

Megiddo Message



*This is our Father's world,
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong
God is the ruler yet.*

Vol. 89, No. 1
January, 2002

WHOSE VALUES?

by GERALD R. PAYNE

Newspapers and news broadcasts are replete with violence, war and hatred between nations and groups within nations. To define this type of violence a new and terrible term was given birth this past century: ethnic cleansing.

There are two common thoughts about what causes such violence. The most popular, perhaps, is that age-old resentments and hatreds simply well up and motivate ethnic cleansing. The other thought is that they are initiated by modern-style states that have at their cores racist, nationalistic ideals.

No matter which view you may hold, your view is the result of a system of beliefs and the value you place on these beliefs. This belief system may show itself in somewhat subtle ways. For example, recently while doing some research, I discovered a website offering a free counter for all "Christian" web pages. But to get this free counter, there were a few requirements which reflected the values of those making the offer. Surprisingly, this "Christian" web page placed greatest importance not on morality, not on obedience to the Word of God, not on studying and understanding the Bible as the Word of God, but on their own belief values. To use their web-counter, one had to believe in the Trinity, the blood sacrifice of Christ on Calvary to pay the debt for our sins, and salvation as a result of belief on Christ—without works plus nothing. I didn't read any more because I realized that this "free counter" was far too costly.

While placing great value on belief can bring about wonderful results, wrong beliefs and misplaced values can result in prejudice, violence, hatred and even bloodshed. Such was the case during the battles of the Crusades, the clashes during the Great Reformation, the Holocaust, and even the recent terrorist attacks on America.

Suppose God decided that He would take away the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe if we didn't believe as He wants us to believe. Suppose Christ had not called the hated tax collector Matthew, or the tempestuous Peter, or Paul the Christian persecutor. Or, suppose He would have nothing to do with either Jew or Gentile because neither would listen completely to His laws. Where would this leave you and me?

To view the history of war and witness the animosity between religious groups with this in mind is revealing. We are here not to discriminate between religious or racial groups but to learn God's will and do it; to change our faith values to be in perfect harmony with God. Life is not just a few years to spend on self-indulgence, career advancement and pleasures. It is a divinely given privilege, a responsibility, a stewardship to be

lived and loved every day, every moment according to a higher law—God's law. This alone gives meaning to life and opens the way to eternal life.

Do your belief values measure up to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? *"Are your hearts tender and sympathetic? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself.*

Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing" (Phil. 2:1-4, NLT).

Our moral compass must always be pointing in one direction, toward Christ, so that by His example, His faith values may become ours.

To follow Christ's will, we need to keep Christ's faith values in clear focus. Such a life will bring controversy. But if you ever feel discouraged, remember Jeremiah, one of Judah's greatest prophets during the nation's darkest days. Apostasy, idolatry, perverted worship, moral decay—these were the condi-

tions under which Jeremiah lived and ministered—and all because he would not compromise. Life for him was not easy. He was persecuted, plotted against, imprisoned, priests and false prophets declared him worthy of death, threatened in his hometown of Anathoth, and put in stocks. Forced to go in hiding from king Jehoiakim, he was ridiculed publicly by the false prophet Hananiah and put into a cistern. When Jeremiah became discouraged (wouldn't we too?) his first thought was, *"I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name. But"*—did he give up? Did he change his beliefs and values? Not for a moment. Speaking of the Divine message, he said, *"His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not"* (Jer. 20:9).

Nor will we hold back if our faith values are in clear focus. All cannot be great speakers or writers. But if God's words are in your heart like a burning fire, a joy and delight, as they were to Jeremiah, your life will be a living testimony to your faith.

Have you considered your faith values lately? ♦



*To follow
Christ we need
to keep His
faith values in
clear focus.*



It was a game we played in childhood, commonly known as “hide-and-go-seek.” There was a certain ritual about it. Whoever was “it” would close his eyes and begin to count, while everyone else ran to find a hiding place. When the one who was counting reached one hundred, he would open his eyes and announce in a low, slow, reprehensive tone, “Ready or not, I’m coming!” and dash out to find the hiders.

“Ready or not, I’m coming!” speaks to us of God’s way of dealing with men, also of the limitation which God places on time. God speaks. He warns—verbally, or prophetically, through His written Word. The days that intervene may be long; but inevitably the moment arrives when it is “Ready or not, I’m coming!” It means that the time of God’s silence is ended; the time of His long-suffering is expired; the day of probation is done. The time has arrived for God to act—and act He will, whether or not the result is to the liking of His human creation. How else can He work? How else can He see His plan through to a successful finish?

What does this message say to you and me today? First, it tells us that God will always have the last word. We can protest, and fight, and complain—and suffer the consequences of our folly; or we can feel ourselves privileged to be called to fit into His plans and comply with His stipulations—and live! The choice is ours. Secondly, these words speak of our obligation to prepare so as to be ready whenever He speaks.

God is supreme—none can challenge that. Is not the Creator greater by far than any of His creatures? And when the time is right, God acts, and acts decisively. And He doesn’t need to take an opinion poll to find out what men think might be the right time, or the

continued on page 5 (inside)

Ready or Not—

IN THE BEGINNING

The Lord had not been working very long with the inhabitants of our planet before He said in effect, “Ready or not, I’m coming!” In the very first record of God’s dealings with men, Adam and Eve were in the garden where God had placed them, “to tend and care for it” (Gen. 2:15 NLT). But there were rules—“do’s” and “don’ts”.

Do we find in our lives express commands from the God of heaven meant to train us in the ways of obedience and right? There are times to speak, and times to keep silent. There are times to move forward, and times to stand still. There are always do’s and don’ts, limitations intended for our good, for “no good thing” does He ever withhold from those whose “walk is blameless” (Ps. 84:11 NIV). The rules and principles He has set are for our good; we violate them to our own detriment.

What was the law to Adam and Eve? “You may freely eat any fruit in the garden,” they had been told, “except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17 NLT).

The law was plain, unmistakable. But the forbidden fruit looked so tempting—as forbidden things often do—and Eve decided, at the urging of the serpent (her own lower nature) just to *sample* it. She did. Delicious! She gave some of it to her husband. Delicious! They had found just what they liked!

But—but just at that moment, when all seemed to be in their favor, Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden, “in the cool of the day.” What did this mean? It was a moment of truth, one of those times when the word was “Ready or not, I’m coming!” Adam and Eve were not ready, for they went and “hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8 NIV). Some of these trees they hid among may have had more of that delicious forbidden fruit; but there is no record of their being tempted by it now; the attraction was gone—their sins had been found out. They were in hiding.

But what did their hiding avail? It availed just as much as yours or mine or anyone else’s does when they or we try to hide from God—*nothing!* “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3).

Though the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 and 3 is an allegory, it is written for our learning; the lesson is there for us: We cannot hide from God. And when our day of probation is expired and we must face ourselves as we are and our record as it stands, there will be no successful hiding.

continued on page 5 (outside)

Megiddo Message

January 2002
Volume 89, No. 1

EDITORIAL

2 **Whose Values?**

FEATURE TOPIC

3 **Ready or Not, I'm Coming!**

Ready or Not—In the Beginning

Ready or Not—In Noah's Day

Ready or Not—In Sodom

Ready or Not—In Egypt

Ready or Not—In Israel

Ready or Not—Christ Came

Ready or Not—The Bridegroom Came

ARTICLE

9 **In Search of Meaning** *by Russell Hamby*

DIALOGUE

10 **The Bible—Can We Trust Every Passage?** *by Gerald R. Payne*

Did Copying Contaminate the Bible?

God's Chosen Authors

God's use of human instruments

13 **Know Your Bible?**

Come and Dine • Famous Words— Who Said Them? • Who

BIBLE STUDY: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

14 **Just When Saul Thought He Had It All...**

(PART ELEVEN) *by Ruth E. Sisson*

Stopped in his tracks • Turned 180 Degrees

A Disciple Named Ananias... • Ready to Preach

ARTICLE

18 **"Please, Lord, Don't Let Me Buy Junk!"**

BACK COVER

It doesn't take a New Year

The **Megiddo Message** (USPS 338-120) (ISSN 0194-7826) is published monthly (except March/April and September/October issues) by the Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619. Telephone: 716-235-4150. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, New York.

