

Dumbfounding Grace

Her heart pounded loud enough to be heard by the others in the room. Outside, the streets were filled with horrible screams – people were dying. The house she was in quivered and at times seemed like it would collapse; the neighboring homes were already in rubble.

Her hands shook uncontrollably, and the situation seemed completely unreal – as her mind considered her present condition, she was bombarded with images from her past – a sordid, dismal past. She was a whore and her livelihood was known by all.

Not only so, but the city she called home was so filled with vile practices that she knew it deserved every bit of the terrible judgment it was now receiving. Through the dusty air, she could make out the devastation and it was complete – every building, every life, gone.

Except hers! She knew without a doubt that she, as much if not more, deserved the same fate, yet here she was along with her family – huddled together – alive and unharmed.

Her brother who at first had scoffed when she warned him to take shelter from the attack in her home was now on his knees hugging his wife and children.

“Are you sure we’re safe?” he whispered trying not to alarm the children.

“Why would they spare you and us? You said their God abhors harlotry. How do we know they won’t just save us for last?” her father asked.

“What makes us different? Are we going to die too?!” queried her young nephew.

Suddenly, there was silence outside. Shortly thereafter, loud trumps from a ram’s horn sounded and the thousands of soldiers who had utterly destroyed her city began to depart.

Slowly, and with a shaky hand, she opened the door. In a moment, several men approached her. “Stay inside until we come for you!” they commanded. Remembering her promise to do just that, she closed the door and began to reassure her relatives.

What seemed a long, long time passed until a strong rap on the door was heard and three soldiers entered, fully armed.

“You may come out now,” said one of them, taking her by the hand and gently leading them all out of the devastated city. They’d not gone far when she gasped and said, “May I get something I forgot? Please?!”

The soldiers were quiet for a while and then assented, watching her carefully as she scrambled back to the only standing part of the once mighty wall. Running to the window which faced outward, she grabbed a large scarlet cord that she had hung there and made her way back to the escorts.

The story of Rahab speaks so very loudly to my own heart. Obviously, I’ve dramatized it (see Joshua 2), but here was a woman no one would have thought worthy of the mercy of God. She had no good works, no history of devotion.

As a matter of fact, her fame was a shameful one and her life a cruel testimony to the passion of the sinful human heart. Yet one thing stood between her and a horrible death – a scarlet cord.

You see, she lived in the fortified city of Jericho and her home was actually a part of the city’s wall. When the two Hebrew spies sent by Joshua needed a hiding place, she gave it to them. She was convinced that the God of these Jewish invaders was going to give them victory and thus asked for their protection. In response, the spies promised her the same if she hung a scarlet cord outside her window and remained in the house.

You know the story. The hosts of Israel marched around the city for seven days then shouted and blew their horns. At that, the walls of Jericho tumbled outward – all except Rahab’s portion. She and her family were saved by the scarlet cord.

But the story doesn’t stop there. As merciful as it was for her to be spared the fate of the rest of Jericho, she also received a marvelous gift – an awesome outpouring of grace. You see, she somehow became acquainted with a man by the name of Salmon (maybe the kind of guy who goes ‘against the current’!). He may have been one of the spies or a guard to Rahab and her family, but against ALL the odds, this man took her as his wife.

Think about it! God had commanded the Jews to annihilate virtually everything in the promised land – to absolutely clean house –

to ‘wipe the slate clean’. Moses had strictly admonished them, “...you shall destroy all the peoples who the LORD your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them...” (Deut 7:16). The mood was NOT one of tolerance if you catch my drift.

Yet, in spite of this, God put it in the heart of Salmon to go against the flow, to actually take her into his family – I mean this was without a doubt a huge leap of faith for him. Dumbfounding indeed.

But the story doesn’t stop there either. Rahab had a child by the name of Boaz who had a child by the name of Obed who had a child by the name of Jesse who had a child by the name of David – as in king David. Yes, Rahab was actually the great, great grandmother of the great king and sweet psalmist of Israel!

But the story doesn’t stop there either. You see, this genealogy also put her in the Messianic line as well! Jesus Christ was a descendant of David, and thus, of Rahab – whoa! This is a story of mercy followed by grace after grace after grace... Why? Simply a scarlet cord? Could all this be bestowed upon her because of a scarlet cord?! Can I get me a couple hundred yards of it somewhere??

Dear friend, here’s a foundational principle many of us need to be reminded of frequently – and I’m one of them. This may surprise you, but... well... I’m not any better than Rahab. (Steady Mom, you want to sit down? Need a glass of water?) And neither are you! Oh,

you may not have consciously brought to the Lord a Samsonite full of what YOU think is terribly gross Rahab-like sin when you asked Christ to be your Savior; then again, maybe so. In either event, as you grow in the Lord and endeavor to walk more closely to Him, you'll realize to a greater and greater degree that Rahab should have been 'your middle name'.

And you will thereby cling more tightly than ever to that glorious scarlet cord. Why? Because of what it represents – the blood of our spotless Lamb, Jesus, Who constantly prays for us and justifies us to the Father. He covers us over and over and over and over ... (imagine a LOT of 'overs') in grace.

In fact, if you consider that in Revelation, each gate of the heavenly city is described as being one pearl and you know that the wall of the city is recorded as 144 cubits or about 216 feet. Plus, you consider that one thin coat of the nacre of the pearl is about 0.35mm or about 0.1378 inches. Well, then

each pearly gate could have over 18,000 coats of 'grace and beauty' around that initial piece of underlying grit. Now DON'T start counting your sins! It's a PICTURE!

The point is, when we fail at the gate of our lives so to speak, when we make poor choices, bad judgments, let the wrong influences in, etc. (which we all do quite often), God is gracious to us over and over and over and... not because we deserve it, not at all. It's the scarlet cord you see – for the scarlet cord is all He sees. He has chosen to see only the Blood of Christ covering you from the moment you believe and accept His free gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

So don't forget that cord! Don't leave it behind. Don't start thinking of your own good works or noble attempts at greater purity or personal holiness as substitutes for it – those are responses, not replacements! Nothing replaces that 'cord'. Nothing substitutes for the Blood of Jesus Christ. Nothing.

The Bible indicates that the generation which witnesses the rebirth of the nation of Israel will also witness all the events leading up to Christ's 2nd coming. It says that in the last days Jerusalem will be a "cup of trembling" – the focus of attention of the whole world. It predicts a massive war with Russia leading a league of nations including Iran, Iraq, Libya, and many others against Israel. It is thought by many Bible scholars that this war will either immediately precede or be immediately subsequent to the rapture of the Church as mentioned in I Cor 15, 1 Thes 5 and several other scriptures.

