



# Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 16, Number 6

July 2007

HOW  
THREATENING  
IS CHINA?

# july 2007

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Thousands of Chinese reservists attend a ceremony at a stadium in Nanjing. China is increasingly challenging U.S. dominance in several critical areas, including economic, military, and diplomatic power. But is China in a position to rise to superpower status? Is it on the verge of breaking into the first tier of nations, or will its internal problems hold it back?

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# The Christian Fight

## Part Three

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Metaphors involving warfare abound in the Bible. New Testament writers in particular frequently draw on some form of them to illustrate Christian life. These metaphors remove any doubt that living a Christian life will not be like a Sunday walk in the park. Though the writers allude to some of the mortal dangers of war, their metaphors focus more on the stresses of struggle, deprivation, and sacrifice. Any soldier participating in warfare for the benefit of his nation and especially for his loved ones must possess some measure of devotion and determination, which are driven by his belief that his cause is just. The more these qualities reside in his character, the greater the likelihood that he will endure the trials of warfare in a hopeful spirit.

Faith dominates the picture of a Christian's fight with the spiritual forces arrayed against him. In fact, since we cannot literally see God, yet we can spiritually see and understand what He has inspired to be written, instruction regarding faith is instrumental in every aspect of a Christian's life. Faith is absolutely essential to the Christian's warfare. To love as God loves is indeed the goal of Christian life, but to reach that awesome peak, we must have a strong foundation. For a disciple of Christ, that foundation is faith.

Hebrews 11 is a classic chapter of the Bible. Though it may not be as high in public popularity as Psalm 23 or I Corinthians 13, its importance to conversion must be equal to theirs. Psalm 23 is warm and comforting, giving us assurance that God is with

us regardless of circumstances, and that He will provide. In its own intimate way, it is also a strong expression of faith, touching on many areas of the Christian's fight. I Corinthians 13 provides clear word-pictures about how godly love acts and reacts, and in doing so, it sets high standards for us to pursue in emulating God in practical living.

Hebrews 12:1 exhorts, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." This verse shifts our attention to practical applications of the lessons that spring from the previous chapter's vivid illustrations of lives lived by faith.

Hebrews 11, then, is to faith what I Corinthians 13 is to love and what Psalm 23 is to encouragement. Hebrews 11 is a beckoning, guiding beacon, showing how great men and women of the past used their faith in God to achieve great things in witnessing for Him. As they overcame in their daily struggles and responsibilities, they left behind standards and examples as instruction for our spiritual well-being. In broad strokes, this chapter provides direction by illustrating circumstances in which they made practical use of their faith in God and His way.

Hebrews 11:1 states, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Understanding this verse is essential to deriving the most from this chapter. It establishes a good, practi-

# personal *The Christian Fight*

cal definition of faith, but it is not the only one, since the Bible uses the term “faith” in several other ways. We have to be thinking as we read, or we may get an idea about faith other than the one God intends within a given context.

Galatians 1:23 uses “faith” in a somewhat different manner. “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.” In context with “preaching,” *faith*, as used in religious parlance, means “a confession,” thus “a creed,” “a body of religious beliefs,” or “a statement of the principles of one’s way of life.” The New Testament often uses “faith” in this manner. Its usage in Jude 3 is similar but a bit clearer, as a body of beliefs to which we must cling steadfastly and apply to life’s challenges.

In John 20:29, the apostle relates, “Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” Here, with Jesus Christ as faith’s object, believing indicates a personal trust or confidence in Him. Paul, in Romans 3:22, puts it in different light: “. . . even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” Here, in a legal context, it indicates a level of personal confidence or trust in what Christ did as a means of justification and therefore access to God.

Romans 10:17 imparts vital understanding on how faith in God becomes part of our thinking and conduct: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Faith becomes an element of our thinking by our hearing words that concern the objects of faith: our Father in heaven; His Son, Jesus Christ; and their message, the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Interestingly, Paul emphasizes hearing rather than merely reading, though reading is included in the sense of hearing. Jesus declares in John 6:63, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” Hearing—or more correctly, listening—is probably Jesus’ most frequent and consistent exhortation during His ministry.

If we do not listen thoughtfully, we will not have faith in the right object. Regardless of the context, faith always contains a mixture of believing, knowing, understanding, trusting, and sometimes even bold conviction—all locked together and pointed toward a specific object. Within the Bible, that object is almost always either God, Jesus Christ, the Word of God, or a messenger sent by God, whether angel, prophet, or minister.

## The Background

Hebrews 10:35-39 introduces the subject of faith, paving the way for Paul’s exposition in chapter 11:

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may

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

This is not the first time faith or its opposite, unbelief, is mentioned in Hebrews. The very purpose of the entire epistle is to recapture, build, and sustain in its recipients their faith in the superiority of Jesus Christ Himself and in His message, the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Notice the strong, earlier statements Paul makes regarding unbelief:

- **Hebrews 3:12, 19:** Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. . . . So we see that [the Israelites in the wilderness] could not enter in[to the Promised Land] because of unbelief.

- **Hebrews 4:2:** For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

These are weighty statements. The Israelites failed to accomplish their responsibility of walking from Egypt to the Promised Land primarily because of one weak element in their character. They did not believe God or His messenger Moses. They did not listen thoughtfully or yieldingly.

Because of the warning contained within Hebrews 10:35-39, chapter 11 places the virtue of faith in direct contrast to the sin of unbelief by exposing what unbelief caused to occur. The Israelites drew back in fear rather than trusting God and boldly going forward. Thus, the main point of the epistle of Hebrews is that they will be destroyed who, by failing to put their trust in the living God, shrink back from this Christian war we have been called to fight, whereas those who believe will be saved.

## Subjective or Objective?

A clear understanding of faith in Hebrews 11 largely depends on how we perceive the word “substance” in verse 1. In Greek, it is *hypostasis*, literally “a standing under.” A more complex definition is “that which underlies what is apparent.” Amplified a bit further, it is that which, though unseen, exists beneath what is visible. It, then, has the sense of a foundation. Even as the foundation of a building is unseen, but the building above ground is apparent, the foundation, the *hypostasis*, is nonetheless real, supporting the building. *Hypostasis* is the unseen support of what is standing in clear view.

Spiritually, then, invisible faith underlies, supports, and thus motivates the visible action. However, that does not end the discussion of how *hypostasis* is to be understood. Should it be understood subjectively or objectively? In other words, should we consider faith to be a quality, a virtue within us (that is, subjectively), or should we understand it as something not a part of us but on which we can rely (that is, objectively)? Neither of these usages is wrong, but one seems better than the other within the context of the entire book.

If the translators believed it should be understood subjectively, then the first phrase in Hebrews 11:1 will be translated similar to, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see.” Another subjective variation might be, “In faith, things hoped for become a reality.” This emphasizes conviction, an internal certainty about what we believe.

If the translators believed it should be understood objectively, then the same phrase will be translated, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for” or “Faith is the title deed of things hoped for.” This emphasizes something outside the person that he can rely upon.

This issue is not an easy matter. However, the subjective perspective, conviction within us, is better, given the tenor of the entire epistle.

Certainly, Paul spends a great deal of time reminding the Hebrews of how great what they believe in is—that things pertaining to Christ are far better than anything ever before offered to mankind. This by itself would require an objective point of view. However, the real problem was within these Hebrews’ hearts. Paul was exhorting people who were letting the things of God slip away from them through personal neglect. It was not that they did not have something to believe in, for the epistle clearly states they had formerly done much better. Rather, through their lack of conviction, and thus their neglectful personal application, they were slip-sliding away. The real issue is subjective.

