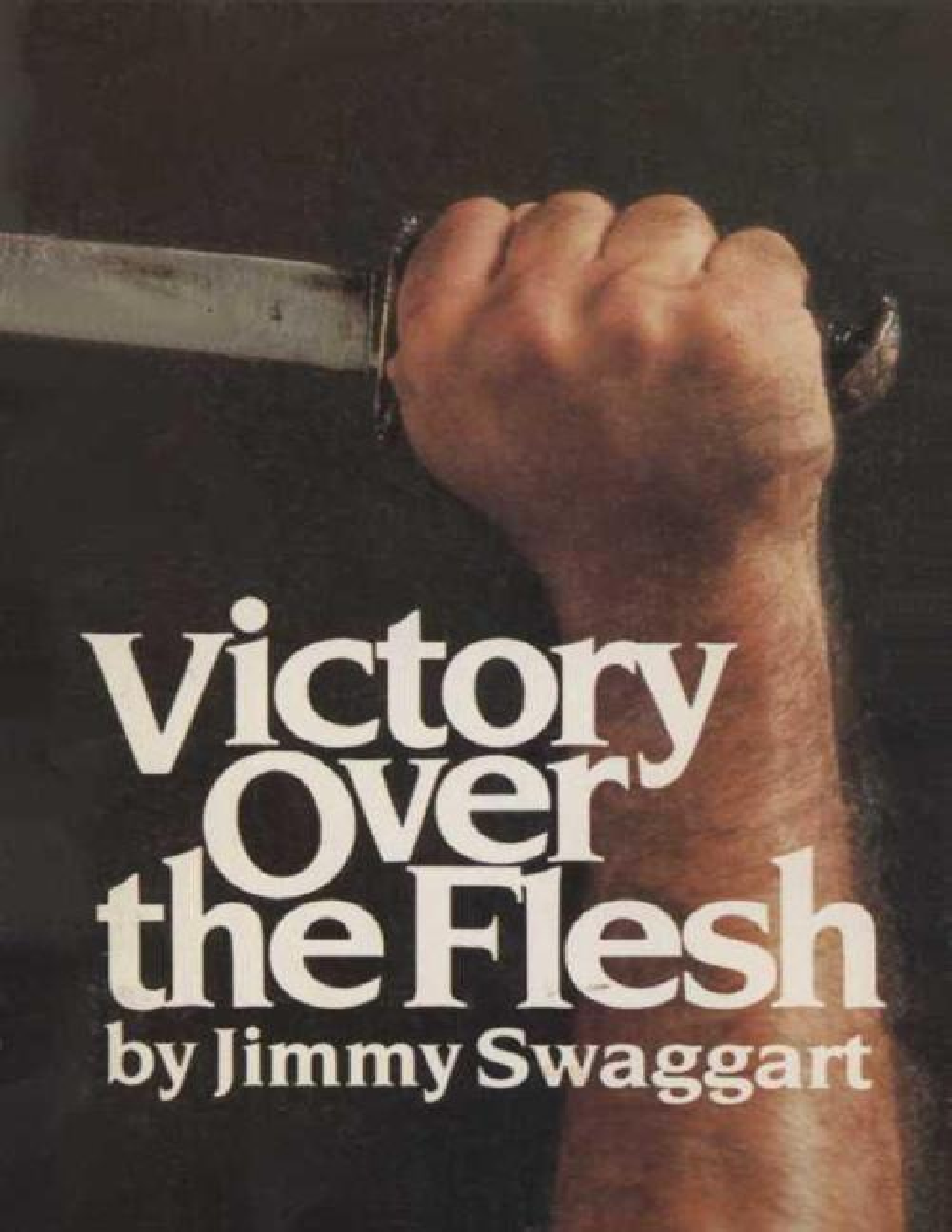




Victory Over the Flesh

by Jimmy Swaggart

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:24-28).

"And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir: These are the names of Esau's sons; Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Bashemath the wife of Esau. And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these were the sons of Adah Esau's wife" (Genesis 36:9-12).

"Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat

thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: For he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:8-16).