In addition, there is the prediction of revival of a major world power that arises out of the former Roman Empire. This coalition will exert a strong influence over Israel and in particular, Jerusalem. (Dan. 2) The leader of this coalition, a charismatic man, will be the ultimate false Messiah and lead the world to oppose Christ's return. He will insist upon a one world religion and ultimately exalt himself as god. Punishment for not following this religion will be, as with Islam, death. In addition, no man will be allowed to buy or sell without this leader's "mark" in his hand or forehead.

Also, Daniel the prophet predicted man's knowledge would dramatically increase in this time. Christ said there would be wars and rumors (news) of wars. Without a doubt, we are living in exciting and sobering times. As we consider these things in light of God's eternal Word, we can take heart that all is moving toward His conclusion. Just a few scriptures to review:

**Middle East -- Zech 12:2,3, Ez 37
Church -- 2Tim3:1-5, 1Tim4:1,2
Knowledge growth -- Dan 12:4**

**Final Generation -- Mk 13:28-30
One World Religion -- Revelation 13
Russia/Saudi Arabia/Iran -- Ez 38, 39**

World News

With Potential for Prophetic Significance

Middle East

DIVINE MYSTERY OF LEAKING WATER AT WAILING WALL

Daily Telegraph 7/5/02

Sages across the Holy Land were yesterday trying to fathom the significance of a mysterious damp patch that has appeared on Jerusalem's Wailing Wall.

Worshippers noticed water trickling from between the huge blocks of stone on Saturday.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch, who presides over the wall, told the Jerusalem Post that the dripping was 'highly unusual' and suggested that 'maybe the wall is indeed crying because of the current situation in the country'.

Rabbi Menachem Fromann went further. 'There is a prophecy that everybody knows, that states that when water comes through the stones of the wall it presages the advent of the Messiah,' he said.

Proposal seeks to internationalize Jerusalem's Old City

Jerusalem Post 7/8/02

Israeli, US, and German delegates spent yesterday fighting a surprise proposal to internationalize Jerusalem's Old City presented by an Italian politician at the five-day meeting in Berlin of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, composed of parliamentarians from 55 countries.

"It came as a surprise to us," said MK Colette Avital (Labor). "We have been working the whole evening to persuade him to take it back but we haven't succeeded."

"The head of the Italian delegation told us his main concern is that in the future

when there are peace discussions, the Palestinian entity will be given control of the Christian Holy sites. He thinks that is not good enough for Christians," Cooper said.

Jerusalem Fenced Off

Israel Today 7/1/02

Construction has begun on a 30-mile-long (50 km) electronic fence that will protect three sides of Jerusalem. The aim is to keep suicide bombers out of the city, which has been hard hit by terror. The barrier will be about 15 feet (5 meters) high in some places, and will be built first at the city's northern and southern ends. That will take about three months; later, the fence will be built on Jerusalem's east side.

Terror Group In Damascus Ordered Attack On Israeli Bus, Israel Says

CNS News 6/6/02

[Jerusalem] Orders to carry out the deadly car bomb attack in Israel on Wednesday came from a terrorist organization headquartered Damascus, just a few days before Syria is due to become the rotating president of the U.N. Security Council, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said on Thursday. "We know today that this attack was done on an order from Syria, issued by Jihad leader Ramadan Shalah," Peres was quoted as saying by the Itim news agency.

Shalah issued Islamic Jihad's statement in Damascus, in which the group claimed responsibility for the attack. "What a confused world we see, watching someone like Ramadan Shalah issuing an order to kill Israelis on a bus near Megiddo," Peres said.

"And who is heading the world's

security council for the war on terror? Syria. It's an unbelievable situation."

Bush, Mubarak Fall Out Over Middle East MENL 6/12/02

The American-Egyptian summit was reported to have ended in serious disagreement between President George Bush and President Hosni Mubarak.

'There was a surreal atmosphere to the summit,' a diplomatic source who obtained a report on the Bush-Mubarak meeting said. 'They were talking at each other rather than toward each other.'

The sources said Mubarak also turned down Bush's appeal for Egypt's cooperation in a military campaign to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.



Israeli tank patrols in Bethlehem.

only the region but the stability of the whole world.'

Arafat Threatens 'Disastrous Explosion'

Jerusalem Post 6/9/02

Chairman Yasser Arafat threatened that if Israel does not retreat from PA-ruled areas that there will be a 'disastrous explosion that will impact stability of the whole world.'

Arafat warned that if Israel does not withdraw from Palestinian held territory immediately, 'enabling our people to practice their legitimate rights of establishing the independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, the whole region will witness a disastrous explosion that will impact not

Returning to the Temple Mount CBN 6/13/02

JERUSALEM — Officials in Jerusalem say Israel may soon allow Jews and Christians to return to the Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism. Security forces closed the Temple Mount to Christians and Jews after Palestinian riots at the site launched the current Intifada more than 20 months ago. This latest move to reopen it is bound to be controversial.

Ariel Sharon was virtually the last Jewish visitor to the Temple Mount. For security reasons, authorities have kept

the area closed to everyone but Muslims during Sharon's term in office. But now there is a growing move to reopen the Temple Mount to people of other faiths.



Hezbollah leader Nazrallah denies ties to al Qaeda

Controversy: Israel Begins Construction Of Wall

CNS News 6/17/02

Jerusalem -- A suicide terrorist attack was averted on Monday when the bomber blew himself up near the point where Israel began construction of a controversial security fence over the weekend.

The terror "obstacle," which will cost an estimated \$220 million, eventually will stretch more than two hundred miles. Although officials admit it won't hermetically seal the border, they say it will make it harder for suicide bombers to cross the line.

The terror obstacle, which will reach some 66 miles in the initial stage, will follow more or less along the "green line," which is the 1949 armistice line between Israel and Jordan.

Egyptian Academics Hold Conference To Discuss 'Demise of Israel'

CNS News 6/17/02

Jerusalem - Israel responded coolly Monday to a conference of Egyptian academics and intellectuals, which gathered over the weekend to discuss the eradication of the Jewish State.

The group discussed what they believe to be the imminent downfall of Israel as well as the overthrow of moderate Arab regimes.

Wire reports from the conference quoted participants discussing how they could hasten the demise of Israel and topple moderate Arab regimes.

"We should probe ways on how to bring that date sooner rather than later," the

moderator was quoted as telling the opening session of the seminar.

"Israel will collapse, it is doomed, but what is necessary is the collapse of the Arab system," said Islamic activist Hassan el-Sayad.

"We should fight this racist pocket [Israel] planted in the heart of the Arab nation," said Salah Abdel Karim, deputy head of Egypt for Culture and Dialogue, the group of Islamic and leftists activists which organized the meeting in Cairo.

