

Megiddo Message



Resisting the

Lure

Vol. 76, No. 2
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“When He Came to Himself...”

The Bible is a textbook in the art of self-searching. Its one point of beginning is always KNOW THYSELF.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son is a key line upon which the whole story turns. The prodigal “came to himself.” If he had not, there would have been no point to Jesus’ parable.

In the life of every striving Christian there must be this moment of truth, this moment of honest self-facing. It is a great moment. It is a moment of self-recognition that brings about a complete turning in one’s life. And how much better that it come now as a result of candid self-examination than when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is only prudence to be able to say as did the old Scotsman when asked if a storm was coming, “I thatched me roof.”

The Bible is a textbook in the art of self-searching. Its one point of beginning is always KNOW THYSELF. From this point we can go forward to *improve* ourselves. For after we have seen what we really are—and are not—we will feel an irresistible urge to *change*.

The wise of all ages have recognized this. Inscribed on the temple to Apollo at Delphi some 600 years before Christ were the words: “KNOW THYSELF.” Thus Shakespeare penned:

*Go to your bosom;
Knock there, and ask your heart
what it doth know.*

Getting acquainted with ourselves may be a shattering experience; it may involve a new relationship with family or friends, with business associates, and—

most importantly—with God. But whatever the price in self-effacement, it is vital to our success.

The moment of self-understanding in the Christian’s life is the moment of hope. For from that moment on we can live with a realistic understanding of the goal we seek and our own possibilities of attaining it. This gives us a new sense of nobility and purpose.

Until we see ourselves as we are we may revel in great—and exceedingly foolish—pictures of our own grandeur. As the poet expressed it,

*...Until the donkey
tried to clear
The fence,
he thought himself a deer.*

Bringing ourselves to the level of reality in our struggles with life, seeing ourselves for what we really are, is the only route to genuine improvement. So easily when we run into difficulties we blame our companions, or our job, or our friends, or our tools, or our community, or our church, when the real problem is right where it always has been—ourselves! Oh, for the moment when we come to ourselves!

Are we tempted to *wait* for it? It will not come until we *make* it come. It will not come until we picture the image we want to be—even the “stature of the fullness of Christ”—and compare ourselves with it to see wherein we lack.

When we have done this, it may be said of us, “He came to himself,” and the door to improvement will stand wide open. MM

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 life, all men, and all things.

We believe

—in the Bible as our only source of knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for the salvation of humankind.

We believe

—in Jesus Christ the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was born of a Virgin, ministered among men, was crucified, resurrected, taken to heaven, and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.

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 humankind 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 applying the precepts and principles of the Word of God in our own lives, in this way 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

