

Megiddo Message

January/February, 2006



*On wings of time
relentless, swift,
The seasons come and go.*



PROFIT OF LOSS?

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"—Mark 8:36

The experienced business owner knows the importance of watching the bottom line. If critical attention is not given to profit and loss tracking, profits will suffer and the business will ultimately fail. Before making a purchase, conscientious owners look carefully at the risks.

Yet, when it comes to the profitability of our lives, this simple rule is often ignored. Perhaps this is due in part to a distorted values system. In our culture we tend to think of personal profit in terms of money, pleasure, and things—our job title, our salary, our bank account, our clothes, the model of our car, our house and where we live, our friends and our pleasures—with little regard to the costs to our inner, spiritual life, which may be very high. Didn't Jesus say, *"What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36).

If we use a value system based on tangibles of this world, we may discover in a time of crisis that the costs have far outweighed the real value. Like the owner of a business who gives no regard to costs, our investment will prove to be short in duration, rarely fully satisfying, and certain to fail ultimately.

In the parable of the Hidden Treasure, Jesus tells of one who had the right view of his personal profits and losses. Previously this man's investments had been in tangibles, with nothing of permanent value—until one day he discovered real treasure. Then what did he do? He went and with joy *"sold all that he had"* and bought the treasure (Matt. 13:44).

What did he sell? Is Jesus saying that it is wrong to own a

Oh, that he might own this great treasure he had found!

Some would argue that Jesus was overdrawing the picture, that God would never require this much. And besides, they say, Jesus paid the price, so we can keep what we wish and have the treasure of great price, too!

Before drawing conclusions, let us consider the profit and loss. The question of profit and loss, of risk and reward, applies to every aspect of life. We need to constantly ask ourselves whether the things we are seeking are worth what we are giving up in exchange. Everything has cost. Is having my own way worth the cost in time, money, leisure, or freedom?

Eternal salvation is free—the reward is too great for us to even begin to purchase it. But there is a requirement to meet which is by comparison infinitesimally small. We must exchange our way of life for the way of life Christ taught. *"If any man will come after me,"* said Jesus, *"let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"* (Luke 9:23).

Is this asking too much? It is, if you are satisfied with your life as it is and care for nothing better. If you are satisfied to live and die accepting whatever good fortune may come to you, then the price is too high. But for those who aspire to the eternal benefits God offers, Jesus' offer is so much for the little we give in exchange!

And when we begin to add up the costs, we find that some of the things we lose are actually gain!

For example, we lose old acquaintances, pleasures, friends, perhaps even family—all things that hurt to let go. But we also lose discontentment. Gone is useless worry, agitation of mind, and desire for those things that cost heavily in time and money. We lose the friendship of those who are against the good. No more is the mad rush to keep up with the latest fashions. Lost is the pride that caused us so much hurt in jealousy and hatred. Gone is the enslavement to a way of life that leads nowhere. We are giving up everything we don't need, those things that are a detriment to our well-being, especially to our spiritual lives.

Yes, these are the losses when we make a wholehearted commitment. But some of the losses are actually gain. And then, too, we should look at what we are losing if we don't buy the field (in Jesus' parable), if we gain the whole world and "lose" our soul, our very life!

When we go for the gain of this world, we live in a dream world, and one day we will wake up and find that all these worldly riches were really a delusion, and eternal death is its reward.

Everything we give up now will ultimately be gain—we get the immediate benefit of a more peaceful, contented life, and ultimately, joy unending! For *"true humility and fear of the Lord lead to riches, honor, and long life"* (Prov. 22:4 NLT).

What can we possibly lose in this exchange! ♦

*Follow it to the end and
you will find this world costs
far more than it gives.*

house, or a car, or to have a bank account? No, the man in His parable *"sold all"* by turning over His whole life to God—his thoughts, his decisions, where he would go, how he would use his time, what he would talk about, his friends, even family if they stood between him and God. He talked about spiritual issues, he dreamed about the rewards of victory over his life of sin. He meditated on the Word of God day and night. Absolutely nothing was so important as pleasing God every moment of every day for the rest of his life.



Standing on the BIBLE

Why are we here? Where did we come from? Where are we going?

For centuries, people have been trying to answer these questions. For some there is no plan, purpose, or future. This life is all there is, and when you're dead, you're dead. In the minds of these people, everything about us "just happened." The sun, moons, planets, and billions of galaxies, with myriads of stars all just happened. Reference: Charles Darwin. Robert Ingersoll. Madeleine O'Hare.

Personally, when I think about the complexity of life, i.e., the six trillion cells in our own bodies, the structure of DNA, how our eye "sees," how our ear "hears," I find any chance theory much harder to believe than to believe in an Almighty Creator and Designer.

Going a step further, some people believe we are all puppets on the string of a great Superpower's all controlling will. He has predetermined our destiny, and nothing we do can change it.

Some people believe we are here solely for the good we can do to others. We are here to love and serve one another, to relieve suffering and promote goodwill, that this is the supreme good in life.

Others believe in an endless round of existence, where life is constantly moving from one form to another. Still others believe in worshiping images they shape with their own hands, from clay or wood or stone.

What shall we believe? One idea is as valid as another—or is it? When we look at the evidence, we discover only one source of reliable information: the Bible.

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WHY BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

◆ Evidence from extra-biblical sources

Secular historians record events/people/places mentioned in the Bible

◆ Scientific evidence

Example: Isaiah quoting the Creator, said the earth is round (Isa. 40:22)
—written 1000 years before science confirmed it

Example: God's law to Israel mandated quarantine to avoid spread of disease (like leprosy)—written 1500 years before modern science confirmed it

Example: God's law to Israel mandated washing in running water for best body cleansing—more than 2000 years ago

◆ Archeological evidence

Visible ruins of cities mentioned in the Bible

Archeological digs uncover evidence that confirms the Bible

Because the culture today is largely prejudiced against the Bible, many archeological findings are being denied fair review or are totally disallowed. Nevertheless, there is a vast amount of archeological evidence confirming Bible facts, people, places and events.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

◆ Unity of its teachings

◆ Testimony of its writers

◆ Eyewitness accounts

◆ Agreement of multiple copies of manuscripts of Bible texts

◆ Nature of Bible's message

◆ Fulfillment of prophecies

The Bible predicted events days, years, and centuries in advance; prophecies fulfilled in detail (see chart, "Short-term Prophecies Fulfilled")

The Old Testament alone contains over 200 prophecies fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and over 2000 other prophecies fulfilled

ITS MIRACULOUS PRESERVATION

◆ Preserved in monasteries through the Dark Ages

◆ Preserved by multiplicity of copies extant

◆ Preservation confirmed by discovery of Dead Sea Scrolls

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BACK COVER POEM

At Evening

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MEGIDDO MEANS...

"a place of troops" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon); "a place of God" (Young's Analytical Concordance). Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

WE BELIEVE...

- ♦ in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- ♦ in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- ♦ in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to

heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.

- ♦ in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- ♦ in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- ♦ in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ♦ in ourselves as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

- ♦ in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

THE HERALD AND THE KING

OUR PLANET will soon witness the greatest events in its history. For centuries God has been silent. But that silence will soon be broken by the arrival of Elijah the prophet, who comes to herald the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

Then shall follow the King of kings and Lord of lords, to begin His momentous work of transforming our world into the glorious and eternal Kingdom of God.

WHY BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

Is the Bible just another book by human authors? Or is it truly knowledge revealed by our Creator? Let's look at the evidence.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

◆ Evidence from extra-biblical sources

The Bible tells of God's dealings with His human family, beginning in Genesis with the time of Adam, about six thousand years ago. It tells about people who actually lived. Many events/people/places in the Bible are mentioned by secular historians. For example, Jesus is mentioned by Josephus, Pliny, Thallus and others.

◆ Scientific evidence

The Bible is not a science textbook, but it includes facts not discovered by science until centuries later. For example, when Columbus sailed for America, people feared he would sail off the edge because most believed the earth was flat. But more than two millennia before, the Bible had recorded that the earth is a sphere (God sits above "the circle of the earth" – Isa. 40:22).

Modern medical science recognizes the value of quarantine to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. But more than two millennia earlier, the laws God gave to Israel included laws about quarantine to prevent the spread of diseases such as leprosy (see Lev. 13).

Modern laws of hygiene recognize the value of washing in running water for optimum cleansing of the body and to prevent the spread of germs. Again, the Bible included this stipulation in the law of Moses (Lev. 15:13).

◆ Archeological evidence

Over the course of centuries, the Bible has been the subject of exhaustive studies. Since the 19th century, archaeologists, applying more scientific methods to their discoveries, have achieved more accurate dating. In the last seventy years, evidence has been unearthed that agrees with much of the cultural, geographic, and political information in the biblical text.

For example, it is said that St. Paul left his stamp so indelibly on the Roman world that it is futile even to try to say he did not live. The ruins of the places he visited, and the cities where he founded churches—i.e., Ephesus, Colosse, Corinth, Thessalonica—are still visible today, as well as monuments to his memory built centuries ago, and even streets named after him.

Jehu, a king of Israel (2 Kings 9–10), during the 9th century BC, is mentioned outside the Biblical account on an Assyrian obelisk. Jehu, who after fulfilling a series of prophecies against the house of the infamous Ahab and Jezebel, even destroying the entire family of Ahab, became Israel's king. However, Jehu did not choose to worship God. So God allowed Israel to be plundered by its neighbors to the north, the Syrians and Assyrians. King Shalmaneser III of Assyria left the record of his victory over Israel on stone for all to read.

There are a number of interesting archeological discoveries connected with King Hezekiah of Judah (2 Kings 18–20). During Hezekiah's reign, the Assyrians pushed southward into his towns and vil-

unclean,
unclean—



DISCOVERED AT NIMRUD IN 1846, the striking Black Obelisk, pictured at right, depicts the Israelite king Jehu (reigned ca. 841-814 BC) kneeling before the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (reigned ca. 858-824 BC). The cuneiform inscription above the scene reads "Tribute of Jehu, Son of Omri."

BIBLE REFERENCE TO JEHU: 2 Kings 10:31-34, "But Jehu did not obey the law of the LORD....At about that time the LORD began to reduce the size of Israel's territory....The rest of the events in Jehu's reign and all his deeds and achievements are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel."

A note on 2 Kings 10:34 in the *NIV Study Bible*: Other events of Jehu's reign: "The 'Black Obelisk' of the Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser III informs us that Jehu paid tribute to the Assyrians shortly after coming to the throne of the northern kingdom in 841 B.C. In the Assyrian inscription Jehu is incorrectly called the 'son of Omri,' but this may simply be Shalmaneser's way of identifying Jehu with Samaria [or Israel]."



lages. The Bible tells us that Hezekiah secured his city's water supply by building a long tunnel. He "blocked up the upper spring of Gihon and brought the water down through a tunnel to the west side of the City of David" (2 Chron. 32:30 NLT). At the end of the record of Hezekiah's life, this accomplishment is mentioned again: "The rest of the events in Hezekiah's reign, including the extent of his power and how he built a pool and dug a tunnel to bring water into the city, are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Judah" (2 Kings 20:20 NLT).

In 1880 an inscription was found in the tunnel—Hebrew text carved by Hezekiah's engineers—describing the anxious moments of the tunnel diggers. Hezekiah also fortified cities and stored up food. Archeologists have found jar handles sealed with Hezekiah's royal seal.

Another significant find that confirms the Bible is a prism on which Sennacherib, king of Assyria, tells about his siege of Jerusalem. A translation of it reads, "Hezekiah himself, like a caged bird, I besieged in Jerusalem, his royal city." Sennacherib did besiege Jerusalem, but did not conquer it. God intervened to save Jerusalem in response to Hezekiah's earnest prayer (2 Chron. 32:20–21).

