



# The Ryburn Christian Clarion

BIBLICAL STUDIES RESOURCE

*Upholding the Accuracy of the God-Breathed Word*

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Unless otherwise stated, all passages are quoted from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible. All explanatory remarks by a writer within scripture verses are enclosed in brackets [ ].

## “AN ANCHOR OF THE SOUL”: SURE AND STEADFAST

*Exploring The Hope*

**PEOPLE WHO HAVE GOALS OR** an ultimate aim in life, who have direction, generally accomplish more of consequence and are often more secure in themselves as capable human beings. Having a destination, or a target at which to aim, serves to give them focus. This, in turn, allows them to funnel their efforts toward their desired aim, eliminating a lot of wasted time, energy, and resources caused by floundering in peripheral matters. We all need direction; it’s how we’re made.

From the opening pages of the Bible, we see God giving man a goal in order to focus his activity toward that which is beneficial. As early as Genesis 1:28, we observe Him giving purpose and direction to mankind. When He told Adam and Eve to “...Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...,” God was actually providing long-term direction for mankind that, if obeyed, would glorify the Almighty and be a substantial blessing to His creation. A similar imperative was revealed by God to Noah (Gen. 9:1), for the Lord, Who made man, made him to aim and work toward that which is beyond his current state. Man, thus, gains purpose and a reason for being.

*continued on next page...*

### INSIDE AT A GLANCE

**THINGS WILL BE GREAT** in 2008! It sounds like a slogan, doesn’t it? It’s actually what we anticipate here at the Clarion. If the Lord tarries, we believe God will do mighty things by this avenue of outreach.

“**AN ANCHOR OF THE SOUL**”: SURE AND STEADFAST” continues our look at the return of Christ, which we began last issue. When this truth becomes embedded in people’s souls, they will no longer “drift” in their spiritual commitments.  
*by Rick Heeter, Editor-in-Chief.....1*

“**GOD’S MATCHLESS WORD**” is pleased to present an offering by the director of *Good News Publications*. Since life coaches and other types of mentors are currently so popular, we thought we’d examine “**The Perfect Personal Trainer**”.  
*by Rev. Duke Clarke.....3*

“**FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT**” explores the common belief in luck. Where did we get such an ill-defined philosophy, and what is “**Luck’s True Identity**”? God’s wonderful Word contains the answers.  
*by Rev. Charlie P. Johnston, Jr. ....4*

“**FROM THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT**” offers a look at the believers’ future glorification. We are taught often of God’s great glory, and that of His Son, Jesus Christ, but “**Our Glory**” is rarely noted. What does The Word say about it?  
*by Keith Jamison, Columnist.....5*

“**GOD AND COUNTRY**” picks up where it left off, in the European Dark Ages. In “**The Lamp Of God Went Out**”, the Father searches the hearts of men, that His Word may once again be the light of their lives.  
*by Rick Heeter, Editor-in-Chief.....7*

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Later, in Proverbs 29:18a, The Word declares, “Where *there is* no vision, the people perish:...” One possible rendering for the word “perish” has been given as “are made naked.” When people are unclothed (especially spiritually), they have no protection from the elements; they are exposed and vulnerable.

Another possible translation for the Hebrew word that is rendered “perish” in this verse is “wander aimlessly” and, perhaps, this translation best conveys the point of the verse. Without a vision, a goal toward which to direct effort, either collectively or individually, people will always wander through life, expending resources and time here and there, ending up with little to show for it. Essentially, they burn out their lives heading into one cul-de-sac after another. This is not God’s will for His people.

The word “vision” in the verse, based upon the immediate context, indicates the “knowledge of God.” It also implies the ability to “see” where you are going. When we get a knowledge of God, from His wonderful Word, we can see where we’re going. We no longer bump around aimlessly in the dark, for His Word “...*is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Ps. 119:105)

Our loving Heavenly Father not only gives us direction and goals, but He also shows us how to reach them. In this life, He has set before His people the possibility of growing into wonderful children of God who embody Christ-like characteristics and qualities. For example, in Ephesians 4:15, we are told that as we speak the truth in love, we “...grow up into him [Christ] in all things...” It sounds amazing, but this tremendous potential is there for any saint to “...grow up into...” God, however, being eternal, doesn’t stop there. Since His children now have everlasting life (John 3:16), God, in the Scriptures, gives them a glimpse of the life that is to come at the return of Christ.