NASB—New American Standard Bible

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

AAT—The Bible: An American Translation

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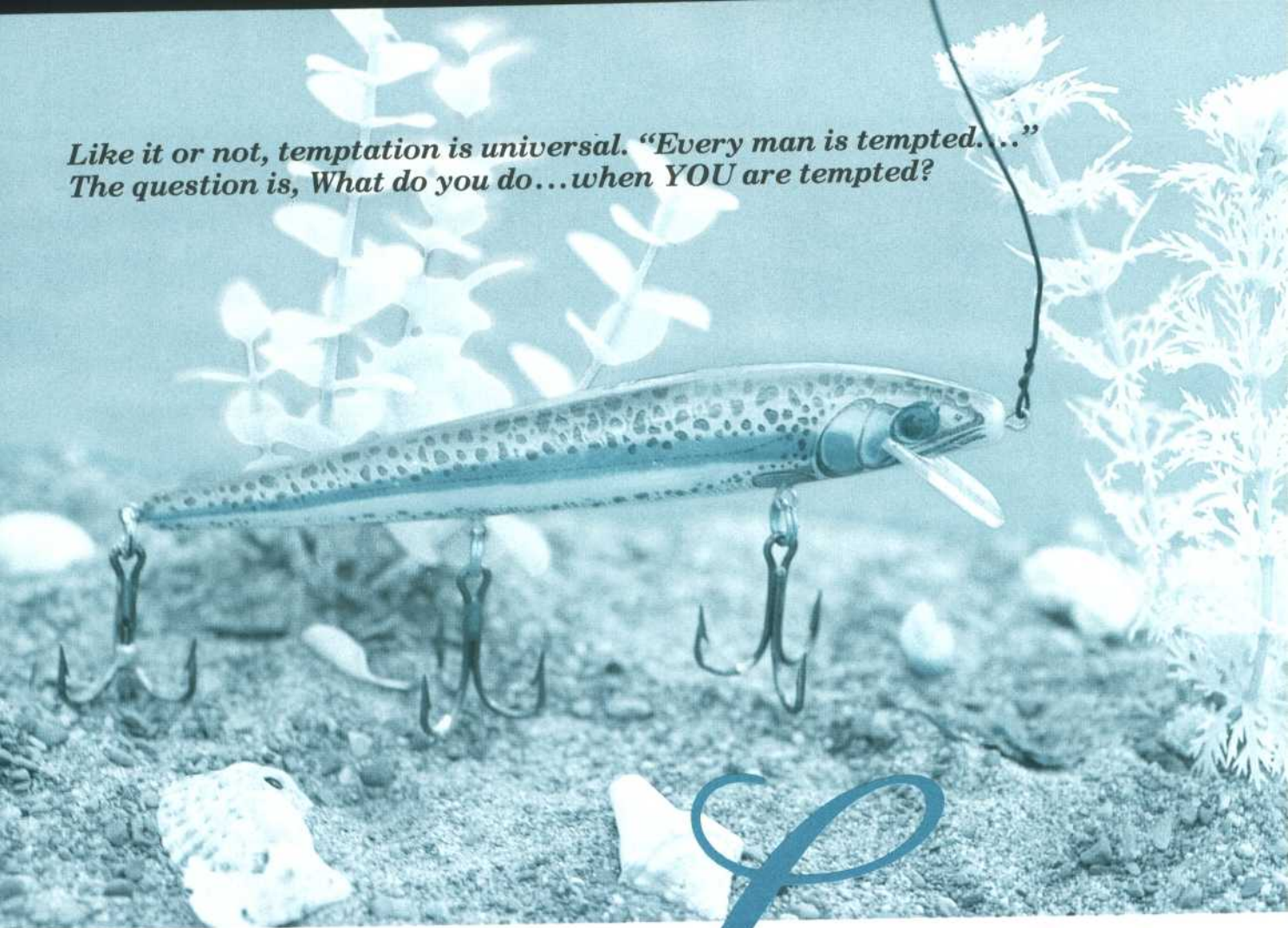
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MEGIDDO is a way of believing and living, grounded solidly in the Bible as the reliable Word of our Creator. A total view of life, the world and the universe, it sees all events, men and nations moving together toward one God-ordained climax: the Kingdom 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.

*Like it or not, temptation is universal. "Every man is tempted..."
The question is, What do you do...when YOU are tempted?*



Resisting the Lure

There is only one knob to the door of our heart, and that is on the inside. That door never opens except WE open it.

Temptation is one of the very first subjects presented in Scripture. According to the Genesis allegory, Adam and Eve found themselves in a beautiful garden, with definite instructions about what they should and should not do. "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." "Thou shalt not." So what did they do? Whenever they came near that tree, with its luscious-looking fruit, did they immediately turn away, saying a firm "NO!" to themselves? Was it their first and only thought that they must obey strictly the command of God? No, they looked at the forbidden fruit, and they looked again. And again. And again. It seemed so harmless, so attractive, so good. Why should it be so bad? And then they started to reason. Did God really mean what He had said? What would happen if they sampled the forbidden fruit—just a *little* of it...?

That first look; that first temptation; that first sin. We read about Adam and Eve, and classify them as foolish, weak, disobedient. Then we look at ourselves and the unenviable record behind us, and what are we forced to conclude? That *we* are Adam, and *we* are Eve. For we, too, have looked at the forbidden fruit, and looked again and again, and by our actions have said, "Does God really mean what He has said? Just a little won't hurt anything..."

So runs the story of the human race. To be alive is to be tempted.

Something about "temptation" disturbs us. The very sound of it makes us uncomfortable. It reminds us of something we prefer to forget. Perhaps it recalls a feeling of shame from a time we failed. Or it awakens in us a struggle which we wish were over.

But like it or not, temptation is the universal experience. Said the inspired author of the book of James, "Every man is tempted...". No exceptions. *Every* man. The very fact that we are mortal, human creatures, means that we must deal with temptation. No one lives who is not tempted by something, somewhere.

Naturally, no one *wants* to be tempted. The experience is troublesome. It humbles us. It brings us face to face with the fact that we still have inclinations to evil, or we would not be tempted. We have not yet arrived at the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." We are still weak, faltering, stumbling creatures in need of God's mercy and long-suffering.

Temptation is a trial, a test, a circumstance we would not naturally choose. It is anything that calls upon us to muster our inner resources and fight. It may be a thought, a feeling, a desire which the law of God forbids; along

with an opportunity to do wrong. We know better, but flesh is naturally stronger than spirit, and continually conflicts with the higher allegiance we owe to God. And so we are tempted.

