

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

# Heavenly Minded

Vol 8 Iss 5



Collage by J R Dickey

Dear Friends,

What an exciting and yet sobering time we live in. As we've pondered it, it is our fervent prayer that we will all be ready for the Lord's appearing. Whether it's sooner or later, the fulfillment of God's Word is on the horizon. Jesus said that the 'last days' would be like both Noah's and Lot's. You may recall that poor Lot tried desperately to get all his family out of Sodom, but his married daughters just laughed at him. It is sad that many in the Lord's family today are only amused by the 'ranting' of those who are trying to tell them to 'leave Sodom' – to leave the cares of this world in their proper and subordinate place to the matters of the kingdom of God. May we all be sincerely and desperately seeking to do God's will. May we not be like those who are 'sticking their heads in the sand' if you would.

Please pray for us – we need it! And do keep trusting God – for He is trustworthy! In all circumstances, may you keep your heart set upon Him.

*In Christ's Love,  
John and Darlene*

Front Cover: Olmert, Sarkozy and Abbas at MU Summit; Sarkozy and Mubarak – Co Presidents of MU; Sarkozy receives applause; image at right is taken from Daniel chapter 2.



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## Dreamworld

You may miss it if you're not watching. And in the scheme of end times events, it's likely very important. No, I'm not alluding to the rapture but to what may be a governmental change that could be prophetically huge.

Let me suggest that if you haven't read the letter "Counterfeit Controllers" that you do so (see [www.heavenlyminded.com/Essays](http://www.heavenlyminded.com/Essays)) in order to review the prophetic picture given in Daniel chapter two. Briefly, you'll remember that Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a human image with several strata of metals – the head was of gold, the arms and chest were of silver, the abdomen and thighs were of bronze and the legs were of iron. The final part of the image, the feet and toes, were of a mixture of iron and clay.

Here's what Daniel said about this dream: *You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.*

Of course, most of you remember that the kingdoms which followed Babylon were the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek empire and the Roman empire, each corresponding to the deteriorating metals in the image. Note, however, that Daniel specified

that the head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar – that is, the representation pertained to the head of the head, the head of the government and his power to rule. Now, Nebby was an absolute monarch. He had total power to rule. What he said, happened, period. He was the law. What we observe in history is that this authority to rule diminished in each of the subsequent kingdoms along with the value of the metals. Recall that the head of the silver portion of the image, king of the Medes and the Persians, was constrained by the very laws he made as with Daniel in the lions' den. The Greeks ruled by way of an oligarchy and next, the Roman ruler was 'advised' by the senate.

Another important phrase in the passage is Daniel's statement above that these kingdoms rule "over all the earth". Now, sadly, this is a very poor translation in light of the prophetic significance of this dream. You don't need history 101 to know that none of these empires ruled over the entire earth. No empire ever has. "Earth" in this passage is much better translated "land". It is the Aramaic word corresponding to the Hebrew word for land and is associated with Israel. What the translation should have said was "over the complete land of Israel" (i.e. both north and south kingdoms of Israel and Judah).

Daniel continued: *Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile.*

For good reason, many if not most students of eschatology see this kingdom as the 'revived Roman empire' because it 'consists of the same metal as the legs' if you would.

As I pointed out in "Counterfeit Controllers", the Bible itself says that the clay in the image is symbolic of the Jewish people, more accurately the

Below, is a map of the old Roman Empire. As you will note, what is now Europe comprised less than half of the regional entities of the empire.



Hebrew people. See Isaiah 64:8 and Jeremiah 18:1-6.

Again, a poor translation has left us with the word "fragile" when it is most correctly "broken". As a result, what we have prophesied is a final government that jointly rules over Jerusalem and the Hebrew people. It will consist of the iron and clay or the revived Roman empire and the reborn state of Israel. The constituent parts of the government will be partly strong or authoritarian and partly broken. Now, what kind of government has its authority broken up? Democracies of course. As with our own country, the authority to rule is broken or divided up. It's called the separation of powers – executive, legislative and judicial.

Here's the rub. All of the countries in the current EU are in this "broken" category. None of them has an authoritarian head of government. So where are the "strong" in this equation?

