved, no faith is necessary for obedience to God's commandments.

What about expecting Christ to return soon? Now, that requires faith! The prophet Habakkuk, serving God just before Ezekiel's time, foretold of Judah's fall, as the Chaldeans began their relentless advance toward them. He highlights the need for faith in times like these:

I [Habakkuk] will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am reproved. Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:1-4)

(continued on page 18)

(continued from page 6)

Old Testament fits this usage, providing us with valuable spiritual instruction through its examples.

Even some books are typical. For example, Genesis provides the foundation for many important things to come and states God's overall purpose. Chapters 1-2 tell us of re-creation and of mankind's responsibility to dress and keep it. Dressing and keeping has as much to do with God's spiritual purpose as it does maintaining the earth. These chapters also lay the groundwork for marriage, which in itself contains spiritual instruction within it. Chapter 3 tells us how this world became as it is and gives the first hint of Christ's sacrifice.

In chapter 12, God's spiritual plan clearly gets underway and introduces us to Abraham, a type of the Father. As the history progresses, it shows us Isaac as a type of the Son, Rebecca as a type of the church, and Jacob as a typical overcomer. A bit later, Joseph is shown as a type of Christ, a Forerunner and Savior of His people. As the book ends, Israel descends into Egypt, the land of sin, unaware of their danger because of their seemingly good life and prosperity.

As the story continues in Exodus, the pattern of spiritual redemption is acted out. As the book opens, the Israelites are aware they are living in sin and slavery, and they appeal for a deliverer.

God supplies him in Moses, a type of Christ as Deliverer, Lawgiver, and Judge.

Leviticus, through the sacrifices and their attendant ceremonies, deals with access to God, devotion, and holiness. To some, this is a mysterious and utterly useless book. However, when its intent is understood, it becomes a veritable spiritual diamond mine to those seeking to know God, our Savior, and the many requirements to follow in His footsteps.

Numbers reveals typical patterns of experiences and trials we must face and overcome during our Christian pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. We see how people wilted under the pressures of their wilderness wandering and how God's leadership and judgment was expressed in His reactions. In addition, the spiritual leadership of Moses and Aaron emerges in their handling of and growth in bearing their responsibilities.

Deuteronomy contains final instructions and the recalling of many events and their meanings before Israel entered the Promised Land. These numerous types are a rich source of wisdom and understanding, and we have only scratched the surface of the first five books! As Paul did in Galatians 4, we can find valuable spiritual lessons when we look beyond the story on the surface.

And the LORD God
took the man,
and put him into
the garden of Eden
to dress it and to
keep it.
—Genesis 2:15

The Value of Old Covenant Ritual

This series will focus on the book of Leviticus and specifically on several of the sacrificial offerings that have important bearing on our Christian lives. We can learn a great deal about devotion, commitment, holiness, suffering, sacrifice, perfection, righteousness, the surrender of the self, and knowing God. This section of the Bible has been long neglected by far too many Christians due to unfamiliarity with the spiritual purposes of the offerings.

We must never forget that Jesus clearly states in Matthew 5:17-18, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." God inspired Jesus to say this for very good reasons, perhaps thousands of reasons that can be contained in one brief statement: They are not destroyed or done away with because they still have practical spiritual application. They are still useful for living the Christian life, being in the image of God, and knowing

Him. To destroy them would constitute a great loss, for which we would be the less.

Hebrews 9:1, 8-9; 10:1 augment this thought:

Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. . . . [T]he Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience. . . . For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

Scripture clearly teaches that the Old Covenant ceremonies are symbolic of essential New Covenant spiritual truths. Further, the author reinforces this by saying they are "a shadow of good things to come." The verb "having" in

Do not think
that I came to
destroy the Law
or the Prophets.
I did not come
to destroy
but to fulfill.
—Matthew 5:17

Hebrews 10:1 is a present active participle, expressing continuous or repeated action. This means that the Old Covenant ordinances of divine service and the sanctuary are still valid and effective teaching vehicles.

Where there is a shadow there must also be a reality. In this instance, the reality is the life of Christ—the reality we are to strive to emulate as closely as we can, “as dear children,” as Paul puts it, to be “a sweet-smelling aroma” to God (Ephesians 5:1-2).

In Luke 24:27, Jesus buttresses this concept while instructing the two men on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection: “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Jesus draws teaching from the books of Moses to show parallels with His own life.

