

# Megiddo Message

Winter 2008

*Thus says the Lord,  
...I—My hands—stretched  
out the heavens;  
And all their host I have  
commanded. —Isaiah 45:11–12*



## Eat Right, Live Right



We are hearing it on all sides: Eat your veggies and get moving. Proper diet (plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains) and consistent, daily exercise/activity is the key to optimum health.



Five years ago our local food chain, Wegmans Food Markets, rolled out a diet and exercise program called the “Eat Well Live Well Challenge.” The program was an appeal to employees to eat enough fruits, vegetables and exercise, which they defined as 5 cups of fruits and vegetables a day and 10,000 steps. Results have been dramatic, and recently the sponsors have opened the program to other companies. “Get moving,” is the slogan. “Standing still is not an option.”

A whole new industry is capitalizing on a solution to the problems of obesity and disease that have resulted from the “you-deserve-it” mentality of the current culture. Some of the advertisements read: “Walking is a Great Form of Exercise—Walk off the Weight”... “Stride with pride: the virtues of walking”... “Eat your

### How nourishing is your spiritual diet?

way to a healthier life”... “Fruits and vegetables—why more matters”... “Exercise Rx for Better Health.”

Unfortunately, all the advertisements are not factual. Many distort the truth to sell their products or literature. And, for the long term, many don’t work. But the underlying fact has been amply proven: that better diet and exercise do improve the quality of one’s life at any age.

Yet statistics show that only a small percentage of the American people are following the advice—because there is a price to pay. You cannot sit on the couch munching on chips, and get the benefit.

I would like to take Wegmans’ “Eat well, Live well” to the next level and venture a spiritual application that says: “eat right, live right,” where the word eat is applied to one’s spiritual diet and “right” is defined by the Word of God. Why? Eating right is daily

ingesting spiritual food, i.e., the principles of right and wrong as taught in the Word of God. And living right is exercising our spiritual muscles of will power and “won’t” power to apply those principles to our life. The result will be improved spiritual health.

Why not do what we feel like doing? Why make this effort to “eat right, live right”? There are benefits in spiritual health and future well being. Listen to the appeal from the Lord through the prophet Isaiah: “*Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good... Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live*” (Isa. 55:2–3). Here is spiritual food that promises life: “*Hear and your soul shall live.*”

The apostle Paul acknowledged centuries ago that exercise is beneficial to one’s physical and mental health. “*Bodily exercise profits a little*,” he said (1 Tim. 4:8). It can even add a few years to one’s life.

But why settle for a few years (when there is no guarantee of even another day) when the Bible offers a much better program *with a guarantee*? Read the rest of Paul’s statement: “*Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come*” (1 Tim. 4:8). Training in godliness—“live right”—gives promise of sufficient of this present life to complete the training AND MORE: it also promises “*the life to come.*” Who does not want the MORE?!

But like any program, there is a price to pay. Just as good physical health comes by “developing healthy eating habits and increasing daily physical activity,” so good spiritual health requires daily eating the right spiritual food (the knowledge from God’s Word) and living right (applying that knowledge to one’s life).

What is the difference in the benefits? The Bible regimen guarantees a secure future—a life filled with joy, contentment and peace, with no threat of disease or pain. And there are even some limited benefits right away.

If such a diet and exercise program really works, why has no one discovered it? The fact is that thousands have discovered it over the past 6,000 years. But few, very few have been

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Our national heritage did not come without sacrifice. Our spiritual heritage did not come without sacrifice either. Our founder, Rev. L. T. Nichols, bore the brunt of scorn, attacks on his reputation and even risked his life more than once, rather than compromise his integrity and deny what he believed to be the true teaching of the Word of God.

# Are Your Beliefs PREFERENCES or CONVICTIONS?

by JOHN W. RITENBAUGH

The following article is of special interest because it illustrates a principle of Scripture: Only "the doers" of God's law will be saved (Rom. 2:13)—because the goal of eternal salvation demands a faith that meets the test of a conviction. This article was published in **Forerunner**, "Personal," November 1993. It is reprinted here with the permission of the publishers (<http://cgg.org>).

**B**efore becoming the sixteenth president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, whose integrity is legendary, made a speech against the advice of friends. Largely because of that speech, he lost the 1858 election to the Senate. But he said, "If it is decreed that I go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth."

We all admire men and women of conviction. We have an innate and inescapable awareness that we should stand for some things no matter what they cost. To cover our own inner poverty, though, do we sometimes scornfully laugh at those who risk much for the sake of a cause or their integrity?

Conviction is essential to faithful living, character building, sanctification, loyalty, integrity and faithfulness to God. Whether we compromise with sin is directly tied to the strength of our convictions. We often think that strength of conviction comes to the fore only when everything is on the line, perhaps even when our eternal salvation is at stake. But in thinking like this, we make a serious mistake. Strength of conviction in day-by-day life situations is the very exercise that determines whether we will have the convictions necessary when all may truly be on the line.

In both the United States and the world, certain events are bringing Christians and Christianity more intensely under the magnifying glass of official government scrutiny. As this scrutiny intensifies, we may have our convictions severely tested, as others have, in certain areas of religious belief.

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*Would your religious convictions pass under examination of a Court of law? Your answer, or mine, may well define our standing before Christ, who will judge even more critically and fairly than a Court of law.*

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**No time, no time to study**

**FRONT COVER:** NASA, ESA, and the Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA)-ESA/Hubble Collaboration  
Description: Cluster within Star-Forming Region in the Large Magellanic Cloud.

## 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.

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## CHANGE IN PUBLISHING FREQUENCY

Due to increased pressures from rising costs of postage and printing, effective in November 2007, we have changed the frequency of the **Megiddo Message** from a bimonthly to a quarterly magazine. We will now publish the **Megiddo Message** with the seasons—Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall.



The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that a person's religious **convictions are protected** by the First Amendment of the Constitution, but one's religious **preferences are not**.

## U.S. Legal Guidelines

Fortunately, the Supreme Court did not leave the courts without guidelines to determine whether a person has a religious preference or conviction. In a 1972 decision, the Court established the guidelines to determine a person's convictions. Before giving those guidelines, the Court laid down two principles regarding persons who claim to hold religious beliefs.

In fact, the Court spelled them out clearly.

First, the Court stated that "one cannot hold a belief unless one can somehow describe that belief." Though the Court does not ask for eloquent testimony, it will not accept hunches, feelings or "it-seems-to-me" testimony either. The Court wants a witness to show thoughtful consideration of his beliefs.

Secondly, but more important, the Court requires that one's beliefs must be *individually* and *personally* held. In John 8:32-44 Jesus confronted opponents who clearly had not internalized the beliefs they claimed to hold. "They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children you would do the works of Abraham'" (verse 39).

The Court views such people as hiding behind a title. Christ's opponents said, "I am a son of Abraham." Today, one would say, "I am a Christian." The Court would reply, "Fine, now tell us what that means to you."

In both Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul writes, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Ezekiel 14:14, 20 adds that righteousness is not transferable from one to another. Each one is individually judged for what they have done. Following through with this principle, the Supreme Court requires that one's beliefs be personally held.

From those two general guidelines, the Court then established that no matter who we are or what our religious affiliation, beliefs fall into one of two categories. Beliefs are either convictions or preferences.

These terms must be defined further because in U.S. courts only convictions are protected by the Constitution. It may be surprising how the Supreme Court defines a preference.

## Preference or Conviction?

**A preference is a very strong belief.** A belief can hold one with very great intensity and strength. How strong? Strong enough that one will go into full-time service of that belief. For example, one can be a minister of the gospel, a missionary or Bible study teacher in a religious school and still be operating on a preference, not a conviction.

According to the Supreme Court, a preference can be held so strongly that one will give all of his wealth to support it. A preference can be so intense a person will energetically proselytize others by going house-to-house, handing out tracts on street corners or broadcasting on radio or television—and he will still be operating only on a preference. [This is possibly based on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 where Paul mentions doing great things, even to giving one's body to be burned. Yet without love, it is profitless.]

Though a preference may be a very strongly held belief, according to the Supreme Court, it is a belief that one will change under certain circumstances. Through long experience judging cases, the Court has learned that certain pressures, if brought to bear, will motivate people to change their beliefs. These

*A PREFERENCE is a very strong belief.*

*A CONVICTION is a belief one lives for and is willing to die for.*

*Whether we  
compromise with sin  
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convictions.*



## It Takes Courage

(Written for boys and girls, this challenge is for any age.)

- ✓ To stand for the right at all times.
- ✓ To say "No!" squarely to evil when all those around you are saying "Yes."
- ✓ To speak the truth when, by a little "twisting," you can gain some advantage or escape punishment.
- ✓ To refuse to do a thing which you are convinced is wrong, when it is being done by others.
- ✓ To face slander and lies, and keep cheerful in the confidence that God is on the side of right.
- ✓ To obey your parents when other boys and girls are trying to say it's all right to "put one over on them."

These things take courage, but it is the kind of courage that pleases God.

people do not have a conviction but a preference and are not protected by the Constitution.

## The Tests of a Conviction

How would you respond to the following pressures?

### 1. Peer Pressure

Teens tend to be idealistic. But there are a few who resolve to be serious, "hit the books" and spurn the drugs, sex, smoking, drinking and "hanging out" that they have seen others doing. But if the "right" boy or girl appears, or if the teen is recognized by the "right" clique, his desire to be accepted by them pressures him to adjust his ideals to conform to theirs. His ideals or convictions are merely preferences.

A minister may search the Bible for truth and find something interesting that he believes and resolves to do and teach. When he tells his fellow ministers about what he has found, they may say to him, "I don't say you're wrong in this, but don't you think you should tone it down a bit? Make it less offensive, and then maybe we can cooperate with you and work on some of your objectives."

At first he may strongly defend his belief, but little by little, as he sees the reaction of his peers, he may begin to bend. He believes it and resolves to do it, but if he changes, his belief is a preference.

If we learn from the Word of God that we are wrong we must change! But we must *be very careful* when some form of pressure is brought to bear, lest we fail!

### 2. Family Pressure

This is perhaps the strongest pressure. When Jesus advises His disciples about counting the cost of commitment to Him, every person He mentions is a family member. *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [or love less] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple"* (Luke 14:26).

Usually no one can motivate you like a deeply loved mate. A husband may resolve to commit himself to a strong belief, but on telling his wife, she replies, *"Please don't; do you realize what this will do to us and our family?"* His resolve begins to melt because he knows he will feel responsible if, because of his belief, he inflicts discomfort or pain on a loved one. His belief is only a preference.

### 3. Fear of Lawsuit or Financial Ruin

We are aware of the expense and hassle of going to court. We may say, *"I'm all for this, but I'm not going to get sued over it! You can't ask me to be sued—that's going too far! I'll be publicly humiliated! At the very least I'll lose my hard-earned reputation, maybe my job and all my property because of attorney and court costs."* If this daunting pressure causes many to change their beliefs, they are not convictions.

### 4. Jail

You may have never really been in a jail, but they are not pleasant places. Most prisoners want to get out as quickly as they can. Jail is very damaging to a person's liberty and reputation.

Virtually every move an inmate makes is programmed by his captors. You are isolated from your dearest family members and friends. You are told when to get up, when to eat, when to exercise, when you can read, watch TV, bathe or shower, and occasionally even when you can talk, go to the bathroom or sleep.

Additionally, the people around you (your fellow inmates) have made a living of not playing by the rules. Some are quite violent. It is a crazy, frightening environment for one accustomed to the comforts of home.



Would you really be willing to go to jail for your faith? Even when no one seems to understand why you would do such a thing? Would the pressure of facing jail make you change your beliefs? If so, your beliefs are preferences.

