

Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

The Serpent of Genesis

THOU SHALT CLOTHE THYSELF

WHY ARE WE HERE?

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

G-R-O-W!

MUSIC

I'M THINKING

TO GO OR TO COME

MEDITATIONS ON THE WORD

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BE FAITHFUL UNDER COVER

Megiddo Message

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A religious magazine, devoted to the cause of Christ and published for the dissemination of Bible truth alone. The MEGIDDO MESSAGE will

- Strengthen your faith in the Bible
- Answer perplexing religious questions
- Give you courage for these uncertain times
- Help you live above the world's moral corruption
- Reveal to you how to develop a character acceptable to God.
- Bring peace and stability to your life

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Megiddo means

"a place of troops, a place of God."

Geographically, Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, located at a strategic point, demanding heavy fortification. Palestine is the age-old gateway between East and West, and the famous pass at Megiddo through a solid mountain range is the one means by which this avenue between continents may be traversed.

In the spiritual parallel, God is in this place with a band of troops. Soldiers are equipped for spiritual warfare against the forces of evil without and within. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

Editorially Speaking...

Complaining?

JESUS gave small comfort to those who complained to Him about others. Usually He turned the conversation or inquiry to the plaintiff's own need. Take Martha of Bethany. She complained to Jesus about her sister, Mary, who was so engrossed in the Master's teaching that she forgot all about her household service. Martha complained, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." In reply, Jesus pointed out that Mary had chosen the better part. Perhaps He was also underscoring the fact that by her faultfinding and complaining Martha had missed even one more thing that was needful.

One day a man came to Jesus commanding, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." Jesus' reply at first seemed to avoid the controversy: "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" Then pressing to the heart of the issue, He warned the complainer against covetousness as He declared, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Jesus did not actually endorse the philosophy of the absent brother; He dealt with the one before Him.

In one of the closing scenes of our Lord's ministry, Peter inquired about John, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Jesus' reply was both enigma and rebuke: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

Someone has observed that in the presence of God man is never a plaintiff; he is always a defendant. Every man must stand or fall for his own conduct, therefore *that* should be his first concern. No man can afford to be a "tattler." In the words of our Lord, "What is that to thee? follow thou me."

When the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman taken in adultery, Jesus at first said nothing, but "stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not." But they persisted in their complaint until Jesus silenced them with the pronouncement: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Jesus' refusal to condemn the woman did not mean that he condoned her conduct, but neither would he justify the self-seeking hypocrisy of her accusers. After all the complainers had departed, Jesus said simply to the woman, "Go, and sin no more."

In His call to discipleship, Jesus insists that God's Kingdom and His righteousness must be first in our lives, and other things are relatively unimportant. This is the clue to His take-no-thought-for-tomorrow philosophy. Our assignment, then, is first of all, our own holy living, to discover these top priorities and follow them as guideposts on the road of life. ●●

The Serpent of Genesis

PRAYER

Eternal Father, as once again we come into Thy presence we come with hearts filled with gratitude and thankfulness for Thy abundant mercies. We thank Thee for the gift of life, for the miracle of breath, for the healthy heart and lungs we must have to be able to stay away from death. We thank Thee for the seeing eye, for the hearing ear, for the powers of reason, reflection and retention.

We thank Thee for the privilege of choosing between Thy exalted service and the service of the flesh. May we always be aware of the excellence of the one, and the worthlessness and depravity of the other, and always make the wise choice.

We thank Thee for the assurance that Thy Son soon shall return to earth to unravel man's tangled affairs, and that after centuries of mismanagement, graft and bungling, a better day is about to dawn, when existing systems of misrule shall give way to a new and heavenly order which shall bring peace and plenty to all, and shall endure throughout the blissful ages of eternity.

Father, grant us the wisdom to suspect the serpent nature in ourselves; the insight to recognize the serpent intrigue when it is present; the courage and strength to banish him completely from our lives.

One day in the near future the footsteps of the Lord of all the earth will be heard walking in the "garden"; the word to the Adam man, "Where art thou," will call him to judgment, demanding that he give an account of how he spent his short span of life. Alert us, Father, that if found naked, unclothed with the robe of righteousness in that revealing day, we will be ashamed; the most plausible excuses we can produce will be of no value, our nakedness cannot be hid.

Help us, Father, not to be beguiled by the wily voice within declaring that we will not surely die even if we partake of the forbidden fruit. Thou hast spoken; Thy Word shall not return to Thee void; a life that is half and half will end in failure. Thou dost not permit us to partake of the tree of both good and evil.

One day we shall reap what we have sown. The seed of the woman, the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall crush the head of the serpent, completely stamping evil from this fair earth. Help us to project ourselves into that auspicious Day, to now so conduct our lives that when that Day arrives we will be part of that glorious woman and her very special "seed." In Jesus' name. Amen.

DISCOURSE

WHEN GOD wants to teach men and women His plan, He uses illustrations which they can understand, symbols which describe the characteristics of the principle or problem being illustrated. As we study the Creation narrative from a spiritual point of view, we see His frequent use of such illustrations. The "heavens" represent His finest and most excellent result of a long and painstaking process of creation, the rulers of the new order which He is outlining. The "earth" represents the populace of His kingdom, multitudinous in quantity but nonetheless perfect in quality. The garden illustrates that portion of mankind which God sees fit to use, to cultivate and beautify and perpetuate in His eternal purpose. In this garden are trees, individuals who grow by the spiritual river of the wisdom of God, from which they draw vital, life-giving nourishment.

Understood in the depths of its spiritual significance, the Creation allegory becomes a beautiful and comprehensive outline of God's plan, compassing the entire scope of His divine purpose for earth and mankind. How shallow and meaningless by comparison are the literal interpretations placed upon it by much fundamental religion!

But of all the symbols to which religious teachers have attached literal meaning, perhaps none involves more obvious impossibilities than the serpent. According to the story in Genesis, the serpent beguiled Eve. Was it a literal serpent? Many religious thinkers and Bible students cannot believe that it was, but they have no solid, Scriptural counterbelief to present. As seekers for the truth of God's Word, we should count it our obligation to secure a sane and Biblical solution to the subject. Before we proceed, we must understand what, in Biblical terminology, is a serpent.

Defining the Serpent

A survey of the ministry of John the Baptist as recorded in Matthew 3 reveals the type of serpents which come within the scope of Scriptural discussion. As the result of John's dynamic preaching, multitudes "were baptized of him in Jordan. . . . But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:6-8). The

Pharisees and Sadducees were designated *vipers* because they had serpentine characteristics.

Jesus addressed these professed religious leaders of His day in like manner, saying, "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?" (Matt. 12:34). Again in Matthew 23, which records His eightfold denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell [destruction]?" (v. 33). Those who are informed concerning the scribes and Pharisees of that day—their masked hypocrisy, their external sanctimony which concealed internal filth, their scrupulous attention to detail which the original law of Moses never imagined—may well feel that Jesus' denunciation was just. They were unmistakably a "generation of vipers," "serpents," poisoning with their deadly venom the minds of innocent seekers for true religion.

However, the serpent class is not confined to the temple priesthood. We find the serpentine nature to have existed right within the circle of Jesus' closest followers. The serpent symbolism finds its equivalent in numerous other Scriptural terms such as "the Devil," "Satan," "the great dragon," and the like, all of which denote sin and all sinners, any adversary to God.

Because of the opposition which they raised, Jesus placed both Judas and Peter in the serpent or devil category; the difference in the two men was that Judas chose to remain in that category, while Peter changed his nature. We read in John 6:70, 71, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spoke of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve."

When Jesus revealed His imminent crucifixion, Peter was the opposer, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:22, 23).

The scribes and Pharisees were accounted serpents, Judas was a devil, and upon the occasion noted, Peter was Satan—all because they opposed the purposes of Jehovah.

What of us? Can we escape like classification? Not when we oppose the will and ways of God. Paul supplies a definite answer in II Cor. 11:2, 3, which reveals how Eve was tempted and who and what tempted her: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." This text reveals how Eve was tempted—just the same as you and I are tempted—by our own evil tendencies. We ourselves, we who

desire to be selected as the virgin Bride of Christ, are in constant danger of being seduced by the serpent—not a literal reptile but the wiles of our own natural mind. This was the serpent that beguiled Eve in the garden.

Lest we should still feel the serpent to be far removed from our environment, Jesus adds further explanation. In Mark 7:15, 21—23, He states plainly the source of all temptation and evil—not a literal serpent or a devil or Satan, but man's own deceitful human heart. He says, "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. . . . For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." In all ages nothing from without can defile a man; the crafty serpent dwells right within the compass of the unregenerated mind. "All these evil things *come from within*, and defile the man."

James teaches the same principle in chapter 1: 13, 14: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." This eliminates all possibility of a literal devil or a literal serpent upon whom to lay the blame for our evil devices and shortcomings. As we are tempted, so Eve was tempted—when we are drawn away of our own lusts and enticed.

Eve's Temptation—and Ours

Keeping these facts in mind, let us read carefully the occasion of Eve's temptation as recorded in Genesis. The serpent said to Eve, "Is it true that God has forbidden you to eat from any tree in the garden?" And Eve answered weakly, "We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except for the tree in the middle of the garden; God has forbidden us either to eat or to touch the fruit of that; if we do, we shall die." The serpent countered, "Of course, you will not die"; and the woman, deceived by the serpent's wiles, tasted the forbidden fruit. "She also gave her husband some, and he ate it" (Gen. 3:1—7, NEB).

With whom or what was Eve consulting? a literal snake? If such be the case, then we must give to it the superserpent capabilities of speech and articulation. Furthermore, the serpent is plainly stated to be alive at Christ's second advent (Rev. 20:1—4)—truly a great age for a literal serpent—nearly 6000 years! Yet no such species can be found today.

