

## Power Belongs To God (Part One)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

*Forerunner*, "Personal," November 2006

For many years, the message I have given on the Feast of Tabernacles' opening service has been titled "The Handwriting Is on the Wall," which comes from Daniel 5:5-6:

In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

The phrase, "the handwriting is on the wall," has become a cliché in Israelite cultures, instructing us in retrospect that, an event having concluded with bad results, we should have known better. Being forewarned, we should have foreseen the result. We should have recognized that warning signs were everywhere and taken different steps to provide a more positive solution.

However, my intention in the 2006 message, and now in this article, is somewhat different. Previous "Handwriting" sermons utilized significant news events that signal that we are indeed in the end time and need to be alert and motivated. Significant news events are continuing to take place. We are further along the road to Christ's return than we were at this time last year. In this record, a sense of urgency still exists, and we must heed it so that we are not caught unprepared for what comes as we near Christ's return.

Only in a minor way does this article deal with news events. It is more directly aimed toward a spiritual end—in fact, it is aimed directly at us. It is tied to the larger issues of God's sovereignty and providence and especially to the quality of our relationship with Him within these ever-intensifying times. He is, after all, our Father, the unseen power who is directing events to the conclusions He desires.

These conclusions *will* come to pass; His goals are a certainty. Because we in His church are directly related to Him by means of His Spirit, we are directly involved in this message. We are not merely interested bystanders, looking at a curiosity we read in the news. The quality of our lives is intimately involved in this subject.

Consider this: Are we taking seriously the warnings that the news events—the "handwriting on the wall"—are giving to us who know the truth? How thoroughly are we applying these biblically prophesied "news alerts" to our lives? This article is designed to lay a foundation for reinforcing a single, major, spiritual factor we *must* take into account and rightly apply to make the very best use of the perilous times leading up to Christ's return.

The factor we must consider is that *power belongs to God*. We must know and comprehend and believe this fact in a practical way, using it constantly to make the best possible use of God's merciful warnings. A firm conviction in God's ever-present power will give us the right perspective on the approaches we can take, not merely to endure these times, but to grow, overcome, and witness for God in the best way.

We must believe and practice what Paul writes in Philippians 4:12-13 without justifying ourselves for failing to grow as we should: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Be aware, be warned, and be exhorted that, if we have any desire to overcome faults, if we sincerely desire to be in God's Kingdom, if we desire to be like God and glorify Him, we need to protect our relationship with Him. He is *the* Source of the power to do all things, even to grow while also enduring these intense times. Paul is saying that he knows how to discipline himself and thus keep on track in every circumstance of life. By this time in Paul's life, he had the skills required for making the best of every situation. This article will examine the foundation of these qualities that Paul developed.

He is not suggesting that he did this alone through mere human discipline and skill that anybody can achieve, but that he was enabled because of his faithful relationship with Christ. The real dynamic is that Christ has the power, and it was He who faithfully enabled Paul. The apostle's skills, which enabled him to accomplish things that pleased God, were spiritual.

### **How One Is Enabled**

By what practical means was he spiritually enabled? In John 15:4-5, Jesus states:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Jesus Christ is our Mediator (I Timothy 2:5), the connection, the bridge, between God and us. Spiritual enablement flows from God through Him to us. God's power and God's faithfulness are the "handwriting" issues that are of supreme importance to us in these critical times. Are we constantly cognizant of the fact that our salvation lies in His hands? He has the power to save.

Notice how David expressed this in a psalm written during a time of serious trouble for him: "For look, they lie in wait for my life; the mighty gather against me, not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord" (Psalm 59:3). David feared the threat of murder in a situation in which he was innocent. Verses 9-10 carry his thoughts further: "I will wait for You, O You his Strength; for God is my defense. My God of mercy shall come to meet me; God shall let me see my desire on my enemies." Here, David's confidence rises because he believes in God's awareness and strength—which is strong enough to put down nations, let alone a small band of enemies. He also recalls God's mercy toward those who serve Him.

Verses 16-17 show that his thoughts extend one step further: "But I will sing of Your power; yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; for You have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble. To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; for God is my defense, the God of my mercy." These final two verses summarize why he trusts God, and conclude in a strong affirmation of David's faith. He trusts God because of the combination of God's strengths, His power, combined with His mercy and His will to use them in behalf of those who trust Him.