In the Bible, the return of the Lord and all that it entails is called the “hope.” It is an understanding of this knowledge that, more than almost anything, empowers a believer to stand for the True God, even when assailed by harsh adversity. It is this principle of revealing the glories of eternity that diminishes, in the mind of the believer, the hardships of this present life, making them endurable. God knows (and every saint should realize) that the battle is either won or lost in the mind, therefore, He provides sterling truths that, if believed, reinforce and strengthen the resolve of His sons and daughters.

As the Apostle Paul observed in Romans 8:18, “...I reckon [“calculate”] that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared* with the

glory which shall be [in the future] revealed in us.” Such wonderful glory will be revealed “in us,” when Christ returns to “change” us into His own likeness (Phil. 3:20 and 21), that no experience in this “present time” is even worthy to be compared to it.

In Hebrews, there is a section of scripture that, to my mind, encapsulates the stabilizing effect that a sound knowledge of the “hope” can have in the life of a Christian. In Hebrews 6:18b, we, God’s people, are challenged to seek “refuge” as we “...lay hold upon the hope set before us:...” As we grasp, or “lay hold upon,” the knowledge of Christ’s return, it offers “refuge,” a sort of insulation, from the darkness of this fallen world in which we live. This hope, according to verse 19, “...we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast...”

Hebrews is peppered with an array of nautical terms, and this word “anchor” is one of them. Everyone understands the importance of a ship’s anchor. It keeps the vessel from drifting when it is desirable for it to remain in one location. Even in turbulent waters, anchors act as moorings, lest a craft be dashed upon a rocky shore. Likewise, a true understanding of the hope of Christ’s return (and all that it involves) serves as “...an anchor of the soul...” lending stability to a believer’s life. By growing in his awareness of his eternal destination and condition, his ultimate goal, the saint begins to “drift” less and less. Instead, he remains constant in his convictions and actions, even amid the storms of this life.

God further emphasizes the illustration in verse 19 by assuring us that *this* “anchor” is “...both sure and stedfast...” Jesus Christ’s return to gather His brethren is an absolute certainty, and it is irrevocable; it SHALL happen, and NOTHING will stop it! When this knowledge is more than wishful thinking, when it burns brightly in the heart and soul of a believer, commitment to the things of God becomes solidified, and fruit that glorifies the Father and blesses the saints abounds.

It is our prayer that this aspect of our calling in Christ becomes more living and real to you every day. God’s people everywhere need to have a vibrant understanding of this topic, for it provides spiritual backbone for The Church; indeed, it has been described as the “steel” in a Christian’s convictions. Certainly, this is quite needful among believers in our day and time. To do our part to remedy this need, we, at the *Clarion*, do our best to bring to you insights that we believe to be necessary and indispensable to a spiritually healthy body of saints.

In fact, in every installment of *The Ryburn Christian Clarion*, we present relevant articles by

God's people from across America, and even Europe. During the past year, we have been pleased to print an array of four offerings in our "God's Matchless Word" column that has touched on a number of pertinent subjects. We routinely review these articles in every winter issue, as we will at this time, in order to say "thanks" to those beautiful saints who have enhanced our outreach efforts over the past year.

"The Recipe Of God" (Spring, 2007; Vol. IV, No. 3), by Rev. Stephen J. West, Th. D., of *Akribos Theological Seminary* (Huber Heights, Ohio), got us started by showing that The Word is not a "menu" from which to pick what we like but, instead, is a "recipe" where every ingredient is important. Next, we presented "The Anointing" (Summer, 2007; Vol. IV, No. 4), by the director of *The San Diego Biblical Studies Fellowship*, Rev. Bob Lindfelt, in which we looked at what it means to be "anointed" in New Covenant times. Our third offering was entitled

"The Israel Of God" (Fall, 2007; Vol. V, No. 1), by Rev. Linus A. Mathis III, the founder and director of *Frontier Christian Ministries* (Wasilla, Alaska), showing that believers today are the real "Israel." Finally, in this Winter, 2008 issue (Vol. V, No. 2), we present "The Perfect Personal Trainer", by Rev. Duke Clarke, of *Good News Publications* (Oro Valley, Arizona), where God Himself is cast in the role of the best "life coach" anyone could have. To all those who have graced the pages of the *Clarion* during the past year, we extend our heartfelt appreciation.

