

Megiddo Message

March/April, 2005



*I know that
my Redeemer lives,
and that he will stand upon
the earth at last. —Job 19:25 NLT*



The Wonder of SMALL

It doesn't take a lot of immensity to totally boggle our little minds. Just think about needing upwards of 100,000 years to travel to the very nearest star—a mere 4 light-years distant—by any means of travel known today.

Or think about boarding the fastest rocket known and still needing *quadrillions* of years to cross the Milky Way.

Or try to comprehend how Hubble's powerful eye has picked up light from some 2000 galaxies from an area of the sky no larger than a grain of sand at arm's length!

But immensity is only half the picture. Have you thought about the wonder of *small*?

The word *atom* is from the Greek *atomos*, which means "indivisible...that cannot be cut in two or divided." When the ancient Greeks discovered the atom, they thought they had arrived at the smallest possible particle in the universe. We now know that each atom is a tiny universe in itself, composed of a nucleus and one or more orbiting electrons.

Take, for example, a single atom of copper. An atom of copper has 29 electrons orbiting the nucleus. The 29th electron, unlike the other 28, is orbiting in a path far from the nucleus and is therefore termed a valence or "free" electron. Being "free," it combines with other free electrons forming a vast cloud of electrons that move freely within the copper.

Within one cubic centimeter of copper there are 8.5×10^{22} free electrons (literally 85 thousand million millions, or 85,000,000,000,000,000,000,000)! Imagine what this piece of copper might look like if we could magnify it large enough to see its structure. It would no longer look like a

Who said that the atom was the smallest existing structure?

The particles that compose the atom may be beyond our understanding, yet our Creator has used them as the building blocks of the substances we recognize as a copper wire, a glass of milk, a candy bar, a flower, or a bit of earth. As far as we know, all material objects share the same basic atomic structure. Do we have some idea of that structure? Yes. Do we understand it? No. It is the wonder of small.

Where does small end? How small is small? Doesn't it seem that the limit of small is the limit of our ability to measure or observe? Could what we are able to observe in the atom be the pattern of the universe? Could an entire galaxy be as a tiny nucleus with other galaxies orbiting around it to form an even larger mass, which may in turn be a nucleus for even greater expansion, and so on and on? We can only exclaim with the Psalmist, "How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension!" (Psalm 147:5 NLT).

Doesn't it seem that our Creator intends us to be awed by things beyond our ability to comprehend, whether small or great? Should we not feel to say with Job of long ago, "I was talking about things I did not understand, things far too wonderful for me"? (Job 42:3 NLT). Little wonder the prophet Isaiah exclaimed, "Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust" (Isa. 40:15, NIV). Just how small are we, anyway!

Yet this same Creator is able to use smallness to make great. He has done it in the past, and He will do it again. It is His immutable promise: "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time" (Isa. 60:22).

In the prophetic dream in the book of Daniel, a small stone, representing the Kingdom of Christ, grew and grew until it had filled the earth (Dan. 2:34-35, 45).

Jesus said smallness was the way to real greatness when He promised, "he who is least among you all will be great" (Luke 9:48). "He who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14). The strait gate and the narrow way—all small—open into the most expansive life imaginable, even *eternal* life! (Matt. 7:14).

When God is working with the small, small is great! ♦

*Our Creator can use
smallness to make great.*

solid but more like the steel skeleton of a skyscraper with the wind passing through it.

Just how small is an electron? One electron weighs 8.999×10^{-28} grams (0.000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 899 9 grams). Our small minds are baffled by the minuteness of this number.

The Triumphant FINISH

J

f there is any one thought that should stir the heart of every earnest believer, it is the thought of victory. Imagine what it would be like to know—not imagine or surmise but know—that God is accepting us, that He is pleased with our life-sacrifice, that we are absolutely sure of the final goal and triumph! Can we feel the radiant joy, the power, the delight that will fill us?

Such was the joy Jesus felt as He approached His last and severest test. There was no question in His mind. He knew absolutely that He had performed the will of His Father and that His Father would see Him through to a triumphant finish. And so He prayed, *"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do"* (John 17:4). There was no wonder, no misgiving, no fear but only hope and eager expectation. His had been the fully triumphant life. In a matter of hours He would be standing in His Father's presence and receiving the glorious change to immortality.¹

With this on His mind, the hours of agony on the cross could be borne courageously, patiently. In the midst of the worst, He could

believe the best—because He knew what really lay ahead—not Golgotha and suffering but glory and honor and a crowning with immortality in His Father's presence, surrounded by a host of holy angels. What a moment that would be! And it was coming! Thus in the agonizing death throes of Golgotha, when He said, *"It is finished,"* it was not an expression of defeat but a powerful word of victory.

Finished?

There was no tone of despair in those words. On the lips of Jesus they were words of triumph. The final test had been passed. It was a moment of victory complete!

To those who watched it probably did not look like victory. To the onlookers who did not know Jesus, Golgotha had the appearance of tragedy. Those who watched Him die, who heard Him say *"It is finished,"* thought—wrongly—that He was finished.



Jesus knew absolutely that He had performed the will of His Father.

¹Within three days He was tried, crucified, buried and resurrected. Forty days later He was taken to heaven (Acts 1:3). Ten days later He had been glorified (Acts 2:35).

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FRONT COVER: PASSION FLOWER. PHOTO BY PATRICIA A. FLEMING

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.

The Pharisees thought that at last they were rid of His disturbing presence. Now things could return to normal in Jerusalem and Judea. It wouldn't be long until the people who had thronged to Him would have quite forgotten Him. Now the people could go back to their humdrum life until another hero came along, another preacher whom they could follow. There could be no more of His disturbing miracles, His impious blasphemy, His heart-searching questions, His continual threat to their pride and their comfortable positions. They watched Him die, fully satisfied that here was a difficult chapter closed. He was finished.

The Romans, too, thought that He was finished. No more would they be bothered by this man, this disturber among the people. It was rumored that He was a king of the Jews. Only a week or so earlier the multitude tried by force to crown Him king. But it did not last long. This man, whom they had watched lest He cause an uprising of the people against Rome, now was finished. So they thought.

The people, too, concluded that He was finished. To these people who had looked up to Him as their teacher, their comforter, their healer, their Redeemer-to-be and in whose presence they had found such delight, such relief—it was all over. Some had admired, often misunderstanding yet fascinated. Now it was over. The miscellaneous crowd thought that He was finished.

The disciples, too, thought it. Finished were the bright dreams they had delighted to entertain, dreams of freedom and victory and places of honor in His Kingdom. Gone, too, was the One so loving, so compassionate, so understanding, in whom they had placed all their hope. Gone was the glory of an intimate fellowship that had kindled their hearts and started something new in their lives. Despondent, discouraged, and fearful, the disciples stood helpless and hopeless in the midst of their ruined dreams. Theirs was a leader lost. Theirs was a cause ruined. They looked, and thought that He was finished. It was all over. Mary, too, thought that her beloved Son was finished. As she stood by the cross, it seemed as though a sword pierced through her own heart also. The iron of sorrow turned love into a thing of anguish. This was her Son, and He was finished. For the moment that was all she could see.

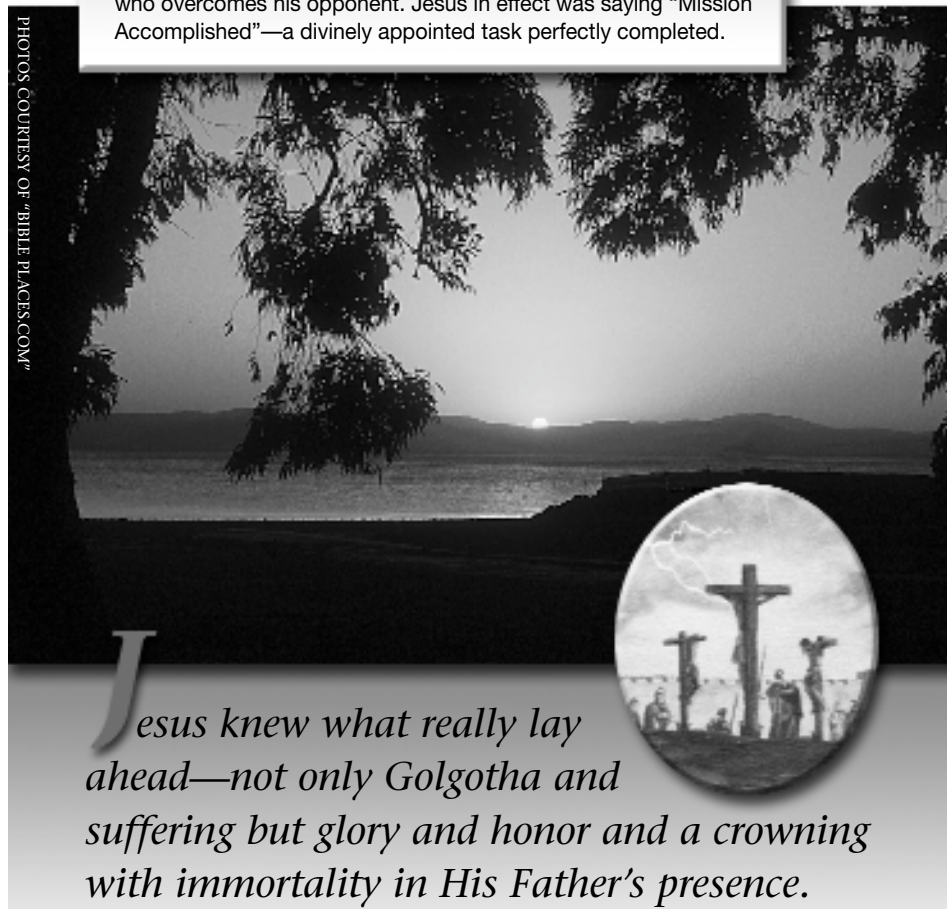
Mission Accomplished

But though the onlookers thought that He was finished, they—and even His own as well—had missed the message He had so carefully taught,

“that the Son of man must be...crucified...and the third day rise again.” When Jesus said, *“It is finished,”* the Greek word He used was *tetelestai*, and it is a word full of courage and purpose, a victory word used by a runner who wins a race, or a boxer who overcomes his opponent. Jesus

When Jesus cried out, *“It is finished,”* it was a cry of victory, not defeat. The Greek word He used is a word full of courage and purpose, a victory word used by a runner who wins a race, or a boxer who overcomes his opponent. Jesus in effect was saying “Mission Accomplished”—a divinely appointed task perfectly completed.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLE PLACES.COM"



Jesus knew what really lay ahead—not only Golgotha and suffering but glory and honor and a crowning with immortality in His Father's presence.

was saying “Mission Accomplished,” i.e., a divinely appointed task perfectly completed.

It was *Mission Accomplished*, all the way. He had done not part, or most, but *all* that the Father had given Him to do (John 17:4). He had come into the world to give men a guiding light to the Father (John 12:35–36; 8:12). He had done it. He had come to be the perfect example of the life God loves (1 Pet. 2: 21). He had done it. First in His teaching and first in His life had been to *do* the will of His heavenly Father (Heb. 10:7–9). And He had done it. He had been commissioned to take the pearl of great price and show it to the world in all its loveliness and beauty. Though few would



Mt. Gilboa in Jezreel

N*o other religion in the world has a founder who is or even claims to be "alive for evermore."*

make the effort to observe or commend, He had done it, and done it well. He had come to commission those who would carry His gospel to others, to start them on the way. They were His own and He loved them to the end. He even had asked forgiveness for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Jesus had done all that He could do. His work

was finished. He was the pattern, perfect and undefiled. Every vestige of His own will had been surrendered to His heavenly Father.