So in the EU, the revived Roman empire is apparently only partially revived. Now, there's no prophetic requirement for it to be fully revived – only that it jointly rules in a loose, non-cohesive manner over the land of Israel and Jerusalem along with the Hebrew people. That may happen yet for just recently Israel and the EU agreed to an "upgraded relationship". Here is an excerpt from an article last week describing the event in Epoch Times:

*After a year of negotiation, Israel and the EU entered a new phase of negotiations on Monday (June 16, 2008) during the annual EU-Israel General Affairs Council...*

*The negotiation process between Israel and the EU was initiated more than a year ago in a meeting of the Association Council with Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni, in recognition of Israel's upcoming 60th anniversary. Accelerated negotiations*

between Israel and the EU are now set to begin.

### **Possible Integration of Israel in European Market**

*Israeli-EU relations will be addressed in three areas: increased diplomatic cooperation; Israel's participation in European plans and agencies; and examining the possibility of Israeli integration into the European market.*

This has been widely supported within Israel as well. As an example, on Monday, January 1, 2007, Minister of Strategic Affairs Avigdor Lieberman said that Israel should set itself a political objective for the next five years to join as a full member of the European Union...

So the discussions that once were considered secret are now out in the open. Israel and the EU plan to merge in some substantial form. But that may not be the whole story for something new has surfaced that may have great prophetic importance.

The French have just taken over the rotating presidency of the EU and their new president Nicolas Sarkozy is in charge. For many reasons, not the least of which is that he is part Jewish, he is sympathetic to the welfare of Israel and is very vocal about an equitable peace in the Middle East. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, a new entity which he has proposed and pushed through came into being – the Mediterranean Union (or as is more politically correct, the Union for the Mediterranean). It is considered an extension to the EU and will be focused initially on trade rather than on governmental conformity. See the map which follows on the next page:

The darkest area on the map is the new MU and the lighter gray areas to the north are countries in the EU but not specifically included in the MU. The lightest gray areas are countries in neither. Do you see it?? THIS

indeed is representative geographically of the 'revived Roman empire' – all of it! And, importantly, who is included? Israel.

Out of the 43 nations involved, only one did not send its head of state or the appropriate representative – Libya. Gahdafi's reasoning was that this union "is the rise of another Roman Empire." Ha! Even he gets it!

Here are a few headlines and a 'snipit' from each:

**"Israel sees Mediterranean Union as way to boost Arab ties"** -- AFP

*"This is the first time that the top leaders of the Mediterranean meet" with the participation of Israel, [Prime Minister Ehud Ohmert] said.*

**"Mediterranean union launched with Mideast peace hopes"** – AFP

*Sarkozy said Arab states had made a "gesture of peace" by attending the inaugural summit of the new union and proclaimed that a "great initiative has been born."*

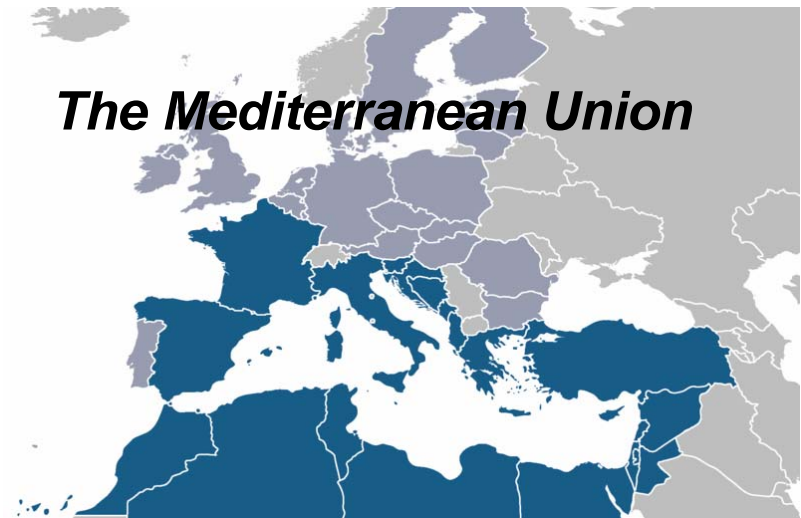
**"43 nations creating Mediterranean union"** – AP