In closing, we submit for your enjoyment and spiritual enrichment the remaining pages of this issue. Our prayer is that something in this edition will affect your life in a meaningful way, bringing you into a closer fellowship with our God, and with His wonderful Son, Jesus Christ. God bless you.

-----by Rick Heeter, Editor-in-Chief

## **GOD'S MATCHLESS WORD:**

### *A Forum For Presenting The Light Of Life*

*(This column features a wide range of subjects from God's Word as they are set forth by a host of preachers and teachers from differing avenues of Christian thought and various areas of Biblical study and concern.)*

## **"The Perfect Personal Trainer"**

*by Rev. Duke Clarke*

**[Editor's Note:** *This edited article first appeared as an untitled work in the January, 2007 edition of Good News (Volume XVI, Issue 5). It is used here by permission of Good News Publications and the author. Additionally, the title used here has been agreed upon by the author and the editor-in-chief of The Ryburn Christian Clarion.]*

**H**ERE WE ARE IN another new year! Would you like someone to help you get started on the right track? Would you like to have a trainer, a coach, a mentor that can guide, advise, and set you on the path to greatness? Well, I have one for you, and He has actually been waiting for you since before you were born. Of course, I am talking about the greatest personal trainer we could ever have: God Almighty!

Now, most people only consider God in what they call their "spiritual" realm. Yes, God *is* spirit, but He also knows all about your body and soul existence. He also knows "what makes the world go 'round,'" and how everything works together. Do you think God knows something about business? Do you think God knows something about relationships? Do you think He knows something about physical and mental health?

While some people think that God puts us through hell to get us to Heaven, I don't believe that is true. I do believe that God constantly guides us and gently leads us through life. All we need to do is look at the Scriptures to see how He dealt with Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, or Paul.

Sometimes God trained people directly and sometimes indirectly, but He never tried to control anyone's life, or put them in hurtful situations in order to teach them lessons. God was always there to teach, direct, and guide, but each person, by his free will, had to make the decision to follow God's lead. Let's look at Abraham.

### **Genesis 12:1**

*Now the LORD had said unto Abram [Abraham], Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:*

God was leading Abraham, but He did not control Abraham's decisions. Abraham chose God to be his trainer, coach, and mentor. Throughout his

life, Abraham consulted God on all issues, even negotiating with Him on the fate of Sodom.

Joseph is another great example of God leading in a way that most would not have chosen on their own. Even though Joseph did not have a choice in the manner in which he ended up in Egypt, once there, he continually looked to God for guidance and held fast to God’s principles, even when it cost him his freedom. At every turn, even when things looked bad, God was there to show him what to do next. In fact, God was Joseph’s number one business advisor when he became second in command over Egypt, the most powerful nation at that time.

Now, what about Moses? God gave him an invitation by way of a burning bush, and Moses stopped to see what it was. Step by step, God coached him, and showed him what to say and do (Ex. 3:1-4:17). As a good student, Moses followed God’s guidance, and the Children of Israel were delivered.

I keep using the example of God as a personal trainer, which may offend some people who think

that it does not dignify Him, however, I am using it because I want people to wake up. I want us to snap out of the thinking that God leads us around by the nose, forcing us to obey. From day one, God gave us free will in order to make decisions, and that’s what I want to point out. God provides guidance and gently leads us, but we are the ones who must decide to follow. Even as with a personal trainer who gives me a workout schedule, or a business coach who is helping me to get my business up and running, nothing ever happens until I decide to act.

Let this year be a year of action, as we follow the plans and direction of the best personal trainer anyone could ever have: God Almighty! \*

*(Rev. Duke Clarke has served as a minister of the Gospel for some thirty-five years. He is the owner and director of Good News Publications, presently making his home in Tucson, Arizona. Feel free to visit his website at [www.DukeClarke.com](http://www.DukeClarke.com). If you like, you may e-mail him at [Duke@DukeClarke.com](mailto:Duke@DukeClarke.com).)*

You may call the *Clarion* at.....(937) 275-3316.