He had said, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work"* (John 4:34). True to the end, He had finished it.

Resurrection Morning

Let us go now to the beginning of the next chapter, to the morning of the Resurrection, which Jesus had clearly and publicly foretold but even His closest disciples were not expecting (John 20).

It is very early in the morning. Mary has anticipated the dawn by hastening to the garden. His body had been taken down and

buried so quickly on the day before the Passover that there had been no time even to prepare spices and anoint the body. Now was her first opportunity to do the very least for one she loved.

In her anguish she stooped to peer into the sepulcher and saw two strangers there who inquired sympathetically, *"Woman, why are you weeping?"* She could only answer, *"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him."* Then she was conscious that someone came near. Who could he be but the keeper of the garden, and who else would know better than he where the body of her Lord had been transferred. *"Tell me where you have put him, she cried, and I will get him."*

To tears and tragedy there came back a single word, *"Mary!"* She was startled from her sorrow, comforted from her tears, stabbed awake in spirit by the intonation of her name. It could not be—but it was. It was He—the Lord Jesus Himself! He was alive!

From that point forward the story moves quickly. Mary runs to bear the news to the disciples; Peter and John race to the tomb, to find it empty, still wondering what has happened. They quickly return to the other disciples to tell the news that the tomb was empty. By the end of the day, the fact is fully discovered and confirmed: Jesus is alive! Incredible, but *true*: they have seen the risen Christ!

The Resurrection Was Real

The true Gospel is no fanciful legend that asks men to believe apart from reason. It is solidly anchored in history. In the first century Christ's apostles and disciples turned their world upside down with a message that stressed Jesus' resurrection as an event in history that they had witnessed. On this basis they called men to repent and turn to God. The Apostle Peter, speaking to men in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed: *"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:32, 38).

The Apostle Paul, addressing men of Athens, asserted that God *"has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead"* (Acts

17:31). The Apostle John, writing to the seven Churches in Asia, referred to *"Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth"* (Rev. 1:5).

The literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was the central proclamation of the early Church; it must also be the true Church's central proclamation in our death-filled day. The Gospel today rests on the same evidence that the historian Luke asserted in the first century: *"For forty days after his death Jesus showed himself to them many times, in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive; he was seen by them, and talked with them about the Kingdom of God"* (Acts 1:3). Christians must become well grounded in the historical basis of the Gospel and vigorously advance its truth so that men seeking an answer to death can recognize the necessity of examining the hope Christ offers.

Evidence for the Resurrection

How can we KNOW absolutely that Jesus Christ rose victorious over death? Our testimony includes the following Biblical proofs:

1. The transformed lives of the Apostles can be adequately explained only by the resurrection of Christ. Christ's followers were utterly distraught by the execution of this One who

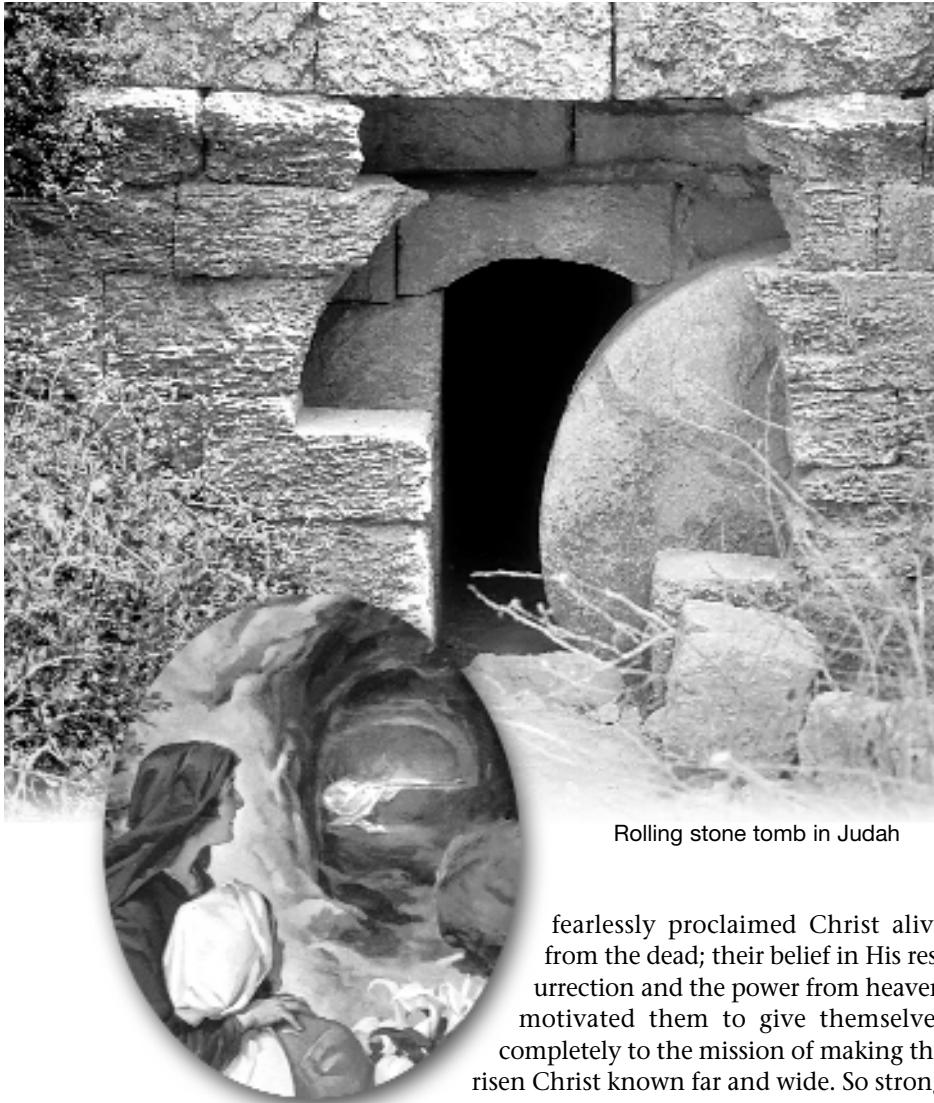


Jesus is for all time the living evidence of a living hope.



Southern end of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan Rift

they hoped would become the ruler of Israel, and they feared for their own safety because of the violence of Christ's enemies. Yet in a matter of days these discouraged and frightened men were amazingly transformed. They openly and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLE PLACES.COM"

Rolling stone tomb in Judah

fearlessly proclaimed Christ alive from the dead; their belief in His resurrection and the power from heaven motivated them to give themselves completely to the mission of making the risen Christ known far and wide. So strong was their belief that they submitted to persecution and death rather than deny their Lord.

Had these unlearned men cunningly devised a fictional message (a scheme for which they had no discoverable motive), it would be reasonable to assume that sooner or later one or more of the eleven (not to mention other followers) would have confessed the subterfuge under the pressure of numerous threats of death. But none of His apostles did. Their witness never wavered. Rather, the lives and message of these changed men changed the course of human history. No reasonable explanation has ever been given to account for their transformed lives except their own: they had seen Jesus alive from the dead.

2. The diversity of appearances by the risen Christ provides substantial historical

proof for His bodily resurrection. The four Gospels relate at least ten post-resurrection appearances of Christ. He appeared to individuals (both men and women), to small groups (two, three, seven), to larger groups (ten, eleven), and to a crowd (over five hundred). He exhibited His wounded body, spoke intimately to those who knew Him, ate in their presence, taught them, directed their activities, and gave instructions about their future work. His first appearance was to women—hardly likely had the story been invented by Jewish men. He appeared to His followers to assure them of His triumph over death, to reaffirm His promise of Divine power, the Holy Spirit, and to prepare them for their worldwide preaching ministries. These various appearances to different people in different settings cannot reasonably be explained as hallucinatory experiences. The best explanation is that given by the reliable writers of the New Testament: the risen Lord actually met with His followers. Paul said there were five hundred eyewitnesses, most of whom were still alive when he was writing (1 Cor. 15:6).

3. The empty tomb can be explained only by the supernatural power of God in raising Christ. After the crucifixion, the obviously dead body of Jesus was anointed, wrapped in linen, and placed in a new tomb sealed with a great stone and guarded by soldiers. His adversaries, knowing He had predicted He would rise from the dead, took pains to prevent any possible plot for a simulated resurrection. Yet the first day of the week after His death, the morning of the 15th of Abib, the stone was rolled away from the tomb, revealing no corpse, but only the body wrappings undisturbed and the head cloth rolled up in a separate place.

How was the body removed? Jesus' enemies would not have taken it—the last thing they wanted was the suggestion of a resurrection. Furthermore, they did not—they could not—produce the corpse later to refute the Apostles' claims that He had risen. (Had it been in any way possible they certainly would have!) The friends of Jesus were in no position to steal the body: they were grief-stricken after His rejection by Israel and crucifixion by Rome and feared they too might be killed. And His disunited disciples certainly did not have the power necessary to carry out such a plot in view of the guards who stood watch over the great stone that sealed the tomb. If Christ's enemies wouldn't have removed the body and His friends couldn't have done it, what possible answer is left? Only that the power of God was the means by which the body was removed and the tomb opened to reveal its emptiness.

Do some attempt to explain the empty tomb by claiming Jesus never really died but only swooned and then revived, or was merely drugged? These claims fly in the face of the evidence from the Bible and from history, and create far more problems than they solve!

4. The growth and spread of the Christian Church during the centuries that followed is evidence beyond dispute that Christ rose from the dead. Though it soon turned away from His teachings to falsehoods, yet it had a noble beginning, and that beginning can be explained in no other way than that it had a living hero, Jesus Christ. No other religion in the world has a founder who is or even claims to be *“alive for evermore”* (Rev. 1:18).

These arguments for Christ's resurrection are not all the important ones that can be advanced, nor are they developed as completely as they might be. But they present rational support for Christ's resurrection that any honest truth-seeker must consider.

The surety that death can be conquered permanently is of the very highest importance to the true believer. Without the resurrection, the entire meaning of religion is gone.

The Power of Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provide a complete and perfect example for all people in any possible circumstance of life, whether weak or powerful, slave or free, poor or rich, ordinary or genius, depressed or happy. The age was drawing on when the Scriptures as we have them today would be complete, and men would have to walk by faith. Those written Scriptures would be their only contact with God.

To walk by faith without angelic visitation, vision, miracle or power of the Holy Spirit needs a special faith; and that faith needs a special, complete and perfect Pattern.

True Christianity differs from all other religions in numerous ways, but one great difference is often forgotten. There is no circumstance of life which can ever prevent the true Christian from living the life God requires. The true Christian needs no priesthood, no cathedral, no measure of position, no special situation, no power, wealth, or worldly approbation. Once the principles of the law of God are scribed on his mind, the Christian needs only time and the determination and stamina always to choose and to do right.