There is far more archeological evidence confirming the Bible than can be discussed in this article. And even though all of it is not conclusive, numerous findings confirm details of the time of the Captivity of Judah and their return to their homeland: 1) That Babylon would conquer Judah and Jerusalem would be destroyed; 2) That the Jews would be taken to Babylon, but would be allowed to return and rebuild after 70 years; 3) That they would bring back the golden and silver vessels Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem; 4) That there would be no more kings to sit on David's throne until the "Son of David", but that King Jehoiachin would be raised out of the dungeon.

□ INTERNAL EVIDENCE

◆ The unity of Bible teachings

The Bible teaches one purpose and one way to salvation from Genesis to Revelation.

Go to any university today and ask 40 people to answer one question: What is the purpose of life? What would you expect? You would expect 40 different answers, depending on the background of the persons you asked. And these persons would have some commonalities. They would be all contemporaries, and all belonging to one school. They would all know the same current events, all speak the same language, and share the same time in history.

Now suppose you could put the same question to the authors of the Bible. The 66 books that compose the Bible were written by some 40 different authors. But these authors were not all contemporaries acquainted with the same current events—they wrote at various times during a period of some 1500 years. They spoke at least 3 different languages. And they were not all living in one area or belonging to one school—they lived on three different continents and came from all walks of life. Some were scholars and teachers, some were kings, some were fishermen, some herdsmen, statesmen, even a doctor.

Yet what do we read in the Bible? They all proclaimed one supreme, all-powerful God and taught one way to salvation. They also had the same understanding of the purpose of life and the plan of God. All are in agreement on every point they address (the nature of man, life after death, God's plan of salvation, etc.).

How is this humanly possible? It is not. It could not be except by one supreme, all-knowing God overseeing the entire work, guiding each writer to communicate His knowledge accurately.

ORIGINAL LOCATION OF INSCRIPTION
construction engineers engraved
on its wall, commemorating
their success.



(above) THE SILOAM INSCRIPTION,
as the inscription is called, was
discovered in 1880. It describes the
anxious moments as two teams of
diggers working from each end of
the tunnel and under a hill managed
to meet in the middle—truly an
engineering feat!

CLAY PRISM OF SENNACHERIB
on which he tells of the siege of
Jerusalem in 701 BC.



HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL
A 1750' tunnel dug under a
hill in Jerusalem to carry
water from the Gihon
Spring to the other side
of the city. The tunnel is
identified by an inscription
in Hebrew on its wall
just 20 feet from its
southern outlet.



BABYLONIAN CLAY TABLET
Fragment of a chronicle
recording Nebuchadnezzar's
victory over Judah in 597 BC.



CYRUS' CYLINDER
Includes the decree that allowed
the Jews to return to their home-
land and rebuild. This permission
ended the 70 year captivity, as
Ezra 1:1-4 records.

◆ **Testimony of its writers**

The accuracy of the Bible is confirmed by internal evidence. Different authors at different times may mention the same events, from different standpoints, yet there is no contradiction that cannot be explained.

The Bible authors themselves testify to the God who was speaking through them. They realized that they were not on their own, that they were instruments in His hand. Phrases such as *"The word of the Lord came,"* or *"Thus says the Lord God,"* or *"The Lord said,"* or *"The Lord spoke"* occur literally thousands of times in Scripture. Here is a feature that the writers of any other "sacred" scriptures cannot duplicate. And the writings of all of its authors combine to present one teaching and one plan of salvation—a total impossibility if the Bible were the work of individuals writing on their own.

◆ **Eyewitness accounts**

The accuracy of the Bible stands on numerous eyewitness accounts. The person writing the story was very often the one either experiencing or directly observing the situation being written about. Take, for example, the resurrection of Jesus. Two gospel writers personally saw Jesus after His resurrection, and all included eyewitness accounts. They were not writing about something that "he said she said." They saw and knew firsthand.

Both Peter and John, as Jesus' disciples, testified to their firsthand information. John said, That *"which we have seen, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled"* (1 John 1:1). And Peter said, *"We heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain"* (2 Pet. 1:18).

◆ **Agreement of multiple copies of manuscripts of Bible texts**

Our Bible has been translated from manuscripts that are copies of the original writings. No originals survive. Does this mean there is no sure evidence that the Bible speaks the truth?

The accuracy of the Bible is confirmed by the existence of multiple copies of the original text, some of them more than a thousand years apart, yet Bible scholars report that above 99% of the text agrees exactly. Newly found manuscripts differ hardly at all from those discovered years ago—more evidence that God was at work, preserving His message.

Consider a few facts. Most people think of Julius Caesar as one of the founders of the Roman Empire. How is Caesar known to us? Caesar wrote the *Gallic Wars* shortly before the birth of Christ; today there are nine or ten good manuscripts in existence, the oldest of which was copied some 900 years after Caesar's day.

Another Roman known to us today was a historian named Livy. Of 142 books by Livy, about 35 survive in some twenty manuscripts, only one of which is as old as the fourth century AD. A history by Herodotus, a Greek writer of the fifth century BC, is known to us through eight manuscripts, the earliest belonging to the tenth century AD. Yet no one questions whether Livy or Herodotus lived.

Now compare this with the evidence for the New Testament. Bible scholars tell us there are some 8,000 manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate, and at least 1,000 for the other early versions. Add over 4,000 Greek manuscripts and we have 13,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament! And many of these copies are from very early dates. Two of the best date from the fourth century, and both are complete New Testaments. Fragments of certain books survive from the third and fourth

"If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."

—F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?*



HOW MUCH EVIDENCE FOR ANCIENT DOCUMENTS?

Author(s)	When Written	Date of Earliest Copy Surviving	Time Lapse from Date of Writing	Number of Known Copies
Julius Caesar ("Gallic War")	58–50 BC	ca. 900 AD	900 yrs	10
Roman historian Livy	59 BC–17 AD	ca. 400 AD	400 yrs	35
Tacitus ("Histories"—14 books)	ca. 100 AD	ca. 900 AD	800 yrs	20
History of Thucydides	460–400 BC	ca. 900 AD	1300 yrs	8
History of Herodotus	480–425 BC	ca. 900 AD	1300 yrs	8
Aristotle	384–322 BC	ca. 1100 AD	1400 yrs	5
Sophocles	496–406 BC	ca. 1000 AD	1400 yrs	100
New Testament (Greek)*	Before AD 70**	ca. 200 AD	< 100 yrs	Over 5,000

*There are also some 36,000 quotations of Scripture by the early church fathers prior to the third century. In fact, it has been observed that if all of the New Testament manuscripts were to disappear overnight, it would still be possible to reconstruct the entire New Testament with quotes from the Church Fathers, with the exception of fifteen to twenty verses! —<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/bib-docu.html>

** "We can say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about AD 80." —Dr. William Foxwell Albright, distinguished archaeologist.

Contrary to prior supposition, evidence seems to favor dates for the writing of the New Testament prior to AD 70 (see John A. T. Robertson, *"Redating the New Testament"*).

centuries. A few papyrus fragments of the Gospel of John date from less than a century after John lived.

Further evidence for the New Testament is found in the writings of other first century authors who quoted heavily from the various books of the New Testament—so heavily, in fact, that it is said that if the manuscripts of the New Testament books had been entirely lost, they could have been completely reconstructed from the quotations in these early Christian writings alone!

◆ **Nature of the Bible's message**

There is still more evidence for the authority of the Bible in this fact: The Bible expresses "God's" thoughts, not man's.

One Bible scholar put it this way: "The Bible is not such a book a man would write if he could, or could write if he would."

There are many statements in the Bible that people simply would not write. Who would ever write that "all nations" before God are "as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity"? (Isa. 40:17).

Who would acknowledge: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"? (Prov. 14:12).

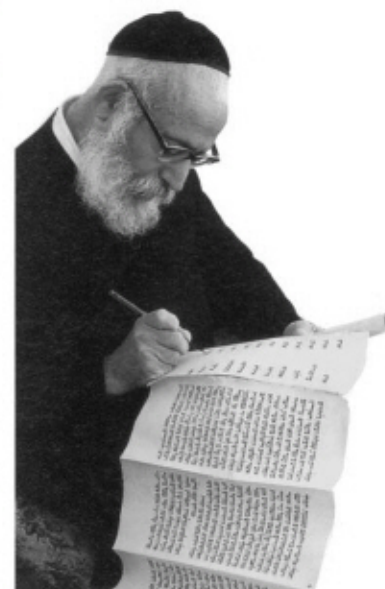
Who, other than a man of God, would testify to the futility of man's wisdom and thoughts, even going so far as to say that the thoughts of God are as far superior to man's as "the heavens are higher than the earth" (Isa. 55:8-9)? If the Bible were the expression of human minds, such an idea would never be written.

Looking further, we find that the Bible deals very frankly with the sins of its characters, calling sin by its real name. Contrast this with the present culture where political correctness camouflages reality; where a rebellious child is "not socially adjusted," or a drug addict is "chemically dependent," a drunk is "chemically inconvenienced," or a lazy person is "motivationally deficient." The Bible tells it like it is. Sin is the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4), without regard to one's wealth or social status.

No, the Bible contains the thoughts of God, not men.

The Bible contains the information our Creator wanted us to have. It records His thoughts, His plans, and His guidelines. God Himself supervised the writing of this Book by giving Divine power to certain people He chose. In the words of the Bible, "prophecy never

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SHORT-TERM PROPHECIES FULFILLED

Event predicted	Text and time prediction was given	Text and time of fulfillment	Approx. time lapse from prediction to fulfillment
Child named Josiah would be born in the family of David, who would become king	1 Kings 13:2, ca. 975 BC "Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David."	2 Kings 22:1, ca. 648 BC (New Bible Dictionary) "Josiah was eight years old when he became king."	About 327 years
Josiah would burn the bones of false priests on altar at Bethel	1 Kings 13:2, ca. 975 BC "...he [Josiah] will sacrifice the priests from the pagan shrines...human bones will be burned on you [the altar]."	2 Kings 22:3 & 23:16, ca. 622 BC "In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah... sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar."	About 350 years
Ahab King of Israel would die in battle, defeated.	1 Kings 22:17 "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep without a shepherd."	1 Kings 22:34-35 "An Aramean soldier, however, randomly shot an arrow at the Israelite troops, and the arrow hit the king of Israel...and as evening arrived he died."	A few days
Jezabel would die in disgrace.	1 Kings 21:23 prophesied during reign of Ahab, ca. 874-853 BC (The New Unger's Bible Dictionary) "the dogs of Jezreel will eat the body of your wife, Jezabel, at the city wall."	2 Kings 9:36, ca. 842 BC (New Bible Dictionary) "This fulfills the message from the Lord,... 'At the plot of land in Jezreel, dogs will eat Jezabel's flesh.'"	More than 10 years
Man who would rebuild Jericho would lose two sons while rebuilding	Josh. 6:26, ca. 1451 BC (margin) "May the curse of the Lord fall on anyone who tries to rebuild the city of Jericho."	1 Kings 16:34, built during Ahab's reign, 873-851 BC "Hiel, a man from Bethel, rebuilt Jericho. When he laid the foundations, his oldest son, Abiram, died. And when he finally completed it by setting up the gates, his youngest son, Segub, died."	Approx. 590 years
Sons of Eli the High Priest would die on same day	1 Samuel 2:33-35, ca. 1070 (margin) "I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to die on the same day!"	1 Samuel 4:5-11, ca 1050 BC (margin) "Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed."	About 20 years

