

Megiddo Message



*Encouraging Ourselves
in the Lord*

Vol. 74, No. 2

February, 1987

Don't Forget the Z-Factor

**Small can be beautiful,
if small is of God.**

ZERUBBABEL is not among the best known of Biblical characters, but he was a great man called by God to do a great work in his time, and as far as we know he did it well.

Zerubbabel had the challenging task of motivating the Jews to rebuild the Temple after the return from captivity when they had many other things on their minds. His story is told in the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Ezra.

Basically, Zerubbabel had two problems. The first was to get the Jews to "Think Temple" when their minds were on everything else—including building and decorating their own houses, looking after their families, and getting themselves well fixed in their native land.

Zerubbabel's second problem was to convince these people that "small can be beautiful"—if small is of God. The people in Zerubbabel's day weren't delighted by Zerubbabel's "small" ideas—indeed, Zerubbabel's floor plan of the new Temple looked like a thumbnail sketch compared to Solomon's original. What could it ever be worth!

But had they stopped to think, they would have realized that there was no way it could be restored to its former grandeur and beauty. And had they been reasonable, they would have been grateful—grateful that their God would be satisfied with smallness. If God had required that it be what it had been in

the former age, those people would have had a *really* serious problem!

A few, no doubt, took the extreme position that if it couldn't be what it had been, it shouldn't be at all. For them, the only purpose of the temple was something to see, something to talk about, something to show their wealth and greatness.

Again, this was not God's mind, and this was not Zerubbabel's mind. Even though it was to be a small replica of what had gone before, there was no question in Zerubbabel's mind that *it should be done*. It was a duty they owed to their God and to their own spiritual good. If they couldn't be interested even in building the house of the Lord, how could they ever be interested in *serving* Him?

So this was Zerubbabel's problem. The temple-building idea was not popular among most of the people—because all they could see in it was the glory of it, and what glory was there in something so small?

How do you motivate workers with smallness? How do you give them vision and faith and great expectations—and smallness?

That is where God summoned Haggai and Zechariah into action. While Haggai dealt basically with problem number one, "Think Temple," Zechariah gave the word of the Lord to deal with the problem number two: *Small can be beautiful, when small is of God.*

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Megiddo means . . .

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

We believe

—in God the Creator of all things, all men, and all life.

We believe

—in the Bible as containing the genuine revelation of God and His purposes for men, and as being our only source of divine knowledge today.

We believe

—in Christ the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was born of a Virgin, ministered among men, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.

We believe

—in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.

We believe

—in all mankind as providing the nucleus from which a superior, God-honoring people shall be chosen to receive the blessings of immortal life.

We believe

—in ourselves as capable of fulfilling the precepts and principles given us in the Word of God, thus perfecting that high quality of character which God has promised to reward with life everlasting in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

We believe

—in the promise of God, that a new age is coming—is near—when the earth will be filled with His glory, His people, and His will be done here as it is now done in heaven.

Bible Quotations

Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version. Other versions are identified as follows:

NEB—New English Bible

NIV—New International Version

NAS—New American Standard

RSV—Revised Standard Version

TLB—The Living Bible

TEV—Today's English Version

JB—The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition

Phillips—The New Testament in Modern English

Berkeley—The Modern Language New Testament

Weymouth—The New Testament in Modern Speech

Goodspeed—The New Testament translated by
Edgar J. Goodspeed

Moffatt—The Bible, A New Translation

RV—Revised Version

About Our Cover

Our cover photo is "Blue Ridge in Winter," provided by the Shenandoah Natural History Association, Shenandoah National Park, Luray, Virginia.

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God is looking for quality, not quantity.

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The **MEGIDDO MESSAGE** is a religious magazine devoted to the cause of Christ, and published for the dissemination of Bible truth alone. Official organ of the Megiddo Church. L. T. Nichols, Founder; Newton H. Payne, President and Editor; Ruth E. Sisson, Executive Editor.

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MEGIDDO is a way of believing and living, grounded solidly in the Bible as the reliable Word of our Creator. A total view of life, the world and the universe, it sees all events, men and nations moving together toward one God-ordained climax: the Kingdom of God on earth. This has been the plan of God since the beginning. Christ will return visibly, bodily, as King, and the governments of this world will be joined to form a totally new worldwide government. When the task is complete, our earth shall be numbered among the heavenly, glorified worlds and filled with immortal inhabitants. This is the purpose and goal of all creation.



CHRIST,

the Hope of the World

**Above the gloom of a
problem-ridden world
stands the immutable
promise of Christ:
“I will come again”
It is the promise of
Christ, the hope of
the world.**

HOPE is in short supply in today's trouble-filled world. Never has there been so much talk of peace, or so much preparation for war, as there is today. Crime and drug addiction continue their devastating course. Massive debts threaten our economy. Moral values plunge, and family life and personal values falter.

But above the gloom of a problem-ridden world stands the immutable promise of Christ: “I will come again.” It is the promise of Christ, the hope of the world.

Christ is coming! It is a topic upon which the Bible speaks explicitly. It is the promise which links the future to the present in a solid reality of hope.

This is no fancy, no wild imagination, no dream of the night. Christ is coming as the rightful King of the whole earth. The God of heaven has foretold it. Christ is coming to inaugurate a series of steps that will transform our world into a heavenly paradise, filled with happy, glorified immortal inhabitants.

Here is great, good news for our time.

The Second Advent Foretold

The Old Testament foretold the birth of Jesus, but the subject of His second coming and His kingship is expressed many more times in the ancient prophecies than His first coming. Jesus Himself repeated the promise, both during His earthly ministry and in His post-ascension message, The Book of Revelation.

Altogether, the promise is stated more than 300 times in the New Testament alone. If we believe the Bible, we cannot deny this fact. Christ *is* coming.

In John 14, Jesus told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you; . . . I will come again, and receive you to Myself." He compared Himself to a nobleman, going into a far country, to receive for Himself a kingdom, and to return (Luke 19:12).

At the Ascension the angels gave this assurance: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). What do these words mean? A literal, visible Second Coming! He *is* coming again, just as He went away.

The apostle Paul spoke repeatedly of Christ's return to earth. In II Timothy 4:8 he states his personal confidence in the promise: "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." In Hebrews 9:28 we read: ". . . Christ . . . shall appear a second time, . . . to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation."

The apostle Peter believed he should see his Lord again, and repeatedly referred to "the appearing of Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 1:7) It would be the time when all the faithful would be rewarded. He states it simply: "And when the

Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (I Pet. 5:4).

James echoes the same Christian hope: "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. . . . You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (5:7-8).

The Bible closes with the same sublime hope and promise: "Behold, I am coming quickly [suddenly], and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. . . . Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:12, 20).

Events Associated with the Second Coming of Christ

• The Arrival of the Herald

Christ will not return to earth unannounced. He will send His messenger to prepare the way, to herald His approach, to warn the nations of judgments He is bringing upon all who reject Him. Malachi identifies this messenger: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5).

• The Resurrection

All hope of life beyond death depends upon a physical resurrection of the dead.

Christ alone holds the keys to death and the grave, and by His authority those who sleep in death will awake. Writes the apostle Paul: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to

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meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:15-17).

• The Judgment of Christ's Servants

One of the first tasks of Christ at His return will be the judging and rewarding of His servants. We read that He will separate them "one from the other, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:31-33). The apostle Paul confirms this: "Christ Jesus . . . is to judge the living and the dead, . . . by His appearing and His kingdom" (II Tim. 4:1).

All found faithful and approved will be rewarded with immortality, the "crown of life" (James 1:12); for "the Lord Jesus Christ . . . will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:20-21). To them will be given the supreme honor of reigning with Jesus, associate kings and priests (Rev. 5:9-10; 3:21).

• A Real, Worldwide Kingdom Established

The co-rulers chosen, Christ's next step will be the establishing of the Kingdom as an organized, political entity with authority worldwide. For "the Lord will be king over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9).

This will be the time when the

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angel's promise, spoken at the time Jesus was born, will be fulfilled. "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:31-33). He will have dominion from "sea to sea" (Ps. 72:8). Pilate said, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a King. For this I have been born . . ." (John 18:37).

• **The Judgment of the Nations**

The next event will be the subduing of the nations, an event which the Bible refers to as the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; 19:19).

In the book of Revelation (5:5 and 6:2) Christ is represented as the Lion of the tribe of Juda, riding forth conquering and to conquer.

Even though Christ comes to bring peace, justice, prosperity and blessing worldwide; even though He is the "hope of the world" and the "desire of all nations," all will not be ready to accept His authority. The result can be described in one word: conflict.

But this conflict will be different from all which have been before. The outcome of this conflict will be predetermined. No innocent shall suffer, and for the first time in history, none but the evil will be destroyed. Right will triumph (see Rev. 19:11; Isa. 32:17-18; 60:12, 14, 17-18).

It is not God's plan that men and

nations should perpetually fight each other, exhausting themselves and the world's resources in the pursuit of war. When Christ, the hope of the world, takes control, He will make "wars to cease to the end of the earth" (Ps. 46:9).

Then shall the words of Micah (4:3) be fulfilled: "And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war."

"Thy Kingdom Come"

Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And it *will* come to pass. God is going to break into the pattern of world events with shattering suddenness and irrevocable authority. Christ's kingdom *will* come, literally, physically, without fail.

A "Kingdom" is not a state of mind. It is not the Church Universal, or a healthful condition of the world. A kingdom denotes a political entity ruled over by a king. It has territory, laws, subjects, and rulers. All these are part of our Lord's plan for a Kingdom.