*Israeli, Syrian and Palestinian leaders were among those attending an unprecedented gathering on the River Seine in Paris. Coping with age-old enmities involving their peoples and others along the Mediterranean shores will be a central challenge to the new union.*

**"Mediterranean Union Launched Amid Hopes for Peace"** – Deutsche Welle

*Leaders of the EU and of its southern neighbors agreed Sunday to a joint declaration accompanying the creation of the union, a breakthrough which came after heads of state and government from 43 countries, among them Israel, Syria and the Palestinian territories, overcame their differences over a reference to the Middle East peace process.*

Of note, in this new Union, we also see the fulfillment of the "strong"



portion of the final government for many of the countries included in the new MU have very authoritarian heads of state such as Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Jordan.

Additionally, as we consider the structure of the image in Daniel 2, each portion appropriately pictures the corresponding empire – the two arms united by the chest justly symbolizes the Medes and Persians as one empire. The two thighs and four sides of the abdomen pictures the four generals that Alex the Great left his empire to and the two of them that emerged as most powerful – the Seleucid and the Ptolemy kingdoms. Then there are the two legs representing the two parts of the Roman Empire (East and West -- Rome and Constantinople). At the end, there are the two feet. Until this point, the EU did not fit this part of the picture but now with the MU we see it complete – 'northern' Mediterranean members and 'southern' members each with their own presidents. The first two are Sarkozy from France and Mubarrak from Egypt. As you Bible students know, the ten toes are 'kings' who will arise during the Tribulation and rule "for one hour" with the Antichrist.

Finally, we should note from the prophecy Daniel emphasized that the **toes** of the image were made of the mixed iron and clay. He says that the feet and toes are of iron and clay, but with the emphasis on the toes, you get the impression that the mingling of these two materials is happening, really, at the very bottom of the image. That is, the clay-iron mingling happens at the very end. Thus, based upon the emergence of this MU, I'd say that we are now finally seeing this mingling of the clay with the iron. And folks, we're in the very last days.

The enemy of our souls is creating his own dream world called hell on earth. Let's not get caught day dreaming of the here and now or spiritually nodding off. Jesus said, *"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."* (Luke 21:34-36)

# VICTORY!

You know, I did a search in a sermon database on overcoming and found that the large majority of topics were about overcoming various vices such as alcoholism or pornography or discouragement – good topics. However, I am intent here upon presenting the specific things Jesus said we, as members of His church, should overcome and how.

In Revelation chapter two and three, He presented admonitions to each of the seven churches to overcome something. That is, He spoke to all of us because we're all in there somewhere – and so no one beats the rap. So, let's look and see if and/or where 'the shoe fits'. Please read Revelation chapters two and three then continue herein.

Here's Ephesus. Jesus says: *To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.*

Now, when you read Revelation chapter two, you notice that this first church was very good at examining doctrine and ministries to validate their authenticity. They were also quite diligent, laboring with perseverance for the Lord. There are many such ministries today which work to defend the faith against myriad heresies. We need them and appreciate them.

*Nevertheless (Jesus also said) I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

In the midst of the garden of Eden stood two trees. The tree of life was there along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As you recall, it was the ability to discern good AND evil that was the bait Satan used on us and it worked. Unfortunately, man has the sinful propensity ever since to see evil everywhere and to focus on it. When that is the case, the inward desire for love, for life, for the very goodness of God wanes. That's why Jesus told this church to overcome in this way – to put their first love back in focus as the main thing. And you know their first love.