Event predicted	Text and time prediction was given	Text and time of fulfillment	Approx. time lapse from prediction to fulfillment
King Zedekiah would be blinded and taken to Babylon to die.	Ezekiel 12:12-13, ca. 592 BC <small>(margin)</small> "Zedekiah will leave Jerusalem at night through a hole in the wall, ... I will bring him to Babylon, ... though he will never see it, and he will die there."	Jeremiah 52:10-11, ca. 586 BC <small>(margin)</small> "There at Riblah, the king of Babylon made Zedekiah watch as all his sons were killed; ... Then they gouged out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon. Zedekiah remained there in prison for the rest of his life."	About 6 years
God would use King Cyrus to "subdue nations," even calling him by name before he was born.	Isaiah 45:1-4, ca. 690 BC <small>(margin)</small> "Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: 'I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron.'"	Daniel 5:30-31, ca. 539 BC <small>(margin)</small> That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, <i>being</i> about sixty-two years old.	About 150 years
Jews would be in captivity 70* years, then return to rebuild Jerusalem. *Dating from the 1st captivity about 605 BC	Jer. 29:10, ca. 596 BC <small>(margin)</small> & Isaiah 44:28 ca. 690 BC <small>(margin)</small> "you will be in Babylon for seventy years. But ... I will bring you home again. ... Who says of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"	Ezra 1:1-3, ca. 535 BC. "In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy by stirring the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation into writing and to send it throughout his kingdom: 'This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: The Lord, the God of heaven, ... He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem in the land of Judah. All of you who are his people may return to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you!'"	About 160 years from Isaiah's prophecy; about 59 years from Jeremiah's
In a time of severe famine in Samaria, Elisha predicted that an abundance of food would be for sale the next day.	2 Kings 7:1, "By this time tomorrow in the markets of Samaria, five quarts of fine flour will cost only half an ounce of silver, and ten quarts of barley grain will cost only half an ounce of silver."	2 Kings 7:16, "Then the people of Samaria rushed out and plundered the Aramean camp. So it was true that five quarts of fine flour were sold that day for half an ounce of silver, and ten quarts of barley grain were sold for half an ounce of silver, just as the Lord had promised."	About 24 hours
The Prophet Elisha also predicted that the officer (who disbelieved the prediction) would see it but not eat of it.	2 Kings 7:2 The officer assisting the king said... "That couldn't happen even if the Lord opened the windows of heaven!" But Elisha replied, "You will see it happen, but you won't be able to eat any of it!"	2 Kings 7:17 "The king appointed his officer to control the traffic at the gate, but he was knocked down and trampled to death as the people rushed out. So everything happened exactly as the man of God had predicted when the king came to his house."	About 24 hours
Joseph's eleven brothers would bow down to him.	Gen. 37:6 "Listen to this dream... We were out in the field tying up bundles of grain. My bundle stood up, and then your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before it!"	Gen. 42:6 Joseph was 39 years old at this incident. "Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of the sale of the grain, it was to him that his brothers came. They bowed low before him, with their faces to the ground."	About 22 years
King Ahaziah of Israel was sick, was told he would not recover.	2 Kings 1:2-4 "You will never leave the bed on which you are lying, but you will surely die."	2 Kings 1:15-17 "So Ahaziah died, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah"	A few days
Kingdom of Babylon would fall to Medes and Persians	Daniel 2:39 "after your kingdom comes to an end, another great kingdom, ... will rise to take your place." Daniel 5:28 "your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians"	Daniel 5:30-31 "That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom."	About 68 years and Within hours
Entire family of King Jeroboam's would die	1 Kings 14:13-14, ca. 940 BC "a king over Israel ... will destroy the family of Jeroboam."	1 Kings 15:27-29, ca. 908 BC <small>(The New Bible Dictionary)</small> "Baasha... became the next king of Israel. He immediately killed all the descendants of King Jeroboam so that not one of the royal family was left"	About 25 years
Mary would be the Mother of Jesus	Luke 1:31-33, Angel to Mary: "You will... have a son, and you are to name him Jesus."	Luke 2:6-9 "She [Mary] gave birth to her first child, a son [Jesus]."	Nine months
Jesus would die and be resurrected	Mark 9:31; Matt. 17:23 "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead."	Matt 27:50; 28:1-7, His death: "Then Jesus shouted out again, and he gave up his spirit." His resurrection: "you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn't here! He has been raised from the dead."	Less than 3 years
Every member of Ahab's family would die disastrously	1 Kings 21:21, ca. 874-853 BC <small>(The New Unger's Bible Dictionary)</small> "The Lord is going to bring disaster to you and sweep you away. He will not let a single one of your male descendants, slave or free alike, survive in Israel!"	2 Kings 10:10-11, by Jehu, ca. 841 BC <small>(New Unger's Bible Dictionary)</small> "Jehu killed all of Ahab's relatives living in Jezreel and all his important officials, personal friends, and priests. So Ahab was left without a single survivor."	More than 10 years
Descendants of Abraham would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years.	Gen. 15:13-16, ca. 1913 BC <small>(margin)</small> The Lord told Abraham: "your descendants ... will be oppressed as slaves for four hundred years... in the end they will come away with great wealth."	Exodus 13:3; Israelites leave Egypt "This is a day to remember forever. For the Lord has brought you out ... by his mighty power."	More than 400 years
False prophet Hananiah would die within the year.	Jeremiah 28:15-16 "Listen, Hananiah! ... the Lord says you must die. Your life will end this very year because you have rebelled against the Lord."	Jeremiah 28:17 (2 months later) "So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month."	2 months

continued from page 8

came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). They wrote what they could not or would not have been able to write on their own. They were human pens guided by Divine inspiration.

◆ Fulfillment of prophecies

The Bible includes hundreds of prophecies that were given and fulfilled as predicted. It is said that in the Old Testament alone there are some 2000 prophecies made and fulfilled. Fulfilled prophecy is a feature unique to the Bible because no man has the power to know the future. Who can look at a child born in the year 2006 and say with certainty what that child will be doing in 2032? Or who will venture to predict with certainty the name of the person who will be President in 2020, or even who will be the next President? Some will speculate, and occasionally guess right. But the ability to know the future, to foretell events accurately time after time after time belongs to the God of the Bible, and Him alone. The mere quantity of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible attests to the fact that it is indeed the written Word of God.

Just consider the prophecies about Jesus. Nearly every aspect of His birth, life, death and resurrection were foretold, and these prophecies were spoken hundreds—even thousands of years before He was born. The Prophets foretold such specific details as that He would be born in the town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), that He would be descended from the family of King David (Jer. 23:5), and even predicted the year of His death (Dan. 9:25–26). Prophets of God foretold the effects of Jesus' ministry (Isa. 53:4), how He would be betrayed, and the price for which He would be sold (thirty pieces of silver, i.e., the price of a slave, see Zech. 11:12–13). Numerous details about His suffering and death were foretold (see Psalm 22), even so specific a point that he would be buried in the grave of a rich man (Isa. 53: 9). The Psalmist foretold that He would be buried but only briefly, because He would be resurrected ("You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" – Ps. 16:10). The Psalmist also foretold His ascension to heaven, that He would be at the right hand of God until the time when He would return, to conquer His enemies (Ps. 110:1–2). All these forecasts proved accurate even to the smallest detail. How is this possible? There is only one answer: the all-knowing God of heaven was speaking through its authors, He who knows the future with as much certainty as we know the past.

□ ITS MIRACULOUS PRESERVATION

The Bible has had the fiercest of enemies. During the dark Middle Ages, it was unwittingly preserved by its enemies. It has been ridiculed, falsified, denounced, and burned. Its advocates have been persecuted and tortured, to say nothing of the abuse it has suffered in the hands of intellectuals. Yet today, this two thousand year old book still tops the best seller list year after year, and has been translated into nearly every written language known.

Why? Because its Author intended that it should be available to those who would seek to learn His knowledge.

One dramatic evidence of its preservation is in the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in a number of caves in the wilderness of Judea between 1947 and the mid 1960s. These caves, occupied by the Essenes in the time of Jesus, produced tens of thousands of fragments of ancient books, including about 100 biblical manuscripts that represent the entire Old Testament except the book of Esther. A full copy of Isaiah was found dating to the second century BC, the oldest copy of a book of the Hebrew Bible known to exist. The Essenes' documents were produced between 200 BC and 50 AD.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls pushed back the dates of existing manuscripts by about a thousand years, yet their text has been found to be 99% identical to later copies used for our common translations—a testimony to the carefulness and skill of the copyists. ◆



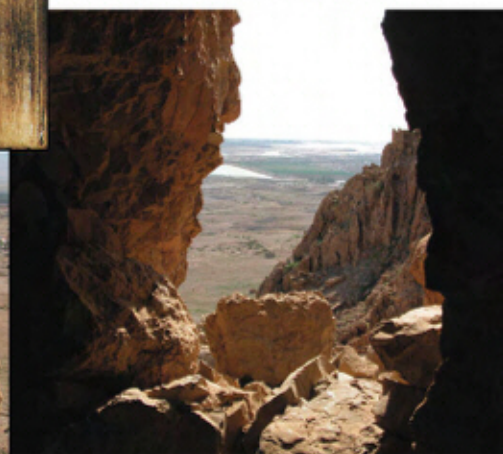
DEAD SEA SCROLL and JAR
Scrolls stored in jars were
much better preserved.



A COMPLETE ISAIAH SCROLL
found in one of the caves is 24 feet
long and dates to ca. 200 BC.



ENTRANCE TO DEAD SEA CAVE 1



THE DEAD SEA FROM CAVE 1
In 1947 the first of a number of caves
was discovered that contained
scrolls, many preserved in clay jars.



Problem: Hopelessness

SYNOPSIS

The **Apostle Paul**, the great missionary, is a prisoner in Rome, living "in his own hired house" (Acts 28:30) while he waits for a trial before the Emperor Nero.

Upon arriving in Rome, he found a congregation of Christians needing his leadership. Though in chains and under guard, he is still counselor and governor—not only of the local church but also of a far-flung chain of churches. Daily, members of his flock come to him with their problems.

In the previous scene, the problem was one of Ambition and Personal Sacrifice. **Lucius**, a young Roman patrician, found himself torn between the "things that are seen" and those "not seen." A young man with his background and ability could see a great many things that could be his. Even so, he had seen enough into another world and another way of life to know that there was something better. However, to gain those things of true worth, he had to face giving up. The Apostle, with the tenderness and understanding of a father, reasoned with him over the uncertainty of this life and all it can give, as compared with the seeking of enduring rewards—as Paul himself had chosen to do.

In this scene, the problem is Hopelessness. We are brought face to face with one of the ugliest and most vicious features of Roman society, human slavery. Christianity had a special appeal for the oppressed classes, offering them manhood, dignity, equality, and hope. These things might be acquired easily. But however bright the future; the trials of the present are so close, and every mortal has his low moments.

In the current scene, Paul is seated with **Telemachus**, a middle-aged Greek dressed in the coarse garb of a slave. The slave's face is stamped with the bitterness of despair.

Telemachus: You speak to me of hope! Is there anything more hopeless than the life of a slave? A slave—yes, with no hope of being anything else. Is this the way a loving God treats His children? (*bitterly*) It seems to me Christianity is for free men, for those who can choose their own course in life. What chance has a slave?

Paul: (*leaning forward earnestly*) My son, Christianity has a message of hope for all who will accept it. Not one of us can escape trouble. We all have our problems, and slavery is yours—a part of your discipline.

Telemachus: (*desperately*) It is more than a problem, it is a burden! one I cannot bear!

Paul: You are near-sighted, Brother Telemachus. Look to the end of the matter...Look ahead!

Telemachus: Look ahead??!! To what? To a life of brutal labor and cruel treatment, and dying like (*spats out angrily*) a beast! (*pauses—tone changes from anger to hopelessness*) Looking ahead is no relief. To think of food to come next week, or next month, is only a torment to a hungry man. (*desperately*) I need something now!