Several times, Paul urged them to recall former days and recapture the bold confidence they once had. Thus, though neither of these approaches is wrong, the subjective perspective is better, meaning Hebrews 11:1 is better translated, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see.” The believer is convinced that the things he cannot see regarding God are real, and so, from that perspective, he will act in fullness of hope.

Many claim to believe God, but what influence does this belief have on their behavior? If it wields little or no influence, they are unconvinced people, people without conviction who are seeking only an intellectual righteousness. Such belief is without certainty, and so it lackadaisically, gradually retreats instead of going forward in growth. These Hebrews had become this way under the pressure of time and trial.

## **Endure to the End**

As stated earlier, the introduction to the Faith Chapter appears in chapter 10, when the author directly mentions faith. However, a secondary subject motivated the writing

of chapter 11, and this subject appears in Hebrews 10:36 as “patience,” as the King James Version renders it. Ample material appears throughout the epistle to explain why patience needed to be addressed.

Although “patience” is not a wrong translation, for better understanding, more specific words should be used. Today, we generally think of “patience” as passive, whereas “persevere” or “endure” are more dynamic. The Greek word used in Hebrews 10:36 is *hupomone*. In his *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, Spiros Zodhiates comments that it means “constancy under suffering in faith and duty.” “Constancy” indicates that persistent effort is being made, in this case against a pressing trouble. In light of this series, he perhaps describes it even better by defining it as a “quality of character that does not allow one to surrender.”

“Perseverance,” “endurance,” “constancy,” and “steadfastness” all have a sense of activity, of actively straining against some pressure. Thus, as Hebrews 11 begins, the author approaches two related subjects: one directly, faith or strong conviction; and the other, perseverance, less directly. *Hupomone*, however, does not appear again until Hebrews 12:1.

The Hebrews badly needed both conviction and perseverance to meet and overcome their problems. These virtues go hand in hand, and they really cannot be separated because we operate on a different concept of time than does God. Compared to God, we operate on fast time. Almost everything in our lives seems to have to be done or received right now, or faith begins to evaporate and we lose heart. True faith, though, operates in a rhythm closer to what God does because, due to conviction, it is more in tune with Him.

Therefore, a convicted person not only believes that what God says is true, but he also trusts and willingly endures trials in an attitude of realistic hopefulness. He does not restlessly complain to God to fix things right away on his schedule. A person develops conviction by thoughtfully processing a great deal of God’s truth and yielding to the evidence He provides.

Paul continues in Hebrews 11:2 by noting, “For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.” This sets the stage for the remainder of the chapter by showing its importance: Others we respect have lived by faith before us, and as a result, God approved of their lives.

The apostle implies that, if they could do it, why can we not do as well, since the same factors that existed for them are still working? Namely, God is still on His throne, and His truth stands firm. We should desire to please and trust no one else in the entire world above God. This is an important point regarding faith because this faith must be lived toward God.

Remember, God as a personal Being and His message given through Jesus Christ are the objects of our trust. It is easy for our attitude to be oriented toward pleasing other people. God does not deny this to us, but pleasing Him must dominate our attitude. We must choose pleasing Him as the primary desire of our lives, or conviction has little chance of growing.

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In Hebrews 11:3, the apostle writes, “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” This further continues laying the groundwork, as this concept reveals the solid base of faith toward God: that He is Creator and Ruler. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” God Himself demanded of Job. The answer to this question is why we can understand the existence of things by faith.

E.W. Bullinger has an additional thought on this verse that is worth considering. He takes this beyond creation, as the word translated “worlds” is literally *aiones* or “ages.” Thus, the verse is literally stating that God framed or put into order the *ages*. Zodhiates agrees that *aiones* indicates ages or times, in contrast with *kosmos*, often translated as “world,” which indicates people as a society. Bullinger shows that God, unseen and sovereign, is not only Creator, but also actively shapes events within the expanses of time. As Jesus says in John 5:17, God is always working, directing the movement of history to bring about His desired ends. Bullinger’s approach is to be preferred as more appropriate to the entire epistle.

## Patterns to Note

With Hebrews 11:4, we begin to see the contrasts between faith and unbelief more clearly: “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.” These contrasts are seen in the practical applications made by faithful men and women who pleased God, gaining His respect by the way they lived.

As Paul presents the examples of faithful men and women, we should notice several patterns. The first is an obvious one: The examples are arranged chronologically—up until Moses. At that point, he mysteriously skips over Joshua, but then includes Rahab. Next, he names a few judges but not in chronological order. Finally, he mentions David, Israel’s second king, but before Samuel, the last of the judges.

A second and more important pattern is that each example of faith is different from any of the others, and they are arranged in a progression important to Christian living. This aspect will become more apparent as we wend our way through the examples.

The third pattern to notice is that Paul is making a general but powerful argument against the no-works doctrine of those who profess that strange and destructive concept. In each example, it is clear that faith motivated each person to do his particular cited work. The faith of these people, then, was not merely intellectual, and it most certainly was not dead. Paul is showing conclusively that what one says he believes is absolutely useless unless it pleases God by producing works.

Works are the evidence that the person has faith! This is a major theme of the entire epistle.

These Hebrews claimed to be Christian, but in the face of severe trials, their lack of faith, their doubt that God would provide for them, motivated them to draw back. Their lackadaisical and fearful works exposed their lack of faith. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, they were slipping away.

The fourth pattern is that Hebrews 11 is divided into three sections. The first section is the introduction, which extends to the end of verse 3. The second section, verses 4-7, covers the examples of Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Abel’s example focuses on the genesis of Christian living, while Enoch’s concentrates on the character of the life of faith, of which Christian living consists. Noah’s example continues the theme of Enoch’s, adding a significant work (preparing the ark) and showing the goal of Christian life. With Abel, Enoch, and Noah, Paul lays a general foundation to show how faith motivates a person’s life.

The third and major section, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, focuses on what the remaining examples achieved by means of their faith in God and their always looking beyond their own time of life. This is not to say the first three did not achieve anything, only that achievement through faith was not the focus of Paul’s instruction at that point.

As the Bible records history, Abel is the first human to offer a sacrifice to God. The Bible gives no indication that he was following what was then popular among the children of Adam and Eve, nor that he was following “common sense,” human reason, or his feelings. Undoubtedly, God had instructed Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, and maybe others in His truth. Abel stands out because he offered by faith. He believed the specific instruction given to him, while neither Cain nor anybody else did. His motivation is what set Abel apart; he believed without twisting what God taught.

Recall that Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Faith in God must have a foundation, and listening is the means by which that foundation is formed. At this point, it is important to understand what Paul—and of course, God—mean by “faith.” There are two general kinds of faith: “dead” and “living,” as James terms them.

When James calls the one “dead,” he is in no way saying that whoever has that faith is stupid. In fact, they may be quite intellectual—“smart,” as we might say. He means that, in relation to God, they do not have living or active faith. We can illustrate the difference this way: Suppose two people receive exactly the same instruction from the Word of God; both have been informed as to what He requires. The difference between the person with dead faith and the one with living faith is that

*(continued on page 17)*

## THE SECOND EXODUS

### PART ONE

It has long been observed that about one-third of the Bible is prophecy, and the majority of those prophecies have not yet been fulfilled.

In addition, nearly all of those unfulfilled prophecies pertain to the descendants of Abraham in general—and Jacob in particular—and to other nations and entities only as they encounter the descendants of these patriarchs.

Understanding the history and the future of the descendants of Jacob is paramount to understanding the rest of the Bible. In particular, grasping what God says will happen to these people allows us to make sense of this world's seemingly incomprehensible events. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," as Proverbs 29:18 (KJV) notes. But God has given us a vision of where current events are leading, and what will soon happen to the nations of Israel that have been scattered around the globe.