If we seek to understand the incident in the light of plain, Scriptural teaching, we can only conclude that Eve was consulting with her own lower nature, her uncontrolled human desires.

Eve's temptation is a characteristic type. The

serpent's success lay in its convincing her that God's law was not so exacting as she had supposed, that the forbidden fruit could be sampled with safety. Said the serpent, "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4, 5).

Always, as in Eden, the baser instincts of our nature are parleying with the better inclinations, suggesting liberties which God prohibits, and assuring their harmlessness. The voice of the serpent whispers out of the dust of human desire, saying, "Indulge your natural cravings just this once; you shall not surely die."

The apostle Paul felt this duplicity of desire warring within him when he wrote, "When I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:21—23). This was the serpent at work. Again Paul wrote of the conflict: "... the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). Every Christian experiences this same warfare: the struggle between his lower desires and his higher aspirations.

The Day of Judgment

After Eve had tasted the forbidden fruit and given of it to her husband, what happened then?

We read further in Genesis 3 that in the "cool of the day" the Lord came and called His servant Adam to account for his conduct in the garden. Had he obeyed? He had not. "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:11—13).

Arraignment before the Judgment seat of Christ is part of the plan of God for each of His servants, to determine their eligibility for future blessings. But first let us note the time of this Judgment, as given in Genesis. When did the Lord call Adam to account? "In the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8). During one six-thousand-year day, the "day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2) God has been calling men and women to work in His spiritual garden. The first to respond to this call, Adam and Eve, and all since who have agreed to work for their heavenly Master, labor at various hours throughout the day until the evening, the "cool of the day," arrives. Then the Lord (Christ) comes (the second advent) to judge His servants. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may re-

ceive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10).

Jesus described this Day of Judgment in parable, as the separation of the sheep and goats, faithful and unfaithful servants. "And before him shall be gathered [out of] all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . . And then shall he say also unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire [destruction], prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:32—41).

When at the close of the day the Lord questioned the man Adam as to his obedience, he blamed the woman for his transgression, because she offered him the forbidden fruit. And the woman blamed the serpent which had enticed her. What an accurate picture of human nature! How instinctively when blamed for a transgression we point our finger at our neighbor or our brother and comfortably excuse ourselves!

Judgment on the Serpent

Genesis 3:14 states God's ultimatum to the "serpent" who had deceived Eve (symbolic of the human heart which is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"—Jer. 17:9): "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life."

This text fittingly describes the condition of the unfaithful who will be permitted to live during the Millennium. At Judgment Day, when all covenant-makers are called before "the judge of all the earth," the unfaithful among them, those who have not during their day of probation completely killed their serpent natures, will be given an ultimatum regarding the length of their lives, and their limited activities during the years that they are permitted to live. As in the Lord's word to the "sea," or the wicked peoples of the earth: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (Job 38:11), so the "serpent," flesh, will have its future existence circumscribed. The decree will go forth: "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field [representative of the enlightened ones who have weakly surrendered to the enticements of the flesh]; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." As will be explained later, the "serpent" will still be alive during the Millennium. During that thousand-year period, however, he will be helpless to perform his work of deception.

The plan of the Almighty being to reward each

of His servants according to his works (Rev. 22:12), a full reward, eternal life, will be given only for a perfected character. Any covenant-maker proving worthy of a partial reward must receive it in the form of a limited number of years of life during the Millennium. But they will still be unholy. Their permission to live for a time in that holy environment will not cancel their unholy past, hence as long as they live they will continue to feed on their unholy thoughts, "the dust" of their former lives.

Transgression—Its Consequences

The serpent beguiled Eve. She tasted the forbidden fruit, then gave it to her husband. Thus the husband blamed the woman, and the woman blamed the serpent. There we have it, a cardinal doctrine of much fundamental faith: original sin, the first transgression, but a transgression of such far-reaching effects that it defiled the formerly pure and sinless progenitors of a race and stained the natures of all their posterity.

A convenient excuse for our baser inclinations, perhaps; but the doctrine is no more Scriptural than it is reasonable. Natural death was in the world long before Adam and Eve transgressed, as is evidenced by the remains of prehistoric men and animals. Adam was a mortal man; there is nothing in the narrative to indicate anything to the contrary. And his receiving the disapproval of God did not change his physical nature. Men are mortal, Adam and all his ancestors and descendants not excepted (Job 14:1, 2, 4; 4:17). The death to which Adam was condemned was not natural death, the result of mortality, but *penal death*, condemnation at Judgment, eternal death.

And furthermore, the guilt of sin is *not* inherited. God does not condemn us for the sin of our father, our grandfather, or our greatest, greatest grandfather Adam. Every individual is responsible for his own sin. The divine principle is plain: "The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin." "Every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." "Every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (II Chron. 25:4; Jer. 31:30; II Kings 14:6; Deut. 24:16). *Every man shall die for his own sin.* "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20)—*it* shall die, and no other.

Ezekiel states explicitly: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezek. 18:20). "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 18:30)—at the Judgment of Christ every one shall stand or fall for *his own* doings.

"The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. . . . His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins" (Prov. 3:33; 5:22). *His own iniquities shall take the wicked.*

"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12)—these are Jesus' own words, and He shall be the Judge. Every man shall stand or fall for His own obedience or disobedience, not Adam's.

Christ Reckons with the Serpent

The serpent that was present in the Garden of Eden, the human heart that is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9) is still very much alive today and thrives in the world at large. However, this earth was not created to be plagued everlastingly with the wiles of evildoers. Upon the pages of the Sacred Volume is decreed the final end of the serpent class.

The Bible teaches that when Christ returns and calls upon all men to submit to His righteous rule, the nations will rise up to resist His authority and will wage war against Him. This conflict, the Battle of Armageddon was foreseen by the Revelator in the following symbolism: "There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (Rev. 12:7—9). This war is waged in the political heavens between Michael, or Christ, and the powers of earth, here designated by the equivalent terms, "the great dragon," "that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan." No ambiguity is left as to the result of the war: The old serpent is to be cast out of heaven; erring man shall be forced to surrender the throne to Christ.

The ousting of the old serpent from the political heavens fulfills Christ's words, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Though some Bible students place this as an event of history, claiming Satan to have been a prominent angel in heaven who through misconduct became the Lucifer of earth, the text is much more meaningful and in harmony with general Bible teaching if understood as an unfulfilled prophecy. Satan has not yet fallen from his high place of authority; he still rules supreme in the political heavens of this troubled world. But Satan shall fall; all evil shall be brought down until the prophecy of Zephaniah shall be fulfilled: "Thou shalt not see evil any more."

Though Satan will be dethroned by Christ at His coming, he will not at that time be destroyed. The Revelator informs us, "I saw an angel come down

from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (20:1—3). Evil will be confined, though not entirely destroyed during the thousand years.

Who will subdue and confine the serpent, evil and all evildoers? We read in Psalm 149:

"Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints."

Clearly, Christ and the saints are to chain the serpent class during the Millennial Age. And how will this be accomplished? By the enforcement of unbreakable law. We read, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Rev. 2:26, 27). All will be justice and righteousness, but no evil action will be tolerated. For "though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isa. 30:20, 21).

Without the solid foundation of the law of God, the heart of man is fittingly termed the "bottomless pit" from which proceed no end of evil devisings. But there the serpent shall be compelled to remain, captive for the duration of the Millennium. Some may stubbornly choose to retain evil in their hearts; but no open manifestation of the serpent nature will be tolerated. The chain is strong, the law unbreakable. The hand or power of the "weaned child" (the righteous rulers, newly born into immortal life) will be placed on the cockatrice' den, the hiding place of evil, so that the serpent cannot project his ugly head; wickedness shall be confined within the heart (Isa. 11:8). Only in this way can the promise of a world filled with the glory of the Lord "as the waters cover the sea" be fulfilled.

At the close of the Millennial reign of Christ and the saints, there is "silence in heaven" for a brief period. The second Resurrection has taken place, all who have died during the Millennium being brought forth for Judgment, and the law is suddenly suspended to reveal what has been in their hearts. The serpent is "loosed a little season." A formidable rebellion ensues, but it is swiftly ex-

tinguished by the destruction of the rebels, as we read in Rev. 20:9: "They went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." This second Judgment consigns the remainder of the serpent class to eternal destruction in the "lake of fire, . . . which is the second death" (Rev. 20:9, 10, 14; 21:8).

During this little season will be accomplished another phase of the allegory in Genesis. Addressing the serpent, the Almighty says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your brood and hers. They shall strike at your head, and you shall strike at their heel" (Gen. 3:15, NEB). Always enmity has existed between the seed of the serpent (the wicked) and the faithful woman (the Bride of Christ). We see it evidenced between Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Daniel and his persecutors, Jesus and those who opposed and finally crucified Him. However, it is not until the second Judgment following the rebellion at the close of the Millennium when the serpent strikes at "the heel" of the woman (Christ's faithful Bride) that the woman, striking at his head, will crush the serpent of sin to his everlasting death.

We read of this event in Numbers 24:17—19, "A star of a king has come from Jacob, a mace has risen from Israel, crashing in Moab's head, the skull of these proud creatures! . . . Israel wins the day, and Jacob tramples on his foes" (Moffatt translation). The crushing of the serpent's head will be the most stupendous event in the history of this planet, for it will terminate wickedness in all its forms; nothing shall be left to hurt or destroy; the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord—righteous rulers and subjects; death itself shall be vanquished in the dawn of that eternal day.