Paul: There is something you can have now. You already have it, if you could recognize it. You need only lay hold of it, and a hundredfold is yours.

Telemachus: (*scoffs*) A hundredfold? What does this hundredfold look like? (*with extreme emotion*) beatings and starvation? heat and cold? thirst and endless toil? Is

it the constant threat of being sold into the arena for a Roman holiday? I've tried to dream of a glorious time to come, a time when all people will be brothers and sisters under Christ the King, but I am always awakened by the coarse voice of my master and roughly brought back to reality—to slavery. *(desperately)* Why should this be?

Paul: (quiet for a moment, then gently) I do not know, my brother. I cannot account for many things in this life. But I have learned one lesson that has been priceless to me. Have you ever been shipwrecked, Telemachus?

Telemachus: (with feeling) I have never even seen the sea.

Paul: I have been shipwrecked, several times. The first time—off Paphos—I was panic stricken in the water. I struggled and thrashed and was at the point of sinking, when something spoke to me, saying “Relax. The water is ready to bear you up. Let it help you.” That is what I did, I turned on my back and floated quietly until strength returned and my mind cleared, and I was saved. So I say to you, and to all who have problems, or burdens, as you call them: do not struggle against circumstances you cannot change. *(imploring)* Accept them. Use them. Build around them and with them.

Telemachus: (resentfully) You have never known the life of a slave—to have no rights, not a moment you can call your own, to be completely—

Paul: Look, my son, look; what is this? *(holds up his arm to show the chain hanging from his wrist)*

Telemachus: ...A chain.

Paul: Are you in chains?

Telemachus: No, not at this moment.... *(ashamed, looks down)* I see. I'm sorry Father.

Paul: (appealing) I am not free to come and go either, not as free as you are. Yet I do not complain. I try to let the waters of adversity hold me up. What do I gain? I have leisure to write letters to the churches. I have time to get the physical rest I never had when I was free. And I have great opportunity to develop those jewels of patience and contentment. Yes *(chuckles softly)*, I even have some good talks with my guards. I may have converted a couple of them—at least they were removed from guarding me.

Telemachus: (unconvinced) Even so, you are a citizen. You have hope of a trial and release. I have no such hope.

Paul: Perhaps. Perhaps not. I have to leave that in the hands of my heavenly Father. But would you like to change places with me? Would you like to be at the mercy of the Emperor Nero on one of his bad days?

Telemachus: (looking uneasily at soldier) Please, sir, be careful.

Paul: Oh, I'm not worried *(nods his head toward dozing soldier)*. This fellow doesn't understand Greek. He's a Dacian; very kind, but we have to use sign language

to communicate...*(businesslike)* But to come back to your condition. Let's be realistic. You are a slave. I am not asking you to be overjoyed that you are a slave, but to accept it. If you do not accept it, what is the alternative?

Telemachus: (sullenly) I could run away.

Paul: (warning) Now son, be careful. You know the penalty. It isn't worth it. Even if you escaped, you would have to live the fear-filled life of a fugitive and would be unable to meet with the church of Christ—the only place where you can find equality and fellowship now. Besides, you are a Christian. It is important that the cause of Christ not suffer. Christians must be trustworthy.

Telemachus: (desperately) Running away is my only prospect of hope, as I see it. It is the only way I can find myself. How can I be a Christian when I have no self? I am not a human being, not a person, not a man, but a thing. *(bursts out bitterly)* Service is the name the Romans give us; not servants, but only service.

Paul: (thoughtfully, patiently) My son, can you see a parallel between your current life as a slave and the Christian life? Slavery can be accurately described as the extinction of all personal rights, the loss of individuality. And similarly, in Christ we must surrender our individuality, we must forfeit our free-



FAITH in Action

by RUTH E. SISSON

THE UNWRITTEN REPORT

Acts 20:1-6 (NKJV)

1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia.

2 Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece

3 and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

4 And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

5 These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas.

6 But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

Paul Continues His Third Missionary Journey



Read Acts 20:1-6

The uproar in Ephesus ended, the great Apostle felt that it was time to move on. His goal was Jerusalem, by way of Macedonia. Brothers Timothy and Erastus had already gone ahead to Philippi of Macedonia before the riot (Acts 19:21-22).

Wouldn't one think that after a riot that had focused mainly on Paul, the great Apostle might need a little encouraging? But no, as he prepared to leave, he called a general meeting of the Ephesian brethren to encourage *them*. He knew that what he had experienced was only a taste of what was to come—for himself and them—and they must be prepared to stand against it.

The farewells were likely tearful, because in all probability this was the last time most of them would be seeing their beloved elder and Apostle.

As a reporter, Luke usually included a large amount of detail about activities and travels. In the first few verses of Acts 20, he is very brief. In fact, we have only an outline.

What do we learn?

1) That Paul traveled by way of Macedonia to Greece, where he stayed three months (20:1-2).

2) When he planned to leave for Syria by ship, a plot on his life was discovered. Paul immediately changed his plans and headed for Macedonia on foot (20:3).

3) Paul had seven travel companions with him, representing the various Churches (20:4).

4) From Macedonia, his companions went ahead by land to Troas, where they waited for Paul and Luke, who sailed from Philippi to Troas (20:5-6).

What is lacking in Luke's report? A lot of the tears and trials the great missionary experienced during this time. How do we know? Because Paul included some of the details in two



Epistles that he wrote during this time (2 Corinthians and Romans). What might look like a simple journey was probably upwards of two years of time and hundreds of miles of danger and hardship, heat and cold, by land and by sea, not to mention the many meetings and partings with those he loved. It was not easy, but it was time well spent.

ON TO MACEDONIA

Leaving Ephesus, Paul eagerly set his face toward Macedonia (Acts 20:1). It had now been six or seven years since he heard that first call in a vision from the Lord, *"Come over into Macedonia and help us"* (Acts 16:9). Now the very mention of Macedonia brought pictures to his mind, the faces of loving brothers and sisters in Christ whom he longed to encourage in Philippi, in Berea, in Thessalonica, Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Neopolis.

Yes, Macedonia lay very close to Paul's heart. As he had written to the Thessalonians, *"What gives us hope and joy, and what is our proud reward and crown? It is you! Yes, you will bring us much joy as we stand together before our Lord Jesus when he comes back again"* (1 Thess. 2:19 NLT).

Making his way up the coast of Asia, he stopped at Troas because, as he later wrote, *"A door was opened to me by the Lord"* (2 Cor. 2:12). But even with the open door, Paul did not seem able to stay long. He had too much on his mind. Too much concern. Too much worry.

1. Whom was Paul anxious to meet as he traveled? (2 Cor. 2:13)

2. What was on his mind? (2 Cor. 7:6-7)

Paul was anxious to hear from the church in Corinth. Some months earlier, while in Ephesus (he had been at Ephesus over two years), the family of Chloe had brought him word (1 Cor. 1:11) about serious problems in the Corinthian Church. There were moral issues (1 Corinthians, chapters 5-7), and problems of rivalry and divisions (1 Cor. 3:1-7), plus the everyday prob-



Fellow Helper and Partner: Titus

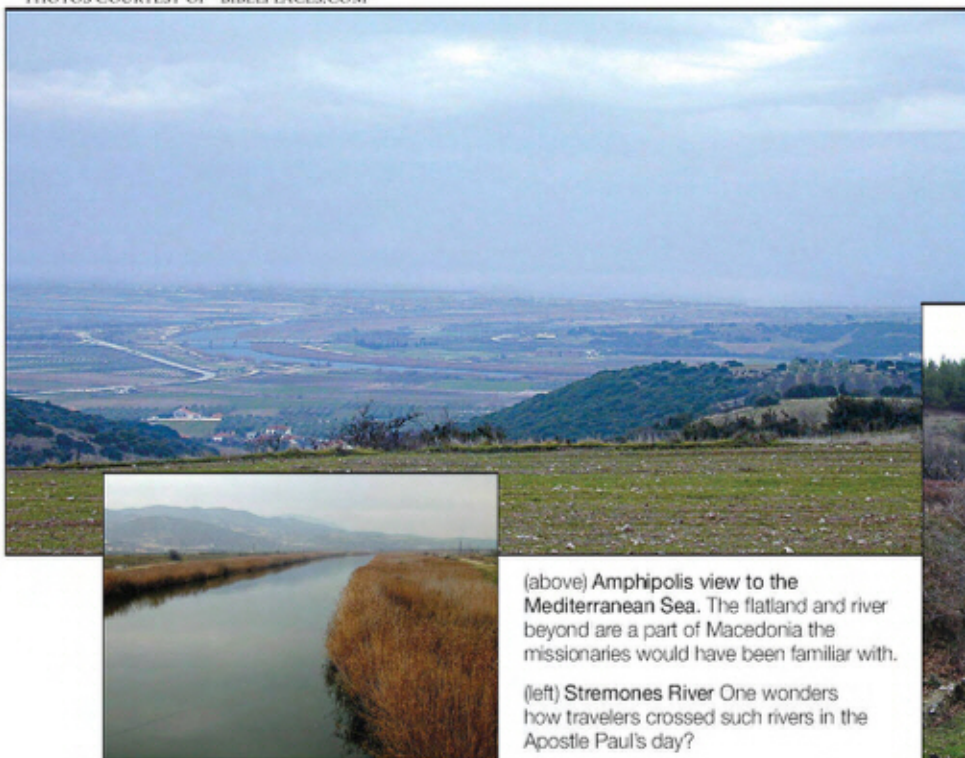
Titus was a full partner with the Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 8:23) in the work of the Church. Paul called him a fellow helper and true working companion.

When Paul needed help, Titus was there. When Paul had written his first Epistle to the Corinthians, apparently Titus acted as messenger. It was not a pleasant mission, to go to a Church as a disciplinarian. But when Titus returned, he told Paul how well they had received the correction, and relieved the fatherly Apostle's anxiety. As Paul said, when writing back to the Corinthians, *"We were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was about the way all of you welcomed him and set his mind at ease. I had told him how proud I was of you—and you didn't disappoint me. I have always told you the truth, and now my boasting to Titus has also proved true! Now he cares for you more than ever when he remembers the way all of you obeyed him and welcomed him with such fear and deep respect"* (2 Cor. 7:13-15 NLT).

Almost immediately, Paul sent Titus back again with his second letter, encouraging them to help their Jerusalem brothers and sisters. This time Titus was to be the encourager (2 Cor. 8:6).

Paul was the motivator. *"I am not commanding you to do this. But I want to see if your love is true by comparing you with others that really want to help"* (2 Cor. 8:8 NCV).

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(above) Amphipolis view to the Mediterranean Sea. The flatland and river beyond are a part of Macedonia the missionaries would have been familiar with.

(left) Stremones River One wonders how travelers crossed such rivers in the Apostle Paul's day?

(below) Amphipolis (ancient) city wall No doubt Paul and fellow travelers stayed in this city as it was on route from Philippi to Thessalonica.





Insight

Paul Cared

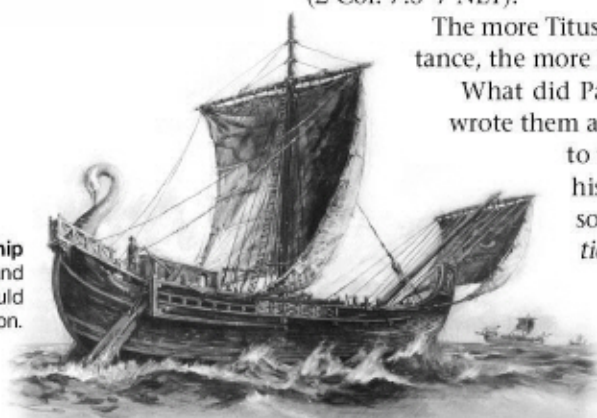
"...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." 2 Corinthians 11:28 (NKJV)

"I don't care" was not in Paul's vocabulary. He had a deep love and concern for all his churches. Their struggles and conflicts and burdens were his also.

