



The Morning Star

PROPHETIC BULLETIN

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Knights in Shining Armor

by Rick Joyner

In the first days of this new millennium, we stand at the threshold of some of the greatest challenges and possibilities that mankind has yet faced. Never has there been such darkness and delusion, or such light and truth. We are living in the fulfillment of Isaiah 60:1-2:

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

"For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you.

Through the growing darkness, a greater light will arise. The darkest, coldest part of the night is just before the dawn. Even if it gets darker and colder, it is only evidence that the dawn is that much closer. Already we can see the signs that the dawn is near. Isaiah 21:11-12 records what must be one of the ultimate prophetic questions: **"Watchman, how far gone is the night? Watchman, how far gone is the night?"** The watchman says, **"Morning comes but also night. If you would inquire, inquire; come back again."** The morning is coming, but also night. We must keep inquiring.

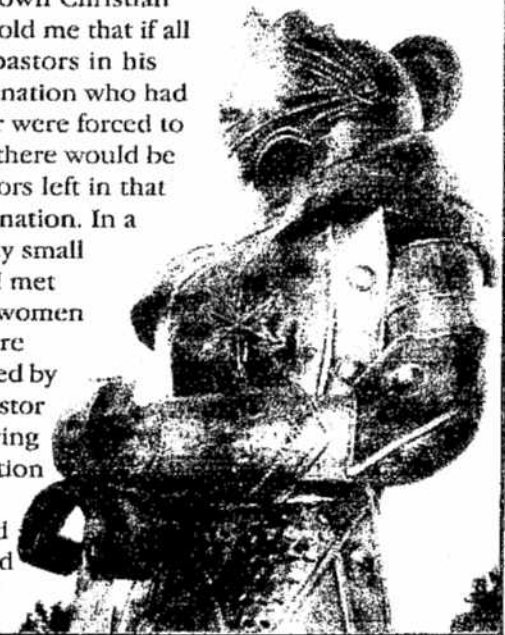
It will be because of the darkness and the light that the third verse in Isaiah 60 will be fulfilled: **"And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.** The darkness will cause the light that arises in the church to appear that much brighter, compelling the nations to turn to the true light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So in the midst of

the darkness, we should always look for the light that the Lord will bring forth, and draw close to that light.

The Darkness

Recent studies indicate that there is no longer a perceptible moral difference between Christians and non-Christians. The divorce rate among evangelical Christians is now *greater* than that of the general population. Other studies have estimated that as many as one half of Christian men are now addicted to pornography. Others have indicated that Christians are having abortions at nearly the same rate as non-Christians.

In just the past year, I was told by the management of a large hotel that when they host the annual convention of a certain denomination, the orders for pornographic movies triple. One well-known Christian leader told me that if all of the pastors in his denomination who had an affair were forced to resign, there would be no pastors left in that denomination. In a relatively small group, I met several women who were pressured by their pastor into having an abortion because the child belonged to him.



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Knights in Shining Armor

There were a couple of cases in which the daughters of pastors were pressured by their fathers into having an abortion because they did not want their daughters' indiscretion to hurt their ministry. When I talked to a lady who has a special ministry to women who have had abortions, I was shocked to find out how widespread this kind of thing is in the body of

Christ. We are experiencing a meltdown of morality within the church. It is time to "sound the alarm in Zion!" (Joel 2:1) The enemy is not just at the gates, he is plundering us at will from the inside! We must find the answers to three basic questions:

- 1) **What has happened to us?**
- 2) **Why did it happen to us?**
- 3) **What can be done about it?**

Of course there are many Christians, and Christian leaders, who live by the highest standards of integrity and morality. There will always be a faithful remnant, but it is not right that professing Christians should be a *remnant* in these matters! The church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. What is happening in the church today is a tragedy of historic proportions. As the Lord Jesus warned in Matthew 24:12-13: "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved." He is not talking about unbelievers here. Unbelievers do not have the love of God for it to grow cold. He is talking about believers whose love grows cold because of lawlessness. We see in Romans 6:19 that lawlessness begins with impurity:

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Many have fallen into the deadly trap of pornography because they reason that they are not committing adultery. However, as we read in the text above, impurity leads to lawlessness, and then further lawlessness. Very few who have fallen into adultery fell all at one time, but were usually drawn in by a gradual slide into the trap. Even if one does not fall into an actual act of immorality, impurity itself can disqualify us from entering the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus warns in Matthew 7:21-23:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

These things are not tolerable in Christians, as we are warned in Revelation 21:8:

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Paul also made it clear that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,

nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9-10).

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, *of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).*

Shutting This Gate of Hell

This shocking and dramatic slide in the morality of Christians has happened mostly over just the last few years. When I inquired of the Lord about what is happening, I was given Matthew 7:1-2: "Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." One of the main reasons for this meltdown of morality among Christians was our unrighteous judgment of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart. They had serious failures that could not be overlooked, but the general response of the church was to condemn them rather than help them. That kind of response to any brother or sister who falls can open the gates of hell.

Galatians 6:1 declares, "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual,

restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Restoring is more than just forgiving. It is helping a person get back to the place from which they have fallen. I was given this scripture a few years ago and was told that if we, the church, did not learn to restore those who have fallen, that we would fall to the same problems. Many who condemned Jimmy Swaggart for his problems with pornography are obviously now subject to the same bondage. Many who condemned Jim Bakker have also fallen into the same traps. Many who did the condemning were Christian leaders, whose falls have hurt countless others, and the cycle is continuing to broaden, capturing more and more in this terrible death spiral.