Historically, after the death of Solomon (c. 931 BC), the Kingdom of Israel split into two separate kingdoms. The northern ten tribes retained the name *Israel*, establishing their capital at Samaria. The southern tribes—Judah and Benjamin, along with part of Levi—became known simply as *Judah* (and its people known as *Jews*; see II Kings 16:5-6, KJV), continuing to be ruled by the royal line of David from the capital city of Jerusalem.

Two hundred years after this national division, the northern ten tribes were in a terminal state of wickedness and rebellion. Idolatry was widespread, pagan religious practices from the surrounding cultures were common and celebrated, God's law was trampled underfoot, and God Himself was scoffed at—much as in today's Western culture. God's proph-

ets, warning of Israel's destruction and subjugation, were invariably ignored, mocked, or killed.

Around 722 BC, God caused Assyria to subdue Israel and enslave the people. The Assyrians deported the population from its homeland in Canaan to the southern shores of the Caspian Sea in what is today Iran (II Kings 17:5-6). The northern Kingdom of Israel thus passed from the view of all but the most obscure histories, becoming known as the Lost Ten Tribes.

The Jews—the southern Kingdom of Judah—followed the same course shortly thereafter. With few exceptions, the kings of Judah proved more corrupt than Israel's kings. Israel set the pace into idolatry, and Judah enthusiastically followed (Ezekiel 16:45-52). As with Israel, God sent prophets to Judah to warn her of destruction if she failed to repent. She refused. Between 604 and 585 BC, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar carried the population of Judah to Babylon (II Kings 24:14). Later, he totally destroyed Jerusalem, Temple and all, and "carried away captive the rest of the people" (II Kings 25:11).

Both kingdoms, having turned from their covenant with God, earned the penalty of national captivity.

#### **REVERSE MIGRATION**

After seventy years in Babylonian captivity, the Jews began returning to Canaan. Under Ezra and Nehemiah, the wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the Temple was restored under Zerubbabel and Joshua. However, the northern ten tribes of Israel

# prophecy watch *The Second Exodus*

never returned. After a long sojourn in and around the areas of their captivity, they migrated north and west into the European continent, eventually spreading from there into the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

However, this migration of Israel will reverse in the days ahead. The Bible shows in many prophecies that a *second* exodus will occur, and God's people will return to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The first exodus, when God brought the children of Israel out from Egypt, is a defining event for both Israelites and Christians. Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and even Pentecost all commemorate God's sovereignty, providence, and grace in liberating His people (see Deuteronomy 16:1-12). Yet, as remarkable as this spontaneous movement of millions of people from a plundered Egypt to a bountiful Canaan was, the Second Exodus will be so momentous that the original exodus from Egypt will pale by comparison:

"Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that it shall no more be said, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers." (Jeremiah 16:14-15; see also 23:7-8)

In Isaiah 11:11-12, the prophet also tells of this time when

the LORD shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left. . . . He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

God tells Jeremiah, "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers" (Jeremiah 3:18).

During the first exodus, a few million Israelites left Egypt and headed for the land of Canaan, a relatively short distance away. Today, Israelites number in the hundreds of millions, and their current homelands are thousands of miles from Canaan. They cannot re-migrate to the Promised Land as a single group, for their movements have left them in numerous countries around the globe. Only the sovereign God can orchestrate such a regathering.

While some prophecies speak of Israel returning from every compass point (Isaiah 11:12; 43:5-7), Israel is most commonly foreseen returning from the north and the west (of the Promised Land) (Isaiah 49:12; Jeremiah 3:18; 16:15; 23:8; 31:8; Hosea 11:10; Zechariah 2:6), reversing the path of their migration thousands of years ago.

## **REGATHERED TO ZION**

The prophet Isaiah gives numerous descriptions of how this exodus will take place, such as the individual attention that will be given: "And it shall come to pass in that day . . . you will be gathered *one by one*, O you children of Israel" (Isaiah 27:12). He speaks of "a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel In the day that he came up from the land of Egypt" (Isaiah 11:16). A similar road appears in Isaiah 35:8-10:

A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it. . . . But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (see also Isaiah 43:16-21; 51:10-11)

Not all of Israel will be able to travel back via this Highway of Holiness, however. Isaiah 60:8-9 asks:

Who are these who fly like a cloud, and like doves to their roosts? Surely the coastlands shall wait for Me; and the ships of Tarshish will come first, to bring your sons from afar, their silver and their gold with them, to the name of the LORD your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you.

Isaiah 66:20 describes this massive undertaking further:

"Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD."

Jeremiah 30 and 31 give a broad overview of what God will do to bring back Israel and the rest of Judah, and restore the Promised Land to them. This was not fulfilled in the 1940s, when hundreds of thousands of Jews returned to their historical land and founded the modern State of Israel, for only *Judah* took part in that. The prophecies regarding the Second Exodus clearly speak of both Judah *and* Israel. Notice, for instance, Jeremiah 30:1-3:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Thus speaks the LORD God of Israel, saying: 'Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will bring back from captivity My

*people Israel and Judah,*’ says the LORD. ‘And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.’”(emphasis ours)

God refers to *both* kingdoms here—the descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel as well as the southern kingdom of Judah. The return of Israel will be the larger migration because, aside from the 70-year captivity in Babylon, some of the descendants of Judah have always resided in the Promised Land. Today, the State of Israel is predominately made up of the descendants of Judah.

However, neither Israel nor Judah has truly *possessed* the land since the time of their respective captivities. Despite some of Judah having *returned* to the land, ever since the Babylonian captivity, she has only rarely and intermittently held *sovereignty* over it.

After Judah was taken into captivity, Babylon ruled the Promised Land under Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon later fell to the Medo-Persian Empire, which then became sovereign over Jerusalem and the Promised Land. Because of their vassal status, the Jewish captives that returned from Babylon had to ask permission from Cyrus and Darius, the Persian kings, to rebuild the wall and the Temple. The Jews enjoyed a measure of peace, but their freedom depended on the favor of the ruling Persian emperor.

After Alexander the Great conquered Medo-Persia, the Greeks became the new overseers of the Land of Promise. Jews under the Maccabees gained a measure of independence until Rome took control of the area. Thus, during the time of Christ, Jews lived in the land and even worshipped in the Second Temple, but they did not really *possess* the land because it was under Roman jurisdiction. Since the collapse of the Roman Empire, notwithstanding some temporary Crusader holdings, the Promised Land has been under the sway of various Arab and Muslim nations—notably the Ottoman Empire—down to modern times.

Even now, the state of Israel does not control all of the land. Jerusalem is a divided city, and the Israelis have not dared claim all of the Temple Mount for themselves (even though they had the opportunity immediately following the Six Day War in 1967), because they know that it would result in an all-out war with the Muslims. Even though the Jews regained a considerable amount of land when it declared statehood in 1948, gaining even more during the Six Day War, the ownership is endlessly argued. Judah is not truly sovereign yet. It does not yet “possess” the land in the fullest sense of the word.

### ***BUT FIRST, TRIBULATION***

Even though Israel and Judah will ultimately be restored to the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they will first go through a time of tremendous tribulation and hardship:

For thus says the LORD: “We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a

woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that *none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble*, but he shall be saved out of it.” (Jeremiah 30:5-7; emphasis ours)

This is what must happen before the Second Exodus. Notice that it is called “Jacob’s Trouble,” not either “Israel’s Trouble” or “Judah’s Trouble.” *Both* houses will experience it. God causes Jacob’s descendants to be greatly troubled because of their sins. This time of unprecedented crisis—“none is like it”—corresponds to the time of “great tribulation” of which Jesus Christ warns:

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . . For then there will be *great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time*, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.” (Matthew 24:15-16, 21-22; emphasis ours)

Luke’s version of the Olivet Prophecy uses different language to describe the same time and events:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. *For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. . . . For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.* (Luke 21:20-24; see Revelation 11:2; emphasis ours)

Just as Christ reassures us in Matthew 24:22 that this will not be the complete end of mankind, Jeremiah promises that Jacob will be saved out of his trouble. Even though that “day” is great, and like nothing we have seen before, it will not be the end of Jacob.