THE BATTLEGROUND OF THE SOUL

The Scriptures that we have used demonstrate several factors that weigh importantly upon the never-ending battle between God's influence

for good—and Satan's influence for evil. Even though we are the children of God, we are not isolated from this battle. To the contrary, we often find ourselves involved at the very *core* of this eternal confrontation. The names Esau, Edom, and Amalek figure prominently in the quoted passages and, with God's grace and assistance, I hope to demonstrate their relationship to our lives today.

I WAS IN PETRA

In Genesis 36:9 the name Mount Seir appears. Today, this city (called Mount Seir in the Bible) is known as Petra and is in the country of Edom—which means *Red Earth*. In other words, Edom is symbolic of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is the biblical "type" of the world's systems, and by observing God's relationship to Mount Seir, we can more clearly determine what *our* relationship should be with the world today.

Amalek was Esau's grandson; he was the archetype of worldliness. God said that He would war with Amalek from generation unto generation.

What did God *mean* when He said He would have eternal confrontation with Amalek? It was the same as saying that the child of God would battle the *flesh* from generation to generation. The flesh is the battleground of the soul. It is, no doubt, the area of Christian living that causes more failures than any other. It is the eternal battle with Amalek. It's the battle the children of God fought so long ago—and the battle we're still fated to fight today. Needless to say, none of us can hope to *win* this battle unless we place our total confidence in God.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF JACOB AND ESAU TO GOD

In order to fully understand the relationship of Jacob and Esau to God, we must examine their very beginnings. When they were born, God foreknew, through His omniscience, the future of both. The Bible states without question that God hated

Esau. He hated Esau because He knew (before it happened) that Esau would reject his birthright.

Esau would literally prove to despise everything pertaining to God. When God looked at Esau as a newborn, He knew that Esau would first define and then *choose* evil as opposed to good. Perhaps more than any other man in history, Esau would draw the line—and then brazenly step across it. Jacob, on the other hand, would eventually become the personification of righteousness, while Esau would become the standard-

bearer of all that is evil. As such, he would naturally gravitate toward Petra—the Las Vegas of biblical days. Esau was the ultimate worldling.

When (in Genesis 25:29-34) Esau traded his birthright to Jacob for a serving of food (bread and lentle soup) he was, in essence, saying, "I have absolutely no concern for the coming Messiah. *Pie-in-the-sky* religion has no place in my life. I am a believer in situational ethics: I worry only about the things of the moment. I want everything the world has to offer."

God characterized Esau as a fornicator. He was fascinated by the fleshpots (worldly entertainments) of the day; and as such, Petra was the perfect place for him. In it were concentrated the gambling dens, the floor shows, and all fleshly sins common to that era. It was, undoubtedly, similar to Las Vegas, Atlantic City, the movies, or pay TV of today, the only difference being the technical marvels not yet available. But the attitude and the *spirit* were the same.

Esau was, in effect, saying, "A Messiah *will* come, and as firstborn I *should* be in the lineage of the Messiah." But in his dedicated immersion in worldly pleasures, he repudiated this and totally rejected it as unimportant. In essence, he cursed God. Millions are doing the same today, saying, "I don't care for heaven. I have no concern for the value of my soul. I deliberately choose the pleasures of the world."

Any Sunday School pupil knows the outcome of the dreadful conflict between Esau and Jacob. Jacob went one way, Esau the other. There was bad blood between them—and bad blood *usually* ends in a confrontation.

JACOB CHANGED AT PENIEL

Many years after fleeing the wrath of Esau, Jacob decided to return home. He's a different man now, yet not *totally* changed. As he approaches the land of Israel, his family and flocks with him, he suddenly receives word that Esau is approaching with four hundred armed men.

Jacob is disturbed. Could it be that the bad blood has *not* disappeared? Then the Bible recounts Jacob's historic wrestling bout with the angel (the Son of God) until the break of day.

Jacob persists heroically and will not let Him go until the angel blesses him. In other words, Jacob said, "I must be changed. My name means 'supplanter' or 'deceiver' and I'm *tired* of being the old Jacob. I want to be a *new* man. I want Your Spirit to prevail within my heart and my life."