This concept develops further in Psalm 62:1-12, which is almost wholly dedicated to this theme:

Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved. How long will you attack a man? You shall be slain, all of you, like a leaning wall and a tottering fence. They only consult to cast him down from his high position; they delight in lies; they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.

My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah.

Surely men of low degree are a vapor, men of high degree are a lie; if they are weighed in the balances, they are altogether lighter than vapor. Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them. God has spoken once, twice I have heard this; that power belongs to God. Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work.

David's overall theme concerns the things he has learned from his experiences with God as to *why* we can give God our fullest trust.

Pay attention to these concepts because trouble is building on a scale never before experienced by mankind. Jeremiah 30:7 says we are moving into "the time of Jacob's trouble," trouble of such magnitude that "none is like it." Jesus concurs, saying of the same period, "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved" (Matthew 24:22)! As bad as Noah's time was, when every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually, and the earth was filled with violence, this will even be worse (Genesis 6:5, 11)!

Terrifyingly painful trouble is building from every direction, and there is no place one can literally run to escape it. When the recent Israel/Hezbollah war broke out, the Lebanese living in the south fled mostly northward because the Israelis were counterattacking from the south. They had a reasonably safe direction to flee. However, people in the terrible time just over the horizon will not have anywhere to run for safety, unless God supplies one.

Through a rather frightening word-picture, Amos 5:16-20 adds to what we know is coming upon the modern nations of Israel:

Therefore the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, says this: "There shall be wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas!' They shall call the farmer to mourning, and skillful lamenters to wailing. In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you," says the Lord. "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?"

Where will a person turn in a time like this? At that point, it will be too late. Now is the time for those of us in the church to read "the handwriting," as it pertains especially to us. Now is when we

should be admonished and turn in heartfelt devotion and submission. We will have to confront the trouble we will soon be facing—the trouble of which Jeremiah, Amos, and many other prophets speak—using spiritual resources.

### Seeking God's Available Help

When a person is in ordinary trouble and needs help, does he not seek out someone who has more of whatever it takes to help him overcome his situation? The need may be as simple as an additional hand or a bit more physical strength, or it could be something more complex like wisdom, a specialized skill, practical expertise, or community influence. The helper's power may simply be that he or she has more experience in the area of need. The need may be legal, so contacting a lawyer is a wise move. If the need is medical, seeing a doctor makes sense. One would consult an auto mechanic if the car needs to be repaired, etc. We frequently seek the powers of others.

Psalms 62 instructs us that the supreme power in all creation is God. In verse 1, David begins to express this fact by saying that from God comes salvation, that He is our Deliverer from trouble, implying that it should be to Him that we run. In verse 2, God is our rock, meaning our foundation and source of stability, who keeps us grounded and free from unreasonable anxieties. He is also our defense; He can deflect attacks in ways humans cannot provide.

Verses 3-4 are said to David's attackers, who were attempting to undermine his reputation before the public while also seeking a way to assassinate him. He warns them that their lies will prove to be their undoing.

In verses 5-7, David turns his attention back to himself, trying to encourage himself by resolving to wait patiently upon God as his only trustworthy hope. In verse 7, he reminds us that God is our glory: We take pride in Him for all that He is. He can give us favor even before those who may be against us. He is our refuge, an unqualified place of safety in any circumstance. In verse 8, he exhorts others—friends, companions, and supporters—urging them to pray because God is a solid place of refuge in our times of trouble.

Five times in this brief, twelve-verse psalm, he exhorts himself or instructs us that God is the only sure place of refuge and of help in times of trouble. How can God be and do all these things? David names Him as our Rock, Salvation, Defender, Refuge, and Glory. He can hold all these titles because, as David says simply in verse 11, "Power [or strength] belongs to God."

This confronts us with a major reason why God is the only One we can rely on *fully* in our time of need. Power is not only something God possesses, but when we come to understand it, *all* power belongs to Him. All power flows from Him, and He gives it to whomever He will. God not only has power as a possession, but He can use it in any situation or distribute it as He sees fit! Who can fight God or gainsay His choice of whom He chooses to give it to? Who has sufficient power to nullify God's doing of anything He desires to accomplish?