Jesus is for all time the living evidence of a living hope. His appearances to Paul immediately lighted in the former persecutor's being an inextinguishable, burning hope for this same immortality; and the theme of his mes-

sage, as recorded in the Acts and the Letters, was *“Jesus, whom God raised from the dead.”* Only such evidence and such a hope can fully account for such singleness of purpose as Paul displayed every day of his life, from Damascus to the day when he too could feel the warm, pulsing glow of a triumphant finish and could exult, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”* (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Jesus' cry of victory echoes across the ages to us. It is the shout of triumph from one who believed and achieved the highest. *“It is finished.”* How it gives us new heart, new courage, new strength to rejoice in His victory and know that because He triumphed, *so can we*. As He conquered, *so can we*. And as He was crowned with immortality, so can we one day



A garden near Jericho

receive the sparkling diadem! For if we follow, carefully, every step of the narrow way of self-denial and discipline and service He walked, we shall arrive at last at that same triumphant hour, that moment of victory, when we shall see and know that for us, too, *“It is finished”*—Mission Accomplished. At that moment, all that lies ahead of glory and life and immortality will be our very own. Forever! ♦



FAITH *in Action*



Bible Text: Acts 17:10–15 NKJV

10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.

14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.

15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

by RUTH E. SISSON

THE UNSTOPPABLE PAUL TRAVELS ON TO BEREA

 READ ACTS 17:10–15

Paul did not let his experience at Philippi discourage him in continuing on to Thessalonica. And he did not let his experience with the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica discourage him from going on to Berea.

Under cover of darkness Paul and Silas—and probably Timothy with them—slipped away to Berea.

It might sound like they went a mile or two down the road, and stopped at the next town. But Berea was sixty miles down the road. This was no pleasant evening stroll! But there was no other safe way to escape from the trouble-makers at Thessalonica.

1. Where did they go when they reached Berea? (17:10) _____
2. Why didn't Paul give up on the synagogues after all the bad experience?

Paul was convinced that this was the right pattern, “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16).

Luke speaks very highly of the believers in Berea.

3. What was the result of Paul's preaching in Berea? (17:12)

At Berea, Paul's perseverance was rewarded. Instead of the usual opposition, he found an eager enthusiasm for the Word of God. Even more important, they were not taking it just at Paul's say so. They must have been exceptionally receptive, fair minded, and willing to study the Scriptures—all essential qualities if one is to understand God's knowledge. They listened eagerly to Paul and “searched the Scriptures daily” (17:11). They looked into the Scriptures themselves. They were checking up on Paul and Silas, to be sure that they were telling them the truth.



Berea was home of Sopater (Acts 20:4). He may have been a convert from Paul's first visit to the city.

Because of this investigative attitude and eager inquisitiveness, Luke describes them as *"more noble"* than the Jews in Thessalonica. The word *"noble"* does not mean aristocratic by birth. Rather, they were showing their noble mindedness by not allowing prejudice to close their minds to the truth. How this spirit must have encouraged Brother Paul! Here were brothers and sisters who loved God's Word enough to look into it for themselves, and to look diligently.

This was the same approach the Apostle Paul later recommended to the Thessalonians, perhaps thinking about the noble Bereans. He wrote: *"Test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good"* (1 Thess. 5:21 NLT). In other words, check it out to be sure that what you are hearing is true to the Scriptures.

Those who honestly want to know what God has said will look and read for themselves. If it will not stand examination in the light of the Bible, it must be discarded, however time honored.

Jews and Gentiles Believed

Luke notes that from among the Jews many believed—perhaps even a majority. There seemed to be no opposition in Berea. Also *"of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."* The believers *"included outstanding Greek women and a goodly number of men"* (17:12 Berkeley).

Apparently these noble-minded Jews were not upset or jealous when Gentiles believed. Perhaps in searching the Scriptures they had learned that God's promise was to *"all"* the families of the earth. *"In every nation"* those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted (Acts 10:34–35).

Chased by Trouble

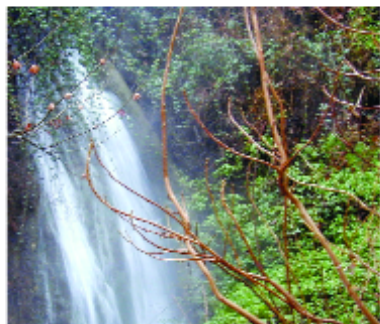
4. Who disturbed the peace in Berea? (17:13) _____

5. What was the complaint of the Thessalonian Jews against Paul? (17:13) _____

6. What did the brethren do to save Paul from harm? (17:14) _____

We can almost see the reaction of these hateful, exasperated Thessalonian Jews, upon learning that Paul had left for Berea. We can almost see them putting on their robes and marching down the 60-mile road to Berea, bent on all the mischief they could devise. Did he think he could run away from them? They would teach him a lesson!

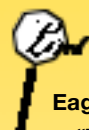
What was Paul's chief evil? That he preached *"the Word of God"* (17:13).



(left) Berea Spring—*"place of many waters"*
Few remains, aside from several inscriptions, have been found at Berea.



Zealous believers in Berea study the Scriptures



A closer look

Eager Believers!

"They searched the Scriptures daily..." (17:11)

It was the plan taught by Jesus: *"Search the Scriptures"* (John 5:39). In other words, know what you believe, and why! Check it out! *"Prove all things"* (1 Thess. 5:21). Know the evidence that underlies what you believe. Your beliefs are too important to take for granted.

The teaching of the Apostle Paul stirred up these zealous believers to find out what the Scriptures taught. They wanted to know for themselves. Such zealous study was bound to bear fruit.

We can imagine how their eagerness encouraged the Apostle Paul. *"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica."* There are not many comparisons in Scripture, but this one stands out commending the Bereans. Realizing that *"not many noble are called"* (1 Cor. 1:26), Paul appreciated these truehearted ones. Whatever their natural bent, they were diligent in their study of the Scriptures, and eager in applying what they learned.

Are you a Berean?



Insight

Anything New? (17:21)

The Athenians had a modern trait: they had a fascination for anything new!

It is one thing to treat an old truth in a fresh, vital, new way. It was quite another to be always looking for something new, different, exciting, as though one's only purpose was to acquire information.

Paul's commitment was to the Scriptures, and he was seeking those whose interest in life went deeper than the fascination level. He was talking about serious issues. He was teaching the absolute truth of the Word of God. And he was looking for those who would appreciate his message because it was founded on facts.

The Apostle Paul later wrote about people who were *"ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the Truth."* (2 Tim. 3:7). If this described any of the Athenians, it is not likely they were among the believers. Athens was a city of intellectuals, and intellectuals tended to appreciate profundity more than truth.

Bible Text: Acts 17:16–22 NKJV

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

18 Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?"

20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean."

21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.



Did you know...

Athens

Athens was already an old city when Paul saw it. Founded some 1100 years before the birth of Christ, it was occupied almost continually as a Greek city. Today, even though it is the capital of Greece, the heart of the city is sufficiently cleared for the great monuments of its classical past to be visible.

Of all the buildings that cram the Acropolis, the greatest is the Parthenon, the temple of Athene, the city's patron goddess, built in 447 BC. At the foot of the Acropolis, cutting into its southern slope is the theatre of Dionysus, where the great dramas of classical Athens were staged. Northwest of the Acropolis lies the Agora, the great Athenian marketplace, adorned with public buildings and colonnades. In the Agora the Apostle Paul entered into daily debate during his stay in Athens with those who chanced to be there, including philosophers of the Epicurean and Stoic schools, both of which had their headquarters in Athens (17:17–18).

Although the Athenians felt themselves religious, Apoloniuss the philosopher, a contemporary of Paul, rebuked them for their "lascivious jigs at the festival of Dionysus and for their love of human slaughter in the gladiatorial games" (*The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, Tyndale House Publishers).

They did not want it themselves, and they did not want anyone else to have it either. How like those, of whom Jesus said, "*You entered not in yourselves, and those that were entering in you hindered*" (Luke 11:52).

While the troublemakers from Thessalonica were making their way to Berea, some swift messengers must have carried word to the Berea brethren of what was about to happen. We don't have the whole story, but apparently some quick thinking Bereans succeeded in throwing the persecutors completely off course by appearing to put Paul on a ship. Instead, they set him on the road to Athens. Meanwhile Silas and Timothy stayed behind with the Bereans to instruct, teach, and encourage.

The result? The work went forward uninterrupted. God was directing it.

On to Athens



READ ACTS 17:16–21

In Paul's day, Athens was still a great city, though most of its glory was in the past. Some 600 years before Paul's time, it had been a world leader in art and philosophy. It was still a center of culture and learning for the ancient world, standing among the greatest cities.

Though it had lost its drive and creativity, it still attracted curiosity seekers and philosophers. And it still nurtured the memory of its past. Its temples were still beautiful examples of the best in Greek architecture, and its university attracted talent from all over the empire.

Paganism Headquarters

When Paul reached Athens, he was alone. He could have holed up in an Athenian inn for a well-deserved rest while he waited for Silas and Timothy. But Paul was not the hole-up kind. He was a man of purpose. A new city was a new opportunity, and if he was going to reach any of these people, he needed to be preparing.

7. As Paul walked the streets of Athens while he waited for Silas and Timothy to arrive, what did he see? (17:16) _____

As Paul traveled around the city, He saw the beautiful buildings, and the temples. And the statues. And altars to idols. And idols! *And idols!* There were so many idols and altars to gods that it was said of Athens that it was easier to meet a god there than a man.

The city was full of images, idols, and the most degrading and immoral idolatry.

8. How did Paul feel about the idolatry in Athens? (17:16) _____

Then Paul came upon the ultimate altar, bearing this inscription: "*To the Unknown God*"! (17:23). Here was subject material for his sermon! Paul knew the God they didn't know, the one true and living God of heaven!

Paul was no stranger to idolatry. In Tarsus where he grew up, idolatry was a way of life. But even there, as a young Jew, he had come to hate it with every fiber of his soul. To see a city completely given over to idolatry stirred him to the core. Idols and images were dedicated to every conceivable aspect of life, from the stars to the underworld, from every conceivable virtue to every known vice. To think that with all this wealth of learning, people would be so foolish as to worship images made with their own hands! Dead gods.

A Culture Morally Bankrupt

Paul knew the Greco-Roman culture firsthand. He had grown up with it in Tarsus. He knew its literature and its moral bankruptcy. He also knew firsthand that "*the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God*" (1 Cor. 3:19). He knew firsthand that their philosophy had no solutions to life's problems, that

their religion was only a mockery, that the gods of Greece were lifeless pieces of wood or stone.

To Paul, Athens was the epitome of life without God.

9. Where did Paul go first to find an audience for his message? (17:17) _____

10. Who did he find there? _____

In talking with the Jews of Athens, Paul could at least find those who opposed idolatry. Here were some people who, at least in theory, worshiped the true God. Here was an audience where he could begin to talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ, to those who understood the basics of faith in God. We are not told how much success Paul had, or how many he convinced, but as usual they were firmly grounded Jews not ready to accept his teachings about Christ.

11. Where else did Paul teach? (17:17) _____

12. What was the attitude of some of the people who heard him? (17:18) _____

Paul was not one for giving up. He went on to the marketplace where he found others, *"devout persons,"* who were ready to talk.

The great Apostle had one gospel wherever he went, but unlike many preachers, he did not have any one-size-fits-all message. Even when he talked about Jesus, he had different approaches for different audiences. He tailored his message in an effort to get and hold their attention.

Paul's presence in Athens created a stir. People began talking—and as usual, criticizing. The two most prominent schools of Roman thought, the Epicureans and the Stoics, were also present. *"And some said, What will this babbler say?"* (17:18)

The intellectuals sneered. *"He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,"* they said, because he preached Jesus and the resurrection (17:18).