From the opposite side, a temptation is a golden opportunity. It is a chance to prove our sincerity, to demonstrate the strength of our growing spiritual muscles; it is our signal to give battle, to show that we are stronger than the forces that tempt us, that we are indeed serious about winning in the conflict against sin and making real our bright hope of life in the world to come.

There is another good in temptation: It uncovers those areas of our lives that need work. So much within us needs to be tempered, tutored and tamed. When we are suddenly faced with temptation, the test reveals our weak point and we see clearly where we need to change. This was Peter's experience. Jesus had warned him, but only under trial did he learn what was lacking in his obedience, that his anxiety about his personal safety was deeper than his commitment to Christ. Peter learned the hard way, just as we often do; but he learned, and after the fall rebounded quickly to his feet, stronger for the experience.

What Tempts Us?

There is something very common, yet very personal about temptation. The apostle John described it as the "world" in us—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The "lusts of the flesh" are temptations from *within*, what Paul called our "earthward inclinations" to immorality, impurity, vice and carnality. The "lusts of the eye" are temptations from *without*, the things we see or experience that tempt and try us. "The pride of life" covers all

By keeping a firm hold on God's great and precious promises, we can escape even now the corruption of a world that is sunk in vice, and live a pure and holy life before God. With God's help, we CAN!

When there is no desire within, there will be no temptation without.



The law of God held Jesus to an inflexible obedience. Not a hairsbreadth would He swerve. However strong the temptation, the law of His Father was stronger.

the rest—whatever we might do or feel or say or think to promote or exalt ourselves, or to seek our own way, which brings out our stubbornness, jealousy, selfishness, deceit, dishonesty. A miserable list to be sure, but there is no evil from which we may safely say “I am exempt.” Again and again we must give battle.

We have heard the call to a higher life. We know God is looking for His elect. We know that God is setting apart “the godly” for Himself (Ps. 4:3). *We want to be set apart.* We have learned of His eternal plan; we want a place in His eternal scheme. But oh, these persistent, stubborn, “earthward inclinations”! We are not godly by nature. How well we understand the experience of the apostle Paul: “when I would do good, evil is present with me.” How well acquainted we are with that law in our members that wars against the law of our mind and brings us into captivity to the law of sin (Rom. 7:18-23). The struggle is intense, and it goes on, and on, and on. If only we could be done with it! If only we could wake up some morning a brand new person!

But such cannot be. We must fight it out, moment by moment, point by point, day after day. And even after we have fought many years against some tendency of our flesh, let the proper circumstances arise and we learn quickly—to our dismay—that our old nature is still alive. Well did the prophet Jeremiah know us mortals when he wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

Powerless Temptation

There is nothing so weak, so ridiculously weak in itself as a temptation. It can do nothing, absolutely nothing without the consent of the one being tempted.

It can allure, it can sing bewitching songs, it can make an atmosphere around you mighty hard to breathe in, but it can’t get inside you without *your* consent, and it is as powerless as a butterfly until it gets inside.

It is easy to be respectable when no one is giving you an opportunity to be anything else.

There is only one knob to the door of our heart, and that is on the inside. That door never opens except *we* open it. Let us ever remember this, let us underscore it so that it will stand out sharp and clear. We are responsible for the things that tempt us. When there is no desire within, there will be no temptation without. It always takes *two* to make a successful temptation, and I am one of the two. When my desires are fully Christ-centered, when my whole desire is to please God, when the old self within me has died, then all the nature that is left in me will be Christ’s nature, and temptation will disappear.

But not completely. The message from the experienced is that we will be tempted on something as long as we live. Our temptations will change with the passage of time. As we make a serious and sustained effort to do right, they will grow less and less; but we must be prepared and watchful, all the way to the end.

**Don’t wait to OUTGROW
your temptation—
OVERCOME it!**

Overpowering Temptation

Since temptation or trial is the daily lot of every one of us, let's consider some practical ways of dealing with them. At this late hour, when our working time may be *very* limited, we cannot afford any failures we might avoid. One of these days we will confront our last temptation, our last test, our last opportunity, and if we have not made maximum use of them, how we will long then for another test, another trial, another temptation—another opportunity to prove our strength!

What can we, erring mortals, do to have a record that pleases God? We know that God does not require a life of perfect obedience without one slip; but He does expect us to learn from our failures, until we are able to meet our temptations triumphantly. We know it is possible, for there is a blessing promised to those who accomplish it. We read from the book of James, "Blessed is he who endures (stands firm under) trials; for when he has stood the test, he shall gain the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas. 1:12, Weymouth).