Paul compared his feeling for those in Christ to the parts of the physical body. If you have a broken toe, or a crushed finger, your whole body suffers. Just so, we are all one body in Christ. *"If one member suffers, all the members suffer"* (1 Cor. 12:26). All are joined together, all suffer or rejoice together (Rom. 12:15).

He supported the weak, strengthened the tempted, in short *"endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"* (2 Tim. 2:10).

Faith in Christ does not take away burdens; it only changes their nature. Our anxieties turn from ourselves to those whom we are nurturing in the faith. Concern about one's health or success is natural, but concern about character is uppermost.



A Roman merchant ship very much like Paul and his companions would have sailed on.

lems of *"quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfishness, backstabbing, gossip, conceit, and disorderly behavior"* (2 Cor. 12:20 NLT). They needed HELP!

Paul attempted to help them by writing the Corinthians a very serious, reproving letter (the Epistle of First Corinthians). In this letter he addressed many of the issues head-on, as a concerned father (1 Cor. 4:14). He loved them too deeply and cared for them too much to let them go on in their sin. For the good of the whole Church, the offenders needed to take the correction, repent and reform.

Paul sent the letter by his beloved Titus (2 Cor. 7:13). Then he waited, and waited, and waited. Months went by, and no Titus. How did they receive his letter? Were they helped, or hindered? stimulated or discouraged? anxious to change, or ready to give up? No news was no news.

The great Apostle could hardly endure the strain of not knowing, but what could he do? There were no cell phones, no email, not even any air letters or telegrams. There was no way to get word, except by the return of his right-hand helper Titus.

Now it was time for Paul to leave Ephesus. Do we wonder why he could not focus on helping the Church at Troas, even when the door was open (2 Cor. 2:12)? So, stopping briefly, Paul headed on to Macedonia. Perhaps he would meet Titus somewhere on the way. He walked on, wondering, praying, longing, all the way to Philippi.

And there in Philippi was Titus, on his way to meet Brother Paul!

Can't we imagine that even before Titus said a word, Paul could see that all was well? Can't we almost hear the heartfelt prayer of thankfulness Paul lifted to God at that high moment of joy! As he told the Corinthians in his next letter, *"When we arrived in Macedonia there was no rest for us. Outside there was conflict from every direction, and inside there was fear....But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. His presence was a joy,...so was the news he brought of the encouragement he received from you. When he told me how much you were looking forward to my visit, and how sorry you were about what had happened, and how loyal your love is for me, I was filled with joy!"* (2 Cor. 7:5-7 NLT).

The more Titus told about the Corinthians' zeal and sincere repentance, the more Paul rejoiced!

What did Paul do? He sat down immediately at Philippi and wrote them a second letter, which we have as the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. In this letter he expressed warmly his joy at their turnaround, their zeal, and their godly sorrow which produced repentance *"leading to salvation, not to be regretted"* (2 Cor. 7:10).

On a Mission of Mercy

Paul also used this letter to prepare the Corinthians for his upcoming visit. In a few



Insight

Reflections of Christ

Paul sent a party of three ahead to Corinth from Philippi (2 Cor. 8:17-22). They were Titus, along with Unnamed Brother One and Unnamed Brother Two. Each of the three was highly commended for his character and work in the Lord.

Paul says of Titus that he is *"my partner who works with me to help you"* (2 Cor. 8:23 NLT). At other times Paul called Titus *"my true child in the faith that we share"* (Titus 1:4), also *"my*

brother" (2 Cor. 2:13 NLT)—enough to recommend him!

What about the other two? Paul says of Unnamed Brother One that his *"praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but [he] was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift"* (2 Cor. 8:18-19). This brother had a reputation for being trustworthy, as well as of honorable character. What about Unnamed Brother Two? Paul writes that he *"has been thor-*

oughly tested and has shown how earnest he is on many occasions. He is now even more enthusiastic because of his increased confidence in you" (2 Cor. 8:22 NLT). Of both of them Paul says that their lives are a mirror in which Christ is reflected—they are *"the glory of Christ"* (2 Cor. 8:23)—because everything they did was for Christ, not themselves.

Was their reflection of Christ so evident when Paul thought of them that their names did not matter?

months he would be seeing them, and he was on a special mission. One purpose of this journey was to solicit funds for the relief of their suffering brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Paul wanted the Corinthians to give—not out of compulsion, but out of love for Christ and His church and their family. They (the Corinthians) owed their spiritual life (their faith) to the parent church in Jerusalem—shouldn't they be willing to help them with their physical needs?

It was a difficult issue, because Paul's brethren were not likely among the wealthy. Nevertheless, he wanted to teach them to be givers—for their own good, for *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Cor. 9:7). Selfishness has no place in the Christ-life. You will receive as you give, he told them. *"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully"* (2 Cor. 9:6).

Paul encouraged them by telling them how liberally other Churches in Macedonia had given, and appealing to them to do as well (2 Cor. 8:1-4). He complimented them for abounding in *"faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also"*—the grace of giving to other brethren. (2 Cor. 8:7). Paul saw it as an opportunity to teach sincere Christian love and concern.

Finishing the letter, Paul sent it ahead by his faithful Titus who, Paul says, went *"of his own accord"* (2 Cor. 8:17).

3. Who went with Titus on this special errand to Corinth? (2 Cor. 8:18)

How is this brother described? (2 Cor. 8:18-19)

4. A third brother went with the two. How is he described? (2 Cor. 8:22)
-

Paul encourages the Corinthians like any good parent: by setting high expectations. He challenged them to prove their love and sincerity—and to justify Paul's boasting about them—by giving generously and being true to their promise (2 Cor. 8:24, 10-11).

By these brothers arriving in advance of Paul, the Corinthians would have time to prepare a *"generous gift"* (2 Cor. 9:5).

Paul leaves Philippi

Leaving Philippi, Paul traveled on, visiting and strengthening believers in Thessalonica, in Berea, and all the cities where he had established churches,



Take heed

"I'm Sorry" Is Not Enough

Imagine Paul's joy when Titus brought good news from the Corinthians, about their tears of sorrow, their fervent zeal, and their true godly repentance (2 Cor. 7:7).

They did more than say, "I'm sorry." They repented and changed their ways!

When King Saul sinned, he was sorry, but only that his wrong was found out. King David sorrowed to repentance, realizing he had sinned against God and needed God's mercy (Ps. 51:4).

All sorrow is not repentance. *"The sorrow of the world produces death"* (2 Cor. 7:10).

True repentance is a change of heart that brings one to acknowledge and correct the wrong. It is not a surface action but a deep-seated change of attitude and outlook.



Ephesus Lampstand

2 Corinthians 7:4-8, 11, 13-14 (NLT)

4 I have the highest confidence in you, and my pride in you is great. You have greatly encouraged me; you have made me happy despite all our troubles.

5 When we arrived in Macedonia there was no rest for us. Outside there was conflict from every direction, and inside there was fear.

6 But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus.

7 His presence was a joy, but so was the news he brought of the encouragement he received from you. When he told me how much you were looking forward to my visit, and how sorry you were about what had happened, and how loyal your love is for me, I was filled with joy!

8 I am no longer sorry that I sent that letter to you, though I was sorry for a time, for I know that it was painful to you for a little while.

11 Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish the wrongdoer. You showed that you have done everything you could to make things right.

13 We were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was at the way you welcomed him and set his mind at ease.

14 I had told him how proud I was of you—and you didn't disappoint me. I have always told you the truth, and now my boasting to Titus has also proved true!

2 Corinthians 8:1-7 (NLT)

1 Now I want to tell you, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done for the churches in Macedonia.

2 Though they have been going through much

trouble and hard times, their wonderful joy and deep poverty have overflowed in rich generosity.

3 For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford but far more. And they did it of their own free will.

4 They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem.

5 Best of all, they went beyond our highest hopes, for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord and to us for whatever directions God might give them.

6 So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to complete your share in this ministry of giving.

7 Since you excel in so many ways—you have so much faith, such gifted speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, and such love for us—now I want you to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving.



Insight

Does It Matter What People Think?

What is your first thought: what people think? Or what God thinks?

The Apostle Paul was for keeping a balance. His primary responsibility was to God, as he often said (1 Cor. 4:4—"He who judges me is the Lord"). At the same time he wanted to do what he could to avoid unjust criticism, especially regarding Church finances.

Regarding the proper handling of money, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "We are careful to be honorable before the Lord, but we also want everyone else to know we are honorable" (2 Cor. 8:21 NLT)—"before the Lord" and "everyone else." He wanted everything honest and aboveboard, with no room for suspicion or criticism.

As a good teacher, he was setting an example for younger ones—and even for us, two thousand years later. You may not always be able to prevent gossip, but do what you can.

encouraging and exhorting. At the same time he was soliciting their help for the suffering Church at Jerusalem. It was one last all-purpose effort.

It may have been on this trip that Paul took opportunity to travel to the western province of Macedonia called Illyricum, on the Adriatic Sea, across from Italy. All we know is that he told the Romans he had been there with the Gospel (Rom. 15:19), and at this point he would have been as close as at any time in his travels.

At last he reached Greece and Corinth. Staying three months, he had time to teach and encourage. Every hour was an opportunity to help them.

While in Corinth, Paul wrote his masterpiece, the Epistle to the Romans. For a long time he had planned to go to Rome, and now that trip was seeming closer.

Why did Paul choose this particular time to write to the Church in Rome? Perhaps it was because he learned that a devoted sister Phoebe of the Church at Cenchrea was soon going to Rome on business, and she could hand deliver the letter to the Church there. The letter would serve a triple purpose, giving her an official, personalized introduction (Rom. 16:1-2), helping the believers there with their everyday problems, and also letting them know of Paul's hope of seeing them some day.



5. With whom did Paul stay during those months in

Corinth? (see Rom. 16:2-3) _____

6. Where did he plan to go from Corinth? (Acts 20:3) _____

7. How did Paul plan to travel? (20:3) _____

8. What changed his plans? _____

9. What alternate plan did he follow? (20:3) _____

It seems that a pilgrim ship left Cenchrea every year bound for Palestine, taking Jewish people for the annual festivals. Paul could have planned passage on such a ship. It would have been natural, since he, too, wanted to be in Jerusalem for the festivals. But perhaps the Jews saw this as a way to get rid of Paul—they could easily arrange for him to

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Cenchrea: About 6 miles from Corinth on the east side of the Isthmus.