This is not an appeal for us to overlook the sins of leaders, or anyone, but rather the contrary. The Scriptures are also clear that we must judge those who are within the church (I Corinthians 5:12). However, this judgment does not imply condemnation. When such things are revealed in a person, our response should be to help them, not condemn them, doing it in gentleness lest we too be tempted. When Jesus saw what was wrong with the world, He did not condemn it; He laid down His life for it. If we are of His Spirit, we will do the same. How are unbelievers ever going to believe our gospel of redemption if we do not learn to redeem and restore our own? To condemn others who stumble is simply not Christlike. It is the kind of pride that leads to a fall, and we are in the midst of a terrible fall.

One thing that we must do to shut the gates of hell that have released such impurity and immorality into the church, is to repent of any unrighteous judgment that we have had toward Bakker, Swaggart, or any others who have fallen. It does not matter how bad the fall was. The Scriptures are clear that if a man is caught in "any trespass" the spiritual are to restore them. We need to help them repent and find restoration, while we search our own hearts, repenting of our own failures, turning from the sins that can ultimately disqualify us from the kingdom of God.

A Jubilee

The Lord gave me a great hope and a promise. He is going to give the church a Jubilee. He is going to forgive these debts and restore the inheritance of all who have fallen into bondage, if they will just turn to Him and seek His grace. Repentance is not just turning from the sin, but it is turning to God. We cannot fight these things in our own strength. A repentance for many of us also involves forgiving others. Forgiving is basic Christianity. If we do not forgive, there is a basic departure from the faith. If we forgive others, we will be forgiven.

The Lord gave me I Corinthians 11:31 as a word for this year: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged (KJV)." It is better to fall on the Rock and be broken, than to have Him fall on us and crush us into powder. This year, if we will judge ourselves and repent of our unrighteousness, He will not judge us. If we do not, His judgment will begin with His own household. How can He judge the world when His own people do the same things? This year the Lord is offering mercy and grace. He will cover the sins of those who repent and turn to Him. He is also going to raise up powerful restoration ministries that are anointed to bring healing to all who have suffered divorces, abortions, unfaithfulness, addictions, etc.

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The Coming Knights Of the Holy Spirit

As Isaiah 59:19 states, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (KJV). The Lord is even now raising up true knights of the Holy Spirit who will confront the great darkness of our times. They will be of the nature of Phinehas, who stood up and interposed for Israel so that the plague was stopped. It was reckoned to Phinehas as righteousness forever (Psalm 106:30-31). These knights will likewise arise to stop the plague that is now sweeping the body of Christ, and they will earn an eternal place of honor for their service. Because of them, holiness, integrity, and honor, will be esteemed again. In spite of the unprecedented onslaught of evil in our times, the Lord is going to bring forth a church in purity, without a spot or wrinkle.

The Lord is going to have a glorious, holy bride that is worthy of such a great King. These spiritual knights who are coming are for both the protection and preparation of the bride. The remarkable history of the Knights of St. John is a prophetic parallel of the knights of the Holy Spirit who are to come. The following is a brief history of The Order of St. John from a prophetic perspective.

Courage That Changes the World

The exploit of the Knights of St. John during the Middle Ages is one of the greatest stories of faith, courage, and endurance since biblical times. Three times a few hundred knights took their stand against the most powerful armies on earth. Outnumbered by as many as a hundred to one, they resolved to keep

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their vows, and never to retreat before the enemies of the cross. They endured some of the most terrible sieges and human wave assaults in the history of warfare, but they simply could not be dislodged from the ground that they had claimed for the kingdom of God.

The Lord is now calling forth spiritual warriors with the same resolve, to do in the Spirit what these courageous souls did in the natural. These modern knights of the Spirit will not just take their stand on earthly territory, but on truth, and the biblical standards of honor, integrity, and morality. They will also defend the poor, the oppressed, and those who are unjustly treated. Whether they are few or many, they will refuse to surrender a single acre of holy ground to the enemy. By their faith and patience they will bar the path of the hordes of hell, and turn them back.

The Test Of Ridicule

Before their epic battles, the nations of Europe scorned members of the Order of St. John (OSJ) as "archaic relics from the past." Christian rulers refused to send them supplies or reinforcements because no one gave them a chance against the huge, modern armies of Islam. Still, to become a knight of the OSJ, one had to vow never to retreat before the enemies of the cross. Even though such vows and chivalry were considered out of date and unrealistic, these knights still cherished honor. Their word was their bond. They kept their vows.

Most of these knights died, and all of them were wounded, but they did not retreat. During the most severe battles, the wounded and dying asked to be carried into the thickest part of the fray so that they could die with a sword in hand defending Christian soil. The great nations of Europe that had scorned them soon stood in awe of their courage, and then of their victories. Rulers who had ridiculed them called for national celebrations to honor them. Some even acknowledged that these brave souls had saved them from the conquest of Islam. To this day, a number of nations still celebrate St. John's Day in recognition of their great victories.