Paul could clearly say, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ"* (Rom. 1:16). And he meant it. The word used for *"foreign gods"* is the word usually translated *"devil"* or demons.



PHOTO COURTESY OF "BIBLE PLACES.COM"

The ruins of the Roman Forum In the great marketplace, adorned with public buildings and colonnades, Paul entered into daily debate 'with those who chanced to be there' during his stay in Athens.

More than Discussion

Like most educated people of their day, the Athenians loved to sit around and discuss. When they invited Paul to Mars' Hill, they didn't care whether his message was something to believe or not, they just loved to sit around and discuss new ideas. It was a prestigious citywide pastime. If you were educated and an intellectual, you gathered with the intellectuals at any opportunity, for a discussion.

Paul went to Mars' hill without the normal topics for discussion. He saw these intellectual pagans as people with great worldly knowledge and no knowledge of God.

But Paul had picked up an attention grabber that could not be improved: an



Insight

Epicurean or Stoic?

Athens boasted two schools of philosophers. The Epicureans were followers of one named Epicurus, who had taught that happiness is achieved by the pursuit of virtue and moral excellence. By Paul's time that teaching had degenerated into the grossest kind of sensuality and was interpreted as *"a good life."* The ultimate experience was pleasure, without regard to morals or virtue.

The Stoics, on the other hand, had higher moral standards but were totally pagan. They believed that everything is governed by fate. Veno, the first Stoic, committed suicide, and self-destruction was common among his followers. They had no god and no future.

Both views of life are still common today. Those who believe that pleasure is the ultimate experience, who recognize no God and no future life, are preoccupied with materialistic goals. Their philosophy of *"eat, drink, and be merry"* differs little from the Epicureans of Paul's day. Their counterpart are the Stoics, who are absorbed with learning and pride of intellect and are willing to trust themselves to the hands of a headless fate, also without God and without hope of future life.



Did you know...

Athens: Capital of Knowledge and Ignorance

If any city was on the map of the ancient world, it was Athens. The native home of Socrates and Plato, Athens was also the adopted home of Aristotle, Zeno, and Epicurus. Athens had come into the Roman Empire as a city in its own right, a city that Rome did not disturb out of respect for her illustrious past.

At the same time, Athens was a city of ignorance—ignorance of God. A center of learning of all kinds—mathematics, philosophy, logic, physics, biology, ethics, political science, art form and even democracy, it also represented a civilization that was spiritually bankrupt. The gods of Greece were as full of lust and greed as their makers, mere extensions of the human personality, thoroughly savage and immoral. Because the Greeks had no creed, no church, and no knowledge of the true and living God, they had no morals.

Bible Text: Acts 17:22–34 NKJV

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;

23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter."

33 So Paul departed from among them.

34 However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

altar the Athenians themselves had built and labeled "to the unknown God."

The Athenians were taking no chances. To keep in the good favor of the "higher powers," they built altars to every imaginable god and goddess. And just in case they had inadvertently omitted one—and that one might be responsible for putting them in harm's way—they erected this additional altar as comprehensive insurance.

No wonder Paul called them superreligious!

Paul spoke with boldness

 READ ACTS 17:22–31

Paul began with this line of approach: "*Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.*" It was a statement they could take as a compliment, if they chose. They were very religious, not considering the objects of their worship.

Then Paul proceeded to point out the altar with this singular inscription: "To the Unknown God."

Paul took this "unknown god"—unknown to them as a symbol of the true and living God of heaven, and when he was sure he had their attention, he continued his sermon, focusing on the "*God, who made the world and everything in it, ... Lord of heaven and earth*"—not an object set up on an altar, or fastened to a platform, carved out with human hands. What a contrast!

He "*does not dwell in temples made with hands*"—again a statement against the idols of Athens.

"*Nor is he worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.*" Without considering how the people would receive it, Paul was presenting the facts. Against their dead idols, he was teaching a living God. Against their hopeless despair, he was telling of absolute certainty. Against their vain philosophies, he was declaring solid truth.

The very temple of Mars stood as a monument to countless idols. On the rocky ledges to the south of the Acropolis were the works of all the Greek sculptors, and others who had been employed to adorn the temple. Everywhere one could see the work of

PHOTO COURTESY OF "BIBLE PLACES.COM"

(below) Mars Hill viewed from the Acropolis



A closer look

The Areopagus (Mars Hill)

"They brought him to the Areopagus" (17:19)

The term Areopagus (literally, *pagos* meaning a hill, and *Ares*, the Greek god of war) called Mars by the Romans.

"Mars Hill" was both a place and a group of people. The place lay northwest of the Acropolis in the middle of Athens, and served as a meeting place for the magistrates of public business and for courts of justice. It was also a university civic hall, where learned politicians, philosophers and orators "discussed" and exchanged ideas. It was reached by a staircase of sixteen worn steps hewn out of rock that led out of the marketplace and up the hill to the place where the court met.

Areopagus is also used of a group of people. Long before Paul's time, Athenian government had this council of the Areopagus, composed of elected officials. It grew into the Senate and supreme court of Athens. This court tried the most difficult transgressions and rewarded all kinds of virtues. The court was particularly sensitive to issues against the Greek gods and religions. Four centuries earlier this court had condemned Socrates for his out-of-line views.

When "*they brought him to the Areopagus,*" was Paul brought before the court, the Areopagites, or was he merely in the place where the court met?

It seems from the text that both are true. But in Paul's day, the council of the

Areopagus was apparently little more than a discussion forum with pseudo-official status. The intellectuals were checking him out, to see if his "new" religion was valid by their standards, and they were doing it in the time-honored setting on Mars Hill.

Did they favor his teaching? Not likely. We never hear of a church of Athens, as we do of a church in Corinth or Colosse. But we do know of one of the Areopagites, one named Dionysius, who became a believer and joined Paul's cause!

Paul's efforts bore fruit, even in Athens!

genius. Hundreds of idols seemed to leap out of the very stone.

Paul said it was all worthless, because the God that made the heavens did not need “temples made with hands” (17:24).

This God is the source of all nations of men (17:26)—Paul left no room for any idea that the Greeks were the “master race,” a theory which the Athenians cherished.

Unlike the gods of the Athenians, who had no power over any nation, the true God holds control over the rise and fall of nations (17:26).

This God is One whom they can seek and find—if only they will give up their idols and images, all of which were “unknown” gods.

This God is the source of our very life and being—“In him we live and move” (17:28).

Anyone hearing Paul’s address had no question about his beliefs. Having introduced the true God and His way of working, Paul proceeded to attack their idolatry.

Christians cannot be compromisers. The Greeks might think themselves highly educated, but they were ignorant of the true God and His simplest, most basic working.



Insight

Paul Addresses Pagans

Having been educated in Greek philosophy himself, Paul could meet the Athenians on their own ground. But rather than accuse them of idolatry and ignorance, he artfully directed his words to show them the positive side of the true God, the Great Creator of all life, all nature, the earth and everything in it. Such a statement totally ruled out their multitude of gods, including the “unknown god” (17:23).

“You are correct,” said Paul in effect, “in admitting that there is a God you do not know.” And he went on to capitalize on this one God—unknown to them but very well known to His own, and One whom they needed to know above all others. “Let me talk to you about Him,” he pleaded (17:23).

Paul did not immediately put them on the defensive, but instead found some common point of meeting and began at that point to present his beliefs. Realizing that the philosophers’ greatest concern was with the origin of things, Paul centered his discussion on God’s power and sovereignty as the Creator of all (17:24; Rom. 1:20).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF “BIBLE PLACES.COM”



(below) The ancient Agora and restored Stoa of Attalus seen from Mars Hill. Recent research suggests that it may have been here that Paul addressed the Athenian thinkers (the Areopagus).



Mars Hill: A barren hill, 370 feet high, northwest of the famous Acropolis in Athens. It was dedicated to Ares, the god of war. The elevated place became the seat of the Greek council, the Areopagus. Because of the Athenians’ sudden interest in his message, Paul was taken there to clarify his mysterious teachings (Acts 17:16-34).



Hundreds of homes and buildings had to be removed before the ruins of ancient Athens could be excavated beginning in the 1800s.



A closer look

God is Patient, But...(17:31)

Paul explained God's patience with the idolatry and wickedness of the people of Athens. He also made known that God was going to take action, and that His judge was already appointed in the person of Jesus Christ (17:31). And the next astonishing fact, which they refused to believe, was that this man had been confirmed in this appointment by being raised from the dead.

What should they do? They were to "repent" (17:30), because repenting was the only way to prepare for the coming Judgment. What was their response? Just what might be expected of intellectuals who were very confident of their knowledge base. *"When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'we will hear you again on this matter.'"*

The Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but did not have any idea of a resurrection of the body. To them this was an absurd notion. Because of their disbelief, they did what others have been doing since their time. They began to mock. Rather than cast his pearls before swine, Paul discontinued his message—he would save his jewels for those who wanted to hear them.

Would the God of heaven overlook the ignorance of these educated people? In the past He had, but such time was past. Now was the time to repent, to acknowledge their error, and turn to the true God (v. 30).

It was like exploding a bomb. *"Because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world"* (v. 31). Paul did not say when this would happen, but he caught their attention with the certainty that it would happen.

Paul understood the plan of God, that the world will be judged, that God is righteous, and that right will triumph. He understood that the Day would come when God will expose the secrets of men's hearts, and only what is on His side will stand.

Finally, Paul brought his discourse around to Jesus, the coming Judge of all the earth, who had been crucified and resurrected.

Paul did more than say that Jesus had been resurrected. He said that Jesus' resurrection was visible proof that God approved of Jesus and would fulfill His plans.

Reaction

13. What was the reaction of the people when Paul mentioned the resurrection? (17:32–33) _____

14. What did others say? _____

Both the Epicureans and Stoics would have ridiculed Paul's teaching of the resurrection. But Paul was speaking for the handful who would listen and follow.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *"Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called"* (1 Cor. 1:26), he was well aware that his message would not have its greatest impact among the worldly wise. They had little room for God. Their lives were too full, their minds too preoccupied with the knowledge of this world.

We never hear of any strong Christian Church in Athens during the first several hundred years of Christianity. A few believed, but Paul did not expect—or see—a mass conversion. ♦

to be continued



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 (or Nisan) 1, the first day of the Sacred New Year, begins this year on Saturday evening, April 9, and continues

through Sunday, April 10, Bible time being measured from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). It was the pattern of the ancient Hebrew people to begin the new year from the first occurrence of the new moon after the Spring Equinox. 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 Thursday evening, April 21. 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 Sunday, April 24. 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,"* 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 12. ♦

COLORS

1. What colors of yarn were used to make the curtains of the tabernacle?
2. What color was the manna that God provided for the Israelites while they were in the wilderness?
3. What was the color of the cord that the spies had Rahab tie to her window?
4. Lydia of Thyatira was converted in Philippi. She was a dealer in what color of cloth?
5. Zechariah had a vision of a man on a horse among the myrtle trees. What color was the horse?
6. What was the color of the priest's ephod?
7. What was the name of the Sea that Moses and the Israelites miraculously crossed when leaving Egypt?
8. The Psalmist compared himself to an olive tree of what color, growing "in the house of God"?
9. What was the color of the robe that Jesus' tormentors placed on Him in mockery after beating Him?
10. What is the color of the symbolic fabric worn by the saints at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb?



When Eli saw Hannah praying in the temple for a son, what did he think about her?