Jeremiah 30:5-7 does not detail *why* that time is one of tribulation. The only clue we have in these verses is that God compares it, not just to a woman in labor, but to a *man* in labor. This is certainly an unusual symbol, but the picture of the sorrows and pains of labor and childbirth elsewhere helps us to understand what it portends. For example, Isaiah 13:6-8 prophesies:

Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them;

*(continued on page 16)*

In Luke 21:36, our Savior provides us with the two tickets we need—*watching* (careful, vigilant attention to overcoming our nature) and *praying always*—to be accounted worthy to escape the troubles at the close of this age and to enter the Kingdom of God. These two activities are pillars that support the foundation on which our Christian lives rest during these end times.

How important are these two pillars? Exactly what is Christ instructing us to do as we encounter the end of an age?

In Luke 21:36, when Christ says, “Watch,” He is calling for us to scrutinize our lives in order to change them. We are not just to note the problems we see but to overcome them. How important is it to overcome? If God mentioning something twice establishes it (Genesis 41:32), how significant is a subject when He mentions it *fifteen times*? Not fifteen times throughout the whole Bible but in just one book! And not in just any book, but a book of special significance to us, one about the end time—Revelation!

In this end-time message, Christ says seven times, “I know your works” (Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). What are works? They are simply the results of our efforts in overcoming, both the failures and successes. Jesus is saying, “I know the level of your overcoming.” Then, for each church—whether era, group, or attitude—He comments on that effort. Overcoming is highlighted another seven times (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), as Christ ends each of His critiques with a promise that begins, “To him who overcomes. . . .” As an exclamation point, Christ warns us seven times, a number signifying completeness, to heed what He says to *all* these churches (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Finally, in Revelation 21:7, Christ addresses overcoming a fifteenth time. He makes a promise to those who successfully overcome: “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

Revelation shows us that “Job One” for a Christian is overcoming, especially for someone living at the end time. This is the message in Luke 21:36 also: We have to overcome to be with Him in God’s Kingdom. Salvation itself hinges on our cooperation with Him in overcoming (Matthew 25:30).

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) demonstrates the importance of overcoming. The difference between the wise and foolish virgins is their supplies of oil. While water represents the power of God’s Holy Spirit to cleanse, oil represents its power to work, to do good. Thus, the difference between the virgins is their good works (“I know your works”), how much they

overcame their selfish human natures by acting in love toward God and man.

Both groups had oil, but the foolish virgins did not have *enough* for the unexpectedly long delay (Luke 21:34-35). When the cry went out, their lamps were still burning but sputtering and about to go out. They were not prepared for the long haul. They had not continued to overcome. They were not enduring to the end. Their oil—their good works, their overcoming—proved insufficient for the task. In this one point, they failed, and what a foolish failure it was!

Emphasizing the importance of Luke 21:36 and watching, Christ makes a specific promise to those living at the end who are watching, that is, successfully overcoming: “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them” (Luke 12:37).

Conversely, considering the implications of John 17:3, Jesus gives a chilling judgment to the virgins who fail to overcome: “I do not know you” (Matthew 25:12).

## How Important Is Prayer?

Coupled with watching and overcoming, the next subject that Jesus addresses in Luke 21:36 is prayer. To grasp just how important prayer is, notice the example of Daniel, one of the three most righteous men in the Bible, according to Ezekiel 14:14. Part of his story is in Daniel 6:7, 10:

All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. . . . Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

Daniel believed that prayer was so essential that he chose to risk his life to lions rather than lose contact with God for even a part of a day. We could say that he feared the Lion of Judah more than any physical lion. To him, prayer was a life-and-death issue. Is it to us? How many excuses would we have made to avoid those lions? What excuses do we make today to justify a lack of prayer?

# Praying Always

## Part Two

Is anything more serious than a life-and-death issue? Because of the Bible's obviously high regard for Daniel, it is reasonable to assume that his attitude about prayer played a significant part in deserving the label of "righteous." Prayer, for us, becomes a *spiritual* life-and-death question, not just a physical one as Daniel faced.

## Faith to Endure

If we do not have *enough* faith to endure to the end, we will not survive spiritually (Matthew 24:13). So, how do we increase that faith? How do we increase it to the level needed to ensure our survival? Without the answer, we face possible spiritual death.

The good news is that we have an answer, and we have had it for decades. Herbert W. Armstrong answers that very question in his booklet, "What is Faith?":

When Jesus walked the earth in human flesh, HE possessed faith! . . .

Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul—all common, humble ordinary men themselves—all *had that power*, the SAME identical power Jesus had, *because they lived and walked CLOSE TO GOD* and were *filled with the Holy Spirit!*

And we seem to LACK that power today, NOT because God denies us that power, but *because we are so close to a modern, materialistic world*—our minds are so filled with the *material* interests of this life; our minds and our hearts are *so far from God*; we are so out of touch with Him through lack of enough *time* spent in the study of His Word, and lack of enough of the right kind of surrendered, submissive, earnest and heart-rending PRAYER—and consequently, because we are *not filled* with the HOLY SPIRIT! . . .

And let us remember, FAITH is the GIFT OF GOD.

So many think that everything else that comes from God is His *gift*, but the FAITH required to *receive* these things is something we ourselves must somehow work up, or strain and strive for. But we have to just relax and TRUST GOD, even for the FAITH by which we receive everything else! (Ephesians 2:8.)

In Revelation 14:12 is a description of the *true* Church of THIS DAY. Those in this church have the FAITH OF JESUS. Notice, the FAITH OF JESUS! It is not just *our* faith in HIM, but *His* faith—the very faith with which He performed His miracles—placed *in us* and *acting* in us.

*How can you get it? Draw closer to God. Get to know God. Surrender all the way to HIM, and do HIS will. And then PRAY. You get to know Him in PRAYER. We are too close to the material things. Through PRAYER, much more prayer, you can come closer to GOD and the spiritual things. And what a happy, joyous experience it is, once you have really done it!*

What is his answer to a lack of faith? Prayer and surrender to God's will. Surrendering to His will is our act of overcoming our rebellious carnal nature. His answer, prayer and overcoming, is the same instruction Christ gives in Luke 21:36 to those of us living at the end time.

## Building Faith

A lack of faith is a sign of a weak prayer life. Notice the proof of this in Matthew 17:19-21:

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast him out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out *except by prayer* and fasting."

He advises us how to address unbelief—prayer and fasting.

On a human level, how do we build trust, faith, and loyalty? Will we have faith in someone we do not know? Can we be loyal to a stranger? We build confidence in others through repeated contact with them over time—close and frequent communication. As we get to know them, to see them in action, to see their characters, we eventually reach a point where we can have trust and faith in them and in their behavior. Is it any different with God?

Prayer provides the repeated and continual contact with God that we need to get to know Him. This sets in motion the process that will lead to faith, to God being willing to give us the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8). The prayerful person becomes the faithful person, not the other way around. Hebrews 11:6 illustrates this point: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

Notice the condition in this verse: God is not the rewarder of *everyone*, but "of those who diligently seek Him." The gift of living faith comes from diligently, actively seeking Him, consistently and with zeal. Prayer is a major tool in seeking God, along with study, fasting, and using the knowledge gained to conform to His will—practical Christian living and overcoming. Those who prove their diligence by doing these things are the ones

rewarded with the faith to overcome (I John 5:4).