Ridicule, scorn, and misunderstandings are tests that every true knight must endure. Most of the knights of the OSJ died never knowing of the honor that was later given to them. Most died without knowing about their ultimate victory over the armies of Islam. We must not fight the good fight for the honor of men, but for God. It is His reward that we seek. Most will never know anything but scorn and misunderstanding from men,

even from the very ones we are called to defend. That can make no difference in our resolve—we must take our stand for righteousness because it is right.

The Call

Though the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual, there are great and timely lessons in the history of the Order of St. John. Epic battles such as they fought must be waged today for the truth of the gospel, for our families, and our nations. We, too, must determine that retreat or surrender is never an option. The enemy of truth is presently building strongholds of deception and corruption in every nation and culture, and in the church itself. However, brave knights of the Spirit are gathering to take their stand against the hordes from hell, and fight until the victory is won. These knights are right now building their own fortresses of truth, honor, and true spiritual chivalry. They cannot lose because the truth of the cross will prevail. The ultimate victory of truth has already been won. Even in the darkest of times to come, there will be great souls who will continue to fight. They will not shrink back even when confronted with the most terrible odds. They may be few in number on the earth, but the armies of heaven will be at their side. They will stand until the darkness is pushed back, and the light of the dawn begins to shine forth.

Like the Knights of St. John, these too can expect little help from the nations (denomi-nations) of Christendom. But their strength is not found in numbers, or any of the other powers upon which this present age bases its strength. The truth is more powerful than any human weapon.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete (II Corinthians 10:3-6).

We must not fall for the trap of the enemy in trying to use carnal weapons. Our weapons are much more powerful than guns or bombs. When the Lord spoke, the heavens and then the earth came forth. The truth spoken by the anointing is more powerful than all of the armies on the earth combined. However, as this last verse states, our obedience must be complete before we can be trusted with such power. We will not prevail against the great enemy of souls if he has a grip on our own lives.

When Christians have tried to conquer with the carnal weapons of this world, it has inevitably resulted in some of the worst atrocities ever known. The world remembers these, but Christians who are ignorant of our own history often repeat the same mistakes with each new generation. The kingdom of God will not come by might or power, but by the Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). Even as we study the Knights of St. John, who were such brilliant warriors, we must understand that we are called to do in the Spirit, what they did in the natural.

The Warrior Healers

In 1088, a Catholic monk named Brother Gerard founded two hospices for pilgrims in Jerusalem. One was for men and one for women. These became the world's first hospitals. He dedicated them to the memory of John the Baptist. In 1113, the servants of these hospitals were recognized as an independent Order, and took the name The Order of St. John. They are still to this day referred to as "the Hospitalers" in honor of their heritage as founders of the modern hospital. This is also why the famous Maltese Cross, the standard of the Order, adorns ambulances and hospitals around the world as an international symbol of hope for the sick and wounded.

Though the foundation of this Order was healing, as the conflict between Islam and Christendom escalated, the Order determined that they needed to establish a military arm devoted to the protection of the pilgrims from the bands of outlaws that roamed the land. Though they were to become forever famous for their military exploits, the Order of St. John never forgot that their first mission was to serve the sick and wounded. Thus healing and warfare was first combined in this unique Order. Likewise, true spiritual warfare combines healing with the wielding of the sword of the Spirit.

Since the knights did everything that they set their hands to with all of their hearts, they accomplished far more than even they envisioned or planned. Even though there was no great military genius in their ranks, they won seemingly supernatural victories by simply keeping their word. Just as they refused to retreat from the ground they had taken, they also refused to retreat from honor and chivalry. Thus their heart was united with their deeds, and these truly noble men were able to defeat the most powerful armies on earth at the time.

Victorious Defeats

Overall, the Crusades were possibly the greatest tragedies in Christian history. Some of the great international problems in the world today have their roots in these follies. They were not only human tragedies, but strategic ones as well. At the time, Constantinople was one of the two great cities of Christendom, as

well as the greatest shield that the Christian nations of Europe had against Islam. This great city offered the Crusaders hospitality on their way to fight for the liberation of Jerusalem, but in return was plundered and sacked by them. This resulted in the dividing of the Eastern and Western churches, as well as the ultimate fall of Constantinople to Islam.

(Today, Constantinople is the city of Istanbul in Turkey.)

Likewise, the worst defeats of Christianity remain the tendencies for movements and denominations to plunder one another. Every time a movement or denomination strengthens itself by plundering other Christian movements or churches, it weakens the whole of Christianity. This always results in many more falling into the hands of the enemy than we ever gain from such betrayals.

The Crusades fell into debauchery because the forces that were sent out by the Christian nations were often led by carnal men whose true goals were for earthly conquests, not spiritual ones. This has continued to be the pattern for much of the church to this day. This is why many of our great victories turn out to be great spiritual defeats. The apostle Paul warned us about this in Philippians 3:18-19:

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

We must demand compliance with the biblical standards of morality and integrity for anyone who would be recognized as a leader in the church. We must reject leaders and ministries who are self-appointed, "who call themselves apostles, and they are not" (Revelation 2:2). We must recognize and reject those who are motivated by jealousy or selfish ambition, as we are warned in James 3:14-18:

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

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Jealousy and selfish ambition will lead to "disorder and every evil thing." We must not allow our spiritual currency to be devalued any more by compromising the clear Word of God to allow those of questionable integrity into places of leadership. It would be better for movements or denominations to lose all of their leaders and start with new ones, even less mature

ones, than to overlook the clear biblical mandates for integrity in leadership.