Many today cling to the vain hope that the world is growing better and that in time it will become the kingdom of God and Christianity will be universal. To such, it would seem that the facts of the

twentieth century real world would be shattering. The downtrend is too strong; human resources are and always will be inadequate to transform the world and bring "peace on earth" and goodwill to all men.

The prophet of God, Isaiah, knew this 2500 years ago. He wrote, "Though the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness. . . . For when the earth experiences Thy judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (26:10, 9).

The only true, trustworthy hope of the world is Christ as Judge, Conqueror and King.

Get Ready for the New Age!

The Bible warns continually that we must *prepare* for Christ's coming, linking human behavior with the prospect of acceptance or rejection. The apostle Peter states it concisely: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit. . . . Since all these things are to be destroyed, what sort of people ought you to be . . . Since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (I Pet. 4:7; II Pet. 3:11, 14).

The better world coming must begin *right here and now* with *us* if we hope to have part in it. Always in Scripture there is the personal, individual, ethical demand. We must demonstrate our interest in it by an active, daily consecrated life. We must live every day as men and

(Continued on page 27)

Discipline for Christ's Sake

**Jesus might well have said,
"Blessed are they who are
disciplined for my sake,
for theirs is the
kingdom of
heaven."**

IT has been said that the world belongs to the disciplined. However true or false this statement may be in the present sense it is amply true of God's new, coming world. The world of the future *will* belong to the disciplined, those who are disciplined for Christ's sake.

We think of the undisciplined person as one who is forever seeking ways to avoid the arduous grind of solid work and to arrive quickly at his goal by shortcuts. He wants butter without the bother of churning the cream. He would have the broad vistas without having to climb the hill. He wants the high-paying job without the ardors of hard work. We see such persons constantly. They want a quick and easy way to become musicians, to speak, to write, to teach, to be well informed, to obtain a degree. But there is no quick and easy way. A willingness to submit to discipline is the first step toward any worthwhile achievement.

This is especially true of the Christian. If you need to reinforce your motivation, ponder soberly and honestly the end result of the drifting, undisciplined person. Think of the disappointment that you will be to yourself, to God, and to those you love, by failing to be the man or the woman that you ought to be—simply through sheer slothfulness in taking a firm hold of yourself.

When we set out for the goal of eternal life, we know that we must submit to discipline. This discipline has many aspects, both in things temporal and things spiritual.

Let's think first of things temporal.

To be a disciplined person in things spiritual, we must also be disciplined in things temporal.

If we expect to succeed in our Christian discipline, we should look for opportunities to practice discipline in the common everyday things of life.

- *We should practice personal discipline by being clean, neat and orderly in our personal habits of life.* Even the smallest things, so ordinary that we sometimes overlook their importance, are part of our Christian

discipline. Can we imagine what life would be like if no one picked up their clothes, or washed their face, or polished their shoes? Do we picture Timothy or Titus as slovenly persons, neglectful of the simplest disciplines of daily life?

Let us never scorn these trifles as being irrelevant to a disciplined character; they are inseparable from it; for they indicate that touch of carefulness and thoughtfulness which makes the difference between sloth and refinement. It is still true that trifles make perfect, and perfection is no trifle.

- *We can practice discipline by tackling difficult tasks promptly and energetically.* We should do *first* the things we would rather do last and complete what we have begun. Other duties may interrupt, but we should keep calling ourselves back to the task. It is said that Coleridge could have been as great a writer as Shakespeare, but instead his literary career was littered with scraps of unfinished masterpieces, begun in high spirits but never carried through.

It is true that at times we begin projects which prove impossible to complete. Other times we awaken suddenly to the fact that we began what we should not have. There is a time to quit. But let us beware lest numerous starts and few finishings become both a habit and the badge of an undisciplined character.

- *We can practice discipline by observing the advice of the apostle Peter: "Gird up the loins of your mind."* In other words, Gather up your mind, organize the loose ends, draw into service your wandering thoughts, just as an Oriental of Peter's day would quickly gather up his "loose robes with a girdle when in a hurry or starting on a journey." This is no day for disorganized minds to be flapping loosely in the breezes of daily impulse.

There are many ways of honing our minds into razor efficiency. One is to force our minds to a prescribed line of thinking and not allow any deviation. This is not easy. We are so accustomed to letting our minds skip here and there like children. So easily the thought we are trying to catch and hold plays hide-and-seek. It is nebulous, evasive. But if we keep at it; if we separate ourselves from other distractions, sit quietly, and *think*; if we stay with it until the thought comes into clear focus, then will we be girding up the loins of our mind.

When Peter spoke of the loins of the mind, he meant the "understanding," the "faculty of seeing through a thing." It is a capacity that calls for clarity, self-criticism and correction. We must think until muddledness is gone. We must think what we are thinking about, and the process is not automatic.

Consecration to God carries with

it the obligation to excel, not in competition with others, but in competition with ourselves. God's work demands trained minds. We have no right to be mediocre when we are capable of something better. God will not accept anything less than the very best that we can be. Only as we persevere will we acquire that added strength of character and agility of mind which are by-products of discipline.

- *We can practice discipline by learning to turn to good advantage the unscheduled twist of events which throw our well-laid plans into confusion.* Even the most careful and most methodical cannot always avoid upsets, but we must achieve the maturity that knows how to make them *growing* points, not *groaning* points. Time lost may be turned into *discipline gained*. The finest self-discipline may be seen, not in rigidity, but in resiliency. Here are some basic simple rules:

Recognize that fretting is folly. It will change nothing, except as it changes a sunny mood into a sour one. Fretting is the reaction of the small man, whose imagination is stunted, whose stock of ideas is exhausted, and whose life is self-centered. The big man refuses to waste nervous energy in fruitless sputtering.

Thank God for everything. Realize that what seems to you at the

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moment nothing but human blundering may be turned into part of that "all things" that "work together for good."

Someone has observed that not only the *steps* of a good man are ordered by the Lord but also his *stops*.

Ask God to show you how to turn your frustration into His fulfillment. Too often the would-be disciplined person provides only for the *ideal*; when the un-ideal develops he is thrown off balance. We must prepare for this reality, because it will come. Plans will not always work out; sometimes everything will seem against us, and we must be ready to handle either situation with poise and Christian grace. These experiences are the raw material which we may take and fashion into heavenly jewels.

Cultivate an attitude of sincere gratitude for all correction. The circumstances of life can correct, smooth and polish those rough and unsightly edges on our characters. For all such circumstances we should be deeply grateful. Is not our supreme and first desire to *be* right, to *do* right? Should we not, then, thank God, for everything that shows us an area of life where we are *not* right, so that we can correct it? This is vital to our Christian discipline, for without it we would go on, day after day, year after year, the same old creature, growing deeper and deeper in our unholy ways.

We should regard correction as a favor; for the sooner a wrong is called to our attention, the sooner we can correct it. The agent may be circumstances; it may be a person. In either case, be grateful.

Learn to thank the person who points out an error, for he is handing you a piece of material for the disciplined character you are building.

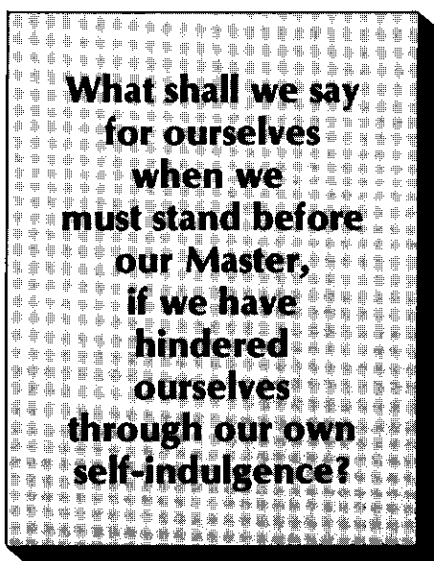
Petulance or supersensitiveness

under correction shows immaturity. A certain magazine cartoon depicted a young secretary on the floor in a tantrum, fists pounding the carpet. Her middle-aged boss was looking benignly at her saying, "Miss Davis, you must learn to take correction."

And so must each of us.

To accept either correction or instruction graciously is difficult at times, especially when we doubt the justice of it, or more especially when we question the other's qualifications to instruct us. But truth is true, whatever its source, and we should be grateful for it.

• *We can practice discipline by practicing the art of exercising self-restraint in three areas:*



(1) *Curiosity.* It is the curious person who learns, discovers, and invents, but sometimes it is wiser to refrain.

(2) *Prejudice.* This actually is nothing but pre-judging, forming an opinion or drawing a conclusion on insufficient evidence. It can be viciously unfair to others and in time only disclose our own immaturity and imbalance.

(3) *Dogmatism.* The true Christian is a dogmatist. He affirms certain

things positively and consistently. But the habit of being dogmatic about everything, unable to state an opinion without being opinionated, without saying "this is the last word, there is no other," is un-Christlike. This is not to say that we should be insipid neutralists who drift with the wind, always hovering and never settling. There are times when we must be firm, when Christian principles are at stake. But there are other times when it is Christian wisdom not only to *have* opinions but to *allow* them. The apostle Paul summarizes it in these words: "Let your moderation be known unto all men."

• *We can practice Christian discipline by conquering our appetite.* As Christians we must abstain from poisons and be temperate with food. Temperance is sometimes more difficult than abstinence. Eating is not a sin—it is a necessity and one which God intended should be a pleasure. But like every other aspect of our lives it must be controlled. We must eat to live, not live to eat. The person who is habitually self-indulgent in eating and drinking, without regard to health or need is very apt to be weak and exposed in other areas of his life. Flabbiness in one area of character tends to loosen the whole.