### 5. The Pressure of Death

This final test is obvious: to be a conviction, one must be willing to die for his belief. When a person's resolve over a belief fails to hold under testing, his guilt can be crushing. Luke 22:34, 59–62 shows Peter in such a circumstance:

Christ said, *"I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."* When the crisis moment arrived, another confidently affirmed, saying, *"Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean."* Peter replied fearfully. Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, *"Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."* Peter went out and wept bitterly. His beliefs had faltered at the threat of death.

### Beliefs Really Convictions?

Do you see the common factor in these? What does your belief mean to YOU? What are you willing to sacrifice in exercising your belief? If you feel you *should* do something but have the right *not* to do it, it is merely a preference, according to the Supreme Court's test. Therefore, your belief is not protected by the Constitution.

The Court says that a conviction is a belief you will not change. Why? What creates a conviction? The Court's answer: **A man must believe that his God requires it of him.**

A belief that is **God-ordered** is a conviction. It is not merely a matter of resolve or dedication, but a matter of believing with all our heart that God requires it of us. The Court says that if we hold our beliefs as God-ordered, we will withstand all the above tests.

The Court says more: A conviction is not something we discover but something we purpose. It is not something we just happen to run across but something that is part of the very fiber of our personality.

This means that a person is not made by a crisis, but that a crisis exposes a person for what he is. The Court says our convictions will be purposed as part of our way of life, beliefs that we are determined to perform and fulfill.

### Daniel's Three Friends

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in Daniel 3 is helpful at this point, but the prelude to this crisis in Daniel 1:7–8 reveals why they could do what they did.

Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Though the resistance began with Daniel, verse 12 shows all four young men were involved; they united in purpose to be careful to always obey God.

[Daniel's three companions met face to face with another crisis. Obey the king, bowing to his golden image, or obey God—be true to the command "you

What are you willing to sacrifice in exercising your belief?





*With God, just  
appearing to be right  
is worthless;  
we must stand for  
right, even when it  
costs.*

*shall not bow down to them or worship them"* (Ex. 20:5 NIV)—and be cast into a blazing hot furnace. The choice they made revealed their conviction.]

In Daniel; chapter 3, the three young men flatly, but politely, refused to obey the king. Were there not other Hebrews that Nebuchadnezzar had brought back to Babylon? Where were they? Bowing to the dirt, complying with the king's decree?

The Court has ruled that if you require other people to stand with you before you stand, your beliefs are preferences. In effect, the Court asks, "What do other people have to do with what God requires of you?" If what we believe is God-ordered, then who can turn it aside?

These three men did not require others to stand with them. Their beliefs were nonnegotiable. Why are convictions nonnegotiable? Negotiating what God has ordered is saying that He is not supreme, that someone or something is greater than He.

Also, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego told the king that whether or not they came out of the furnace alive changed nothing. Their belief stood firm. The Supreme Court says, "If one must be assured of victory before he stands, then his beliefs are preferences."

If we must be assured of victory before standing, we are not living by faith! With God, just appearing to win is worthless; we must stand for what is right. If we stand for truth, we have the victory, though the onlookers may see us as losing.

Christ stood for truth, and they took His life! To the onlookers He appeared a fool and a loser. But He won! The resurrection was His vindication—and our approval in His presence will be our vindication.

## Truth in Lifestyle

All these tests are guidelines for judges and lawyers to pursue in a court of law. But everyone knows that on the witness stand, after swearing or affirming to tell the truth, not everybody is honest, and that one, though not lying outright, may bend the truth.

So the Supreme Court was left with solving the dilemma of discovering how it could determine whether a person was telling the truth about his convictions. The answer was actually very simple. Though a person may be an artful liar on the witness stand, the truth can always be found in his lifestyle.

Put another way, the court says, "What is on the inside of a man will show on the outside." Jesus made a similar declaration:

*"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man..."* (Matthew 15:18–20).

The Court says, "You have no right to say you have a conviction unless we can somehow see you live that conviction with some consistency." Again, this agrees with Scripture:

*"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"* (James 2:18, 26).

Testimony of beliefs without the works to prove them is invalid.

The Court says, "We want to see your faith in action." If the Bible requires something, it is God-ordered. If it is God-ordered, it should be a conviction. If it is a conviction and God-ordered, not to do it is sin, disobedience to God (Jas. 4:17). Before we state that what we believe is a conviction, we must be prepared to say that its opposite is a sin.

Deuteronomy 6:6–9 is a clear command from God to teach our children the Word of God. Are we prepared to say that not to do so is sin? After all, God orders it. How are we doing it? What instructions have we provided for our children's Christian education? How much time are we spending doing it? If



we have children, we can be sure these questions will be asked.

If we say we are against unrighteous themes in movies and TV (adultery, fornication, murder, pornography and obscenity made to seem attractive, justified, right and good), or that we believe good and righteous themes should not be debased, then we can be sure the next question will be, "Do you own a TV set?" If we answer yes, then the next question will be, "How much did it cost?" Several hundred dollars. "Where do you keep the TV?" In the living room. "Why there, where it is available to the whole family? How much time do you watch it each day? Have you ever heard obscenity on your TV? Have you ever seen sin exalted? Why do you invite into your home these things you claim are contrary to your beliefs?" A sharp attorney will ask such pointed questions, and our lifestyle could condemn us unless it matches our beliefs.

The Court will concentrate on looking for whether we *live* our beliefs. We must live up to what we say we believe. The Court will not demand that we be perfect, but that we consistently show by our lifestyle that we are living by what we believe.

## ***Daniel's Example***

What will a man give for his integrity? To what extent is compromise ever justified? Have we dedicated our lives to God regardless of immediate—possibly painful—consequences?

Daniel 6 is a wonderful lesson in uncompromising dedication. Daniel believed certain things were true. Because of his convictions, he conducted himself in this exemplary way.

Daniel was forced to disobey a decree of Darius, king of Persia, [with possible loss of life, and dishonor to God. His choice was loyalty to God.]

*"With his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days"* (verse 10).

Daniel was living his beliefs as a way of life—"as was his custom"! When the crisis arose, he was prepared. His conviction about what to do was strong and clear, and he did not hesitate. Because of Daniel's choice he was thrown into a den of hungry lions. But God's angel kept him safe.

The Bible clearly states the origin of conviction about God: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever"* (Psalm 111:10).

Conviction does not come because we are suddenly struck with inspiration, but it is the product of a process that involves a growing relationship with God. From beginning to end, the Scriptures are clear regarding the faith of its heroes. They grew in faith as they came to know God, sometimes over long expanses of time as God worked with them until they grew to maturity.

In the book of Hebrews is a powerful exhortation to a group of people who neglected their relationship with God. At one time, because they were living their beliefs, they were filled with zeal and had shared struggles and persecutions with others. But they had fallen far from that high pinnacle. They were no longer living by what they were taught. The author of Hebrews writes:

*"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food....But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Hebrews 5:12, 14).

**W**hat does your belief mean to YOU?

Are you willing to die for it?





*A belief that is  
God-ordered is a  
conviction.*

He laments their lack of knowledge. What kind of knowledge? Knowledge gained by research or argument is of no benefit in God's sight unless one lives by it. God wants experiential knowledge—knowledge of Him gained as the result of knowing Him, obeying Him, living life with Him at the center of our life.

It is the same in the natural world. We may know someone through the reporting of certain things about him. But we do not really know a person until we live with him. When we do that, we are convicted of certain things about him.

[Holding a belief is like riding a bicycle. Someone may meticulously, in great detail, tell you how to ride a bicycle. But as soon as you pedal off, you realize that you only know how to ride a bicycle by riding it. Bible knowledge is like this: mastered only through practice.]

We can, through this analogy, say that people whose judgment about honesty is foggy are not practicing (exercising) honesty. Those who cannot distinguish between kindness and selfishness, fidelity and adultery, purity and sensuality, have their judgment distorted by bad practice.

The quality of discernment regarding good and evil can be understood by comparing the skilled eye of an artist or the trained ear of a musician with that of someone who just likes art or music. The trained person's eye or ear is discerning. Thus, it is capable of judgment and conviction in a way the person who merely "likes" or "prefers" something is not.

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### *Summary Thoughts*

How is it with you? What are you living for? Are your beliefs preferences or convictions?

- ★ Only convictions will motivate us to put off the old nature and put on the new (Eph. 4:22–24).
- ★ Only convictions will give us the strength to endure to the end so that we can be saved (Matt. 24:13).
- ★ Only convictions will receive the approval of the Great Judge when we must stand before Him and give an accounting of what we have done (2 Cor. 5:10).
- ★ Only convictions will allow us an entrance into the Kingdom of Christ when He is exalted as King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9).

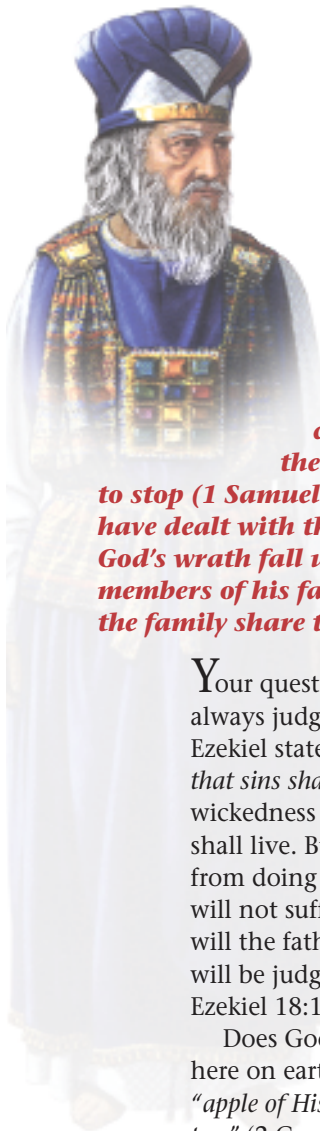
*Let's be sure our beliefs have the strength and power of convictions! MM*



*Whether you believe it or not,  
God's Word stands true.*

*Ignoring facts does nothing to  
change them.*





## Does God Judge Righteously?

***“The story of Eli the priest and his two sons brings another question to mind. Priest Eli did not cover the acts of his sons, but continued to warn them against their wickedness. He also asked them to stop (1 Samuel 2:22–25). I believe God should have dealt with the two sons of Eli; but why did God’s wrath fall upon Eli and the other innocent members of his family? (1 Samuel 2:31–32). Why did the family share the guilt of Eli’s sons?”***

Your question is basically, Is God fair? Does God always judge righteously? The 18th chapter of Ezekiel states God’s policy in some detail. *“The soul that sins shall die.”* But if that person turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live. But if the one who is righteous turns from doing right, he shall die for his sins. The son will not suffer for the iniquity of his father, nor will the father bear the iniquity of the son; each will be judged according to his own doings (see Ezekiel 18:19–32).

Does God really care for His “extended family” here on earth? He does! He speaks of them as the *“apple of His eye”* (Zech. 2:8), *“My sons and daughters”* (2 Cor. 6:18), *“heirs of the kingdom”* (James 2:5). The Lord has *“no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die...?”* (Ezek. 33:11). He will see to it that all who are willing will be given opportunity to learn of Him. *“I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me”* (Proverbs 8:17). If the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, how much more will He care for the upright! *“As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him”* (Psalm 103:13). The Lord will *“...deliver their soul from death, and...keep them alive in famine”* (Psalm 33:19; see also Ps. 34:7, 17).

God also knows our innermost thoughts and motives (Job 42:2; Ps. 139:23; Dan. 2:30). He knows in advance what a person will be. He has foreknowledge of what the end will be from the very beginning, *“...I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My*

*counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’”* (Isa. 46:9–10). This ability allows Him to act with complete justice because He can preserve the life of the one who will repent and turn to Him.

God promises never to forget those who fear and obey Him. As He promised Jeremiah, *“‘Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,’ says the Lord”* (Jer. 1:8). God really does care for those who will be heirs of the Kingdom as a father cares for his own children. *“The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him”* (Ps. 103:13 NLT).