RICHES

1. If you've accumulated a great deal of money you have become wealthy. According to Proverbs 23:5 what is true about wealth?
2. Why is wisdom of greater value than money?
3. In James 2, how was partiality being showed to one who was rich?
4. According to Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:10 and 11, can possessions of silver and abundance satisfy?
5. True or False? Money is the root of all evil.
6. What is to be chosen above great riches?
7. What king gave lavishly of his riches to honor God even after God had denied him a very special blessing?
8. What did the Psalmist say about those who boast about their great riches and call their property by their names?
9. Why did the young ruler feel very sad after asking advice from Jesus?
10. What two financial extremes did the Wise man wish to avoid?

SAMUEL

1. What was the name of Samuel's father?
2. Of what tribe was Samuel?
3. What did Hannah promise to do if God would give her a male child?
4. Why did Hannah name her son 'Samuel'?
5. How many children did Hannah have?
6. What did Hannah bring to Samuel every year?
7. What did Eli tell Samuel to say to God, when God called him?
8. When God spoke to Samuel in the night, what did He tell him?
9. What did Samuel eventually become?

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

COLORS

1. Blue, purple and scarlet (Ex. 26:1)
2. White (Ex. 16:31)
3. Scarlet (Joshua. 2:1, 17-18)
4. Purple (Acts 16:13-14)
5. Red (Zech 1:7-8)
6. Blue (Ex. 28:31)
7. Red (Ex. 14:21; 13:18; 15:4)
8. Green (Ps. 52:8)
9. Purple (John 19:5)
10. White (Rev. 19:8)

RICHES

1. "Riches certainly make themselves wings and fly away."
2. "For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense; but the

PICTURE: Eli thought Hannah was drunk because she was distraught and prayed so earnestly. (1 Sam. 1:12-13)

excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." (Eccl. 7:12)

3. In the meetings the wealthy were given a place of honor while the poor were asked to sit in the less favorable places (Jas. 2:3)
4. No. Wealth cannot bring true happiness.
5. False. The love of money is the root of all evil. (1 Tim. 6:10)
6. A good name (Prov. 22:1)
7. David gave lavishly for the building of the temple of God, even after God had told him he could not build it (1 Chron. 29:10-16)
8. None can deliver himself from death (Ps. 49:6, 11-12)
9. Because he had great riches and was not willing to give them up to follow Jesus (Luke 18:18-24)
10. "Give me neither poverty nor riches" (Prov. 30:8).

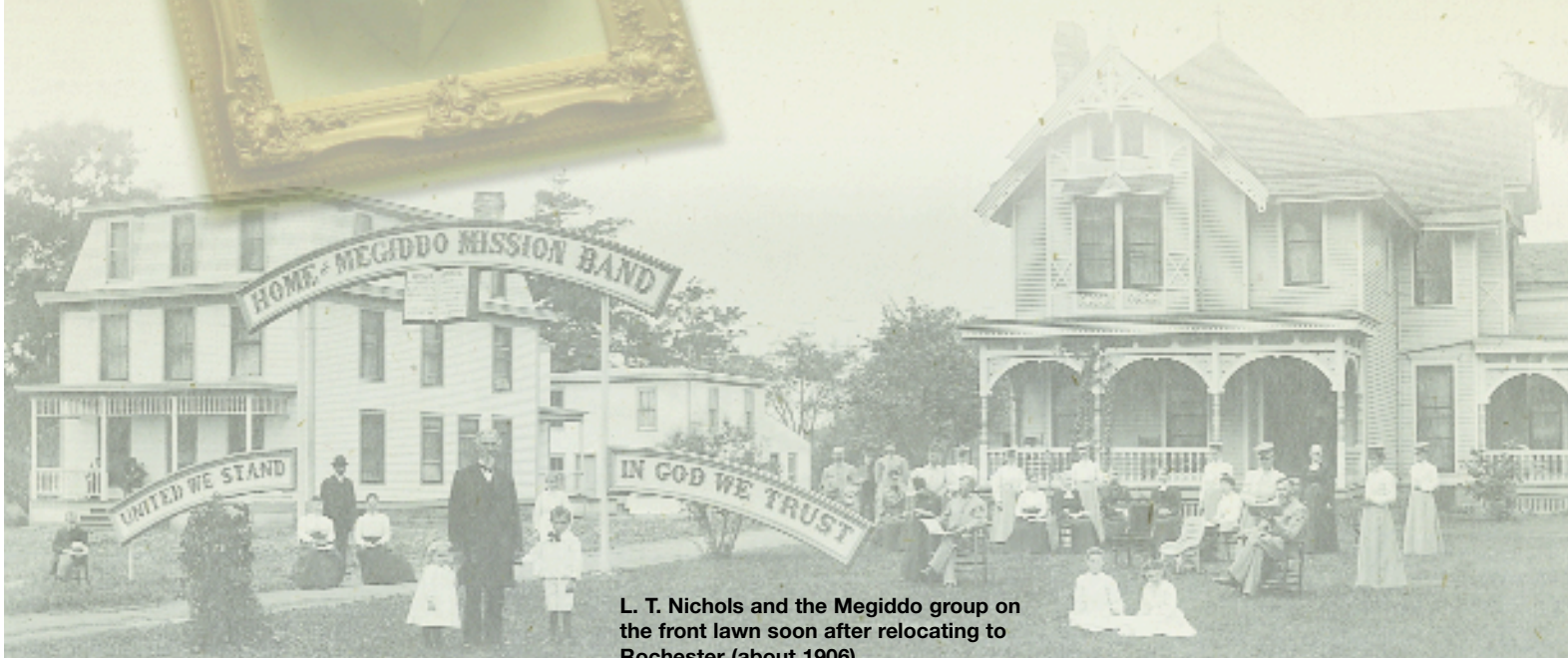
SAMUEL

1. Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:19-20)
2. The tribe of Levi (1 Chron. 6:36-38)
3. She would dedicate him to the Lord all his days, and never cut his hair (1 Sam. 1:9-11)
4. Because she asked him of the Lord (1 Sam. 1:20)
5. Six, including Samuel (1 Sam. 2:21)
6. A coat (1 Sam. 2:18-19)
7. "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." (1 Samuel 3:9)
8. That Eli's sons would die (1 Sam. 3:11-14)
9. A prophet (1 Sam. 3:20)

History of *Megiddo* CHURCH



- ◆ Founded in 1880 by L. T. Nichols
- ◆ Located permanently in Rochester, New York, in 1904
- ◆ Incorporated: 1958



L. T. Nichols and the Megiddo group on the front lawn soon after relocating to Rochester (about 1906)

**Key Dates in the life of L. T. Nichols,
founder of the Megiddo Church**

- 1844:** Born in Elkhart, Indiana
- 1849:** Nichols family relocates to frontier state of Wisconsin, where life was rugged and difficult.
- 1854:** Young L. T. (age 10) attends Christmas party, where Santa Claus' false face falls off, revealing Deacon Graves—starts him questioning fundamentals of religious beliefs.
- 1855:** L. T. is carrying Bible to school, studies and talks to classmates during recess. Vows that he will never lie or steal, or take the name of God in vain, or use tobacco or alcoholic beverages
- 1864:** Is married to Harriet Griffis
- 1864:** Is drafted into the army only weeks after marriage; refuses to kill his fellowmen based on convictions of Bible teaching; when his life is threatened for his stand, he appeals to President Lincoln and is allowed to serve in the military hospital.
- 1865–1875:** Studies Bible intensely, seeking correct understanding of it
- 1869:** Debates publicly in Wrightstown, Wisconsin. Subject: The resurrection
- 1868–1874:** Settles in Fon du Lac, Wisconsin, circuit preacher for nearby towns
- 1870:** Debates publicly at Kasson, Minnesota. Subject: The Bible is all one harmonious teaching
- 1874:** Relocates to McMinnville, Oregon, for opportunity to preach; holds annual camp meetings for followers
- 1877:** Debates with Professor Campbell at Salem, Oregon. Subjects: Is man mortal or immortal by nature? Is the resurrection physical? Will there be a literal kingdom on earth? Maud Hembree (his successor-to-be) is converted.
- 1878:** Publicly debates at Salem, Oregon. Subject: Is the sabbath observance binding now?
- 1880:** Discovers cornerstone Bible teaching: that one's salvation depends on knowing and obeying every command of Scripture, as expounded by Jesus.
- 1882:** Travels east through Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio
- 1882:** Returns to Oregon
- 1883:** Leaves Oregon, travels to Texas, then settles in Ellington, Minnesota
- 1883–1900:** Serves several congregations in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois as traveling circuit preacher
- 1887:** Holds public discussion in Owatonna, Minnesota. Subject: Is the Mosaic Law binding today?
- 1888:** Establishes church at Barry, Illinois, places church under the direction of Maud Hembree
- 1891:** Makes 6-month trip by ship to England and Wales in an effort to persuade Christadelphians of his convictions about the Bible and its teachings

CHAPTER 1

Beginnings

The story of the Megiddo Church begins with the vision of its founder. L. T. Nichols (L. T., the initials of his father, was his only given name) was born in Elkhart, Indiana, on October 1, 1844. Five years later his pioneering parents settled in the frontier State of Wisconsin, where he literally grew up with the country.

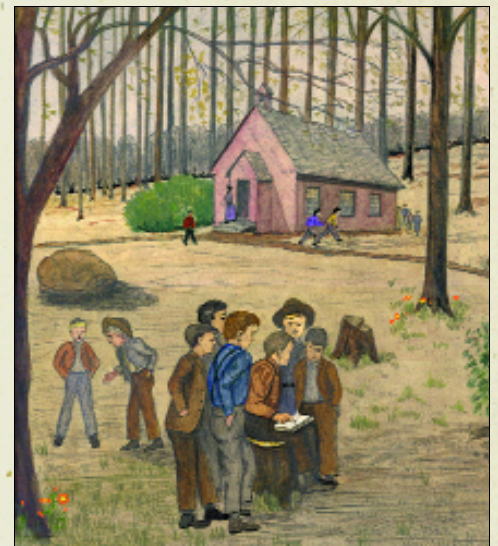
In his own words:

"Life, to me, began with earnest toil. In my northern Wisconsin home there were no luxuries, and few of even the necessities of life; but love lightened the toil, and contentment made happy its hours. A boy of fourteen, with only what I could earn by daily toil; an invalid father, a devoted mother, a loving sister, dependent to a great extent on my exertions; I faced the battle of life with few hours to spend in the schoolroom, and none within a college hall. While other boys were at play, I was poring over my books. Truth was the gem for which I sought—and my soul's cry was: 'Oh, tell me where can it be found?' I started out in life determined to reject error, it mattered not in what deceptive form it might appear, or however honored by long acceptance."

Having a profound reverence for God and the Bible while still very young, he made the Bible his constant companion. At school, he was dubbed "Elder Nichols" by less serious classmates. Already he was beginning to challenge some of the orthodoxy in which he had been reared. Not only did he find it at odds with the Scriptures but revolting to any sense of reason and justice. The result was a skepticism that rejected everything he could not find taught in the Bible. The process was simple: whatever the time-honored belief, if he could find it taught in the Bible, he accepted it. If not, be it ever so hallowed and respectable, it had to go. This forthright honesty set the pattern of things to come.

In his teens he was locally known as the "boy preacher." In the schoolhouse, which served the frontier community as church and public forum, he often used the Bible to challenge local ministers. On one occasion a visiting preacher solemnly warned the congregation against "the devil who goes about with a black Bible under his arm." But he held fast to the principle he had found in Scripture: "*Let God be true, [though] every man a liar*" (Rom. 3:4).

