



Ralph and Arlene Woodrow
P.O. Box 21, Palm Springs, CA 92263-0021

“NEVERTHELESS”

This message is based on Ralph Woodrow's sermon at Wallace Memorial Family Church, Indio, California, on July 11, 2011.

The odds were stacked against David. To take Jerusalem, the Jebusite stronghold, seemed impossible. **“NEVERTHELESS** David took the *stronghold* of Zion...the LORD was with him” (2 Sam. 5:7, 12).

At the time of David, carnal weapons were used to pull down strongholds. But today, as Christians, we are in a *spiritual* battle. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of *strongholds*” (2 Cor. 4, 5).

With the word “stronghold” in mind, we think of *addictions* that have a *strong hold* on people, ruining their lives: addictions to drugs, alcohol, gambling, pornography, and sexual perversion. Think of the thousands of people who have gone through the Betty Ford Center seeking freedom from the strong hold of addictions. [*The Betty Ford Center, located only a few miles from the church, was much in the news, the death of Betty Ford having occurred only three days before on July 8, 2011.*]

Once in the heat of a battle with the Philistines, David longed for water from a well in Bethlehem. Being aware of this, three of David’s men risked their lives cutting through enemy lines to go to Bethlehem and obtain that water. **“NEVERTHELESS** he would not drink it, but poured it out to the LORD.” It was not that he was ungrateful, but as he explained: “Is this not the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?” Therefore he would not drink it (2 Sam. 23:15-17).

Perhaps a lesson we can glean from this: We should not take lightly the efforts of people who risk their lives in various ways for the betterment of mankind.

The Bible speaks of three heavens (2 Cor. 12:2). These are commonly classified as the first, the sky, the heaven just above earth; second, the heaven of the stars; and the third, the heaven of God’s throne. It has been said we see the first heaven by *sight*, the second by *night*, and the third by *faith*!

We read that Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind into *heaven* (2 Kings 2:11). Because John 3:13 says “no man has ascended up to heaven, but he who came down from heaven”—Jesus Christ—the question is sometimes asked: Was Elijah taken up into the heaven of God’s throne? Or was he, like Philip, simply caught up into the sky, the first heaven, and taken to another location? (Acts 8:39). But that is not our subject here.

When Elijah was taken up, it was no surprise. That this was going to happen was known ahead of time (2 Kings 2:3, 5). Elisha, who would be his successor, did not want to fail to see this happen. At Gilgal, Elijah told Elisha to remain there, that he was going to Bethel. But Elisha said, “I’m going too!” Later, when Elijah said he was going to Jericho, Elisha said, “I’m going too!” Elijah told him to stay at Jericho, that he was going to Jordan. Elisha said, “I’m going too!”

Together they miraculously crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken away.” To this Elisha boldly replied, “Let a *double portion* of your spirit be upon me.” Elijah’s response was: “You have asked a hard thing, **NEVERTHELESS**, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so unto you” (2 Kings 2:8-10).

His diligence to stay close to the man of God paid off; he *did* receive that double portion. Of the recorded miracles, it appears Elisha performed twice as many as Elijah. Well, almost—he lacked *one*. But that miracle came later!

In the course of time, Elisha became *sick*—and *died of that sickness* (2 Kings 13:14). Did he not have “enough faith” to be healed? Was there some “sin” in his life? Had he “lost out with God”? No, none of these; for even after his death a miracle occurred. Some men had carried a dead body to the cemetery. When they were suddenly confronted by enemy Moabites, they tossed the body into the tomb of Elisha and made a run for it. When the dead man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived! (2 Kings 13:21).

The Bible does not say what happened then, but I have heard it sermonized that the dead man, seeing the others fleeing, hollered out: “Hey, boys! Wait for me, I’m going with you!” Those men who were fleeing may have been more scared of the revived dead man than the Moabites!

Sometimes as an attention-getting question I have asked: “What preacher in the Bible got so mad at some of his members he cursed them, punched them out, and yanked out their hair?”

The answer: Nehemiah. “And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair” (Neh. 13:25). Some of the Israelite men had married heathen wives who led them into idol worship. Nehemiah went on to give this example: “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?...Among many nations was there no king like him... **NEVER-THELESS** even him did outlandish [pagan] women cause to sin” (verse 26).

It is sad to read that Solomon, who built the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, later built shrines to false gods. “His wives turned away his heart after other gods...for Solomon went after Ashtoreth...and after Milcom...he built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech....And

likewise did he for all his strange [pagan] wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods” (2 Kings 11:1-8).