Be careful not to make the careless mistake of thinking of the offerings as childish, insignificant, primitive, or barbaric. Undoubtedly, they are different from what we are culturally familiar. However, these quoted scriptures make it clear that God intended all along to use them as

teaching vehicles. To those under the Old Covenant, the offerings looked forward to what would occur. We look back on what occurred and accept the spiritual intent of the teaching as applicable to us under the New Covenant.

The sacrifices of Leviticus stood at the heart of the worship of God under the Old Covenant. The overall image we may retain from them may indeed be of an endless number of bulls, sheep, goats, and birds slaughtered and burned with profound solemnity on a smoking altar. However, there is absolutely no doubt that they prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in His death by crucifixion. Less understood is that they also foreshadowed the depth of His consecrated devotion to God and man in His life. Even less understood is how they demonstrate the life we also are to exemplify as living sacrifices.

Is not being living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, and not being conformed to this world but being transformed by the renewing of our minds into the image of Christ our Redeemer, to be at the center of our lives once we are redeemed (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:13)?

Be you therefore
followers of God,
as dear children
—Ephesians 5:1

Follow the Leader!

Hebrews 2:10-11 forcefully reminds us of this:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

The word translated “author” is from the Greek *archegos*. It means leader,” “pioneer,” “forerunner,” or “captain.” It can even mean “trailblazer” or “scout.” An *archegos* is one who goes before, doing things with the intent that others should follow. Christ fits all these descriptions. He is our example, and Paul says to the Corinthians to follow him, Paul, as he followed Christ. Did not Jesus Christ and His apostles lead intensely sacrificial lives, representing God in submission to Him and in service to the brethren and the world?

Paul writes in Romans 8:28-31:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His pur-

pose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Here is God’s purpose plainly stated. Those He calls are to be conformed to the image of His Son, clearly tied to the theme of creation where God says in Genesis 1:26, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” We have a small part in this greatest of God’s creative works. We must yield to that purpose. We must surrender to it and allow its power to carry us along to perfection. But it requires faith, conviction of its rightness, and devotion to its requirements. This creative process requires sacrificing our former lives with their sinful desires in submission to the details of God’s purpose for us. This is our small part in this vast operation ongoing already for about 6,000 years.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” In I

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—Romans 8:28

Let us make man
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Genesis 1:26

Corinthians 15:31, he adds to this concept of sacrifice: "I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." How do we crucify ourselves? Every time we submit in obedience to God's instruction as part of His purpose rather than unresistingly following the dictates of human nature, we are sacrificing ourselves to God and His purpose.

In the sacrifices of Leviticus, there are many types. Even though we are members of the body of Jesus Christ, we cannot conform to every aspect of every offering. The reason is that they are not all intended for us individually. All of

them will give us insight into Christ's character, but not all of them will apply directly to us. Yet, for those that do, we must strive to understand their practical applications and apply them to our lives.

We can mine a great deal of useful and sensible instruction in Christian living from the sacrifices of Leviticus. Next month, we shall begin to explore the burnt offering.

In Christian love,

John W. Ritenbaugh

READY ANSWER ➤

The Gun Lap

(continued from page 8)

Notice in verse 1 that he is standing watch, as a watchman or shepherd should do. Part of the faith we need should be in our leadership. Many of us, having been burned by unfaithful men, have developed a distrust of the ministry. But we cannot run this race alone; we need coaching, motivation, and leadership. We have to put our faith in the men God has led us to follow.

"Write the vision and make it plain . . . that he may run who reads it" (verse 2) fits nicely with the gun-lap analogy, as it conveys a sense of urgency. The vision is plain to those God is working with. Do we have the faith that God is indeed working with us? Do we have faith to run with the message He has revealed?

In verse 3, God says there is an "appointed time" for these events. God has a timetable to which we are just not privy. Do we believe Him? "Though [the prophecy] tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come." We must fight against the urge to become impatient be-

cause it seems as if Christ "is delaying [H]is coming" (Matthew 24:48; compare Ezekiel 12:25).

Then in verse 4, Habakkuk brings it all down to living by faith—faith in God from God. *The Amplified Bible* renders the clause immediately before this as, "Look at the proud; his soul is not straight or right within him." These are people who look to their own understanding, who have forsaken God's laws, and they will not survive the coming time of trouble because they have no faith. The righteous—those who are upright because they live according to God's laws—will live. Christ, when He asks in Luke 18:8, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" implies that few faithful will be left.

So, what will it be? This is our gun lap! Do we coast along, shrugging our shoulders, sighing in fatigue and apathy—or pick up the pace with a renewed sense of urgency and faith? "Whaddya gonna do?"