## **FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT**

### **Essay**

*(This column offers our readers a variety of inspirational and edifying submissions. In this “grab-bag,” appearing from time to time, you will find essays, book reviews, testimonies, poetry, compositions, letters, and other things designed to exhort and comfort God’s people.)*

## **“Luck’s True Identity”**

*by Rev. Charlie P. Johnston, Jr.*

**[Editor’s Note:** *Portions of the following article have been excerpted and adapted from the author’s 2005 book, No Such Thing As LUCK! A Biblical Perspective.]*

**L**UCK IS A MUCH-USED WORD in our modern vocabularies. We hear it used over and over again. “Good” and “bad” luck are concepts we have known about from childhood. References to luck being the direct cause behind this or that event are as commonplace to us as the daily rising of the sun. What luck truly is and is not, however, will become fully evident shortly.

First off, **luck is a misguided belief in the existence of a metaphysical god.** The supposed god of luck is mysteriously hidden from view; nevertheless, many believe it is a generating force causing good, and working evil. Although there is no physical semblance to see or touch, active belief in this metaphysical god continues. Popular belief in luck is kept alive by the metaphysical teachings from mythology. This bewildering body of mythological

theology has been elevated to a place almost comparable to the Scriptures. Legendary, “scripture-like” records have captivated people’s “believing.” They purport to depict the defining qualities of what luck is. It is to these unsound, idolatrous images of chance, fate, destiny, and fortune that many people give homage. The idea of luck has become the modern embodiment of these ancient, pagan theologies, and it is to this mythical, metaphysical luck god that many people kneel with reverence, in their thinking and beliefs.\*\*

Plainly, **luck is not an inexplicable force that cannot be understood, explained, or accounted for.** The natural-minded, irrational man mistakenly imagines the existence of a force he calls luck, and then says, “It cannot be explained.” The *only* forthright and truthful explanation for the ultimate forces behind “good” and “evil,” however, is clearly defined by God’s Word, the Bible. There are **no other spiritual forces** affecting our lives beyond

those named by this greatest of all books, and upon this reality we can confidently rest.

**Luck is not a source of prosperity, nor is it the cause of evil and destruction.** Early on, men denied God and His Word, and began devising their own explanations and beliefs concerning the *causes* of prosperity and destruction. Eventually, in ancient Roman times, men attributed prosperity to a goddess named Fortuna (“fortune”). Today, the goddess Fortuna is called “luck,” and people continue to foolishly and mistakenly credit it (her) with the power to bestow prosperity. The true and abiding source of prosperity, however, is God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. The blessings we enjoy in life are from Him. The source of evil, destruction, and death is the archenemy of God, the Devil (or Satan).

Additionally, luck is **none** of the following. It is *not* an innocent, harmless crutch-word that can be used without any real impact or consequences; a natural impulse operating through personal instinct; a force that comes and goes in cycles; or an accident, happenstance, or circumstance. Having now established what luck is **not**, we may finally move ahead with certainty, accurately naming what luck **is**, and what it has been throughout its sordid history.

**Luck is a religious devotion.** Those who embrace it, sing its praises. They pay it homage. They bow to it within the depths of their hearts and minds, seeking its blessings and summoning its protection from harm. They believe in luck’s power, and they attribute its workings to many categories of life. Their outstanding confession and the manner in which they embrace luck certainly signify a religious devotion. A confession of luck is surely a religious acknowledgment of one’s belief in the power of a false, metaphysical god.

The following three sentences comprise a concise, “nutshell” summation of the meaning of luck.

**Luck is a religious devotion, an idolatrous confession, and a corruption of sound thought and will. It is a misguided belief in the existence of a metaphysical god, and a denial of “cause and effect.” Luck is passive submission to fatalistic thinking, a doctrine of devils that stands diametrically opposed to the Word of God.**

It’s not exactly the dictionary’s definition, but it’s free from cloudiness. It paints a clear picture, and accurately points out truth, exposing error. So, the next time a good-intentioned friend or acquaintance wishes you “good luck,” be ready. Tell them you would rather have their heartfelt prayers. Tell them how you look to your Heavenly Father for His blessings upon the activities of your life. Let them know it is God Who enriches and protects. Let them know that confessing luck is just a modern-day form of idolatry. Teach them to count on God; He is *always* faithful to His Word.

