

PREPARATION OF THE BRIDE

PART 9

"LORD OF THE DRAGON"

When we originally started this series, we had no idea where the Lord might lead us in it. As a matter of fact, we never even intended for it to become a series! But obviously, the Lord had other plans, and so we have endeavored to stay with the subject. Certainly it has been a timely word for us; and we trust that it has been to you, as well.

What began as a brief look at some of the principles Christ employs in purifying our hearts from rebellion and independence, as illustrated in the book of Hosea, has eventually found its way into the book of Revelation. The Word is so rich on this topic, we've hardly known where to end!. We pray we have not unnecessarily belabored the issue, or burdened our readers with excessive repetition; but this subject just happens to be one of the major themes of the Bible (not to mention a necessary work of which all of us are in desperate need)! Our purpose has not been to try to exhaust the matter, however, or to overemphasize its importance out of true proportion; we are not attempting to give explanation for every type and shadow in the Revelation, but to merely show that there is purpose involved in every detail of life; lessons to be learned at every interval; obstacles to overcome, and opportunities that abound in every experience. NOTHING HAPPENS BY CHANCE! When we learn to respond positively to God's dealings, He causes all things "to fit into a pattern for good"... "according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"! He is working mightily within us, accomplishing His divine objective, delivering us from the harlotrous ways of Babylon, and into a pure and virginal relationship with Him. And when He is finished, He shall have the pleasure of presenting us to Himself spotless and white, as His glorious Bride, to reign by His side throughout the ages to come!

We understand that some of the terminology we have used may be foreign to many, since there has been so much theological "conditioning" over the years, associating certain things with certain futuristic events that are predicted to transpire. We have "many things to say, and hard to be uttered", mainly because of these preconceived interpretations that pose as mental stumblingblocks. And admittedly, "some things are hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unsettled wrest"; but the truth of the matter is, they were never meant to be understood by the carnal mind! "But the natural man RECEIVETH NOT the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: NEITHER CAN he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). Therefore, we appeal to the spiritual faculties in our readers, that they might judge all things according to the relativeness of their applications (the spiritual "litmus" test for any doctrinal interpretation is in whether it provokes us to "LIVE BY EVERY WORD that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord", or whether it relegates certain portions of scripture to other times, and/or other people). If you have "an ear to hear what the Spirit says", we are convinced you will comprehend this word! Now, let us proceed!

MORE ON THE GREAT RED DRAGON

One symbolic character mentioned in Revelation that folks should have no problem identifying is THE DRAGON. Since we have spoken little of him thus far, and since he does play such a important role behind the scenes in relation to both "the harlot" and "the virgin", we will consider him now. He is twice referred to as "the great dragon... that old serpent, called THE DEVIL, AND SATAN, which deceiveth the whole world" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). He is typified as being both that ancient serpent who began his deceptions in the Garden, and the great dragon who is deceiving the whole world today! Therefore, these titles are used interchangeably throughout Scripture in reference to the same being (it has well been said that while the book of Genesis, particularly the first three chapters which pertain to the Garden of God, is the "seedbed" of all spiritual truth, Revelation portrays the fully developed harvest; and what was "planted" in the Garden as a tiny serpent, cursed to crawl upon his belly in the dust of the earth, has progressively through the history of mankind "grown up" and developed into a mighty DRAGON dwelling in the midst of the sea)! It is clearly manifest that his power and influence have spread throughout the whole world, and increased rapidly as we near the end of the age.

This "great red dragon" is seen to stand in opposition to that which comes forth of the "sun-clad" woman (namely, the "man child", or, manifestation of the Christ life; Rev. 12). John, in verse 1, notes that this "virgin with child" is herself "clothed with the sun", that is, covered by and enshrouded with God's radiant Presence (on a personal level, she depicts the soul of the believer that is in submission to the Spirit, that is under the covering of her espoused Husband, Christ; and thus, gives "birth" to the expression to His indwelling life). The dragon persecutes this unadulterated woman in the wilderness, and makes war with the remnant of her seed, because there is a natural animosity between them. As God said to the serpent in Gen. 3:15, "...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed", we understand that the devil hates every expression of a pure heart toward God, as much as it hates the devil! The feelings are mutual!