If the Lord really cares for His children, then it is necessary for Him to intervene to protect them. For example, how would you feel toward a deadly snake that crawled into your house while you and your family were having your Bible studies? Would you consider how old or how young the snake was? Would you not do what you could to make your family safe? If you had to make a choice between the death of the snake and the death of your child, would you not kill the snake and feel justified in doing so?

Because it was clear to you that you had a deadly snake in the house, you had no problem knowing what action was best; you chose to get rid of the snake, even if the snake was still very small, to save your child.

When God is dealing with humans it is just as plain to Him which are snakes and which are His children. He doesn’t have to wait for them to grow up to know their identity. Paul (called Saul at that time), for example, seemed like a snake when he was persecuting the Church, but Christ saw him for what he would become and called him to be one of His own. Even though in his youth Paul had a misdirected zeal, God used him to help many others for His cause.

Both Jesus and John the Baptist knew who the snakes were. They addressed evil people as vipers, a kind of poisonous snake (Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33; Luke 3:7), because they were using their venom to poison others.

God is committed to protecting and helping each one who is serving Him. *“For the Lord will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance”* (Ps. 94:14). If He forsook such a one He would not be true to His Word. And it is for their sake that the Lord *“will purge the rebels from among [them],*



and those who transgress against [Him]..." (Ezek. 20:38).

When God led the Children of Israel into Canaan He commanded them to destroy all the Canaanites, men, women and children. This seems cruel to us, but God had good reason to command this. He knew the evil and immoral practices of people who worshiped pagan gods would attract Israel's sons and turn them away from following the true God to serve other gods, so that in the end God would have to destroy them. The Lord said, *"When the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly"* (Deut. 7:2, 4). Did God's people follow His instructions? They did not. We read, *"They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them"* (Psalm 106:34). And they suffered the consequences. Just as the Lord had said: *"They shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you"* (Judges 2:3 ESV). It all came to pass, just as the Lord had said, and all because they did not follow God's instructions and destroy them.

Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were also guilty of immoral conduct with the women (1 Sam. 2:22). The Bible describes them as very wicked (v. 12). Eli did ask his sons to stop their wickedness. But when his sons did not amend their ways, Eli, being the high priest, was responsible to take further action. The law said, *"...the man who acts presumptuously [as Eli's sons did] and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel"* (Deut. 17:12). Eli's sons had committed sin punishable by death, yet Eli continued to let them serve. It is likely that had they not been his sons, he would have removed them from serving. But since he was also their father, he could look beyond their sin and see some reason they should continue to serve. But such was not God's view. God was making Eli a lesson for all time because Eli, by having sympathy for them because they were his sons and not removing them from officiating at the altar, was honoring his sons ahead of God. In fact, Eli was honoring his sons and dishonoring God.

The Lord warned Eli before He took action. *"Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?"* (1 Samuel 2:29). We are not told as much as we would like to know, but it sounds as though Eli

and his family partook of the offerings his sons obtained illegally, so all were involved. And this may have been happening for some time, because we read that they all had made themselves *"fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel."* God sees and judges us as individuals, not as families, and commends or condemns each of us according to what we do. Each individual is responsible to step out and condemn what is wrong, even if it is a family member; otherwise that person is part of the crime.

Were there children not of mature years? If there were, we must trust God to act according to His foreknowledge, since He knows in advance who will obey Him and who will not. As we said earlier, He can recognize a snake even when it is very young.

Eli's sons' lack of respect for God showed also in their attitude toward the ark. When Israel was losing in battle against the Philistines, the elders of Israel conceived the idea of taking the ark from Shiloh onto the battlefield, hoping it (*"God's presence"*) would turn the battle in their favor. Hophni and Phinehas, the acting priests at the tabernacle at Shiloh, could have stopped this disgraceful action, but they did not. Here again they were

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## ***Eli's sons did not show proper respect for God or His law.***

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more concerned with the favor of their fellow Israelites than with the honor of their God.

*"So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated [the second time], and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died"* (1 Sam. 4:10-11).

When Eli heard this report, and the ark of God was mentioned, Eli fell off his seat, broke his neck and died (1 Sam. 4:16-18).

At this time, the Israelites as a nation did not respect God's law or the ark. They had grown complacent and were serving other gods.

Samuel's address to the people verifies that more than just Eli and his two sons were guilty. *"Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, 'If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.' So the children of Israel put away the*



*Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only"* (1 Sam. 7:3–4).

So Eli, his sons, his whole house, and many of the house of Israel were guilty of sinning against the Lord, even after He had warned them. An unnamed prophet came to Eli and told him that the sins of his sons would bring judgment and that his priestly line would be cut off and superseded by another (1 Sam. 2:27–36). The same basic message was repeated to Eli by Samuel himself who, serving as the conduit of God's message to the aged priest, informed him of the day of reckoning to come. Eli accepted the inevitable as a sign of the Lord's displeasure (1 Sam. 3:11–18).

God's actions were justified, and they were fair.

***"Another perplexing story is about the destruction of the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why did the innocent of Sodom and Gomorrah share the guilt of the wicked? Why did the innocent children perish as they did in the destruction of the city? Did they receive the punishment just because their parents sinned?"***

The angels revealed to Abraham that they had intentions of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham asked, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?" Abraham continued until the number was down to ten. "Suppose ten should be found there?" And he [the angel] said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten" (Gen. 18:23–32).

Evidently there were less than ten righteous ones in Sodom and Gomorrah because the two angels did go to Sodom and brought destruction on it and the cities in the plain. But before the destruction, the angels sent Lot out to warn his sons-in-law, or anyone else he had in the city (Gen. 19:14). The angels would not do anything until Lot and his family were out of Sodom.

When the time came for them to leave Sodom, the angels took Lot, his wife and two daughters by the hand and led them out of the city. The angel commanded them to flee for their lives and not look back (vs. 16, 17 and 21). Lot's wife disobeyed. When she heard the fire descending on the city, she looked back, and perished (v. 26).

Why did God allow the men, women and children, except for Lot and his two daughters, to be destroyed? A few years and those children would have been adults who would have continued to commit evil just as their parents had done. God has no pleasure in the death of evil people. He wants them to turn from their evil practices and do

right (see the previous discussion above).

Therefore, we can be certain that if there had been any who would turn from their evil practices and serve the Lord they would have been spared, just as Lot and his two daughters were spared. God knowing the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:9–10) knew in advance what the children would be. He did not have to wait and see as we would have to do. He did not consider them innocent any more than you would think of a baby viper innocent if it were in your house.

Accounts like that of Eli or Sodom and Gomorrah were recorded as both warnings and encouragement; warnings if we are outside God's will, or if we are walking on shaky ground that may lead us away from what is good. They are an encouragement to turn from our wickedness if we are doing wrong, or to remain steadfast if we are making a serious effort to obey His will.

When Korah, Dathan and Abiram led the people in open rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16), God told the people to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (16:23–26), and "Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, with their wives, and their sons, and their little children" (v. 27). What happened? At the Lord's command, "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households" (v. 32). When the incident is mentioned later, we read that "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died...and

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***Even when we cannot understand, we can always trust God's justice.***

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*they became a sign. Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die"* (Num. 26:9–11). This shows God's justice and foreknowledge from the other side. Apparently the children of Korah were not involved in the evil actions. And God knew in advance that good people would be coming from the descendants of Korah and they needed to be spared. The godly prophet Samuel was a descendant of Korah (see 1 Chron. 6:33–37), and Samuel's grandson was a spiritual advisor to King David (1 Chron. 25:5).

Even when we cannot understand, we can always trust God's justice. We can be sure that "The Lord loves those who hate evil; he guards the lives of his faithful; he rescues them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 97:10 NRSV). *MM*



## “Write...Send” to

PART SIX

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens:

I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ –Revelation 3:7–13

# Philadelphia



TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA:

## KEEP YOUR *Crown*

We have looked at the first five of Jesus’ letters to the Churches in Asia, and each Church has had some major deficiency. He has given them assessments like “You’re too tolerant,” or “You’re compromising,” or “You’re lazy,” or “It’s too easy for you to do wrong,” or “Where is your enthusiasm?”

Philadelphia breaks the pattern. To this church, Jesus does not have anything negative to say. He only says, in effect, “Little church, you are doing so well. Keep it up. Don’t lose that crown.” What encouragement!

### A LITTLE CITY

Philadelphia was not a big place in the middle of the first century, and there was no automatic prominence to one living there. It’s only claim to fame lay in its many grape vineyards, and the good soil due to its proximity to a volcano. But apart from its bountiful crops of grapes and a prosperous wine industry, it had little to talk about.

Still the little Christian church was as if on an island in a sea of pagan-





ism. The city itself had been built some 250 years before Christ by a king of Pergamum. This king built the city for his brother, whom he loved, and after whom he named it Philadelphos, meaning City of Brotherly Love.

Though small, the city was very strong in Emperor worship. It also had a large Jewish population and a very large synagogue. This combination would not make survival easy. Still, Jesus commended them.

### INTRODUCTION

Jesus starts His letter by giving His own credentials. *"These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens"* (Rev. 3:7).

This letter is from Jesus. No one was ever more qualified to claim these credentials than Jesus. As was written of Him, He was indeed the *"holy, harmless, undefiled"* Son of God. He was also *"true"* in the highest sense. He was true in speech, because He spoke only what His Father had given Him to speak (John 8:38). He was true in character, to the end bearing *"witness to the truth"* (John 18:37).

Jesus also could claim genuine authority: He held *"the key of David."* When He opens, no one shuts; when He shuts, no one opens. It is as if He says, I have the last word. I know you are in a city filled with paganism, and wrong is on the throne. Wrong has the last word now. But don't forget, I have the key, and I am on your side.

Before Jesus went to heaven, He told His disciples, *"All authority has been given to Me..."* (Matt. 28:18). God vested Jesus with the authority to judge and the power to give life. He can dispense, or withhold; give, or deny. Even more, He has the authority to admit into or exclude from His eternal kingdom. When He was preaching (John 5), He explained that the Father had given Him this authority. *"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son... For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man"* (John 5:21–23, 26–27). He will also hold the destiny of those resurrected: they will *"come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation"* (John 5:28–29). His decision will be final. If He shuts, it stays shut. If He opens, it stays open.

Think about the privilege of knowing who has control of our lives, and our world. Human hands may fail, but Christ will not fail. If we stay on His side, we will be safe.

### THE ASSESSMENT

Like all His other letters, Jesus starts His letter to the little church of Philadelphia with these words: *"I know your works."* It is as if to say, I see you inside out. I know what you are made of. I

## VISIT FIRST-CENTURY PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia was a wealthy commercial city located on the lower slopes of Mt. Tmolus some 25 miles from Sardis. This "city of brotherly love" was founded around 189 BC by a king of Pergamum to function as an outpost of the kingdom.

In 133 BC the kingdom of Pergamum came to an end and Philadelphia came under Roman rule.

Advantageously situated to take advantage of commerce that ran north to south through Pergamum and on to Laodicea, it could also handle trade moving from the center of Asia Minor to the coast. All trade that ran from east to west had to pass through the Cogamus River valley, along which the city was located. As a result, Philadelphia became prominent in the Roman province of Asia.

The city was also known for its temples and religious festivals.

The location also had its negative points, having been built along a fault line. The earthquake of 17 AD damaged the area severely, and the city received recovery assistance from Roman emperor Tiberius. Although Philadelphia did not suffer as much damage from the initial quake as other cities in the area, it suffered aftershocks for the next 20 years, severely limiting the effectiveness of the city. Fearing they might be injured by falling masonry from the untrustworthy walls, most people lived in huts outside the city walls during this time.

After the quake the city took the name of New Caesar, in gratitude to Rome for their aid. Under the rule of Vespasian (69–79 AD) it again changed its name to Philadelphia Flavia. By this time, though, and during the time in which Revelation was written, the city was nothing more than a small town. Still, grand walls and ruins pointed up past prosperity. The city survives as modern day Alasehir, Turkey.