Our Task Now: To Resist the Serpent

The allegory of Genesis reveals—and our own experience in coping with the impulses of the natural mind amply confirms—the serpent to be "more subtle than any beast of the field" (Gen. 3:1). With equal significance but plainer language the prophet Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

But lest we find ourselves in the serpent class when Christ returns to render judgment on all workers of iniquity, we now must learn to resist and subdue the serpent in our own hearts. How shall we succeed, how shall we resist falling victim to the stratagem of a deceitful heart that is desperately wicked in its subtle devices?

God has provided a means by which it is possible to resist and overcome the serpent nature.

We read in Ephesians 6 of the Christian's armor,

which is invulnerable to all attack when properly worn: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. . . . Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (vs. 11—17).

This lifts the matter beyond controversy. Spiritual armor would not have been supplied for conquering a literal foe. Furthermore, Paul says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," and he de-

scribes the foe as consisting of all *spiritual* wickedness.

The enemy is legion. There are scores of religious misconceptions to be assailed by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. There is the demoralizing influence from a world grown corrupt to be resisted from without. There is the carnal mind with its endless subtle devices to be suppressed from within. And it is here that the Christian encounters his severest struggle. To help us in the war, Peter says, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind" (I Pet. 4:1). This armor, the mind of Christ, means terror, retreat, banishment to the serpent.

Why engage in such a death struggle with the forces of evil? Because victory means life—life—immortal life filled with happiness and peace throughout eternity! ●●

The Eleventh Commandment—

THOU SHALT CLOTHE THYSELF

From a sharp and well-barbed protest cast in an undenominational magazine, Eternity, we borrow the following excerpts. Unable to exceed the author of the article, Kerry Elliott, in ability of expression, we wish to join our voices with the protest against the flagrant and uninhibited display of undressed womanhood.

IT WAS a birthday party for Harry, a relative of mine who had reached the venerable age of 50. The group was just a small one—the family and a few friends.

Among the gifts was a necktie. Harry admired it, and thanked the giver. Then he turned to his wife. "When I'm finished with it, Hon," he winked, "you can make a bathing suit out of it."

His suggestion drew a round of laughter and a long, low whistle. But it didn't draw a blush from Hon.

The episode was a small one, granted. But it was revealing—in more ways than one. Harry, you see, is a leading elder in a thriving evangelical church. All the people present were church members, most of them leaders of one kind or another. But, like many Christians, they have adopted a casual, almost indifferent attitude toward immodest dress. Bare midriffs, backless gowns, miniskirts, and beachwear that boggles the eyeballs are all perfectly acceptable to these good church people. The thought of Hon running around in Harry's necktie was a joke, not an embarrassment.

I protest such lack of modesty. To me, today's flesh-displaying fashions make a travesty of the Christian woman's claim to godliness.

"Oh, come, come," you say. . . . "What's so sinful about a miniskirt?"

Well, in my opinion, miniskirts are immodest. They have no more place in the wardrobe of a Christian than bikinis or peek-a-boo dresses.

"Oh, don't be ridiculous," you retort. . . . "It's just a fashion. . . ."

Fashion is shaping your outlook—maybe more than you realize. *Newsweek* makes the significant observation that fashions have "changed people's minds and life styles as well as the way they dress," all of which is one reason why a lot of [so-called] Christians are no longer shocked at what they see. . . .

"But what can I do?" you purr. . . . "Do you expect me to look different from the whole world? Everybody wears these styles, you know."

Now there's an argument for you—"Everybody's doing it." Most parents beat that one down a dozen times a day with a reply that says in effect, "Everybody but you." And if [being dressed] makes you look different, be thankful.

The Christian woman isn't in a glamor contest with the dolls from Hollywood, remember? She has higher standards. Her values are not determined for her by Fifth Avenue, or even by the steno pool at the office. Sometimes it's her privilege to be identified as a Christian by looking distinctively different—even if that means wearing clothes. . . .

To argue that to the pure all things are pure won't do, either. A man can be provoked into thinking what he doesn't want to think. It isn't honest to expose a man to the aroma of steak and apple pie and coffee, and then accuse him of being a

glutton because he licks his lips. This is particularly true in regard to our teenage boys and young men. To tantalize them with displays of the delicious young female form, when they are already struggling with the frustrating drives of adolescence and the pressures of sex-ridden culture, is not only unchristian but downright cruel. Can you blame the boys for trying to spring the trap when it's loaded with such luscious bait? . . .

To cover oneself from the gaze of others is instinctive in all but the most degraded (I did not say primitive) cultures. Those who are capable of appearing before others in a state of undress, without embarrassment, have had to learn that condition and that applies to the stripper as well as to the savage on the banks of the Amazon. The distressing thing is that the women of our culture, including Christians, are learning that condition so well.

This raises an interesting point. Other cultures recognize the impropriety of our current fashions and do not hesitate to condemn them. In Malawi, for example, a violent reaction was triggered when President Banda, coming from church (Martyrs' Day, Sunday, March 3, 1968), was shocked to see a European girl "indecently clad and looking at him."

The *Malawi News* (March 8, 1968) editorialized that "foreign women such as the one seen on Sunday by the President are setting bad examples for our young girls, and we will not tolerate anyone who wants to spoil our nation by importing these diabolic fashions." Tough official measures were launched against importing such fashions, and bands of young men literally unfrocked girls who appeared in public wearing miniskirts.

Observers in the sophisticated West laughed. "You object to miniskirts?" they ridiculed. "Your own tribal women run around almost naked!" The

fact is, however, that most African governments are taking steps to eradicate tribal nudity (which, incidentally, is quite divorced from sexuality) because it is considered a reproach.

The extent to which American Christians have lost their sense of modesty hits home when leaders of African churches appeal to mission leaders to do something about the apparel of their lady missionaries. "How can a woman who displays herself help our women improve themselves?" they ask. . . .

As Christians, we turn to the Scriptures for guidance. What specific does the Bible lay down? . . .

The Scriptures lay down some very clear principles. One of them is that God's standards for His women are high ones. He expects them to be modest.

In I Timothy 2:9, 10, women are exhorted to "adorn themselves in modest apparel" and to make themselves attractive not by the use of fashion's devices but by good works and high character, "which becometh women professing godliness." In *Today's English Version* that reads, "I also want women to be modest and sensible about their clothes, and to dress properly."

In Titus 2:5 it says that Christian women should be "sensible and chaste . . . a good advertisement for the Christian faith."

In our culture, with its emphasis on sex, one thing is certain—clothing that over-focuses on the female form, instead of enhancing your feminine grace must be classed as unacceptable. And if the Christian woman has any doubt about the acceptability of any style, she will follow the scriptural injunction to forego it rather than risk the possibility of giving offense.—*Reprinted by permission from Eternity Magazine, copyright 1970, the Evangelical Foundation, 1716 Spruce St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19103.*

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Why Are We Here?

THOUSANDS of millenniums in the past an event took place on our planet which was destined to play an enormous part in its future development. Climatic and environmental conditions having progressed to a point where habitation became possible, God introduced a new resident: man.

However, compared with his competitors, man was at a seemingly insurmountable physical disadvantage in the struggle for survival. Everywhere abounded mammals and reptiles of mammoth size and superior strength; and man was small and weak.

What was the secret of man's survival? A mighty Creator had given him a special power the larger creatures lacked: intellect. Man was able to reason, reflect and remember. Consequently, as the centuries passed, his knowledge increased. He moved out of the caves and the stone age to domesticate animals for his use, and to grow and harvest foods for his sustenance. Later he learned to work with metal, and with this capability he progressed rapidly through the bronze age into the iron age, the machine age, and finally to our present day and time, the space age.

But what of all the men who lived and worked through all these ages? For what purpose was their existence?

When we reflect seriously on man's past and consider the now silent host which has preceded us, we feel constrained to ask: What of me? Why am I here? Is there no purpose in my presence here? Am I, too, destined just to work, eat, and sleep, or perhaps by some determined effort wrest some superior accomplishment from life and then, like a tale that is told, leave the scene of action and join those who sleep in the dust?

Far from it! That Almighty Being who formed man in the beginning created him for a specific purpose, and with a glorious, far-reaching plan in mind. Nearly 6000 years ago God made Himself and this plan known to mankind. It is His vow to someday fill the whole earth with His glory, a righteous people who will praise and glorify His name forever. Throughout the centuries, from every nation, race and people, He has been selecting men and women who are willing to work untiringly for a place in this new order, the world to come. Yes, and even today, through His written Word, God still calls, giving all who will learn and keep His law an opportunity to become His sons and daughters.

This, then is why we are here. Life need not be lived in a benumbed, meaningless fashion. To the aspiring Christian, every day is a springboard to greater achievement, bringing him closer and ever

closer to the ultimate goal, perfection of character.

This course of action is not necessarily an easy one, for the requirement is that we be completely changed, both mentally and morally. Anger, jealousy, and hatred may possibly have assisted the cave man to survive, but to become truly civilized, as God requires, these and every other evil not in accord with the divine plan must be displaced by the Godlike virtues of love, joy, peace, purity, patience, longsuffering, courage and faith.

Nearly everyone who loves life enjoys a challenge, something to which he can dedicate his life and resources. Easy living is not for such a man; he thrives on struggle. So it is with those stalwart individuals who seek life's highest goal, a pure heart and the glorious recompense of immortality. They have accepted the challenge of remaking their lives into a perfect copy of their Creator, a work of such magnitude that they are a people to be "wondered at."

There is yet another reason why we are here. No man liveth unto himself alone. As we go about our daily duties, our lives touch other lives and we frequently meet our duty to "do good unto all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

This fleeting life may be compared to a one-way ticket to some distant destination with no provision for a return trip. The good we do must be done now, for we will not pass this way again. A friendly smile for a stranger, or a kind word to a friend costs nothing and may accomplish much in brightening the lives of those we meet.