When still in his teens, a minister representing a large New York City church happened to hear him preaching and recognized his talent. What salary would lure him to take the big city pulpit? Although needing the money to supply the necessities of the family, he refused every offer, fearing the obligation would bind him to a system he was convinced was error. Like the Apostle Paul, he resolved to preach the gospel without charge. In that way he would be free to speak the



Nichols talks to classmates at school

truth as he found it in the Bible, whether others would listen or not.

While he could have obtained a formal seminary education, he did not want the influence of human philosophies. His autobiography describes his reasoning:

TRUTH DOES NOT CHANGE

Do you ever talk to anyone about the really BIG issues—life, death, God? If you do, chances are you get as many different views as you have voices. Of course each feels that his/her belief is “right,” the others are “wrong.”

But you might meet (or be) one who believes ANY belief is all right if it works for you, that none is any more “right” than another. If you’re comfortable with what you believe, that is all that matters. Nothing is absolute, nothing is really true.

The reality is, however, that certain things are true and certain things are not, whether the subject is history, or math, or science, or religion. For example, I might tell you that San Francisco is located on the East Coast of the United States, and that US Highway 1 will take you there. This statement is either true or false. If you try it out, you will find that it is false. And even if I continue to say that it is true, the fact will not change.

Or I might say that water is a combination of the elements oxygen and nitrogen. Here is another statement that can clearly be proven false. I may continue to say that it is true, even after the evidence has been clearly demonstrated, but the fact will not change.

The same is true in religion. A certain belief is either true or false, and the criteria is not what you think or what I think. What our Creator, the author of the Bible, has stated is true, and you and I have no power to change it. We may reject it, but that does not change the facts.

Such was the reasoning that the young L. T. Nichols followed as he avidly pursued his study of Scripture.

As a result of his lifework, the Megiddo Church believes:

- ◆ that God in Heaven is the omnipotent Creator of all life, all being, all creation
- ◆ that the Bible is the only source of knowledge about God and His plan, and is without error in the form in which it was originally written;
- ◆ that the Bible presents one God, one faith, and one way of salvation
- ◆ that the Bible is in no way responsible for the maze of false religions which have been handed out in its name;
- ◆ that the Bible reveals God’s plan of salvation and that worthy individuals can participate in that plan and receive eternal life in Christ’s Kingdom
- ◆ that obedience to the principles of the Bible is the law of life and the only means of escape from death.

Continue reading in this series to see how this powerful system of beliefs developed. —*The Editor*.

“I looked over the field of human thought to see by what means I could accomplish the greatest good, and decided that of all the literature of earth the Bible contains the requisite knowledge which benefits humanity for both this life and the one to come. On the very threshold of my investigations I was met with much to appall and bewilder an even older head: over one thousand faiths in the land, all teaching different things, and all claiming to speak the words of an infallible God, the words of Holy Writ, yet that very Bible teaching that all its sayings are Yea and Amen, not Yea and Nay (2 Cor. 1:19–20), and that its followers must be perfectly joined together in the same mind, all speaking the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10)!

“With such a state of affairs, I could not wonder that the world was turning infidel. I did not wonder that the inquirer after truth, bewildered by the confusion arising from jarring sects, began to doubt the infallibility of this blessed Word, and infidelity was adding thousands to its ranks. Either the Bible was Divine, the work of an infallible God, or the work of fallible man; there was no halfway ground upon which to stand. I met prominent infidels and I could not answer the charges brought against it. I saw that the wise of the world, the great teachers of the day, those trained in the theological schools of the land, could not meet them. I saw that the time-honored creeds of the day would not stand the test before the ‘bar of reason and evidence.’ If all others had failed, what could I do? I trembled at the magnitude of the undertaking. Thus passed days and weeks of anxious study, when often upon bended knees and with falling tears I prayed to God for light.

“One day while carefully reading, my eye caught a striking testimony in Prov. 2:3–5, ‘Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.’ How the reading of these testimonies impressed my mind! I must search as for hid treasures to ever find the knowledge of God.

“I knew that the world would only sneer at the thought, but others had been sneered at, and had succeeded for a lesser prize.

“It has been truly said: ‘Every great cause for which heroes have bled and brave souls have suffered, has once been on coward tongues an impossibility.’ I need not be discouraged because I stood alone. If I could but learn to read aright I could grasp the key of knowledge that would open the door to the storehouse of truth and enable me to grasp her treasures—more precious than the rubies of earth, more to be desired than the gold of the Transvaal.”¹

¹ Transvaal, former province of South Africa: Most “important to the Transvaal’s future were discoveries of diamonds and gold deposits (1868–74) along the Vaal River and other sites, which heightened British interest in gaining control of the region.” —*Encyclopædia Britannica*

to be continued

Heart or Mind?

"I can't quite get the meaning of 'heart' and 'mind' in the Bible. Is there some way you can tell me in layman terms exactly what 'heart' means in the Bible? Sometimes it speaks of 'heart' and sometimes of 'mind.' So what is the mind? Is it the thoughts that we think of all the time? I would appreciate your answer on the matter."

A study of the use of the terms "heart" and "mind" in Scripture leads us to the conclusion that the terms are used interchangeably. However, "heart" seems to lean more to the emotional part of our thinking, while "mind" emphasizes the intellectual part. When Jesus told us we must love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, He was saying that we must love God with all that we have and are, that is, with all our heart (emotions), soul (our whole being—actions and deeds), mind (thinking processes) (Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; Matt. 22:37). These terms leave nothing to the imagination. God wants our all. And lest there be any misunderstanding that He might mean less, He includes one more "all" in the list: "with all thy strength" No half-hearted love here!

It is also interesting to note that in the original Greek, the three words, "heart," "mind," and "soul" are preceded by the word "whole." Can we miss the point of just how inclusive these passages are, how that *all*—including our salvation—hinges on our obedience to this command?

In the New Testament, heart is used 37 times in this way, and mind is used five times. The word *heart* comes from the Greek word *kardia*, from which we derive the familiar term cardiac. The Greek word *kardia* is defined as "1) the heart; 1a) that organ in the animal body which is the center of the circulation of the blood, and hence was regarded as the seat of physical life. 1b) denotes the center of all physical and spiritual life; 2a) the vigor and sense of physical life; 2b) the passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors;...of the soul as the seat of the sensibilities, affections, emotions, desires, appetites, passions" (*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*).

In classical Greek, the word *kardia* was used of the physical organ we call the heart, also of the heart as the source of emotions, and also as a figure of the core of anything (e.g., the heart of the matter, the center of a kernel of grain as its heart, etc.). In the Septuagint (a translation of the Old Testament into Greek prior to the birth of Christ), *kardia* was used to refer to the totality of man's "inner being" (see Deuteronomy 6:5; 1 Kings 8:18). In the New Testament, heart is used as the seat of spiritual activity, as the custodian of emotions, intellect, and so on. It "summarizes the totality of man's inner being and nature" (from *The Complete Biblical Library*). The word *mind* comes from the Greek word *dianoia*, and is defined as "1) the mind as a faculty of understanding, feeling, desiring; 2) understanding; 3) mind, i.e., spirit; way of thinking and feeling; 4) thoughts, either good or bad" (*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*).

"In the New Testament, the writers used the word as associated with the internal ability of man to express thoughts, desires, and feelings (Luke 10:27)....Through this avenue of the mind he is able to seek His Help and Assistance. A disciple must be renewing his or her mind on a continual basis in

order to keep this channel of communication open (Rom. 12:2). *Dianoia* is used in reference to the mind as the seat of understanding, emotions and desire in Matt. 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27 and Eph. 1:18. In 1 John 5:20 it refers to discernment; in Colossians 1:21 and Luke 1:51 to a way of thinking" (*The Complete Biblical Library*).

Paul, in Philippians 4:7, prays that God will "guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus," using the two terms together.

The Bible uses the term "heart" frequently in a context that shows it refers to the center of thought and feeling and not the physical organ that pumps our blood.

For example:

"The hearts of the people are hardened" (Matt. 13:15 NLB).

The heart can depart from Christ (Jer. 17:5).

The heart can love (Deut. 6:5).

The heart reasons (Eccl. 7:25).

The heart can be hardened (Ex. 9:35).

The heart can imagine (1 Cor. 2:9).

The heart can be hot (Ps. 39:3).

The heart can be broken (Ps. 51:17).

The heart can be honest and good (Luke 8:15).

God knows the heart (Jer. 17:10).

The heart can be overcharged with worldly things (Luke 21:34).

The heart can be slow to believe (Luke 24:25).

Our heart can burn within us (Luke 24:32).

The heart can be filled with sorrow (Rom. 9:2).

The heart can be single (Col. 3:22).

One can be cut to the heart (Acts 7:54).

The foolish heart can be darkened (Rom. 1:21).

The heart can lust (Matt. 5:28).

The heart can be proud. "Everyone that is proud in heart is abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 16:5).

One can obey from the heart (Rom. 6:17).

The heart can wish (Ps. 73:7).

The heart can believe (Acts 8:37).

The heart has afflictions and anguish (2 Cor. 2:4).

The heart can be enlarged (2 Cor. 6:11).

The heart can commune (Ps. 4:4).

The heart can care (2 Cor. 8:6).

The heart can err (Heb. 3:10).

The heart can be deceived (Jer. 17:9).

The heart [affections] can be wide open (2 Cor. 6:11).

The heart can condemn self (1 John 3:21).

One's heart will be with one's treasure (Luke 12:34).

God knows the secrets of the heart (Ps. 44:21).

Jesus Himself gives us good reason to give attention to the condition of our spiritual heart (mind), because "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). ♦



Did You Say, *Happy* NEW YEAR?

I sometimes wonder if “Happy New Year!” isn’t for many people a 21st century oxymoron (an oxymoron is a contradictory pair of words, like “awfully good,” or “pretty ugly”). How can the new year be happy in the midst of suffering, doubt, cynicism, and corruption; in a culture where virtue is despised? How can those who worship the gods of money, power and lust be happy? Where is happiness for those whose dominant emotions are fear and hate? What will make the new year any different from the old one?

by Gerald R. Payne

*T*hank God, we don’t have to have our lives dictated by the present culture. We don’t have to be part of the fear, doubt and cynicism around us. Why not welcome the new year as God-given, making the best of everything and not letting anything make the worst of us? Then “Happy New Year” will be a reality, because everything that happens will be helping us toward the Kingdom of God!

Not what happens *to* us but what happens *in* us—that is what makes or breaks our happiness.

Even though we have to live in a world of hate and strife and fear, we do not have to let the world live in us. Else we are sure to be all tangled up, half slave and half free.

As Christians, our happiness can be independent of our environment. Our human life moves on two levels: a surface level and a deeper, sub-level. On the surface level are our encounters with the culture, statecraft, and applied science. On this level, labor, money and “things” concern us. On this level we buy, and sell, and gain or lose. We are alert, active, eager, and the days always seem too few and too short.

Then there is the deeper, sub-level of life. This level remains the same in spite of changes on the surface. On this deeper level are the secret sources of our strength and inner confidences. Here our hope, our faith, and aspirations are the important issues. On this level are our life purposes and our higher commitments. The words of Jesus, the Prophets, and Apostles all speak to this deeper level of life.