"Our sister Phoebe, a deacon in the church in Cenchrea, will be coming to see you soon. Receive her in the Lord, as one who is worthy of high honor. Help her in every way you can, for she has helped many in their needs, including me." —Romans 16:1-2 NLT

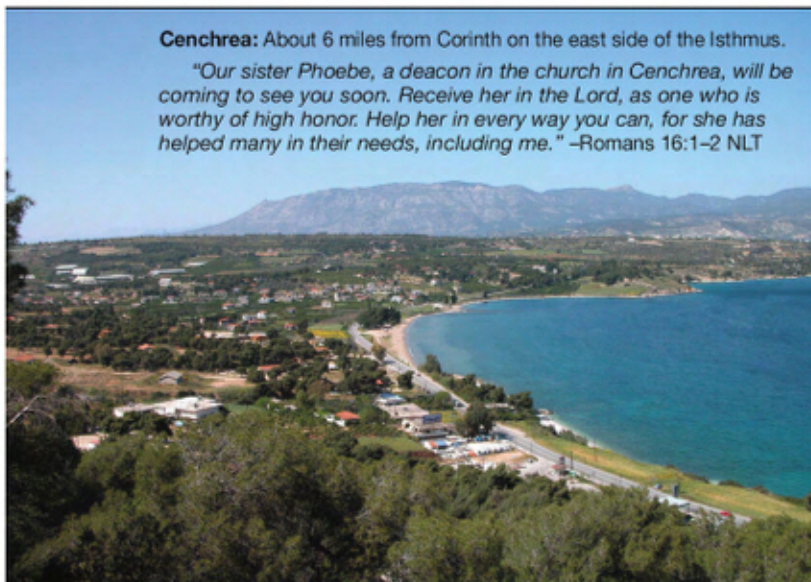


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Take heed

Guard Your Integrity

"By traveling together we will guard against any suspicion, for we are anxious that no one should find fault with the way we are handling this generous gift." —2 Corinthians 8:20 (NLT)

Paul lived by the principles he taught. His manner of handling the money contributed by the Churches for the suffering Church at Jerusalem shows his carefulness. He didn't want to give any occasion to his critics to

think he had taken the money for himself.

Paul took sensible precautions. When developing his plan for gathering and delivering the money, he built in an accountability that would not only guard the money but also the reputation of those handling it. He wrote in advance to Corinth: "I will write letters of recommendation for the messengers you choose to deliver your gift to Jerusalem. And if it seems appropriate for me also to go along, then we can travel together" (1 Cor. 16:3-4 NLT). Their own representatives

could see it through. Their role was primary; Paul's was secondary.

Why was he so careful? "For we are concerned for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of others" (2 Cor. 8:21 NAB).

Paul gave the same advice to the Romans: "...do things in such a way that everyone can see that you are honorable" (Rom. 12:17 NLT).

It may not always be possible to prevent malicious gossip, but Paul tried wisely to avoid needless jeopardy.

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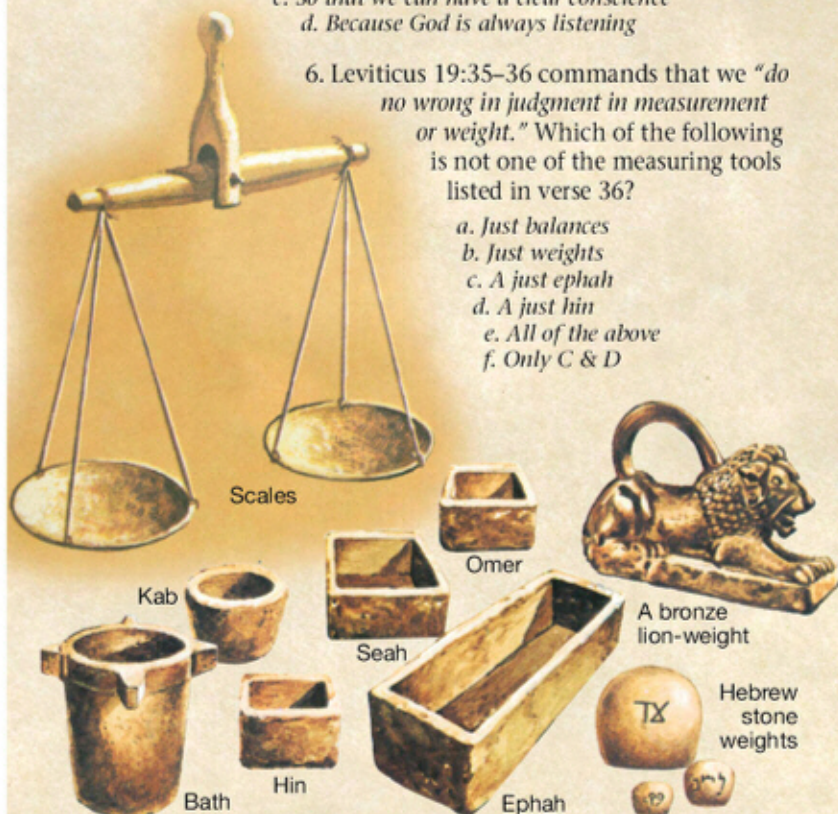
BE HONEST

Many Bible texts teach principles. Each choice is a possible option. Choose the answer that best states the right principle for Christian living in each of the following.

1. In Deuteronomy 25:16 we read, "For the Lord your God _____ anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly."
a. Disapproves of b. Detests c. Will destroy d. Adores
2. In Psalm 24:3 we are asked, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?"
a. One with clean hands and pure heart
b. One who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood
c. One who has not sworn deceitfully
d. All of the above
3. In Acts 24:15 Paul says he strives to keep a clear conscience before God and man because:
a. It is the command of the Lord
b. People thought "The Way" was a sect of Judaism
c. That would keep persecution away
d. There will be a resurrection of righteous and wicked
4. In 2 Corinthians 8:21 we read, "We have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also ____."
a. Because our parents or children are watching
b. With the members of our congregation
c. In the sight of men
d. Before the leaders of our government
5. Why, according to Colossians 3:9, are we commanded not to lie to one another?
a. To ensure we keep tabs on each other
b. We laid aside the old self with its evil practices
c. So that we can have a clear conscience
d. Because God is always listening

6. Leviticus 19:35-36 commands that we "do no wrong in judgment in measurement or weight." Which of the following is not one of the measuring tools listed in verse 36?

- a. Just balances
- b. Just weights
- c. A just ephah
- d. A just hin
- e. All of the above
- f. Only C & D



Know Your Bible

7. Hebrews 13:18 suggests that others can help us live honorably by praying for us.
True False
8. Proverbs 11:1 says "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but ____."
a. Good balance comes from strong genes
b. A just weight is His delight
c. Putting your finger on the scale is all right
d. The metric system is for cheaters
9. First Thessalonians 4:11 says we should make this our ambition:
a. Let our yes be yes, and our no be no
b. Climb the ladder, get ahead, pursue happiness
c. Lead a quiet life, attend to our own business, work with our hands
d. Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace
10. Luke 6:31 tells us "just as you want men to treat you, ____."
a. Treat them in the same way
b. Repay them skin for skin
c. Handle them with kid gloves
d. Tell them white lies when it suits their own good

BE HUMBLE

1. In Genesis 32:10, why does Jacob say that he is unworthy of all the lovingkindness and faithfulness God had shown him?
a. God had made him into a great nation
b. He became reconciled to Esau
c. He had only a staff when he crossed the Jordan; now he is two companies
d. He was injured but spared while wrestling with God
2. In Proverbs 22:4 we read, The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are:
a. Riches, honor, and life
b. Their own reward
c. Wisdom and a family without strife
d. Love, sanctification, and forgiveness
3. In Isaiah 51:1, the prophet says those who would pursue righteousness need to:
a. Strive to be like God
b. Humble themselves to the point of death on a tree
c. Look to the fact they are made of dirt
d. Remember a great nation came forth from a childless old couple
4. First Corinthians 10:12 says, If you think you are standing firm:
a. Guess again
b. Be careful that you don't fall
c. You have become proud like the Pharisees
d. Get out of your comfort zone
5. James 4:10 promises that if you humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, He will exalt you.
a. True b. False

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A closer look

Reciprocity

Why was Paul encouraging the different churches in Greece and Macedonia to contribute to the aid of the suffering parent Church in Jerusalem?

He explained in his letter to the church at Rome. They were actually repaying a debt, he said. *"Since the Gentiles received the spiritual blessings of the good news from the believers in Jerusalem, they feel the least they can do in return is to help them financially"* (Rom. 15:27 NLT).

Christian living is built on reciprocity: a giver and a receiver. Each has a vital role in helping the other.



Insight

Free-Will Offering

In talking about giving, Paul points out several principles.

Giving must be willing. *"If there is first a willing mind..."* (2 Cor. 8:12).

Giving must be according to one's means, not creating hardship. *"Give according to what you have, not what you don't have"* (2 Cor. 8:12 NLT). If everyone could be trusted to follow this plan, there would be no lack anywhere in the world.

Giving should be without regard to being recognized. Paul said *"they gave themselves to the Lord"* (2 Cor. 8:5). The root of their liberality was a consecrated attitude of life.

Stinginess is not Christ-like. We are stewards, not owners. Everything we have belongs to God. As he wrote to the Corinthians, *"What do you have that you did not receive?"* (1 Cor. 4:7).

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go overboard during the passage, and who could say what happened!

Somehow the plot was uncovered, and Paul changed his plans, opting to return by land through Macedonia as he had come. He would be later in reaching Jerusalem, but safer.

God was guiding, and had more work for Paul to do. Paul was immortal until his work was done.

Paul and Company

Notice that over these many miles Paul is not traveling alone.

10. Who were his travel companions at this time? (20:4) _____

They are seven brothers in the faith, all from different churches. Their names may be strange to us, but each belonged to the Christian family. There was Sopater, representing the Church at Berea (mentioned also in Romans 16:21), and two brothers from Thessalonica, Aristarchus and Secundus. Then there were two brothers from Galatia: Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy from Lystra. There were also two brothers from Churches in Asia: Tychicus of Colosse (Col. 4:7) and Trophimus of Ephesus (Acts 21:29). Each was chosen by his church to travel with Paul on this special mission.

11. What might have been Paul's reason for having these brethren accompany him? (2 Cor. 8:19-20) _____

12. What very special package were they carrying? _____

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that these brothers were *"chosen by the churches to travel with us with their gift"* (2 Cor. 8:19), so that no one could accuse him of any mishandling of funds.

The Apostle Paul practiced the principles he taught. He was realistic. There were enemies of the cause anxious to throw stones, and Paul was very careful to be above reproach in the handling of the money. With the brethren from the various Churches accompanying him, each could share the responsibility. Each could testify that nothing was amiss.

There is yet another factor in the handling of money in the first century. They were traveling on open roads with no protection. These men walking through the countryside, unarmed, could be attacked and robbed. There was safety in numbers.

Paul and company took the road north through Greece into Macedonia and Philippi.

13. Who rejoined the missionary party at that point? (20:5) _____

Notice in Acts 20:6 that the "we" appears once again. Luke joins the party. Recall that previously Luke had stayed at Philippi when Paul had traveled on. In Acts 16:11, "we" arrived in Philippi, and in Acts 16:40 "they" had departed.

(to be continued)

Cenchrea Bay
from the southeast

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UNPARDONABLE SIN?

"I have a friend who worries that he might do wrong, even without realizing it, something God cannot forgive. I thought God is a forgiving God."

When we realize our inborn tendency to sin, we are very grateful that God has provided a means of pardon. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." And God through the prophet Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7).

However, your friend is right, that not all sin is pardonable. Though this is frequently misunderstood, the Bible does tell of four basic situations in which sin was or is unpardonable:

- 1) Breaking a law of Moses that had a death penalty.
- 2) Disobedience when God pronounced immediate judgment.
- 3) Sin that was unpardonable because it was against the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4-6).
- 4) Sin that becomes unpardonable through delay.

Let us look more closely at each.

1) Sin unpardonable under the law of Moses

Under the law of Moses, there were sins for which no pardon could be secured. (The law stated God's ideal, although it does not seem to have been enforced very long.) For example, the penalty for breaking (dishonoring) the Sabbath law was death (Ex. 31:14). The penalty for homosexuality was death (Lev. 18: 22-29). For abusing one's parents, the penalty was death. Would-be transgressors were well advised to consider carefully before acting. God was civilizing a nation, and this was His means of training them to live by His laws.

2) Sin unpardonable because God withdrew opportunity to repent and sent immediate Divine judgment

During the time when God was working openly, there were times when sin became unpardonable because God knew that those guilty would not repent, or because they failed to repent while opportunity was extended, and so God withdrew opportunity.