As we all know from our own bitter experiences, life has many ups and downs, joys and sorrows, and it takes a sustained and determined effort to make our life a blessing to ourselves and others. Remember, no man is an island. In some way or other, for good or ill, we are influencing the lives of others. As a closer walk with God inspires the spirit of imitation in others, so also a careless and dilatory life can lead others in a downward path.

Why are we here? To do all the good that we can, lift every load we can, and lead to God every soul that we can. For what we are is God's gift to us, but what we become is our gift to God—and a real proof of why we are here.

The time allotted by God for the first phase of His plan for this earth and mankind is almost complete. The decisions, actions and reactions we make now are determining our future destiny. If we choose to serve ourselves, have our own way, seek our own pleasure, we shall in the end join the multitude who sleep in the dust forgotten, their hopes and aspirations forever buried with them. Or we may choose the better part and dedicate our life to God's service and aid His cause. If the latter is our choice, and the pinnacle of perfection is our goal, we can be absolutely certain that if we achieve

(Continued on page 18)

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God."

The Kingdom of God

IN OUR last lesson we commenced a brief study of God's human kingdom, the theocracy of Israel. Though it was an earthly government and not in any measure infallible or divine, it did have heavenly authority. But such authority, superior though it be, is limited by the human capacity to respond and cooperate. God can direct only insofar as men are willing to follow. All men are free moral agents, capable of choosing and, to an extent, determining their own course of action.

Thus it was in the Kingdom of Israel. Some obeyed and proclaimed the Word of the Lord; many did not. Some received God's rebukes through His prophets and amended their ways; others refused. And so it remains today: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14).

We shall continue with our outline of study:

- V. The Kingdom of God in Israel
 - C. A Nation Becomes a Kingdom
 - D. The Time of Division
 - E. The Divided Kingdom
 - 1. The Kingdom of Judah
 - 2. The Kingdom of Israel

Fulfilling in part the promise to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation" (the most significant fulfillment is yet future, when "in thee [Abraham] shall all nations of the earth be blessed"), the family of Jacob, a total of 70 persons, went down into Egypt, and grew and multiplied and prospered until they became so great a number that Egypt feared them. Delivered by Moses from Egyptian bondage and settled in the land of Canaan under the able leadership of Joshua, the people gradually grew into a nation, attaining the height of their power under King David. Then, like all human governments, the nation weakened until it was subdued by foreigners and its once-proud inhabitants were carried captives to a strange land.

As we study, let us keep in mind that all that happened in Israel and in Judah was not time and chance. Though never a world power or a nation of worldwide influence, it was upon the nation of Israel that the Lord focused most of His earth-directed attention. The God of heaven was directing, and the people of Israel were often instruments in His hand.

V. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ISRAEL C. A Nation Becomes a Kingdom

3. David, the second king of Israel. When Saul proved himself to be not the type of man to continue to reign over His people Israel, God instructed Samuel to anoint a new king. His choice was **David**, a sheep herder of Bethlehem and the eighth son of Jesse. In choosing David the Lord said to Samuel, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; . . . for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. 16:7). David's heart was pleasing to the Lord, and Samuel anointed him king over Israel that day. But before David ascended the throne, he spent several anxious years fleeing from jealous Saul, who sought his life. Just how long Saul remained king after David's anointing we are not told, but historians estimate it to have been at least eight years. During these years only the hand of God prevented him from killing David.

In the humiliation of defeat Saul ended his long reign by taking his own life, and David became king. The loyal followers of Saul made Saul's son **Ishbosheth** king over all but the house of Judah, and as long as Ishbosheth and Abner, who had been the captain of Saul's army, lived, David was forced to reign from Hebron. After their death David by a series of conquests extended the kingdom to include all the twelve tribes. "In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah" (II Sam. 5:5).

Under the kingship of David the twelve tribes of Israel became solidified into a nation with Jerusalem as its capital. David brought much woe upon himself by his sins, but unlike Saul before him, he was capable of true repentance and always turned again to God. But in spite of all his troubles, his reign was the most brilliant in Israel's history and under him the nation became prosperous. The government rested upon a religious basis; the law of God was the law of Israel under David. For this reason David's kingdom is used as the type of the future, more glorious Kingdom of Christ.

4. Solomon, the third king of Israel. David was now old and feeble. God had promised him that the kingship was to remain in his family and had chosen his son **Solomon** to be his successor (I Chron. 22:9). Adonijah, David's oldest son, sought to take the kingdom for himself, but the

plot was known and **Solomon** was made king before his father's death.

Under Solomon the nation became even more prosperous. He built up a powerful army (I Kings 4:26), he carried on foreign trade with other nations (I Kings 9:26—28), and he undertook a massive building program.

Solomon was a strange mixture of wisdom and folly. He began his reign in glory with wisdom that "excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country" and ended it "an old and foolish king, who [would] no more be admonished" (I Kings 4:30; Eccl. 4:13). Because Solomon asked for wisdom and understanding, God granted him wisdom and riches and honor "such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have" (II Chron. 1:7—12).

Solomon had a penchant for building. His father David had provided for building the house of the Lord at Jerusalem but was denied the privilege of seeing it built. Solomon spent seven years building the house of the Lord and thirteen years building his own house. He also built many cities throughout the land (I Kings 9:15—19). Such a building program was costly and inflicted a heavy tax burden on the people. Much of the work was done by slave labor (I Kings 9:15, 20, 21). And at the same time Solomon lived in luxury such as had never been known. Thus he was sowing the seeds of discontent among the people that before many years would divide the kingdom.

D. The Time of Division

Solomon transgressed the commandment of the Lord and took as wives "many strange women" who "turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God" (I Kings 11:1—4). As a result, God said unto him: "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant" (I Kings 11:11). But because God had promised the kingdom to the house of David forever, the tribes of **Benjamin** and **Judah** were to remain with the son of Solomon. The division was not to come until after Solomon's death.

1. **Ahijah prophesies.** In olden times, when God had a special message for one of His servants He made it known through a prophet specially selected for the purpose. These men were endowed with a peculiar awareness of the presence and the power of God. God's Word was in them and through them. They were God's "inner circle," so to speak. The secret of the Lord was theirs, and they knew and proclaimed what God was about to do.

Whenever there was a need, God found a man for the task.

Often the prophetic announcement was not made in words but in action. Such was the drama produced by Ahijah, God's prophet chosen to announce the division of the kingdom. The prophecy can be

found in I Kings 11:26—39. Study it until you are thoroughly familiar with it.

Ahijah, wearing a new garment, met Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Solomon's servant, in the field. "And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: and he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: . . . because that they have forsaken me, . . . and have not walked in my ways, . . . Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: . . . for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, . . . and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel."

The kingdom would be divided. Ten tribes would go to Jeroboam, the son of Solomon's servant, and the two remaining tribes would go to the house of David, to Solomon's son, **Rehoboam**.

2. **The kingdom divides.** After the prophecy of Ahijah, Jeroboam took refuge in Egypt to escape the wrath of Solomon, but after learning of Solomon's death he returned to Israel to claim his kingdom. True to the prophecy of the Lord, the ten tribes revolted when Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and natural heir to the throne, went to Shechem to be crowned king. The ten tribes under Jeroboam's leadership were known as **Israel**, or the **Northern Kingdom**. Its capital was Shechem at that time, later removed to Samaria. The two tribes under Rehoboam, Solomon's son, were known as the **Kingdom of Judah**, or the **Southern Kingdom**. Its capital was at Jerusalem.

3. **Rehoboam seeks to recover the kingdom.** After the split in the kingdom, Rehoboam assembled an army to fight against Israel to bring the Northern Kingdom back into his fold. But such action was not in God's plan, and God sent His word by the prophet **Shemaiah**: "Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: . . . for this thing is from me" (I Kings 12:22—24). While the actual split had come about because of a revolt against the heavy tax burden imposed upon the people, it was God's decree that the kingdom should be divided; and the split remained.

E. The Divided Kingdom

The division of the kingdom was the beginning of the end for God's literal earthly kingdom. The Northern Kingdom continued for about 240 years, and the Southern Kingdom for about 330 years (see chart in July issue of the MEGIDDO MESSAGE). During this period the two kingdoms were ruled over by a succession of kings, some good, others less good, and some bad.

From the end of the reign of Rehoboam until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B. C., a space of about 330 years, Judah had 19 kings. Of these, eight were classified as good kings, doing "that which was

good and right in the eyes of the Lord," and Rehoboam and the other 11 were classified as bad, doing "that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." Of these 19 kings we will review a few of the more outstanding.