If our religion moves only on the first level, it is only an outward, social rite, a form devoid of religious quality. And, being on the surface, it is constantly exposed to the elements around us.

What we are in our deeper life determines what we do on the surface. If we have inner peace and contentment deep down where our real life is, surface storms will not shake us. Time will have no tyranny over us. The opinions of others will not affect us. Those who would attack the Bible and the foundations of our faith will not touch us because we give them no access to the deep, sub-level of our lives.

Our happiness is largely, I am convinced, a matter of choice. If we are to have a happy new year, we must be victors over time, not victims of it. We might think of time as simply raw material. It is our task to apply the energy and the art to make something beautiful of it, or it will make something ugly of us. How often we see people after a long time and wonder what time has done to them. Some faces are exquisitely carved, while others are cold and hard, with lines of cynicism or sadness.

“The days of our years” fly away so quickly. What are we doing with them? We can live every day on the surface and be affected by the things around us, or we can live every day supported by those deep, sub-surface qualities of hope and faith in God.

We can live every day as a God-given gem out of eternity. We can be a little kinder than necessary, every day.

Let this new year, if God grant it, be a consecrated year. Then it will be a *happy* year filled with joyful service to God and to one another as we anticipate the indescribable happiness God has in store for every faithful one. Yes, He is waiting with blessings beyond anything we have ever seen or heard (1 Cor. 2:9), beyond anything we can ask or imagine! (Eph. 3:20).

I am sincere when I say it: *Happy* New Year! ♦

Pain of Talebearing

(continued from Jan/Feb issue of Megiddo Message)

The blue car in the Blanchard yard was the cause of many excited remarks as the Johnsons continued down the road. Suddenly, Mom suggested, "Dad, let's drive back and stop long enough to greet the Turners." Melissa and Ann shrank against the car cushions, frightened at the thought of actually meeting the "jailbird." But the other children who had heard none of the gossip about the new neighbors were eager to meet the new family.

Dad turned at the crossroads. Soon the Johnson car was parked near the little brown house.

Ann squeezed her hands nervously as she watched her father and mother get out of the car and step up on the front porch. Dad knocked at the door.

It seemed to Ann that it was a long time before the door opened. Jailbird people would be suspicious, and wouldn't be quick to open the door!

She heard a man's voice saying, "Good afternoon."

Then she heard Mom say, "We're the Peter Johnsons, your neighbors up the road half a mile. We just wanted to stop a few minutes to welcome you to our neighborhood."

From inside the house came a woman's voice, but Ann could not tell what she was saying.

Soon the door closed behind Mom and Dad.

While her brothers looked curiously about, hoping to see signs of future friends, Ann fearfully hoped that her parents would soon come safely out of that house. She was frightened at the idea of Mom and Dad being in there with a jailbird and his wife—and very likely, with those four bad sons.

"Say, look over there—on the porch," exclaimed Mark. "Look at those guns! Three of them!"

Ann looked in the same direction. She stared in terror. Three big guns! She scarcely heard Stephen saying, "The Turners must like to hunt. That's a rifle and a couple of double-barreled shotguns."

Ann had her own ideas about the guns. Of course, a jailbird family would have guns. But not for hunting ducks and pheasants!

She put her hands to her face and began to cry with fright.

"Why, Ann," exclaimed Stephen in surprise, "what in the world is the matter with you?"

Ann had no answer. But Melissa piped out, "I know! She's scared! She's scared—of the—jailbird."

"Jailbird," puzzled Mark and Stephen together. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, we promised not—to tell—anybody. "

"Not to tell *what*?"

"Oh—we can't tell anybody!" By now both Ann and Melissa were crying.

At just that moment, Mom and Dad stepped out on the porch, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Turner. Ann could see only four blurry figures because her eyes were so full of tears, but she did hear Mom saying very plainly, "Goodbye now. I'll be sending a hot dish over for you folks tomorrow. And then we'll all see you Sunday morning."

The Flourishing "Grapevine"

The Turners are going to make wonderful neighbors!" announced Mom as the Johnsons drove on their way to the Reynolds Farm. "Mr. Turner has been a school principal all his life, and he's come here to retire because both of them have always wanted to live on a little farm. Both of them were born on farms in North Dakota. Mrs. Turner has been a piano teacher. They are Christian people, and they are coming with us to church on Sunday."

Ann and Melissa looked first at their Mother, and then at each other. "Guess I sure wasted a lot on being scared," whispered Melissa to her sister.

"Don't they have any children to play with?" Paul inquired of his mother.

He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back upon him who starts it rolling. Proverbs 26:27 (RSV)

"Well, hardly," replied Mom. "They have one son. He's married and lives in Chicago. They expect him here for a visit this fall, during hunting season because he just loves to hunt pheasant."

"But even though the Turners don't have children your age, you'll have happy times with them. I think they are a delightful couple, and I'm just thrilled to have them as neighbors. You children will be interested to know that they are going to raise a few Angora rabbits, and they are going to have some goats because Mr. Turner prefers to drink goat milk. They are going to raise some pedigreed dogs, too."

All the way to the Reynolds farm, Mom and Dad reported happily about what they had learned about their new neighbors.

Somehow, Ann did not have as much fun as usual with the Reynolds children. She kept remembering the jailbird story, and she was glad when at last they were home, and Mom came tiptoeing into her room to say good night.

"Oh, Mom," Ann whispered, "I wish I hadn't told that jailbird story!"

"Yes, I'm sure you do. But let's see what you can think of to do to help make it right."

"I could go over and apologize to the Turners."

"Do you think that would make matters right?"

Ann pondered a while, then said, "Maybe it would do more good if I went and told the Schramm twins the truth about the Turners—so they won't go spreading that jailbird story."

So it was that when Mr. Johnson drove to town on an errand the next day, Ann rode with him as far as the Schramm farm. It didn't take Ann long to tell the twins and their mother that Mr. Turner was *not* a jailbird, but that instead the new neighbors were good people. When she had finished, she said, "I hope you girls didn't go tell anybody else that jailbird story."

"Oh," said one of the twins, "we told Gertie Gordon and Patsy Smith."

The Gordons lived across the road from the Schramms. So Ann and the twins went there to tell the Gordons that Mr. Turner was not a jailbird but a respectable retired schoolteacher.

They discovered that Gertie Gordon had already told Sharon Oberholtz.

So Ann and the twins walked half a mile down the road to the Oberholtz farm. There they found that Sharon had told the jailbird story to Grace Lawler. And she had told it on the party line, and there was no telling how many people might have "listened in." To make matters even worse, Sharon had thought that *she* had heard that both Mr. and Mrs. Turner were jailbirds, and that was what she had told Grace.

Wearily, Ann and the twins trudged back to the Schramm farm so that Ann would be there by the time her father returned from town.

As she rode home with her father, Ann told him how the jailbird story had spread, and how it had gotten worse with each telling.

Dad said, quietly, "Well, the next time you hear someone telling something like this jailbird story about someone you don't know, I'm sure you'll remember this little verse. '*The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire*'" (James 3:5 NLT). ♦

MEMORY VERSES:

The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire (James 3:5 NLT).

PRAYER:

Dear God,

Help me not to use my tongue for anything unkind. I want to be very careful what I talk about—words that will help make others and me more like Christ. Amen.

Let's talk about this:

Before you repeat anything you hear, make it pass three tests:

Test 1: Is it *true*?

Test 2: Is it *kind*?

Test 3: Is it *necessary*?

The above stories are reprinted from *Happy Acres* by Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud. Published by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

A lesson from yesteryear

THE SMALLEST LOAF

In Germany at a time of great scarcity of food, a certain rich man invited twenty poor children to his house to get bread. He said to them, "In this basket there is a loaf for each of you. You may come again every day at this time until the scarcity of food is past."

The children fought for the bread, each one trying to get the largest loaf. At last they went away, without even thanking the kind gentleman.

One little girl stood by and waited until the others had taken their bread. Then she modestly went to the basket and

took the little loaf that remained, thanked the kind man, and went home.

The next day the children were just as rude as before, and poor Frances was left with a loaf only about half as big as the others. But when her mother cut the bread, some silver coins fell out. Her mother was frightened and said, "Take back this money—it must have fallen in by mistake."

Frances took the coins back to the man, but he told her it was no mistake. "I had the money baked in the smallest loaf in order to reward you," he said kindly. "Remember—the child who is content to take the smallest loaf rather than quarrel for the largest will find blessings far more valuable than money." ♦



JUDGMENT FOR WHOM?

by GERALD R. PAYNE

Why does Paul say we must all be judged (2 Cor. 5:10), when Jesus said that if we believe in God we have everlasting life "and shall not come into condemnation, but have passed from death into life"?

The passage from Jesus that you quote is in John 5:24, and it reads: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

If Jesus meant us to take His statement literally, that those who heard His words and believed on Him had eternal life right then, wouldn't we also be obliged to think that they were at that time physically dead—because He said the believer "has passed from death into life"?

Also, if Jesus meant us to take Him literally, He was contradicting His own statement: "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13)—shall be saved, not is saved now.

Again, if the one who heard Jesus teaching and made a casual profession of belief had literally passed from death to life, how should we understand the parable of Jesus, where the seed fell in different places, some into stony hearts, some among thorns, and some in good ground? If some of the seed sprouted and withered away, how would that align with Jesus' saying that the one who heard and believed had already passed into eternal life? How is the person who hears Christ's words and believes them said to have "everlasting life"? How has such a one "passed from death unto life"? According to the Bible, each must appear "before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Only at the Judgment will it be determined whether one receives eternal life or eternal death. Those who have died will be resurrected, brought back to life for this purpose, as the Prophet Daniel said, "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and ever-

lasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). Only then will they, if faithful, be given everlasting life.

How, then, does a believer "have everlasting life" now? There is only one way, and that is by promise. "And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life" (1 John 2:25). The Apostle Paul said that believers "become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). We live "in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). Why? "For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Rom. 8:24–25). He also spoke of Jesus being "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1), and the Apostle John said that every man "that had this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). The book of Hebrews expresses the same thought that "Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). We cannot escape that little word "if." We belong to His house, we have eternal life as a hope, "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

What did Jesus mean in saying that one who has believed has "passed from death unto life"? He was saying that the one who hears and believes God's Word knows the way to eternal life. It is not that he has that life, but he is *on the road* to it, if he continues on that road all the way to the end.

We should not think of the judgment as a condemning. All who are judged are not condemned. Those judged faithful will be given eternal life. Such will truly "not come into condemnation"; every faithful one will not be condemned to death at the judgment seat of Christ, but will be approved and given eternal life.

Jesus Himself confirmed this plan: "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). To those who seek for glory and honor and immortality He will give eternal life (Rom. 2:7)—a future gift, not a present possession. ♦

HAVE YOU PLANTED YOUR LETTUCE PATCH?