"When he has stood the test..." The question is, how do we *stand the test*?

There is a story from old England about a hostess who had visiting in her home the widow of an English army officer and her young son, a charming little fellow of about five. The mother had told what care she was giving to the discipline of the child, how honorable he was, how high-minded, and that she never allowed in him any traits that were low or base.

The child was put to bed at six. The guests dined at seven. The hostess was sitting in the drawing room one evening before dinner. The room was dark, and the doors were open, and her seat commanded a view of both the stairway and the dining room. The table was set, and in the center was a dish of tempting peaches.

Presently there was heard the patter of little bare feet, and a childish figure, clad in a nightgown, stole down the stairs, through the hall into the dining room and up to the table. Small fingers quickly seized the topmost peach from the dish, then the little fellow turned and trotted away upstairs again.

As the hostess sat motionless in the dark, contemplating what the mother had said about this child, there came again the patter of little feet, and a white-clad figure stole down the stairs, through the hall, into the dining room and up to the table. Small fingers care-

fully replaced the stolen peach just where it had been, and a stubborn little voice muttered, "Done again, old Satan!"

There was temptation, and a will not strong enough to resist. But there was also the knowledge of wrong done, a will to make it right.

Can we, as mature believers in Christ, say that we always do as well?

There will be conflict, there will be temptation, but to be tempted is not sin; the sin lies in *yielding* to the temptation.

Conflict is part of every Christian's life. The apostle Paul described this conflict between the better and worse self, between the old nature and the new, as flesh against spirit. It is impossible for the two to live together in peaceful coexistence. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). So long as both live there will be conflict, for one is carnal; the other spiritual. But as long as we deny the carnal its gratification, we are victors.

1: Say A Firm NO!...

Our best defense against temptation is a firm "No." And, "If in doubt, DON'T!"

What was Jesus' masterful method of meeting temptation? Simply this: "It is written," and the law of His God held Him to an inflexible obedience. Not a hairsbreadth would He swerve. However strong the temptation, the law of

His Father was stronger. He could not—He *would* not—dishonor His Father.

By one means or another, as committed Christians we must gain the mastery over ourselves—mind, body, and will. As long as we do anything to satisfy or gratify or please our fleshly tendencies, they will dominate. There is only one way to subdue them, and that is by complete and total denial. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). Nothing easy, comfortable or painless, but it is the road to freedom and victory.

There is no substitute in all the world for the power to say No to ourselves, and to make it stick. Every man is tempted, but every temptation need not penetrate. Remember Jesus. He, too, was tempted; He was tempted in all points as we are, "*yet without sin*"—His temptations amounted to nothing because He put to death the desire from within. When temptation knocked on His door, there was simply no response.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24 NAS). Temptation will continue to knock, but there will be no answer, no response from within, because the old life of the flesh with all its passions and desires is dead, gone, crucified. All that remains is the new life in Christ!

2: Keep God's Promises Ringing In Your Ears

Another effective means of dealing with temptation is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. They had been guilty of serious sin, but he would not have them continue to dwell on that. They must think higher, live higher, be higher. They must keep the promises of God ringing in their ears, promises of divine favor and

blessing and eternal fellowship with God's heavenly family. Think, he says, what God has promised to His people: "For God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and...I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

What is Paul's personal reaction to these magnificent promises? "With these promises ringing in our ears," he says, "let us"—you and me both—"cleanse ourselves from anything that pollutes... Let us prove our reverence for God by consecrating ourselves to him completely" (II Cor. 6:17-18; 7:1, Philippians). With these promises ringing in our ears, we won't even be able to *hear* the voice of what would tempt us!

The apostle Peter used the same sure formula. These are his words: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Pet. 1:4). "By these"—by keeping a firm hold upon these great promises, we can escape even now the corruption of a world that is sunk in vice, and live a pure and holy life before God. With God's help, we *can*!

We are familiar with the story of Siren Island and its curious sounds, alluring but fatal to all who stopped to listen, and how, as the story goes, a certain captain, determined to pass safely by the island where others had been caught, ordered his men to bind him securely to the mast and not loose him until the ship was safely beyond the range of the sound.

There is another version of the story which illustrates another way of gaining victory over the flesh. On board the boat were four singers, who were instructed to sing as the ship drew near the island.

To be tempted is not sin; sin lies in yielding to the temptation.