1. Notable kings of Judah:

a. **Rehoboam**, the first king of Judah, started out well. For three years he and his people walked in the way of the Lord (II Chron. 11:17). But when he had established his kingdom, like his father before him he forsook the commandment of God, and the Lord allowed an enemy to invade the country. Despite this contrary action, God would not let them forget they were still His people. He sent His prophet, **Shemaiah**, to the king to remind him of his transgression. And as in times past, when the people sought the Lord and humbled themselves, God made the penalty less severe. Nevertheless, "Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem, . . . and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made" (II Chron. 12:9).

b. **Asa** was the second king following Rehoboam. Apparently his father **Abijah** had allowed idol worship to flourish in Judah. We read that Asa "took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to do the law and the commandment" (II Chron. 14:3, 4). He is also noted for the fact that he removed his mother from being queen because she had an idol in a grove (II Chron. 15:16).

c. **Jehoshaphat**, the son of Asa, was likewise a good king, but he did wrong in forming an alliance with the wicked king **Ahab** of Israel. But God helped him out of his predicament, yet not without words of reproof spoken by the prophet **Jehu**: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God" (II Chron. 19:2, 3).

d. **Joash** is known as the "boy king." He was saved from the wrath of his grandmother, the wicked queen **Athaliah**. When he was six years old, **Jehoiada** the priest succeeded in having him crowned king and **Athaliah** was slain. Joash was reared by **Jehoiada** and his wife and he "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of **Jehoiada** the priest." He is noted for repairing the temple and re-establishing worship of the true God following the wicked kings **Jehoram**, **Ahaziah** and queen **Athaliah**.

e. **Hezekiah**. Hezekiah was a reformer in the truest sense of the word. His reign followed that of his wicked father, **Ahaz**. During **Ahaz**' reign the

people, led by their idolatrous king, turned far from God and the doors of the temple were closed and the sacred vessels removed. Hezekiah reversed the processes of his father, opened the temple doors, restored the vessels, cleansed the house and called upon the people to cleanse themselves and prepare to keep the Passover, "for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written" (II Chron. 30:5).

During the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign over Judah (II Kings 18:10), Samaria, then capital of Israel, was taken by the Assyrian king **Shalman-ezer**, and the Northern Kingdom fell never to rise again. Again, we find that it was God's will that it be so because "that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God." Palestine was a small country and the fall of the Northern Kingdom posed a threat to the remaining Southern Kingdom. Hezekiah feared the Assyrians, for Samaria was less than 50 miles from Jerusalem.

Sennacherib, the next king of Assyria, soon came to Hezekiah and demanded tribute for leaving the little kingdom at peace. Hezekiah granted the request, but the peace was shortlived; and eight years after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, Assyria invaded Judah. Hezekiah turned to the Lord for help and was advised by **Isaiah** the prophet to be not afraid, for the Lord would help them. The incident is found in II Kings 18, 19 and also in **Isaiah** 36, 37.

f. **Josiah** became king at the tender age of eight, and like Hezekiah, he followed the reign of a wicked father and grandfather under whom the people had forsaken the true God and neglected to keep the temple in repair. In the process of cleaning the Lord's house, the priest found the book of the law. **Huldah** was a prophetess of the Lord at that time, and when consulted concerning the prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, she informed Josiah that Jerusalem would indeed be destroyed, but not until after his death. Josiah, like Hezekiah, was a true reformer and he restored the temple and commanded the people to worship God. **Jeremiah** was also a prophet in the days of Josiah and lamented Josiah's death (II Chron. 35:25).

g. **Jehoahaz**, the son of Josiah, became king after his father's death. It was after only three months of his reign that the prophecy of the Lord was fulfilled and the Egyptians took control of Jerusalem. "And Pharaoh-nechoh made **Eliakim** the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to **Jehoiakim**, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there" (II Kings 23:34).

Eleven years later, **Nebuchadnezzar**, king of Babylon, defeated Nechoh. The land of Judah was ruled indirectly by Babylon, and many of the people were carried captive to Babylon. It was at this time that **Daniel** was taken to Babylon, about 606 B.C. Upon the death of **Jehoiakim**, his son assumed the

throne. His reign was a short three months, for at that time Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar and the king and many others were taken captive to Babylon.

Thus the Southern Kingdom, Judah, came to its tragic end. It was the fulfillment of God's prophecy through his servant Jeremiah: "I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon" (Jer. 20:4). Jerusalem was rendered uninhabitable by the siege and the puppet government was set up at Mizpah under the charge of Gedaliah. After his death, the survivors went down into Egypt, contrary to the admonition of Jeremiah, and there disappeared, and God's once glorious kingdom was no more.

2. Notable kings of Israel. Of the kings of Israel the Scriptures have almost nothing good to say; the outstanding characteristic most common among them was their ability to do evil. They were God's agents, but merely human, and failing to rely completely on Him, they led the people to sin in worshipping other gods.

a. Jeroboam, the first king over the ten tribes of the divided kingdom, came to the throne by divine decree. But he did not reign long before God was displeased with His choice of a king. The name of **Jeroboam** became synonymous with idol worship because of the golden calves he built and commanded the people to worship. He is often spoken of as having taught Israel to sin.

During his reign we again hear from the prophet **Ahijah** whom God sent this time to warn Jeroboam that because of his sin the kingdom of Israel would fall: "For the Lord shall smite Israel, . . . and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, . . . and he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin" (I Kings 14:15, 16). This prophecy was fulfilled when Israel was captured and the inhabitants carried away by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, never again to return.

b. Omri, the father of Ahab, the sixth king of Israel is to be noted because he built Samaria, the capital of Israel. "And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, . . . Samaria" (I Kings 16:24). Until this time Shechem had been the capital of Israel. But he was not pleasing to God, for we read that "Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him" (I Kings 16:25).

c. Ahab, the son of Omri, ascended the throne in Israel following his father's death. His name has become a symbol of wickedness, for he "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him." And the name of his wife, Jezebel, has passed into the English language as a description of cruelty and wickedness. Jezebel was the daughter of the king of the Zidonians. Zidon was the princi-

pal city of the Phoenicians. She brought with her the worship of the god Baal and led Ahab and many of the people to the worship of Baal; soon moral degeneration became apparent.

It was at this time that the prophet **Elijah** appeared on the scene. He appears very suddenly, described only as "Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead." His was a message of judgment because of the wickedness of the people: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (I Kings 17:1). The drought was to be so severe that it would bring famine in the land. The account of Elijah's encounter with Ahab and the false prophets at Carmel that subsequently brought rain and ended the famine is to be found in I Kings 18.

Elijah is regarded as the greatest of the prophets, stern and fearless. He did not hesitate to speak the truth, even to kings, and even though it was bad news. He wanted nothing of compromise. Israel wanted to worship God and Baal, but Elijah knew that it was not possible and his question was: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal then follow him."

After the incident at Mt. Carmel, the wicked Jezebel sought his life and Elijah fled into the wilderness, but God had yet more work for him and he returned to the presence of his arch-enemy in the vineyard of Naboth. God had sent him to prophesy the doom of his entire house because of his wickedness and that of his wife Jezebel. The prophecy was fulfilled some 35 years later by the hand of **Jehu**, (II Kings 9:25—37; 10:1—17), and Jezebel likewise met death according to the word of Elijah. The last we hear of Elijah is when he turned his work over to **Elisha**, and was taken up into heaven by the chariots of God, which according to Ps. 68: 17, are angels.

Following Ahab, the Northern Kingdom was ruled by one wicked king after another until the city of Samaria fell to Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, some 240 years after the split in the original kingdom, and the people were dispersed, never again to be a nation. ●●

To be a messenger you must know the message.

TEST YOURSELF

1. Why were the majority of the kings of Israel and Judah unfaithful to the true God?
2. What caused the division of the Kingdom?
3. When did the Kingdom of Israel terminate? Judah?
4. List 5 kings of Judah, and an important event in the reign of each.

Reprints of these studies are available upon request.

G-r-o-w!

THE GLORY of life is that we can grow. And grow we must! The instant we stop, death begins. The moment you and I become satisfied with the situation that may be improved, that moment we are dying. To stay alive we must keep growing.

How?

1. *Vitally.* To grow physically or spiritually we must be alive. Concerning spiritual vivacity Jesus said, "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." Whatever our environment, if we have the Son, if we have the life which He lived and the words which He taught ("My words are spirit and they are life"—John 6:63), we can grow spiritually.

2. *Naturally.* By the laws of nature, living things grow. We have to place ourselves in the line of growth. And suitable environment is a factor. An acorn lying on a stone will never make an oak. But put that acorn in the ground, where it belongs, and then watch it grow. Healthful environment, insofar as we can choose, is necessary.

3. *By eating.* What we eat affects us directly. There is a story of a sea gull which was shut up and fed on grain. Its natural food is soft fish, and its natural stomach is soft. After a time this sea gull was killed, and it was found that the stomach had changed into a gizzard.

Since we are what we eat, let us eat to build the spiritual man. "Eat ye that which is good," urges the prophet Isaiah. In other words, read what will upbuild.

No book can make you grow as can the Bible, for it is the Word of God. Someone once said that if you can digest all you see in the daily newspaper, you must have a gizzard instead of a stomach. Feed on "angel's food." The Bible is full of it. It will build you up. It will edify you. And more—it will furnish you for every good word and work.

4. *By breathing.* In a closed room we continually breathe over our breath. If we go outside and then come into such an unventilated room, we wonder how we survived in such poor air.

Growing in such a stagnant situation would be difficult. Jesus was a man who lived in the fresh air, the fresh air of prayer. Common atmosphere stifled Him. He could not long breathe it, hence His communion apart with the Father. If we would grow, we also need a constant supply of that same fresh air. Get deep breaths of heavenly air every day. Wherever you are, this air is available.

5. *By resting.* Even the heart rests between the heart-beats. The man who is growing needs rest. Read Psalm 37:7: "Rest in the Lord, and wait

patiently for him." Anxiety will not add one inch to you or your growth. It will subtract. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow—quietly—silently! "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Our strength is to "Be still and know that I am God." "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. 3:26). "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." If we rest from all sin and evil, we will be secure, for "underneath are the everlasting arms."

6. *By working.* We gain strength by exercise. And if we work, we will eat, rest and sleep. We can "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" only by eating the food He has provided, and by doing the work which He has laid out for us. People who do not work sometimes complain that they lack strength; often their weakness is the result of improper nourishment. And if we are spiritually weak, it is because we are not spiritually fed—and we are not spiritually fed because we are not hungry. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

Broken-down tissues call for nourishment. And so the tissues of our inner life call for the Bread of Life. We must develop a hunger and thirst for righteousness. How? By exercising, and that to godliness. Then we will eat, rest, work and grow.