There is a great deal we can learn from this:

1. Victory over the flesh does not come easily. The Bible says Jacob *wrestled*. We are in a wrestling match. The Word of God tells us that we *wrestle* not against flesh and blood—but against principalities and powers. So it's a contest; a conflict; a fight.

2. Jacob *was* changed. You and I can be changed too. Something happened in Jacob's life. The Lord told him his name would no longer be Jacob (the supplanter), but would from then on be Israel (the Prince of God).

Something happened in the spirit world when Jacob met the Lord. Esau was, undoubtedly, coming with hatred—as his four hundred men would attest. But suddenly, for no apparent *worldly* reason, he had a change of heart. Is it possible—when a child of God walks in the flesh—that he lowers his protection? And if this *is* possible, isn't it *also* possible that when he walks in the Spirit—situations change on his behalf? It is almost as if there were two *simultaneous* reactions. It would appear that at the moment Jacob was changed, *Esau* was also changed.

I wonder if the spiritual battles we fight (and sometimes lose) don't also cause concurrent conflicts in our physical lives, our material lives, and our financial lives? I feel this is a lesson we should consider. I think it's evident in our own experiences (and from the account of Jacob wrestling with the angel—that when he was changed, his situation with Esau also changed) that this is the case. Our spiritual battles can, and often do, affect the other areas of our lives (physical, material, financial).

I must ask the question, "Do we, by allowing sin a foothold in our lives, cause ourselves to have tremendous difficulties and problems, simply because we are not right with God?"

Oh yes, we are saved. But these can be areas of the flesh where we have not yet gained victory. And, due to our lack of victory in these areas, aren't we then prey to *other* influences that wouldn't be present —had we gained victory as Jacob did at Peniel?

I firmly believe—if Jacob had not been changed, serious consequences would have developed with Esau and his four hundred men. But when Jacob changed, Esau changed. It would seem that God formed a protective shield round about Jacob—because he had been changed by the power of God. This not only affected Jacob, but all those who came in contact with him—particularly Esau (Proverbs 16:7).

And perhaps most importantly of all, we should mention a fact that might be overlooked in this incident: While Jacob was changed by *the power of God*—it was Jacob's determination to *receive* God's life-changing power that *caused* God to change him.

In Genesis 32:26 we read that the angel wished to *terminate* the struggle and depart. At this point Jacob *could* have fallen back on the position we Christians often embrace and said, "Well, the Lord knows I *tried*." Instead, he said, "I will *not* let thee go, unless thou bless me."

Certainly it is God's mercy and grace and power that creates a change in us. But without dedication, commitment, and determination on our part, we can miss *out* on God's great blessings.

ESAU INVITED JACOB TO MOUNT SEIR (PETRA)

From the latter part of the 33rd chapter of Genesis (especially verse 14) it would appear that Esau invited Jacob to Mount Seir—which today is known as Petra. Actually, Jacob never went there. Although he did not openly *refuse* the invitation, there is no biblical record of his ever setting foot within the boundaries of Seir. And we can learn a great lesson by following Jacob's example in this regard.

Esau and Jacob were brothers, but they were totally different. Jacob was now in a position to continue the righteous lineage that had come down through the centuries from Seth, Enoch, Noah, Eber, and Abraham. He was now insured a position, through grace, as a progenitor of Judah, Pharez, Boaz, and David—all mortal ancestors of the only begotten Son of God.

Esau, on the other hand, was the personification of evil. He lived in Edom (Red Earth) which is a type of the world.

Many believe he made Petra his home for a considerable period. Petra was the type of all worldly evil. It appears that Esau never went back to Canaan—and that Jacob never went to Petra. Now here's the lesson we must learn from this:

The world is our enemy—our area of conflict—the spot where the line is drawn. The Word tells us that we are *in* the world, but not *of* it. Yet some Christians seem unaware of this. The child of God is faced today with an onslaught of satanism unlike any period the Church of the Living God has ever known.

On our Telecast, over and over again, I have felt the promptings of the Holy Spirit to impress upon the church that—even though we must not become engrossed in legalism, at the same time—we must *also* avoid

becoming obsessed with the world. Legalism is *not* the problem of the child of God today—the *world* is.