However, that great whore "Babylon" (the heart of rebellion) has no conflict with him; as a matter of fact, they cooperate quite well together (seeing that they share a common interest)! He gives the beast she rides upon (the expressions of the Adamic nature) "his power, and seat, and great authority" (13:2), while she gives him a place of habitation (18:2)! They serve one another's purpose! It is obvious that there is a close affinity between the harlot, the dragon, and the beast, because all three appear in RED (see page 6 of Part 7, "From Harlotry to Purity", for more on this). We know that in that Edenic paradise of old, when "lust was first conceived", and iniquity was "born" into the world, three characters were used... the serpent to inspire, the woman (Eve) to entice, and the man (Adam) to enact (fully understanding the choice he had made). And beloved, these three still serve (in the symbolic forms of the dragon, the harlot, and the beast) to perpetuate the "mystery of iniquity" in the earth today!

THE DRAGON'S ROLE

The reality of this ancient foe can hardly be denied by anyone who has ever encountered him; but it is his purpose that has long been misunderstood. You see, while he may SEEM to have a mind of his own, doing "his own thing" to whosoever he wills at his desired appointment and bidding, and while it may APPEAR that he is just a rebel force defying both God and man with his universal mischief, the truth is that HE IS UNWITTINGLY A SERVANT to God's eternal purposes! In fact, it was for the divinely ordained purpose of manifesting certain facets of God's ways that he was created: "(God's) hand hath FORMED the crooked serpent. Lo, THESE ARE PARTS OF HIS WAYS: but how little a portion is heard of Him?" (Job 26:13-14). Can we accept this? While usually only the positive aspects of God's ways are preached, we are learning that He has formed "the crooked serpent" AS A PART OF HIS WAYS, too (and, may we say, A VERY EFFECTIVE PART, at that)!

Though this runs contrary to the popular concepts of men, God, in His own indisputable Word clearly states, "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I MAKE PEACE, AND CREATE EVIL: I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. 45:6-7; we would carefully point out that the Hebrew word used here for EVIL, "RAH", speaks of adversity, affliction, calamity, distress, etc. but NOT SIN. ADAM is the one who is responsible for creating sin, by transgressing God's law). Though we know that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all", IT IS HE who originally authorized the contrast between light and darkness, between positive and negative; NOT BY ACCIDENT, but as a part of His original design (this is clearly seen in the first chapter of Genesis)! IT IS HE who has designated times and seasons for both to be manifested, with determined results: "to EVERYTHING there is a season, and a time to EVERY PURPOSE under the heaven" (see Eccles. 3:1-8)! IT WAS HE who "planted" two contrasting trees in the Garden, who set before the Edenic couple "LIFE AND DEATH, BLESSING AND CURSING" (Deut. 30:19); and IT WAS HE who specifically planned for Adam and his counterpart to encounter the serpent when they did (else the serpent would never have been there in the first place)! He needs no one to make excuses for Him; He takes full responsibility for His actions! In just the same way, IT IS HE who suffered the Christ to be tempted in the wilderness; and IT IS HE who has led us into our wilderness conflict with the dragon today, with divine purpose: "to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deut. 8:2)! By bringing us this way, He is providing us with opportunities for advancement into the Kingdom, and teaching us more perfectly the ways of the Spirit! And what valuable lessons they are!

Please allow us to briefly clarify what we deem to be a general misconception concerning Satan. We have heard the traditional account of the devil's origin so many times, it has become unquestionably accepted by the masses of religion as sound doctrine. As you know, the strength of any tradition comes from repetition; if it is repeated often enough, and with enough enthusiasm, folks will come to believe it over the plain and undeniable truth found in God's Word! By taking a few scriptures out of context (basically from Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28), and weaving them together with a great deal of foolish folklore and vain imagination (not to mention some "twisting" by the old serpent himself, to masquerade as "an angel of light"), we have the fantastically fictional story of one who

was originally created as a great and holy archangel (supposedly "the choirleader of heaven"); who, because of pride, attempted to be "like the Most High", and overthrow the Throne of God. He was said to have led a revolt with a third of the angels to accomplish his objective; and as a result, was cast out of heaven, forever banished from those hallowed halls. Because of his insubordination, therefore, HE MADE HIMSELF THE DEVIL that he now is! The warfare has continued, according to the tale, for 10 these past six thousand years, with God (and two-thirds of the angels) struggling to contain the devil and his hellish hosts, but never quite able to do so (in the minds of many, he is a god of almost, if not altogether, EQUAL POWER to Jehovah. This is nothing short of IDOLATRY)! In the end, however, he will be defeated, but not before he has thoroughly botched and fouled up God's plan! Because of the broad range of satan's influence, God will have to "airlift" the saints, destroy the world, and start all over again!