*The ancient city of Philadelphia lies under the modern city of Alasehir, Turkey. Due to the abundance of seismic activity tied with the city's history, there have been few inscriptions found and almost no significant excavations attempted.*



*It lay about 25 miles (40 km) south-east of Sardis, along the skirts of the Tmolus Mountains.*



## "YOU HAVE KEPT MY WORD"

These are five commending words we also would like to hear from Jesus: "You have kept My word."

Only the Bible gives us insight into life and its true values. People can follow good psychology. They can observe others before them, and decide on appropriate responses. But only the Bible can provide the philosophy of life that will bring God's approval. That is why Jesus was so commending when He said, "You have kept My word." That is why the Church at Philadelphia was big on faith, because faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We do not get faith from reading the newspaper. We do not get faith from the radio or the TV. We get faith by reading the Word of God. We get faith by studying the record of the lives of those who have gone before us.

There is no shortcut to faith.



## KEY SYMBOLS

- ❑ **OPEN DOOR:** a symbolic term for an opportunity for spiritual improvement
- ❑ **HOUR OF TEMPTATION:** a time of difficulty or stress during which Christ promises to protect His people
- ❑ **NEW NAME:** an honorary name given by Christ to recognize one's high character achievement
- ❑ **NEW JERUSALEM:** a figurative description of the faithful, illustrating their permanent place in God's new order (see Rev. 21). In other Scriptures the saints are called the "city of the Lord" (Isa. 60:14).
- ❑ **KEY OF DAVID:** a symbol of the authority of Christ to allow or bar entrance into His future Kingdom
- ❑ **PILLAR:** the most stable and permanent support of a building; symbol of strength and stability

know what you are thinking, where you are going, and what you really love. There is nothing hidden. I can see all.

Jesus follows immediately with a statement of opportunity. "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8). Jesus' words tell us something about this little Church that shows how well they are doing. They may have little strength, but they have big faith: you "have kept My word." They may have little strength, but they have big courage: you "have not denied My name."

Someone has said that when God measures a man, He puts the tape around the heart. He is not looking at the exterior. He was not looking for a large, prosperous church with many ministries, great youth programs, and a great reputation. Pergamum had all of that, and was severely condemned. Jesus was not looking at size, or the building, or anything external. He was looking at the heart of the congregation. He was looking for spiritual growth, and He saw it. He saw the strong inner qualities of these people, heart qualities He admired.

We humans are impressed with size. God's view is different. He said, "I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Jer. 3:14). God knows He will not get people to join His cause wholesale. His cause has never been popular. But His ways are not ours, and His values are not ours. He is not looking for wealth, or talent, or physical strength. He is not looking for influence and position. He is looking for those "who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at [His] word" (Isa. 66:2 NLT).

It is noticeable in Scripture that God never condemned smallness. There is nothing wrong with small. He is looking for strong, inner character. What did Jesus say? "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). The amusement parks and entertainment centers and theaters get their crowds, but Jesus said, "Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads unto life, and there are few that find it" (Matt. 7:14). The straight and narrow way never was popular (Luke 13:24). His product does not appeal to multitudes. It is not natural to think seriously about God and the future. When God is looking for people, He looks for quality. He wants big praise, big prayer, big faith, big spiritual growth. He is looking for real heart quality, not quantity.

Yet, when His plan is all together, the Almighty will have quantity also. His is the only plan in the universe. There is nothing greater or larger in the whole world. His family includes the people from all ages who have been faithful to Him, plus all who have been faithful from eternity past on all His glorified worlds. Wherever He has faithful people, they are part of His family. No need to feel small!

## COMMENDATION

How did Jesus commend the little Church? He said, "You have kept My word" (vs. 8). They had been faithful to His word, even through severe testing.

Can it be said of us that we have kept His word? This does not mean we have the Bible sitting on the shelf. It does not mean that we have a Bible with the family history written in it. Nor does it mean that we have fifteen translations in our library. He is not even commending us if we have large portions of the Bible committed to memory. He said to this Church, you have kept it. In other words, you have it in your heart. You have learned it, you love it; you live by it.

These people were making the Word of God their environment, and it was influencing their lives. The Word of God was setting their stan-



dard. Its principles were telling them where to start, and where to stop; what to do, and what not to do; what to say, and what not to say. The Word was their guide. *"You have kept My word."*

What did the Psalmist say? *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You"* (Ps. 119:11). The Word of God was their shield against wrong.

Jesus had another commendation: *"You have not denied My name."* Here again, they have been tested and found true. Someone had tried to get them to deny their faith and they had refused. Resisting that pressure took big courage. They had to be willing to stand up and say, *"This I believe, and nothing you can say or do is going to change me."* It could have been pressure from authorities, or pressure from their employers, or pressure from their families. Whoever applied the pressure, they stood true.

*"You have not denied My name."* In a strongly Jewish community, there would have been opposition from committed Jews who refused to believe in Jesus and His resurrection. Then there would have been opposition from pagans who were committed to pleasing Rome and supporting the temples of Tiberius' emperor worship. Through it all, Jesus said, you held faithful. *"You have not denied My name."*

Next Jesus mentions Satan's synagogue. We heard about this sinister *"synagogue"* back in Smyrna. Jesus says, *"I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you"* (Rev. 3:9). One day there will be a turning of the tables. Jesus says, I know they are putting pressure on you to compromise. They are trying to make you feel like nobodies, that you have no power or influence. I am going to make them come and worship before your feet, and *"know that I have loved you."* What a turnaround! The persecutors are going to be looking for favor from those they had persecuted!

This prophetic picture occurs elsewhere in Scripture. In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet tells of coming events (Isa. 60:14), *"... the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet."* Their enemies are going to be seeking their favor. The despised will be the honored, and the former despisers will be those giving the honor. Isaiah says even more:

*"Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no one went through you, I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations"* (Isa 60:15).

Wasn't it comforting to the little, despised Church who felt no worth? The Prophet says, *"I will make you an everlasting pride, a joy from generation to generation"* (NASB).

The Book of Zechariah has a similar prophecy of the same future time: *"The inhabitants of one city shall*

*Rev. 3:12 "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God..."*  
The word picture of the pillar would have had special significance for the inhabitants of a city plagued with earthquakes. Pillars were support for buildings. Jesus was comparing the solid nature of God's holy temple with the fallen pillars of literal temples.

## HE HOLDS THE KEY

During the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah, about 700 B.C., the Lord gave Isaiah a prophecy. The Lord told Isaiah that Shebna, King Hezekiah's right-hand man, was going to lose his position. Shebna was like the King's chief-of-staff. Isaiah relays the word from the Lord about this man: *"Indeed, the Lord will throw you away violently, O mighty man, and will surely seize you. He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball into a large country; there you shall die, and there your glorious chariots shall be the shame of your master's house. So I will drive you out of your office, and from your position he will pull you down"* (Isa. 22:17-19).

Looking ahead, the Lord had someone else appointed for the position. *"Then it shall be in that day, that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe and strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open"* (Isa. 22:20-22). In the short term picture, we do not know who filled the position. But in the long term, this was a prophecy of Jesus, here called Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah.

How do we know this is a prophecy of Jesus? Verse 22 says that the *"key of the house of David"* will be given to him, along with the authority to function as supreme administrator. *"He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."* Jesus quotes these words in Revelation 3:7, where He applies them to Himself.

What is the prophetic significance that applies to Jesus? Those who look like they are in authority will lose their positions to the coming one, Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus is returning to earth, to take the authority of its governments and establish a righteous kingdom. This is why God said to the Prophet. *"I will give him the key of the house of David."* With that authority, what Jesus allows, no one can put down. And what He forbids no one can put forward. The result of the administration of Divine authority will be justice and stability worldwide (see Isaiah 32:17-18; Zech. 2:10, 12; Isa. 28:17).

In Philadelphia, it might look like the wrong power is in control. But Jesus reminds them, *"Wrong will not prevail. I will have the last word."*

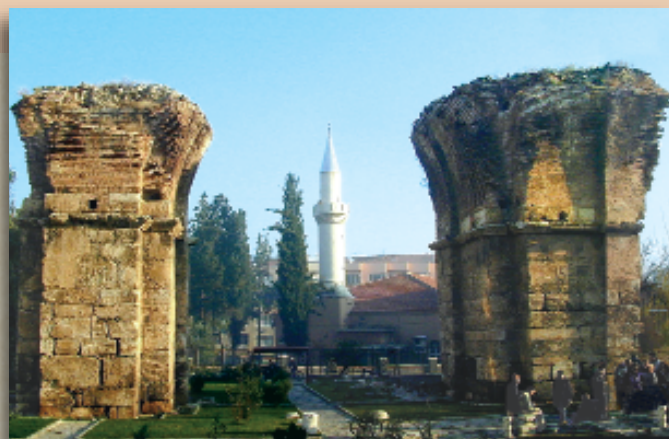


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Ruins of large piers from St. John's Church in Philadelphia



Philadelphia acropolis (unexcavated)



PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



Philadelphia theater (unexcavated)



Temple ruins on the acropolis above the city

Philadelphia was known as an important religious center, even dubbed "Little Athens" by the 5th century A.D. The main deity of the city was Dionysus, the god of wine, based upon the city's important grape production. Many religious festivals were held at the temple to Dionysus. In addition to the pagan religious practices of the city, Philadelphia also had a high population of Jews.

Fragment from the top of a pillar in the Philadelphia acropolis



go to another, saying, 'Let us continue to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts. I myself will go also'. Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord" (Zech. 8:21-22). It is a prophecy from the Lord: "In those days ten men [symbolic number] from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech. 8:23). Those despised few who seemed to have nothing in their favor were going to become the popular ones, "in the day of the Lord."

Suddenly, they felt proud to be on Christ's side!

## THE OPEN DOOR

Jesus said, "I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it." Why an "open door"? God is always opening doors, doors of opportunity. "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Is Christ telling this little Church that their opportunity is just as great whether they are big or small, rich or poor, many or few? Each individual has the same opportunity. The door is open because Christ opened it. He opened it, and none can shut it. No circumstance can stand between them and salvation unless they allow it. No person can stand in the way. No test can be beyond their ability to endure, nor will the State make any law that keeps them from serving God.

Along with the open door that no one can shut comes a promise, in fact a double promise. It is the promise of "the life that now is," and "that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). The door is open and no one can shut it. Sickness cannot shut it. Accident cannot shut it. Not even the emperor on the throne of the Empire can shut it. It is an open door.

Their job—and ours—is to enter. We must step across the threshold and through the door. We must actually take the step to enter, i.e., apply the lessons we have learned. That is why Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door" (Luke 13:24 NRSV). The other implication is, do it now. Don't wait for some better day—when you are older, or the children are grown up, or you are out of debt, or in a more comfortable situation. Do it now, because doors close.

## MORE COMMENDATION

Jesus has even more commendation for the little Church of Philadelphia. "Because you have kept My command to persevere..." (Rev. 3:10). To persevere means to "endure patiently." They didn't endure with teeth grinding determination; they endured in hope of a glorious future. They weren't just putting up with an undesirable situation. They were not growling, and complaining, and saying, why does life have to be so hard for us? Jesus says, you endured patiently. And because you did, I am going to protect you from the trouble that is coming. He follows with a little picture of Armageddon. It is as if He is looking far into the future, to the time of trouble that will come when He returns (Dan. 12:1). He says, You won't have to worry about that coming time of trouble. Because you have faithfully kept My commands I will protect you from harm.

## WARNING

Jesus follows with a warning statement about that time: "Behold," He says, "I am coming quickly." Was He suggesting that He was coming at that time, in the first century? The word translated "quickly" is *tachu*, and means "suddenly." Jesus is reinforcing the point of the open door. Go through it now, He says, because I will be coming suddenly. In other words, grasp your opportunity while you have it, because time is limited.