Publication Staff: Ruth E. Sisson, Editor; Gerald R. Payne, Executive Editor; Newton H. Payne, Senior Editor (emeritus). Artwork and design by Margaret A. Tremblay; Subscriptions Manager, Donna R. Mathias.

Subscription Rate and Renewals: One year (ten issues) \$5.00. Send to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697. Or call 585-235-4150.

Note: For the protection of our subscribers, we do not sell, rent, lease, publish or distribute our mailing list.

Address Changes? Be sure to notify promptly of any change in your address. Please include your old mailing label and your new address. Send to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697. **Postmaster:** Send all changes of address to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, NY 14619.

URL: www.megiddo.com

E-mail address: megiddo@megiddo.com

Manuscript Policy: Unsolicited manuscripts for publication are not accepted.

The **Megiddo Message** is the official organ of the Megiddo Church, Inc., founded in 1880 by L. T. Nichols. Publication was begun in 1914. Maud Hembree, Editor-in-Chief (1914-1935); Ella M. Skeels, Executive Editor (1935-1945); Percy J. Thatcher, Editor (1945-1958); Kenneth E. Flowerday, President and Editor (1958-1985); Newton H. Payne, Editor (1985-1997).

The **Megiddo Message** is available in microfilm from Bell & Howell Information and Learning, Serials Acquisitions, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Indexing: The Megiddo Message is indexed annually, in December. Combined indexing available, 1944-1996.

Bible Quotations: Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version or the New King James Version. Other versions are identified as follows: NEB—New English Bible; NIV—New International Version; NASB—New American Standard Bible; RSV—Revised Standard Version; TLB—The Living Bible; JB—The Jerusalem Bible; Phillips—The New Testament in Modern English; Moffatt—The Bible, A New Translation; NRSV—New Revised Standard Version; NLT—The New Living Translation; NCV—The New Century Version.

Note: If you wish to remove label on cover, warm with hair dryer and carefully peel off.

MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

WE BELIEVE...

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

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

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

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

THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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

continued from page 3

right manner for His action. He dictates His own terms, formulates His own plans, and knowing the end from the beginning, He is able to make those terms and plans in the best interest of all with whom He is dealing. Thus, when it suits His wise and considered purpose, He acts.

So accustomed have we become to the democratic ideals, to the idea of majority rule, consulting the mass opinion before any action is taken, that we may be inclined to think God is rather dictatorial to do as He does. Is it right for Him to design His plan without consulting us, or to give no consideration to our opinion when He takes a decisive step? But let us check any such tendency quickly, before we are caught by His authoritative "Ready or not, I'm coming!" Who are we, after all, to question the great Omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth? Where were we when He was designing His system? Is it not rather our honored and rare privilege even to *know* of His plan—much more, to be called to participate in it?

God is supreme, and we are awed by that lofty supremacy. It is within His power to kill, and to make alive; to debase, or to honor; to make low, or to exalt. When we think of it, we in our natural state, are little more than helpless creatures of dust before Him. He had no obligation to give us life in the first place, much less to perpetuate that life. And when we realize the standard maintained in His vast universe, we marvel that He lets us live. Apparently those who saw angels in times past felt this way, as though they were looking on God's holiness and were unworthy even to live. As Manoah said, *"We shall surely die, because we have seen God"* (Judges 13:22). Or Gideon, *"Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. But the Lord said to him, 'Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die'"* (Judges 6:22–23 NIV).

The Creator who made us knows our strength and our possibilities; and He also designs a way whereby we can live in His favor now, and continue on—and on—and on—even into the eternal age beyond. He is not a ruthless God delivering an ultimatum that we cannot survive whatever we do. There is no fatalism with God. He warns and warns before He acts: urgently, forcefully He warns; and then, when the time is right, it is His Divine prerogative to act. When it suits His wise and considered purpose, it is "Ready or not, I'm coming!" In other words, if you have heeded My warning, all well and good; if you have not, the fault is yours, not Mine; I gave plenty of warning.

continued from page 3

Suppose Adam and Eve had resisted the temptation to partake of the forbidden fruit. Suppose that they had done exactly as the Lord had commanded them, had tilled and kept the garden as they were instructed, and had eaten only of the right tree. What would have happened when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day? Would they still have had to run to hide? Would they not have been glad to meet Him and to show Him how faithful and obedient they had been?

When our day of probation is ended, if we have been faithful and true, won't we be glad and happy when we are presented *"before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy"*? His ultimatum, "Ready or not, I'm coming!" will be a cause for joy if we are ready.



Ready or Not—

IN NOAH'S DAY

The whole problem with God's authority and finality of action has been a dire lack of readiness on the part of men. It was so in the time of Noah. When *"...the Lord observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and he saw that all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil"* (Gen. 6:5 NLT), there was a long period of warning, ample for any to repent. But that time was not forever. The moment arrived when it was "Ready or not, I'm coming!" The door of the ark was shut.

The sky grew frightfully black, and it began to rain. And rain. And rain. And rain. The flood God had foretold, had come, whether the people were ready or not—and most of them were not. God's long-suffering with them was ended.



Ready or Not—

IN SODOM

There was another "ready or not" moment at the time God pronounced judgment on the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The angels came

WHAT DOES BEING “READY” MEAN?

Is “Ready or Not” a message of inevitable doom? It is not, for God *“does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent”* (2 Pet. 3:9 NLT). The only trouble is, they will not. Thus it often becomes a signal of His severity; but that same signal can mean goodness, deliverance, blessing, if men are ready. Consider the moment that came to Enoch. We read that *“Enoch walked with God three hundred years.”* A long time to walk and not grow weary; but Enoch did it. Then, one day, the moment arrived when Enoch *“was not; for God took him.”* The “ready or not” moment had arrived, and to Enoch’s everlasting credit, he was *ready*. His days of tribulation on earth were over; God was ready to take him to serve in another phase of His great plan; and Enoch was ready (Gen. 5:22–24).

What are we to think of “Ready or not, I’m coming”? It is not a threat or proclamation of doom; it is a warning to *get ready*. The whole focus is on one word: *readiness*. If we are ready, it is a message of supreme joy. If we are not—oh that plight need not be ours. This is why the ancient prophet Amos spoke those solemn words: *“Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”* (Amos 4:12). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if we are not ready to meet Him, if our record is still spotted and marred by acts of willfulness, selfishness, pride or complacency; but if we have sustained a lively interest in those higher realms of life and activity, if we have fitted ourselves to the pattern He provided us and have made Him our closest friend, then what joy! What pleasure supreme if we can fall into His hands, knowing that we are ready and we are His!

“Ready or not” points out the *maximum limit of God’s mercy*. God is good, supremely good; He is long-suffering and benevolent beyond anything we can imagine. What man would be willing to wait six thousand years for the first small phase of His plan to succeed? The years have proven how exceedingly patient God is with His human family. Time and again we have transgressed His law; we have done the things we know we should not do; we have left undone the things we should have done; and still His mercy waits. But His mercy and goodness and long-suffering are not forever.

Nor are they equal to everyone. To the disobedient, the fault-finding, the hard-hearted and recalcitrant, His mercy is very limited. It is also limited to those who harbor lesser sins of sensitiveness, jealousy, bitterness and

with their warning cry; but few, very few, listened and took heed. They could not believe God meant what He said, everything in and about Sodom seemed perfectly normal. But the Divine countdown had begun; the ticking of the clock was counting the seconds of grace remaining while the angels hurried the few would-be escapees. *“Flee for your lives!”* they urged, *“Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain!”* (Gen. 19:17 NIV) It was a moment for action; it was a moment when God was saying, “Ready or not, I’m coming!”

Scarcely had Lot and his family left when the fire began to fall.



A “ready or not” moment arrived for the Pharaoh who refused to let the Israelites leave his land. His insolent reply, *“Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go?”* (Ex. 5:2 NIV) certainly did nothing to win God’s favor. Pharaoh saw himself the ruler of a great and powerful nation. He saw not the Lord, the Ruler and Governor of all creation.

So the Lord went about to show him. Egypt’s water turned to blood. Then, there were frogs all over his land. Then there was the plague of flies. By this time any half-perceptive person should have realized there was a power greater than Pharaoh.