While our purpose here is not to make a lengthy debate of this (since we have dealt with it in other writings), we would simply ask, "what saith the Scriptures"? Did God create the devil, or did the devil create himself? Is God truly sovereign, or is He in some sort of a power-struggle with the forces of darkness? Are all things truly working "after the counsel of His own will", or has He been forced to abandon it, and resort to "PLAN B"? The way we look at these questions are more important than we may think!

Let the record state that Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things (John 1:3; I Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2); and that "BY HIM were ALL things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, PRINCIPALITIES, OR POWERS: all things were created BY HIM, and FOR HIM: and He is before all things, and BY HIM ALL THINGS CONSIST" (Col. 1:16-17)! If we believe that ALL THINGS were created BY Him, we must also believe that they were created FOR Him... that is, for His purpose, with divine intention. And if we believe that they were created FOR Him, we must likewise accept the fact that BY Him all things CONSIST (or have their consistency)! Everything that is in existence receives it's constitution, it's composition from Him! He made it thus! That includes the very PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS we presently wrestle against (Eph. 6:12)! He specifically said so!

Furthermore, Jesus, the greatest Authority on any subject, made some very revealing statements in the days of His flesh concerning the devil. In speaking to the Pharisees, He said, "Ye are of your father THE DEVIL, and the lusts of your father ye will do. HE WAS A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING, and abode not in the truth, because THERE IS NO TRUTH IN HIM. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for HE IS A LIAR, AND THE FATHER OF IT" (John 8:44). Later, He said, "The THIEF cometh not, but FOR to STEAL, KILL, AND TO DESTROY..." (John 10:10). Likewise, we read in I John 3:8, "... THE DEVIL SINNETH FROM THE BEGINNING". Shall we say then that IN THE BEGINNING, when all things were created, the devil was "a holy angel", as men say, or "a murderer and liar", as Jesus said? Was he really a sinner FROM THE BEGINNING, as John said, or did he become one sometime thereafter? And what of his purpose? Shall we say that he perverted his original intention, and thereby interrupted God's plan, or shall we agree with Jesus that the thief came FOR the express purpose of "stealing, killing, and destroying"? Which view is consistent with the plain

teachings in God's Word? "Behold, I HAVE CREATED THE SMITH that bloweth the coals in the fire, and THAT BRINGETH FORTH AN INSTRUMENT FOR HIS WORK; and I HAVE CREATED THE WASTER TO DESTROY" (Isa. 54:16)! Certainly, there is no mistaking who is the subject spoken of in the above passage; but who did the creating here? Was it not the Lord? And why did He create "THE SMITH"? Scripture answers, "to blow upon the coals in the fire", to "bring forth an instrument for His work"! And why did He create "THE WASTER"? Plainly, to "destroy"! But to destroy what? That which is unprofitable in the King's servant, of course! There is a destroying work that is vital to the fulfillment of God's plan in us, that He might have a refined and purified instrument for His work in the end! (It is amazing to us how many people very piously DEFEND the original holiness" of the devil, whenever it is questioned! What pleasure this must bring him! But we would much rather stand in defense of the plain and simple teachings of the Gospel, saying no other thing than that which is written, than to attempt to justify such a vague and obscure doctrine as the one described above, no matter how popular it might be)!