“As luck would have it” is no longer available. For some of us, it is no longer a viable option. Luck has “had its day,” and that day has ended. It has been buried and laid to rest. All of us can now say, with tremendous authority, **“There is no such thing as luck!”** \*

*(Rev. Charlie P. Johnston, Jr. was ordained in the early 1960s, serving, over the years, in several southern churches. He and his wife, Carol, currently live and oversee an in-home Bible fellowship in Greenwood, Florida. For more information about Charlie’s book, No Such Thing As LUCK! A Biblical Perspective, feel free to visit the website at [www.nosuchthingasluck.com](http://www.nosuchthingasluck.com), or you may send him an e-mail at [Johnstons850@embarqmail.com](mailto:Johnstons850@embarqmail.com).)*

## **FROM THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT**

*(This column, featuring the work of Keith Jamison, the director of The Ryburn Christian Clarion’s Research Department, examines God’s Word and how its application in our Twenty-First Century lives has been influenced by mythology, philosophy, and tradition.)*

### **“ ‘Our Glory’ ”**

**L**ET’S TALK A LITTLE about glory. More specifically, let’s talk about something many Christians would hesitate to consider; let’s talk about *our* glory. God has glory, and the Lord Jesus Christ has glory, but do *we* have glory? Will we get it in the future? How do we get it, and what does it consist of? Let’s look to the Bible to answer these questions.

First off, what is what the Bible calls “glory”? Glory is praise, and not just simple praise, but lofty

or worshipful praise. It is the praise itself, or that which merits and/or secures the praise. In the Scriptures, it may be a physical object, a person, a quality, a condition, or a state of being. (In some religious traditions, it is also the nimbus, or halo of light, around exalted beings.) Vainglory, on the other hand, is a hollow imitation of the genuine. It includes empty boasting, and is not worth our time as God’s people.

Can we have glory in and of ourselves? Of course not, no more than we can have holiness without God's gracious benevolence. We have all been sinners, "...in times past..." (Eph. 2:2 and 3) worthy of death. God, however, by His grace, gives us an opportunity for redemption, and a way of salvation (Eph. 2:4 and 5). If we are to have glory, therefore, it must come from God.

In I Corinthians 2:7, the Apostle Paul talks a little about the "...wisdom of God..." regarding the mystery of Christ by saying that this great wisdom was "...ordained before the world unto our glory [OUR glory]:..." This "...hidden wisdom..." as the Bible calls it, is so remarkable that it was ordained, prepared, and arranged for by God, our Father, long ago, just for us. It was all kept secret with a view toward *our glorification*. The very next verse in I Corinthians 2, verse 8, then refers to Jesus Christ as "...the Lord of glory."

### **Colossians 1:27**

*To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

It's **Christ in us!** That is our "hope," our confident expectation, of glory, when the Lord returns from Heaven, but that spirit of Christ within is also glory in the here and now when it is in operation in a believer's life. When we get born again (Rom. 10:9), we are redeemed, and we gain glory. It's not the glory of men, or anything the world would even recognize and acknowledge, but we have it nonetheless, because of "...the Father of glory..." (Eph. 1:17) All that God gives us, holy spirit, righteousness, sonship, eternal life, the blessings we have now and the ones to come in the future, is the essence of "our glory."

### **Ephesians 1:17 and 18**

*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:*

*The eyes of your understanding ["heart"] being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*

### **Romans 8:17 and 18**

*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

*For I reckon [or "calculate"] that the sufferings ["experiences," both good and bad] of this present*

*time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

We have just seen that Jesus Christ is "the Lord of glory," (I Cor. 2:8) and God Almighty is "the Father of glory." (Eph. 1:17) If this is true, then, as the Lord's brethren and the Father's children, we certainly must have glory! We do! Our glory is two-fold; it is in the here and now, and in the future.

Our glory is our inheritance. Our glory is our status as children and heirs of God. It includes our rewards for believing God's Word and walking in love, plus the new body we shall someday receive. Our glory is our stand upon The Word in this life. It is *of* God and *from* God. It is not one thing, but everything. Our glory is almost too simple to understand. It is not simply an attribute that we have been given. It is not only a facet of our lives and walk. It is not just that which we hope for in the future. It is a mindset, as well, that empowers us to believe.