But he was determined to hold out, and he did—to the bitter end. Not until ten plagues had run their destructive course did he relent. Whether Pharaoh was ready or not (Pharaoh would never be ready to part with a host of productive slaves!) the time for action had arrived, and under the guiding hand of Moses the Israelites departed. The official decision of the Egyptians to pursue them only increased the Egyptian’s grief and loss—their armies were drowned, and the hosts of Israelites were safe beyond the sea.

This is what always happens to those who try to withstand God’s purposes—it is all defeat, defeat, defeat. We oppose God only to our own hurt. How else could He say absolutely, *“My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please”* (Isa. 46:10 NIV)?

pride. *"The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" only "on those who fear Him,...and to those who remember his commandments to do them"* (Ps. 103:17-18). If we want His mercy, we must fit ourselves into this category. And there is a limit to the time He will give us; there is a limit to the years He will wait while we stumble and fall and rise and stumble again. There is a limit, even with our long long-suffering God. True, *"he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities"* (Ps. 103:10 NIV); but neither are they removed from His book of remembrance until we ourselves have taken the steps to remove them. Soon or late the time will arrive when it will be for every one of us, "Ready or not, I'm coming!" Our day of grace will be gone.

This was Jesus' message in His parable of the evil servant who says, either vocally or in his heart, *"My lord delays his coming."* He complains that his lord is late—when he himself is far from ready. What is the attitude of this servant? *"My lord tarries"* expresses a secret belief that the lord may not come at all—perhaps even a secret, hidden wish that He *will* not. He doesn't really want Him, because now, in His absence, he is *free*.

The possibility that He will not come removes all the trouble and worry and leaves him totally carefree. Now he can enjoy himself in any way his heart desires. Now he can eat, drink and be merry with no thought of accountability tomorrow.

And so he does just as he pleases. But what is the prospect for such a one? *"The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of"* (Matt. 24:50). Caught unawares! And what shall be his portion? He shall be placed with *"the hypocrites,"* those who say and do not, and *"there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* All this because he was not ready.

What a contrast to the commendation given the faithful servant: *"Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has"* (Matt. 24:45-50; Luke 12:43-48).

This is why Jesus said so often, *"Watch."* *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come....So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him"* (Matt. 24:42-44 NIV). If we maintain this attitude, if we are fully concentrating on getting ourselves ready for that Day, there will be no feeling of *"My lord delays his coming."* If the time tarries longer than we expect, we will thank God for extended mercy.



The people of Israel and Judah found themselves facing God's authority at one of those "ready or not" moments. Mercy and long-suffering had run their course and the people had proved themselves corrupt, apostate, forgetful of Him and His laws. After God had planted, fathered, protected, defended and nourished them, how could they possibly be so dishonoring?

The time of judgment arrived, and with it war, destruction, captivity. These were the harsh words that came with the "ready or not" pronouncement.

Of course they were not ready. But the fault was not God's. He had sent prophet after prophet to warn them, to show them the error and folly of their lawless ways, to show them that they were hurting themselves and would have to suffer in the end. But they preferred to die rather than repent; and many did. Thousands perished at the hands of their enemies. Others were carried away to live in exile. The proud, independent nation was ended. The beautiful temple lay in ruins; the holy city was burned with fire.



The Bible tells us, *"When the proper time had come, God sent His Son"* (Gal. 4:4).

"When the right time came"—the right time according to God's schedule. It was not the right time if He had consulted Herod. For Herod, the time would *never* have been right for the birth of a rival capable of sup-

TAKE HEED!

Jesus said it again in words too plain to misinterpret. *"Take heed to yourselves,"* He warned, *"lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares"* (Luke 21:34). Here again is the ultimatum. And Jesus, knowing the great and growing temptation to fill our lives and hearts to the brim with the affairs of time, gave this warning. No more needful or seasonable counsel could He have given us in this final hour. *"Take heed to yourselves, lest...your hearts be overcharged with...the cares of this life."* Undue and unwise carefulness about secondary things—good health, good homes, good friends, good activities, good tasks in this world—may endanger that which is even more important: our salvation. They may simply absorb our interest to the exclusion of the direct service of God, which is our means of deliverance. They may so absorb our time and mind as to dwarf the inner life and starve the soul.

The warning is plain: *"Take heed."* If we would be ready when the great Day arrives, we must not be enlarging our interests in this world when that enlargement means spiritual shrinkage. We must not let the cares of this life crowd in and crowd out the culture of the inner man. If we do, if we put second things first and sacrifice ourselves to circumstances, we shall find ourselves unready for the advancing Day and shall be caught unawares.

What is Jesus' preventive formula? *"Watch therefore, and pray always, that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man"* (Luke 21:36).

"Watch...and pray." And how great the results! How great, how surpassing the privilege—think of it! to be permitted to *stand* before the Son of man, He who trod every step of this way before us, He who was crucified, resurrected, taken to heaven and glorified in the presence of the great Creator Himself! To think of standing before so glorious a Being, now immortal, the King of the whole earth!

To stand means that we are prepared to give a worthy account of our faithfulness, of worthy work well done. To stand means that we are prepared to show how closely we have followed His example, how obedient we have been, how fervent, how faithful.

He will also want to see how like Him we have become. We know that He is holy, and He will be looking for that same holiness in us. He *will* look, and what will He see in us?

That moment of *"Ready or not, I'm coming!"* will come. May we so prepare, that we may meet Him with joy and *"stand before the Son of man"*—accepted and approved to live eternally in His Kingdom on earth! ♦

planting him. But God didn't consult Herod. *"When the time was right, God sent His Son."*

The Gospel of Matthew records the instructions of Herod to the wise men: *"Bring me word when you find the new-born king, that I may come and worship him also."* And we are told that these words came not only from Herod but from *"Herod and all Jerusalem with him."* What does this mean? Obviously Herod and his court, those who had a personal interest in maintaining the local power structure, were worried.

If Herod and his co-agents could have realized how mighty the power behind this event, they would have been astonished that they even dared resist it. But Herod never realized how silly and futile his efforts were. All the king's horses and all the king's men were powerless to stay the plan of God. And so it went forward.



Ready or Not— BRIDEGROOM CAME

A Lesson from the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-11)

The time for preparation is critical—upon it depends our entire future. For this reason Jesus warns and warns. If we would be ready, we must be conscious of every act, aspect and attitude that promotes or hinders that readiness. We must do everything as before Jesus' warning—*"lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping"* (Mark 13:36). It is the message He repeated again in His parable of the Ten Virgins. Some will be found ready, He says; others will not be ready. And where each of us stands depends entirely on us. We are not predestined to be either accepted or rejected; God does not decree whether or not we shall be ready.

The ten virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom could have all been ready and waiting for him, with their lamps trimmed and burning; they could have if they had made proper preparations, if they had all taken a sufficient supply of oil with them in their lamps. But they did not, for *"five of them were wise, and five were foolish."*

Notice that all the virgins took *some* oil. All had some desire to be ready to welcome the bridegroom, and all made *some* preparation. The difference lay in their *degree* of preparation. The five wise virgins had anticipated a possibly extended delay and had taken what they thought would be *more* than enough oil—just in case. The other five took only the normal amount. When the hours of waiting proved unexpectedly long, the five wise virgins were able to hold out; the lamps of the other five went out. So it is with the supply of faith and endurance we need today. It must be a supply we keep continually renewing. If not, we shall find as the hours wear on that *our* lamps are going out, and we shall not be ready when our Bridegroom finally does appear.

The warning is for us. There is no need that those five foolish virgins should include us. We can be ready; we can keep our faith lamps fueled and burning brightly with faith-building evidence from the Word of God, *if we will*. But we have to be acting *now*, for the hour draws ever nearer when it will be *"Ready or not, I'm coming!"* ♦



In Search of MEANING

by RUSSELL HAMBY

*The “teacher” was
looking for fulfillment in
all the wrong places.*

Boredom. Restlessness. Fatigue. No meaning. We hear these phrases often these days. They are phrases that could pretty well describe the way many feel about their lives. Ecclesiastes 1:1–14 serves as a good foundation to study this subject.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is referred to as *Qoheleth* in Hebrew. Though various translations refer to *Qoheleth* as teacher or preacher, the word is still somewhat difficult to translate. Its meaning implies one who addresses an assembly as a speaker or teacher. Though the writer's identity is not actually given, it is clear that the author was a king and someone with great wealth, intelligence, and power—plus an overpowering drive for the things of this world. The name most often associated is Solomon, and who is more likely?