Hezbollah Buildup in Lebanon's Border with Israel

Washington Post Jun 16,2002

The Iranian- and Syrian-backed group Hezbollah has built up forces along Lebanon's southern border with Israel, while humanitarian conditions inside Palestinian territories have deteriorated rapidly.

Sources said signs of a variety of new weaponry, including missiles capable of reaching major northern Israeli population centers and of shooting down planes, have been detected along

the border in recent weeks, together with the increased presence and activity of Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

There is also concern of a massive Israeli retaliation, including movement into Lebanese and possibly Syrian territory. A new round of Israeli reports has now coincided with information collected by other observers in the region.

The opening of a "second front" in the Middle East is viewed by most governments involved in the region as likely to spell the end of U.S.-led efforts to organize a political dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians.

Stowaway Terrorists Steal into America by Sea Container

DebkaFile 6/18/02

Between 75 and 125 operatives of the fundamentalist terror network, al Qaeda, are known to have illegally penetrated the United States in the last two months, mostly through American ports as stowaways in commercial sea containers. Many more are estimated to have slipped through unbeknownst to US authorities.

Some of the stowaways arrive complete with arms or explosives, the nature of which - conventional, radioactive, chemical or biological - the US authorities are at great pains to keep dark. However, shipping sources told us witnesses had seen suspect containers appearing to be quarantined after their al Qaeda infiltrators were killed, suggesting the suspected presence of toxic substances.

"More details have emerged about an apparent infiltration of Islamic extremists through US ports during the past two months. Some of the men slipped through security disguised as stevedores, according to Bob Graham, chair of the Senate select committee on intelligence. He said he had seen reports indicating that some extremists

might have been wearing safety jackets and protective helmets to give the appearance of dockworkers. US Coast Guard officials have refused to divulge any information about the reports, but Graham stressed: 'The American people have a right to know.' He said 25 extremists 'entered in a foreign country, hid out in a container and then entered the United States'.

U.S. prevented major Israeli attack on Syria

World Tribune 6/18/02

TEL AVIV — The United States blocked a major military offensive by Israel against Syria last month, but



Palestinian rides through checkpoint shares Israeli concerns that the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad is openly arming Hizbullah and Palestinian militants.

Israeli officials said the attack was to have taken place last month in response to a spate of Hizbullah strikes along the

Lebanese border with the Jewish state. The officials said Israel's military had mobilized its reserves for what they termed was to have been a heavy blow on Syrian military positions in Lebanon and Syria, Middle East Newline reported.

Arafat Pockets 'Martyr' Money

NewsMax June 17, 2002

It looks as if a big chunk of the money donated by Arabs to help the families of Palestinian suicide "martyrs" won't be reaching its intended destination anytime soon.

According to a Kuwaiti news service, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat seems to have pocketed over \$5 million of the donated cash, depositing the tidy jackpot in his own personal account.

"Yesterday, Al-Watan received documents from private sources in the Cairo branch of an Arab bank showing that Yasser Arafat had deposited in his name \$5.1 million into a personal account. According to sources, this is theft of Arab aid funds allocated to the Palestinians through an arrangement between Arafat and his Cairo office head Ramzi Khouri."

ABDULLAH UNDER SAUDI PRESSURE TO RETRACT PLAN

MENL 6/20/02

WASHINGTON [MENL] -- Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdullah Aziz is said to be under increasing pressure from within the kingdom to retract his Middle East peace proposal.

Leading experts on Saudi Arabia warned that rising anti-U.S. sentiment in the kingdom could force Abdullah to drop his proposal for an Arab-Israeli peace. The experts said Saudi Arabia is being gripped by an effective anti-U.S. boycott and anti-U.S. demonstrations.



Arafat's Fatah gunmen at public rally.

"There is rising pressure within the Arab world, and especially within Saudi Arabia, on the crown prince to retract his peace offer," Chas Freeman, president of the Middle East Policy Council and a former U.S. ambassador, told a Washington seminar on Friday.

EU, Russia, UN line up behind Arafat

Ha'aretz 6/26/02

European governments said yesterday that it is up to Palestinians to decide who should lead them, rejecting U.S. President George W. Bush's assertion that Mideast peace requires Yasser Arafat to be replaced.

Russia, though not an EU member, largely echoed the EU's response. "This initiative shows that the United States wants to actively promote normalization of the situation in the region," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Alexander Yakovenko told the Interfax news agency in Moscow. But Russian President Vladimir Putin told a news conference ahead of Bush's speech on Monday that it would be "dangerous and mistaken to remove [Arafat] from the political arena," as such a move risked a "radicalization of the Palestinian people."

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed similar concerns.

"The time for the elections is not optimal," he said. "You could find yourself in a situation that the radicals are the ones that get elected, and it would be the result of a democratic process, and we have to accept that."

Israel occupies 7 of 8 West Bank cities, prepares for two-front war MENL 7/3/02

TEL AVIV — Israel has mobilized thousands of additional soldiers as the nation's military's chief has warned that it must prepare for war.

Israeli officials said the military has started calling up reservists for a 30-day stint in the West Bank. They said parliament would have to approve the number and length of the mobilization.

The fresh troops would be required to man positions in West Bank cities taken over by Israel over the last few weeks. Israel's military has captured seven of the eight cities in the region, the exception being Jericho.

Outgoing Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz said the military must prepare for a two-front war. This includes the insurgency war with the Palestinian Authority as well as a confrontation along the northern border with Lebanon.

U.S. Air Force: Israel has 400 nukes, building naval force

World Tribune 7/4/02

A United States Air Force report asserts that Israel is building a nuclear naval force meant to respond to any nuclear strike by such countries as Iran or Iraq.

It is the first time a U.S. military institution has stated that Israel has produced a hydrogen bomb

The report, sponsored by the Air Force's Counterproliferation Center, asserts that the navy can deploy any of what it asserts is Israel's 400 atomic and hydrogen weapons, Middle East Newslines reported. The center is

located in the Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

... entitled "The Third Temple's Holy of Holies: Israel's Nuclear Weapons," U.S. Army Col. Warner Farr said Israel's nuclear arsenal has grown from an estimated 13 nuclear bombs in 1967 to 400 nuclear and thermonuclear weapons

Russia/China/Africa

African Union gets teeth

BBC 7/9/02

The first summit of the African Union has opened in Durban, South Africa.

The new organisation is intended to be people-orientated, in contrast to the "dictators' club" of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which was formally wound up on Monday.

Its first task was to set up a Peace and Security Council, which, in turn, will establish an African peacekeeping force.

The union is the brainchild of Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, but the South African President Thabo Mbeki is the AU's first chairman.

TWO KILOGRAMS OF URANIUM DISCOVERED IN CAR IN CENTRAL RUSSIA

Hindustan Times 6/20/02

Russian police and the Federal Security Service seized two kilograms of uranium found in a company car in central Russia, ITAR-TASS news agency reported Tuesday.