We would inject here a thought from the past, which we touched briefly upon in Part 6 of this series ("Preparation for Presentation"). The very name "DEVIL" in Greek is "DIABOLOS"; which, in turn, is the product of two words, "DIA", meaning, "a channel for an act", and "BOLOS", "to throw, or cast down". While his natural instincts are to cast down his prey, to "steal, kill, and destroy", he inadvertently performs a necessary work for God in the process! He provides the opposition required for those who are called to "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"... by turning up the heat in their lives, and blowing upon the coals! He serves as "a channel for an act", well pleasing unto God, by creating fiery trials, strong temptations, difficult circumstances, etc. to be overcome. While we know that God does not tempt us with evil (Jam. 1:13), it is obvious that He does allow the devil to do so. Sometimes, in times of trial, we are inspired of the Lord to stand up, and openly rebuke the adversary, while other times we may be instructed to quietly and confidently "endure hardness as a good soldier" (either way, whether forcefully or passively, as long as our attitudes are "Lamblike", we are still "treading on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy". Our authority is seen in the fact that our actions are not controlled by him)! If we are directed to aggressively challenge the enemy, God will vindicate us with His Presence, and by the evidence of victory. But if we are called to endure temptations, passively and patiently trusting the Lord as Job did, then we find that our flaming test will merely serve to burn away the impure dross of carnality and unbelief, and refine our faith as gold! "But He knoweth the way that I take: and when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10)! While we thank God for those times when He quickens a word of authority in our lips, and our enemies are put to flight, really, it is those times of intense tribulation that actually work the most in our favor to consume the fleshly, Adamic nature within us, and mature our spirits! Truly, it is a work we cannot do ourselves; and a process (if God has ordained it for a season), we cannot stop, no matter how loud we shout at the devil! The "smith" just keeps on blowing! We can only learn to respond to the fire by drawing nigh unto God, by depending on Him, and patiently waiting upon Him for directions and deliverance! We can rest assured that when the work is complete, and all the impurities are consumed in us, the fire will have no power over us! "When thou passest through the

waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2)! We will arise from the ashes, beautified from the process (Isa. 61:3; Job 42)!

DEVIL ON A LEASH

We know that in the story of Job, Satan is not the unrestrained character we have imagined him to be, free to do as he pleases. HE HAS TO REPORT FOR DUTY (Job 1:6-12)! Is this not evident from the fact that "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, (that) satan came also among them" (verse 6)? While he does have a certain amount of liberty, he is required to give an account of his activities, to show up for "roll call" (Hey! Wait a minute! We thought he was forbidden in heaven! Isn't that what we were taught)? And not only that, but HE MUST RECEIVE PERMISSION FROM GOD TO FULFILL HIS MISSION (verse 12)! He can only do what he is allowed; for it is the Lord who decides how far he can go (he's like a dog on a leash)! Just as the Lord has set bounds for the raging waves of the sea (Job 26:10; 38:10; Psa. 104:9; Prov. 8:29), He establishes "hedges" the devil has to abide by! He takes his orders from God (a few other instances where God sent out evil spirits to accomplish His purposes are found in Judges 9:23, where he sent evil spirits between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; I Sam. 16:14, when God sent an evil spirit to trouble Saul; I Kings 22:19-23, when He sent forth a lying spirit into the mouths of the prophets of Israel; Psa. 78:49, which tells how God sent evil angels among the Egyptians, to trouble them; and Exodus 12, when the Lord sent forth "the destroyer", the death angel, to slay all the firstborn of the Egyptians. Incidentally, the name for "the king of the bottomless pit" in Rev. 9:11, "Abaddon", or "Apollyon", means "the destroyer")! Even the youngest convert among us should see this... there should be no mistaking this fact!

We would point out that once God establishes a hedge, the only way the serpent can cross it is either for God to remove it (for the purpose of testing us), or for us to break it (as did Adam, through iniquity); in which case, the serpent is free to bite us at will (Ecl. 10:8)! And believe me, he WILL bite "without enchantment" (v. 11)! He needs no encouragement!

(We share these truths, not that you might sympathize with the devil for being made a vessel of dishonor, but rather, that you might better understand why he exists. And we certainly do not want to leave the impression that he is always willing to cooperate with God's plan. Quite the contrary! Just as God raised up Pharaoh, and hardened his heart, "that He might shew His power in him", and thereby fulfill His will (Rom. 9:17-18), even so has He made the devil to abide in the realm of darkness, to rebel against the Light, in order to "to make His power known"! The devil is an insurrectionist by nature; he thrives on trouble! Therefore, he can be counted on to provide opportunities for God's delivering power to be seen in the most amazing ways possible! We desire to emphasize the absolute sovereignty of God, that He reigns over the affairs of our lives, and the fact that HE HAS ORDAINED FOR US TO MEET WITH OPPOSITION; AND IN MEETING

IT, WE MIGHT LEARN TO OVERCOME ANYTHING THAT COMES OUR WAY,
THROUGH HIM!