If we read the entire book of Ecclesiastes, we find that the teacher embarked on an expedition in search of meaning and purpose in life. His words are not the result of idle speculation, but rather of his actual life experience and observation. He tried pleasure, work, knowledge, folly, and all that riches could buy. The very first verses in the book are actually a commentary on that search. Here is the journey of someone who sets out to find what is worthwhile and what gives lasting meaning “*under the sun*.” But note that he will only believe what he can see and experience for himself.

Is there also a sense in which he was

right? Maybe he was more than just a bored, rich king with a bad headache. For can we not read the stories of people living two thousand or more years ago and see ways in which their joys, problems, doubts, and faith are similar to our own?

Human nature has not changed very much over time. There are new cultures, new languages, new ways of living, and new knowledge for sure. But we have the same desires, hopes, fears, sins, joys—and most importantly, the same God. So, in a sense, there are new things under the sun. At the same time “*nothing is new under the sun*.”

The teacher in our text is more honest than many of us would like to admit. He borders on cynicism as he

strips off all the masks of human pretension to find meaning, purpose, and lasting enjoyment. His message leaves us with a choice: to resign in despair, perhaps seeking what temporal pleasures may be found, or to seek meaning and hope through faith in God, a God the existence of whom the teacher never questions.

We may not find satisfying meaning and purpose in our jobs, our families, our leisure. But there is hope if we go further. There is hope if we heed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who spent His ministry proclaiming the coming of God's complete Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

In Christ, the promises of God give hope that can break into the day-to-day grind—the routines of work, school, leisure, family. It is the hope expressed by Paul in this prayer: “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, that...your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope*” (Rom. 15:13 Phillips). ♦

Announcing... *Abib 2002*

This year the members and friends of the Megiddo Church will welcome the beginning of the sacred New Year on the evening of Saturday, April 13, extending through Sunday, April 14, Bible time being measured from “evening to evening” (Lev. 23:32). The ancient Hebrew pattern, according to the law God gave to Moses, was to begin the New Year with the month “Abib,” which is the month beginning with the first new moon following the spring equinox (March 20, this year). The first new moon occurs this year the evening of April 12.

This day has double significance as we commemorate the beginning of the sacred year and also the birth of our great coming King.

We extend an invitation to our members and friends to join us for this sacred season. The anniversary of the Lord's Supper will be on the evening of April 25, and the Resurrection on April 28.



Dialogue

PART FOUR

A second question that has lingered in my mind since childhood is that the Bible as we now have it was compiled or arranged by ungodly people not having the Holy Spirit guidance. This appears to have been arranged many years after the last Apostle died, then how can we be assured that all the books that they chose to include are God's Word? Would it not make more sense that people that are closer to God's Truth would be more qualified to choose or cull which works are more likely to be Inspired Books? Maybe to be more specific, how can we be sure which parts of the Bible are added or left out to support false doctrine and are not the works of God's Holy Writ?

In a previous section (Part Three, see September, 2001 issue), we surveyed the evidence underlying the Old Testament Scriptures, especially in the light of recent findings, i.e., the Dead Sea Scrolls and the account in Genesis 22 of the command of God to Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering.

As was pointed out, it seems we have ample evidence that the passage regarding Abraham's sacrifice belongs to the original text of Scripture. This fact is confirmed by the Septuagint (2nd century BC), by Josephus (1st century AD), by the Dead Sea Scrolls (200 BC to 200 AD), and other documents predating the New Testament. If the evidence from any or all of these is true, it was

not added to support the teachings of the Apostate Church.

Most confirming is the fact that much of this evidence is from before Christ. About three centuries before the New Testament was written, the writings that make up our Old Testament were translated from Hebrew to Greek to satisfy the needs of Jews* who only spoke Greek. The result was called the LXX, or the Septuagint. This is the form in which the Old Testament was most commonly available during the time of Christ.

*It is also argued that the Jews had not been dispersed long enough to have needed the Scriptures in another language at this time, and that it was likely translated for the king and later used by the Jews.—Preface to the LXX, Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, Hendrickson Publishers.

The Old Testament in the authorized version has the same books that are in the LXX. Soon after the LXX was finished, the Alexandrian Jews added about 15 books, calling them the Apocrypha. Though these books were held by some Jews, particularly those of Alexandria, to be authentic, and were widely read, they were generally looked upon as spurious additions. Our common version does not contain them as part of the Canon. (See preface to the LXX, by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton who also translated the LXX to English). It is interesting to note that the "New Testament writers never quote these additional writings to Scripture." —Preface to the Apocrypha, Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton.

As a matter of comparison, the Douay-Rheims (Catholic version) has 46 books while our version has the same number as the LXX, or 39 books. The New Catholic Study Bible, a newer version of the Catholic Bible, has adopted the same layout as our versions except that they have 15 books, mostly of the Apocrypha, appended to the end like the LXX. The New American Bible, Saint Joseph Edition, has seven books of the Apocrypha interspersed among the Accepted Books. The Books included in the LXX are the same as the Protestant versions except for the names of two (The LXX has 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Kings, which our version names 1st and 2nd Samuel, followed by 1st and 2nd Kings).

If God allowed one spurious book to enter the Canon, how could we be sure that there are not more?

There is no reason to doubt that the books of the Bible are authentic.

There are a few qualities of all inspired Scripture which may serve as guidelines:

THE BIBLE—CAN WE TRUST EVERY PASSAGE?

by GERALD R. PAYNE

1) If the book or passage contains prophecy that has been fulfilled

Prophecy is a good way to determine if a book or passage should be in the Bible.

Does the book contain prophecies that have been either partially or completely fulfilled?

Does it contain prophecy (unfulfilled) that is parallel with that in another book of the Bible?

2) If the book or passage compares favorably with other inspired books

It is often helpful to compare writings in question with those known to be by a Divinely inspired author. But we have to be careful that we do not discard what is true. We might consider the following factors as a means of giving the Scriptures opportunity to prove themselves. For example:

- ◆ *Do the writings of two different authors seem to disagree?* If so, why? Could it be a matter of selecting the correct definition of certain words (translation problem)? Or perhaps we are reading our thoughts into the text because our minds have been preconditioned to an erroneous line of thought? Are we misunderstanding one of the authors, or both?

Genuine, truly inspired Biblical authors will agree on any and every subject they discuss (i.e., the nature of man, the role of Jesus Christ, the state of the dead, the reward of the righteous, the destiny of the wicked, the Kingdom of God, etc.). The authentic Books we have are almost error-free. The most significant area of error seems to have occurred in the process of translation from the Hebrew and Greek languages to English, and the influence of the transla-

tor's own views on his translation. But isn't that why we have Lexicons and other language resources available, plus the work of numerous translators, so that in the isolated situations where discrepancies arise we are usually able to search out what the author intended?

- ◆ *Do the writings in question agree with the general teaching of the Bible on any given topic?* I think this is a fair rule for any study. If we have studied any secular matters in depth, we have likely come to situations where something does not make sense yet we have solid proof that it is true. Then one day, something is discovered, or something "clicks." We come upon something we did not know, and it all makes perfect sense. Sometimes what we think are discrepancies are resolved by more study.
- ◆ *Is there no apparent answer to our question?* When a passage seems questionable, one rule-of-thumb could be to resign to the idea that the passage is genuine but we simply do not understand it, unless there is good reason to believe it is spurious. Sooner or later, we will either find clear reason to believe it is spurious, or we find evidence to understand it in relation to the general teaching of the Scriptures.

3) Is the book or passage quoted in another part of Scripture?

We gain valuable insights as New Testament authors understand and quote from the Old Testament. The New Testament authors, having Holy Spirit power, could quote accurately as well as give the correct meaning. Their quotations can give us confidence that those portions of the Old Testament are accurate and inspired.

Did copying contaminate the Bible?