This is the purpose of our week of Self-denial, to give us practice in conquering ourselves. The apostle Paul was speaking of food when he said: "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." In other words, *he*, Paul, was in command.

This does not mean that we should be unsociable in our eating, or that we should not eat heartily and with enjoyment. But we must know ourselves. Our general health and efficiency are affected, too.

Just as the growing plants in a garden are the property of the gar-

deners who planted the seed, so we as Christians belong to Him who planted us. Our lives are not our own. In another figure, we are "slaves" of Christ, and as such are accountable for every aspect of our lives—and what shall we say for ourselves when we must stand before our Master, if we have hindered ourselves by our own self-indulgence?

• *Another area of our self-discipline is that which relates to our concept of time.* Sometimes we must act immediately; sometimes we must learn to wait. And the latter is often fully as difficult as the former, especially in our day when the prevailing attitude is "I want what I want when I want it." Others have had to learn this lesson before us. Moses had to learn it. So did David and Jesus. For these men, it was not a matter of days but *years*—ten, twenty, thirty or even forty. Why? Was God's calendar mixed up? No, it took that long for God to get his man *ready*. And so, while time seems to tarry in this last hour, God is giving us time. The important thing is that we be making the most of the time He gives, and acknowledge His wisdom, whether the time seem soon or late to us. We do not help God by opening a rosebud—we simply spoil the blossom!

In the meantime, while we must wait, we must demonstrate our maturity by acting responsibly where we are. This thought is expressed beautifully by the hymn writer:

I would be true,
for there are those who trust me.
I would be pure,
for there are those who care.
I would be strong,
for there is much to suffer.
I would be brave,
for there is much to dare.

Another route to self-discipline is that of personal devotion, taking time to read, meditate and pray. There is no better preventative against spiritual sloth. Not only do we benefit from the worship, but from the simple act of laying aside our plans and activities and subordinating our independence.

We benefit, too, from the still deeper reason: that we want above all to develop a character that is truly and thoroughly *Christian*. We desire to become disciplined persons, not for the glory of self, but for the glory of God. Our one motive must be to develop the



character God is seeking. Outward actions must be matched by genuineness within, for in the end we want to be not *self-made* persons but *God-made*. Only then will our disciplined character be truly Christian.

The apostle Paul advised Timothy concerning his own personal discipline: he must be ready to "endure hardness." "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

IN these days of so much comfort and ease, we need a rugged philosophy of discipleship that demands of us the utmost in spiritual dedication—mental, physical, and emotional—all grounded firmly in the

bedrock of holiness. The scriptural phrasing of this philosophy is the mandate of Jesus: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Whatever our situation, each of us has a self to deny; a cross to take up.

Part of this cross may be in our detachment from this world's viewpoints and standards of value. As Christians, we cannot be inordinately attached to anything of here and now. "Things"—whether fine furniture, houses, lands, dishes, a certain climate—all must be secondary, never an end in themselves but only a *means* to the greater end in view.

"A tent or a cottage, why should I care?"—this is easy to sing or say, but it may be tough meat for the natural man to chew. For naturally we *do* prefer a cottage to a tent. But there is something that each of us as disciples of Christ must prefer above all—to please God. Whatever the cost in personal sacrifice or suffering, we will want above all else to be *right*. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Here is a principle that must be real to us, not a threadbare platitude to which we pay lip service. Real life is not outward but inward, the inner life of the spiritual man, and that life is fed and nourished by spiritual disciplines.

Sometimes discipline is imposed by circumstances; sometimes we must impose it on ourselves. We must guard against the hazards of ease. We can apply this in the simplest, most ordinary things of everyday—by refusing to let a bit of weariness or disinclination keep us from our personal devotions; or by not allowing our feelings to hinder our faithfulness to our daily duties. We cannot afford to be easy on ourselves. Ours is a high calling,

with a high price, and we must build into our lives enough of rigor to keep us in shape as true soldiers of Christ.

We must remember, too, that our immediate goal as Christians is not happiness but holiness. The current philosophy around us is that all is well if only people are happy. The great aim of education, science, and government is to give the most temporal happiness to the most people. For the Christian it cannot be so. Discipleship cannot be compromised in the interest of present happiness. Sometimes there must be pain, suffering, sacrifice.

But the benefits are beyond comparison. What matter a little self-denial and crossbearing now, if the end result is "glory, and honor and immortality, eternal life" with pleasure beyond anything eye has seen or heart has imagined?

Our success or failure as Christians is not measured by our happiness but by our faithfulness and obedience.

For the Christian, life is serious, challenging, demanding. It is not a picnic or a parade, but a field of battle. It is written of our great Pattern and Example that "he pleased not himself." We cannot be His disciples without this same spirit of earnestness and commitment, this passion for the cause of His Kingdom.

What is the message of Jesus? What does it mean to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him? It is to have:

—an overpowering desire for the life He offers;

—a consuming passion for personal mental and moral improvement;

—a sincere desire to please God;

—a sense of responsible stewardship toward our life and all of its aspects—our health, our money, our possessions, our time;

Don't Forget the Z-Factor

(Continued from page 2)

How to deal with smallness was Zerubbabel's special assignment. We today, remembering Zerubbabel's work, might call it the "Z-Factor." And for us who find ourselves at the very end of the age, it is very much of a factor, also. We, too, must learn that *small can be beautiful*.

Two quotations from the book of Zechariah identify this special assignment of Zerubbabel's. For us, again, these passages from the work of Zerubbabel take on increasing significance. They tell us that God is not looking for size, but for *perfection*. He is not concerned with quantity, but *quality*.

The first quotation is found in Zechariah 4:10, "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

The second is found in Zechariah 4:6, and tells the true source of all accomplishment: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

In our day, when "small" is so often regarded as inferior, we should remember that this is not God's view. He will not look unfavorably upon any effort for Him simply because it is small. He highly regards, even commends, the humble offering of a sincere, contrite heart. He will not turn away from us because we are small, if we do not turn from Him. He has said many times that

—a constant readiness to accept God's will;

—*and*, as we grow in the disciplined life, a growing eagerness to participate in the promises of God.

Jesus might well have said, "Blessed are they who are disciplined for my sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." MM

His people are the fewest of all people (Deut. 7:6-7). The entrants at the narrow gate were described by Jesus as "few" (Matt. 7:13-14). And again He said that many would *seek* to enter in, who would not be allowed (Luke 13:24).

As we labor against seemingly insurmountable problems in this day of small things, let us not forget the Z-Factor that Zerubbabel long ago had to surmount: that small can be beautiful, pleasing to God, perfect and precious.

If our work meets these criteria, what else matters? MM

Self-Denial Week

This year, the week of February 1 will be the annual observance of Self-Denial Week for the Megiddo Church congregation and all who wish to observe it with us.

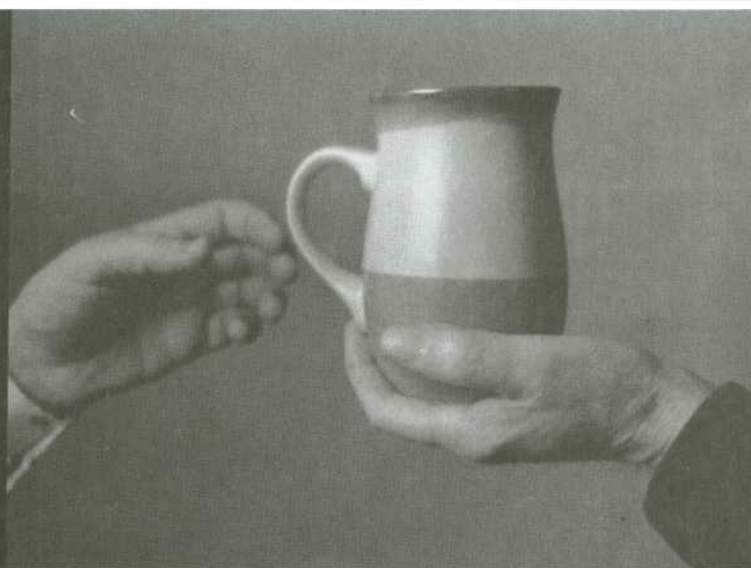
During this week we will limit ourselves to three articles of food at each meal. Selection will be made from simple, plain, common foods, varied each meal as desired. We shall refrain from all specialties, all cookies, pastries, desserts, and fancy foods.

While observing this week, let us make it another opportunity to practice discipline for Christ's sake. Let us strive harder to be like Him in *all* things, even in denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily, and following Him (Luke 9:23). Let us practice giving up the things we cannot keep, that we may lay hold on that which will be our very own, even eternal life in Christ's kingdom, which no one shall ever take from us.

All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for what I have not seen.

Drink This Cup

Obedience is the first principle of the law of Christ.



ALL of us naturally like to feel we are in control of our own lives. If anyone wishes to know, we are quite capable of managing ourselves. We make our own plans, choose our own goals, and find our own way in the world. In one sense, it is well that we are thus motivated, for the human race is meant to be self-sustaining and independent. Were it not, it would have perished millenniums ago.

But at the same time we must remember that God is looking for other qualities. He is seeking hearts and wills which He can bend and shape for His purposes. Just as a general in the army must have soldiers who will obey the commander, so God must have servants subject to His will, ready and willing to do as they are told.