Someone has said that some Christians have become so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use. I'm sure that's true. But by the same token, it seems that many Christians have become so worldly minded that they are of no *heavenly* use. This, I'm persuaded, is the *greater* danger!

Jacob had his reasons for avoiding Edom. There were many things about it that were totally repellent to him. And it should be the same for the child of God today.

We're in the world, but not of it. We just don't fit. As a child of God, I am totally disinterested in the latest movies or TV shows. I'm not interested in Academy Awards or in Grammy Awards. I know they represent *evil* and should have no place in the sphere of interest of the child of God. As a Christian, I'm not interested in the latest styles, nor in those persons who influence them.

The things of the world simply don't interest me. I was preaching the other day in New York City, and the building was thronged. I came to a portion in the message where I was speaking of lifestyles. I mentioned entertainers in Nashville (or wherever); men and women who are prominent in the music business. And then I asked this question: "If you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, will you have to give that up? Will you have to turn your back on the "rewards" offered by this type of worldly activity?"

Somehow, as I watched this segment on television weeks later, and as that question boomed through the television set, it seemed as though the very airwaves were charged with anticipation. I was stunned at the *electricity* of the moment. Of course I recalled *saying* it, but now it seemed that the Holy Spirit guided every word.

Then the answer came. "Yes, you *are* going to have to give it up. You can't hold on to God with one hand and the world with the other. There's a dividing line."

I knew, when I uttered those words, they would not stand well with a lot of the church world—or even with those who were watching. But I also knew that some individuals, whoever they might be, would be willing to come in the precise way the Lord Jesus Christ would have them come.

It's a dangerous game to dangle our feet in a raging torrent. Sooner or later the current will catch us and we'll be swept over the falls. We can't go *part* way. If we try to dabble in Edom—involving ourselves *somewhat* in

the things of this world—it will eventually destroy us. It's all of God ... or all of the world. There's no middle ground.

AMALEK

Amalek was Esau's grandson, and Esau's spirit has persisted through the ages. When Israel came out of Egypt, the Amalekites harassed Israel's rear guard. You saw, in the scriptural passage at the beginning of the message; how Joshua fought the Amalekites while Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses. Whenever they let down Moses' hands, Joshua began to lose the battle. But—when they held his hands aloft—Joshua would again prevail.

This, of course, tells us that we can have victory over Amalek—who is a type of the flesh. But we can't do it with the things of this world. It must be accomplished in the Spirit. It's done in the same way that Jacob gained victory so many years ago.

As Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses, the Spirit of God was actually drawing us a picture. He was giving us the lesson that it's *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts"* (Zechariah 4:6b).

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds. Amalek—the very name sounds like a chain, a rope of bondage, a binding that wraps itself around us.

The Amalekites hated Israel intensely and the flesh (of which Amalek is the type) is *your* biggest enemy. You will have more problems with the flesh than with anything else. And some may ask the question, "What do you *mean* by the flesh?"

When we mention the flesh, we do not of course refer to the physical tissues of the body. We refer instead to the passions and influences that lay siege to our souls—and which have their roots in the things of the world. The politician who craves power (and sells his integrity for such power)—that's the flesh; and it's all intertwined with the world and the devil.

The entertainer who hears the call of God—but who will not give up his worldly pursuits for the Lord Jesus Christ—that's the flesh. The rich man who thinks more of his money than of his soul (as did the rich young ruler who came to Jesus)—that's the flesh.

It's all Amalek. And it attacks the Christian with terrible, lustful desires that seem to choke off the victory of the child of God; a war he

wages constantly. That's the flesh. That's Amalek, and as Amalek harassed Israel's rear guard, so will the flesh do to the Christian.

In the last few months, I believe I have witnessed the fall of more Christians to sin and adultery than in the last five years put together. These are the works of Satan *through* the flesh. It seems to tear at the very *soul* of the child of God. It's Amalek—he doesn't give up. The Lord said He would war against him "*from generation to generation.*"

The flesh caused Saul's downfall when he was given orders by God to slay *every* Amalekite and he disobeyed. (Because the Amalekites were the type of the flesh, God ordered them slain.) If the child of God doesn't gain victory over temper, jealousy, envy, malice, lust, bitterness, and strife—eventually Amalek will defeat *him*.