God loves us! He loves us so much that He, according to I Corinthians 4:5b, wants to someday praise and commend us for our loving service. In truth, God wills to give us lofty accolades, for if we live His Word, the Scriptures say that we shall have "...praise of God." Our Father wants to lavish us with commendations, exhibiting His love toward us throughout "...the ages to come..." (Eph. 2:7) He loves you enough to give to you true praise, because you chose to love and believe Him.

God set in motion the plan of redemption to make it available for us to receive praise. I know it sounds astounding, almost blasphemous, but this is part of what God gave His Son, Jesus Christ, for. Through Christ Jesus, and not of ourselves, we become worthy of that praise. Though we still stumble through this life at times, God has made us worthy of praise! As we have noted in Romans 8:18, there is nothing in this life that is worthy to be compared with what God has wrought in Christ, and will work in us at the Lord's return.

God, like any good father, wants to be proud of us. Everything He gives is to thank us for believing Him. It's a big deal, but still very simple. The riches of God's grace shall be ours at the Gathering Together, when the Lord Jesus returns for us. This is the "hope" spoken of in God's Word, but even now, in this life, we have the token, or down-payment, that demonstrates our Father's intent to fulfill all He has promised (Eph. 1:14). Even the token itself is far more than the world could possibly offer. The truth here is not just that we shall receive future riches, but that God has made us worthy of them. Do we deserve

these blessings? No way! God, however, loves us much more than enough to give them to us.

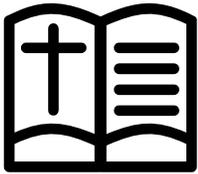
This is “our glory.” It is God’s “thank you,” and God’s praise, given out of His boundless love for us. It is the *true measure* of our worth to God. The knowledge of it helps us to endure the adversities of

this present life. It gives us reason to thank God, praise God, believe God, and walk with God.\*

*(Mr. Keith Jamison is the director of The Ryburn Christian Clarion’s Research Department, and regularly develops new material for the “From The Research Department” column.)*

## **CAN YOU HELP US MOVE GOD’S WORD?**

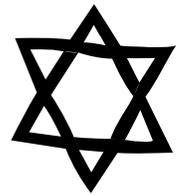
*If you are interested in submitting an article for our “God’s Matchless Word” column or, perhaps, an essay, some original Christian poetry, or a testimony for our “For Your Spiritual Enrichment” column, please note that it is best to send them on a 3½” floppy disk, using a standard Microsoft™ Word® format. You may also e-mail your submissions, in a “plain text” format, sending them to [ryburnclarion2@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ryburnclarion2@sbcglobal.net). If you desire, you may send a fax to (937) 278-1590. For more information, feel free to call us at (937) 275-3316. If you would like to send a letter to the editor, you may use our e-mail address or fax number, or simply write **The Ryburn Christian Clarion**, 420 Ryburn Avenue, Suite C-2, Dayton, Ohio 45405-2552. If you would like to support our outreach work financially, please make your offerings payable to “The Ryburn Christian Clarion,” and mail them to the same address.*



**GOD**

And

***Country***



*(In this column, appearing in every summer and winter issue of The Ryburn Christian Clarion, our editor-in-chief, Rick Heeter, will explore the Judeo-Christian heritage of America and her social and political institutions. Through this running commentary, we will discover where we came from as a people, and how we can preserve our unique, cultural identity and the liberties it fosters.)*

## **“ ‘The Lamp Of God Went Out’ ”**

*by Rick Heeter*

**WHEN A CHARGE IS GIVEN** and a trust is extended to others, committing them to an obligation, the one giving the commission being wholly upright and true, it is a shame if those so entrusted fail in their duties. The breach of any trust, when the cause is altogether good and proper, is sad, but when the One doing the commissioning is Almighty God and those in default are His children, the failure to fulfill the oath is more than sad or shameful; it is tragic.

When the people of God neglect their “...high calling...” (Phil. 3:14) and turn away from the Truth, the result is the kind of thing we’ve been looking at in the social fragmentation that plagued Europe during the Dark Ages. These “dark ages” came upon Europe for one major reason. As the Roman Empire disintegrated, especially during the third and fourth centuries after Christ’s earthly ministry, The Church, the Body of Christ, was doing the same.