This is how we "grow up together unto Him", and become the mature and comparable companion Christ is waiting for! Therefore, it is with purpose that God endures "with much longsuffering" this "vessel of wrath fitted to destruction..... that in due season, "He might make known THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY on the vessels of mercy, which He hath afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:22-23)! Praise God!

WISDOM FROM THE DEEP

Though we may say that it was satan who brought a whirlwind of trouble against Job (and all with malicious intent), GOD WAS IN IT ALL THE WAY! "THE LORD HATH HIS WAY in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nahum 1:3)! He could have easily stopped the procedure any time He wanted; He could have turned the storm another way; He could have pulled on the devil's "leash", and made him back of f; but obviously, there was purpose in the purging. HE WAS GETTING JOB'S UNDIVIDED ATTENTION! Once He had thoroughly broken Job, producing in him the desired effect of humility; and once He had brought him to a place where he could hear His voice above the myriads of voices (both within and without), which were all clamoring and competing for his attention, God spake to him OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND (Job 38:1); and His voice stilled Job's troubled waters! He imparted tremendous wisdom and instruction to him concerning His ways. Needless to say, by this time, Job was ready to "place his hand over his mouth", and just listen! He needed to hear from God!

As the final word of a lengthy discourse, God, in describing to Job His awesome power, used LEVIATHAN, the mythical fire-breathing dragon, to illustrate the point. "Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an hook? Or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down? Canst thou put a hook in his nose? Or bore his jaw through with a thorn?... Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? Or his head with fish spears"? (Job 41:1-2, 7). Verses 8-10 are well phrased from Berkeley's translation: "Lay your hand upon him; then remember the conflict; you will not do it the second time! The man who hopes to master him will be disillusioned; at the sight of him a person is paralyzed (interestingly enough, the KJV uses the phrase, "cast down")! No one is foolhardy enough to stir him up; WHO THEN IS HE WHO CAN STAND BEFORE ME"? In other words, if you are unable of human ability to conquer this sea-dwelling monster (woe unto the man who presumptuously attempts to, without the quickening of the Spirit!), this fire-belching brute of a beast, a mere part of the creation, how then could you possibly stand up to the Creator Himself?

(Certainly, Job knew that this was not a natural creature God was speaking of, nor the natural sea that he takes his abode in. No such beast has ever been found on earth (in their desperate attempt to literalize everything, some commentators have foolishly tried to say that this referred to a whale, or a crocodile)! Those who were as familiar with Old Testament imagery as Job, however, would immediately recognize this to be spiritual

language. These were common Semitic symbols to him, conveying a far more relevant and personal meaning. This life-threatening monster does not exist in the natural; nay, his "playground" is in the watery regions of the soul! He moves about in the shadows of life's experiences, seeking opportunity to "make waves"! Job knew this by way of experience! In light of this, we can more readily understand what is implied in Psa. 104:24-25: "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom Thou hast made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches. So is THIS GREAT AND WIDE SEA, wherein are things creeping innumerable, BOTH SMALL AND GREAT BEASTS. There go the ships: THERE IS THAT LEVIATHAN, WHOM THOU HAST MADE (Heb."formed") TO PLAY THEREIN")!

Now, as God continues his oratory of the sea-serpent, He reveals something of his purpose: "I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportions... when he raiseth himself up, the mighty are afraid: BY REASON OF BREAKINGS THEY PURIFY THEMSELVES... HE MAKETH THE DEEP TO BOIL LIKE A POT: HE MAKETH THE SEA LIKE A POT OF OINTMENT. He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary. Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. HE BEHOLDETH ALL HIGH THINGS: HE IS A KING OVER ALL THE CHILDREN OF PRIDE" (Job 41:12, 25, 31-34)! What a clear depiction of the activities of the devil! He is the great agitator of the soulish realm, fearlessly thrashing about in the vast sea of humanity! As he forcefully moves through the deep waters of the soul, he leaves a foaming, glistening wake in his path; when "out of his mouth sparks of fire leap out", and "his breath kindleth coals" (verses 19-21), he easily stirs up the dirt and mire that have settled on the bottom, like a boiling pot! He knows how to roil the waters! He shows us our immaturities, the corruption and carnality that is hidden within us, through the turbulence of his oppressions! And not only that, when he raises himself up, he is able to BREAK mighty men... strong-willed men... so that they PURIFY themselves.' How many of us can say "amen" to that?