This is war to the death? There is no middle ground. God said that they must *all* be destroyed. They must be *universally* put to the sword. That's the reason the righteous judge, Samuel, took a sword and hewed Agag (the king of the Amalekites) to death. This might seem brutal and bloodthirsty, but it represented what we fight against today.

We can cater to the flesh by giving vent to its desires; but *when* we do, we destroy ourselves. The impulses of the flesh must be brought under subjection. They must be hewed to pieces. There is no other way to victory.

MY OBSERVATION OF PETRA

Some time ago I walked through the ancient city of Petra which is, of course, deserted now. Still its eerie strangeness is so compelling that one is overwhelmed by the beauty of this place. One reaches it only by passing through a narrow passageway, its vertical walls rising hundreds of feet on either side of the trail. A few men could hold off an army here; yet it's unoccupied today. Many feel (because it is a natural defense) this is where Israel will flee during the great tribulation period when the Antichrist attempts to destroy her.

As I stood there that day, I couldn't forget that this had been the home of Esau. I could almost hear the buzz of activity— even though its role as an important trade center had long since evaporated. It had been one of the most imposing cities on the face of the earth. Due to its unique location, the way the buildings were cut into the sides of the cliffs, and its inaccessible and almost impregnable position—it had become the "playground" of the world.

One could sense the dancing girls, the torches as they illuminated the great broadways, the huge buildings carved out of solid rock, the soldiers laden with the spoils of war, the gambling, sinning, and wallowing in the filth of the flesh.

Esau was prominent in this "Las Vegas" of his day. (Had he lived now we would see him on the front of *Time* or *Newsweek* magazines.) He would have been the late night TV host of his time. He had the glib tongue, the sarcastic remark for anything sacred or holy. He would have been respected by millions as *the* example of those who are "hip" and worldly-wise.

No doubt, many mothers wanted their sons to be just like him. He was a "superstar"; an attraction of his world.

If Jacob had lived today he would be branded as one of those "odd" Jesus people —those who aren't really "with it"; those who are willing to bet on "pie in the sky." Jacob would have been ridiculed, if noticed at all; but Esau would have been lifted up as the model of the "smart" man of the times.

You see, then as now, the world loves its own—and its own love the world. Nothing has changed. The minister of the Gospel is reviled, laughed at, and ridiculed— persecuted at times—even in so-called "Christian" America. The rock star staggers across the stage with eyelids drooping, overcome by the effects of drugs, almost unconscious in his performance of songs that deify adultery, fornication, and rebellion. The public acclaims him as he sows the seeds of death for literally millions of young people. He's lifted up as the idol of the masses and reported glowingly in the newspapers and magazines—while ministers of the Gospel are ridiculed.

Nothing has changed. It's exactly the same as it was in Jacob's day, and it never *will* change until the Lord returns to hurl Satan into the pit. The world is our enemy. The flesh is our enemy. We must attain victory over sin by rejecting all that pertains to the world. We must utterly remove ourselves from the world— spiritually speaking. Again, of course, we're in it, but we're not of it; and very often this is a weakness in the Church of the Living God.

Our music has become like the world. Our actions have become like the world. Our *attitude* has become like the world. This will destroy us quicker than all the Neros and Hitlers that hell has ever produced. It's Satan's favorite tactic, enticing us with the flesh (Amalek). More Christians succumb on this battlefield than in any other area of conflict.

As you read this, this is perhaps your area of difficulty. Is there a battle going on in *your* soul—an area of weakness—a conflict that has raged for some time? While you have warred against this, you seemingly have *not* won the victory. Remember this, though: It took Jacob a long time. For many years he was known as Jacob the deceiver—Jacob the supplanter; a person little different from Esau. Yet there was a hunger in his soul for a higher walk with God. Jacob knew that things were not as they should be in his soul, and he abhorred this. His desire was to be as he should be. He longed to be Israel, the Prince of God.