Do you want to g-r-o-w? Then *go right on working*. In this way you will find your straight line of life without variableness or shadow of turning. This is God's own lifeline. You will grow until you reach the "stature of the fulness of Christ."

"My Father worketh hitherto and I work," said Jesus. ●●

Words to WALK By

If one wishes to be a knocker, he needs neither brains nor education.

Some people are trying to get to Zion with their compass in reverse.

You cannot be good without being good for something.

Those who do not cross rivers until they get to them usually have fewer rivers to cross.

Sin is sugar-coated.

Beware of the rubber conscience and the concrete heart.

When a Christian rests, he rusts.



*It is joy to give thanks to the Eternal,
to sing thy praise, O thou Most High,
to proclaim thy goodness in the morning,
and thy faithfulness at night,
To the sound of a ten-stringed lute,
to the music of the lyre;
Thy doings have made me glad,
O thou Eternal,
I sing for joy at all that thou hast done,
How great are thy deeds, O Eternal,
how deep are thy designs!*
Psalm 92:1—5, Moffatt.

Music is power.

Music can rouse or soothe. It can suggest the tenderest memories or express the brightest anticipations. Unfortunately, in the possession of sordid performers it can appeal to basest emotions; but performed to the glory of God, it can inspire the most sacred desires. It is music that intones the mourner's lament, or rings the glad melody of the happiest festival. It expresses the keenest disappointment and dejection of the defeated, or the triumphant shout of the conquering hero.

Music through the centuries has helped to minister to man's spiritual needs. Since the earliest time music and religion have been so closely connected that it is difficult to determine which came first. From primitive times man's urge to worship was accompanied by a desire to express his feelings. And music offered one of the most suitable and effective means of expressing those feelings.

Singing was early a means of worshipful expression among God's people, singing often accompanied by instrumental music. Excepting poetry, music seems to be the only art cultivated to any extent among the ancient Hebrews. We are told in Gen. 4:21 of early musical expression by instrument: "Jubal was the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ." That is, he was the inventor of the first stringed and wind instruments. When we use the word "jubilee" we still give verbal credit to this ancient musician.

The singing of God's people has echoed down through the ages. We hear it first

. . . In the Wilderness

Pealing across the ages are the triumphant notes of Israel after their miraculous deliverance from

the pursuing Egyptians and Pharaoh at the Red Sea. It is recorded (Ex. 14) that Moses and the children of Israel sang unto the Lord. Listen to the first and last stanzas of their song:

*I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed
gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the
sea.
The Lord is my strength and song, and he is
become my salvation;
He is my God, and I will prepare him an habita-
tion;
My father's God, and I will exalt him. . . .*

*Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the
mountain of thine inheritance,
In the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for
thee to dwell in,
In the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have
established,
The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.
—Ex. 15:1, 2, 17, 18, Berkeley.*

How they rejoiced to be delivered from their oppressing enemies! And how better could they have expressed their gratitude than through music and song?

We read further: they combined instrument with voice. "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" (Ex. 15:20, 21).

From the midst of the wilderness arose another song, and this song brought water out of the dry ground. The valley was dry, but the Lord "spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water." Then Israel sang,

Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it.

And the princes digged, and the nobles digged, "by the direction of the lawgiver with their staves," and with the praise and rejoicing of the people the waters came (Num. 21:15—17).

Again we hear the voice of melody, this time it comes

. . . From the Land of Promise

Deliverance from the hand of the enemy brought the triumphant thanksgiving of Deborah and Barak to an exultant climax of praise:

*Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel . . .
Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes;
I, even I, will sing unto the Lord;
I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel . . .*

*So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord:
But let them that love him be as the sun when he
goeth forth in his might.*

—Judges 5:2, 3, 31.

Music played an important role in divine worship

. . . In the Kingdom of David

In the kingdom of David, music flourished. We are told in I Chron. 25:6 that "God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. All these were under the hand of their father for song in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God." A musical family indeed! And what happy times they must have had together, singing and playing to the glory of God!

But they were not the only singers: "the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight." According to I Chron. 23:5 there were no less than 4,000 singers and musicians for the sacred service, and according to one historian, 288 of them excelled.

And there was organization. These singers were divided into 24 orders, with 12 singing masters directing. Also included in the service equipment were thousands of silver trumpets, as well as harps and psalteries. What an overwhelming volume of sound must have ascended when all these instrumentalists and singers performed at the same time.

To our modern taste, Israel's instrumentation may have sounded more like noise than music. But let us not judge harshly: These musicians were praising and glorifying God, and what could be more inspiring than the expression of their joy!

What did they sing? In I Chronicles 16 we find a sample:

*Give thanks to the Eternal, proclaim his fame—
celebrate among the nations his exploits;
Sing to him, make music to him,
go over all the wonders he has done;
Glory in his sacred name, let the worshipers
of the Eternal rejoice in heart.
Worship the Eternal and his might,
worship his presence evermore,
remember the wonders he has done. . . .*

Give thanks to the Eternal for his goodness;

his kindness never fails.

*And cry, "O God of our salvation, save us,
gather us, free us, from the heathen,
to give thanks to thy sacred name,
to triumph in our praise of thee."
Blessed be the Eternal, Israel's God,
through all eternity!*

—I Chron. 16:8—12, 34—36, Moffatt.

And, we read, "all the people added 'Amen,' and praised the Eternal."

We must not gather from this religious enthusiasm that all the people of Israel were zealous servants of Jehovah. Some, no doubt, served out of mere pleasure; others were motivated by the respect they had for their king and an inner obligation of duty. Others, inspired by the joyful sound, joined in word but not in heart. Nevertheless, David's promotion of music helped to keep Israel united and alive to the interests of God's temple, awakening in some a desire for the higher, holier life.

. . . In the Kingdom of Hezekiah

In II Chronicles 29 we read of Hezekiah's diligence in cleansing the house of the Lord from all the wickedness and idolatry of his wicked father Ahaz. When the cleansing was complete, the king "commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshiped.

"Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and bowed their heads and worshiped." All this was commanded by king Hezekiah.

The people of God employed musical instruments more than two thousand years before the Mosaic law was given. During the duration of the law they were used extensively in divine worship, and when the sacrifices and burnt offerings commanded under that law ceased and a better hope was brought in by Christ, never a word do we read that music, either vocal or instrumental, was taken away.

. . . In the New Testament

Though there is little said in the New Testament of the use of musical instruments, neither is the subject forgotten. In His parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus speaks of the elder son hearing the sound of music as he neared the house (Luke 16).

In I Corinthians 14, Paul recognized the use of

musical instruments, though his point was the necessity of intelligible worship. "Even the inanimate things that produce sounds—a flute, say, or a lyre—unless their notes mark definite intervals, how can you tell what tune is being played? Or again, if the trumpet-call is not clear, who will prepare for battle?" (v. 7, NEB).

In the same chapter Paul gave command concerning singing: when we sing, we must "sing with the spirit" and "sing with the understanding also" (v. 15). The right use of devotion is essential. If our praise is unintelligible, though its sound may be melodious, who can be admonished? We must "sing with the understanding also." Song, like prayer, should come from the depths of the heart and make us better.

Why were musical instruments little used in New Testament times? Consider first the fact that Jesus and His apostles were traveling from place to place on foot, and that they were a persecuted people, as were also the followers of Christ in after years.

In the days of the Israelite nation, the temple was an established center of religion and the people living nearby could easily attend the hours of practice and worship. But it would have been very inconvenient for Paul to carry a musical instrument in his wanderings, knowing as he did that wherever he went, bonds and imprisonments awaited him. Remember his escape when he was let down from a window in a basket over the city wall; or when he was stoned and dragged from the city and left for dead.

But the apostles could sing—and they did. We read in Acts 16:24, 25 that Paul and Silas, caught and thrust into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks, at midnight prayed and sang praises unto God. Their songs must have established a direct connection with the throne of God, for suddenly there was a great earthquake which shook the foundation of the prison.

... In Our Day

Music, wholesome music, inspiring music, is still a powerful force in the Christian life.

God's command is definite: "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," and in what manner may Christians fulfill this duty more delightfully than through music?

In church service, music transports our thoughts from the everyday cares of this mortal existence to a higher, exalted plane where only God and the saints can tread. It puts us in direct communion with God. For the first time that day everyone in the congregation is thinking on the same subject. It prepares our minds to receive the message of the sermon.

It has been said that a hymn is addressed to God; a gospel song, to the people. Both are good, when their message is uplifting. The Christian delights

in the command to sing praises to God, and—if faithful—he will have eternity in which to praise Him.

The Christian has even more reason to sing. He is engaged in the tremendous task of preparing a character worthy of God's approval; therefore he must be warned, exhorted, and stimulated continually to greater and still greater efforts in the divine life, for at best he has only a few short years in which to accomplish this. How needful, then, is any assistance available to him.

... In the Future

The ministry of music is our duty now, and it will grow—and grow—and grow into the resounding glory of the new age when the "redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isa. 51:11).

When the day arrives for the marriage of the Lamb and the Bride, His faithful church, "the voice of a great multitude," shall unite with "the voice of many waters" and "the voice of mighty thunders" in a rapturous chorus of "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. 19:6—8). And the music of that hallelujah chorus shall glorify God through the endless cycles of eternity. ●●

Why Are We Here?

(Continued from page 10)

our goal our value to our Creator will be such that He will delight in finding a useful place for us in His majestic plans for eternity. This is the ultimate of why we are here.