**So this overcoming is keeping the heart set on Christ and a deep love relationship with Him.**

Next, here's Smyrna. Jesus says: *He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.*

This was/is the persecuted church and thus applies to all who suffer for the cause of Christ. Jesus has no criticism of this church but only empathy and encouragement. These folks suffer physically, endure poverty and even die for our Lord. The things they must endure, Jesus says, are not sent by Him but by Satan and his followers, but neither are they necessarily eliminated by Christ. He simply says not to fear them and adds, *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Oh, how we want and even expect Jesus to deliver us from all our trials. Why, He even taught us to pray to Father God to lead us not unto temptation but deliver us

from evil. And though we can doubt that He has answered those prayers, I'm absolutely convinced that when we get to heaven, one of the things we'll come to understand is just how much evil and temptation He did protect us from. Nevertheless, this world is a battleground and we must continually realize that we are in a war. We often forget or dispel that notion and wonder why, oh why, has this or that befallen me.

**This overcoming is holding on to your faith through all the circumstances of this life.**

Then, there's Pergamos to whom Jesus says:

*To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.*

This church, like those of Smyrna, faithfully hold on to their faith even in extreme trial and Jesus commends them for that. They also hold, though, to two specific false doctrines – Balaam's and the Nicolaetan's. Balaam sold his services to the guy with the gold, he was a 'for-profit prophet'. The name Nicolaetan is oddly linked to the word overcome in the Greek – both are based upon the same root, 'nike' – yeah, like the shoe. It means to be victorious or to rule over. Nicolaetan means one who rules over the people. So together, these false doctrines spell money and power (or notoriety). They also spell trouble with a capital T.

Of course, most of you remember that Jesus specifically told us to give, not to hoard or even focus on acquiring stuff – He said, *So likewise, whosoever he be among you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple.* (Luke 14:33). He also commanded us to serve, just as He did, rather than seeking the so called 'high seat of popularity and leadership' over other Christians. (See Mat 20:27; 23:11; Mk 9:35; 10:44; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 5:13)

So Jesus' promise to these overcomers addresses these two problems. In "hidden manna" is a reference to the beautiful treasures buried in the Word of God – that is, true doctrine revealed and confirmed. The "white stone" is referring to "tesserae". These were white stones given to those who were victorious in the public games and indicated that they were to be supported by the public for life. They also gave the holders admittance to special events such as feasts or banquets. But the most remarkable of these were the *Tesserae hospitales*, which were given as badges of *friendship* and *alliance*, and on which some name was engraved, as a testimony that a contract of friendship had been made.

**So this overcoming deals with searching out the truth of God's word and expecting Him to feed your soul. In addition, it's about serving.** When you are truly a servant of God and to your brethren, you can be tempted to think of your self as a "nobody".

After all, you're not in the limelight, others are taking the stage and getting the recognitions. Others have the big names everyone knows. But here Jesus says, "Overcome through serving and I'll give you a special name and with it a special character. I'll take care of you forever and admit you to My special events. Best of all, you and I will be special friends throughout eternity."

And now, here's Thyatira. Jesus says:

*And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations -*

*'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;*

*They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' - as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.*

This church is comprised of those who had/have a real handle on works, love, faith and patience but especially works. Lots and lots of good works. Yet, there's that "Nevertheless" in the passage which Jesus adds and with it He exposes a most serious problem. In fact, it's one so serious that if not repented of, He says these folks could find themselves in the midst of the Great Tribulation. The culprit is one called Jezebel. Her devilish poisons focus around teaching the believers in this church to commit sexual crimes against the Lord.

*The name Jezebel had a powerful association. If we called someone a "Judas" or a "Hitler" it would mean something strong. It's also a strong thing to call this woman Jezebel. "She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal . . . Jezebel herself had a most unenviable record of evil."* (Guzik, Walvoord)

Mixture of religions or the worship of false deities in place of, or along side of, God Almighty is always referred to in scripture as the equivalent of spiritual adultery before Him. Now, this will be especially prevalent during the coming Tribulation time where I'm convinced Christianity will be mixed with Islam and myriad other religions and will perhaps even be promoted by Rome. But to all believers, the message is to never mix your faith in Christ with any other, not with Mammon (materialism), not with new age theism, not with your own self exaltation or pet philosophies, not with politics or patriotism, no other god period.

**So this overcoming is an uncompromising one – no mixture but rather pure religion and undefiled.** And it hits all of us squarely in the heart, for we all have the 'natural disposition' to join our material, political and philosophical preferences with our faith in Jesus Christ. Of course, the Word itself deals with material, political and philosophical issues, but we can sometimes assume that

our interpretive 'tangents' are really on the straight and narrow. All the while, they may simply be a mixture of our own making.