When studying the Bible, scribes apparently made marginal notes, and in the process of copying, these notes were occasionally inserted as part of the text, which adds to our problem of understanding certain portions of Scripture. As best as scholars can determine, these additions were few, and many have been eliminated in the newer versions. (It is interesting to read the passages which some are complaining about having been removed from the Bible or edited. Very often, it seems, the additional edit actually confirms other Scriptures.) This is likely because we have always tried to understand various passages in harmony with the general teaching of the Bible, not trying to support a preconceived dogma.

Quotations and writings from the early Church Fathers also provide evidence of the writings that were considered Scripture in the early Church. In fact, it is said that they revered the "Scriptures" and quoted so heavily from them that had the Scriptures been entirely destroyed, the entire New Testament could have been reconstructed from the Scripture quoted in their writings.

Also, knowledge gained from archeological digs and the discovery of numerous manuscripts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, has given scholars a broader base of material for comparison. When there are several claims regarding a particular subject, one can usually look at these different sources, comparing one with another, and discover what statements are false, or presumed, and what are fact.

We know how the scribes took great pains copying Biblical texts—another

fact not to be overlooked. Scholars have marveled at the accuracy between our texts and those discovered during recent decades.

God's chosen authors

The waywardness of a Biblical author (Solomon for example) in no way discredits the Divinely inspired writings of the Bible. No book or passage of sacred Scripture can be laid aside with impunity. More than once God delivered His message to men by means of agents other than faithful stewards. For example, the dumb donkey was used to reprove Balaam (Num. 22:28-30; 2 Pet. 2:16). An unscrupulous Joab spoke the word of truth to David when he had transgressed in numbering Israel (2 Sam. 24:3). Even Paul did not condemn the words of those who preached the Gospel *"from envy and strife,...not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains"* (Phil. 1:15-16). Always the issue was not the verity of the messenger but the message.

God's use of human instruments

Many times God has used those who had no Holy Spirit power, even those who were against Him or who were unaware that God was using them, to do what He wanted done.

Joseph's brothers did not know they were helping to bring about God's plan to save their lives. They heard no voice, saw no vision. Yet when they sold Joseph into slavery they set in motion Joseph's journey to Egypt, his service, his discipline, in preparation for a great work he was to do. Joseph, after experiencing the heartbreak, humiliation and agonizing trials, was exalted to a position of ruler over all Egypt, in which he was able ultimately to save the lives of his family as well as many Egyptians. *"And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt"* (Gen. 45:7-8).

It may seem cruel and unjust to us

that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. For all they knew, he could have spent the rest of his life at the oars of some sea-faring vessel under a ruthless taskmaster. But great men and women of God must have special training and education that will make them strong and wise servants. The discipline often is difficult. But those who undergo such training must not hold grudges against those whom God may choose to help provide this discipline. We never hear

*Often God uses human
instruments who know nothing
of His purposes.*

of Joseph holding his brothers in contempt for the terrible deed they did to him. Those who understand that discipline is necessary for their own benefit do not become embittered by it. Rather, like Joseph, they are only grateful they were found worthy material to do the work God arranged for them to do.

Pharaoh, not knowing God was using him, also had a role in this drama. It was by the providence of God that Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt which led to the saving of Joseph's father and his kin from a seven-year famine (Gen. 41).

Four hundred years later God used another Pharaoh to make Himself known. *"For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth"* (Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:17).

The Sanhedrin, a lad, the Roman army, Felix the governor, Festus, king Agrippa, the people of Malta, and two ships with crew, were all involved in Paul's first journey to Rome where he wrote most of his Epistles.

Who can say that God was not behind the entire development of free and independent thought which broke the power of the Apostate church and gave rise to the individualism we see today? Who can say God was not

behind the long and slow transition from control by the state to the freedom of religion which we value so dearly today?

Columbus led the way to America where the founders of our Nation coined the Constitution and Bill of Rights, giving liberty and the freedom of worship.

God even uses rulers today to carry out His will, and we are commanded to obey their laws as long as they do not contradict God's laws. Many of these rulers do not recognize God or His providence. Neither do they have Holy Spirit power.

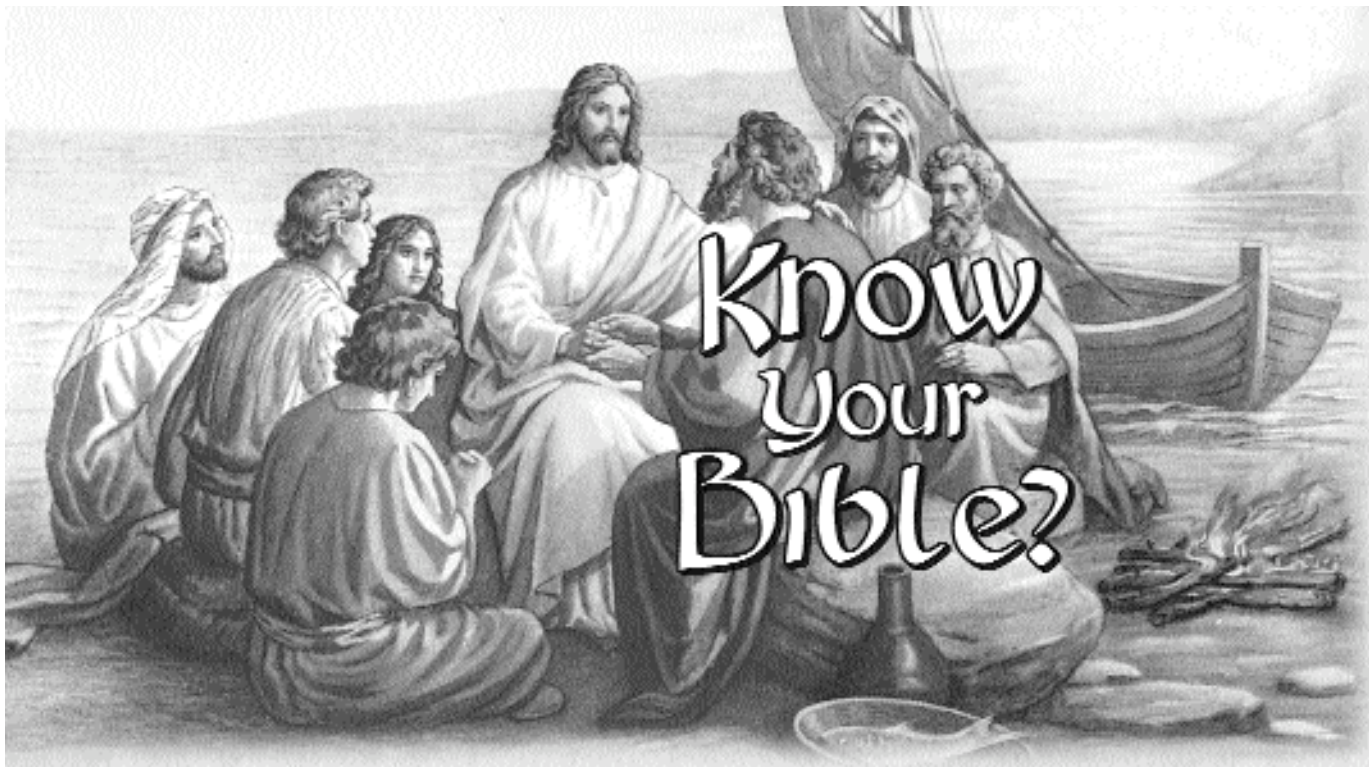
Our commitment is to God. And if we are committed to God, He is committed to us for providing us with the material we need for understanding how we must conduct our lives to meet His

approval. Where do we go for this information? To science? To some philosopher? To a Bible we cannot trust? It is very evident that none of these will suffice. We must have information we can trust. If God used those who had no Holy Spirit power, and even unknown to themselves that they were being used to accomplish His purposes, could God not have accurately guided those who assembled the Books we now embrace as the Holy Word of God?

Finally, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Aside from the helps we receive from the various resources, the final judgment of whether a particular passage is true or spurious may be from careful, prayerful analysis, observing what other Divinely inspired Bible authors say on the subject. If they seem to disagree, then further research is needed to determine if the problem may be due to translation. If they agree, then we have to accept it as true and apply it to our lives.