Surely in our heavenly Father's limitless universe there are in other worlds a lot we could be privileged to deliver from Sodom, an Elijah we could aid on a lonely Mount Carmel, a Daniel to whom we could be sent to give skill and understanding, shepherds to whom we could announce the birth of their future King, and a loyal Peter we could release from prison.

Truly only a life that is perpetual could begin to be long enough to explore all the possible rewards of consecrated service to our God! ●●

Perhaps it is not your *position* but your *disposition* that's making you unhappy.

MEGIDDO MESSAGE



I'm Thinking

MY SUBJECT is not to be found in your Bible, though I am sure you have all heard it before. The other day I heard someone say to a boy who had done a kindly and manly deed, "Herbert, you're a brick!" And that's my text—"You're a brick!" "Oh," you may say, "that's slang, and we must not use slang." Well, I think you will agree when I have finished that this, if it is slang, will not do you any harm at all.

I am going to tell you where this phrase came from. It was used a very long time ago by a Spartan king, whose name was Agesilaus. We are told that there visited him an ambassador from another part of Greece, and the king showed him the wonders of Sparta. Now this ambassador had heard how great and mighty a man the king was, and he expected to see the towns surrounded by great, high walls and towers to keep off the attacks of the enemy. And he found none at all. So he said to the king: "O king, I have visited the towns over which you rule and though I have looked, yet have I seen no walls to defend them against an enemy. I am amazed!" "Why," said the king, "you have not looked carefully enough, Sir Ambassador. Come again tomorrow morning, and I will show you the walls of Sparta." The Ambassador went away more surprised than ever, and was very curious the next morning when he returned to meet the king.

Then the king led him down the plains where his army was drawn up in full battle array, with their spears and their shields shining in the sun. Pointing to the battle lines, he said proudly to the Ambassador: "There, sir, thou beholdest the walls of Sparta—ten thousand men, and every man a brick!" Every man a brick—every man loyal and true, staunch, and steadfast, ready to defend his country and fight for his king.

And so, "you're a brick." I say it to every boy and girl I know. I want you each to be a "brick," to be loyal and brave and true—not to Sparta, but to the King of kings, to God, fighting for Him and defending His Name. You remember when Jesus

came the first time, men expected Him to build a great throne and to establish Himself as King of the Jews. But Jesus said: "No. I will not build a throne, nor a city of bricks or stone. My kingdom is made up of men and women, boys and girls, all who will be faithful to my every command. They shall inherit the earth when I return and set up My Kingdom."

Jesus relies on us to defend his cause, to be loyal to His cause, to be His strong walls of defense.

I want you then to take this text away with you, and when anyone says to you, because of some kind deed you have done, "You're a brick," remember that you really are if you are strong, and loyal and true to Jesus, His cause, and His kingdom. Every kind word, good deed, loving thought, every battle against sin, deceit, temper, disobedience—all these will please your King and help win for you a crown of eternal life. ●●

To Go or To Come

A STORY is told of a patriotic rally held in Civil War days to get enlistees for a regiment from a certain community. On the program were three speakers, two of them brilliant orators. The orators spoke first, painting in vivid terms the obligations of citizenship and the implications of patriotism. Each closed his speech with the ringing exhortation, "Go, boys, go!"

But nobody went.

The third speaker was no orator. He had difficulty finding the right words to convey his message. He was an old soldier who had seen service in other wars. He closed his simple address with the words: "Come, boys, come!" and he struck off across the field for the recruiting office. Within thirty minutes every able-bodied man in the crowd had signed enlistment papers—there was more power in "come" than in "go."

And today there is still the same difference. It has been said that *come* is twice as long as *go*, but twenty times as strong.

From the prophets to the Revelator the invitation is to "come." In Genesis God called Noah to come into the ark that he and his family might be saved—they would not dwell there alone, for He would be with them. "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation" (Gen. 7:1).

Isaiah beckoned his hearers to follow him: "Come ye to the waters and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat"; and again, "Come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live" (Isa. 55:1, 3).

"Come," says Wisdom, "eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake

the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding" (Prov. 9:5, 6).

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). We are commissioned not to say "Go" but "Come." We are to invite others to follow us, to go where we ourselves are going.

Jesus also extended the invitation to all who would come to Him: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28—30).

What did Jesus mean when He said "Come"? "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). To answer Jesus' summons to "Come, and follow me" involves much. In fact, it involves all—all our mind, might and strength. Peter and Andrew answered the call by leaving their nets at once. They could say, "We have left all and followed thee."

Have we done this? Are we *coming*? And do our lives radiate an example that others will feel compelled to follow? Are we living witnesses for Christ and His truth, living witnesses for the cause of God on earth?

The rich young ruler in Jesus' parable heard the call to "come," but was not willing to deny himself and follow the Master. Many down through the ages have answered the call and started to follow, only to turn back when the road became rough.

As the Revelator commissioned all who hear to say "Come," it not only becomes the privilege but also the duty of each and every one of us to say "come." But before we say "come" to others, let us double check our own course—are we walking straight? Are we walking in the footsteps of our Master who said, "I do always those things which please the Father"?

Let us walk carefully, seizing upon every opportunity to progress, for there is waiting for us an invitation which we shall not want to miss: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). ●●

LETTERS

Do More than Think

Just thinking or reading about things we would like to do, or be, will not help us; for to accomplish anything worthwhile, knowledge or theory must be put into practice.

Just believing, thinking about or reading the Bible will not give us eternal life; we must *work out* our own salvation. We must *do* the works of righteousness. We must *live* a life ordered and sober, given to prayer.

May we not think that the work is too difficult, for what indeed are our trials or temptations compared to our Lord's? Our appearance, our physical strength, or our social position means nothing to God, "for the Eternal does not see as man sees; the Eternal looks at the heart." So may we serve Him faithfully to the end.

Swansea, South Wales

R. B.

Times of Confusion

I think the times we live in are very confusing to the young people. They see so much wrong in the world today and so little being done about it that many are frustrated.

I thank God every day for all the blessings He has given us. There are so many people in the world living in misery, with no hope of a better world ahead.

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Mrs. L. S.

Paying the Price

World happenings are a daily reminder that time is running out for all who are striving to be ready to meet the Master, and to quote a saying from the Rev. L. T. Nichols, that which "remains to be done must be done quickly."

I would like to be worthy of a place in that soon-coming divine social order, and I am sure you would also.

To aspire to membership in that new arrangement is a high and commendable ideal, and, as might reasonably be expected, is both costly and difficult. Yet it is available to all, regardless of any temporal wealth they might possess. It cannot be purchased with money, for money already belongs to the Lord. God has adjusted the price in terms of something that is exclusively our own and does not belong to Him—our wills, affections, and desires.

This is the only medium of exchange by which we can engage in spiritual buying and selling. It is our own ways, and a complete "sellout" with nothing reserved is the price of membership in that new order, and the value received will be all out of proportion to the cost, as all who have paid the price will realize in the coming ages.

Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

G. W. S.

Finishing the Work

According to the Word, we have not much time left to finish the great work of cleansing ourselves from all our old carnal ways. The apostle Paul tells us that in order to please God we must have this one strong faith that God exists and that He is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him. All of God's people walking in this narrow way had this faith and hope of that great reward. Jesus, our greatest example, endured the cross for the joy set before Him.

We are very thankful for the shades of the evening so mercifully stretched out for us to finish our work of putting off the old man and putting on the new.

Vernon, B. C., Canada

Mrs. Z. S.

Meditations

On the Word

"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

We do not know why God created man with the particular set of characteristics that he possesses. Two of them, his thirst for knowledge, and his willingness to back his personal judgment, have set him apart and also led him into many unpredictable adventures. Probably few persons cannot recall with ease their own failures. Often we had good counsel to follow, had we only been willing. "Counsel" is defined as advice or opinion suggesting some course of action. It may be mutual consultation or deliberation. Advice may be unsought, and unwelcome. Counsel is supposed to be desired.

The Wise Man says in a "multitude of counselors there is safety." We never hear anyone speak of a small amount of safety. It must be sure and complete or it is not safety at all. If interested in hearing only a few of the Lord's counselors, we are not interested in safety. But if we are interested in the true safety we will be storing up in our hearts the multitude of counselors provided for these last days. This will place us in the most favorable position possible to walk in the strait and narrow way that leads to life.

Every example in the history of God's people which was necessary for our learning, or which would contribute to our effort to gain salvation was made available through the written Word. In the earlier part of the 6,000 years now drawing to a close, God dealt with men through angels. They spoke face to face. Moses inquired of the Lord in times of crises and occasions of doubt. In Ex. 33:11 it is recorded that Moses talked with the Lord (angel) face to face. Numbers 16:15 tells how Moses spoke to the Lord (angel) at a time of rebellion. God dealt directly with men in His service, to instruct and direct them. From Genesis through Judges it is recorded fourteen times that the angel of the Lord "called," "said," or "appeared" to men, in addition to an equal number of times where the angel's presence was promised. God's counsel to man came regularly through angels. As time went on and more and more of God's counsel and instruction was recorded, we find these testimonies referred to as God's counselors. David said, "Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counselors" (Psalm 119:24).

Jesus could always say, "It is written." God's

written testimonies were His delight and counselors, even though He enjoyed the privilege of angelic ministration and instruction. Paul's writings are richly filled with references to the knowledge and teachings of the prophets, together with many quotations from their writings. After Jesus appeared to him with a special commission, Paul very seldom failed to keep himself surrounded with a multitude of counselors of God's choosing. Otherwise he could never have fought the good fight of faith which he did.

In a large crowd, one is surrounded by people, bumped, pushed and shoved by them. Their very presence affects all our actions. So it is with a multitude of God's counselors. If we fill our minds with His counsel and His thoughts, everything we do will be affected by God's ways; and under continual practice we will become Godlike in our thoughts and ways.