The Enemy

As the Eastern and Western churches divided and fell into constant quarrels within their own camps, Islam was unifying under brilliant and able leaders. When the Crusades finally ended in disgrace, the Turkish Ottoman Empire had arisen to become the most powerful and cultured empire in the world. After conquering the Middle East, much of Africa, and Eastern Europe, the Turks stood poised to sweep over the rest of Europe. The remaining Christian nations of Europe were so embroiled in political and religious wars with each other that they could not raise a common army to stand against them. It appeared that nothing could stop this tidal wave of Islam from completing its subjugation of Europe.

Have we not likewise seen the forces of our enemy unifying and getting stronger at the same time the church is weakened by our own infighting? Noble unity movements have arisen, and some are accomplishing great things. Bridges of trust are being built between large parts of the body of Christ that had previously been at opposition. This is encouraging, and certainly worthy of our efforts, but overall the church remains more divided than any other religion, while the forces of darkness are massing for what may well be the final and ultimate battle between light and darkness.

The Knights Unite

The Order of St. John was composed of the sons of noble families from all of the different nations in Europe. Even though many of these nations were at war with each other, the OSJ never experienced a serious division within their own ranks. Through all of the discord that was experienced by their home nations, these knights kept their focus on whom the real enemy was, and maintained their unity with one another. The vows that required them to never retreat before the enemies of the cross also required them to defend Christian unity, and to never lift the sword against another Christian nation. We must learn to do the same.

A Table in The Presence Of Their Enemies

With the exception of a few of the wounded who had been carried to ships in the harbor, the entire garrison of the Knights of St. John in Jerusalem died as the last Christian defenders of Palestine. The stories of their valor galvanized the resolve of the remaining knights from the Order based in Europe. They gathered and found a home on the small island of Rhodes.

Rhodes was situated precariously in the middle of Moslem shipping lanes in the Aegean Sea, just below the very mainland of Turkey itself, the heart of the Ottoman Empire. Though some thought it to be the most dangerous place for them to build their home base, the knights considered this to be a convenience rather than a problem. Likewise, the Lord is placing garrisons of His knights right in the heart of enemy territory. In places such as Los Angeles, where a great flood of debauchery is being released throughout the world, the Lord is establishing fortresses of truth that will raid the enemy to his distraction. In New York City, the seat of the ultimate idol, the love of money, the Lord is establishing His own garrison of true knights who will raid this enemy to distraction. All over the world, at the great centers of evil and spiritual corruption, the Lord is gathering His own forces of some of the most noble and courageous spiritual warriors that the world has ever known. They are not intimidated by the evil around them. They have far greater faith in the power of truth than in the power of deception. They, too, view their placement as a convenience and opportunity to raid the enemy until his progress is stopped.

Leader-ships

Rhodian sailors were famous for their seamanship, and they instructed the knights in their nautical skills. The knights learned quickly, and were soon known as the most capable mariners in the world. In dreams and visions, ships often represent leaders (*leadership*). Likewise, the Lord's spiritual knights that are about to be raised up will learn the skills of leadership, and emerge as some of the greatest leaders the world has ever known. They will be more creative because they know the Creator. They will be more resourceful because they will have learned to gain the maximum from every talent entrusted to them. They will be the most brilliant in strategy because they will see with the Lord's eyes.

Fight Without Ceasing

When Goliath intimidated the armies of Israel, the scriptures said that they mustered every morning and evening. There are many spiritual armies today

that will "muster" every time the church doors are open, but like the intimidated armies of Israel, they never engage the enemy. The Order of St. John wasted no time boldly attacking their enemy. For 150 years the knights were so effective in their sea battles that the Turks were discouraged from even trying to develop their own naval power. Finally, the effectiveness of their raids was considered the only thing preventing the Ottomans from conquering the rest of Europe, as their supply lines were constantly threatened and plundered.

Just as these knights did not wait until they were as numerically strong as their enemies to start raiding them, we cannot wait until we think we are strong enough to go to battle. All that we really need is the commission of the Lord, the anointing of His Holy Spirit, and the resolve to remain faithful to His truth. The defensive war that the church has been waging is being lost. Though there are times to fight defensive battles, we are not called to fight a defensive war. It is time to attack. We are the ones with the divinely powerful weapons! As General Douglas McArthur once replied when reports came in verifying that his army was completely surrounded by the enemy, "Great," he said, "Attack in every direction. They can't get away this time!"

We are destined to always be outnumbered in this fight until the Lord returns. However, we must endeavor to do what we do with such excellence and spiritual skill that we are effective at keeping the enemy from his own expansion. Paul wrote about what we are to do in regards to even the man of sin himself. He said in II Thessalonians 2:7: "**For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.**" For as long as we are here, with whatever resources we are given, we must use them to fight evil until the Lord removes us.

Fortresses Of Truth

While the knights were developing their naval force, they were also working continually to improve the fortifications at Rhodes. They were wise enough to learn both the offensive and defensive skills of warfare. We, too, must learn to effectively raid the enemy, attacking him at every opportunity, while at the same time preparing our defenses against his inevitable counter attacks. Just as the knights spent years stockpiling food and ammunition for the attacks that they knew would surely come, the knights of the Spirit are now stockpiling ammunition for the great battles to come. However, their ammunition is not arrows and bullets, but something infinitely more powerful—they are storing the Word of God in their hearts.