Police also discovered a fragment of a combustible bar used in nuclear reactors in the car which was found in the central Russian town of Izhevsk 1,000 kilometers east of Moscow, ITAR-TASS reported.

Russia issues blunt warning to Arab allies on U.S. plans

World Tribune 6/28/02

MOSCOW — Russia has told its Arab allies in a series of meetings that they

will not be immune to any U.S. military campaign against Iraq.

Arab diplomatic sources said Moscow has warned several countries including Iran and Syria that they could be included in any U.S. war in the Middle East. The message was blunt: Washington will not limit its military campaign to Iraq and seeks to topple Middle East regimes deemed as terrorist sponsors, the sources said.

The sources said Turkey has also been warned by Russia against helping Washington. They said Turkey has been told that any war against Iraq would lead to a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and new unrest in southeastern Turkey, where many Kurds live.

UN Says AIDS Time Bomb Awaits China

CNSNews 6/28/02

The number of people infected with the AIDS-causing HIV virus in China may have tripled since 1999, and a catastrophic epidemic is looming unless Beijing takes urgent action, according to the U.N. AIDS program. By the end of 2001, UNAids says in a new report, estimates of HIV-positive Chinese reached 1.5 million, up from 500,000 in 1999. By 2010, the figure could jump to 10 million in the absence of countermeasures...

European Union

Amato calls for strong president to lead EU

Financial Times 7/7/02

One of the most senior figures in Europe's debate on its future has added his voice to calls for a powerful president to give strategic direction to the European Union.



African leaders at summit to kick-off the AU

Giuliano Amato, vice-chairman of the EU's constitutional convention, is at the same time calling for an important role for the European Commission, suggesting that when government ministers are not dealing with legislation, their meetings should be chaired by a commissioner.

RIFT DEEPENS OVER ELECTION OF EU PRESIDENT

EU Observer 7/9/02

The rift over the power holder in the European Union deepens, with more leading voices of the Convention on EU future supporting the proposal to elect an EU president at the head of the Council, while small EU countries fight this vision which would in their views reinforce the large states' hegemony and want the European Commission's president to hold the power to defend small states' interests.

Prodi Plans EU Inner Cabinet with 10 Vice Presidents

Ananova 6/19/02

European Commission president Romano Prodi today will announce a plan to shake up his team, creating a **new inner cabinet** to push through reforms.

He wants to create an inner core of [up to] 10 vice presidents, concentrating on what he calls a limited number of essential tasks. That would relegate many of the existing 20 commissioners to an outer team which would meet only once or twice a month to set political strategy.

Hain: President needed to make EU global player

EU Observer 7/1/02

British minister for Europe, Peter Hain, is convinced the proposal put forward by the UK, Spain and France to elect an EU president will win the day, Mr Hain, a heavyweight in the European Convention, told the EUobserver that a full time president to chair the Council of ministers is essential to make Europe a global player.

"If you want Europe to be a force in the world, as we do, you have to have a leader that Bush can phone and say: I talk to Europe now," Mr Hain points out. The British Europe minister deplors the fact that American president George Bush does not know who is in charge with the current EU presidency system. Without a longterm full-time president, the EU will never be influential on the world stage and business will be done, as it is today, with the UK, France or Germany, warns Mr Hain.

PRODI: COMMISSION'S HEAD SHOULD BE EU PRESIDENT

EU Observer 7/16/02

The president of the European Commission Romano Prodi pleads for the Commission's head to be the future president of the EU, rejecting the call by leading EU heads of state to elect an EU president at the head of the Council. In his contribution to a seminar on 'A constitution for the future of Europe' in Milan, Mr. Prodi said on Monday that an 'EU president chosen by the governments and voted on by

Parliament or elected in some other way, with a five-year term of office,' would be a good idea, provided the EU and Commission presidents were one and the same.

The Commission's president has fired in Milan his first shot in the battle between two visions of Europe, opposing leaders of the UK, France and Spain, in favor of an EU president at the head of the Council and more powers for the EU states, and leaders of small countries, backing a powerful Commission.

EU LEADERS CALL FOR EARLY MIDEAST PEACE CONFERENCE

Ha'aretz 6/24/02

European Union leaders, ending a two-day summit, called Saturday for the early convening of an international peace conference on the Middle East, warning the region had reached a 'dramatic turning point.'

In a statement issued after a particularly deadly week in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the European leaders declared they stand 'ready to contribute fully to peace-building' and the reconstruction of the Palestinian economy.

It said an international peace conference - jointly hosted by the EU, the United States, the United Nations and Russia - was needed to discuss security, political and economic issues. It must also 're-affirm the parameters of a political solution and establish a realistic and well-defined timescale.'

EU LEADERS TO CALL FOR PALESTINIAN STATE BASED ON 1967 BORDERS

Agency France-Presse 6/24/02

European Union leaders, deeply concerned by the escalation of unrest in the Middle East, want a quick return to talks and the establishment of a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, diplomatic sources said.

Leaders of the 15-nation bloc, meeting for a two-day summit in this southern city, will issue a call for a Palestinian state when they end talks Saturday on the grounds that it would ensure security for both sides within recognized borders.

"We're going to have something in the way of a major nuclear event in this country," Warren Buffett, the second wealthiest man in the world, told stockholders of Berkshire Hathaway Inc. just 11 weeks ago. "It will happen. Whether it will happen in 10 years or 10 minutes, or 50 years ... it's virtually a certainty."

US Challenges New Hague Court's Right to Judge

DebkaFile 7/1/02

The international war crimes court was born in The Hague Monday, July 1 amid serious challenges to its authority. A few hours earlier, Sunday June 30, the United States announced its withdrawal from the international peacekeeping force in Bosnia unless the UN Security Council could, within 72 hours, produce safeguards for the immunity of US troops from prosecution.

Three Security Council permanent members, the United States, Russia and China, as well as Israel, are among the half of the 130 UN members states who have declined to ratify their signatures on the 1998 Rome Statute that established the court. They fear its judgments will be politically tainted.

They also question the right of European nations to judge the rest of the world.

United States

Bush plan for Palestinian state backed by Israel, Saudi Arabia

World Tribune 6/21/02

WASHINGTON — The United States has obtained an agreement from Israel and Saudi Arabia for an interim Palestinian state whose borders would be finalized by 2007. Concessions were granted to both Israel and Saudi Arabia, according to diplomatic sources who provided details of the plan. Diplomatic sources said President George Bush has discussed his plan to allow for the establishment of a

Palestinian state in 2003. The state would consist of 42 percent of the West Bank and would have limited sovereignty, Middle East Newsline reported.