Jesus is a realist. He is not telling the people at Philadelphia they have done so well that they can relax, that there is no more need for concern.



He wants them to keep alert, watchful, seizing their opportunities. It is a warning to heed, because others have lost out. A good start is not enough; we must keep going to the end. Jesus said, *"He who endures to the end shall be saved"* (Matt. 24:13). That is why Paul warned, *"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Cor. 10:12). Jesus says, *"Hold fast what you have."* Keep going straight ahead. Don't let anybody or anything throw you off course.

The Christian life is an endurance test. *"He who endures to the end will be saved,"* Jesus said three times. The Christian life is not a forty yard dash; it is a marathon.

## THE PROMISES

Jesus concludes His letter with a grand promise to the one *"who overcomes,"* who is faithful all the way, every day. *"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name"* (Rev. 3:12).

## ...RECOGNITION

In that day, large official buildings and temples were constructed with pillars. These pillars were often dedicated to someone important, and that person's name was engraved on the pillar. The pillar told everyone that the person being recognized was a strong supporter of the cause of the building. So Jesus was saying, I'm going to make you pillars in the temple of My God. It would be honorary recognition of their faithful support.

The city of Philadelphia was built in an area that had many earthquakes. In 17 AD, the city was completely destroyed and had to be rebuilt. The only thing left standing were pillars. If Jesus knew this, He may have thought of it when He said, *"I will make you a pillar."* In other words, He says, you can remain standing when all else has come down.

## ...PERMANENCE

After the earthquakes struck Philadelphia in AD 17, the people of the city were frightened. Apparently the earthquake was not one huge quake, but many small quakes that kept the people living in fear for many years. Many moved outside the walls, to get away from the danger of falling masonry.

Jesus may have had this situation in mind when He wrote to them, and said, among His promises, *"He who overcomes...shall go out no more."* It was a promise of security that the people of Philadelphia did not have. In other words, He was saying, you will not need to fear danger. You will not have to flee from any earthquake. Your life will be secure in that new world.

## JESUS' ASSESSMENT

**Introduction:** *"These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens..."* (Rev. 3:7).

**Critique/Commend:** *"I know your works,"* says Jesus, and the critique is all positive. *"See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name"* (3:8). Jesus gives distinct recognition to their fidelity and steadfastness in trial. Their strength is not physical but moral. In spite of its smallness, the Philadelphian Church, when called on to deny Christ, was standing faithfully by His word.

**Promises:** *"... I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you"* (3:9). Compare the promise of Isaiah the prophet (Isa. 60:14): *"The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel"* (Isa. 60:14).

Jesus has another promise: *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth"* (3:10). Jesus' teaching was parallel: *"Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you"* (Luke 6:37, 38). When we take one step toward God, He takes two toward us. When we demonstrate perseverance in obeying His law, He promises to keep and protect us.

**Warning:** *"Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown"* (3:11). Jesus meant to be encouraging, but He also warned. One is never far from falling.

**Crowning Promise:** *"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God,"* not to totter and crumble as the stone pillars of their city, but to abide stable and sure for ever. *"And he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name"* (3:12).



Hermus River near Philadelphia

PHOTO COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



## "BEHOLD I COME QUICKLY"

The thought has special meaning for us who are living down at the end of the age when His second advent is imminent. Would I want Him to find me doing what I am doing at this very moment? Will He find me watching, waiting, ready when He comes?

*That is why Jesus says, "Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:11). Hold fast. Don't get over confident, because you could still lose. You must hold out until the end. If you do not hold out, someone else will, and they will take your crown.*

## HOLD FAST!

The word means literally to grab and hold on. Jesus is telling them there will be something hard to stand against. They will need all their strength. This is no time to relax, but to get stronger.

The letter to the Hebrews has the same thought. *"Since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Heb. 4:1). Coming short, missing by a little, is too much to risk. Keep a tight, firm grip on the faith. "Hold fast." In other words, don't let it slip.*

The apostle John gave the same warning, *"Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward" (2 John 8). In other words, John says hold on to the end. There are wonderful promises, but they are reserved for those who are true and faithful.*

## ...NEW FAMILY

There is yet more honor for this faithful little Church. Think of having God's name! That means belonging to His family, and sharing the family inheritance, the whole earth for an everlasting possession (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 21:6; 1 Pet. 1:3-6). But belonging to His family means we must now be developing the qualities that identify us as members of His family. If we are of the family, we must be *like* the family, and this means adding those qualities of patience, understanding, kindness, and compassion. If we are striving to be godly, every day we must become a little easier to live with, a little more patient, a little more compassionate, more understanding, more peacemaking, more humble. These are the godly qualities we must be building into our lives now if we are going to take God's name.

## ...NEW ADDRESS

Along with a new name will come a new address—in the New Jerusalem. Jesus says, *"I will give him the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on Him My new name."* Here is honor that cannot be taken away. Here is special recognition for the little Church that is doing so well, and just needs to keep their crown.

Let us hold fast to our faith so that we can have a share in that crown when Jesus comes. *MM*

### ANSWERS FROM PAGE 21

#### ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

- Two men (angels) dressed in white (Acts 1:9-11)
- 3rd hour, or 9 a.m. (Acts 2:14-15)
- At the temple gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-7)
- They hoped Peter could heal them (Acts 5:15-16)
- 7 (Acts 6:1-3)
- Stephen (Acts 7:59-60)
- Philip (Acts 8:26-38)
- Ananias (Acts 9:17-18)
- He was eaten by worms. (Acts 12:20-23)
- Cyprus (Acts 13:4)
- Silas and Judas (Acts 15:22); the new Church policy toward Gentiles (Acts 15: 23-29)
- Barnabas took John Mark; Paul took Silas (Acts 15:36-40)
- Timothy and Luke. Timothy joined Paul and Silas at Lystra (Acts 16:1), and Luke joined at Troas—became "we" (Acts 16:10). The slave girl cried out, *"These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation"* (Acts 16:17).

- At Lydia's house (Acts 16:40)
- "To the Unknown God"* (Acts 17:22-23)
- Demetrius (Acts 19:24)
- Jerusalem (Acts 21:15-17)
- He was afraid the angry leaders would pull him apart (Acts 23:6-10)
- 200 soldiers, 200 spearmen, and 70 horsemen (Acts 23:23-24)
- Caesar (Acts 25:10-12)

#### EXODUS

- Aaron (Ex. 4:14)
- Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:10)
- Jewels of gold and silver, and raiment (Ex. 12:35-36)
- Ten (Ex. 7:14-11:1); so that "the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 7:5, 17)
- Aaron's rod swallowed the rods of the magicians (Ex. 7:8-12)
- Red Sea (Ex. 14)
- Just before crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:11-12)
- Marah (Ex. 15:23-25)
- Quail (Ex. 16:11-13)
- He was to strike the rock with his rod (Ex. 17:5-6)

- Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:20; 31:18)
- 1) You shall have no other gods before Me; 2) You shall not make for yourself a carved image; 3) You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; 4) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; 5) Honor your father and your mother; 6) You shall not murder; 7) You shall not commit adultery; 8) You shall not steal; 9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor; 10) You shall not covet (Ex. 20:1-17)
- The mercy seat with a cherubim on each end (Ex. 25:18-21)
- The names of the 12 tribes of Israel, six names on each stone (Ex. 28:9-10)
- Blue (Ex. 28:31)
- They said they did not know what had happened to Moses (Ex. 32:1-4)
- Bezaleel and Aholiab (Ex. 35:30-35; 36:1-2)
- God chose Joshua the son of Nun (Num. 27:15-23)
- A pillar of cloud and of fire (Ex. 13:21)
- Forty years, one year for each day they had spied out the land (Num. 14:32-34)



## Acts of the Apostles

1. Who addressed the apostles when Jesus ascended?
2. At what time in the morning did Peter address the crowd saying, "These men are not drunk"?
3. Where did Peter and John heal the lame man?
4. Why were the sick placed on beds and couches in the streets in Jerusalem?
5. How many men were chosen to be "deacons" in the early Church?
6. What leader in the Church was stoned to death?
7. Who baptized the Ethiopian officer?
8. Who restored Saul's (Paul's) sight?
9. How did King Herod die?
10. Where did Paul and Barnabas go first as they launched out on their first missionary journey from Antioch?
11. Whom did the leaders at Jerusalem send with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to deliver a letter? What was the subject of that letter?
12. When Paul and Barnabas separated, whom did Barnabas take with him? Whom did Paul choose?
13. Who was with Paul and Silas at Philippi on their second missionary journey? What did the slave girl at Philippi keep calling out to Paul and his companions?
14. Where did Paul and Silas stay after they were miraculously released from jail in Philippi?
15. When Paul was in Athens, he saw an altar which made him comment that the Athenians were very superstitious. What was the inscription on that altar?
16. What was the name of the silversmith in Ephesus who made silver shrines of the goddess Diana?
17. What city was the final destination of Paul's third missionary journey?
18. When Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, when the Sadducees and Pharisees were divided, why did the Roman commander order Paul's rescue?
19. What armed protection did the Chief Captain order when Paul was transported from Jerusalem to Caesarea?
20. When Paul feared the injustice of the Jews, to whom did he appeal?

## Exodus

1. What was the name of Moses' brother?
2. Who rescued Moses from the ark of bulrushes?
3. What did the Israelites borrow from their neighbors prior to leaving Egypt?
4. How many plagues did God send on Egypt? What was the purpose of these plagues?
5. How did God use Aaron's rod to demonstrate that He was more powerful than the Egyptian gods, and that Aaron was His appointee?
6. What body of water did God use to deliver the Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians?
7. When did the Israelites voice their first recorded complaint about their deliverance from Egypt?
8. Where did the Israelites find the water too bitter to drink, and God caused it to become sweet?
9. What did God provide for meat in the wilderness?
10. When there was no water to drink at Rephidim, what did the Lord tell Moses to do?
11. On what mountain did the Lord give Moses the Ten Commandments?
12. Name the Ten Commandments.
13. What was on top of the Ark of the Covenant?
14. The Priest's ephod had two onyx stones, one on each shoulder. What was engraved on the stones?
15. The robe of the high priest's ephod was what color?
16. Why did the Israelites ask Aaron if they could make a god to worship?
17. Name two Israelites whom are God gifted to design artistic works for the tabernacle.
18. Who chose Moses' successor? What was his name?
19. What guided the Israelites through the wilderness?
20. How many years did the Israelites wander in the wilderness? Why that many years?

(ANSWERS ON PAGE 20)





# By Wind, By Hands, By Stars



A nautical expression from pre-technology days describes the means by which a ship could cross the sea: *"By wind, by hands, by stars."* *Wind* represented the part which God provides, an essential in sailing vessel days. Without wind the ship would lie motionless. *Hands* stood for the human part in the sailing. The wind could not be caught without the human hand. The sail had to be artfully moved and quickly, and for this the mind and muscle of a man was needed. *Stars* were a necessity, because the sailor at sea had nothing else to steer by and the ship would stray from its course.

*"By wind, by hands, by stars"* also suggests the requirements for sailing our ship successfully across the sea of life. Wind represents what God provides—life, energy and power. Without Him there is no motion, no energy, and no goal. Hands tell us that we have a part in the crossing, an essential part. The apostle Paul wrote, *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* As someone put it, "Pray as though everything depends upon God. Work as though everything depends upon you." Stars are those eternal principles that God has set down in His Book for our guidance. The principles remain the same from age to age, never changing, never diminishing in importance. They are points of reference by which we can chart and correct our course through life.

The stars are absolutely dependable. No mariner was ever lost because the stars betrayed him. Whenever a sailor discovered a conflict between his directional instincts and the information the stars provided, he did well to follow the stars.