Know the Schemes of the Enemy

Though we must resolve to conquer with truth, and to press the battle until the victory is complete, we must fight with wisdom. As divisions and internal conflicts continued to erode Europe's power, the repeated call to arms to stand against Islam fell on deaf ears. At the same time, one of the most brilliant leaders in history, Mehmet, was unifying Islam. He was fluent in a half dozen languages, and possessed extensive knowledge in literature and science. He raised the cultural, economic, and military excellence of his people to a level which surpassed the nations of Europe.

We must acknowledge that our enemy is likewise fielding some of his best leaders today. He has been conquering both literature and science. His influence in culture, the economy, and even the military is unprecedented. The enemy today looks at the church with scorn and arrogance, believing that nothing can keep him from his final conquest of Christianity. Even so, there is a force prepared to take its stand and stop the hordes of hell. However, our power is found in the grace of God, and He gives His grace to the humble. We must go forth with confidence in our God, and humility in ourselves. This is the foundation of the wisdom that will prevail.

The Battle

Mehmet was a conqueror who fashioned himself after Alexander the Great. He marched on Constantinople and subdued it. Europe then stood before his armies like an open treasure chest. Even so, the persistence of the knights to attack his supply lines slowed his advance, requiring that the little Order be dealt with. This led to one of the most extraordinary battles in history. In 1480, Mehmet sent his most able generals and an army of 70,000 men to crush the 600 knights and 1,500 militia at Rhodes. Christian Europe, seeing no hope for the Order against such odds, refused to send them reinforcements or supplies.

After landing his army, Mehmet's siege cannons began to batter the walls which the knights had spent over a century building. Numerous other cannons hurled projectiles over the walls into the city. The leader of the Order was a Frenchman named d'Aubusson. With great foresight, he had prepared his knights for the siege he knew would come. He had even built shelters for the townspeople. Likewise, leaders must have the foresight to prepare for the battles that are

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surely to come, with consideration for the people they have been entrusted to oversee.

After days of bombardment, the first wave of assault troops attacked the Tower of St. Nicholas, an outlying fortification of the city. The Turks were stunned by the stiff resistance they met, and were driven back with great losses.

They followed this attack with another, even more fierce bombardment, hurling more than a thousand cannon balls a day into the city for several weeks. Gradually the walls of the city began to collapse. The Turks snaked closer to the city with their trenches. At night, fires burned throughout the city so that the knights who fought on the walls by day had to fight fires at night. Those who were present at Rhodes declared that a scene out of hell itself could be no worse. Still, the knights refused to surrender.

We, too, can expect our battles to be hell because we are fighting hell itself. The enemy will hurl everything in his arsenal at us with unrelenting fury. This will be a fight to the death, and true knights of the Spirit will consider death better than compromising the truth with which they have been entrusted.

On June 18, the Turks launched a second human wave assault by the fearsome Janissaries, renowned as the greatest fighters in the world. Each Janissary had been chosen from the age of seven because of their physical potential. Trained their entire lives for combat, they were forbidden to marry or engage in any kind of family affection in order to focus all of their emotions and energy on battle. They had never experienced defeat. The enemy of our souls is likewise today raising a terrible army that has been prepared from birth to attack the church in this last hour. There are cults and covens whose only purpose is the destruction of the church. However, those who serve the Lord were called before the foundation of the world for their purpose. It does not matter whom the enemy sends against us, our only option is to stand.

The Janissaries advanced under the cover of darkness, expecting to find the knights sleeping. To their surprise the knights were not only awake, but were at their posts waiting for them. Neither will the knights of the Spirit be found sleeping on their watch. There are prophets and watchmen being raised up who will know the plans of the enemy. They will have the Lord's warriors ready and waiting to turn every scheme of the enemy into his own ambush.

As the Janissaries met the knights, the sound of gunfire and clanging swords filled the night until dawn. The Ottoman generals expected to walk into the fort at sunrise, but with the first light, an incredible

scene was revealed. Multitudes of Janissary bodies were floating in the moats around the tower of St. Nicholas. The entire Turkish army looked up in stunned amazement to see the knights still standing on the battered walls, still defiant, their standard waving in the breeze. Their greatest shock came as they saw the remaining Janissaries retreating. Regardless of how fearful the enemy's assaults are, if we resist him, he will flee. If we stand, we cannot lose.

Attacking From the Inside

The Turks had never experienced such a military setback. They decided to resort to subterfuge by planting agents in the city who pretended to be defectors to the Christians (many of the Sultan's troops were captives from Christian nations). These spies were soon able to do great damage and create serious tactical problems for the Order. The weary knights were pressed from within and without. Each day seemed to present a new crisis that threatened to be their doom. The fortifications were crumbling everywhere, and the worst breeches were at the most strategic points. Still, they refused to give up. Even so, when the Turks began massing for another great assault, both sides fully expected it to be the end.