A case in point was Sodom and Gomorrah and the wicked cities of the plain. The people could have repented if they had had any desire to repent. But God knew that they would not, hence sent immediate destruction (Gen. 19:14).

Another example was the time of the Flood, when "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Despite Noah's preaching of righteousness, the people would not listen; hence the great destruction and only eight persons saved (1 Pet. 3:20).

The case of Ananias and Sapphira is another example of

sin that became unpardonable because of immediate judgment (see Acts 5). The apostle Peter, having Holy Spirit power, could read their hearts. Immediate judgment was pronounced upon them and they died.

A similar situation will exist again in the near future, when God renews His open work upon earth and Christ returns with judgment upon all workers of iniquity. Those who will not repent will be destroyed (Jer. 25:31-33; Isa. 66:14-16; Zech. 13:7-9; Isa. 26:9).

3) Sin against the Holy Spirit unpardonable

What is most often referred to as "the unpardonable sin" is drawn from Jesus' words in Matthew 12:31, "sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."

What is this "blasphemy" or "sin against the Holy Spirit" which cannot be forgiven? The book of Hebrews presents the thought in greater detail: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6).

Who could commit this unpardonable sin? Only those who had "tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit," who had "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." To have in one's being the power of the Holy Spirit was a high and holy privilege not to be taken lightly. And if any having that power should afterward "fall away," he says, "it is impossible" to "renew them again to repentance." In essence God was saying, If you turn your back on Me and disown Me after I have trusted you with My Divine power, you do not deserve forgiveness.

4) Sin unpardonable through delay

Any sin persisted in becomes unpardonable. God is merciful, full of compassion, and of great understanding. But there is a limit to His mercy. The sins of the people of Noah's day became unpardonable through delay. They could have been safe in the ark. They had opportunity, but when the flood came, they were still outside. The sins of the Israelites became unpardonable through delay. Multitudes perished in the various plagues. Because they continued in disobedience and showed no intention of repentance or turning, they were cut off.

None of these first three categories of unpardonable sin concerns us today. However, the fourth type of unpardonable sin is a very real concern. It is the sin of procrastinating too long. God does not guarantee unlimited opportunity. Though our sins be red like crimson, He will make them "white as snow" on condition: "If you are willing and obedient" (Isa. 1:18-20). ♦

Wonder Peckers

How much wood would a woodpecker peck...?

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat! Do I sound familiar? I'm Downy Woodpecker, and I'm here by the wondrous design of my great Creator. Rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat.

Most birds are more often seen than heard. We woodpeckers are more often heard than seen. You hear rat-a-tat-tat, then you try to see us. There are perhaps as many as 20 kinds of us, some as small as six-inches in length, some as long as 19 inches. I'm Downy Woodpecker, and my claim to fame is the bright red crest on my head. Rat-a-tat-tat-tat!

Why do I peck so much? I peck to find food, and I peck to make my nest in the spring. I peck to attract a mate, and I peck to establish territories. Rat-a-tat-tat! Pecking is a way of life for me. Sometimes I peck holes simply because I want to create my own food supply. You see, where I leave a hole in a dying tree, insects are likely to take up residence, and that creates a ready food supply for me for some time later. How about that!

Special shock-absorbers...

Can you imagine pounding your head against a wall 8,000 to 10,000 times? They say that is the number of times I peck each day! But don't feel sorry for me. I don't break my nose, or come away with a splitting headache—none of that—because I was designed to peck! Truly my Creator's designs are awesome. He placed tiny air pockets in my skull to absorb the shock and protect my brain, something like the way you use air-filled plastic sacks to protect your merchandise in shipping. (You thought someone had a new idea in your generation?!) In addition, my Designer fitted my brain so tightly inside my skull that it cannot move, in this way avoiding concussions. Plus I have special shock-absorbing cartilage between my bill and my head. So when my highly efficient neck muscles produce that ongoing series of rapid movements—that compulsive rat-a-tat-tat—I don't suffer one little bit. Isn't my Creator's design marvelous?

Special tongues...

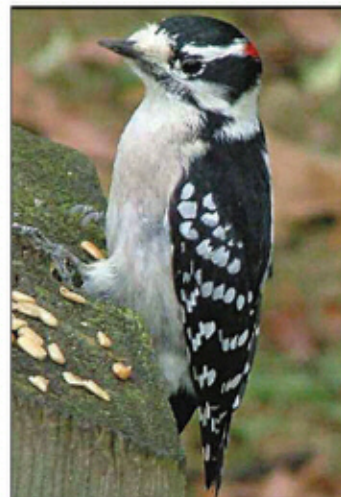
Now, how much wood can a woodpecker peck?

That all depends on why we are pecking. If I'm starting a nest hole, I hammer and twist my head from side to side, flinging wood chips left and right to get them out of the way. If I'm looking for a mate, I find a piece of wood or a branch that is particularly resonant—maybe even a gutter downspout—and use it like a drum to—you guessed it—I just want to make a big noise. If I'm searching for food, I tap lightly on a dead limb, then cock my head and listen intently for that sound of scurrying grubs. Then rat-a-tat-tat! I know just where to peck so as to invade their channel inside the tree.

Beetle larvae are often just beneath the outer layer of wood, in shallow channels that can stretch up and down the trunk for several inches—or even feet. Using my chisel bill I make a small hole into the channel. Then I thrust in my tongue and probe around. If it's a hit of grubs, yummmmm! I skewer my prey with my tongue—the tip is hard and sharply pointed—to penetrate the soft body of a larval insect. Then, tiny rear-facing barbs on my tongue grab hold of the insect as I carefully withdraw my tongue. Mmmmm!

Don't you see that my tongue is a very specially designed instrument? To be able to snag insects out of tree trunks, our tongues must be longer than our bills, even three or four times as long. Some of us have a tongue so long that it forks in our throat, goes below the base of the jaw, and wraps behind and over the top of our head, where the forks rejoin and insert in our right nostril, or around the eye socket. Amazing? One thing sure: I didn't design it! All credit to my wonderful Creator!

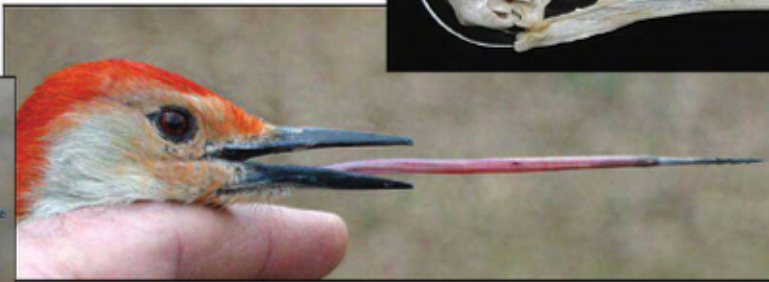
How does a woodpecker manipulate such a tongue? Within the entire length of our tongue is an apparatus which is a linear series of tiny bones sheathed in muscles and soft tissue. These tiny bones fold up accordion like along part



Downy Woodpecker



Red-bellied Woodpecker





Woodpecker—unknown (above)
Northern Flicker (top right)
Gila Woodpecker (right)

of their length. When I want to stick out my tongue, I simply contract the muscles near the base of the apparatus. This forces the tiny bones forward inside their sheath and propels my tongue out of my bill. When I relax the muscles, my tongue shortens and is drawn back inside. My tongue is also equipped with longitudinal muscles so that it can move from side to side as I look for food in a hole I've made in a tree.

When we're newly hatched, our tongue is quite short. This

makes it much easier for our parents to stick food items inside our hungry, gaping mouths. But as we get older, our tongue grows longer and longer, so that when we need to go hunting on our own, we are all equipped. Isn't it amazing?

One of our kind, the Northern Flicker, has a smooth, sticky tongue. Why sticky? Because the flicker was designed to live on ants. Did he just "happen" to develop the long, sticky tongue he needs to probe inside an anthill? Again, remember our Designer! With the right kind of tongue, all the flicker has to do to harvest a meal is to stick his tongue into an anthill, and with one smooth and rapid flick, he snares hundreds of ants in his sticky saliva and draws them back into his mouth. Yummm! A northern flicker can eat thousands of carpenter ants in a day. It's another wonder of our amazing design!

Special feet...

We woodpeckers also have special feet. They call them zygodactyl feet—which says that we have two toes in front and two in back (most birds have three in front and one in back). Why are we different? The special two plus two arrangement makes me very secure as I hop straight up, down and around the tree trunks, as I drill holes in search of food. My Designer has also given me stiff tail feathers, so that I can brace myself against the trunk of the tree as I tap. Between my special feet and stiff tail I have a perfect tripod to keep me steady as I rat-a-tat-tat!

I truly want to join the Psalmist and "sing a new song to the Lord, for he has done wonderful deeds" (Ps. 98:1 NLT).

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat! ♦

THE WOODPECKER PRINCIPLE

Someone has said that the Christian's most valued role is not to be a hawk, or a dove, but a woodpecker. The woodpecker bores beneath the surface and removes the worm that, unfound and undestroyed, would take the tree's life. It leaves a scar, but it saves the tree.

Is your life-tree in need of a woodpecker? Why not make a personal application of this woodpecker principle?

Think about the criticism you resent. Perhaps it was not all justified, but maybe it brought out a fault that you really need to correct, a worm that, left unnoticed, would multiply and be destructive to your inner life. By bringing our attention to these faults, our critic (woodpecker) becomes our savior!

Yet most of us find it hard to accept these criticisms graciously and constructively. We are far more likely to find ourselves saying: "What does that person have against me?" or "What did I ever do to him?" or "Why has he noticed

my faults and overlooked all the good things I do?" or "Why is he trying to hurt me?"

Worse yet, we may actually take the offensive and start looking for his faults, or find some way to punish him for his disloyalty to what we had thought had been a friendship.

Reality? Are we only trying to protect our wounded egos?

Of course we don't want the flaws in our character or personality pointed out. Yet this person (woodpecker) who detects a "worm" in our life and pecks at it is our best friend. He may be saving us from the little "worms" in our personalities that could destroy us.

Human woodpeckers can actually increase our usefulness to God. They may be a tool God is using to help us become bug free.

The next time you feel a "peck," thank God for those helpful human woodpeckers! They are your best friends!

Remember, "The correction of discipline is the way to life" (Prov. 6:23 NLT). ♦



HIDDEN TALENTS

"I am worried about Downy," said Mrs. Woodpecker to her husband one night as they were getting ready to roost.

"What seems to be the matter?" asked Mr. Woodpecker.

"He is so discouraged," replied Mrs. Woodpecker. "As you know, he had his heart set on being in the Winton Choir, but the music director gave him an audition today and discovered that he is a 'monotone' and told him he was wasting his time trying to learn to sing. It is all the harder for him because two of his friends, Henry Warbler and Johnny Mocking-bird were accepted in the choir. When Downy arrived home he said to me, 'I suppose I just don't have any talent, Mother. Why is it that we Woodpeckers can't sing like other birds?'"

"What did you tell him?" asked Mr. Woodpecker.

"I tried to explain to him," she replied, "that God has given different talents to different birds, and that every one does have some talent with which to praise God. One of these days, I assured him, he would discover his talent. In the meantime, I told him he must be patient and not allow himself to be jealous of the other birds."

"You are a very wonderful mother to our little son," said Mr. Woodpecker. "I am afraid I have not been spending enough time with him lately."

The next morning at breakfast Mr. Woodpecker said, "Downy, I am coming home early from the office today. How would you like to go with me for a flight into the park?"

Of course Downy thought that a wonderful idea. So that afternoon about four o'clock they started out together. Mr. Woodpecker pointed out the different kinds of trees to Downy and told him how certain bugs and insects laid their eggs under the crevices of the bark. He showed Downy how to find the grubs and to dig them out with his bill.