"Sing louder! Wake up the sluggards!" was the command. The music of their voices grew louder and louder until it completely drowned the voices of the sirens. The plan worked; the men kept at the oars and so sailed to victory.

If we keep the heavenly strains ringing so loudly in our ears, we will be so enthralled by their melodies that the voices of the sirens of sin will be drowned—we will not even hear them at all.

3: Avoid Temptation

A third method of dealing with temptation is to avoid it. It is the advice of King Solomon, which he himself did not heed: "Enter not into the path of the wicked,... avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Prov. 4:14-15).

It is the lesson in the story of the young man who had only recently given up alcohol, but who persisted in hitching his horses in front of the neighborhood tavern. A well-intentioned elderly deacon advised him to "change his hitching post." In other words, strengthen your defenses by avoiding the thing that is likely to tempt you.

Does this seem like weakness? Not at all. On the contrary, it is evidence of great moral strength. If there are temptations we can avoid by making simple changes in our lives, we should avoid them. Especially is this true in our contacts with the world. As much as we can save ourselves from the sights and sounds of Babylon, that much we can spare ourselves from contamination.

And for whatever precautions we take to assure our safety, we shall be amply repaid. Even if we have to be so drastic as was the captain in the Greek story of Ulysses and Siren Island; even if we have to lash ourselves to the mast to keep ourselves under control, when we have won the victory we shall have no regret.

When you are tempted to do wrong...

CANCEL
TERMINATE
ABORT
ESCAPE
QUIT
STOP

4: Expect Temptation and Be Prepared

We can strengthen ourselves against temptation by expecting it and being prepared.

But what about those sudden temptations? What about those moments of testing that come suddenly and unannounced, when there is no time to prepare?

We have all witnessed the dreadful fall of someone whom we thought strong. Our immediate reaction is, "How could he do it?" or "I can't believe it." But when the one who falls is ourselves, we say quickly, at least to ourselves, that the temptation came too suddenly, without warning, that if this or that had been different we would have had no problem. But in our secret heart of hearts, we know we are only pettifogging. We failed because flesh was stronger than spirit; our carnal desire was stronger than our desire to please God.

Be not deceived. Temptation is *never* sudden. We can be sure of this because half of every temptation is from the inside. Our own inner desire was alive and ready, or there would have been no temptation.

Sin never comes out of the clear blue sky, so to speak. It is the predictable result of a long process in which a mind susceptible to sin is allowed to harbor and cherish an evil thought, evil desire or evil design. If we look honestly and squarely at ourselves, we will realize that we have never had a fall that was truly "sudden."

We must prepare in advance for temptation; look closely into our hearts, discover where we are weak, what will be our test, and prepare ourselves *before* the temptation comes. If we wait until we are tempted to decide how we will react, we have waited too long.

And once we feel prepared, what does this mean? Does it mean we

can expose ourselves to the worst—dare anything, try anything, sure that we shall not be defeated? By no means.

It is much like driving down the highway with a spare tire in the trunk. I don't keep a spare tire in

Prepare IN
ADVANCE for
temptation. If
you wait until you are
tempted to decide how
you will react, you have
waited too long.

my trunk so that I can hit holes and drive recklessly over sharp objects and have a flat tire. I keep it in case, all the while exercising care not to have one. Just so with our preparations against temptation. By being prepared, well fortified with the Word of God, we are ready in case, whenever.

Don't Be Too Sure...

Let us never overestimate our strength or be too confident of our success. Hear this warning from an experienced and inspired veter-

Flee temptation!
And while
you're running,
think not so much about
what you're running
away from as the
great goal you are
running toward!

an: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

From the ancient city of Sardis

comes a lesson on overconfidence. The city was built on a jutting spur of rock that was thought to be impregnable. When Cyrus was besieging it, we are told, he offered a special reward to any who could find a way in. A certain soldier, watching the stronghold one day, saw a soldier in the Sardinian garrison drop his helmet accidentally over the battlements. He watched closely as the man climbed down after it, and marked his path. That night this soldier of Cyrus led a band up the cliffs by that very path. And when they reached the top, they found it unguarded. So confident were the Sardinians of the security of their citadel that they had become careless.

Never is it safe to be too confident of our strength. Let us repeat the warning of the apostle Paul once again, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). However strong we may think we have grown, we must never presume upon our strength. Our minds can be so quickly overwhelmed with temptation that we are never fully and completely safe. Like a dam that restrains water, our grid may withstand a certain level of pressure from evil input. But also like a dam, when the pressure becomes too great, the grid will succumb to it.