At first, people were still getting born again; lives were still being influenced and enhanced by God’s Word, but it was occurring less and less. Unsaved men without spiritual understanding, who were accepted on the basis of acknowledging a creed or oath, began to assume leadership roles. Because of this, idolatrous practices slowly began to be tolerated, and rituals having pagan roots eventually subverted true worship until it was replaced altogether by repetitious works of the flesh. Even pagan temples were turned into centralized places of worship, effectively removing the hub of spiritual fellowship from the homes of God’s people. What resulted was an earthly organism that controlled more and more of the people’s lives through endless works and the dire threat of hell. God’s people, who had been charged with carrying out “...the ministry of reconciliation...” (II Cor. 5:18), let it all slip away, until there was virtually no Word of God left!

***“And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.”***

I Samuel 3:2-4

This was incredibly tragic for the communities and societies of Europe at that time but, as horrible as it was, it was not without precedence. Indeed, man's repeated turning away from God has been going on since the Garden of Eden. In fact, the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is replete with accounts depicting the Lord's people abandoning His ways. For a time, men seem to savor the things of God but, as often happens, prosperity leads to complacency, or spiritual truths are not adequately embedded in the hearts of the next generation. Trust in God thus erodes, and the culture begins to fall apart, that is, until God begins to stir the hearts of those who, once again, seek the light.

There is an account in I Samuel that fits this description very well. As a matter of fact, the nation of Israel, in this particular record, was in pretty much the same situation as the people of Europe in the Middle Ages. In the first two chapters of the book, God shows how the people of Israel had turned to other gods, primarily because those charged with the responsibility of teaching The Word had abandoned their duties in pursuit of pleasures. Even God's priest, Eli, entrusted with the spiritual oversight of God's people, had quit in his heart.

In I Samuel 3:2, we read that “...Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;...” We're not talking about physically lying down, nor is this verse referring to physical eyesight. Instead, God is aptly describing Eli's faltering spiritual condition. The Word says, he “...laid down in his place....” His “place” was his position of authority as a priest of the Lord. “Laid down” simply means that he wasn't standing for God anymore. Talk about “lying down on the job”!

The verse goes on to say that “...his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;...” Simply put, his ability to spiritually perceive situations grew worse, until “...he could not see [spiritually];...” The man who was supposed to be on top of things for God was blind and inactive! The first verse of this third chapter of I Samuel lends additional confirmation concerning the lack of spiritual leadership in Israel at this time.

I Samuel 3:1 clearly describes how “...the word of the LORD was precious [“costly” or “rare”] in those days;...” Furthermore, “...there was no open vision.”

With men like Eli in leadership positions, the teaching of God's Word was a rarity. Also, “...there was no open vision...” shows that nobody was walking by direct guidance from God. Does this not sound like the conditions we've described in Europe in the Dark Ages?

The situations in Europe and ancient Israel are similar, and are both tragic, but they don't stay that way. God is always searching the hearts of men for those who will believe, therefore, in I Samuel 3:3 and 4, we read, “And ere [“before”] the lamp of God went out in the temple...the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.” Psalms 119:105 declares, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” The “lamp of God” in I Samuel is not a literal lamp, but the Word of God, which was “rare” in Eli's day. Just before The Word died out completely, God found someone who would hear His voice and obey, for the Lord “...called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.” Samuel's stand on God's Word would go on to be instrumental in Israel's rise as a formidable and wealthy nation, especially during the times of David and Solomon.

Likewise, we shall see how God, Who roused His people to greatness in Biblical times, worked in the hearts of men in pre-Reformation Europe, stirring His sleeping children, and laying the foundations for social, political, and spiritual upheavals that rocked the continent just as lands beyond the ocean sea were being opened for settlement. We shall examine the active role God played in the Age of Discovery, and revel in His involvement in the rise of Western Civilization. We invite you to join us.\*

*(Be sure to join us in every summer and winter issue of The Ryburn Christian Clarion for “GOD And Country.”)*

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*\*Articles and columns submitted to The Ryburn Christian Clarion are edited to ensure correct spelling and punctuation, proper grammar, and clarity of expression.*

*\*\*The book, No Such Thing As LUCK! A Biblical Perspective, by Rev. Charlie P. Johnston, Jr., was reviewed in the Spring, 2007 issue of The Ryburn Christian Clarion (Vol. IV, No. 3).*