The enemy also has his agents planted in the church, just as he did in the Lord's own disciples. There are many who will remain hidden and will do their diabolical work with devastating efficiency at some of the worst possible times. Their nature is "the accuser of the brethren," and their primary goal is to cause divisions, getting Christians to look at one another with suspicion. The enemy seems to know even better than the saints that a house divided cannot stand. Even so, the true knights of the cross will have but one resolve, to fight for truth and righteousness until the end.

The Final Battle

With the constant bombardment having nearly reduced the entire city to rubble, on July 27, the last great assault began. The Sultan sent his bashi-bazouk troops first. These were mercenaries who were considered expendable, and wave after wave were cut down by the defenders. The bodies of the bashi-bazouk troops soon filled the ditches and streams, making human bridges that lead up to the walls. This had been the strategy of the Turkish generals. The tired and wounded defenders then watched as great waves of the fearsome Janissaries arose and began their advance, now more determined than ever because of their previous humiliation.

The Turks overran the Tower of St. Nicholas, which had taken the brunt of the main assault for months. Then they swarmed upon the main fortress

of the city. The knights contested every inch of ground, for which the Turks paid dearly. Soon the ground was covered with their dead. D'Abusson, with an arrow in his thigh, led a dozen knights and three standard-bearers up a ladder and onto the wall where the Grand Master received four more wounds. Then a Janissary "of gigantic structure" hurled a spear right through d'Abusson's breastplate, puncturing his lung. He was dragged back out of the fray just as the enemy made a breach in the defenses and began to pour into the city. It appeared that the end had finally come for the Order of St. John.

The Turks continued to throw themselves against the remaining knights with wave after wave of fresh troops. Through hand-to-hand combat over burning rubble, in what seemed to be "worse than hell itself," the tenacity of the knights and their ability to continue inflicting casualties so astonished the Turks that it began to dismay even the angry Janissaries. Then, right at the most critical point of the battle, above the smoke and turmoil of this terrible inferno, d'Abusson's standards suddenly appeared on the last remaining parapet. He was held up by three bearers in such shining armor that witnesses said they appeared almost as gods from the hell below. The effect on the Turks was electrifying as a wave of fear swept through the attacking troops. The remaining bashi-bazouk troops fled in such terror that it even overcame the Janissaries. Within minutes, the entire Turkish army began to melt away in confusion, retreating at the very moment when victory was easily within their grasp.

As the Turks fled, Rhodian sharpshooters climbed the walls and poured a deadly rain of arrows into them. Amazingly, the remaining knights found enough strength to counter attack, chasing the pride of the Sultan's troops all the way to their base camp. The shattered army that had been the prize of the Ottomans fled the Island. The whole world, Moslem and Christian, was stunned by the victory of the little Order of St. John. They had not only survived—they had prevailed.

If You Do Not Retreat You Cannot Lose

There is nothing more terrifying to the enemy than Christians who refuse to retreat. Even though "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), the church is being attacked from the hordes of hell without, and evil agents from within. The truth has survived every assault, and it will prevail. We are promised in II Corinthians 2:14: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." This promise is not conditional on the odds. The greater

the odds against us, the more glorious the victory will be. We cannot lose if we do not quit.

Don't Let Victories Defeat You

Some of the most devastating defeats in history have followed a great victory. The Knights of St. John knew this, and even though they had their apparent doom miraculously turned into a great victory, their celebration was brief. All who were able immediately went to work repairing their fortifications, preparing for the next great assault. This was characteristic of the Order's brilliant leadership for the most critical one hundred years of its history. They knew that winning the war would take more than a single victory, regardless of how spectacular it was.

Historically, many Christian leaders and movements have become content to live off of the returns of a single victory. However, there is a leadership coming with the foresight to keep pressing the battle even after great victories. They will continue to fight until the enemy is completely destroyed. The Lord came to destroy the works of the devil, and He said that as He was sent, He has sent us. We have been given divinely powerful weapons for the destruction of the enemy's strongholds, and as long as a single one remains to deceive a single soul, we must fight on.

The Second Battle of Rhodes

While Mehmet was marching south to begin another assault against the knights, he became sick and died. The knights were given more time, and they used it wisely, recruiting, training, and rebuilding their fortifications. In 1520, Suleiman "The Magnificent" ascended to the throne of the Ottoman Empire. Like Mehmet II, he was a man of culture and learning, as well as a brilliant general. Under his leadership the Ottoman Empire reached its greatest heights. One year later, Phillippe Villiers de L'Isle Adam became the Grand Master of the Order of St. John. L'Isle Adam was an educated aristocrat, as well as an experienced seaman and devout Christian. He, too, proved to be a great military leader. The main players were in place for another one of history's most strategic battles.

In 1521, the Sultan sent the newly elected Grand Master of the Order a "Letter of Victory." In it he boasted of his recent conquests, and asked the Grand Master to "rejoice with me over my triumphs." L'Isle Adam was more direct than diplomatic, and he replied that he understood fully Suleiman's intention to

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make Rhodes his next conquest. In his next letter, the Sultan curtly demanded that Rhodes be surrendered to him at once. We, too, must refuse to waste time with political banter with the sworn enemies of the faith, understanding that the enemy of our faith will never give up on his foremost devotion, the destruction of the church which Christ died to save.