"There is no use tearing up the bark unless you know a grub is under it," said Mr. Woodpecker. "The thing to do is to tap lightly on it two or three times like this. Then be very still and listen. If a grub is underneath, he will be frightened by the sound and you can hear him move. Then quickly you can peck away the bark, like this, and get him."

"Oh, Mother," exclaimed Downy when they arrived home, "we had the best time in the world. Daddy has promised to take me again."

And he did. Twice every week Mr. Woodpecker and Downy went flying and grub-hunting together in the park.

Then came what was long remembered in Winton as The Great Scourge. It happened in the spring. Insects seemed to come from everywhere. They bored into the trees, hid under the bark, ate up the sap and the trees began to die. For a time it was feared that all the trees in the park would perish. All the birds of Winton, young and old, were called upon to work in



Father shows Downy how to find the grubs.

the park every afternoon in an effort to save the trees.

On a certain day the Metropolitan Park Commission staged a contest and offered a gold medal to the school bird which, in one hour, could find and kill the greatest number of grubs.

Of course there were a number of birds who were quite expert in finding the grubs, among them the Nuthatch children, the Flickers and the Chickadees. But Downy's little friends, Johnny Mocking-bird and Henry Warbler, were able to find only five apiece. They spent most of their time chipping away bark but finding nothing underneath. Downy, on the other hand, as his daddy had taught him, would tap on the bark here and there and listen for a second. Then, if he heard nothing, he would move on to some other spot. When the hour was finished Downy had found and captured one hundred and twenty-two grubs. No other bird had passed the one hundred mark.

And who do you suppose presented Downy with the medal provided by the Park Commission? None other than Mr. Cardinal the director of the school band. As he handed it to him he said, "Downy, as I watched you working in the park today, I noticed what wonderful rhythm you have when you peck on the bark. You are just the bird we need to play the trap drum in our band and to lead us in our marches. Also that suit you are wearing is just perfect for a uniform. I shall expect you at rehearsal tomorrow night."

Thus it came to pass that Downy Woodpecker discovered that he had not one talent but two. Of course he has lots of fun playing the trap drum in the band, but he never allows it to interfere with what he considers his first talent, namely digging the grubs out of the trees in the park. Just how important that talent is you may judge for yourself when I tell you that Downy's father has recently been appointed Superintendent of the Winton National Park. So Downy works with his father on the trees every afternoon and gets paid for it too. ♦

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BE HUMBLE

continued from page 19

6. Micah 6:8 says walking humbly with God is good and required of man. What other two requirements does the verse list?
 - a. Love others, surrender to God
 - b. Live peacefully, obey the law
 - c. Show grace, be thankful
 - d. Do justice, love kindness
7. Proverbs 15:33 says "Before _____ comes humility."
 - a. Pride
 - b. Fame
 - c. Glory
 - d. Honor
8. According to Proverbs 27:2, who should praise us?
 - a. Ourselves
 - b. The Lord
 - c. A stranger
 - d. The world
 - e. No one
9. First Peter 5:5 says believers should do what with humility?
 - a. Cast it upon the sea
 - b. Wear it like clothing
 - c. Disguise it
 - d. Salt the earth with it
10. Which of the following exhortations to humility does NOT appear in Romans 12:16?
 - a. Be of the same mind toward one another
 - b. Take care of widows and orphans in their distress
 - c. Do not be haughty in mind
 - d. Associate with the lowly
 - e. Do not be wise in your own estimation
 - f. They all appear there

Answers to questions on page 19

BE HONEST

1. Detests (b)
2. All of the above (d)
3. There will be a resurrection of righteous and wicked (d)
4. In the sight of men (c)
5. We laid aside the old self with its evil practices (b)
6. All of the above (e)
7. True (a)
8. A just weight is His delight (b)
9. Lead a quiet life, attend to our own business, work with our hands (c)
10. Treat them in the same way (a)

BE HUMBLE

1. He had only a staff when he crossed the Jordan; now he is two companies (c)
2. Riches, honor, and life (a)
3. Look to the fact they are made of dirt (c)
4. Be careful that you don't fall (b)
5. True (a)
6. Do justice, love kindness (d)
7. Honor (d)
8. A stranger (c)
9. Wear it like clothing (b)
10. Take care of widows and orphans in their distress (b)

CHASING MICE

A farmer bought a new hunting dog that "tracks down the big ones." Eager to see him perform, the farmer took the dog out to track a bear. No sooner had they gotten into the woods than the dog picked up the trail. Then suddenly he stopped, sniffed the ground, and headed in a new direction. He had caught the scent of a deer that had crossed the bear's path.

A few moments later the dog halted again. This time smelling a rabbit that had crossed the path of the deer. And so on and on the chase went, until finally the breathless hunter caught up with his dog only to find him triumphantly barking down the hole of a field mouse!


How well are you doing with your resolves in your spiritual life? Are you still on track? Or are you like the farmer's hunting dog, constantly getting distracted by some lesser interest?

Apparently this is what happened to one of Paul's companions named Demas. At one time he was Brother Paul's right hand helper (Philemon 1:24; Col. 4:14). But in Paul's last letter to Timothy he wrote, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). Demas gave up everything for nothing.

How do we avoid chasing mice? Everyday we must renew our dedication to Christ, or we will be drawn away by the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:15-17). Distractions are all around us, influences that can so easily divert even the most committed.

Is following Christ number one in your life? Or has some lure of the present, some lure of wealth or power or prestige or sensual pleasure caught your eye?

Rededicate your life right now to God—get back on the road that leads to life. Stop chasing mice! ♦



*Demas hath forsaken me,
having loved this present world.*
—2 Tim. 4:10



Abib Means...

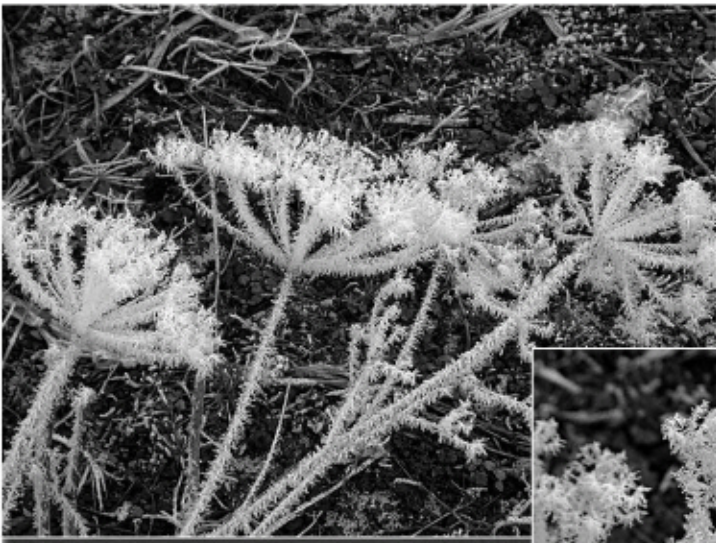
"month of green ears," "spring or sprouting month" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon). God commanded Moses to "observe the month Abib" (Deut. 16:1; Ex. 12:2; 13:4) as a memorial of the Israelites' departure from Egypt.

Abib 1 (Nisan 1), the first day of the Sacred New Year, begins this year on Wednesday evening, March 29, and continues through Thursday, March 30, Bible time being measured from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). It was the pattern of the Hebrew people to begin the new year from the first occurrence of the new moon (this year on March 29 at 10:15 am, Greenwich Mean Time) after the Spring Equinox (this year on March 17). Abib First is the first day of the sacred New Year, and the day on which we observe the anniversary of our Savior's birth.

Abib 13, the anniversary of the night when Jesus partook of the Last Supper with His disciples before He suffered, falls this year on Monday evening, April 10. At this time we partake of the emblems (unleavened bread and grape juice) in obedience to the command, "*This do in remembrance of me*" (1 Cor. 11:24-25). By this sacred rite we symbolize the renewing of our covenant relationship with God, the bread representing the knowledge of the law of God, and the juice representing the application of that knowledge to our daily lives. We agree to offer ourselves to obey totally the will of God.

Abib 15, the anniversary of the Resurrection of Christ, occurs this year on the morning of Thursday, April 13. In ancient Israel, this was the day of the waving of the first sheaf of the harvest before the Lord. On this morning, Christ the firstfruits from death rose triumphant over death and the grave. On this morning, even "*very early in the morning*," (Mk. 16:2) certain women found their way to the tomb (Matt. 28:1). Finding it empty, they heard those immortal words that still thrill and inspire us today: "*He is not here, he is risen! Come, see the place where the Lord lay*" (Matt. 28:6).

Pentecost, fifty days after the waving of the first sheaf offering, falls this year on June 1. ♦



"A bone of contention" has no place in the body of Christ.



*Who is the mother of the ice?
Who gives birth to the frost from
the heavens? —Job 38:29*

When we die, we leave behind us all we have. All we keep is what is written in God's book of remembrance.

Well-balanced Christians not only know their faith, they show it.

SIN IS NEVER SAFE!

Most amateur repairmen don't have sufficient respect for the lethal power of electricity. The amateur knows that a shock hurts but he thinks he can always let go of the wire. It is the paralyzing power of even a small amount of electricity that makes it so dangerous. Even a small amount of current can paralyze your muscles, and you won't be able to let go. Just a fraction more and your heart muscle can become paralyzed.

So it is with sin. People dabble with sin because they don't fear its power to paralyze their spiritual muscles. Then it's too late. Even when people know a sinful behavior is hurting them and they want to quit, they can't let go.

Sin is never safe!

If it doesn't affect your hands, feet, and thinking, it isn't Christianity.

The best thing to do with the Bible is to *know* it in the head, *stow* it in the heart, *sow* it in the world, and *show* it in the life.

Periodic Christianity is perpetual hypocrisy.

A really contented man has his yesterdays all filed away, his present in order, and his tomorrows subject to instant revision.

Character is developed by two small words—yes and no.

Character is the total of thousands of small daily strivings.

A SIMPLE TABLE GRACE

Great God, giver of all good, accept our praise and bless this food. Help us to live as Christians should. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SHINE!

I was cleaning out a desk drawer when I found a flashlight I hadn't used in over a year. I flipped the switch but wasn't surprised when it gave no light. I unscrewed it and shook it to get the batteries out, but they wouldn't budge.

Finally, after some effort, they came loose. What a mess! Battery acid had corroded the entire inside of the flashlight. The batteries were new when I'd put them in, and I'd stored them in a safe, warm place. But there was one problem. Those batteries weren't made to be warm and comfortable. They were designed to be turned on—to be used.

It's the same with us. We weren't created to be warm, safe, and comfortable. You and I were made to be "turned on"—to put our love to work, to apply our patience in difficult, trying situations—to let our light shine.

Just think how happy you would be if you lost everything you now have, and then suddenly got it back. So why not be happy with what you have?

At Evening

At dawn, O Lord, You gave into my hands
A perfect page,
Pure in its unstained whiteness,
A gift from You.
Straight from Your throne,
This treasure fair,
So I could write with careful hand and true
A record there.

And now, dear Lord, whatever came or went today
Of good or ill,
I give it back into the keeping of Your kind
And gentle Hand.
Take it, and bind it in Your book,
And close it, never more
To open be
Till it shall stand a witness, Lord,
Twixt You and me.

Oh, dark the night if on the page You gave
Lies stain or blot!
Rejection, sorrow I will face
You'll own me not—
Unless, dear Lord, You give me yet
Another day
In which, by writing well, I turn from sin,
And You forgive!
So let me live, dear Lord, that I may have at last
A record fair to witness, Lord,
Great joy to me!