The Sabbath is an external sign that identifies God's people (Exodus 31:13, 17). Nevertheless, others not in God's true church observe it. Is there another sign—a less visible one—that perhaps only God sees? Yes, and Zechariah 13:9 shows it is prayer: "They will pray in my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'You are my people,' and they will reply, 'You, LORD, are our God!'" (Contemporary English Version).

Those with a weak prayer life have weak faith (Matthew 17:19-21). Those with weak faith are sinful (Romans 14:23) and are promised death (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23). That is just how important earnest prayer is as part of a solid foundation, especially during the end time. As I Peter 4:7 instructs, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers."

## Faith's Role

Consider the connection the apostle John makes in I John 5:4-5: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

How do we overcome? John writes that our victory comes through belief, the power of faith—God's gift. How do we build that faith to the needed levels? As we saw in Matthew 17:19-21, we do it by prayer and fasting.

Whether His people would have enough faith to overcome, to have a sufficient supply of oil in their lamps, is an issue Christ knew would be critical as the world neared the end of the age. In Luke 18:8, Christ looked down the corridors of time to the period of His return and wondered, "Will I really find faith on the earth?" Are we praying enough in both quality and quantity to build the faith that God is seeking at the end, the faith He knows we need both to overcome and to survive the great trials of the day?

We can now realize the power of Christ's message in Luke 21:36. To overcome, we need faith. To have and show faith, we need prayer. God requires works on our

part, the works of prayer and overcoming. However, the power comes only from God and His gift of faith.

Overcoming and prayer are absolute requirements for those living at the end. They are the two tickets we must have to be among those counted worthy to escape and enter God's Kingdom. Without both of these requirements in abundance, we will not be granted either blessing.

## Praying Always

While prayer is important, notice that in Luke 21:36, Jesus does not use just the word "pray" but the phrase "pray *always*." Why is this significant?

As we begin to answer this question, it is good to know that the word "always" is a translation of three Greek words. A literal translation of those three words, *en pantí kairoó*, would be "in all times," and many Bible translations have chosen to use similar wording, such as "at all times." Other versions may use "all the time," while some use words like "constant" and "constantly." Weymouth's New Testament goes so far as to read, "every moment."

Christ is speaking, not just about prayer, but also about the frequency of our prayers. How often are we in contact with God throughout our day? Do we give Him some time in the morning or evening, but the rest of the day He is in none, or very few, of our thoughts? Doing so places us in very dangerous company (Psalm 10:4).

Laodiceans have lukewarm relationships with God, thus Christ has to say to them in Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." He calls for them to rekindle the relationship. Making the first move, He suggests what friends who have a close relationship do—they share a meal. What happens at a meal with friends? Conversation, which is what prayer is. Humans, whether with people or with God, build their relationships the same way: They talk to each other—a lot.

We can see why Christ tells those living at the end,

*(continued on page 16)*

" . . . pray always that you may be counted worthy. . . "

Some understand this as instruction to be constantly asking God, "Count me worthy, count me worthy, count me worthy!" This understanding is in error, as it contradicts Christ's warning in Matthew 6:7 against vain repetitions.

The word "that" in the above phrase, *hína*, is Strong's #2443. This word can be translated as "so that," as it is in Galatians 5:17: "[The flesh and the Spirit] are contrary to one another, *so that* you do not do the things that you wish." "So that" better

represents the meaning of this word in Luke 21:36.

This verse shows cause and effect. We are to watch and pray so that—or as the New American Standard Bible has it, "in order that"—by doing these things, we will have prepared ourselves to be counted worthy to escape and to stand before Christ in God's Kingdom. Moreover, this latter meaning aligns well with Paul's charge in Philippians 2:12, ". . . work out your own salvation in fear and trembling."

—Pat Higgins

# ready answer

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

## The Sin of Partiality

**“My brethren,  
do not hold the faith  
of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Lord of glory,  
with partiality.”  
—James 2:1**

Back in the 1970s, in Norwalk, California, when I was seeking to be baptized, I was trying to quit smoking. I found that it required that I keep quitting, because I kept finding a cigarette in my hand. It was such an ingrained habit that I did it without thinking. Each time I did, I would leave the rest of the pack some place where I could not recover it.

One night during this time, my family went to the home of some friends for a barbeque. Out of habit, I lit a cigarette and took a drag. As I blew the smoke out, I overheard my mother bragging to our host that I had quit smoking. My mom had been blinded by her partiality toward me and my abilities, and I felt horrible that I had caused her shame and disappointment. Realizing this helped me to quit the disgusting habit for good.

James 2:1 broaches the topic of partiality: “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.” The King James Version translates this virtually the same way except that instead of “partiality,” it reads “respect of persons.” In many ways, “respect of persons” is a plainer translation of the Greek, since that is exactly what the apostle is fighting: church members respecting some people over others.

Since we, too, are members of God’s church, it is beneficial to take a closer look at this idea of partiality or respect of persons from time to time. This problem frequently rears its ugly head, causing trouble among brethren, so it is good to know what it is and how it manifests itself in a congregation.

### Definitions

First, we need to make sure that we understand the full implications of partiality by reviewing some definitions of the term. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines *partial* as “biased to one party; inclined to favor one party in a cause, or one side of a question, more than the other; not indifferent.” A second meaning emphasizes favoring something “without reason,” and a third, “affecting a part only; not general or universal; not total,” implies dividing or separating things apart from the whole.

Another tool we can use to get a better grasp of a term is to see how other

# ready answer *The Sin of Partiality*

translations of a particular Bible verse use it. Here are several alternate translations of James 2:1:

*International Standard Version:* My brothers, do not practice your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ by showing partiality.

*New International Version:* My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

*Good News Translation:* My friends, as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance.

*James Moffatt Translation:* My brothers, as you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Glory, pay no servile regard to people.

*William Barclay Translation:* My brothers, you cannot at one and the same time believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ and be a snob.

*The New Testament in Modern English:* Don't ever attempt, my brothers, to combine snobbery with faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ!

*Amplified Bible:* My brethren, pay no servile regard to people [show no prejudice, no partiality]. Do not [attempt to] hold [and] practice the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of Glory, [together with snobbery]!

This term, rendered variously as “partiality,” “favoritism,” “respect of persons,” “servile regard,” and “snobbery” in James 2:1, is *prosôpolēmpsía* in Greek, and it is very close in meaning to the English word *partiality*. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* expands on its meaning: “ý[It is] the fault of one who, when responsible to give judgment, has respect to the position, rank, popularity, or circumstances of men, instead of their intrinsic conditions, preferring the rich and powerful to those who are not so. . . .”

Armed with this understanding, we can explore some of the occasions when partiality occurs. For instance, parents almost always display partiality for their own children over other people's children, which is only natural, but sometimes they favor one of their own children over his or her sibling(s). This is bound to have disastrous results at some point.

People also make economic distinctions, showing a bias for one brand of car, clothing, appliance, or laundry soap. Some are partial to stocks and bonds, while others prefer to invest in land, gold, or commodities. Such preferences are usually just personal opinions due to habit, experience, advertising, or personal recommendation.

Of course, there are racial, social, religious, and political prejudices. We read or hear of such biases frequently. Many of these kinds of partialities can get one in trouble with the group in question, the law, the community, or the church, depending on how radically a person displays them. Even in supposedly free and equal societies, prejudices abound, as they are part of human nature.

Further, intellectual snobbery and elitism abound. Those who have advanced degrees too often look down their noses at those whose educational achievements were stymied by a lack of opportunity or funds or plain bad grades in school. Though it is more rare, a reverse intellectual snobbery has been known to exist among poorly educated Americans from time to time.