This was the lesson Jesus taught the disciples who came to Him asking for positions of distinction in His Kingdom. Matthew gives the credit for the request to the disciples' mother; Mark gives it to the disciples themselves. So be it; the identity of the spokesperson matters little. Very likely, mother and sons were of one mind anyway. They wanted honor. They wanted recognition. Matthew has recorded the incident as follows:

"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom."

Jesus' answer was surely not the answer they were expecting. He did not say that they should stifle their ambition, nor did He promise to grant their request. Rather—as was His habit—He saw in the question an opportunity to teach a great truth. So He indicated that bearing honor is a weighty and difficult task, a task for which one must be well prepared. "Ye know not what ye ask," was His reply. "Are ye able to drink of the

cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:20-22).

A small thing, it might seem, to drink His cup; but not when prefaced with those demanding words: "Are ye able." Sharing His honor was a worthy goal, but it meant something else also. It meant years of preparation, discipline and cross-bearing, before one could be counted "able"; hence the question, "Are ye able . . . ?"

And so the question comes to us: "Are ye"—are *we* "able"? Are we able to *drink this cup*?

Drink this cup. It is another way of saying, Do as I say. Without question, without hesitation, obey. Obedience is the first principle of the law of God. Even Christ had to obey.

Drink this cup.

What was that cup, and what did it contain? James and John were the immediate subjects of Jesus' words, and how different were the contents of the cup for each of them. For James, the cup held a short, intensive course, with martyrdom at its end. On the other hand, John lived to a great age, and for him the contents of the cup was a test of endurance; holding on and holding out. For him, drinking the cup meant years of prolonged discipline and struggle. It was the discipline of holding fast while others fell away, of keeping faith when others doubted, of standing firm through storm or calm.

We miss the point of Jesus' words if we think that for the Christian the cup must always be the short, sharp, bitter trials and struggles. The cup may well be the prolonged, monotonous routine of the Christian life, with its measure of joy and sorrow; its trials and victories; along with its daily drudgery, daily sacrifices, daily struggles, heartbreaks, and tears.

A certain Roman coin had on it the picture of an ox. The ox was facing two things—an altar and a plow; and the inscription: "Ready for either." The ox was to be ready either for the supreme

moment of sacrifice on the altar, or for the long labor of the plow on the farm.

There is no one cup appointed for all. God apportions to each according to his need. To drink the cup means simply to obey, whatever experiences life may bring; to use the varied experiences of our lives as the building blocks of a Christlike character.

To drink the cup means to submit; to exchange our plans for God's, our ways for His, and our ambitions, aspirations and desires for His.

To drink the cup means to trust God with the directing of our lives, assured that if we work with Him, He will bring us to a most glorious end.

Remember, it is not ours to *fill* the cup, but only to drink it. When we have done this, we have done all that God asks us to do, and He will grant us a place of honor in His Kingdom.

When the disciples came to Jesus seeking places of distinction at His right and left, they were still in their infancy, Christian-wise. They were still thinking in terms of personal prominence, personal advantage, personal distinction, personal goals. They had not yet left all to follow.

Have we seen something of the disciples' aspiration in ourselves? We should have, or we have not the motivation we need to seek true greatness. Christ would not have us stifle our ambition but only *direct* it—away from selfish goals and toward Him. He would have us grow to realize that true greatness comes not from without but from within, not from outward honor, but from inward allegiance.

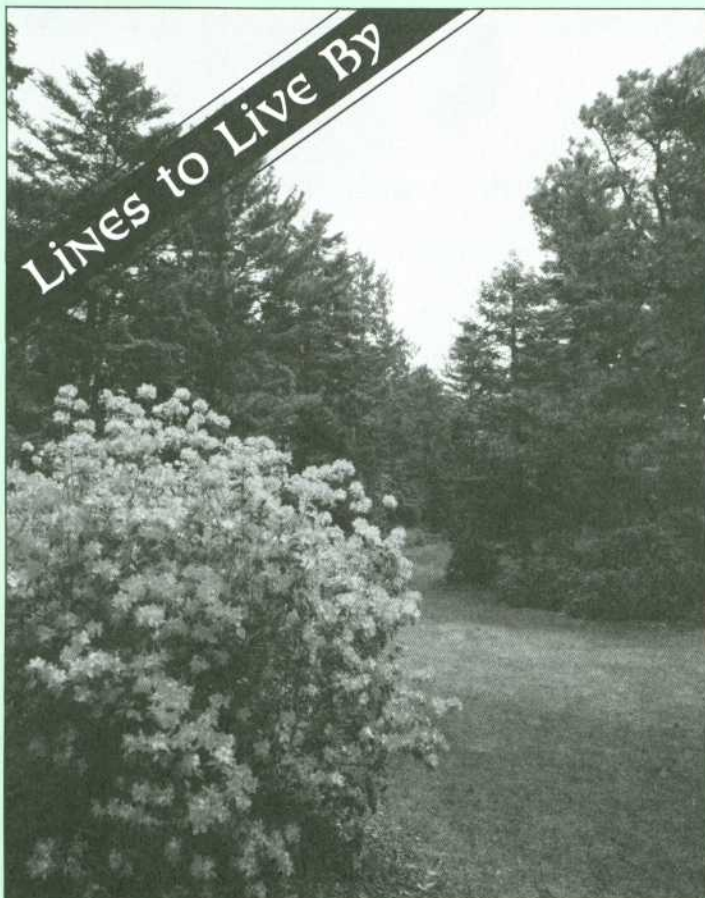
Think, too, of the time when this request was made. It was after a series of announcements. Not normal, everyday announcements but some in which Jesus had told how He would have to suffer. It was at a moment when the air was heavy with the atmosphere of tragedy and the sense of foreboding. Yet even in the midst of that, the disciples were still thinking about the Kingdom. They still believed that the Kingdom would be. They would not abandon their convictions, even if their understanding was not yet mature.

Even though they were told bluntly that ahead of them lay a bitter cup, it never occurred to them to turn back, or to refuse it. Were they able to drink it? Their answer was an unhesitating YES.

May ours be the same.

MM

**True greatness comes
not from outward honor but
from inward allegiance.**



Life is a school. There is something new to learn wherever we may be, wherever we go, wherever we turn.

You will become as small as your controlling desire; as great as your dominant aspiration.

It is not enough to admire virtue; we must possess it.

Our Life Work:

To acquire a thorough knowledge of our own heart and character;
To restrain our irregular inclinations;
To subdue every rebellious passion;
To purify the motives of our conduct;
To form ourselves to that temperance which no pleasure can seduce,
to that meekness which no provocation can ruffle,
to that patience which no affliction can overwhelm and
to that integrity which no self interest can bribe.

One Day at a Time

*One day at a time, with its failures and fears,
With its hurts and mistakes, with its weakness and tears,
With its portion of pain and its burden of care;
One day at a time we must meet and must bear.*

*One day at a time to be patient and strong;
To be calm under trial and sweet under wrong;
Then its toiling shall pass and its sorrow shall cease;
It shall darken and die, and the night shall bring peace.*

*One day at a time—but the day is so long,
And the heart must be brave, and the soul must be strong,
O my merciful Lord, be Thou near all the way;
Give courage and patience and strength for this day.*

*Swift cometh His answer, so clear and so sweet;
"Child of mine I'll be with thee, thy troubles to meet;
I will not forget thee, nor fail thee, nor grieve;
I will not forsake thee, I never will leave."*

*Not yesterday's load are we called on to bear,
Nor the morrow's uncertain and shadowy care;
Why should we look forward or back with dismay?
Our needs, as our mercies, are but for the day.*

*One day at a time, let the day be His day;
He hath numbered its hours, though they haste or delay.
His grace is sufficient; we walk not alone;
As the day, so the strength that He giveth His own.*

POINTS FOR THE MONTH

- Week 1:** No power on earth can harm us if God is our keeper.
- Week 2:** Before making a decision we should ask, Is it expedient? Is it right?
- Week 3:** Perfection of character is the master stroke of the master workman.
- Week 4:** We will be tomorrow only what we make of ourselves today.

Encouraging Ourselves in the Lord

Scripture Lesson: II Corinthians 1:1-7

No one is immune to the possibility of discouragement. Our only surety against it lies in our strong, inner defenses.

AS the great apostle Paul opens his second Epistle to the church at Corinth, his thoughts are focused on the gracious love and kindness of the God he serves. He is deeply impressed with God's magnificent goodness in his behalf, His personal concern for each of his loyal servants, and longs to extend to others the divine favor that has been given him. These are his words:

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (vs. 3-4). The "comfort" of which Paul speaks is more than mere human consolation in sorrow or stress. The Greek word he uses is *paraklesis*, and its primary meaning is "encouragement, exhortation." The "God of all comfort" is literally the "God of encouragement." It is a term which Paul uses 23 times in his Epistles, and conveys his deep desire to help and encourage his brethren in the way of Christ as he himself has been encouraged. *Paraklesis* is divine strength to meet and master life's crises.

So let us reread the above passage, substituting "encouragement" for "comfort": "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of

mercies, and the God of all encouragement; who encourages us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to encourage them which are in any trouble, by the encouragement wherewith we ourselves are encouraged of God." Encouraged of God, encouraged by God, encouraged in God—who on the highway of life does not need this heavenly encouragement!

David Encouraged Himself "in the Lord"

The tempestuous career of David brought him into many a situation where he needed divine encouragement. One time in particular was when he returned to Ziklag, after an expedition to Philistia. Things looked bad for him, about as bad in every way as they could look. Worn and weary from battle, he and his loyal followers had made the long trek home, only to find that the peaceful little town where they had left their families and loved ones had been devastated. In their absence, the Amalekites had raided it, and their wives and children had been taken captive.