"Let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity..." – Heb.6:1

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful." – Heb.10:23

"Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing." – Heb.10:25

"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." – Heb.12:1

"Let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it." – Heb.4:1

"Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest..." – Heb.4:11

"Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." – Heb.4:14

"Let us then approach the throne of Grace with confidence" – Heb.4:16

"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." – Heb.12:1

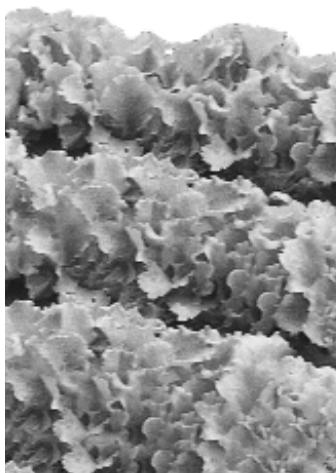
"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." – Heb.12:1

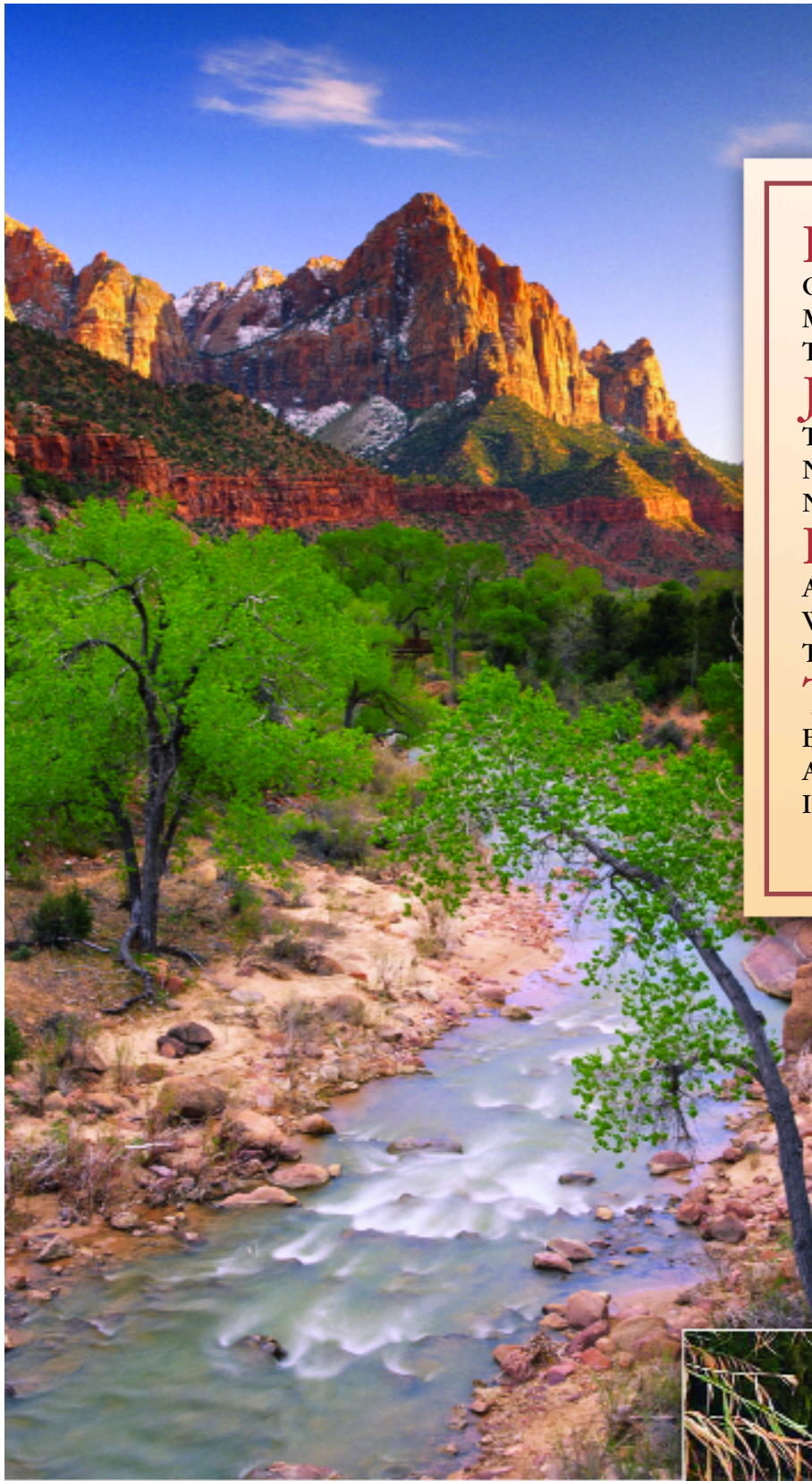
"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." – Heb.10:22

"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." – Heb.10:24

"Let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Heb.10:25

(above quotations are from the NIV).





I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Or to defend His cause;
Maintain the honor of His Word,
The glory of His cross.

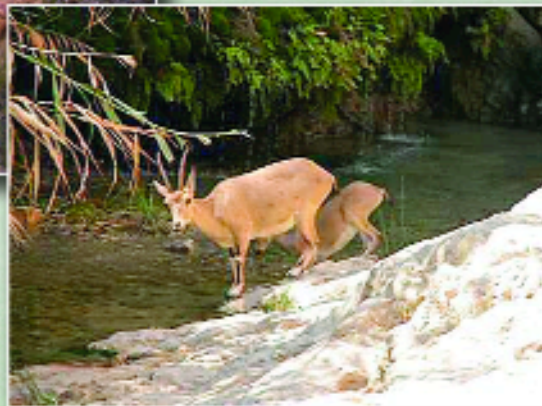
Jesus, O Lord, to know Your Name,
That Name is all my trust;
Nor will He put my soul to shame,
Nor let my hope be lost.

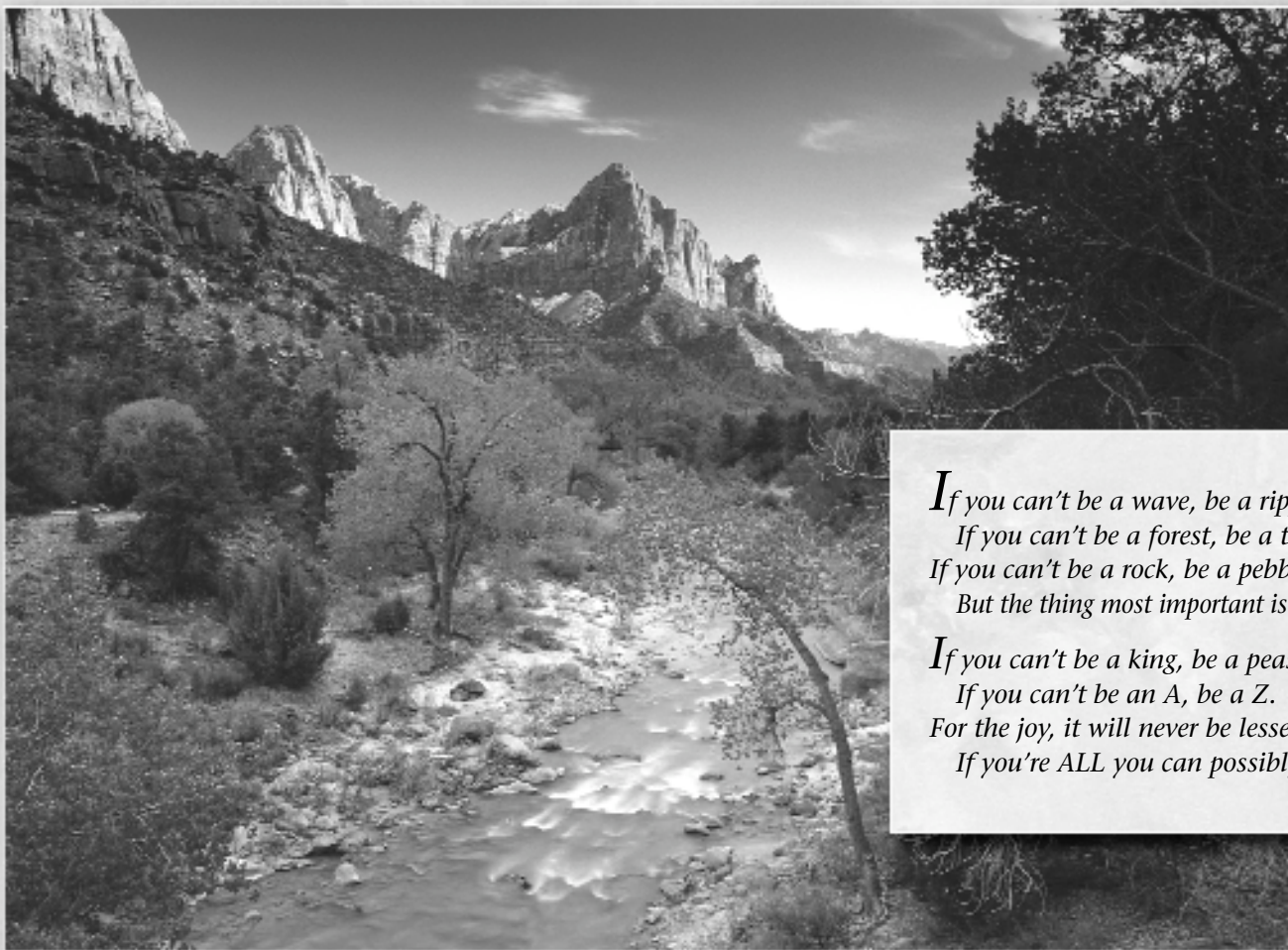
Firm as His throne His promise stands,
And He will hold secure
What I've committed to His hands
Till the decisive hour.

Then will I lift His holy name
Before His Father's face,
And in the new Jerusalem
I shall receive a place!

—Selected

*As the deer pants for streams
of water, so my soul pants for
you, O God. —Psalm 42:1 NIV¶*





*If you can't be a wave, be a ripple.
If you can't be a forest, be a tree.
If you can't be a rock, be a pebble;
But the thing most important is to "be."*

*If you can't be a king, be a peasant.
If you can't be an A, be a Z.
For the joy, it will never be lessened
If you're ALL you can possibly be.*

We cannot do everything *we* want to do, but we should do everything *God* wants us to do.

All men want to succeed, but some men want to succeed so much they're willing to work hard to achieve it.

When we do what we can, God will do what we can't.

Life is like a bank. You can't take out what you haven't put in.

THE BEST RULERSHIP

Self-control is the most essential and accomplished form of rulership. Every man's mind can be a throne. And there he can reign, and there he ought to reign.

However, it is a big job, too big for little people.

Only giants in determination can be king of self. The small in spirit abdicate in favor of people, things and circumstances.

The power of self-preservation is found in self-control. He who loses it becomes a helpless, passive creature with no means of protection. He is as vulnerable as an ancient city with broken down walls.

"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov. 25:28).

It's easy to make excuses when we ought to be making opportunities.

Kee your head and your heart going in the right direction and you'll not have to worry about your feet.

We increase our ability, stability, and responsibility when we increase our sense of accountability to God.

All of us need a faith that will not shrink when washed in the waters of affliction and adversity.



Reflections

How can we learn from last year's experiences? Take time to ponder where you are and where you want to be. Write yourself a letter, a year-end epistle. Keep it so that you can review it at the next year's end. Ask yourself these questions:

- ✧ *How am I different this year than I was last?*
- ✧ *What lessons did I learn?*
- ✧ *For what lesson am I particularly grateful?*
- ✧ *What did I accomplish?*
- ✧ *What might I have done differently if I were to have another opportunity?*
- ✧ *What were the most significant events of the year past?*
- ✧ *Where did I go wrong? What do I feel especially good about?*
- ✧ *What were my biggest challenges/roadblocks/difficulties?
What steps did I take toward conquering them?*
- ✧ *Where do I need to focus the most effort to improve?*

God help me make this year the best ever!

*May the words of
my mouth and the thoughts
of my heart be pleasing to you,
O Lord, my rock and my
redeemer. —Psalm 19:14 NLT*