In the church, we often witness the “holier than thou” individual who wears his spirituality on his sleeve for all to see. He is quick to criticize others for their shortcomings, drawing away from fellowship with them for their “lack of conversion.” Such a person is showing a bias toward his idea of righteousness, which, as we know, is called “self-righteousness.”

There are many other kinds of partiality, and if one keeps an eye out for them, they are easy to spot. Respect of persons is part of the underside of the human condition, so it is not surprising that the Bible presents so many illustrations of it.

## Biblical Examples

God provides us with dozens of examples of men and women who were partial to various people or things, and along with the examples come important lessons we can learn to avoid their mistakes. Sometimes, a right and godly favoritism is shown—particularly by God Himself—and an unrighteous, human reaction causes a great deal of trouble. Yet, more often, human partiality toward or against others opens the proverbial can of worms. A number of examples come immediately to mind.

- When God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's—favor based on obedience and proper attitude—hatred, jealousy, resentment, and murderous rage resulted (see Genesis 4). This first example is one of godly favor taken badly.
- Through favoritism, Isaac (toward Esau) and Rebecca (toward Jacob) instilled a spirit of competition, strife, and resentment between the two brothers, which led to an even-now ongoing feud, more than 3,500 years later (see Genesis 25 and 27)!
- Jacob's partiality to Rachel was the source of a great deal of hostility and scheming among Jacobs's wives and concubines (see Genesis 30). This also created rivalries between their sons.

- Jacob’s favoritism for Joseph made his half-brothers so jealous that they were ready to murder him (see Genesis 37). Instead, they “only” sold him into slavery, telling their father that he had been torn to pieces by a wild beast. This caused the patriarch no end of grief.
- Through his partiality as a father, Eli allowed himself to become complacent to the gross sins of his two sons (see I Samuel 2–4). This led both to calamity for Eli’s house and national defeat at the hands of the Philistines.
- King David’s partiality blinded his eyes to his children’s evil actions, particularly Amnon’s rape of his half-sister, Tamar; and Absalom’s murder of Amnon and his rebellion against David himself (see II Samuel 13–18). Later, he ignored Adonijah’s preparations to take over his throne, in spite of his expressed desire to have Solomon succeed him (see I Kings 1).
- In the story of Esther, Haman’s prejudice almost cost the lives of all the Jews living in the Persian Empire (see Esther 3–8). Only an act of great courage and self-sacrifice saved the Jews from annihilation.

The Bible contains a host of other examples that thoroughly demonstrate the insidiousness of this potential sin. It is clear that the effects of partiality are the real problem. A person can have the best of intentions and reasons for his bias—as God’s favor certainly is—but the reactions of those not in favor cause events to spin out of control. At other times, and certainly in most cases of human bias, the respect of persons is clearly wrong from the outset, and the carnal reactions of those it affects just makes matters worse.

## Emulating God

In his epistle, the apostle James is combating the practice of showing favoritism toward the wealthy at the expense of poorer brethren. He asks in James 2:4, in doing so, “have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” Here, he gets to the crux of the problem. As converted children of God, we are supposed to be able to make righteous judgments through the gift of God’s Spirit. However, when we show partiality or respect of persons, we have allowed evil thoughts to compromise our judgment.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary emphasizes that “the sin in question [respect of persons] is peculiarly inconsistent with His ‘faith.’” Christ died for all, rich and poor alike, and His doctrine consistently stresses the spiritual equality of believers and unity in a brotherhood of believers. Thus, preferring one person over another because of wealth or status introduces an element of wickedness into Christian relations: division.

Matthew Henry agrees:

The apostle is here reproofing a very corrupt practice. He shows how much mischief there is in the sin of *prosôpolçmpsía*—*respect of persons*, which seemed to be a very growing evil in the churches of Christ even in those early ages, and which, in these after-times, has sadly corrupted and divided Christian nations and societies.

. . . You who profess to believe the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the poorest Christian shall partake of equally with the rich, and to which all worldly glory is but vanity, you should not make men’s outward and worldly advantages the measure of your respect. In professing the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should not show respect to men, so as to cloud or lessen the glory of our glorious Lord: how ever any may think of it, this is certainly a very heinous sin.

What about God’s supposed favoritism for His chosen people? For many centuries, it seemed as if God was partial toward Israel in that only Israelites had an opportunity for salvation. From our perspective today, we know that He was working solely through Israel only for the time being, preparing a people for the coming of His Son in the flesh.

After Jesus’ resurrection, God soon opened salvation to the Gentiles too, as related in the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. In verses 34–35 of this chapter, Peter draws a conclusion from his experiences with the vision of the animals let down in a sheet from heaven and with the conversion of the household of Cornelius: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.”

In Romans 2:11, speaking of the righteous judgment of God, Paul repeats this point: “For there is no partiality with God,” a truth Paul understood from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:17). To the Galatians, the apostle makes the spiritual equality of Christians even more specific: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28; see I Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11).

It is clear that God is not a respecter of persons, giving everyone an equal opportunity for salvation and judging all by the same standards. And certainly, we should want to be like God, respecting every member of the church as an equal brother or sister in Christ.

English playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote, “We educate one another, and we cannot do this if half of us consider the other half not good enough to talk to.” The church of God is an educational institution, and every member has a part to play in helping to build up others as they prepare for God’s Kingdom. Eliminating biases and prejudices will go a long way toward bringing unity and growth to God’s church.

—Dan Elmore

# Praying Always

(continued from page 12)

when Laodiceanism reigns, that we have to overcome and pray always. Generally, the relationship between God and the Christian is weak and must be rebuilt, requiring considerable conversation, prayer, at all times of the day.

If we observed a marriage in which the husband and wife only mumbled to each other a little in the morning and/or a little at night, we would conclude that that relationship was in trouble. Our God who sees all knows the same thing when He experiences it.

How does a Christian “pray always”? In one of Herbert W. Armstrong’s radio broadcasts on the book of Hebrews, he says, paraphrased, “You need to be in contact with God every hour!” I Thessalonians 5:17 instructs, “Pray without ceasing.” Hebrews 13:15 urges us to offer prayer to God “continually.” God’s purpose for us requires a great deal of contact with Him.

A speaker once reported that he heard Herbert Armstrong say that he always tried to be aware that he was in God’s presence and that he was constantly asking God for help. It is reported that it was common for him to pray 30 or 40 times a day—short prayers asking for help with a decision, in counseling a person, in preparing an article or sermon, etc.

Notice the advice he gave church members in the October 1957 *Good News*:

You must go to a private place, alone with God, and have long talks with Him—yes, EVERY DAY! Unburden your heart to Him. Take all your problems, your interests, your plans, your troubles to Him. Talk over *everything* with Him, continually. Then, even when going about your work—when walking down the street—when driving your car, or wherever you are or whatever you do, talk with God as you work or as you drive or walk along. Go to a private place, and kneel in prayer (on both knees) as often as you can, and at least once every day. But talk with God often in between.  
PRAY WITHOUT CEASING!

Are we following that good advice? Herbert Armstrong followed the advice of Jesus Christ in Luke 21:36 to “pray always” or to “pray at all times.” Are we always praying? It is those who are overcoming and praying *always*, at all times of the day and night, that will be counted worthy to escape the end-time troubles and to stand before the Son of Man in God’s Kingdom.

Now that we have established what Christ was actually saying in Luke 21:36—and why it is important—the next question becomes, “How do we apply this information?” The next article will begin to provide the answer.

—Pat Higgins

# prophecy watch

(continued from page 9)

they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames.

A similar illustration appears in Isaiah 26:16-18:

LORD, in trouble they have visited You, they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them. As a woman with child is in pain and cries out in her pangs, when she draws near the time of her delivery, so have we been in Your sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain; we have, as it were, brought forth wind; we have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

Paul also uses this symbol in I Thessalonians 5:1-3:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (see also Isaiah 66:6-24; Jeremiah 4:31; 13:20-27; Hosea 13:12-16; Micah 4:9-10.)