Interestingly enough, the name "Leviathan" also gives us a clue to his ways. In Hebrew, it means, "a wreathed animal, i.e. a serpent --- leviathan, mourning" (#3882). This word "wreathe" means (according to Webster's Dictionary), "to cause to writhe: TWIST, CONTORT; to interweave, or to coil as to encircle something; to cause to rotate by force" (that is, to forcibly turn something in an intended direction by surrounding it). As we all should know by now, when that wily sidewinder begins his writhing, twisting, coiling contortions, surrounding our minds on every side, we best WATCH OUT! He is attempting to appeal to us, to intimidate us, and then to turn us in the direction of his choosing! If he can create doubts within us concerning God's character, or of His high and holy intentions for us; if he can persuade us that God is in some way unjust, or that we deserve the right to make certain decisions independently of God, then we are absolutely vulnerable to his attacks! And once he accomplishes his deceptive objective, luring us out of "the secret place of the Most High", and into his territory, he can make the mightiest of men mourn! He can certainly leave sore bruises, deep wounds, and painful memories in our souls, not easily forgotten!

The root word for Leviathan further expands on this thought. It means, "to TWINE, i.e. to UNITE, to remain --- to abide, cleave, or to Join (#3867). His efforts are to intertwine with our thoughts, and cleave to our emotions... to take his abode with us! You see, he knows that in order to gain our cooperation, he must disguise himself; and so he seeks to blend in with our natural line of reasoning. He hides beneath "the lily pads", so to speak, of a thousand drifting thoughts and feelings; amidst the "swamplands" of our carnal, sub-conscious minds... just waiting for the right moment! He slowly begins to encircle us, to silently cut off our "circulation", that is, to constrict the very life of God in our spirits; and once he senses that we are "at ease in Zion", separated from God in our consciousness, and least expecting him, he comes out of hiding! He stirs up all kinds of overwhelming emotions (such as fear, guilt, lust, pride, etc.), to overflow our hearts, to confound our minds, and cause us to act out of our beastly, Adamic nature! And this, my friend, is spiritual adultery!

It is with understanding, now, that we read of Paul's burden for the Corinthian believers: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one Husband, THAT I MAY PRESENT YOU AS A CHASTE VIRGIN TO CHRIST. But I fear, lest by any means, AS THE SERPENT BEGUILLED EVE through his subtilty, SO YOUR MINDS SHOULD BE CORRUPTED from the simplicity that is in Christ" (II Cor. 11:2-3)! His concern for them was that, just as the subtle serpent had caused Eve to surrender her innocence for human intelligence (the knowledge of good and evil), they likewise might entertain his corrupting "seed thoughts" of independence, rebellion, and unfaithfulness, and thereby fall from that virginal state of mind into which He was bringing them!

THE PLACES OF DRAGONS

The psalmist David had obviously experienced conflict, from the sound of his request unto God: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me" (Psa. 69:1-2)! Again, he described it on this wise: "...THOU HAST SORE BROKEN US IN THE PLACES OF DRAGONS, and covered us with the shadow of death" (Psa. 44:19)! He knew what it was to have that "sinking" feeling of destitution, as if he were in quicksand; to be left to himself for a season; to feel absolutely helpless in his circumstances. He understood what it was to be "baptized" in tribulations; to be broken, humbled, submerged, and purged in the "places of dragons", in the deep, dark abyss of the soul! Nevertheless, it was here that he procured the right perspective toward his sufferings... and gained invaluable insight toward his troubled times. Though David's troubles were the result of personal transgressions, he, as Job, did not charge God foolishly, or question His righteous actions. He declared, "Thou hast dealt WELL with Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy Word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed Thy commandments. BEFORE I WAS AFFLICTED, I WENT ASTRAY: but now have I kept Thy Word... IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED; that I might learn Thy statutes... I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that THOU IN FAITHFULNESS HAST AFFLICTED ME" (Psa. 119: 65-67, 71, 75)! He had learned that if God, who is unquestionably sovereign,