The proposal would include negotiations with such a state after its formation. Bush, who consulted with his advisors on Wednesday, is said to expect that such an entity would be declared at the end of next year and be immediately accepted as a full member of the United Nations.

At that point, the sources said, Israel and the Palestinians would begin negotiations on the final borders of the state. The Bush proposal envisions that the negotiations would be concluded within three years, or about 2007.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has agreed to the plan, the sources said. They said Sharon was drawn by the prospect of a long-term interim agreement that could provide a breather from nearly two years of war with the Palestinians.

The Bush plan is said to be a modification of a Saudi proposal discussed with the United States.

Bush Says Peace Requires New Palestinian Leaders

6/24/02

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - In a rejection of Yasser Arafat, President Bush on Monday backed creating a provisional Palestinian state but only if there is a "different Palestinian leadership," democratic reforms and if other tough conditions are met.

Bush specified some conditions on the Israelis, but set the stiffest demands on the Palestinians saying they must create democratic institutions, a new constitution, and new security arrangements with Israel in order to qualify for provisional status over about an 18-month period and reach a final peace settlement within three years.

"When the Palestinian people have new leaders, new institutions, and new security arrangements with their neighbors, the United States of America will support the creation of a Palestinian state," Bush said.

U.S. 'war plan' for Iraq includes attacks on 3 sides

New York Times 7/5/02

WASHINGTON — A U.S. military planning document calls for air, land and sea-based forces to attack Iraq from three directions — the north, south and west — in a campaign to topple President Saddam Hussein, according to a person familiar with the document.

The document envisions tens of thousands of Marines and soldiers probably invading from Kuwait. Hundreds of warplanes based in as many as eight countries, possibly including Turkey and Qatar, would unleash a huge air assault against thousands of targets, including airfields, roadways and fiber-optics communications sites.

Special operations forces or covert CIA operatives would strike at depots or laboratories storing or manufacturing Iraq's suspected weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to launch them... the concept for such a plan is now highly evolved and is apparently working its way through military channels. Once a consensus is reached on the concept, the steps toward assembling final war plan and most importantly, the element of timing for deployments and commencement of an air war, represent the final sequencing that Bush will have decide.

The source familiar with the document described its contents to The New York Times on the condition of anonymity, expressing frustration that the planning reflected at least in this set of briefing slides was insufficiently creative, and failed to incorporate fully the advances in tactics and technology that the military has made since the Persian Gulf War in 1991. *Editor's Note: We would not publish even this edited version of the Times article if it were not already public knowledge.*

This Gay Pride Day, Homosexuals Have Something to Cheer About

ABC News 6/17/02

New Census Bureau figures released last week show a great increase in the number of same sex couples sharing households. Statistics from the District of Columbia and 10 other states show that gays and lesbians have -in ten years — achieved significant social and political gains. There's been a 700 percent increase in same sex couples in Delaware and Nevada, a more than 400 percent in Vermont, Indiana, Nebraska, and Louisiana, and a 200 percent jump in Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts and Montana.

Researchers say the figures do not show a dramatic growth in gay couples. The significance of the figures is the remarkable change in the American

people's attitudes toward gays. Gay couples are more comfortable revealing their relationships.

Religion

Sweden Moves to Criminalize Opposition (Christians) to Homosexuality

Christian News Today 6/14/02

The Swedish government is moving toward prohibiting Christians from voicing Biblical positions on issues.

The Swedish Parliament has moved to within one step of changing the nation's constitution to ban speech or materials opposing homosexuality and any other alternate lifestyles. If the amendment becomes reality, violators could be subject to prison sentences. Swedish lawmakers narrowly approved the constitutional amendment last week.

The amendment must be voted on again after elections this September. If it passes again, it would become effective next January. ... under the amendment, Christians could be arrested for speaking out even in churches. Bob Knight, who heads the Culture and Family Institute at Concerned Women for America, predicted the United States will soon have similar laws. "The Swedish example should be a wake-up call to the rest of the world that the real intent is to criminalize Christianity," Knight said.

Christian America stands by Jewish nation

Associated Press 6/19/02

Hostility is growing in Europe toward Israel for its tactics against Palestinians, but support for Zionism remains constant in one arena: among America's millions of evangelical Christians.

Some Americans simply empathize with Jewish friends. Those with longer memories believe humanitarianism requires a secure Jewish homeland in

the post-Holocaust world. Others embrace Israel as a Middle East outpost of democracy and Western values. Of late, suicide bombings against Israeli civilians have undercut sympathy for Palestinians.

As the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and other media have noted, a major segment of "premillennialists" and "dispensationalists" bases unflinching support for Israel upon literal interpretation of the Bible. For some, that includes prophecies about the nation's future end-times role.

Orthodox Rabbi Daniel Lapin, in an article posted May 7 on National Review Online, says American Jews are "waking up" to Christian support.

"Why does such vile enmity wrack Europe, while America not only remains free of it but persists in standing by Israel in the present clash with the Palestinians?" asked the rabbi, founder of Toward Tradition, based in Mercer Island, Wash. "Why do Americans so overwhelmingly favor Israel, while Europeans regard the Jews there as wretched interlopers?"

"We see why Christians are so sympathetic to the Jewish side in this painful conflict: It is because they revere the Bible. And America, quite simply, is the most enthusiastically Christian nation on earth."

Witches win converts

Herald Sun 7/2/02

WITCHCRAFT is the fastest-growing religion in Australia. Census figures show an increasing number of worshippers are looking towards the earth, rather than the heavens, in search of God.

There are now nearly 9000 witches in Australia, up from fewer than 2000 in 1996, while the number of pagans more than doubled to 10,632. Druids, animists and pantheists, considered to be pagan traditions, also increased their ranks between 1996-2001.

Most of the major Christian denominations lost followers during the past six years.

Pledge battle all about dad?

Father claims 'under God' injures daughter, but pastor says girl is churchgoing Christian

WorldNet Daily 7/2/02

The 8-year-old at the center of last week's controversial court ruling – which held that "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional – is a Christian who voluntarily submits to the classroom recitation of the pledge, contrary to the claim made by her father, who filed the case saying the girl was "injured" by the practice.

The ironic revelation that the child and her mother are Christians who attend the Calvary Chapel in their home town of Elk Grove, Calif., was announced by Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, Calif., on his radio program Sunday night, and first reported by CPI News, a newssite run by homeschoolers. According to CPI News, the mother and daughter pleaded with the father not to file the case.

Sacramento atheist activist Michael Newdow mounted the now-infamous legal challenge against Congress for inserting the phrase "under God" in the Pledge in 1954, and against the Elk Grove Unified School District for its policy to have teachers lead students in reciting the Pledge in class. Newdow filed the case on behalf of his daughter, whom he told the Associated Press he is raising as an atheist.

"It's my parental right to keep the government off my child," AP quoted Newdow as saying.