It took a wrestling bout, which was the spiritual climax of his years of striving with the flesh. Thank God, he persisted and Jacob became Israel, Prince of God.

YOU CAN PREVAIL

It is a deadly game we're fighting—a game so deadly that the end could well be the gain or loss of your eternal soul. That's what Satan is fighting for and the sides are clearly drawn. The line is down the middle.

The child of God does not cross over into Edom. Jacob never went there. It was a "strange" place to him, as the world must be "strange" to you. You have no place nor part in it. If you think you can retain your testimony and play on the fleshly side of the fence—you are sadly mistaken.

Oh, you may get away with it for a time. It may seem you can "play both sides against the middle." But it will eventually take its deadly toll. When you play in Amalek's territory, you will succumb to Amalek in the end. We cannot defeat him at his own game, for he is the master of it.

If you spare him, allowing any part or parcel in your heart and life, he will destroy you as surely as he destroyed Saul. Take *your* example from Samuel and ruthlessly hew him out of your life.

UTTERLY DESTROY ALL THAT THEY HAVE—AND SPARE THEM NOT

I want to refer back to what I mentioned earlier, just briefly, concerning Saul and Samuel. God told Saul to smite Amalek and to utterly destroy all they had, not sparing any. The casual reader might consider this cruel of God; but in God's mind and with His omniscience, He knew that Amalek was a type of the flesh. Amalek cherished all that was evil and unholy.

One or the other side had to win. There could be no draw or survival of *some*. If Israel and Saul were to survive, Amalek had to die. It's the same

with you and me. We will go forward in victory only if the flesh is subdued. We must have mastery over the flesh.

God told Saul to slay them: man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass (I Samuel 15:3). But in the 9th verse it says that Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, and lambs, and all that was good. He would not *utterly* destroy them.

Now there's the lesson for us. There are many enticements beckoning us in the world. Much of the church would tell us we can *have both God* and the world; we're not to become too peculiar. We should *enjoy* what the world has to offer. We don't have to become vile with it, or evil; but at the same time, we should avoid appearing as "religious fanatics." We should tread the middle of the road.

Saul, of course, was going the way of Esau—although he may not have known it —just as many Christians don't know it today. Saul was eventually to lose his soul over this; just as the child of God will lose his soul if he doesn't do exactly as God directs.

The minute we attempt a balancing act, we court Amalek—we spare Agag. When we do this, we flirt with disaster. The 10th verse says *the word of the Lord came unto Samuel saying* Then Samuel gave the grave message to Saul: "*Because thou (Saul) hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee . . .*" (I Samuel 15:23b).

The 33rd verse tells how that Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. That's the only treatment for the flesh. It must be totally eradicated. We can't have *little* to do with the world. We can't pick and choose among its enticements. We mustn't think we can just see the *good* movies or attend only dances where there aren't *too* many drugs. We can't pick as our friends the *good* people of the *world*, while avoiding those who are blatantly evil. As soon as we try to pick and choose among the things of the world, we are inviting entrapment *in* the world. The "good" elements of the world are still *of* the world, and as such they will lead to our downfall. The world will prance before you just as Agag minced before Samuel as he said,

"Surely the bitterness of death is past" (verse 32).

That's Amalek's way. "Let's compromise. Let's not become too fanatical."

But, thank God, Samuel rejected the world and did what must be done in the life of every Christian. Agag was destroyed. You must do the same

thing if you are to have victory over that which Satan would use to destroy you.

THERE CAN BE VICTORY FOR THE CHILD OF GOD

I realize this is "old-fashioned" preaching and an "old-fashioned" Gospel, but the scenario is clearly drawn—all the way from Jacob to Esau, through Esau's heirs, the Amalekites and Edom. It is so vividly clear and concise. Jacob never entered Edom and Esau never returned to Israel. The lines are clearly drawn. We can have nothing to do with the world. We must be extremely wary, walking softly before God. It's victory over the flesh, or the flesh will gain victory over us.

It's taking a sword and hewing Agag, the Amalekite, to pieces—or Agag will hew *us* to death. There can be no middle ground. There must never be compromise with Amalek—God's scriptural example of the flesh.