During all our studies we should never forget that God is the Author, we are the student. ♦



Know Your Bible?

COME AND DINE

1. On what occasion did Jesus prepare bread and fish for His disciples and said "Come and dine"?
2. This man was invited to the feast of King Belshazzar to explain an incident which had alarmed the king.
3. This man surprised the Pharisees by not performing the ritual washing before eating.
4. These people were given places at the feast after those who were originally invited made excuses for not coming.
5. He was served bread and lentil stew by his brother as pay for his birthright.
6. Jesus was Guest of Honor at a supper in the home of these three friends.
7. Ahimelech gave him (and his companions) holy bread to eat.
8. These were fed with five barley loaves and two small fish.
9. A wealthy landowner invited a poor foreigner to eat with them.
10. This guest, having received a piece of bread, left the meal early and went out into the night.
4. "Let me die with the Philistines!"
5. "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."
6. "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."
7. "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"
8. "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."
9. "My Lord and my God!"

FAMOUS WORDS—WHO SAID THEM?

1. "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how."
2. "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."
3. "Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men abuse me."
- Who said to Christ, "If You are willing, You can make me clean"?
- Who called herself "the maidservant of the Lord"?
- Who was Og?
- Who was killed in spite of the fact that he clung to the horns of the altar?
- Who is called "the dayspring from on high," and by whom?
- Who asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"
- Who captured Jerusalem and made it his capital?
- Who was Haman?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 17

FAITH in Action



Bible Text: Acts 9:1–6 NIV

- 1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest
- 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.
- 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.
- 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
- 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.
- 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."



Insight

Why did the Jews so fiercely oppose Jesus?

Besides being a blasphemer, Jesus had been hanged on a tree. Didn't Jewish law say, "*Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree*" (Gal. 3:13)? So He was accursed of God. In no way could He have been the Son of God. So thought the loyal Jew.

True to the prophecy of Scripture, Jesus came "*Unto his own, and his own would not receive him*" (John 1:11). In the view of the Jews, He had started a terrible heresy, one that needed to be removed.

by RUTH E. SISSON

JUST WHEN SAUL THOUGHT HE HAD IT ALL....

 READ ACTS 9:1–2

Many people plan their lives with great care, then work carefully through the plan.

The Apostle Paul (Saul) was like this. If ever anyone thought he had his life going by plan, it was Saul. He had everything, and right on schedule: position, power, education, zeal, recognition, success—he had it all. At least he *thought* he had it. Yet, a few years later, he confessed that everything he had achieved amounted only to so much rubbish compared to knowing Christ (Phil. 3:8).

Why the change? It all came about very suddenly one day. An experience on the road to Damascus changed the whole course of his life—and the course of history.

Even though his career as a Pharisee was only beginning, Saul was already a known figure among his Jewish peers. Bold and fearless in his persecution of the Christian Church, he executed one campaign after another, each more fierce than the preceding. As he saw it, there could be no peaceful coexistence between Judaism and Christianity. The two religions were incompatible. Either Judaism was right and Christianity was apostate, or Christianity was right and Judaism was obsolete.

Because of Saul's birth, belief and background, he saw Jesus Christ as a blasphemer and Christian teaching as heresy. Actually, Jesus Himself was no concern—He was dead. But the cause He had started was something to be eradicated. The sooner, the better.

Stopped in his tracks

 READ ACTS 9:3–6

Something about Stephen lingered in Saul's mind. He could not forget him. That calm look of peace on his face, that prayer on his lips—Saul could not forget. How could a bad man die like that?

The only way to quiet his conscience was to redouble his effort in the oppo-

site direction and initiate a new and fierce persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem.

Seeking the most potent means of damaging Christ's cause, *"still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord"* (Acts 9:1), Saul went to the high priest for written authority. Easily he obtained it, and started for Damascus, doubtless to catch up with the many Christians who had fled Jerusalem due to his violent outrage.

When Paul headed from Jerusalem toward Damascus, he started a trek of close to 200 miles, requiring about a week on foot. Paul's only companions were a sort of police force. Because he was a Pharisee, he could have nothing to do with them, so he walked alone. And as he walked, he thought, because there was little else to do.

Can we imagine what he was thinking as he walked through Galilee, the same Galilee where Jesus had taught? He hated the Christian religion furiously, but at the same time he could not obliterate it from his mind.

From Jesus' side, what would it take to turn around this giant intellect, this bundle of fierce emotions fired to white hot passion, this determined spirit, this boiling volcano of energy? What would it take to turn this man from being the most violent opponent of the Cause to its most enthusiastic and determined supporter?

Jesus knew, and very soon Saul knew also.

It was about noon, and Saul and his party drew near to Damascus when *"suddenly there shined around him a light from heaven."* All of them fell to the ground, and Saul heard a voice speaking to him in Hebrew, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*

Saul could only ask, *"Who are you, Lord?"*

The answer dumfounded him: *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."*

"Lord, what do you want me to do?"

The answer was simple: *"Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

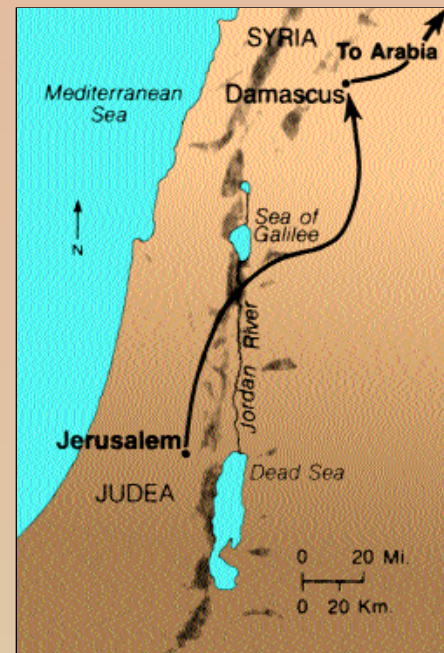
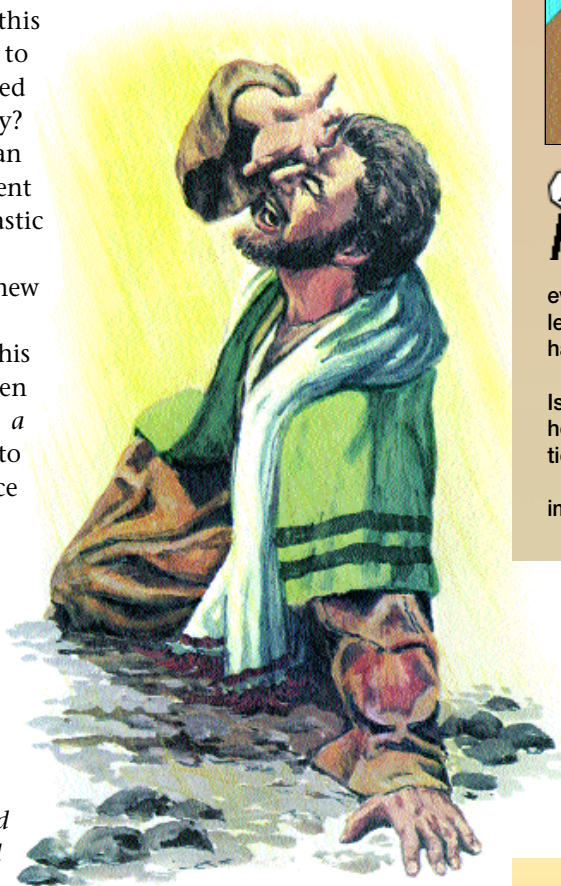
Just as quickly the light and the voice were gone. Saul stood up—to discover that he was *blind!* His companions had to lead him into Damascus.

Did Saul wonder any longer whether Jesus was still dead? Did he ever again challenge the evidence for the resurrection? Not for a moment!

1. Why did young Saul view Christianity as heresy? _____

What about Christianity made it intolerable to him? _____

2. Why do you think Jesus chose the method He used to convert Saul? _____



A closer look

Damascus on the Map

The city of Damascus was an old city, even in the time of the Apostles. Some millenniums earlier the steward of Abraham had come from the city of Damascus.

In the days of the kings of Judah and Israel, Damascus was always a center of hostility, a breeding place of cruel opposition.