David was heartsick, not only for his own loss but also for that of the men who had so valiantly stood by him.

As we well know, David was no stranger to rough weather. He and his men were accustomed to danger and hardship. But to return home and find

Note: *Encouraging Ourselves in the Lord* is available as a complete church service on cassette. Price: \$3.00

**Encouragement is keeping the right relation
to your problem: on top looking down at it,
not under looking up.**

that those nearest and dearest were missing—possibly dead—we can readily sympathize with them in their grief and understand why “David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.”

But a bad situation soon became worse, as David’s men quickly turned from their sorrow to find a scapegoat, someone upon whom they could level blame for the tragedy which had befallen them. The natural object of their vengeance was David. After all, they reasoned, if it hadn’t been for him, it would never have happened.

So now, not only did David have the weight of his own loss to bear; he had also to face the threats of a grief-maddened mob who were clamoring for his life.

What was David’s reaction? Did he panic? Did he blame God? Did he give way to despair or despondency? Listen!

“And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God” (I Sam. 30:6). Is not this an example worthy of imitation? In the darkest hour of distress, “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

David prayed. And God heard, and answered—and David received heavenly assurance of ultimate victory over his enemies, as well as this heartening promise for the present loss, that he would “without fail recover all.” God was true to His

word, and within a short time David and his men were reunited with their families.

We want to think about this divine encouragement, how it can help us, and how we can encourage one another. For everyone needs to be encouraged, especially in the long-term project we have undertaken. Again and again we have been warned—to “endure to the end,” to not “grow weary in well doing,” to press on “through much tribulation”—all of which suggest that we will encounter something to press against, that we will be tempted to become discouraged—but that *we must not*.

What is this subtle thing we call discouragement? It is a term we use broadly to apply to any “down” feeling that threatens our inner peace and happiness. It may be despair, despondency, depression, or a general dispiritedness that sweeps over us. We lose our “spiritual glow,” our fervency of spirit, our Christian radiance, and become sullen, dispirited, or dull. However it affects us, our spiritual progress is hindered. It may be so subtle that we hardly perceive it. But it is no less dangerous.

No one is immune to the possibility of discouragement. Our only surety against it lies in our strong, inner defenses.

We have all heard the story of the devil’s garage sale. He had several tables stacked with tools and other items. One by one he let them go—all except a last little wedge-shaped tool called discouragement. When asked why he would not part with this one, he replied, “When

everything else fails, I can always wedge my way in with this one.”

Discouragement is deadly, and the sooner we realize it the safer we will be. It separates us from faith and spiritual effectiveness; it can cripple our best efforts and paralyze our resistance to evil. But the good news is that *it need not*. It is well within our power to rule our spirit; we *can* conquer discouragement—just as we conquer any other tendency of our nature.

There is another allegorical fable that illustrates the battle with this subtle enemy. According to the story, Satan called all his demons to a conference, a strategy session, to determine how to defeat Christians. It was decided that nothing really works so effectively as discouragement. Furthermore, because discouragement was both baffling and frustrating, it was the easiest weapon to use, and the most devastating.

So one little demon went out to try it.

He landed on the shoulder of a Christian and whispered, “You’re discouraged!”

Looking around, the Christian blinked and shook his head, “Must be hearing things,” he muttered.

So the little demon said it again, a little more emphatically. “You’re discouraged!”

The Christian thought a moment. “Well, I guess things aren’t going too well,” he admitted.

“You’re discouraged!” the voice said the third time.

By this time the Christian felt a dark gloom descend over him, and wondered how he would get through the day.

Hurrying back to headquarters, the little demon triumphantly reported that it worked. It worked so well that he merely suggested that the Christian was discouraged, and soon he really was!

He decided to go out and try it again. This time he came to a really serious Christian. "You're discouraged!" whispered the little demon in the ear of this one whose mind was deeply occupied with thoughts of God.

Looking around, the Christian straightened his shoulders. "What's that you said?"

The little demon repeated it: "You're discouraged."

"Discouraged? I should say *not*!"

A bit frightened, the little demon jumped back. But determined not to be so easily defeated, he soon recovered his courage and said it again, a little louder and much more emphatically this time. "You're discouraged—and you *know* it!"

"Discouraged?" came the quick reply. "Never! 'I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in Him will I trust.' Me discouraged? Not for a moment!"

With that the little demon left and returned to headquarters, where he sat down and folded his arms. Asked how he had made out, he reported that this time his tactics had not worked at all. "Now," he moaned, dropping his head, "I'm discouraged!"

Learning to Trust God

The Psalms are filled with pictures of this inner struggle, along with

**Let us not
complain about
our limitations
until we have
exhausted
our possibilities.**

vivid descriptions of reliance on God for strength and encouragement.

In chapter 73, the Psalmist is struggling with a feeling of envy which has brought him to a point of despair. It is the age-old problem of reconciling the prosperity of the wicked—and the suffering of the righteous—with the justice of God. He is almost ready to say that serving God is profitless and goodness is vain, as—unwisely—he compares his own hardships with the ease of those not serving God.

These are his words, as he pours out his soul in silent prayer: "As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. . . . They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; . . . their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. . . . Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches."

It was enough. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until"—and here his struggle

turns to triumph as he takes the right action against the intruding thoughts. What did he do? It was "too painful for me," he says, "until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end" (v. 17). He took positive action to help him in his struggle—he went where help could be found, to the sanctuary of God, into the Divine presence where the light of God could show him clearly the contrast between the end of those who prosper in this world versus the end of those who serve God. He went into the sanctuary, where all things appear in their true light and the glory of this world is lost in the glory of God. "Then understood I," he said. "Then understood I their end."

Why does not the divine Omnipotence with one stroke smite the crooked balance, overwhelm vice with misery and shame, and crown virtue with prosperity? The answer lies in *the end*. *The end* will answer all questions and equalize all apparent injustice.

With new humility and fresh faith the Psalmist now confesses his sin and entrusts himself and all his concerns to the heavenly Father's guidance. "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins." Here is honest confession. He felt condemned. "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (vs. 21-24). Guidance now, and afterward "glory." Oh, the glory of the

**The key to spiritual prosperity lies in
recognizing our dependence upon God and
submitting to His will.**

"afterward"—it is the same "afterward" we seek, which those who prosper in sin shall never know. The bright sunbeam of clear hope and inspired promise was breaking through the clouds of doubt, fear and ignorance.

Then follows an exclamation of the overwhelming love he feels toward God and the blessedness of dwelling near to Him. Here is the answer to his despair. There is no cause for him to feel discouraged, with God on his side. What if the wicked *do* have all that heart can wish? It is only for a moment—while *his* God and *his* hope are eternal! What else is there in heaven or earth to compare? Where could he find one more faithful, more loyal, more sure, more abiding? And so he exclaims, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. . . . It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God" (vs. 25-28). Let us take his conclusion to ourselves. Let *us* say with him, "It is good for *us* to draw near to God; *we* will put *our* trust in the Lord God."

If the beginning of this Psalm describes our discouragement, let the end of it describe our triumph. How honest is the Word of God! It tells the whole truth about men, good men, great men, faltering men, struggling men. It shows them tempted, tested, tried, and all but overcome. Why? So that we will not be dismayed and discouraged as we confront the same human nature they had, and the same deep-rooted evils, which can only be removed by the same effort they applied.

The reflections in this psalm are also valuable from another standpoint—they show us our need for God. The key to spiritual prosperity

Let Us Pray

Almighty God, Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who hath never failed Thy people or forsaken those who trust in Thee: we come before Thee this morning with hearts grateful for the multitude of Thy mercies and eager for Thy continued blessing and love.

Father, we want life; with all that is in us we want life, life that is free from the degradations and confinements of mortality, life that feels no pain, heartache or disappointment, life that is challenging, fulfilling, abundant and eternal. Our hearts thrill as we realize Thou hast called us to such a life, and help us to summon all the power within us to prepare for it.

We confess with shame the times when in our preoccupation with ourselves and the things at hand we have forgotten Thee and have lived as though Thou art not. We have distrusted Thy leading, and have allowed the subversive thoughts of defeat and discouragement to disarm us and cause our spiritual zeal to flag. May we never do it again, but may we tell ourselves over and over again that the things Thou hast promised are real, and they are within our reach; that Thou dost know us better than we know ourselves and wilt never be so unjust as to ask what we cannot give. And for whatever Thou mayest allow to test us, whatever we may have to do or to bear, Thou wilt provide the strength.

Help us, then, to give our utmost effort to the work Thou hast assigned us, never compromising our convictions or contenting ourselves with anything less than our very best.

Father, we pray Thy blessing upon each and every one wherever they may be who are earnestly striving to please Thee. And wilt Thou grant to each of us the strong encouragement of Thy truth, to know beyond any shadow of uncertainty that Thy Word is true, and that after all that we here see will be the glorious dawn of Eternity.

May we be among those who will be ready to welcome that dawning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

lies in accepting our dependence upon God and submitting to His will. This is one of the great lessons of life. And God has various ways of teaching it—some gentle, some severe. But we need it, each one of us. For if we never learn the humbling lesson of weakness, how can we know the full meaning of trust, submission, obedience, love? Is it not written even of our Lord, that He learned "obedience by the things which he suffered," and "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted,

he is able also to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. 5:8; 2:18).