Notice that in Psalm 62:11 the word "belongs" is in italics, meaning it was added by the translator. It is not a wrong addition but appropriate. It is as though He owns it; it is His to use and/or distribute as He alone sees fit. It begins to open an awesome thought to consideration: Nobody has power unless God provides it for his use.

Understanding this truth makes David's exhortation in verses 9 and 10 more understandable. Compared to God, men are so puny as to be nothing. They may appear strong on the surface, but with our powerful, trustworthy Resource, we do not have to retaliate stupidly or be overwrought by anxiety.

This powerful Being is on our side by His choice! We have not earned it.

Notice the implications of Exodus 15:1-2, 6:

Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him. . . . Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces."

Note especially the mention of God being Israel's strength. This implies that the relationship between God and Israel is so close that, even though we know God did the powerful acts, it may appear to the observer as if humans did it. It is as Jesus explained in John 14:10, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."

Thus a puny man, if God dwells in him and if he trusts in God, is capable of awesome things. The unseen reality is that God is his strength. An excellent and obvious portrayal of this appears in the life of Samson. Jesus also taught that, "if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move" (Matthew 17:20)!

This begins to explain some interesting things involved in Christian living. Paul writes in Romans 12:17-21:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

These remarkably high standards are possible because God is our strength. He works unseen to human eyes and makes living according to these standards possible.

Deuteronomy 32:35-37 is the source for Paul's instruction. God demands this apparently passive requirement of us as an act of faith in our intensely close relationship with Him. It may seem as if a Christian who submits to God's instruction is spineless and easily intimidated, but in God's judgment, he is strong where it really matters: in faith. The Christian, like Christ, has committed himself to the One who judges righteously, who will act in due time, using His powers in love toward all concerned (I Peter 2:23). When a person in a situation like this uses his natural powers to retaliate, he invariably does more damage than good.

Because our God is all-powerful, we must grow to trust Him, understanding that His judgment will be exactly right because He is not only there, He is also powerful in wisdom and mercy. This measure of faith enabled Abraham to trust God to raise Isaac should he actually be sacrificially slain.

When David says in Psalm 62:11, "God has spoken once, twice . . .," He is using a Hebrew idiom that means, "I have heard this repeatedly." Practically, it means God's will always decides the outcome of whatever is in dispute, whatever hangs in the balance. Who can resist Him?

### **Much More Than Brute Strength**

We need to look more closely at the word, "power," or as some translations read, "strength." *Power* is defined in *The Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder* as "having the ability to act, influence" and "a particular faculty of body or mind, capability." This usage opens another exciting avenue, taking the meaning of *power* from mere brute, overwhelming force into such qualities as the powers of love, intellect, wisdom, understanding, vision, logic, energy, eloquence, wealth, authority, privilege, prerogative, control, mastery, persuasion, forgiveness, and so on into every area of activity.

Is there any kind of need in which God is not superior to any alternate source we could seek out to provide help? In Psalm 62, David suggests that, when we need help in time of trouble, why not just go right to the top? Is not our Father willing to provide these things for us?

Then in verse 12, David adds yet another quality of our powerful God that we need to consider. God not only renders to every one according to his deeds, implying punishment, but He is also merciful—in fact, the very pinnacle of love! Even His sometimes-painful correction is an act of love.

The entire psalm briefly and generally explains *why* we should trust God: *To those who believe, no one is more qualified and trustworthy.* Broadly, David is saying that God's power and willingness to act according to His purpose is the very foundation of a believer's practical application of his faith in Him.

There is far more to God being the Source of the powers that we need to serve Him and become prepared for His Kingdom. He has made available many powers, ones that we may take for granted yet have nevertheless been provided for our benefit.

Recall that the Israelites sang in Exodus 15:2, "The Lord is my strength." In a poetic way, they meant that we do not have strength, but God does, and He uses it for our benefit. God has not called the wise of this world (I Corinthians 1:26), but on the other hand, Jesus Christ lives in us, and He is the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:24). He is our High Priest, who has the responsibility before God to lead us prepared into the Kingdom.

The concept of strength or power has many facets that we have not yet explored. Deuteronomy 8:11, 14, 16-18 says:

Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today . . . when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; . . . who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end—then you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have

gained me this wealth." And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

That wealth is power is an easily recognized concept. "Wealth" is used in this context to represent all evidences of prosperity and well-being. We tend to think of wealth in terms of material things like the size and location of our home, the cost of our automobile, or the fashionableness of our clothing. However, there is more to prosperity than material goods.