Overall, the symbol is one of anguish, sorrow, intensity, great discomfort, and pain. The prophets contain scores of examples of God’s anger at the sins of His people. It is with good reason that the prophecies mention that only a “remnant” will return: Even though the descendants of Jacob will ultimately be saved, the percentage of the current hundreds of millions of Israelites and Jews who survive that trouble will probably be small (see Isaiah 10:20-21).

However, *how* this illustration is applied is interesting. When it applies to God’s enemies, the emphasis is clearly on the pain, anguish, sorrow, and fear of what is ahead (Jeremiah 49:20-24). But when it refers to Israel, as in Jeremiah 30, there is always hope that the pain will be turned to joy, just as with a physical birth (Isaiah 66:8-9). It is painful, but a tremendous blessing is promised to come when it is over (compare Jesus’ use of this metaphor in John 16:21).

A hint of this hope appears in Jeremiah 30:7: “But he [Jacob] shall be saved out of it.” The pain and the anguish will not end in total annihilation. Certainly, a dear price will be paid in human lives, but the peoples of Jacob will survive and be blessed—both physically and spiritually, as we will see.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—David C. Grabbe

# personal *The Christian Fight*

(continued from page 6)

the latter is influenced to submit to what he has learned. The one with dead faith remains only informed.

Thus, the person with dead faith may enjoy using his biblical knowledge to discuss and even to argue for or against a given concept. However, it remains only information because the influences to submit and do something in relation to God are lacking. He cannot honestly be said to believe, even though the information he has may be quite extensive and true. By contrast, the person with living faith believes and submits, making active use of the godly information to change his life.

The person with dead faith hears outwardly; the person with living faith hears outwardly and inwardly and yields to it, believing it. This latter person also has what the Bible calls “the faith.” Paul writes in Galatians 5:6 that this faith works by or through love. What is love? I John 5:3 declares, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” Love is obedience to God.

Thus, living faith is belief in God that keeps the commandments. Living faith produces growth. It is this faith that is in view throughout Hebrews 11. In the case of Abel, the Word of God that he heard is most likely what God spoke to Adam and Eve. Abel, in turn, heard it from them and believed it. Cain heard the same words and was merely informed. What did they hear that pertains to Hebrews 11:4? Some of this is recorded in Genesis 3:7-19, 21:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise

your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

. . . Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

Here we have the Bible’s first sermon. This is what Abel heard, believed, and submitted to. The same instruction merely informed Cain.

Adam and Eve were the first sinners to stand before God and be called into account. In this passage are four elements that apply to what Abel believed. The first element is that, in order for a sinner to stand before God, nakedness must be covered. Nakedness, both spiritual and physical, has wide usage as a symbol. At its best, it indicates innocence, child-like simplicity, and vulnerability. At its worst, it indicates humiliation, guilt, shame, and punishment. Adam and Eve were attempting to hide their humiliation, guilt, and shame when they grabbed a few fig leaves to provide covering.

An interesting spiritual lesson comes in understanding an application of the symbolism here. Adam and Eve threw together as a covering whatever was handy at the moment. What they chose to cover themselves with physically was totally inadequate as a spiritual covering. God immediately rejected their effort, which is the main instruction of this vignette.

A secondary teaching is that many carnal people today think it does not matter what they physically wear when they come before God at church services. Oh, yes, it does! These days, people arrive at church to worship wearing all kinds of casual clothing. In fact, many churches invite them to do so, advertising themselves as “casual”! Sometimes this reflects a matter of ignorance; they just do not know any better. At other times, it reveals a serious matter of disrespect for the primary covering—Christ’s sacrifice, as we shall see shortly.

It is good to remember the overall principle to appear before God covered with acceptable covering. The symbolic instruction carries through to both physical and spiritual applications, and the person who cares what God thinks will do his best to conform to Him. God

# personal *The Christian Fight*

covered Adam and Eve with truly fine clothing. That is our example.

The second element Genesis 3 reveals takes us a step further spiritually in regard to the covering: What humans devise in terms of covering spiritual nakedness is, in reality, worthless. The third element clarifies this further: God Himself must supply the only covering that is spiritually adequate.

The fourth element is that the only adequate spiritual covering is by means of death. As in the first element, there are two lines of instruction. The first leads to the necessity of the second, if life is to continue. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The underlying principle is that we are always to give of our best to the Master. When we fail, the death penalty is imposed. This, then, brings forth a second teaching: In a spiritual sense, the entire human race sinned in Adam and Eve, who represented all mankind at the time. Since the wages of sin is death, and all have subsequently sinned, all of us must receive that wage—or another, an innocent One on whom death has no claim because He never sinned, must substitute for us.

However, we find it clearly spelled out in Romans that there must be a link between us and the Substitute. That link is faith:

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. . . .

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. . . .

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. . . .

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith giving glory to God. . . .

Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 4:1-4, 11-12, 16, 19-20, 23-25; 5:1-2)

Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the link between us and God’s forgiveness, which provides the acceptable spiritual covering necessary to be received into God’s presence and receive the gift of life.

The second aspect of the fourth element also involves another death—ours. In this case, it is not a literal death but a spiritual one:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? . . . knowing this, 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. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. (Romans 6:1-2, 6-8)

This death is achieved through repentance because one believes he is a sinner in need of God’s forgiveness, having broken His law and earned death.

What we have just reviewed must have been taught to Cain and Abel, probably by Adam. How do we know this? Because Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Abel offered by faith, and faith comes by hearing. He heard the divine words given by God to Adam and Eve, which were passed to him, and Abel believed. Cain heard the same words, but did not believe as Abel did.

More proof is recorded following Cain’s rejection. God says to him in Genesis 4:7, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” God clearly indicates a choice between right and wrong. Good and evil faced Cain and Abel. The one brother by faith chose what was right in God’s eyes, while the other chose what was right in his own eyes. In essence, he chose death.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

In Christian love,



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## *Is China's Threat a Mirage?*

The People's Republic of China has been in the news quite a lot lately, but not in the way it might wish to be discussed. While China's economy continues to churn out ten percent increases, as it expands its influence in areas as far away as Africa and South America, and as it persists in striking a belligerent—even bellicose—pose against its rivals in Asia and in the Pacific, many Americans seem to perceive China as little more than a producer and exporter of dangerous pet-food additives and lead-painted toys.

Because the War on Terror and the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars dominate the horizon, few people recall that before 9-11, the China threat was front and center. Chinese pilots were playing tag with American assets in the region, even forcing a U.S. Navy EP-3 Aries spy plane to land on Chinese soil. Pundits seriously discussed how soon it would take China to leap from major power to superpower status—especially the more liberal talking heads, who worried a great deal about perceived instability (read “American dominance”) in a unipolar world. That kind of talk abruptly ceased with the collapse of the World Trade Center towers.

Most of such talk has stopped, but not all of it. In the nearly six years since then, China has continued to expand economically, continued to arm, continued to flex its diplomatic muscles, and continued to plan and work toward some grandiose aims (such as floating a bona fide carrier group and putting a man on the moon). It possesses certain strengths that make American leaders nervous, such as its ability to damage the U.S. economy in terms of both trade and monetary policy. China also has North Korea on a leash, for now, and uses threats concerning Taiwan to its advantage. Without a doubt, the Chinese dragon still has teeth and claws.

But is it really a threat to U.S. power?