had allowed affliction to come his way, it would somehow work together FOR HIS GOOD. Though he was temporarily "in the places of dragons", he knew that he was not at the mercy of the devil; his fate rested solely in God! Once he turned from his rebellion, and realized there was purpose in the purging, he could rest in the sure mercies of the Lord; and as a result, the "consumption decreed overflowed with righteousness" (Isa. 10:22)! His sins went out with the wash water! As is written in Rom. 11:33, "O THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES both of the WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE of God! How unsearchable are His JUDGMENTS, and His WAYS past finding out"; it was while he was going through this season of sore breaking, this time of isolation in the great deep that he discovered SUNKEN TREASURE... the hidden "riches" of WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, JUDGMENT, AND A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WAYS! Hallelujah! David found that there were priceless perspectives, "the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches in secret places" (Isa. 45:3), which could not be obtained any other way (not to mention indescribable intimacy to be experienced with God)! Therefore, with total confidence he could say, "Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, SHALL QUICKEN ME AGAIN, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side" (Psa. 71:20-21)! His descent into the "Valley of Achor" provided him with "a door of hope" (Hos. 2:15)!

TRUTH THAT SLAYS THE DRAGON

Having laid the foundation, there are many things we could freely divulge at this point, describing in detail some of the ways in which the dragon performs his diabolical duties; but allow us to simply say that God in Christ has left us glorious promises in His Word concerning both the present and the permanent victory over the dragon.

One of those promises is found in Isa. 27:1... "In that day the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan that piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and HE SHALL SLAY THE DRAGON IN THE SEA". While men throughout the ages have tried in vain to "draw out leviathan with a hook", that is, to solve the perplexing problems of satanic oppression and possession which plague the minds of men, there is but one answer. That answer lies not with "the merchants of Babylon", the vast multitudes of psychiatrists and psychologists who "trade by sea", who have made their fortunes with their endless therapy sessions and mind-altering drugs. It lies not with the teachers of eastern religions, who propagate the idea that meditation eases the serpent's constrictions (kundalini), and thereby liberates man's spirit to be united with the universal spirit. It is not with the so-called "ghostbusters" of our day, who have reduced exorcism to a form of "spooky" entertainment, supposedly chasing demons out of every nook and cranny, for the sake of looking "spiritual". Nor does it rest with those who deny the devil's existence altogether, assuming him to be merely the product of superstition. Rather, it is found in God's Word... HIS SORE AND GREAT AND STRONG SWORD, the "Sword of the Spirit"!

Seeing that our contention is not against "flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness

in high places" (Eph. 6:12), it becomes apparent that true deliverance comes from God, at His appointed time. He alone can slay the dragon dwelling in the midst of our sea! When encountering spiritual conflict, we have learned that simply "chanting" the name "Jesus" over and over, "pleading the blood", or quoting our favorite Bible verses is not enough; it takes His timely Word, "the Sword that proceedeth out of His mouth" (Rev. 1:16; 19:15, 21), to pull down satanic strongholds (II Cor. 10:4)... and sometimes we have to wait for it! When finally we come to the end of our own strength, and are compelled to cry out, "Awake, awake, O Arm of the Lord: awake, as in ancient of days, in generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?" (Isa. 51:9); then the Lord arises, rebukes the wind, and peace prevails (Mark 4:36-39). One word from His lips can immediately calm the raging waves, and bring peace to our troubled souls! Armed with the understanding that whatever the enemy attempts can only further God's purpose in our lives, we are "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16); and as we learn to view each situation in light of God's Word, understanding that whatever happens in our lives, whether it comes as a form of chastisement, or trial of our faith, happens as a result of LOVE, in order for God to draw us into a more perfect union with Himself, then "no weapon formed against us can prosper"; the power of the adversary is bound, and rendered ineffective in our lives!

Little by little, every conflict we pass through provides us with new and valuable lessons from God's Word; it strengthens our faith, purifies our relationship with the Lord, and furnishes us with powerful testimonies wherewith we can face the next challenge. Thank God! He is preparing us to "withstand in the evil day", by convincing us of His incomprehensible love, and perfecting a love in us that casts out fear, that we might "have boldness in the day of judgment" (Eph. 6:13; I Jn. 4:17)! He is developing within us a victor's mentality; a mindset that cannot be defeated... because it is based on the fact that HE WANTS TO BECOME ONE WITH 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 Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. NAY, IN ALL THESE THINGS WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM THAT LOVED US. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39)! Now truly, that is a dragon-slaying attitude! Hallelujah to the Lamb!

to be continued...