—Mike Ford



The letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 describe not just eras but also attitudes and traits present at all times in the church of God. As Jesus Christ says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Order your copy of "The Seven Churches" Bible Study Series booklet today!

For address information, see page 2.

Catholicism's Decline



According to *Index of Leading Catholic Indicators: The Church Since Vatican II* by Kenneth C. Jones, the Council of Vatican II has proved to be disastrous in its attempt to reconcile Catholicism and modernity. Jones' statistics illustrate Catholicism's decline in the United States since 1965:

- While the number of U.S. priests more than doubled to 58,000 between 1930 and 1965, it has since fallen to 45,000. By 2020, only 31,000 priests will be left, and more than half of them will be over 70.
- In 1965, 1,575 new priests were ordained in the U.S. In 2002, the number was 450. In 1965, only 1% of U.S. parishes were without a priest. Today, 3,000 parishes lack priests, 15% of all U.S. parishes.
- Between 1965 and 2002, the number of seminarians dropped from 49,000 to 4,700, a decline of over 90%. Two-thirds of the 600 seminaries operating in 1965 have since closed.
- In 1965, there were 180,000 Catholic nuns, but now there are only 75,000—and their average age is 68. In 1965, there were 104,000 teaching nuns, and today, there are

8,200, a decline of 94%.

- Almost half of all Catholic high schools in the U.S. have closed since 1965, and student population has fallen from 700,000 to 386,000.

Though the number of U.S. Catholics has risen by 20 million since 1965, Jones' statistics show that the power of Catholic belief and devotion is not nearly what it was:

- Catholic marriages have declined by one-third since 1965, while annual annulments have soared from 338 in 1968 to 50,000 in 2002.
- A 1958 Gallup Poll reported that three out of four Catholics attended church on Sundays. Recently, the University of Notre Dame found that only one out of four now attend.
- Among Catholics:
 - ... 53% believe one can have an abortion and remain a good Catholic.
 - ... 65% believe that Catholics may divorce and remarry.
 - ... 77% believe a good Catholic need not attend Sunday mass.

U.S. Religion

A Pew Global Attitudes Project analysis concludes that the United States is the most religious of the world's wealthy nations, and this trait makes it more akin to poorer countries than to other industrial societies. Wealthier nations tend to place less importance on religion, with the exception of the U.S. showing the powerful influence of the Catholic Church and her many daughters. Six out of 10 Americans say religion plays a "very important" role in their lives, making them about twice as religious as Canadians and far more inclined to faith than Western Europeans or Japanese. The study calls the contrasts "stark global regional divides." France is Western Europe's most secular public, and Czechoslovakia is its Eastern Europe counterpart, both with just 11 percent of citizens saying religion was "very" important. The English are Western Europe's most religious, with a third saying religion is very important. Even in heavily Catholic Italy, fewer than 30% say religion is vital, showing how secular it has become.

Natural Disasters

According to the German reinsurance company, Muenchener Rueck, material damage caused by natural disasters reached record levels last year. Approximately 700 catastrophes, mainly storms and floods, resulted in damages costing just under \$55 billion. This is an increase of 57% over 2001, due in large part to the extensive flooding in central Europe. At least 11,000 people lost their lives last year due to natural disasters—only half of the casualties of 2001, as 2002 earthquakes were not nearly as devastating. The worst tremors left 2,000 people dead in Afghanistan, while earthquakes in India in 2001 killed approximately 20,000.



U.S. Military

No country since Rome has possessed America's dominance. The United States plus its allies and friends account for approximately 80% of all military spending in the world. The U.S. spends as much as the next eight countries *combined*, six of which are allies. However, the Pentagon is planning a \$14 billion *increase* in military spending for 2004, on top of the extra \$34.4 billion recently approved for 2003. That was the largest hike in two decades, but the administration originally proposed a \$46 billion increase—more than any nation other than Russia devotes to the military.

E d u c a t i o n



A study by Zogby International concludes that today's college seniors have no better grasp of general knowledge than did *high school graduates* of the 1950s. Stephen H. Balch, President of the National Association of Scholars (NAS), notes that the high school grads of the '50s performed better than today's college seniors on history questions, while contemporary students fared better in art and literature, with no appreciable difference in geography. The questions asked were virtually

the same as those posed by the Gallup Organization in 1955, though a few were slightly modified to reflect history. The NAS study raises questions about the caliber of general education offered in high schools, colleges, and universities. Balch says, "It probably has a lot to do with the dumbing down of curriculum, both at the college and high school level. It looks good, certainly, to say 'more people are graduating from college,' but is there any real intellectual yield from it?"