If she is to be believed, Chinese Vice Premier Wu Yi does not think so. While touring some poverty-stricken areas of China with U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson recently, she flatly stated that, because of her nation's many internal problems, it is no threat to anyone, not economically, not politically, and not militarily—and certainly not to America. Evidently, she wanted the U.S. government to believe that, though it has the world's largest population (1.2 billion people), the third-largest economy, the world's third-ranked military, plenty of nuclear weapons, and a seat on the U.N Security Council, China should not be regarded as a rival, by any means.

Could there be something to her nationally self-disparaging comment? Perhaps. Strategic Forecasting's “Morning Intelligence Brief” of August 2, 2007, reports that, despite China's present booming condition, cracks in the foundation are already evident. China is aging, and it is projected to “get old before it gets rich,” saddling the next generation with a monumental, and probably unsolvable, pension problem. It has an overabundance of unmarried males due to its socially devastating One-Child Policy. Perhaps worst of all, the rural countryside contains 800 million seething peasants, who have watched their urban, coastal neighbors develop and prosper at their expense.

Demography, as columnist Mark Steyn preaches, is destiny, and China's demography forecasts rough times ahead.

In addition, though the Han Chinese are the majority ethnic group, China is hardly monoethnic but consists of dozens of non-Chinese groups, for instance, Zhuang, Mongolians, Manchu, Koreans, Tibetans, and Uyghur. Being exempt from the One-Child Policy, ethnic populations are growing at about seven times the Han population. Most minorities have integrated into Chinese society, yet many Tibetans, Uyghur, and perhaps Manchurians, resent Chinese control and could try to break away. Some of these minorities are strong in areas far removed from Beijing, which keeps the central government on edge.

Regional geography is also a significant factor. Stratfor points out:

Strategically, China is in a box. Its land borders . . . are comprised of the emptiness of Siberia, the emptiness of Central Asia, the mountains of the Hindu Kush, the mountains of the Himalayas, and the jungles (and mountains) of Southeast Asia. All of these borders are just secure enough to limit China's ability to expand, but not quite so awesome (with the obvious exception of the Himalayas) as to provide China with airtight protection.

Geopolitically, China's situation is the worst of both worlds: The wastes and barriers it must cross deny it the ability to expand, yet those same wastes and barriers do not protect it sufficiently from outside pressures. Because it considers itself vulnerable from Russia, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines—militarily, economically, or philosophically—it is more concerned with holding onto what it has than reaching out for more. It is likely to be insular and protective of its borders for many years.

Finally, China must tread carefully in its dealings with foreign powers, and certainly those on whom it relies in terms of trade. Its economy is built on good relations with suppliers of natural resources and buyers of manufactured goods. If either of these pools dries up, the Chinese economy withers. In other words, if it picks a fight with the wrong opponent, it could effectively slit its own economic throat. In China, economic trouble inevitably leads to social unrest and the likely possibility of a harsh military crackdown.

Certainly, the “China threat” is real, but at the moment, it is nowhere near the stature of a superpower showdown. Under today's circumstances, if push came to shove with the U.S.—and American resolve held—China would likely back down quickly, especially if the Seventh Fleet made a show of force in the South China Sea. However, in tandem with other Asian nations, China would definitely be a force to be reckoned with. Should China enter a military bloc with regional neighbors, the China threat will reach the “alarming” level.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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NEWS AND TRENDS

WORLDWATCH

## The Miracles of Jesus Christ

### *Healing a Leper (Part Two)*

His advanced disease had certainly put the leper who approached Jesus Christ in a bad way. His situation seemed hopeless—until God sent His Son as Healer and Savior. The man, having heard Jesus’ message of hope, and realizing that this unique, godly Man was nearby, sought out His help. He would not be disappointed. Jesus’ kindly answer to him, “I will,” showed His willingness to cleanse him quickly. In an instant, the leprosy disappeared; he was restored to full health (Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-15).

The humble leper exhibits at least five notable virtues—sincerity, reverence, faithfulness, truthfulness, and wisdom—that provide insight into how we should approach Christ for healing. We will consider each of these in turn.



#### 1. How does the leper show sincerity?

**COMMENT:** The three accounts tell us that a leper “came and worshipped Him” (Matthew 8:2), “imploring Him, kneeling down to Him” (Mark 1:40), and “fell on his face and implored Him” (Luke 5:12). That the leper “came” and “implored” shows his sincerity in seeking and pleading with Christ. He earnestly determined to reach Him, despite the obstacle of the crowd and the spectacle of his horrid disease. Coming before Christ was the great challenge of his life, so he did what was necessary to overcome his disadvantages.

“Implored” suggests the leper’s sincerity in pleading with Him, implying that he pled earnestly, desperate for a resolution to his condition. Sadly, few of us can see the true devastation that sin has caused in our lives and how much we need spiritual healing.

#### 2. How does the leper exemplify reverence?

**COMMENT:** All three Gospels record the leper’s reverence for Christ, though each reports it a bit differently: Matthew says that the leper “worshipped Him” (Matthew 8:2); Mark, that he came “kneeling down to Him” (Mark 1:40); and Luke, that he “fell on his face” (Luke 5:12) before Him. Each account describes him bowing down before Him—even Matthew’s *worshipped* means “prostrated before.” The leper’s humble approach conspicuously honored Him, for, unlike many today, the leper did not hide his respect for Christ out of fear of other’s opinions.

In contrast, the arrogant will not gain His favor. This society dishonors Christ at every turn with its repeated profanity, its banning of God from public venues, and its rejection of truth and acceptance of the flawed reasonings of men. Such dishonoring of Christ is bringing on our nations an avalanche of curses rather than blessings, and it will not stop until the people repent.

#### 3. How does the leper demonstrate faithfulness?

**COMMENT:** The leper says, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean” (Matthew 8:2), indicating confidence and trust in Christ. True faith always honors both Christ’s power and person. Never doubting His power to heal, the leper submits himself to His will. Some prayers we know God will answer positively, as when we ask in faith for forgiveness. However, when we ask for healing or other physical needs, we must faithfully respect God’s decision, whatever it may be. By faith, we must acknowledge His superior wisdom in

granting our request or not. The leper, in his humility and faith, would never demand God’s healing, as though God owed him. It is not our right to be healed, and truly, we deserve death as the penalty for our sins (Romans 6:23). Yet, God heals us according to His mercy and will. A faithful person realizes that reverence should not stop him from asking God for blessings, but he submits to the wise will of God.

#### 4. How does the leper manifest truthfulness?

**COMMENT:** The leper does not downplay his condition, making it sound less offensive or serious than it was. He is truthful about his case, confessing his uncleanness, as the Bible considers leprosy (Leviticus 13:45). Interestingly, the leper asks to be cleansed, not to be healed. Of course, the cleansing is a healing, but “cleansing” is the more proper term. Christ makes the distinction between cleansing and healing when commissioning the apostles: “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers” (Matthew 10:8).

The filthiness of sin can be removed only by the cleansing blood of Christ (I John 1:7). Isaiah writes, “We are all as an unclean thing” (Isaiah 64:6), and David, recognizing that his immorality and murder had polluted him, prays, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51:10). We all must be cleansed of sin. Even so, until we are truthful about our sinfulness, shown in sincere repentance, we will not be cleansed.

#### 5. How does the leper exhibit wisdom?

**COMMENT:** Mark 1:40 refers to Christ six times: “Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’” The leper wisely chose the right Person to go to for help, for Christ was the only One who could cleanse him. Proverbs 1:5 says, “A wise man will hear and increase learning,” and the leper, hearing what Jesus taught and learning what He could do, made a wise choice.

Similarly, Christ is the only One who can cleanse us from sin and lead us to salvation. Peter says in Acts 4:12, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Paul writes, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11). If anyone comes to Christ for salvation, he is acting wisely. Seeking it from anyone or anything else is foolish because no one else can truly deliver us.

—Martin G. Collins