Finding the Cause

Where does discouragement come from? Like every other weakness to which flesh is heir, it comes from within. Whatever happens, we won't feel discouraged unless we *will* to be; unless fear is stronger than faith; unless we are *under* our problems looking up instead of on top looking down. And we won't feel discouraged unless we dwell too near

to ourselves and too far from God. Like the Psalmist, we need to go frequently into the Divine presence, to get His perspective, to see to the end of the matter.

What does this mean in everyday terms? How can we deal with the spiritual weakness that threatens us, the power-sapping "I can't's," the debilitating "Why's"?

We need to become sensitive to the first touch of discouragement, and try at once to determine the cause. We should not overlook physical causes, for we are mortal; and simple rest, nourishment and relaxation may go a long way in helping us.

Then we should look deeper. If we have learned to know ourselves, we may suspect various causes. For example:

Have we fallen short of our expectations for ourselves in something temporal? Perhaps our feeling of defeat or discouragement is a direct result of misplaced confidence. We so easily put the *created* ahead of the *Creator*. We trust in things that are not permanent—and experience the inevitable disappointment. If this be our experience, our loss may be *gain*—teaching us that the "invisibles are the realities, and the intangibles are the permanencies."

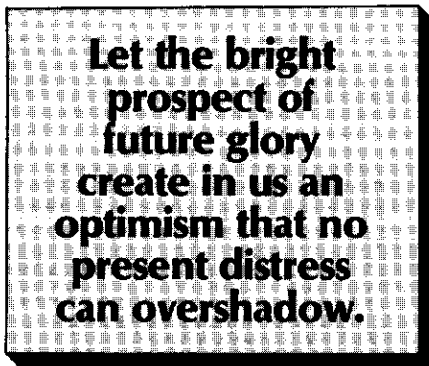
Perhaps the cause of our discouragement is an overly sensitive nature, a feeling that we have been slighted, or unappreciated, or misjudged, or mistreated. For one reason or another our feelings are hurt—with the result that we have lost our good spirit. If such be the case, let us not excuse it but go to work in earnest to redirect our concerns, away from self and toward God.

Remember, he will never suffer from hurt pride who has no pride to hurt!

It may be that we feel thwarted by circumstances beyond our con-

trol. Sickness, ill health and physical limitations keep us from doing what we would like to do. The unremitting reality is so great that, looking ahead, we "despair, even of life." But must our thinking be confined? Have we not the brightest of bright prospects ahead of us? Have we not the greatest God in the universe beside us? And if He be for us, who—or what—can be against us? Can we not, with His help, turn our problems into stairs by which we climb to glory?

But well we know that our part in everything future is conditioned directly upon what we become *right*



Let the bright prospect of future glory create in us an optimism that no present distress can overshadow.

now. For God will not accept our sinful, natural selves. This realization brings us to another cause for discouragement—dealing with our persistent, sinful natures. Again and again we find that the "old man" dies hard. We stumble and try again, and stumble again. And in the process we fall to thinking that what God asks is beyond us. When He designed His plan, He didn't know *our* weakness!

But before we challenge His wisdom, let us look more closely at ourselves. This besetment that refuses to budge: can we say we have really put forth our *maximum* effort to overpower it? Have we really set our minds to overcome it? Have we done *all we can* to conquer it?

Let us not, as someone has said, complain about our limitations until

we have exhausted our possibilities. Who can tell how much is possible to accomplish, in a limited time, if we just set our minds to it, and keep them set!

Meeting Our Expectations

But let us not be discouraged if sometimes we fall short of our expectations. When we set out for the Kingdom of God, we quickly see perhaps a dozen areas of our lives that need improvement. We notice how others stumble and fall, but that is not necessary; *we* will be different. *We* will make it to the top in one grand leap! Didn't Christ live blamelessly—without one slip?

But we soon learn why He is the only one of our stumbling race who holds this record. And God does not ask us to equal it. Try as we may, we will fall and have to try again. But this is no reason to be discouraged—it is only reason to try harder.

There is a human factor with which we must reckon, also a time factor. Trees take *time* to grow. Fruit takes *time* to ripen. We cannot become all we want to be instantly, nor does God require this. There is no way to become the loyal, dedicated, wholehearted, wholly controlled Christian we picture ourselves becoming in "five easy steps." The perfect Christian life is a growth, and growth takes *time*.

Like any large project, we need to think of the Christian life in increments that we can handle. The longest journey is completed one step at a time; the largest house is built by driving one nail at a time. Just so the Christian life is achieved one thought at a time, one step at a time, one moment at a time. God does not ask that we complete a life work in a moment. He gives us time. The important thing is not to *waste* time, or let priceless opportunities slip by unused.

One way we can help ourselves is by setting short-term goals. We might tell ourselves that today we will keep ourselves under absolute control—whatever! Today we will keep check on our feelings; today we will swallow those unkind or hasty words; or today we will think first of others, not of ourselves. Whatever the weakness that besets us, let us each morning set up a definite goal and each night call ourselves to account. In this way we will keep ourselves reaching, and at the same time be encouraging ourselves—for what is possible in one area is possible in another! We will be proving in actual fact that we *can* do it—*by doing it!*

No Negative Thinking

Above all, let us fortify ourselves against negative thinking. The early Church was known for its radiance! They were a rejoicing church. In the darkest of times, their faces were bright with optimism. Shouldn't we reflect this same joy, we who are striving for the same prize they sought? If we keep our high calling in mind, what on earth can discourage us?—

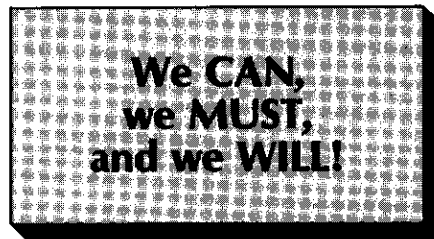
Unless it be a fear of failing. To a point, this is a healthful fear, in the words of Hebrews, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest any of you should seem to come short of it" (Heb. 4:1). We need to be warned to take every precaution—lest we come short.

But what if we fall to reasoning that in this race for eternal life we haven't even a fair chance of making it; that at best, the odds are against us; there are so many more failures than successes, we are almost predestined to fail?

Brethren, let us *never* allow such destructive thinking to lodge in our minds, not even for a moment! If we will but summon them, the forces *for* us are immeasurably

stronger than those against us. In fact, if we are determined to succeed, there is no power in heaven or earth that can defeat us! Have we not His promise—of no cross beyond our strength to carry, no temptation beyond our ability to bear, no affliction beyond our power to endure? What, then, is there to fear?

Are "the odds" against us? *They are not*, because our quest for life is not a game of chance, where odds and evens seal our fate. It is a race in which *every one will win or lose just according to the effort they put into it!* Why have so many failed? It was not that they *could* not but that they *would* not. They were too



shortsighted, they were not constant in their faith. The things close at hand were more real to them than the promises of God, and they lost faith.

Let us encourage ourselves by following the examples of those who have gone before us. Let us *think victory*. With the magnificent promises God has given us, we need not content ourselves with dwelling on our problems and limitations—not when God has given us the mental ability to explore His realm, to project ourselves into His coming Kingdom. Just try it. Picture yourself among the winners, hearing those never-to-be-forgotten words: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Imagine what it will be to feel the vigor of immortality surging in your veins, and the indescribable delight of physical liberation. Think what it will mean to know, absolutely know that the endless ages of eternity are

your own!—endless ages in which to explore the limitless reaches of God's knowledge. And think, too, of the joyous events in which you will be participating. Think of the friends you'll meet, and the joy you'll share—at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, at the Coronation of the King. Yes, think victory!—its possibilities for encouragement are limitless!

May we let the bright prospect of future glory create in us an optimism that no present distress can overshadow. We have everything to gain, and nothing to lose.

And now, "may the God who inspires men to endure, and gives them constant encouragement . . . fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, that . . . your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope."

With such a hope, we CAN, we MUST, and we WILL, be victorious.

O Lord, we earnestly cry unto You today. In the midst of a world of noise and commotion, help us to tune our ears to hear Your call. Help us to ignore the lure of this world and the temptation to be great in the world and in our own sight. Help us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought.

Our Father, fill us with courage, that rare quality that will enable us to overcome fear.

Strengthen us to strike from our hearts the desire to please men and replace it with a desire to please only You.

Break us out of our shells and let us leave the broken fragments and go on to greater heights.

Speak to our hearts with such force that we cannot resist; drive us from lives of ease into fields of toil and service for You.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

The End of the Age

Part II

From the Days of Lot

Setting:

Living room of family living neighbor to Lot in Sodom

Characters:

Ophir husband
 Birsha wife
 Heth 16-year-old son of Ophir and Birsha
 Rizpah ... 10-year-old daughter of Ophir and Birsha
 Elam son-in-law of Lot

Narrator:

We all know what happened to the world of Noah's time. They lingered, refused, and—were lost. The end came, just as God had predicted.

And the message comes to us: Who? who will hearken and hear, for the time to come?

Now we go to another day and another age, and hear another warning. It is the voice of God's messenger speaking to His servant Lot:

Voice:

"Hast thou here any besides? . . . whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it."

Narrator:

The age was to end; heaven had issued the decree. Doom was to descend upon several thriving—but wicked—cities, among them Sodom and Gomorrah. We know little of these cities of the plains except that "their sin was very grievous."

God did not always punish wickedness immediately, but this time He chose to *act*. Perhaps it was for the example these cities would be to those who in years to come should choose to disregard God. Jesus perpetuated the memory of Sodom with His timeless warning: "Remember Lot's wife." And as was written years later by

one named Judas, "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that . . . Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire [destruction]."