For these overcomers, the rewards are two fold. The first is the power to help rule over the nations. This makes sense for there will be no compromise in this rule, no mixed motives or secret agendas. Those who overcome the problem of spiritual compromise are the ones Jesus wants to rule with Him. Second, He promises them the "morning star". What's this? Later in the book of Revelation, it is written, *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, [and] the bright and morning star.* This is the promise is Jesus Himself. No priest or prophet standing between the believers and their Savior – these overcomers get the ultimate reward anyone can have.

Next, there's Sardis. Jesus says them:

*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

Names are always important in the Bible. Naming was the first job of mankind back in Eden. But this church is a misnomer. Its name says it's alive, but Jesus says it's dead. So what do you say to a dead person? What critique is there? Not much. Christ simply says to strengthen what little is left

that's not yet dead and repent. Repent of what? Well, He says to remember what they've heard and to hold fast to it. The clear implication is that these people just don't believe what they've heard anymore. At least, their faith has all but disappeared – faith in the Word of God, faith in the risen Savior, faith in His second coming. As a result, they are no longer watching for the Lord. Are you like that? Are you watching?

*Sardis was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. It had a well-deserved reputation for apathy and immorality. In Sardis there was a large, stately temple to the mother goddess, Cybele. From the ruins of that temple we can see that its main columns were 60 feet high and more than 6 feet in diameter. This mother goddess was honored - "worshipped" - will all kinds of sexual immorality and impurity.*

*The combination of easy money and a loose moral environment made the people of Sardis notoriously soft and pleasure loving. "The great characteristic of Sardis was that, even on pagan lips, Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of decadence."* (Guzik, Barclay)

Whew! This group is in real danger. Jesus clearly says that there's a dire possibility that He will blot their names from the Book of Life if they do not overcome. *The risen Christ is saying that, if*

*we wish to remain on the roll of the citizens of God, we must keep our faith flamingly alive.”* (Barclay)

If their names are in the Book of Life, it's because they, at some time, had saving faith in Christ.

**Therefore, this overcoming has to do with stoking the fire of faith.** How do you do that, and conversely, what is it that tends to quench faith?

There's a clue in the passage itself. Jesus says to them, *I have not found your works perfect before God.* That is, their works are incomplete in God's eyes. Either they are missing closure so to speak in their works or they are missing a vital quality about them. This means that this church has given up walking the walk, or else they are just pretending -- doing what they're doing without the heart attitude that makes their works those of which God approves.

There's no better way to fan the flames of personal faith in Jesus than to get back into a purely motivated, obedient continuation of living out the gospel. The key is to finish what God has given you to do, to walk, to be, with a sincere, humble repentance. Dump whatever has gotten in the way both inwardly and outwardly. Whatever has bummed you, embittered you or bound you is not worth losing a place in the Book of Life. It's quite sobering to read Jesus saying that there are *a few even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.* Clean garments speak of sincere faith in Christ.

*There is a Book of Life, and there are five different references to people being blotted out of the Book of Life (Ex 32:32,33; Psa 69:28; Rev 3:5; Rev 22:19). This means that the idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life should be taken seriously. Perhaps it is only a symbol, and that person's name was never there to begin with. Even if that is the case, the Lord still wants us to take it seriously, because there are some who by every human appearance are saved, yet will not be in heaven.* (Guzik)

His reward to these overcomers is three fold – a white garment which speaks of true righteousness (as opposed to self righteousness), inclusion in the Book of Life and His confession of His true relationship with them before God the Father and the heavenly host.