Under the Romans, Damascus was an important city.



Did you know...

Jesus...the Lord from Heaven

Have you ever noticed that Paul never referred to Jesus as "Jesus of Nazareth"? He is always "The Lord," or "Our Savior," or "The Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47). The rest of his life would be impelled by this experience on the Damascus road. Paul was His willing servant. His whole view of Jesus and Jesus' followers was new from this point forward. Paul could never forget what he called "the heavenly vision."



Insight

"I will tell you what to do."

Up to this moment, Saul had been doing what Saul wanted, what Saul chose, what Saul thought best, what Saul's will dictated. From this time on, he would be Christ's servant, doing what he was told. Never again would he choose his way, but always Christ's way.

That is the pattern for every Christian, not to choose our own way in life but to let Christ choose for us. We are here to do what He wants done.

Bible Text: Acts 9:7-19 NIV

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

What methods does He use to reach us today? _____

3. What was Saul's first response to Jesus? _____

What was second? _____

What is your response to Jesus today? _____

One moment Paul was riding high, "*breathing out threatenings and slaughter*." The next moment he was prostrate on the ground, blinded by a light above the brightness of the sun, listening to the voice of Jesus.

One moment he was cursing the name of Jesus, and the next he was saying, "*Lord, what do You want me to do?*"

From this point forward Saul had a new sovereign in his life. His whole world was turned upside down.

Turned 180 Degrees

Can you imagine how differently he had pictured his entrance into Damascus only a short time before? Saul who had intended to enter Damascus like an avenging fury was led in blind and helpless. He who had come to take prisoners entered as a prisoner himself, the captive of a new master. He who had come to drag others with cords of persecution was being drawn by the power he had planned to suppress.

The eyes that had been fascinated by the honor and glory of this world had caught their first glimpse of things unseen!

What did Saul think about in the three days of darkness that followed, before Ananias restored his sight; those long dark days while Jesus was secretly preparing the man who would restore his sight?

A DISCIPLE NAMED ANANIAS...



READ ACTS 9:7-19

For the next chapter of our story we must visit the home of Brother Ananias.

Luke calls Ananias "*a certain disciple*"—nothing derogatory, for being a disciple of Jesus is a high honor. Later Paul himself said more, when talking about his conversion. Paul described him as "*one, Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all Jews who dwell there*" (Acts 22:12).

The Lord commissioned Ananias in a vision to go to a certain house on a certain street in Damascus, where he would find young Saul. Ananias felt a knot in his chest at the very mention of the name. Surely the Divine informant knew about the mission that had brought Saul to their city. Was Ananias hearing right? Yes, he had heard right, and the Lord reassured him with these words, "*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake*" (Acts 9:15-16).

We cannot blame Ananias for his reservations—anyone with Saul's record and background had something in common with a modern-day terrorist. Who could know the next plot forming in his mind? And notice that the Lord did not reprove Ananias for his caution, He only reassured him that this man was His "*chosen vessel*." Wouldn't that send Ananias' mind whirling? What had happened to turn a dreaded enemy into God's "*chosen vessel*"?

Ananias asked no more questions, but obediently went to the designated place, and, as the Lord directed, gave Brother Saul both his eyesight and the Holy Spirit.

1. Why did Jesus say Paul was His “chosen vessel”? _____

 What special assignments did Jesus have for him? _____

2. Why didn’t God condemn Ananias for his fears? _____

 When is it right to fear? _____

Why did Jesus use such a dramatic means of converting Saul? Perhaps He knew that Saul would take no second-hand opinions from anyone. Perhaps Jesus knew that if He was to convert this man, He had to do it personally—in a singular and dramatic way that even the dynamic Saul himself could not deny.

Saul was now on Christ’s road!

It was the beginning of a long career of service which has benefited even us today. Who but Jesus could have turned this determined young life around!

Who but He knows where His next chosen vessel is being fashioned!

Ready to Preach

In the Damascus synagogue Saul first lifted his voice for Christ. Can you imagine the great moral courage this took? In the very synagogues where Saul had been acting as an official agent to stamp out Christianity! To the very people who had been his partners in crime! Wouldn’t it have been wiser to start somewhere else, where he wasn’t known quite so well?

But Paul by his actions was saying, I am on a new course, and those who know me best should know it. He was already acting proudly the message he later preached, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*” (Romans 1:16).

to be continued

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 13

COME AND DINE

1. After Jesus’ resurrection by the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1–12)
2. Daniel (Dan. 5:1–13)
3. Jesus (Luke 11:37–39)
4. The poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind in Jesus’ parable (Luke 14:16–22)
5. Esau (Gen. 25:29–34)
6. Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 12:1–3)
7. David (1 Sam. 21:1–6)
8. The five thousand fed by Jesus (John 6:8–11)
9. Boaz to Ruth (Ruth 2:1–14)
10. Judas (John 13:29–30)

FAMOUS WORDS—WHO SAID THEM?

1. Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:65)
2. Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:3–4)

3. King Saul (1 Sam. 31:4)
4. Samson (Judg. 16:30)
5. Jesus (Rev. 22:16)
6. Job (Job 42:1, 5–6)
7. Cain (Gen. 4:13–14)
8. Stephen (Acts 7:59–60)
9. “Doubting” Thomas (John 20:28)

Who

1. The leper of Galilee (Mark 1:39–40)
2. Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:38)
3. The king of Bashan (Deut. 3)
4. Joab (1 Kings 2:28–34)
5. Jesus, in the prophecy of Zacharias (Luke 1)
6. Nathanael (John 1:46)
7. David (2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Kings. 2:10–11)
8. A wicked officer of King Ahasuerus, who plotted against the Jews (Esther 3:6)



Megiddo Message

ORDER NOW...

to get your **2001 Megiddo Message**, all ten issues in one hardbound volume.

Price: \$18.00. Orders must be received by Feb. 28, 2002.

Volumes will be mailed by April 15.

Address orders to:

*Megiddo Press,
 481 Thurston Road,
 Rochester, NY 14619-1697*

"Please **DON'T** Lord, **LET ME BUY JUNK!**"

Aunt Marjorie had paid six-year-old Karra a few dollars for helping with the laundry, and Karra had suddenly discovered the power of having money in her pocket. She could think of nothing but spending it.

What should she buy? The urge to spend it on candy and trinkets was all but overpowering. Again and again I heard myself saying to her, "Come on, Honey. Buy something good. Don't waste your money on junk."

That night as she knelt beside her bed, she closed her eyes and said, "Dear Lord, thank You for helping me buy something good with my money. Please help me not to buy junk."

Have we ever had Karra's problem? What are we purchasing with the resources God has placed in our hands? Are we in control of our spending, or are "things" controlling us?

It is a problem to which most of us can relate. Who has not

been tempted by the false value of things that have only limited usefulness...in other words, junk?

In Luke 16, Jesus taught a lesson on the right use of "things." His point is that we can use things properly. With proper planning, we can use them to purchase the riches of eternity and the friendship of God and Christ, so we will be in good standing for ages to come.