The Sultan's timing was typically brilliant. Henry VIII of England had seized the Order's properties in Britain. France and Spain were at war, and Italy was impoverished. Once again, the gallant knights could expect no help. Again, a few hundred knights took their stand against the most powerful army on earth. We can also expect the enemy's assaults to hit us when we are the most vulnerable. We must not count on help from anyone on earth. However, the Lord will never leave us. He is greater than any other army that can be amassed against us.

Historians estimate that Suleiman assembled up to 700 ships and 200,000 men for the second battle of Rhodes. There were 500 knights and an estimated 1,500 militiamen standing against them. The Turks brought up such a multitude of cannons and mortars that they looked like a forest to the defenders. Their siege guns hurled cannon balls nine feet in circumference, and for over a month they poured thousands of these into the city and its fortifications each day. The knights answered with their own artillery, which was much smaller and fewer in number, but quite effective on the relatively unprotected Turks.

We, too, can expect to be greatly outnumbered and outgunned for every conflict. We read in I John 5:19, "**the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.**" After every victory won, we can expect the enemy to return with a more powerful force and bigger guns. When even a demon is cast out it will wander for a time before it returns with seven more (Matthew 12:43-45). Again, some of our greatest defeats have come because we thought the war was over after just one battle. After each victory we must start preparing for the bigger battle that is sure to follow. Even so, let us never forget that, "**You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world**" (I John 4:4).

For six months the Sultan unleashed the fury of the most powerful artillery the world had ever known, occasionally interrupted for human wave assaults by some of the world's most fearless warriors. To the increasing dismay of the Sultan and his generals, each time the smoke of battle cleared, the knights appeared

in their gleaming armor, standing on the remaining ramparts. As the siege wore on, the Sultan's disposition toward the knights began to change. He respected courage, and he had never witnessed the kind of valor that these knights had displayed. On Christmas Eve, Suleiman made an extraordinary offer of peace with honor to the remaining knights. After paying tribute to their courage and endurance, he gave them food and provided his own ships to carry them to the destination of their choice. The knights knew that they were too weak to withstand another assault, and this would at least enable them to fight another day. They accepted.

Two thousand men had taken their stand against as many as 200,000. They held their ground for more than six months against the greatest bombardment and infantry assaults that the world had ever seen. The Ottomans paid a terrible price for Rhodes. Not only had they lost some of their best fighters, they had lost some of their confidence. At the same time, Christians throughout Europe started believing that they could resist the hordes of Islam, and began preparing their defenses with increasing confidence. Even so, the amazing exploits of the Order of St. John were not over.

A New Home, A New Battle

The remaining knights were offered a small, relatively inhospitable island in the middle of the Mediterranean named Malta. They accepted it, and immediately started turning the sleepy little sheep fields into a fortress upon which the future of Europe would soon depend. We, too, must understand that even the most remote little congregation can be the point of a great battle between the forces of light and darkness. We must learn to make every home into a fortress, and prepare for a battle upon which the fate of multitudes may depend.

With Rhodes in his possession, the Sultan believed that he was free to sweep across Europe with little opposition. No one could have conceived that the battered Order of St. John would again bar his path. However, the little Order not only rose to challenge him again, they struck the blow that began the unraveling of the entire Ottoman Empire. Though the Order was severely reduced in both numbers and wealth, their greatest possessions—faith, determination, and courage—were still intact.

While building their fortifications on Malta, the knights also began building ships from which they could again raid Muslim shipping. It was at this time that the famous Muslim pirate, Barbarossa, had been appointed High Admiral of the Turkish fleet. While the Order of St. John was weakened, he built the

Ottoman navy into a force. Soon great sea battles began to rage from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. Most of these battles were indecisive, but they kept the world on the edge of its seat. A significant Ottoman naval victory would almost certainly be the beginning of the end for Christian Europe. It was the tenacious seafaring Knights of St. John who stood in the path of such a Turkish victory. Again, the knights were making themselves odious to the Turkish high command.

Changing of the Guard

In 1546, Barbarossa died, and Dragut assumed command of the increasingly powerful Turkish navy. In 1550, the knights defeated his fleet at Mahdia. In 1557, L'Isle Adam died, and Jean Parisot de la Valette became Grand Master of the Order. Educated and aristocratic, La Valette had once been captured by the Turks and made a galley slave for four years. He was 63 years old when he became Grand Master, and he proved to be a great leader like both L'Isle Adam and d'Abusson before him.

The whole Muslim world was demanding the destruction of the Order of St. John. At times Suleiman had been enraged by the knights, and at other times he feared them, knowing that they could not be defeated without great cost. Finally, public opinion forced his hand, and on May 18, 1565, the Turkish fleet was sighted by the watchman in Fort St. Elmo on the edge of Malta.

The Battle Of Malta

The Ottoman fleet approaching Malta was so great that it appeared as if an entire forest of spars were moving across the sea. Never had a more powerful armada been assembled. With them came seemingly endless multitudes of the Sultan's finest Janissaries, regulars, and more than 4,000 layalars—religious fanatics who sought death over life. This Turkish force came to attack 540 knights, 1,000 foot soldiers, and a little more than 3,000 Maltese militiamen.

Unlike Rhodes, at which there was only one fortified city, at Malta the knights were spread out over several forts and towns. Military strategists considered this a serious disadvantage, but it forced the Turks to spread their forces too. Just as those before him had excelled, the new Grand Master was brilliant at maximizing the advantage of every favorable condition, as well as creating the best possible strategies from unfavorable situations. We, too, must learn to defend every congregation in every town and city. We must view each one as a fortress for the truth that must never be surrendered. We must view any attack against any church an attack against us all.