The concept developed in this passage also includes qualities like good health, sound-mindedness, and the level and breadth of our education—elements common to prosperous cultures. It includes things such as understanding and having the opportunity to perceive what is happening in this world from a godly point of view. All of these and many more are powers available to us. In other words, "wealth" is not limited to material things. It includes our health, the disposition in which we live our lives, the liberties we enjoy, and the opportunities available to have those things whether or not we have actually taken advantage of them.

For example, Solomon said, "Of making many books there is no end" (Ecclesiastes 12:12). The tremendous volume of information available in books is beyond our comprehension. Of course, not all the power contained in this information is good, but God has made it available.

In addition, God can prosper us by giving us favor in the eyes of others. He opens doors to bring us goodwill because power belongs to Him, and He uses it as it pleases Him. No potential help is beyond His power!

In many cases, these things come to us as byproducts of His fulfillment of promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Are we using them, and if not, why not? God's fulfilling of His promises provides us with potentially valuable experiences, which are lavished on us simply because we live in an Israelitish nation. Each nation of modern Israel has its own peculiar wealth of beauty. Most of us have noticed and compared the barrenness of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq on television with the fruitfulness of our nations. This beauty, along with its productivity and liberties, are included in the concept of "wealth."

He provides these things and uses them to benefit us at all times because it pleases Him to do so. Powers are not always given because we please Him. Deuteronomy 8 is a warning against pride. We must humble ourselves, never forgetting that we are created and that we live by the gifts He provides. Remember, Jesus says, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). This awesome statement is made by the One described by Paul as upholding all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus means, in reference to God's purpose, that we could do nothing spiritually without what He adds to our labors. Yet, these verses also tell us where to go to receive the help we perceive that we need.

### **Cooperate With the God Who Helps**

Psalms 121:1-8 expresses where we should look at all times for guidance and intervention:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor

sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.

Are we truly looking to Him? Are we taking advantage of the wealth of spiritual opportunities to become better prepared as the times intensify? What we are doing now may give us insight into what we will do then. Are we establishing a right pattern of accessing God's powers? Are we truly and continuously seeking God to equip us to serve Him to our greatest extent?

Romans 8:28-39 is vital to understanding the powers already used in our behalf and available to us for further growth:

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

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To make the best use of the time remaining in our lives, we must perceive ourselves as individual parts of the costly, important, vast, and glorious purpose and plan that God is working out. That God has called us is not insignificant. We tend to assess ourselves as not being worth much, but these verses dispute that vain judgment.

In I Corinthians 12, Paul illustrates the church as a living body consisting of many functioning parts. His point is that every part of the human body is important to both its well-being and its effective functioning. So is each called-out one vital to the spiritual body. In I Peter 2, Peter uses a more mechanical metaphor, a building, with each called individual as a living stone in it. We are imperfect parts being formed into a perfect team.

In Romans 8, Paul urges us to understand that, during this stage of God's purpose and plan—the process of sanctification unto holiness—our cooperation with God is required for the creation of Christ in us. We must cooperate to bring us into conformity with Christ in a practical way, as well as for the family-team concept to be completed. God is not merely saving us, He is creating.



Many in the world have a problem understanding this concept because it means that, following God's giving us grace, we are required to do works. Doing works is a major reason God has called and converted us (Ephesians 2:10). They believe this is earning salvation, but the doing of works simply prepares us for the Kingdom while glorifying and witnessing for God.

It is as if we were given a free ticket to witness a game, but the ticket required us to sit in a certain seat in the stadium. The effort of entering into the stadium, finding the section and seat, and sitting in the assigned seat does not earn the free ticket.

God's grace provides us with access to the great Creator God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we might be conformed to the image of His Son. Romans 5:1-5 declares:

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. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us.

Romans 8:29 confirms this purpose, one that will require God to give us many powers in order to complete His awesome creation: "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."

The handwriting is on the wall for those of us who have been called during this difficult, end-time period. What lies before us is awesome to contemplate. On the one hand, because we know how difficult the times will be, it can be terrifying. On the other, because the result of God's creative effort is so awesome, because we can access His powers all along the way, and because we can be assured of victory, we have no need for irrational fear.