But as Fox News reported, Newdow admitted that his 8-year-old daughter voluntarily says the pledge along with her classmates.

"This is more about me than her. I'd like to keep her out of this," Fox quotes Newdow as saying.

Court records show the 49-year-old emergency-room physician and lawyer is embroiled in a custody battle with the girl's mother, Sandra Banning.

Science

Scientists Conquer Laser Beam Teleportation

Australian Broadcasting Corp. 6/17/02

Scientists in Canberra have successfully teleported a laser beam for the first time in Australia.

Teleportation is usually found in science fiction programs like Star Trek, but a team of researchers from the Australian National University (ANU) has carried out a successful teleportation experiment in a gravitational wave lab.

Team leader Dr Ping Koy Lam says it involved creating a laser beam, its disembodiment and the recreation of the original beam in a different location.

Dr Lam says the experiment involved laser light which is made up of photons which are quite different from any solid material.

INGREDIENTS FOR WORLDWIDE FLU EPIDEMIC BREWING IN CHINA

MSN 6/20/02

It happened three times in the last century -- and nearly happened again in 1997. Now experts say that another killer flu epidemic is brewing.

Will it emerge to kill millions -- as did the 1918 Spanish flu? Or will it be nipped in the bud, as in the 1997 emergence of chicken flu in humans? There are no easy answers. But now the same experts who led the successful effort to stop the 1997 virus in Hong Kong raise troubling new questions.

'We don't want this in humans or the world will be in deep, deep trouble,' researcher Robert G. Webster, Ph.D., tells WebMD. 'What will you do if one of these gets away? You haven't got anything to do. Are we going to be prepared for this? It is going to happen sooner or later, and authorities are not stockpiling effective drugs. We have had two years of very mild flu, and now these drugs are in very short supply. If one of these viruses gets away, we are in for trouble.'

Largest Asteroid in Years Misses Earth

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - An asteroid the size of a soccer field whizzed by Earth at a distance much nearer than the Moon, the biggest such space rock in decades to get this close, scientists said on Thursday. Asteroid 2002MN was not detected until Monday, three days after its closest approach on June 14, when it got within 75,000 miles of Earth and was traveling at a speed of some 23,000 miles per hour, astronomers said.

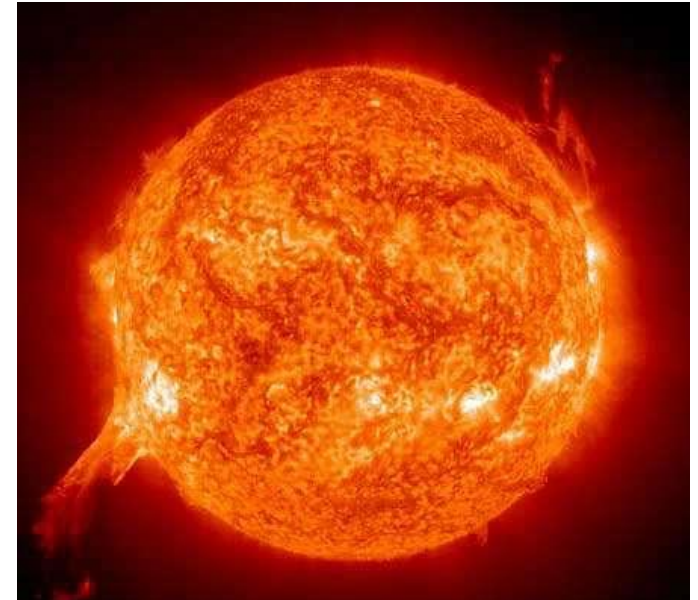
The big rock, with a diameter of roughly 50 yards to 120 yards, would not have caused global catastrophe if it had struck Earth. That would take an asteroid of several miles diameter.

However, if it had hit Earth, it had the potential to cause as much local devastation as a 1908 hit in Tunguska, Siberia, which flattened some 800 square miles of forest.

"Millions" of Dirty Bomb Sources

NewScientist 6/26/02

There are millions of radiation sources worldwide that terrorists could use to turn into "dirty bombs" - and controls to prevent them being stolen are poor in



Massive solar storm more than 30 times bigger than Earth

over a hundred countries. This is the stark new warning today by the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna.

Although the biggest problem keeping track of radiation sources is in the former Soviet republics and developing countries, western countries are not exempt from blame. The IAEA points out that US companies have lost 1,500 radiation sources since 1996, more than half of which were never recovered.

There are also some 30,000 old sources stored in Europe "at risk of being lost from regulatory control", and up to 70 going missing every year. Worldwide, the IAEA has confirmed reports of 263 smuggling attempts involving radiation sources since 1993.

Aids Epidemic Devastating Africa

CNN 6/26/02

Every part of African society from teachers to soldiers is under attack from Aids with over 30% of the adult population infected in some countries, the United Nations says in a new report. And now more than 28 million Africans were HIV-positive as well. The epidemic is creating instability in already fragile African economies. Nearly two-thirds of deaths among managers are due to the epidemic. The impact of Aids goes right across the board from rural farming communities to the armed forces and the police. The disease accounts for 75% of deaths among Kenyan policemen.

National security is also at risk as the UN cites African Ministries of Defence as saying that the rate of HIV infection is between 20% and 40% among soldiers. In some countries it could be as high as 60%.

REPORT: 40 MILLION LIVING WITH AIDS

UPI 7/4/02

United Nations officials predicted Tuesday that by the year 2020, as

many as 68 million people will die from AIDS in the 45 most affected nations -- five times the number of people already killed by the worldwide epidemic.

Twenty years since it was first identified as a health threat, doctors said the epidemic -- despite already killing 13 million people and infecting an additional 40 million men, women and children -- is still in its early stages.

Huge swarms of locusts siege southern Italy

earthweek.com 7/15/02

Huge swarms of locusts from North Africa descended on southern Italy, where many residents took refuge inside their homes as the insects devoured grain and vegetable crops. Television reports showed a farmer wading through the hordes of insects on his farm in the town of Andria in Puglia Province. The region has also been in the grip of an ongoing drought that has caused severe water shortages and triggered strict rationing.

About Face

Pam's husband just disappeared one day. He'd been a good husband and father to his two small children and had been a sincere church attendee for several years. But in a seemingly radical change of heart, he just split.

Ted's wife had expressed some dissatisfaction with the women's group at church, but soon, it turned into a constant criticism. Then she got more and more into wanting stylish expensive clothes. Then came the sudden need for a new car, a new image (teeth, hair, and other things) and then an announcement -- she had found some new friends that were more interesting. A few months later, she left Ted and her three children. She'd been a Christian since her teens, but now she was just 'way out there'. What happened?