St. Elmo's Fire

The Ottoman General Pasha directed the main part of his force toward capturing St. Elmo, the small fort which overlooked the Grand Harbor. No one expected little St. Elmo to hold out for long. The indiscriminate gunfire of the Turks' earlier sieges at Rhodes had now been replaced by mathematical precision and accuracy. For days a deadly bombardment was poured into the fort from three sides.

One night while in his council chamber in Fort St. Angelo, La Valette was disturbed by an unwelcome delegation. A few knights had slipped out of St. Elmo to tell him that St. Elmo could no longer hold out. La Valette, a hero at Rhodes, derided the young knights as unworthy of their fathers. He told the delegation that they need not go back to St. Elmo, but that he would send a delegation to relieve them. Under his scorn, the little troop from St. Elmo begged to be allowed to return to their post, which La Valette finally permitted. As soon as they had departed, the Grand Master told the council that he knew the little fort was doomed, but they had to buy more time if the rest were to have a chance. In this ultimate conflict, we must learn that there can be no retreat from a single fortress of truth. Anyone can get discouraged for a time, and we must provoke one another to love and good deeds. There will be sacrifices, but each one must fight to make the enemy pay the maximum price, and buy more time for the rest.

By now so much smoke and fire was rising from St. Elmo that it looked like a volcano spewing out of the rock. Though it seemed impossible that anyone could still be alive in it, the young knights held their ground, repulsing attack after attack. Then Dragut arrived with a fresh squadron of ships and reinforcements. Dragut's presence raised the morale of the entire Turkish force, and he assumed personal command of the forces. He brought up more batteries to pour their deadly fire into St. Elmo, continuing the barrage without stopping for three entire weeks.

When the guns ceased fire, the Janissaries began a confident advance, believing that there was probably no one even alive in the little fort. Both sides stood in amazement as the attack was repulsed. Enraged, Dragut brought up almost every battery that they had, and began a bombardment so heavy that the entire island shook as if by an earthquake. The next day Dragut sent a second massive assault against the little fort with the layalars preceding the Janissaries. St. Elmo disappeared under the cloud of dust, smoke and fire.

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Hours later when the smoke had cleared, the knights in the other forts and the Turks alike were again astonished to see the Cross of St. John still flying above the ruins. La Valette was so moved, he dispatched a relief force of some of his best fighters to the little fort, but the forces encircling it were too strong and they had to turn back.

St. Elmo's Victory

The following day, Dragut continued the bombardment of St. Elmo. There were fewer than 100 men left in the fort, and nearly all of them were wounded. When the bombardment stopped, wave after wave of the best fighters in the Sultan's army again threw themselves at what was left of the fort. As the remaining knights took their stand, those who were too weak to stand asked to be carried into the fray so that they could die confronting the enemy one last time.

As the last knight fell, the Ottoman generals knew that the price had been too high. The little fortress that no one believed could hold out for more than a few days had sapped the strength of the Ottomans, depriving the Sultan of thousands of his best fighting men. Among those who were lost was the master gunner, the Aga of the Janissaries, and most importantly, Dragut himself, who was felled by a cannon shot.

The Battle of Malta raged on for months. Crisis after crisis threatened to be the doom of the Order, but the knights held on. Europe was so moved that they finally sent help. When 8,000 reinforcements landed to join the knights, the disheartened Turks sailed away, never again to return. The Ottoman Empire remained a world power until World War I, but Malta was their high water mark. The line drawn there by a few brave knights was never again crossed. The battered fortress walls still remain on the islands of Rhodes and Malta to this day as monuments to these courageous knights.

Europe Celebrates

Three times the "archaic relics from the past," stood their ground against the greatest threat to ever arise against Christian Europe. In one of the greatest examples of courage and endurance the world has ever witnessed, the Knights of St. John had prevailed. Only 250 knights survived at Malta, and like those who survived Rhodes, almost every one of them was wounded, maimed, or crippled for life. In England, Queen Elizabeth acknowledged that if Malta had fallen, England itself would probably have fallen to Islam. She ordered the Archbishop of Canterbury to

appoint a special form of thanksgiving to be read in every church in the land each day for three weeks. The rest of Europe also celebrated, paying their respects and acknowledging their debt to the Order that had long before been written off as having no real value. For their extraordinary exploits, the standard of the Knights of St. John, now called "the Maltese Cross," was for a time saluted by every nation on earth. No other flag has ever been so honored.

Summary

Truth is more powerful than any lie. We must not forget that the Lord can deliver by many or by few. He only requires faith, which is demonstrated by faithfulness and obedience to His Word. The Lord is again calling for true knights of the Spirit who will refuse to compromise their convictions. They will stand for truth and honor, and refuse to retreat even when confronted by the greatest darkness of the time. We must resolve not to surrender another inch of ground to the enemy, and also to take back what has already been stolen. The whole world may now lie in the power of the evil one, but we must remember that **"The earth is the LORD's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (Psalm 24:1).** For as long as we remain on the earth, we must determine that we will not surrender a single acre of it to the enemy of our souls. ■

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