Once weakened, a dam collapses. Once collapsed, the forces formerly controlled wreak devastation and ruin. How many—and how sadly—have overestimated the strength of their moral dams. They carelessly let tiny rivulets of impurity join forces into streams and ultimately a mighty river too powerful for the dam of conviction to restrain.

Remember Achan

It is the story of Achan, recorded in Joshua 7. He "saw,...coveted,...took,...hid." His sin was not in chancing to see the robe, the silver, or the gold, but in the second look he permitted his eyes. Had he not

allowed himself to gaze upon these forbidden treasures, how different might have been the end of the story.

Achan could not have hidden what he had not taken. He would not have taken if he had not coveted. He would not have coveted if he had not seen. And while he could not, perhaps, have avoided the first sight, he could have avoided the prolonged gaze that developed into a temptation he could not withstand.

Remember David

The same was true of David. If David's mind had been firmly fixed on God, his happening to see Bathsheba might scarcely have impressed his mind at all. And even if he had been tempted, he could immediately have banished the thought with a deep, holy thought of his duty to God and so resisted the temptation. Let us repeat: *To be tempted is not sin; sin lies in yielding to the temptation.* Sin came when he allowed himself—no, when he *chose*—to fix his eyes and his mind upon her. David's dam wasn't strong enough to resist the temptation to which he exposed himself.

We can easily see how David's sin could have been nipped in the bud and the whole devious course of transgression and punishment have been avoided. But only David could have done it, and he did not; and like the stone thrown into the water, sin's ripples led to sin upon sin, for which David paid dearly in suffering, trouble and remorse.

Remember—and Imitate—Joseph

How different the account of Joseph. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph didn't ask himself, "How far can I go without sinning? It probably wouldn't hurt just to stick around and talk with her a while." Joseph refused to overestimate his strength in the face of temptation. The only safe course, the only right course, as he saw it, was to put as much distance as he could between himself and the sin.

5: Flee Temptation

This brings us to a fourth successful means of dealing with temptation: flee from it. This is the advice that Paul gave: "Flee youthful lusts." Not just "turn away from" or "resist," but *run*.

And while we're running, he would have us think not so much about what we're running away from as the great goal we are running toward!

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (II Tim. 2:22).

What is the point of pursuing good "with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"? It suggests the strength that is available in Christian fellowship. We are all tempted, but thank God we are not all tempted to the same extent on the same point. We can help each other. And we need to. Young or old or anywhere in between, we need the help and love and support of one another. "Woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Eccl. 4:10). We need the help of those who are, like us, striving with all their power to serve God out of a "pure heart."

Let us never undervalue this help, or be ashamed to seek it. There is no greater blessing than the trusted spiritual friend with whom we can share our struggle and who can say to us, "I understand, I had the same struggle; I conquered it, and you can, too."

6: Mark Points of Danger

Another precaution in dealing with temptation is to set up clear markers and strong defenses where we have fallen so that we will not fall there again. Even the highway department finds this a sensi-

(Continued on page 20)

It Isn't Worth It!

However strenuous or stringent the means that we must use to resist our temptations, we shall be more than abundantly compensated for our effort. The high cost is on the side of *yielding* to temptation, where far too little costs far too much. Very simply, it *isn't worth it*.

If Eve could talk to us from across the centuries, she would certainly tell us that yielding to temptation isn't worth it. Yes, our own reasonings may seem logical, we may tell ourselves that God doesn't mean exactly what He says. But to listen to any of this reasoning is to fail. Eve would affirm the statement made many years later by the prophet Jeremiah, that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Eve learned it by her own blundering, and lost what she could have had. Let us learn from her.

Achan believed that by digging a hole he could cover his sin and keep his wrong hidden, and some-

day be able to enjoy the wealth gained by disobedience. But Achan learned quickly that this did not work. Sadly he discovered that no hole is deep enough to hide sin from God's all-searching eye, and there is no pleasure in sin. In reality, Achan hid it but from himself. God saw the whole sordid thing. God saw, and God condemned. Bread of deceit was sweet, but only for a moment. It wasn't worth it.

David would tell us the same thing about yielding to temptation, that it is not worth it. How he suffered through the later years of his kingship, reaping the ill-fated harvest of his own foolishness. Yes, David repented of his sin and God forgave him; but the seeds he had sown brought their inevitable harvest, and a painful harvest it was.