The term 'backslider' rightly or wrongly conjures up thoughts of Cain, King Saul, and even Judas Iscariot. Many of us don't understand the term or the dynamics associated with it. Nevertheless, the spiritual issues surrounding it are so important to us as believers that we cannot afford to ignore, to misunderstand or to deal wrongly with it.

That's because each of us faces it every day.

'What?!' you may think. 'That's crazy. I love the Lord. I would never do that -- why, even if everyone else deserts Him, I never will! I'll never deny Him!'

Uh-huh. It's good that you are confident of your love, but Peter felt the same way, and if you asked them at the right time, so did many of those we consider backslidden. We face decisions, generally, every day that propel us in one direction or another.

"Direction?"

Yes, you see, it's no accident that faith in Christ produces what the Bible terms a "walk" or a "race" (Col 2:6, 1Ths 4:1, Hebrews 12:1, Jer 10:23). That is, at any given time, there's movement in a specific direction.

Randy Alcorn, in his book "Edge of Eternity", depicts his main character, Nick, as finding himself unexpectedly in a different world walking on the Red Road toward the heavenly city of Charis (a la Pilgrim's Progress). Now, Nick is not yet saved. He's discovering much about the Lord along the way, but he doesn't yet have a handle on why people in this place do the things they do. At one point during their trek, he, his friend Quon and their little group of pilgrims encounter many people all headed in the opposite direction toward the city of Babel (hell). Nick recalls...

Just for the fun of it, I turned around and walked about fifty feet with the crowd. It felt great.

"Nick! What are you doing? Get back here." It was Quon. I turned around, weaving my way back. What a pain.

"Don't do that," Quon said. "The GuideBook says once you retreat on the road you may not manage ever to turn around again."

I've just discovered life here is easy
The hard work is over when hearts stop their beating
My moment is done, I've run out of time
But I want you to know, I'm just fine
I am thankful for His grace
It's because of His love that I'm in this place
Now I'm walking golden streets
I'm splashing in the crystal sea
And I've been held by His nail-scarred hands
I've seen the Father and His glorious throne
I can't believe I'm calling heaven home

Don't you worry, don't you weep for me
'Cause I'm walking, walking golden streets
Rubies and diamonds don't mean a thing
All of their beauty is under my feet
Sapphires and pearls scattered around
They don't compare to the beautiful sound
Of angels singing praise to my Lord
And I will be listening forevermore
I'm more at peace now than I've ever been
I spend my days just praising Him
I've reaped the blessings of a faithful life
There's no way to describe
Jesus by my side

--Charles Billingsley

Now, even though he has not yet gotten saved in the story, his experience is consistent with the Bible's description of backsliding. You see, the words used for back sliding in the Bible simply mean to turn from or to turn away. Its fundamentally means that the child of God begins to face a different direction than the Person and place to Whom and to which he/she is called – to Jesus Christ and His home, heaven.

Simply put, **you will proceed in the direction you 'face'**. It's no accident that on two occasions Jesus told Satan to "Get behind Me." (See Mk 8:33 and Luke 4:8). If you're spiritually facing anyone or anything other than Christ, you will begin to backslide. Now we don't refer to someone who's stumbled in a sin a backslider, but the direction and dynamic are the same. It's a spiritual reality more sure than the meager law of gravity – you will gravitate to your 'potentate'; you will embrace the one you choose to face. And you will become like him/it. (See 1Jn 3:2; 2Cor 3:18 and Psa 115:8).

Now, God desires that you draw close to Him (James 4:8) which is to 'walk with Him' as did Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others (Gen 5:22; 6:9; 17:1; 24:40; 48:15). But if you hang around with the wrong crowd physically and/or the wrong influences mentally you'll find that your Christian walk loses momentum. As Psalm One describes it, walking slows to standing which, in turn, becomes sitting (Psa 1:1).

A bad choice, prompted not by God but by your own sin nature can take you way off course as with Alcorn's character or it may be only one degree to the right or left. However, even one degree, when it repeats over and over can take you to the place where you're walking contrary to the Lord. One degree, if not corrected can lead to a big problem. Imagine leaving San Francisco airport headed for Honolulu with a one degree error in navigation – hope you brought your shark repellent!

So what runs through the mind of the backslider? What takes him/her off course?

Temptation... We are all tempted, all of us. What you're tempted by is quite common no matter how 'unique' you may think you are or it is. What you do with the temptation is key. Do you continue to face it, to entertain it, or do you turn from it back to the Lord? The backslider first 'toys' with temptation which inevitably leads to sin.

Denial... Generally, temptation works incrementally. Contrary to popular opinion, we don't 'fall' into sin, we walk into it step by step. Perhaps because of this, the sin nature is often successful in convincing us that we're still in control of the situation and thus we can play around the 'edge' of sin.

Now, thanks to belief in the atoning blood of Christ and the power of His Holy Spirit, we are no longer slaves to sin. Once saved, we are free not to sin. However, the wages of sin is death – sin still has

its consequences even for the believer. As long as you deny your failure, you only allow it to increase its influence.

Guilt and Condemnation...

At some point, the backslider in heart hits the threshold, and denial gives way to guilt. Sooner or later, the devil's tempting 'bait' turns to a terrible 'beating'. He will lure you to the snare and then will be the first to accuse you for stepping into it. This is a critical time though, for the goal of the enemy is then to condemn you in order to keep you from repenting. His lies are laced with reruns of your sins. He wants you to 'look' at him, to continually face your sin rather than looking to the Lord. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear [me]." (Psa 66:18, also see Phil 3:13,14) Satan knows it hinders your fellowship with the Lord.

But LISTEN, Christ does NOT condemn you. He loves you – yes, even in your failure, even in your pit. The devil works very hard though to persuade you other wise. Condemnation and the false perception of God's anger with you is a powerful weapon in Satan's arsenal.

Now, you may think, 'But what about all those stories in the Old Testament where God got so upset with sin? Isn't God still the same?'

Yes, He is. He never changes. But you see ALL of His righteous justified anger with your sin, He poured out on Himself – that is, on His only begotten Son, Jesus. When you are saved and are trying to follow the Lord, you need not ever

again feel condemned (See Romans 8:1)

However, you may face a sense of condemnation if/when you walk after the flesh. In that circumstance, Satan often uses it as his 'hammer'. That's when you must turn and hold to the promises of God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1John1:9) That's when you come back into the light – you honestly confess your sin to Him. "O house of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the LORD." (Isa 2:5) "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1John1:7)

You see, at this point, God actually forgets about it – literally, truly, no jive. He's already forgiven it at Calvary and as you confess it before Him, it's GONE. In His mind, He's chosen to cause it to have never happened. Now, you may still remember, but He doesn't! "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." (Hebrews 8:12, 10:17) "He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and You wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19) "As far as the east is from the west, [so] far has He removed our transgressions from us." (Psa 103:12) Wow! That's unburdening, isn't it?