God's Word is among those things which *"cannot be shaken"* (Heb. 12:27). The learning of this world cannot push it aside, because it transcends human wisdom. Wars cannot move it, since it is not dependent on human consent. The instabilities of human economies, human governments, and human societies can never touch it because it *"cannot be shaken."*

Modern navigators still follow the stars. Even the sophisticated Hubble telescope, we are told, keeps on course by locking its sites on certain predetermined stars.

The Word of God, like the stars, is useful for guidance because it is dependable. It is the Word of One who cannot lie and does not change. *"I am the Lord, I change not...and my glory will I not give to another"* (Mal. 3:6; Isa. 42:8). Not one word will fail of all that He has spoken (1 Kings 8:56).

Stars also give light. Likewise, the Bible is a spiritual light in this world's moral darkness. Nothing about the darkness can dim its light. Those who have learned to live by the light of God's Word have learned that the dark places of earth hold no terror. In fact, in its light *"the night shineth as the day"* (Ps. 139:12).

An inscription on the crypt of Allegheny Observatory at the University of

*God's principles are  
not Divine because they  
are in the Bible. They  
are in the Bible because  
they are Divine.*



Pittsburgh reads, “C. V. Brashear, 1834-1910. We have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.”

Can't we as believers in Christ say the same, in a spiritual sense? Can we say we have no fear of the darkness? We are surrounded by foes we cannot control: foes of error, immorality, violence, oppression, destructiveness, greed, and inhumanity of man to man; foes of our own human limitations and the facts of mortality. However vibrant and full of excitement the sunlight of life can be, we know that it will end. We have no power to save ourselves. But we have “*the stars*”—bright stars of hope and faith that He has given us in His Word. We love these stars far too fondly to be fearful of the night.

The stars never go out. Those Abraham looked up to are the very same ones we see. They are part of eternity itself. The stars represent the eternal verities God has given us in His Word. God's principles are relevant in every age. We can never outgrow them or leave them behind. They are not Divine because they are in the Bible, but they are in the Bible because they are Divine.

If we are to sail safely through life, we need to sail by God's stars, His Word, His principles. Whatever we do, we need them. There are some learned voices today saying that the Bible is out of date, that modern man no longer needs it. But who are we to question the wisdom of Him who made us?

Who are we to say that we do not need what He has provided for us to use?

A religious author, Clovis Chapel, once told a story about two men in a boat on the open sea. Darkness had overtaken them as they sailed homeward. Being weary, the owner of the craft turned over the duties of steering to his hired hand, carefully pointing out the star by which he had been guiding the boat. “Now keep your eye on that star,” he said, and “we'll reach the right port. Keep your eye on that star!”

It had been a hard day, and soon the owner was fast asleep. The new navigator was dozing, too. After several naps, with the boat some distance off course, the navigator awoke and thought of the star he was supposed to be watching. Unable to find it among the vast number overhead, he went to where the older man was sleeping and shook him awake. “Sir,” he said, “show me another star; we've sailed past the first one.”

God has given us stars to sail by, solid principles in His Word, and it is our responsibility to keep awake. If the star seems to be out of sight, it is not the star that moved; we moved. God's Word is a steady guide, but we must keep our eye on it, or we will surely be lost.

Times and customs change, but Divine truth remains the same. May God grant us the wisdom to continue to sail “by wind, by hands, by stars.” *MM*

## Eat Right, Live Right

*continued from page 2*

willing to commit to it. Why? For the same reason that the current programs of diet and exercise often fail: because they require effort and sacrifice. Getting the benefit means committing to it and sticking to it. The same is true of God's “eat right, live right” program. To get the benefit one must both commit to it and stick to it.

Others claim that the sacrifice part of God's program, the diet and exercise part, has already been done for us by another (Christ)... no need to make any supreme effort on our part. But think about it: Can someone eat the right foods for me (broccoli, spinach, lentils, and fish) while I enjoy my calorie-loaded Big Mac and fries ... and I have good health as a result? Can someone exercise diligently for me (30 minutes every day on the treadmill) while I relax in my easy chair... and I get strong heart muscles? Unreasonable?

Neither is it reasonable that someone can eat the right spiritual food and exercise its principles for me, and I get the benefit. No, I must hunger and thirst for righteousness myself. That is why Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*”—not someone else (Matt. 5:6). This good eating and good exercising are so inseparable that Jesus said, “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work*” (John 4:34).

I must *want* the milk and meat of the Word of God—and eat it myself—to get the benefit. The prophet Jeremiah was an example himself. He ate the right (spiritual) food, and received the benefit. “*Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts*” (Jer. 15:16). Jeremiah found great joy in eating every word of God and applying those words in his life.

Jesus also preached and practiced “eat right, live right.” As our perfect example, He could say, “*I am the bread of life*” (John 6:48), so completely did He take His Father's words into His own heart and life.

Speaking to the Jews, He compared the benefits of literal and spiritual bread. “*Your fathers ate the [literal bread] manna in the wilderness, and are dead,*” He said (v. 49). Then speaking of Himself He said, “*I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever*” (vs. 51).

The Jews took offense at these words, “...*saying, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’*” (v. 52). Jesus later explained to His disciples that “...*the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6:63). Peter understood His meaning when he said, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68; see John 6:48-69). And again Jesus said, “*My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me*” (John 7:16).

Both diet and exercise are important. That is why Paul said, “*Exercise yourself toward godliness*” because “*godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come [eternal life]*.” How valid is this claim? Paul assures us that “*this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance*” (1 Tim. 4:7-9), and he was a spokesman for God; we cannot have it from higher authority.

How nourishing is your spiritual diet? Are you trying to subsist on spiritual junk food, or are you eating every Word of God? (Matt. 4:4). And what is your exercise program lately? Can you see that your spiritual muscles are stronger than they were a year ago?

Remember, eat right, live right—it is the only way to “eat and live for ever”! *MM*



## Does It Pay?

**A**s Brandon dragged his snow shovel toward home, the cold air seemed to go right through to his bones. Shoveling Mrs. Walker's driveway and front walk had been a big job — especially since he'd had to do it alone!

Brandon was glad to find that his mom had a cup of hot chocolate waiting for him when he got home. "Mmmm—thanks," he said with a sigh as he slumped into a kitchen chair. "Mom, it just doesn't seem fair. Sometimes I wonder if doing right really pays."

Mother looked surprised. "What makes you say that?" she asked.

"Well, Chad and Alex and I all agreed to shovel Mrs. Walker's driveway after school today," Brandon explained, "but then Mr. Wilbert offered to pay anyone who would come and help clear his long driveway. Of course, that sounded good to Chad and Alex, so they went and did that instead. Not only did they break their promise, but they also got paid for it!"

"That doesn't seem fair," agreed Mother. "You know, Brandon, it often seems to us that people benefit from doing what is wrong. However, the Bible tells us not to envy those who seem to be rewarded for wrong doing, for their end is death—nothing beyond the grave."

Dad had been listening from the living room. Now he entered the kitchen with a smile. "I'm proud of you for keeping your promise today, Son," he said. "I'm sorry to say that I regularly encounter businessmen who seem to benefit by being dishonest or breaking promises, and it sometimes doesn't seem fair to me, either. But it helps to remember that God is fair. We're accountable to Him, and one day He will reward us for continuing to do what is right."

After talking with his parents, Brandon began to feel better about the situation. He knew God had seen his actions and one day would reward him for doing what was right.



*Keep doing right*

*Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.*

*For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.*

—Psalm 37:1, 9

### HOW ABOUT YOU?

*Does it seem like others benefit from doing what is wrong? Do you know some who seem to get away with cheating? Stealing? Lying? God tells you not to get tired of doing what you know is right. He will reward you for it.*

## On Thin Ice

**I** don't see why I can't go — it seems like a fair exchange," Tara told her mother. "Since Crystal is willing to come to church tomorrow if I go with her this afternoon, I think I should go with her."

Mother shook her head. "She wants you to go to two places that I do not approve of. I've explained before why I don't think either of those are places Christians should go. Going to places like that is not the way to win your friend for God."

"But, Mother!" protested Tara. "If it will get Crystal to come—"

"I said 'no,' Tara," Mother stated firmly.

With an angry look, Tara marched off to her room.

Later, with Mother's permission, Tara spent the afternoon ice skating with some friends. When she returned home, she was bursting with excitement. "You know Jack Wolter? He almost drowned!" she exclaimed. "He zipped right past the danger sign toward the middle of the lake. But the ice did—"



*Witness by your life*



n't hold him—one leg went right through into freezing water. I screamed for help!"

"Oh, my!" Mother was concerned. "Is he all right?"

Tara nodded. "He was hanging onto the ice, half in and half out of the water. He's just lucky the men on duty got there in time!"

"Oh, good!" said Mother. After Tara finished telling about the exciting rescue, Mother looked at her thoughtfully. "But, Tara, why didn't you skate out and rescue him yourself?" she asked. "You took that life-saving swim class last summer."

Tara looked at her mother in disbelief. "Mom! You're not serious!" she exclaimed. "The men used boards and ropes and stuff to crawl out and reach Jack. If anybody had skated out there, it would have broken more of the ice and made it worse. Besides, when someone falls through the ice into freezing water, you don't rescue him by going in after him—and in that freezing water? No way! You'd probably both get trapped under the ice!"

Mother nodded. "I'm glad you had the good sense to know that," she said. "Now think about this—when you see someone doing wrong, do you rescue him by joining him? If you do, you might both get trapped in sin."

As Tara heard Mother's words, she remembered their conversation that morning. She nodded. Now she could see the danger. She would have to find some other way to help Crystal. *MM*

*Do not enter the path of the wicked,  
And do not walk in the way of evil.  
Avoid it, do not travel on it;  
Turn away from it and pass on.*  
Prov. 4:14–15

#### HOW ABOUT YOU?

*In order to win a friend, are you sometimes tempted to go somewhere you should not go, or to do something you know is wrong? If you yield to that temptation, you're just fooling yourself—you're not winning your friend. You're "skating on thin ice" and endangering both of you. The way to encourage others to follow Jesus is by following Jesus yourself, living a pure life before them.*

The above stories are adapted from *KEYS FOR KIDS* 1997.



## ABIB Calendar

### Abib Means...

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

### Abib (or Nisan) 1, the first day of the Sacred New Year,

begins this year on Sunday evening, April 6, and continues through Monday, April 7, Bible time being measured from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). It was the pattern of the Hebrew People to begin the new year with the first occurrence of the new moon (this year on April 6) after the Spring Equinox (this year on March 20). Abib First is the first day of the sacred New Year, and the day on which we observe the anniversary of our Savior's birth.

**Abib 13**, the anniversary of the night Jesus partook of the Last Supper with His disciples before He suffered, falls this year on Friday evening, April 18. At this time we partake of the emblems in obedience to Jesus' command, "This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24–25). By this sacred rite we symbolize the renewing of our covenant relationship with God, the bread representing the knowledge of the law of God, and the juice representing the application of that knowledge to our daily lives.

**Abib 15, the anniversary of the Resurrection of Christ**, occurs this year on the morning of Monday, April 21. In ancient Israel, this was the day of the offering of the first sheaf of the harvest to the Lord. On this morning, Christ the firstfruits from death rose triumphant over death. On this morning, even "very early in the morning," devout women wanting to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, made their way to the tomb (Matt. 28:1). Finding it empty, they heard those immortal words from the angel that still thrill and inspire us today: "He is not here, he is risen! Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6).

**Pentecost**, fifty days after the waving of the first sheaf offering, falls this year on June 9.



## The Phenomenal FEATHER



Awesome Albino Peacock

### DID YOU KNOW... ?

- ✓ Even though feathers are light, a bird's plumage weighs two or three times more than its skeleton.
- ✓ Pygmy parrots have been designed with sharp spines on the tips of their tail feathers. The tips dig into the bark of a tree and hold the parrot steady while it looks for insects to eat.
- ✓ The longest feathers found on a wild bird were on a type of pheasant, and measured slightly less than six feet in length.
- ✓ Owls have a special type of flight feathers to make them able to catch prey silently at night. The outer ends of their flight feathers lack barbules—they are unzipped. This makes the edges softer and reduces the noise they make in flight. A silent approach means more success in hunting and more to eat!