Then there's Philadelphia. The Lord says:

*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.*

Philadelphia is given an open door both to missions and to heaven itself. Their commendation is that they have held to God's Word, have not denied His name – which means they have lived in such a way that people see God's nature (i.e. name) in them, and they have a little strength – that is,

they depend upon God's strength. *“The church of Philadelphia is commended for keeping the Word of the Lord and not denying His Name. Success in Christian work is not to be measured by any other standard of achievement. It is not rise in ecclesiastical position. It is not the number of new buildings which have been built through a man's ministry. It is not the crowds that flock to listen to any human voice. All of these things are frequently used as yardsticks of success, but they are earthly and not heavenly measures.”* (Barnhouse)

Now, Philadelphia is known as the faithful church, but even they have an overcoming to do. Jesus tells them, *Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* What they have is that they're doing it the simple, right way – no fanfare, no spectacle if you would. **Their overcoming has to do with the need to 'keep on keeping on'.** They're running a good race and nothing can prevent them from finishing except themselves.

The promise to them reflects the stability or faithful continuance in their 'race' that Jesus desires. As a pillar in the presence of God, throughout eternity they will no more be far from the Lord. And to boot, these overcomers will have three new names/natures – that of Father God, that of heaven itself and that of Jesus Christ. Wow!

Lastly, there's Laodicea to whom Jesus says:

*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

Now, no one wants to be a part of Laodicea. This is the lukewarm, self-satisfied assembly who has left Jesus outside. Yet, because they are a church, it is reasonable to assume that at some point, Jesus was inside. Their condition, however, has become so repulsive to the Lord, He says *because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.* And yet, there He is at their door, knocking! He is certainly unlike anyone I know. His patience and grace are just unfathomable.

Laodiceans are in 'la-la land'. They're completely unaware of their condition. Jesus says to them, you *do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.* Remember, these are not unbelievers but pastors and pewsters. However, Jesus knows what they need to wake them up – tribulation, trials, persecution. There's fire in their future. Did you think His knock at their door would be a gentle rap? No way. He adds, *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

The church in Smyrna thought they were poor while in truth they were really rich (Rev 2:9), but the church of the Laodiceans believe

they are rich when they are really poor. What's the difference? Persecution.

The church of Laodicea needs to have their lukewarm faith put into the fire. Peter wrote, *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:* Now, Jesus will appear two times in the near future – at the rapture and at His second coming. In between, is what is known as the fiery tribulation time. It is in this time that Laodiceans will finally see their true condition, their utter need for Jesus. It is in this kind of situation that they will welcome Him back in to their lives. In Revelation chapter seven, those who come out of the tribulation, having been killed for their faith in Christ, are given white garments.

But this isn't constrained to the tribulation period, is it? Even now, if God has allowed difficulty into your life and you wonder why, it could be that He's knocking on your own door. Listen. Do you hear the voice of His Spirit? Let him back in. He'll do the rest.

**So this overcoming is singular in nature, and uniquely, Jesus says that it is the same type of overcoming He did Himself. You see, in heaven Jesus was, in truth, rich and in need of nothing, but He chose to obey His Father's will and trust Him even in the terrible trials He suffered.** Look at Revelation chapter seven again. Many of

those people in white robes surrounding the Lamb are from Laodicea. They will share the throne of the Lamb! Fortunately, vomit is not the end of the story but rather victory. Jesus knows how to wake up His church. Being 'left behind' is not a condemnation. It's not about rejection but rather repentance, revival and resurrection. Hallelujah!

In conclusion, to all of us as believers, Jesus says, *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* To which John the apostle adds, *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

Take a sec and look again at all the churches. Notice how all the admonitions to overcome involve faith - simple, sincere, uncluttered faith in Jesus Christ as our risen Savior and Lord. That's because, *whosoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, [even] our **faith**. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that **believes** that Jesus is the Son of God?* (See John 16:33; 1 John 4:4; 5:4,5)

## **What Have We Gotten Into Now?**

*In the Line of Fire, Part Two*

Rats! Wouldn't you know it! Here we were in a hurry to get into the city and my ultra reliable little Fiat 500cc died. It sputtered, coughed and then kaput – it was dead. We coasted to the side of the road, got out of that 'bucket of bolts' and after giving it some choice Italian descriptions of its worthiness, started to thumb a ride. Darlene was with me and we had little Star too. She was a real chatterbox three year old with long wavy hair.