Isolation and Rejection... As precious as God's children are,

we can sometimes treat the repentant or struggling backslider with recoil and this can lead him/her to a sense of isolation and rejection – not just by us but by God. Now, the word instructs us not to fellowship with the unrepentant for that only encourages their sin and can corrupt us as well (See 1 Cor 5 as an example).

However, the backslider who's repented or wants to but is struggling must be treated as Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted."

About 30 years ago, shortly after coming to the Lord, I raced to the mission field of Europe. I was saved and loved the Lord genuinely and had a passion to serve Him. But though I memorized tons of scriptures, I had no real grounding in the Word nor any relationship with a godly pastor. While living in Greece, our second child was born and about a month and a half later went to be with the Lord. As you know or can imagine, it was very difficult.

Our shallow understanding and misguided counselors left us wandering. Deep inside, was a sense of failure and futility – like bitter seeds, they infested our hearts. Thus, the next couple of years were filled with my own backsliding.

Hitting bottom, so to speak, spiritually and morally, I finally came to repentance and began again, under some excellent Bible

teaching, to really follow after the Lord. However, just as this healing and restoration was coming about, I confessed my past situation to a leadership couple in our church (James 5:16) – I was hoping they might be willing to help us 'along the way'. Unfortunately, they abruptly recoiled and it made me feel really 'leprous' and untouchable despite my repentance. Thankfully, my pastor and his kind assistant 'caught' me, in a sense, and helped me get going again.

Futility... The backslider loses his grip on the concept of grace. After trying to measure up to some standard and failing perhaps many times, he hears the devilish siren cry that his life is futile, that God doesn't any longer accept him – he's just too bad, too much of a basket case, so why even try? Many, many backsliders simply believe God doesn't love them anymore and maybe never did. Sometimes, our behavior as believers reinforces that.

Self doubt... Now, you may have already observed that much if not all of this thinking is self-absorbed – very 'me-oriented'. And it is. The backslider is consumed with himself. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways:" (Prov 14:14) (As we are ALL tempted to be.) Because of this, he can come to think of his salvation as related to some sort of a personal accomplishment rather than God's accomplishment and free gift. Thus, he can doubt his salvation.

Of course, all of this is a downward trek away from God's outstretched arms. But doom is

NOT inevitable. It is NOT irreversible. It is NOT over. Too many are too quick to assert the scripture, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would [no doubt] have continued with us..." (1John 2:9) and forget the scriptures that say, "Turn, O backsliding children, says the LORD; for I am married unto you:" (Jer 3:14) and, "Return, you backsliding children, [and] I will heal your backslidings." (Jer 3:22) and, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." (Heb 13:5) or the story of the prodigal son and many others that speak of God's unfailing love and tender mercies.

You see, some of the most godly saints have been down this road. Consider King David as an example (See the Bathsheba affair in 2 Sam 11 &12) or the Apostle Peter (See his great denial in Matthew 26). But love, agape love, never fails. It never, ever fails.

Friends, perhaps you know someone who's turned to the 'left or to the right' or perhaps has turned away altogether. Jude writes, "... beloved, remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, **having not the Spirit**. But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. **And**

of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling [them] out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (Jude 1:18-23).

We are called upon to keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for mercy because we are aware of our own failures, acting with discernment and compassion toward those who are saved but turned out of the way. God help us to reach out patiently and in love rather than write them off.

Or perhaps, you're slipping yourself. You're going through the motions outwardly but you know what's going on inside. You're no longer facing your Father in heaven. You're not at all sure what He'd say if you turned back to Him. Listen to this paraphrased story originally told by Clement of Alexandria (153 - 217 AD) concerning John the Apostle:

One day toward the end of his life, John came to a city in western Turkey (some think it was Smyrna). There he met a young man zealous for the Lord whom he committed into the care of the local pastor to raise up and disciple. The pastor accepted the charge and promised to care for the youth and teach him all the ways of the Lord.

John then left for Ephesus. Meanwhile, this pastor endeavored to care for the young man. He reared, kept, and cherished him and finally baptized him. After this however he left off leading him in the Way believing the Lord would 'take it from there'.

The youth though became involved with a crowd of friends that truly corrupted his as yet unsteady

heart. They enticed him with costly entertainment and eventually got him involved in vandalism and robbery. Each time they dared him to carry out something worse which he came to do with increasing enthusiasm.

At last, having entirely despaired of his salvation, he no longer plotted anything insignificant. After having committed what he considered to be the 'ultimate transgression', he made up his mind that he was now lost and resigned himself to the hellish path of his associates. In course, he formed them into a band of brutal robbers with himself the head and cruelest of all.

Time passed, and John returned to the Church. Upon inquiring about the young man placed into the pastor's care, the pastor said, "He is dead."

"How did it happen and what kind of death?" John asked.

"He is dead to God," he answered. "He has turned out wicked and immoral, becoming a robber. He has now taken possession of the mountain in front of the church with a band of men like him."

Tearing his clothes and crying with great lamentation, the apostle said to bring a horse and someone to guide him to the leader of thieves.

Upon reaching the hideout, he was taken prisoner. At once, he cried out for the men to take him to their captain who was standing afar off heavily armed. As John approached, the head bandit recognized the old saint and being ashamed, he turned to flee away.

John followed hard after him with all his might, forgetting his age (approx. 99) and cried out, "Why, my son, do you flee from me your father, your unarmed old father? Please son, have pity on me. Don't be afraid. You still have hope for life. I will give an account to Christ for you. If necessary, I will willingly endure death for you as the Lord did for us. For you, I will surrender my life. Stop and stand still. Believe that Christ has sent me."

When he heard this, he at first stood still, looking down. Then he threw his weapons down, trembling and weeping bitterly. When the old man approached, he embraced him, and was baptized, if it were possible, a second time with tears.

John led him back to the church where he prayed and fasted for him and cared for him tenderly. John did not leave until he had restored the youth who demonstrated a great example of repentance and evidence of regeneration in Christ.

Dear friend, if you perhaps have slid backward to any degree or turned away – hear this – God still loves you and He has not given up on you! You haven't even surprised Him. On the contrary, He's given all FOR you. You are incredibly precious and welcomed. Turn again to see His face. Do an 'about face.' Come into His light. And you will know His relentless love as He says, "I do not condemn you. I love you and it thrills Me that you're home. Come, let's fellowship together!"

No, it's NOT too good to be true – it is the way of our God and Father

Who is ALL good and ALL true. Face it, He loves you. Turn to Him now. "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkens unto Me shall dwell

safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Pro 1:32:33)
"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed you." (Isa 44:22)