W

PATRICIA A. FLEMING

ho has not picked up a fallen feather and admired its shape and color? If it was a bit ruffled, we smoothed it out by running our fingers along its vanes (the vanes of a feather are the soft areas on either side of its center shaft).

All birds have feathers, and only birds have feathers. Every feather is an engineering marvel.

### STRONG, LIGHT, MARVELOUS DESIGN

Feathers are among the most complex structural organs found in vertebrates. They serve the bird as propellers, raincoats, windbreakers, ornamental dress, and even as winter underwear! In mechanical design, the feather is a marvel. Look at it under magnification, and you will see a flat network of tens of thousands of interlocking hooks and hooklets capable of zipping and unzipping many times.

The structure of all feathers is similar. A hollow shaft runs down the center of the feather, and the branches on either side of the shaft form a vane.

A series of fine branches called barbs project outward from either side of the shaft. Each barb has branches called barbules growing out of either side

### HOW COME FEATHERS?

The common explanation given in our schools is that life began in the sea, and over millions of years fish slowly changed into reptiles, and reptiles into birds. How did feathers come about? According to evolutionary theory, the reptiles' scales elongated and changed into feathers. Roger Tory Peterson, an international authority on birds, wrote in Time-Life's "Nature Library" (volume on Birds, p. 43), "It takes no great stretch of imagination to envision a feather as a modified scale basically like that of the reptile—a longish scale loosely attached, whose outer edges frayed and spread out until it evolved into the highly complex structure it is today!"

"It takes no great stretch of imagination..."? Think about it: a "longish scale ... loosely attached" (ready to fall out?), with "outer edges frayed and spread" (worn out?), slowly became (evolved into) the "highly complex" (more intricate, more advanced?) structure we call a feather?

Another noted scientist, F. B. Sumner, made this observation (published in Science 93 (1941):522): "Nothing but the guiding hand of a designer here, if not the direct intervention of the Creator Himself... could have transformed the scales of a reptile forthright into the plumage of a bird."

What shall we think? Does it make any difference? Yes! It makes the difference between honoring or dishonoring the great Designer! It makes the difference between having His favor, or His disfavor. One who achieves is worthy of recognition. How much more the Creator, to whom we are indebted for everything we have!

Is a feather a modified scale that frayed and spread out until it became "the highly complex structure it is today"? Or is the feather another evidence of the awesome skill of a Designer?

Read about the wonders of a common feather, and bow in awe before the Great Designer!



of the barb. The barbules extending on one side of the barb contain a series of hooklets, and the barbules extending in the opposite direction are slightly convex in order to catch the hooklets of the barbules extending from the next barb along the shaft (see diagram). Altogether, the network of barbs and barbules lock the feather together in a zipper like manner, forming a strong, smooth, flexible surface. If the feather becomes disarranged, the bird needs only to draw it through its beak to zip everything back into shape.

Can't we see each feather as a masterpiece of design—and a credit to the great, Eternal Designer?

## KINDS OF FEATHERS

A bird has different types of feathers, which perform different jobs. There are three main types: flight feathers, which are long, stiff and smooth; contour feathers, which are small, neat and fluffy at the base; and small, soft and fluffy down feathers.

### Flight feathers

The feathers on the wing and tail of a bird are called flight feathers. Light and strong, the large feathers of the outer wing propel the bird through the air. The curved flight feathers of the inner wing provide lift. The feathers of the tail aid in steering by acting as a rudder.

A bird's flight feathers are asymmetrical—one side of the shaft is wider than the other. Is this by chance? Not at all. It is the Creator's design to facilitate flight. The vane on the leading edge being narrower than on the trailing edge makes the feather strongest where the pressure during flight is greatest. This design also minimizes fraying at the edges. If the leading edge vane was as large as the trailing edge vane, it would soon become very ragged and not work properly.

### Contour feathers

The greatest amount of feathers on a bird are the ordinary body contour feathers. These give the bird its characteristic smooth roundness, its usual color, and also provide a first level defense against sun, rain, wind and weather. The contour feathers on the bird's body form a smooth surface that offers little resistance to the flow of the air, while insulating its body against heat loss.

Body, or contour feathers are much like flight feathers in construction, except that often only the barbules near the tip have hooks for interlocking—another evidence of the Designer's work!

### Down feathers

Perhaps the most important feathers to the bird are the down feathers. These have a short shaft, with side branches longer than the center shaft. And they are not zipped together, so do not look neat. But they do not need to be neat—these soft fluffies are the bird's underwear, and provide great insulation against cold. (Don't we like our down comforters, and down coats to keep us warm in winter?)

## BROOD PATCHES

Because the bird's feathers are such good insulators, very little of the adult bird's body heat escapes. How, then, do birds incubate their eggs until they hatch? Here is another marvel of design—and one that had to be planned before eggs could be hatched and the species perpetuated! (How would "time"—even millions of years—have solved this problem?!)

Brood patches are areas where the feathers fall out during or immediately prior to the time the bird incubates its eggs. These areas of bare skin on the birds' abdomen have a high concentration of blood vessels to allow the parent bird to transfer heat to the eggs lying against that area of skin. Different kinds of birds may have one large patch or several small patches, matching the number of eggs the bird typically incubates. Herring gulls, for example, normally lay two to three eggs, and have two to three brood patches.

## Feathers—visible evidence of Intelligent Design.

Different kinds of feathers cover different parts of a bird. **Flight feathers** cover the wings and tail. They are long and wide, so they can cover a large area without adding much to the weight of the bird. **Contour feathers** cover the body. These are often the most colorful feathers. **Down feathers** grow under the contour feathers. They trap air and help keep the bird warm.

**Flight feather**  
(Blue Jay's)

**Wide**  
**Narrow**  
**Vanes**

On **flight feathers**, the leading vane is narrower and stronger than the trailing vane. They have tiny hooks on the barbules that hold the feather together in a flat and smooth web.

**Contour feathers** are shaped for their purpose—to give the bird's body its smooth roundness and color.

**Contour feather**

**Down feathers**

**Down feathers** grow under the contour feathers and are designed to trap air and help keep the bird warm. They have a short shaft with a tuft of many barbs sprouting from the tip. The barbs are fluffy because they do not interlock.

Bird nestlings are covered with down feathers.



Is it just by chance that birds have “brood patches”? Here is another evidence of the Great Designer’s handiwork!

## HOW FEATHERS GROW

The birds’ feathers grow from a protein substance in the outer layer of the bird’s skin. Feathers do not grow equally and randomly all over a bird. Again there is evidence of design—and the Designer. Flight feathers grow on “feather tracks.” In between the feather tracks, down feathers grow.

Growing feathers have blood vessels flowing through the tissue of the feather. When the feather becomes full grown, this blood flow is cut off at the base of the feather and the feather tissue becomes dead matter like our fingernails. But unlike our fingernails, the bird retains control over the feather. The feather is attached to a muscle at its base so that the bird can move each feather independently, to keep it in place, tilt or bend it. This intricate feather control allows the bird to exploit air currents to its advantage when flying.

Also, at the base of each feather are nerve endings. It is thought that these nerves serve the bird as a constant sense of touch when it is in flight, so that the bird is sensitive to changing currents that move across its plumage when it is flying. Here is another evidence of intricate design.

## AUTO-REPLACEMENT PLAN

Even with daily maintenance, feathers soon become worn and battered, and fall out. If there were not a replacement plan, the bird would soon be featherless. But the great Designer planned for this also—and the bird does not have to give it a thought. When a feather drops out, a new feather grows quickly in its place. This happens to each feather once or twice a year, depending on the species. In most birds, a few feathers are continually falling out, and new feathers are growing to replace them.

## FEATHER MAINTENANCE

Feathers get dirty. Feathers get unzipped. Feathers lose their oiliness and soak up water if not regularly oiled. Is all this maintenance left to blind chance? By no means! Their great Designer has equipped birds with everything they need—the supplies, tools, and know-

how—to maintain their feathers.

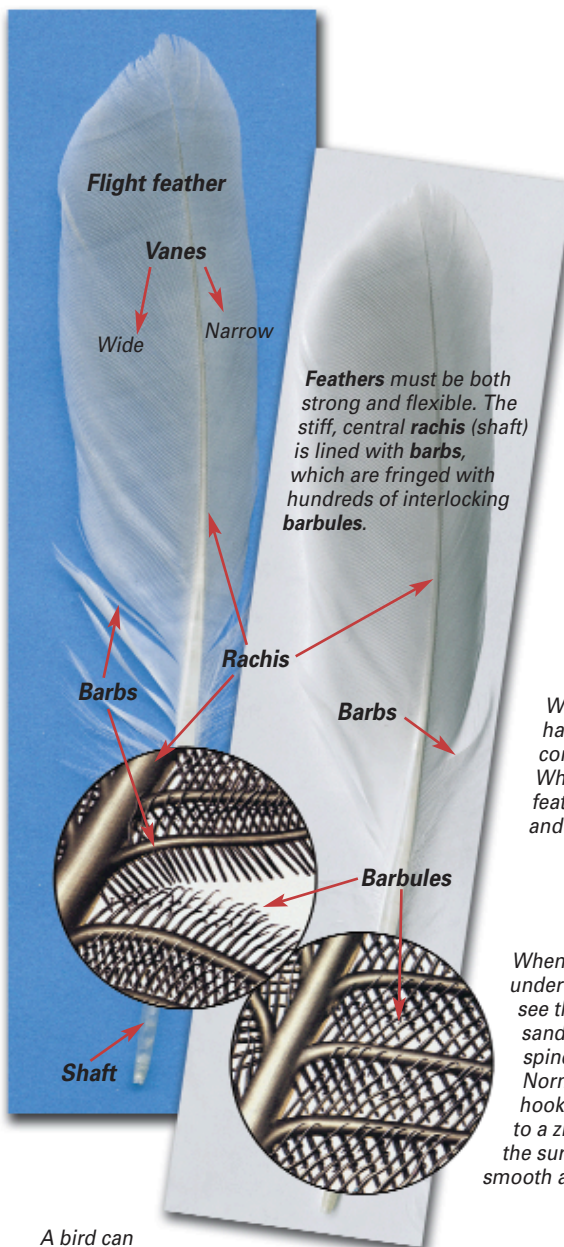
The process is called preening. The bird rubs its beak over the oil gland at the base of its tail. Using its beak as an applicator, the bird spreads the oil over a patch of feathers, then runs the feathers through its beak, nibbling as it goes. This important care cleans and tidies their feathers, straightening ruffled barbs and zipping their hooklets back into place, besides removing pests and waterproofing. Doing one area at a time, a bird preens its entire body, giving particular attention to the flight feathers.

You have heard the expression, that something runs off “like water off a duck’s back.” Water would not run off any bird’s back without the regular and careful application of oil from its preen gland. Without it they would soon become water-logged and sink.

A few birds, like pigeons and herons, preen with powder instead of oil. Because they need a continuous supply of this powder, they have powder-down feathers (by chance?). Unlike regular feathers, powder-down feathers grow continuously and disintegrate at the tip to produce a fine powder. Herons use the powder in mopping up the slime and dust that get on their fronts while eating fish.

## COLORS

Since birds have good eyesight, color is very important to them. Birds with bright hues, usually the males, flash their colors to attract attention to themselves during mating, or to distract enemies. Where do the colors come from?



Feathers must be both strong and flexible. The stiff, central **rachis** (shaft) is lined with **barbs**, which are fringed with hundreds of interlocking **barbules**.

When a feather gets a lot of hard wear, the barbules may come apart, as shown (left). When this happens, the feathers start to look ragged and messy.

When you look at a feather under a microscope, you can see that it is made of thousands of spines. These spines are called **barbules**. Normally, they are hooked together (similar to a zipper). This makes the surface of the feather smooth and flat.