Corel, Broderbund, IMSI

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

BIBLE STUDY:

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

Some parables are designed to convince people of their own sin. For instance, Nathan convinces King David of the seriousness of his sin with Bathsheba by using a parable (II Samuel 12:1). In the New Testament, Jesus Christ pointedly targets the evil of His adversaries with parables in a manner they cannot deny or refute. Such condemnatory parables are appeals to the offenders to repent, and they simultaneously judge them out of their own mouths.

In the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32), Jesus fully intends to have the chief priests and elders of the people convict themselves. From the first words of His parable—"But what do you think?"—Jesus has them questioning their own thoughts and motives. Obviously, He wants them to react to His parable as David did to Nathan's, but as subsequent events show, they did not. Will we?

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1. How do the character traits of the two sons differ? Matthew 21:28; Hebrews 3:8-13; Romans 10:2-4.

COMMENT: The character of each son is vastly different. One son is independent, disobedient, and insolent, but after thinking about his ways, returns to carry out his responsibility. The second is a big talker, full of promises but no action. In these two men, Christ describes, on the one hand, sinners of all types, who, when convicted by John the Baptist and Himself, turned away from their iniquities, repented, and obeyed God. On the other hand are the scribes, Pharisees, and other self-righteous people who feign a zeal for the law but will not receive the gospel.

2. Why does the first son regret his disobedience? Matthew 21:29; Job 24:1-25; Lamentations 3:27; Romans 8:7.

COMMENT: Both sons hear the same command: "Son, go work today in my vineyard." Parents should not raise their children in the destructiveness of idleness, and similarly, God commands His children to work, though we are all heirs. Generally, the first reaction of a sinner to God's truth is "I will not!" which shows the enmity between man and God. The disobedient son represents those who have no desire to make an effort to obey God. They neither fear God nor pretend to, seeing no immediate reward for their efforts. Although hypocrisy may exist in other areas of their lives, they are not hypocritical in their stance toward God—they flat out reject Him! Eventually, when called, they realize that true happiness is to work for God to produce eternally rewarding fruit.

3. Why does the second son not go to work in his father's vineyard? Matthew 21:30; 23:25-26; Job 8:13; 27:8-12; Luke 6:45; Galatians 5:19-23.

COMMENT: The second son deceitfully professes respect and obedience, but he never does his duty. The contradiction between his word and his work exposes his major character flaw—hypocrisy. It is harder to convince a hypocrite of his true state than a flagrant sinner because, in deceiving himself, the hypocrite follows his own standards and form of godliness. Contrarily, the flagrant sinner *knows* he is evil.

Many in mainstream Christianity profess to know God but deny Him in their works. They appear pious at church, but their personal lives are riddled with sin. They are living a lie, and out of their smooth mouths their deceitful hearts

speak. Their efforts produce the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit. The second son does not go to work because he lives for the moment and never comprehends his father's ultimate plan, its wonderful results, and its long-term benefits.

4. Since both sin, why does the openly disobedient son eventually do the will of his father? Matthew 21:31; Luke 7:29-30; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Acts 3:19; Romans 2:4-11.

COMMENT: The sons' ultimate actions reveal their difference. The first son, after open refusal, repents of his sin—better late than never—and goes to work for his father. He overcomes and changes from bad to good. After experiencing the negative results of sin, he yields to God's instruction, changing direction and doing as his father commanded him—the fruit of his repentance.

The proof of our repentance comes to light when we comply with the Father's will and do good works with the help of the Holy Spirit. The result is the production of the fruit of the Spirit.

5. Why do the Pharisees not recognize true righteousness? Matthew 21:32; Luke 7:36-50; Revelation 3:16-17.

COMMENT: John the Baptist proclaimed the truth and lived it, but the Pharisees rejected John's witness and professed their own righteousness while living unrighteously. In this parable, Jesus distinguishes those who generally knew the way of God (Jews) from those who did not (Gentiles). The Jews initially appeared righteous, having the revelation of God and the ordinances of justice established among them. The Gentiles were initially ignorant of righteousness—the way of God—and were sinful in all their conduct. From this, we can learn that those who feel they are knowledgeable and need nothing more fail to realize their spiritual bankruptcy and see no need to change. They may appear righteous, but being deceived by Satan, they believe their own righteousness will save them. Therefore, because they see no sin in their lives, they see no reason to repent.

But God's true church—the Bride of Christ—makes herself ready by repenting and overcoming sin, by truly valuing and appreciating the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and by obeying and revering the Father and His Son. The long-term rewards for obeying the Father's command to work in His vineyard are tremendous.