The angels warned Lot, and he warned others, as God had directed him. But did the people of Sodom believe? Let us see.

(As curtain opens, Father Ophir is just coming in from working in the grain fields; it is late summer; Heth comes in with him.)

Heth: (talking as they enter, in a tone of deep pity)
 Poor Father Lot. He is so easily frightened.

Ophir: The idea that his God would destroy Sodom, with all its wealth and prosperity! Nonsense. I wouldn't worry about it a minute!

Rizpah: What? Something going to happen?

Birsha: What's this I hear? Lot told you—

Heth: (scoffing) Lot's god is going to destroy Sodom—completely destroy it! And soon! Lot's all excited, says we'd better get our things together and get out right away.

Ophir: He even went way to the field to warn us! It would be on a night when we had to work late. All that grain to get in, and if it should rain—

Rizpah: (frightened) What if something *should* happen? Lot's god has done some *mighty things*!

Heth: Now Rizpah, what do *you* know about Lot's God? All you know is something Lot has told you. You don't know anything, so be quiet! Hear me?

Rizpah: Lot told me He was the mightiest of gods, and could—

Heth: (interrupting, mockingly) You don't *believe* it, do you? *All* the gods can do mighty things. Just ask the priest of Ishtar or the priest of Innin. *They'll* tell you!

Ophir: I can't believe in the gods anyway. But any god that would even think of destroying a wealthy place like Sodom is downright foolish!

Heth: The gods *should* be happy!—with all the rich gifts we give them!

Ophir: The gifts we give to the *gods*—or to the *priests*!

Heth: Do you suppose Lot told Elam? I think I'll go see (starts for the door, when there is a knock. Elam enters.)

Heth: Well, Elam! I was just starting out to find you.

Elam: My good friend Heth! (nods a greeting to all in the room)

Ophir: All packed, Elam?

Elam: (laughs) So you've seen Lot, too!

Heth: (looking Elam up and down conspicuously, speaks in mocking tone) You don't look too frightened.

Ophir: We were thinking you might be leaving this fair city soon.

Elam: Not me! It would take more than *that* to make *me* run!

Birsha: What did Lot tell you?

Elam: He said he had some visitors from his God (laugh). They're going to destroy this (scorning) *wicked* city—and (craftily) they're giving us a special *advance-warning*. We're supposed to *get out of here*. Right away!

Ophir: And now, Elam, what are your plans for *next winter*? I mean, after Sodom is destroyed! (all laugh)

Birsha: (thoughtful and serious) Is there *any possibility* Lot is right?

Ophir: My good wife (lays his hand comfortingly on her shoulder) you've seen a good many suns rise and set on the city of Sodom, and I assure you that you'll be seeing a good many more.

Heth: Lot is really taking it seriously, though. He said his wife and daughters—

Elam: Daughters!

Heth: Yes, Lot says his wife and daughters are busy packing. They plan to leave as soon as they can.

Rizpah: Like tomorrow?

Heth: I don't know—we'll have to wait and see. They won't be gone long (mocking) before they come dragging all their stuff back again.

Birsha: Don't you think it might be wise to at least go over to Lot's home and talk with the family? *just in case* there's something to it?

Heth: Mother, you'd make yourself look like a fool. What would all the neighbors think when they found out?

Elam: Sodom has been here a good long time, and it isn't ready to go off the map yet. Father Lot is old, and probably gets nervous easily. He'll feel better after he gets a good night's sleep. At least, I *hope* he doesn't leave town for good! He has a fine daughter, and—

Rizpah: And a lot of money!

Heth: Be quiet, Riz! (disconcerted pause) Lot's always been rather queer, anyway, in different things. Remember, Elam, last spring, when he took us out to his altar one evening to worship with him? Strangest thing *I* ever saw for religion. No priest, no god, nothing you could see. Just a very plain altar, and—

Elam: I think I could go along with *that* part, but what gets me about Lot's religion is all the "do's" and "don't's." When I set out to get his daughter, I never *dreamed* what I was getting into! But I decided to see it through. The inheritance will be worth it. But once I have *that* in my hands, I'm going to have *my* way about religion—and I'm afraid it won't resemble Lot's ideas.

Heth: Yet, I can't help admiring Lot for his devotion. I just don't understand it.

Ophir: Lot is always telling how *wicked* this city is—

Elam: (interrupting) As if *he* were so righteous. To hear him talk, you'd think Sodom was about the worst place in the world to live.

Ophir: Wonder what ever brought him here, if Sodom is so bad.

Rizpah: Maybe that's why he wants to go.

Birsha: Then you're *sure* we don't need to look further into this matter?

Ophir: I'm *sure* of it. *Positive* sure. Let's drop the dreary subject of doom right now and take it up again next moon. Sodom will still be here.

(Continued on page 27)

Caught Up into Heaven?

"Who was caught up to the third heaven? Was it Paul or someone else? What does it mean?"

The text to which you refer is found in II Corinthians 12. The passage reads in our King James Version, "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, . . . how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (vs. 1-4).

We should observe first of all that the experience told here, to whomever it was given, was not a physical occurrence but a "vision". The Apostle has been talking about other matters and now comes to the subject of visions. "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord," he says (v. 1), and he continues by describing one. He is not saying that he himself or anyone else was literally caught up into heaven. His question of whether it was "in the body" or "out of the body" describes the sensation as it seemed to the person having the vision. The Bible does not support any idea of the "out-of-body" experiences that are thought to be experienced today.

The apostle Paul being able to prophesy by the power of the Holy

Spirit, it might be possible that he was speaking prophetically of the apostle John as "the man in Christ" whom he knew, who had the great vision he describes. However, this seems unlikely as Paul says the vision occurred some fourteen years previous, and John's vision was many years later than this writing.

It seems much more likely—and numerous Bible commentators agree—that the "man in Christ" who experienced this vision was none other than the apostle Paul himself. The wording of the passage in several of the newer versions upholds this thought.

Whether or not Paul was describing the vision of the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, John's experience was parallel in several aspects: 1) it was a vision from heaven; 2) John, too, was "caught away" into heaven in his vision; and 3) John, too, heard that which he was forbidden to write. John heard the voice of "seven thunders," and when he was about to write what he had heard, a voice from heaven said, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (Rev. 10:3-4). Apparently these, too, were words which "it is not lawful for a man to utter."

John's Patmos experience was rapturous, we can be sure; but Paul also experienced the wonders of God firsthand. Though we have no record of the details, great visions, revelations and miracles were all

within the scope of his experience, —apparently due to the superior measure of Holy Spirit power which he enjoyed. It is recorded of his work in the city of Ephesus that "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul" (Acts 19:11). Again, he explains in his letter to the Romans: "I have . . . whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. . . . to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom. 15:17-19).

And in the passage in question (II Corinthians 12) he reinforces this thought. Later in the same chapter he speaks directly of his superability to perform miracles. "In no respect," he writes, "did I fall short of these superlative apostles, even if I am a nobody. The marks of a true apostle were there, in the work I did among you, which called for such constant fortitude, and was attended by signs, marvels, and miracles" (II Cor. 12:11-12, NEB).

In fact, he says, so great was the power he enjoyed and so marvelous the experiences he had from God both in visions and revelations and in his ability to perform miracles, that he would have been tempted to feel conceited, overly confident or boastful, were it not for a very grievous personal trial that God allowed, translated in our common version as a "thorn in the flesh." We are not told the nature of this thorn, but it

was a source of severe pain and was, as Paul saw it, a heaven-sent "balancer" for the favors and superior advantages with which God had blessed him.

The entire passage seems clearer as translated in the New English Bible: "I shall go on to tell of visions and revelations granted by the Lord. I knew a Christian man who fourteen years ago . . . was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I knew that this same man . . . was caught up into paradise, and heard words so secret that human lips may not repeat them. About such a man as that I am ready to boast; but I will not boast on my own account, except of my weaknesses." Would Paul be likely to say this if it were not his own experience—and his own temptation that resulted from the experience? He might boast, he said, "but I refrain, because I should not like anyone to form an estimate of me which goes beyond the evidence of his own eyes and ears. And so, to keep me from being unduly elated by the magnificence of such revelations, I was given a sharp physical pain which came as Satan's messenger to bruise me; this was to save me from being unduly elated."

Paul was the recipient both of a great spiritual blessing and of a severe, compensating trial. "Three times I begged the Lord to rid me of it, but his answer was: 'My grace is all you need; power comes to its full strength in weakness.' I shall therefore prefer to find my joy and pride in the very things that are my weakness; and then the power of Christ will come and rest upon me. Hence I am well content, for Christ's sake, with weakness, contempt, persecution, hardship, and frustration; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor. 12:1-10, NEB).

Many have thought that his trying affliction was severe illness; we

are not told. But whatever it was, Paul accepted it as something God sent to keep him from being "unduly elated by the magnificence" of the rich experiences which were granted him by the Lord.

Paul was doing what we must do also: using every experience of life, pleasant or otherwise, for his personal spiritual growth; as from God and for good.

The experience of Paul seems to be the experience of every serious believer. Our blessings are from God; our trials are also God-directed. Whenever He gives a greater measure of spiritual blessings, He allows also a greater measure of trial and testing. Where more is given, more is required. But God is always fair and just, and will not allow any of His children to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear. This promise is also found in Paul's writings to the Corinthians (I Cor. 10:13).