A bird can repair its feathers by re-hooking the barbules. It uses its bill or beak to zip up each row of barbules, in a way that is similar to zipping a zipper. This is called preening. Most birds and especially waterfowl spend a lot of time preening. They carefully zip up the barbules in each feather and put a thin coat of oil on many of the feathers from a special gland.

How can we think that the birds figured out this ingenious way to maintain their feathers?



Water runs off a duck's back. This is because the feathers have oil on them, and this makes them waterproof. By helping to keep water out, the oil helps to keep waterfowl dry and warm.



The blacks, grays and light tans are manufactured in the birds' bodies. The brighter colors of red, orange, yellow, blue, green and brown come from the food the bird eats. This is especially evident in flamingos. Zoo-keepers were frustrated when captive birds soon paled and turned a dull white—until they learned the beautiful bright pink was dependent on the food the birds ate.

Some birds, like the lowly starling, are iridescent. Iridescence occurs when minute structures on the surface of the feather reflect only one wavelength of light. (Does a wonder like this just happen?)

Observe the pattern and order in bird coloration. Every bird has its own distinct colors that identify its kind. Some feathers have several colors in them, others are solid in color, some lack color altogether, leaving them a natural white. But the right color feathers grow in the right place on each bird so that a robin always looks like a robin, a wren like a wren, and a male cardinal looks like every other male cardinal. Isn't this consistency another evidence that the bird was designed by the Great Designer, and is not the product of blind chance?

Think about how every bird is clothed in the feathers that suit it to live in the environment for which it was designed. Add the ability to escape from predators by camouflage, the ability to fly, to swoop and soar and hover. Are we not filled with wonder and admiration for the Great Creator who "made the earth and all things that are there in" (Neh. 9:6), who gives life to every creature great and small? Should not the wonders of His creation remind us continually to reverence Him, worship Him, honor and obey Him, and bow in humble adoration before Him? *MM*

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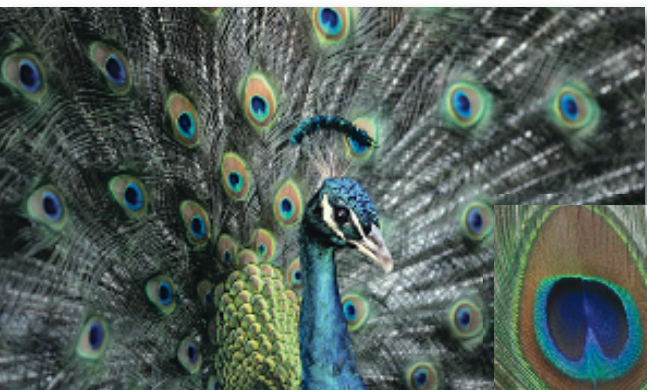


### HOW MANY FEATHERS?

How many feathers does a bird have? That depends on the species of bird. Someone once calculated the feathers on a Tundra swan at about 25,000!

Most song birds have between 2,000 and 4,000 feathers, of which 30 to 40 percent are on the head and neck.

The number of feathers on a bird depends very much on its size, and where and how it lives. In general, a bird has about a third of its feathers on its head, likely because that area needs the most protection.



*Which birds have unusual feathers? In a sense, all bird feathers are unusual, for you can often identify a bird by only a single feather. But some species have strikingly specialized plumage like the resplendent plumes of a peacock's train.*



Peacock feathers



*Most cockatoos carry a crest of pointed feathers on top of their heads. They can raise or lower the crests whenever they want to.*

*Why is the cockatoo able to raise or lower its special crest feathers at will? (Did the cockatoo design itself?)*

*Just consider the endless variety of feather shapes, colors and displays. Some birds (usually the male) have spectacular color in their feathers during mating season. Some birds change feathers seasonally to better blend into their environment. How could these awesome designs come from the bird itself or random chance? Or—without intelligent design how could the biological information for these specialized feathers—their growth, use, visual appeal, maintenance, etc.—be put into genes to be passed from generation to generation? No way!*



## Today Is Mine

*Today is mine, in which to work,  
In which to fight the foes that lurk  
In hidden places, to appear  
When I least think that danger's near.  
While yet today I breathe, and live,  
I may my enemies forgive;  
And right the wrongs that oft I do,  
That I may be forgiven, too.*

*Today is mine, but who can tell  
If on the morrow I shall dwell  
In strength and health, upon the earth,  
To still accomplish things of worth.  
Before the setting of the sun  
Some work remains that must be done,  
For ere there is another dawn,  
'Tis possible I may be gone.*


*Today is mine, a monument  
I'll make of it, a day well spent  
In drawing closer to my God,  
To walk the path by Jesus trod.  
I'll learn the art of being meek,  
To practice through the coming week;  
But lest I can not longer stay  
I'll practice being meek today.*

*I'll strive to be more kind today  
To those I meet along life's way;  
At home, and as I go abroad,  
I'll try to glorify my God.  
The angry passions that would rise  
I'll curb today, the thoughts unwise  
I will dispel, nor longer wait.  
Tomorrow it may be too late.*

*I'll work tomorrow, if I may,  
But while it's mine, I'll work today,  
That it may be a stepping stone  
To heights that are as yet unknown.  
I will not wait, and just lay plans,  
Consoled to think God understands;  
For should we meet, He soon would say,  
"My son, what have you done today?"*

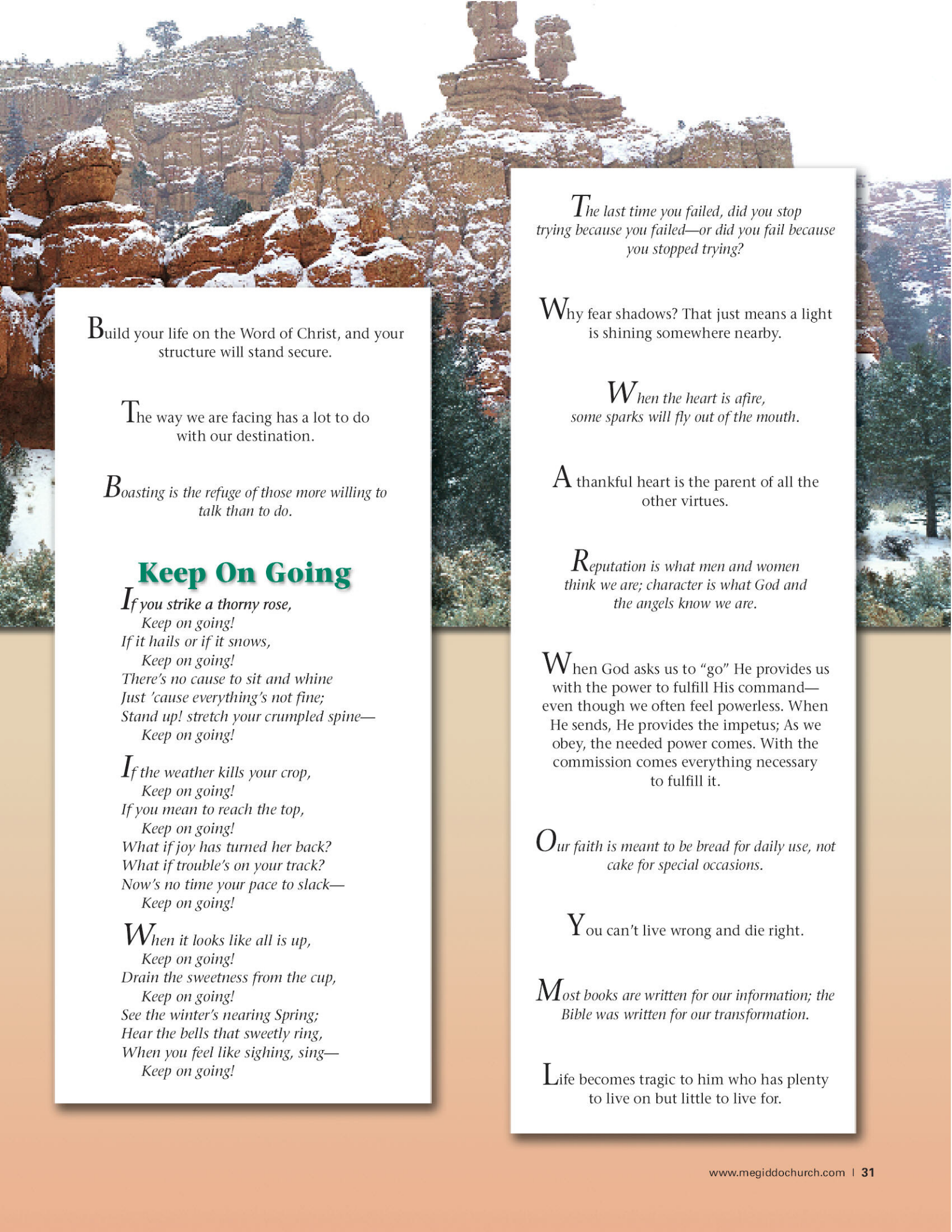
by Liot L. Snyder, 1942

## How To Be Perfectly Miserable

- 
1. Think about yourself.
  2. Talk about yourself.
  3. Use "I" as often as possible.
  4. Refuse all responsibility.
  5. Expect to be appreciated.
  6. Be suspicious.
  7. Make the most of another's mistakes.
  8. Envy others' gifts and talents.
  9. Be sensitive to slights.
  10. Listen greedily to what people say about you.
  11. Never forgive a criticism.
  12. Trust nobody but yourself.
  13. Insist on getting proper respect from others.
  14. Demand agreement with your own views.
  15. Sulk if people do not appreciate you for favors shown.
  16. Be on the lookout for a good time for yourself.
  17. Shirk your duty if you can.
  18. Do as little as possible for others.
  19. Love yourself supremely.
  20. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others.
  21. Never forget a service you may have rendered.

This recipe is guaranteed infallible.





**B**uild your life on the Word of Christ, and your structure will stand secure.

**T**he way we are facing has a lot to do with our destination.

*B*oasting is the refuge of those more willing to talk than to do.

## Keep On Going

*If you strike a thorny rose,  
Keep on going!  
If it hails or if it snows,  
Keep on going!  
There's no cause to sit and whine  
Just 'cause everything's not fine;  
Stand up! stretch your crumpled spine—  
Keep on going!*

*If the weather kills your crop,  
Keep on going!  
If you mean to reach the top,  
Keep on going!  
What if joy has turned her back?  
What if trouble's on your track?  
Now's no time your pace to slack—  
Keep on going!*

*When it looks like all is up,  
Keep on going!  
Drain the sweetness from the cup,  
Keep on going!  
See the winter's nearing Spring;  
Hear the bells that sweetly ring,  
When you feel like sighing, sing—  
Keep on going!*

*The last time you failed, did you stop trying because you failed—or did you fail because you stopped trying?*

**W**hy fear shadows? That just means a light is shining somewhere nearby.

*When the heart is afire,  
some sparks will fly out of the mouth.*

**A** thankful heart is the parent of all the other virtues.

*Reputation is what men and women think we are; character is what God and the angels know we are.*

**W**hen God asks us to “go” He provides us with the power to fulfill His command—even though we often feel powerless. When He sends, He provides the impetus; As we obey, the needed power comes. With the commission comes everything necessary to fulfill it.

*Our faith is meant to be bread for daily use, not cake for special occasions.*

**Y**ou can't live wrong and die right.

*Most books are written for our information; the Bible was written for our transformation.*

**L**ife becomes tragic to him who has plenty to live on but little to live for.





No time, no time to study,  
To meditate and pray,  
And yet much time for doing  
In a fleshly, worldly way;  
No time for things eternal,  
But much for things of earth;  
The things important set aside  
For things of little worth.  
Some things, it's true, are needful,  
But first things must come first;  
And what displaces God's own Word  
Of God it shall be cursed.