But on the other side, how great the gain from resisting temptation. For every sacrifice we make here we are gaining for ourselves millions of ages in eternity. For

the companionships we forego in this world we shall someday be welcomed into the society of the angels, our own brothers and sisters, and delight in the communion of the triumphant saints. For every degrading picture we refuse to look upon we shall be granted a deeper view into the wonders of God's limitless creation. For any of the knowledge of this world that we forego we shall be invited to explore the infinite depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God. For every satisfaction we deny here we shall be abundantly satisfied with the bounties of God's heavenly realm, and be granted the privilege of drinking from the rivers of His pleasures (Ps. 36:7-9).

*Oh what bliss 'twill be to linger
on that bright celestial shore,
There to bask with Christ forever,
throughout ages evermore;
There to be all life and action, go
with freedom of the wind:
Ev'ry act and thought so holy,
we'll forget we ever sinned.* MM

gods

THAT CAME NEWLY UP

The Great Eternal God, the Creator of the universe, is a self-existent, self-proceeding, omnipotent Being who has lived through the countless aeons of the past and will continue to live through all time to come. And while we cannot conceive of as much as one second of time passing without a mortal being somewhere in His vast domain discovering for the first time His majestic greatness, yet He could by no means be designated as a God that came newly up. There is a vast difference between a newly discovered God, and a god that came newly up.

By His own declaration, He is the one eternal God, who requires help from none other, but is all-powerful, and can help and save to the uttermost: "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour" (Isa. 43: 10-11).

Nearly six thousand years have elapsed since in the dawn of civilization man had become sufficiently developed that the Almighty could reveal Himself to a few select members of the human family. In this revelation He did not fail to declare Himself to be one God and the one Being to be supplicated and worshiped. When

the Law was given on Mt. Sinai, the first commandment had to do with the one God and His worship: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:2-3).

Now six thousand years is a long time, as man with his limited horizons scans time, yet to Him to whom a thousand years is but as yesterday when it is past, it represents but one brief tick of Eternity's clock: hence any creature or thing, animate or inanimate, any interest or ambition that has arisen to challenge the Almighty's rightful claim to total worship, could properly be styled a god that came newly up.

Among the first men to enter God's service and compete for the prize offered were found those who made the futile effort to serve God and mammon at the same time; and, sad to say, from that day to this, most professed seekers for the prize have made the same blunder. These newly developed gods are legion and include all sorts of objects of worship, from the tribal gods of the primitive peoples to the innumerable interests of the man of the twentieth century.

In speaking of a god other than the true God, our minds naturally revert to some sort of an idol fashioned from wood or stone or metal, but this is not the only form of idol worship to which

human nature is prone. "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face," said the Lord to Ezekiel many, many years ago (Ezek. 14:3). Today the people of the world have many idols in their heart: they worship their earthly possessions, their homes, the cars they drive, their wealth, the power they wield over others, their mental attainments and social status. Nor is this worship of external things confined to individuals alone, but is now admitted to be the cause of international friction leading to wars. Unwillingness on the part of the nations having an abundance of natural resources to share that abundance with the "have not's" leads to international rivalries and war. High tariffs, trade barriers, closed national economies, are all the outgrowth of the worship of national selfishness.

No one who cares to admit the facts will deny that the average human being is afflicted with this sin of self-worship, and the man who has entered the service of the Eternal in quest of that which is so much better is no exception. It is real work to so completely transform oneself that the thought, "How will this affect me?" will not flash across our mind when our name is mentioned in connection with some spiritual duty to be performed or sacrifice to be made. Perhaps someone in a distant city

who is carrying on single-handed and alone needs a letter of encouragement. Are we always ready to do our part? Some worthy one who is seeking God's approval may need a place to live; are we willing to inconvenience ourselves slightly, to show hospitality without grudging and open our doors and share our home with them? When we see something to be done, but our doing it will cut into the time that we prefer to spend in another way, what is our choice?

The world of unbelievers are not alone in the worship of temporal wealth. Many also who have been called into the narrow way to life have found it difficult not to place the worship of the almighty dollar above the worship of the Creator. The young ruler who asked Jesus what he must do to be saved thought he had kept the law from his youth up, what could he lack? but when told to sell all that he had and give to the poor, he went away sorrowful. Let us never forget the words of Jesus as reiterated by the great Apostle to the elders at Ephesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Moses' forty years' experience leading the children of Israel through the wilderness should have placed him in a good position to judge correctly human nature. In his farewell address to the people shortly before his death he sketched their checkered career from the day they left Egypt, noting the blessings that had attended obedience and the curses that had followed disobedience, and mixing warnings with good counsel implored of them to be wise and consider their latter end, and make the service of God their choice. Here it was, too, that he made the statement about gods that came newly up. "They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers

feared not" (Deut. 32:16-17). They sacrificed to devils. A devil is anything opposing God; it may be an individual, a group of individuals, or one's own self; and to such opposition they had made obeisance; they had chosen mammon rather than God, the flesh in preference to the Spirit.