Back in the late 70s, between services at a Bible conference in Dana Point, California, John Otto (a pastor friend of many years) and I, took a short drive down the coast to San Clemente. “The Western White House,” as it had been called, was located there and was at the time the residence of former President Richard Nixon. It was a beautiful spring day and as we drove along we were talking about things that are commonly overlooked in the Bible. Turning in his Bible, John shared this with me:

Jesus told Peter, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your NETS for a draught” (Lk. 5:4). Notice that the word “nets” is *plural*. Peter explained that they had fished all night and had taken nothing. “**NEVERTHELESS**,” he said, “at thy word I will let down the NET” (verse 5). Peter said “net,” *singular*. This was not what Jesus said! It ended up that Peter and the others “enclosed a great multitude of fish: and their net broke.” Had Peter followed the instructions of Jesus more carefully, had he let down the “nets” and not just a “net,” certain problems would have been avoided.

I should point out that this contrast between “nets” and “net” is based on the King James Version. Some translations use the plural in both places. But, this does illustrate how it is easy to pass over certain details as we read the Bible.

Another example, howbeit minor, involves the women who came to the tomb of Jesus with spices. The Bible says they “bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him” (Mark 16:1). On more than one occasion I have heard this read incorrectly—that the women *brought* sweet spices. It is true they *brought* spices to the tomb, but the word here is “bought.”

The time had come when Jesus was going to leave his disciples and return to the Father. “Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow has filled your heart. **NEVERTHELESS**...” (John 16:6,7). And what a great “nevertheless” it was! The Holy Spirit—the Comforter, the Helper, the Advocate—would come. He would guide them into all truth. “Your sorrow shall be turned to joy...In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good *cheer*: I have *overcome the world*” (John 16:6-33).

As our dear Lord prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, he became “exceeding

sorrowful.” Facing the agony of the cross, he prayed: “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; **NEVERTHELESS**, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:38,39). What is most important to us—*our* will or *God’s* will?

The wording of the Lord’s Prayer says: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.” Some who repeat this, would be more honest if they said: “For MINE is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever”! They are more concerned about their own selfish will than God’s will.

How different was Paul’s testimony! “I am crucified with Christ: **NEVERTHELESS** I live; yet not I, but Christ who lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Today with so many diverse teachings making the rounds, the words of Paul are timely and provide a great preaching text: “**NEVERTHELESS** what does the *Scripture* say?” (Gal. 4:30). Some doctrines may *sound* good, but are not *good sound doctrine*.

There are some who spread vain babblings and err concerning the truth, “**NEVERTHELESS** the foundation of God stands *sure*” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Though Paul faced tremendous persecution—“troubled on every side, without were fightings, within were fears”—he could write: “**NEVERTHELESS** God, who comforts those who are *cast down*, comforted us...” (2 Cor. 7:5,6).

Though Paul “suffered” many things, he could affirm: “**NEVERTHELESS**...I *know* whom I have believed, and am *persuaded* that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Some of you reading this may feel the odds are stacked against you. You may feel defeated and depressed. I recall an uncle of mine once saying he felt “lower than a snake’s belly.” But God can turn things around, can lift you up, and bring you out on top! Let me share the testimony of three people who are examples of this:

First, I will tell you about a man named Pete. Though he believed in the Lord, he had a problem with his temper. Sometimes he would cuss and even become violent. On one occasion he actually did bodily harm to a man who worked for a religious organization. Another time a very well-known preacher called him “Satan”!

Then there is the story of Joe who faced many difficulties in life. He was not a bad person, but he seemed to be haunted with bad luck. Over and over he seemed to be crossways with people. Most of his own relatives did not like him. He had a problem holding a job. At one period in his life he spent time in prison.

Our third story is about a woman—I won’t mention her name for a reason that will become obvious. She faced serious marital problems. Having always dreamed of a happy marriage, her first husband left her. On the rebound, she married again. But this marriage also ended in divorce. A third marriage failed—as did a fourth, and fifth! Having gone through so many divorces, she felt like a failure. I actually heard a pastor use this wording to describe her: “She made so many trips to the county Divorce Court, she knew the names of the Clerk’s grandchildren!”

NEVERTHELESS, in time, the lives of all three of these people were changed for the better. “Pete,” is better known as Peter the apostle. Two books of the Bible, huge church structures, and cities bear his name—even all these centuries later!

“Joe” was really Joseph who ultimately became Prime Minister over the land of Egypt and was instrumental in preserving a very important family in biblical history: Israel.

And the unnamed woman we mentioned, we know simply as “the woman at the well.” There she met Jesus, her life was transformed, and she became (in the words of Adam Clarke), “The first apostle of Christ in Samaria”!

You may be troubled by fear. **NEVERTHELESS**, be assured that “God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and a sound mind” (2 Tim. 2:7).

The world may ridicule and make fun of you because of your Christian stand. **NEVERTHELESS**, “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Present circumstances may cause you to feel defeated. **NEVERTHELESS**, “in all these things we are *more* than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

It may seem like the enemy has almost overwhelmed you. **NEVERTHELESS**, “when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa. 59:19).

Be assured: GOD has a “**NEVERTHELESS**” for YOU!