If we, like Paul, can see each "thorn" in our lives as something allowed by God for our spiritual development, and accept it with God's "grace," we will find, like Paul, that we are richer for the experience, stronger in our weakness, and nearer to God. And we will be able to say like Paul, "Most gladly therefore I will endure."

We in this age when there is no Holy Spirit power can hardly imagine what it would be like to have a vision of being caught up into heaven and hearing and seeing that which is indescribable and inexpressible. But the coming of Christ, the renewing of the Holy Spirit and the latter rain will bring a renewing of these special experiences; and then, in the words of the prophet Joel cited by Peter on the day of Pentecost, "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour

out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18).

What a day that will be!

• Concerning Sparrows

"What did Jesus mean about God's care for the sparrow? Does God really count sparrows?"

The passage to which you allude is found in Matthew 10:29-31, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. . . . Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Does this mean that God counts sparrows? No, we are sure God does not count sparrows. Sparrows are part of His creation, just as are snakes, lizards and toads. For what purpose they were created, we cannot speculate.

But Jesus used the sparrow to emphasize God's care for His own. It has been suggested that like many other sayings of Jesus, it is a hyperbole, that is, an exaggeration not intended to be taken literally but only to illustrate and emphasize a point.

• Falling into the hands of God

"Please explain, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb. 10:31)."

The key to understanding this verse is found in the context from which it is taken. Let us read the passage, beginning with verse 26:

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." For *those who sin* "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Their willful disobedience makes it a fearful thing.

The New English Bible translates the verse, "For if we willfully persist in sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins remains: only a terrifying expectation of judgment." It is those who deliberately continue to sin after they have learned what God requires who are in danger. God is just and merciful and gives all a chance to repent and turn from their sin, but there is such a thing as continuing in sin until it is too late to change.

Each one who has a knowledge of the law of God and has covenanted to serve Him will be called to the Judgment, to "receive for things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). Those who never learned the law of God or placed themselves under it by agreeing to serve Him will be covered by a cloak of ignorance—they sin "without law," and "perish without law" (Rom. 2:12). But of those who know and then refuse to obey, it is as the apostle Peter said, "better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (II Pet. 2:21). MM

I am a little thing with big meaning. I unlock doors, open hearts, dispel prejudice. I create friendship and good will. I inspire respect and admiration, I bore no one; I violate no law, I cost nothing. Many have praised me. I am pleasing to those of high and low degree. I am useful every moment of the day.

I am COURTESY.

True Beauty

Nothing is more beautiful and majestic than a great tree standing in the mystery and solitude of a forest. It tells us that all worthwhile things are built slowly, layer upon layer, season by season, by wind, rain and sunshine, that nature is patient, that God can wait. God has been waiting nearly 6000 years for all those who will become stately trees of righteousness.

But He will not always wait. We must become like the trees David spoke of, "full of sap" (Ps. 104:16), full of these life-giving words. We must keep thinking heavenly thoughts so we can grow into a righteous tree of God's planting.

To have a right attitude toward others, we must keep God's law in our mind and His love in our heart.

Iowa

W. P.

News Headlines

Our secret thoughts and private conversations are known to God as though they were news headlines. And God must judge us because of them. The things we do now will rob us of life with Jesus and God unless we "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness."

We have so many stalwarts to bolster our feeble efforts, to strengthen us, to make us see it is possible in these fear-filled days to press on, daily building, never looking back but looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured to the end.

If we follow Him, we also can endure, and receive that indescribable "joy."

England

N. T.

Our Need

We are so fortunate to have all that we have, especially the knowledge of God's law.

It seems as if each sermon is meant directly for each of us. We learn something from every one we hear.

We need something or some one we can truly rely on and trust, and the Lord is certainly that!

New York

I. R.

Uplifted

I entered our Library Centre in our town and was having a glance at your *Megiddo Message*. I was really uplifted by all the information about God's kingdom, and enjoyed all that was published in it. I visit our library daily and I think that the Lord has shown me a wonderful book to read with all the spiritual information inside it.

Please make me a subscriber for this magazine as I am so interested.

Fiji

M. T.

More Humble, More Content

Life is a series of choices, and if we aren't ever so careful we can make many unwise choices in this life. It is for sure we cannot have the world as we go along and have the future world also.

The more we read and study God's words, meditate on them and pray, the more humble and content we will be. We know God will help us if we strive to obey His commandments.

The *Messages* are excellent reading and help me to walk in the strait and narrow way. The more I learn, the more humble it makes me.

South Carolina

H. C.

Interested

We and many others are enjoying this booklet, the *Megiddo Message*. Thank you for sending it.

Alabama

L. M.

It Made My Day

I read your magazine, the *Megiddo Message*, for the first time the other day. I found it very interesting and to my liking. It made my day!

I would like to subscribe to your magazine and also if possible I would like to order a back issue of your October magazine.

California

C. C.

The End of the Age

(Continued from page 23)

Elam: Yes, Sodom will still be here—and I'll be settled in my own little home. Goodnight. (scoffing) See you tomorrow.

Narrator:

We know what they did not live to learn—that it is fatal to disregard the divine decree. God knows whereof He speaks, and when He commands, we disobey at our own peril.

This is why the Lord caused the record of these events to be preserved for us, so that we might not fall where they fell; so that we might escape the doom which fell upon them.

This was the message in Jesus' words: "As it was in the days of Noah, . . . likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, . . . even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-30).

Human nature has not changed; the instinctive rebellion of the human heart has not changed; and the unalterable certainty of the divine decree has not changed. As it was, so shall it be.

Let us take heed. MM
(To Be Continued)

*Lord I would own Thy tender care
And all Thy love to me
The food I eat, the clothes I wear
Are all bestowed by Thee.*

*'Tis Thou preservest me from death
And dangers every hour
I cannot draw a single breath
Unless Thou give me power.*

*Such goodness, Lord, and constant
care
I cannot e'er repay
But may it be my daily prayer
To love Thee and obey.*

—Selected

Time's Bank

If you had a bank that credited your account each morning with \$86,400 and every evening cancelled whatever part of the amount you had failed to use that day, what would you do? Draw out every cent, of course.

You have such a bank. Its name is Time. Every morning it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it rules off as lost whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries no balances. It allows no overdrafts. Each day it opens a new account with you. Each night it records your daily deeds, whether good or bad. If you have failed to use the day's deposits to add to your good store against the eternal day, the loss is yours alone. There is no going back to use wasted hours. There is no drawing against tomorrow's account. You must live in the present, on today's deposits.

Invest each day so as to get from it the utmost, both in this life and in the world to come.

Announcement

THE New Year is coming—this year with the evening of Sunday, March 29, Bible time being counted from evening to evening (Lev. 23/32).

At this time, members and friends of the Megiddo Church will set aside a special day in honor of Christ, our coming King and Ruler, to give recognition to His past, present, and future work in our behalf. The heavenly Father chose to honor Christ at the time of His birth by sending angels to the shepherds—shouldn't we do our part?

Abib First is also another landmark in our journey, the beginning of the Sacred New Year and an appropriate time to reconsecrate ourselves to God.

Thirteen days later (Abib 13, this year on Friday evening, April 10) we will commemorate the anniversary of our Lord's Supper, and the morning of April 13 (Abib 15) will be observed as the anniversary of Christ's triumph over death and the grave.

Pentecost this year is June 1.

Christ the Hope of the World

(Continued from page 6)

women who are expecting their Lord, not all absorbed in the interests of the moment but watchful and alert, "lest he come suddenly and find [us] asleep.

"And what I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" (Luke 12:36; 17:26-30; Mark 13: 35-37).

Only then can we share in Christ the hope of the world.

MM

Note: All Bible quotations in this article are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

Encouraging Ourselves in the Lord

Scripture Lesson: II Corinthians 1:1-7

No one is immune to the possibility of discouragement. Our only surety against it lies in our strong, inner defenses.

AS the great apostle Paul opens his second Epistle to the church at Corinth, his thoughts are focused on the gracious love and kindness of the God he serves. He is deeply impressed with God's magnificent goodness in his behalf, His personal concern for each of his loyal servants, and longs to extend to others the divine favor that has been given him. These are his words:

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (vs. 3-4). The "comfort" of which Paul speaks is more than mere human consolation in sorrow or stress. The Greek word he uses is *paraklesis*, and its primary meaning is "encouragement, exhortation." The "God of all comfort" is literally the "God of encouragement." It is a term which Paul uses 23 times in his Epistles, and conveys his deep desire to help and encourage his brethren in the way of Christ as he himself has been encouraged. *Paraklesis* is divine strength to meet and master life's crises.

So let us reread the above passage, substituting "encouragement" for "comfort": "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of

mercies, and the God of all encouragement; who encourages us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to encourage them which are in any trouble, by the encouragement wherewith we ourselves are encouraged of God." Encouraged of God, encouraged by God, encouraged in God—who on the highway of life does not need this heavenly encouragement!

David Encouraged Himself "in the Lord"

The tempestuous career of David brought him into many a situation where he needed divine encouragement. One time in particular was when he returned to Ziklag, after an expedition to Philistia. Things looked bad for him, about as bad in every way as they could look. Worn and weary from battle, he and his loyal followers had made the long trek home, only to find that the peaceful little town where they had left their families and loved ones had been devastated. In their absence, the Amalekites had raided it, and their wives and children had been taken captive.

David was heartsick, not only for his own loss but also for that of the men who had so valiantly stood by him.

As we well know, David was no stranger to rough weather. He and his men were accustomed to danger and hardship. But to return home and find

Note: *Encouraging Ourselves in the Lord* is available as a complete church service on cassette. Price: \$3.00

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