The 119th Psalm has 176 verses, and in all but four of them at least one of the following words appear: commandment, judgments, law, ordinances, precepts, statutes, testimonies, ways (God's), word (God's). Frequently the connection is with some character trait of the Psalmist, nearly always with his conduct. This is a good illustration of how God's testimonies can be a multitude of counselors to us. Verse 11 is the heart of the whole matter, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." This is the safety the counselors of the Lord can provide. It is the only safety man can achieve in this age when all are subject to the frailties of mortality.

As man is reluctant to follow the advice of wiser men, he is equally reluctant about following the counsel of the All-wise God. The Almighty tells us His ways are as much higher than man's as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa. 55:8, 9). His Word counsels that we should put away all bitterness, anger, evil speaking, and malice (Eph. 4:31, 32). But man's heart counsels to go ahead and think and speak as we wish and feel, whether right or wrong. God's counsel urges us to be tenderhearted and forgiving; but it is so easy to follow our natural ways and be gruff or hold a grudge that should be put away. God's counsel offers a great reward for the meek (Matt. 5:5); but it is so much easier to be proud even when we have little, if anything, to be proud about.

God's counsel advises us to be peaceable and easily intreated (James 3:17); but too often we prefer to be stubborn and argumentative. God's counsel advises that we bridle our tongue (Ps. 39:1); but we so often prefer our own counsel and tell at length of our own experiences. Truly God's counselors are different from man's, and if we follow them we can give, improve and become different in a pure way, acceptable to God.

As there was once a time when all God's counsel

to man was given through angels—the immortal beings who have worked out their salvation on other worlds—there will come again such a time. All of life's activities will be adjusted and regulated. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21). One of the differences in that age will be that the angels will be principally those who have worked out their salvation on this earth in the preceding epoch of six thousand years. During the thousand years they will be engaged in instructing the great unnumbered multitude, training to become the subject class, whose presence will fulfill the promise made so long ago in Numbers 14:21, "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."

In this little short period of time, God holds open the door of opportunity, extending to us the chance to become really somebody in His sight. By following the counsel of His testimonies, the perfect counselors ("The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul," Ps. 19:7), we have the opportunity to rule self, and later the nations. By putting away sin from our lives we can become instrumental in putting sin and evil out of this world forever. By letting our light shine, we can shine as the stars forever and ever in the heavens of the Great Eternal. ●●

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"As I understand the Bible, the war Armageddon will not be fought between Christ and this world's armies, or between right and wrong. This war Armageddon will be fought between Judaism and Moslems, or paganism and Communism. Also, this might be a *religious* war, but not a *righteous* war. There is no such thing as a righteous war, because war does not come from God."

The Bible states plainly that the battle of Armageddon will be fought between the forces of good, under the direction of Christ, and the forces of evil, under the direction of the world powers. Says the Revelator, "And I saw the beast [leading the powers of earth], and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. . . . These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev. 19:19; 17:14).

The prophet Zechariah also tells us of this war: "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh. . . . For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and

. . . then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle" (Zech. 14:1—3).

Psalm 2 also describes this time of righteous judgment. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. . . . Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (vs. 2—5). Psalm 149 also describes the judgment and the battle: "To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgments written: this honour have all his saints" (vs. 6—9).

And this *will* be a righteous war. Right, under the execution of Christ and His saints, shall prevail. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." *In righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

"I was raised to believe that the taking of life for any reason was a mortal sin. Yet, I was assured by many chaplains that the taking of the life of an enemy in war was not a sin. Please clarify this for me. Where may I find it in the Bible? This is one thing that hangs heavy on me now that I am retired from the service and have time to sit back on the outside and look in."

During the period when God was actively involved in the affairs of His people, the children of Israel were required to wage war with some of their heathen neighbors. In these and such cases, war was just and the taking of life was not only allowed but commanded.

Again, when Christ returns to this earth as King, the only way He will be able to subdue the wicked nations will be to wage the Battle of Armageddon, in which two-thirds of the inhabitants of the earth will be destroyed (Zech. 13:8).

War under divine guidance would be justified, and the taking of life would be honorable, not sinful. War under human authority is something else. Man without Holy Spirit power cannot read the mind of an individual; he cannot know whether another man is worthy to live or worthy to die. The world today would be better off if many of the gangsters, murderers, etc., could have been eliminated in childhood. But man's perception is not sufficiently educated, and in many instances what power he did possess has been grossly abused.

Jesus said to Peter, "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). And again to the soldiers: "Do violence to no man" (Luke 3:14). In view of these facts, we believe it is wrong to serve in an army under man's direction.

MEGIDDO MESSAGE

The members of the Megiddo Church are conscientious objectors. Our members of draft age serve in work of national importance, but will not serve with the armed forces.

As far as your past military career is concerned, if you now realize this was a transgression of God's law and no longer serve in the army, you have nothing to fear. It is the situation which the prophet Ezekiel describes: "If the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. . . . None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live" (Ezek. 33:19, 16). There is no sin committed today from which we cannot repent.

"Do you think the earth will be destroyed by fire? II Pet. 3 says that the earth will 'melt.' I think if people were aware of this fact they would repent and amend their lives."

You make reference to II Pet. 3:7—10, which you seem to feel refers to a fiery demolition of the earth and heavens. We cannot agree on this. In Biblical language the common people are often spoken of as "earth," and the ruling groups as "heavens." We feel it is the present world leaders that as the "heavens," and the wicked among the common people as "earth," will pass away as a result of God's judgments, figuratively referred to as fire.

You feel that if the truth were known the people would heartily repent and amend their lives. That was not the result of Noah's 120 years of preaching before the Flood. And Jesus foretold that His second coming would find the world as it was in the days of Noah (Luke 17:26—30).

"Doesn't the prophecy in Jer. 3:14 give modern Israelites a clear title to the land of Israel? I believe the Bible, 'And so all Israel shall be saved.'"

Jeremiah 3:14 is obviously figurative language: "I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." This small proportion would be a far cry from, "And so all Israel shall be saved." Could we assume that the present setup is fulfilling the promise in verse 15? Has the Lord given them pastors according to His heart that are feeding them with knowledge and understanding?

Ezekiel 36:24 is often adduced to support the belief that natural Israel has a clear title to the Holy Land, and that the Jewish colony there is a fulfillment of prophecy. The text reads: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and I will bring you into your own land." If the precarious foothold Israel has in the Holy Land today represents God's power in fulfilling His promise, He has grown too weak to be recognized as the God of heaven and earth.

Verse 25 pictures an associated situation that does not exist in Israel today: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." Has modern Israel been cleansed from all their filthiness of sin? Do they no longer worship temporal wealth, or use the filthy weed tobacco? Do they no longer prevaricate to drive a shrewd bargain? no longer permit the marriage of divorced people, permitting a married person to have more than one living spouse?

"In Luke 21:32, Christ is telling the people that 'this generation' shall not pass away before these things come to pass. I believe Christ is the son of God, but I wondered if I had misread or if it was a misinterpretation. The way I see it, Christ is telling the people of that day that His second coming will be in the days of that generation. Some of my friends feel that this means that there are still those walking the earth today who were hearing Christ at that time. Please, your explanation."

Christ in the parable of the Talents said, "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh" (Matt. 25:19). Only after a *long time* would He return; therefore, in Luke 21:32, Christ could not have been referring to the generation living when He spoke those words, or there would be contradiction in the words of Scripture.

In order to understand Luke 21:32, we must be familiar with the fact that there was a long period of time in which the truth of God's Word lay dead. (For more evidence on this subject, see our publication, *The Great Apostasy*.)

In Luke 21:29, 30 Jesus said, "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." We believe that the budding of the fig tree refers to the recrudescence of God's divine truth after the long dark night of the apostasy when all mankind turned away from the laws of God. The phrase "this generation" could refer to the generation which saw the fig tree bud, the truth of God's law rediscovered and proclaimed.

This verse has also been explained as follows: The generation could refer to Jesus' words or the statement of fact. The statements which He had just made would not pass away. "Heaven and earth [referring to the political heaven and earth, rulers and the people ruled over] shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." God's promises, once spoken, are certain to be fulfilled. ●●

Only a little man is troubled because someone fails to appreciate his greatness.

Be Faithful Under Cover

When to the front you cannot go
Be faithful under cover;
God needs a secret service, too,
The one to help the other.
It may be in the engine-room,
Just firing the old boiler
E'en where it's dark and lonely, lad;
Be faithful under cover.

Daniel defied the king's decree
Was faithful under cover;
He trusted God whom He well knew
Was able to deliver.
And cast in den of lions fierce,
He yielded not nor cowered
And God remembered him, for he
Was faithful under cover.

Elijah, in the wilderness,
Was faithful under cover;
God's hidden man was sent to warn
Of dearth, the country over.
Then, if like him to Cherith sent
To wait the coming shower,
He'll keep and feed and cherish you
If faithful under cover.

*First, find the place of secret prayer;
Be faithful under cover;
Fast close the door and linger there—
It is the place of power.
If in the home and kitchen, lass,
Your calling you discover,
Remember you can serve Him there,
Be faithful under cover.*

*Joseph, hated by his kin
Was faithful under cover;
Though sold to Midian as a slave
He hated not his brother.
Unjustly cast in dungeon dark
His God was with him ever
Because He knew that Joseph still
Was faithful under cover.*

*Perchance you missed the battle's front—
Be faithful under cover;
God needs the ones who mind the stuff
As much as any other.
Lift up your heads; do not despair
Trust God to keep you ever
Whate'er your lot, where'er you are
Be faithful under cover.*