*If we don't
control our money, it
will control us.*

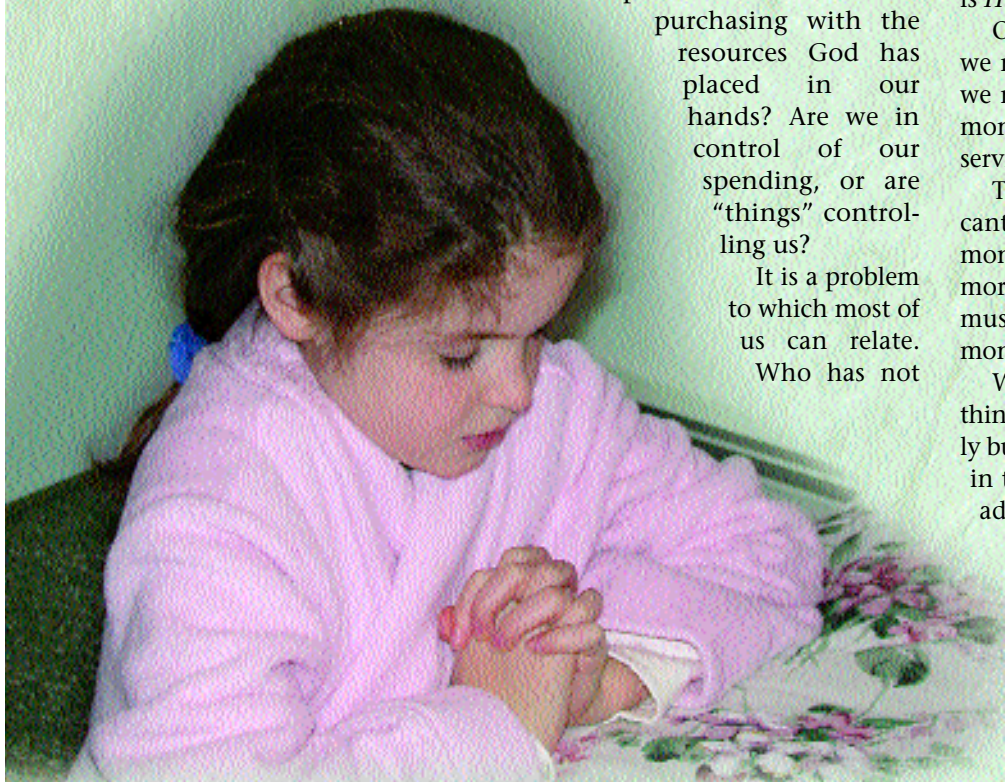
Christ is teaching us that people of God must not use their money as their own. Instead, we must spend with God's values in mind. After all, it is *His*, not *ours*.

Of course we must have money to buy what we need. Jesus Himself acknowledged that. But we must be careful, because how we spend our money determines whether we are serving it or serving God.

To our Lord, money was relatively insignificant. He made it clear that the way we use our money indicates how we will handle larger and more important spiritual issues. In that light, we must avoid the trap of becoming slaves to our money or desires by buying things we don't need.

When we spend our time, our energy, or anything else on temporary gratifications, we are really buying only junk—it will have no lasting value in the eternal scheme. Only as we follow Paul's advice and "lay up" a "good store," a good record in heaven, will we be able to purchase eternal values, even "life for evermore." (1 Timothy 6:17–19).

*Lord, help me to spend what You have given me with **Your** values in mind. Please help me not to buy junk. ♦*



The human mind will always set itself on something, and Paul wished to be quite sure that the Philippians would set their minds on the right things (Phil. 4:8). This is something of utmost importance, because it is a law of life that if a man thinks on something often enough and long enough, he will come to the stage where he cannot stop thinking about it. His thought will be quite literally in a groove out of which he cannot jerk them. It is of first importance to attach the mind to the things of greatest value. —William Barclay

The Lord's tomorrow of blessing is waiting for our today of consecration.

The harder you work at what you should be, the less you'll need to hide what you are.

One of the best ways to save time is to think and plan ahead. Five minutes of thinking can often save an hour of work.

That "Little Member"

Did you ever realize as soon as you said something that you had said the wrong thing?

James' Epistle gives us a big discourse on the "little member." We seem to have no difficulty controlling a "big member"—an arm, a hand, or a foot—but when it comes to that "little member," the tongue, it is a different story! This "unruly evil, full of deadly poison," taking its own course, runs wild and wreaks havoc.

Few have the ability to consistently say the right thing, in the right way, and at the right time. Did you open your mouth and "put your foot into it," and all efforts to correct the mistake turned out to be greater disasters than the original error? This is an old, old problem.

It is said that TV performers rely on "idiot cards" to prompt them. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* says, "We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us." The Christian does not need an "idiot card"—he has a wonderful prompter in the Word of God. This Word can change our heart so that we will be able to control the "unruly member," and gracious words will replace the harsh, cutting words.

"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26 NIV).



Time is what we want most, but what—alas!—we use worst!

Don't fret about what you'd do with your life if you could live it over again—get busy with what is left.

Thankfulness depends on what is in your heart, not what is in your hand.

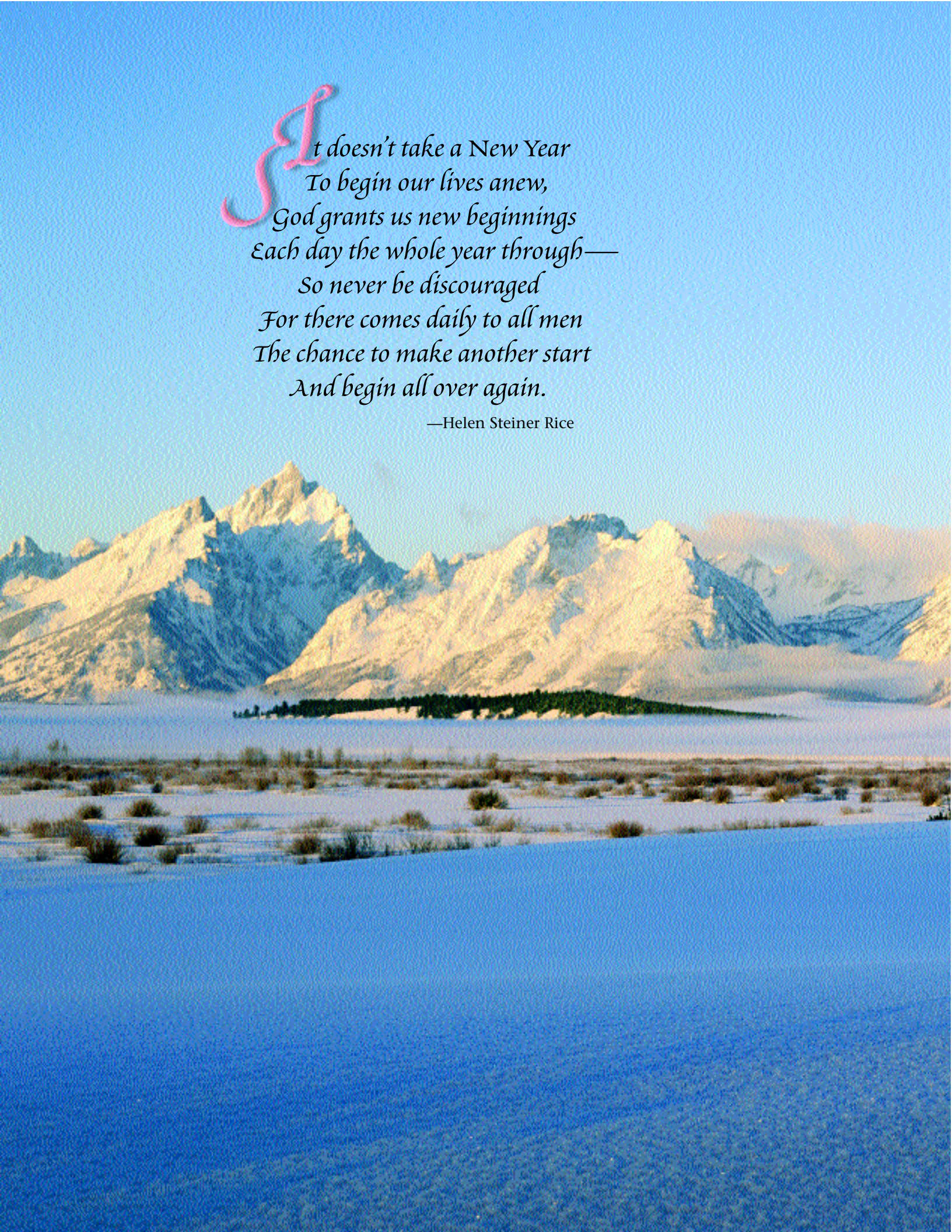
A person with enthusiasm knows how to live abundantly *in spite of* and not *because of* his situation.

A life totally consecrated to God sees all of its tasks as God-appointed.

One of the surest evidences of greatness is a humble spirit.

Humility is the acceptance of the place appointed by God, whether it be in the front or the rear.

True dignity is never gained by place, and never lost when honors are withdrawn.



*It doesn't take a New Year
To begin our lives anew,
God grants us new beginnings
Each day the whole year through—
So never be discouraged
For there comes daily to all men
The chance to make another start
And begin all over again.*

—Helen Steiner Rice