We didn't have to wait long, but to our surprise it wasn't just another car that stopped to help us but a stre-e-etch limo – a huge Mercedes with tinted glass windows. Admittedly, I was a bit nervous for we had just recently had our house 'cleaned out' by the mafia because we refused their protection and I wasn't looking forward to another encounter. (That's another story perhaps.)

As I cautiously approached the car, the rear window on the passenger side came down and a man in the back of the limo asked me in English if I needed help. It was about another half hour or so into Rome where we were headed so I reluctantly said, "Si, grazie Signore," and we climbed into the limo.

As I expected, Star began talking about everything she saw and though I wondered if it would irritate the man, he clearly enjoyed her curiosity. He was probably about 45-50 years old with just a touch of gray in his hair. It wasn't long before we had a lively conversation going about our work and Italy and Italian food and... then he said, "Why don't

you let me show you some real Italian food? Join me for lunch."

Not wanting to offend (and being hungry enough to eat anything short of toxic waste) we said, "Sure!" As we were still fairly new to Italy, we knew how to get around Rome but we didn't know the whole city that well. Initially, I recognized the areas we drove through until suddenly, the limo turned off the main road and began squeezing through some narrow alleys and back roads. We were still having a great conversation, but I gradually began to be concerned. Were we in trouble? I was definitely lost. When the car finally came to a stop, I got even more worried.

We were in front of a shack, I mean it wasn't much more than a shanty, and as he led the way inside, we half expected to meet more mafiosos with an attitude. Darlene and I looked at each other with an 'oh boy, what have we gotten into now' look.

But as we entered, it was a whole different world. In fact, we'd never seen such a place – it was beautiful! Lots of people were enjoying a wonderful classic Italian atmosphere with the hearth fires burning, old wooden beams draped with garlic weavings and antiques, the smell of indescribably delicious food cooking, on and on it went. Amazingly, the inside seemed much bigger than the outside. As we sat down, our host explained that this place was only for Italians – no tourists allowed. And the food was, indeed, out of this world.

Of course, as we conversed, we shared that we were living in Italy in order to minister the gospel. This was something quite curious to our

new friend for he thought that since Italy was so pervasively Catholic that our efforts would be better spent somewhere else. But then we explained the Words of Jesus concerning knowing Him and having a relationship directly with Him by faith. This intrigued him, and as lunch was drawing to a close (albeit slowly – remember, we were in Italy) he insisted that when he dropped us off, he would give us his home phone number.

When we parted, he said most sincerely, “Now, you must remember to call me.”

A couple of weeks passed and we thought that we ought to call our new friend if for no other reason than to again thank him. (By the way, his hospitality, as great as it was, was not uncommon in Italy!) He was thrilled to hear from us and asked us to come to his home for a special dinner. It was a large early afternoon meal really.

Arriving at his home, we met his wife and children and had just a wonderful day of fellowship and fine dining. He was still quite curious about our previous talk of salvation and a relationship with Christ. It was a concept he'd never considered. As a sincere Catholic, he hoped to go to heaven based upon how good a life he lived, and as for knowing Jesus – that was really the job of the priest, right?

Anyway, we continued to share our testimonies and scriptures from the Bible like *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Rom 6:23) and *“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none*

*that does good, no, not one.”* (Rom 3:12) and *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Eph 2:8,9) and *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* (Rev 3:20)

Maybe it was the part about dining with Him, I don't remember, but there in his living room our friend and his whole family 'got it'. They understood for the first time the simple message of the gospel and embraced it.

The next time we met, we prayed with each of them to receive the Lord. In fact, we probably met with them weekly for a couple of months sharing the Bible and praying with them. Towards the end of that time, we were surprised to learn that our host was the Secretary General of [a major political party] in Italy. If you know much about the history of Italian politics, at that time it was not a particularly safe way to make a living so to speak so I think he had kept his important position under wraps for our own protection.

A few months later, we returned to the States and then were off to Mexico. Sadly, we lost contact with them but are trusting that God has had His way with that precious family. Anyway, what started out with a “Rats!” turned into a real blessing. You just never know – maybe sometime when you're confronted with a bummer, you may see God use it for His own good purposes. That's often His way, isn't it.



*Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. Dan 2:35*