Let us watch lest we sacrifice to a god that came newly up, to an interest of a temporal and transient nature that suddenly sprang into being and will as quickly pass into nonentity, leaving its admirers helpless and in the end hopelessly dead. The idol of self in our heart is the object of worship we should guard against most. The stumblingblock of our own iniquity may be held at such close range that it will loom so large before our mental vision as to obscure everything else, even the Eternal Himself. Every way of our own seeming right to us, the temptation is great to burn just a little incense on this altar of self and sniff its sweet fragrance.

Self, this god that comes newly—and repeatedly—up, and is no part of the age-old plan of salvation, appears in many ways. Let us note some of its more common forms, and the dire results of its worship. Pride, in its many forms: "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). The unbridled use of our tongue: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21). The determination to pursue the course that seems right to us at all costs: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25). We may worship our wealth and say to ourselves, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," but God will say to us, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:19-20). We may yield to our desire to sow to the flesh as we

please, but "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8). We may seek the praise and fair speeches of men: but "Woe unto you," said Jesus, "when all men shall speak well of you" (Luke 6:26).

Some are tempted to idolize their

Idols "In the heart" are the most dangerous form of idol worship.

physical strength and prowess, their wisdom or natural ability; but this too is strictly forbidden by the Almighty (Jer. 9:23-24).

The idol may be securely tucked away on the shelf in the closet; we may be the only living person who knows it is there (but God knows it is there, never forget that). Many days may pass between the times that we secretly bring it to the light for one more adoring look. Time and again we may have promised ourselves that some day we will take the accursed thing and smash and destroy it completely, but the convenient time has not yet arrived. Unexpectedly our day of salvation ends by our sudden death or the appearance of the great Judge. The god that came newly up goes quickly down, and his worshiper—like the 450 prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel—goes quickly down with him.

Fellow-believers, the door of escape from such an untimely end is still open to us. Let us hasten to make a full and complete surrender to the true and living God, and so win His eternal favor. MM

HISTORY HAS

History has been defined as the biography of the human race. More correctly, it is a written record of the outworking of the plan of God as, step by step, it progresses toward its ultimate goal in the Kingdom of God.

History has direction. It is not a meaningless succession of happenstance events. Though it may appear as such to the untrained eye, it is not. History has direction. It is going somewhere, and that "somewhere" is the goal of earth's creation. The prophet Isaiah, speaking by divine authority, described that goal in these meaningful words: "For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18).

Because the life of a single individual is so brief and the plan of God so vast, it is often difficult for us to perceive its direction, much as a fish swimming in the ocean cannot understand its tides and currents. With our small minds we are able to comprehend only a very small interval of time. But this does not change the purpose of God.

In so much of the record of history, the Creator is forgotten and His purpose overlooked. But though blind humans foolishly disregard their Creator and Sustainer, He who gives them everything they have, yet all the visible—and invisible—creation proclaims His existence. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). All is His, all is subject to His will, all is serving His purposes, even though mankind for the most part has rejected God's authority, preferring to pursue its own dastardly course to destruction. Human negligence notwithstanding, *history has meaning.*

God is directing and controlling. This does not mean that He is intervening in every great and small event. But He is watching, so that nothing interferes with His purposes. How can we know?

At the present time, our only knowledge of His work comes from the Bible, the written Word which He has provided to tell us what He is doing. But it is a great source of information, revealing all we need to know. As someone has said, "The Bible is a window in this prison world through which we may look into eternity." Through the Bible we can discover the plan of God. Though it has borne many attacks, it has emerged unscathed, an anvil that has worn out many hammers. Though men and nations change, God's Word stands unshaken, and we today can rely on it just as firmly as could the believers of the second or third century.

DIRECTION



God does not mean for us to wander in darkness or ignorance. He has given us a way of escape. He has prepared a "great salvation" for all who faithfully heed the warnings and commandments He has written.

And when the time is right, God will act. "He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20-21).

This is God's way of working. He lets events take their course for a period of time, then when conditions suit His need He intervenes. This happened when He sent Christ, as a babe born of the family of David according to prophecy. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4). Since that time He has allowed nearly two thousand years to elapse, while men and nations pursue their courses of life without consulting Him. But very soon He shall intervene again, this time dramatically, forcefully, and all the world will know. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him" (Rev. 1:7).

Someone may ask, "If God is really in control of events, how do we explain the evil in the world?" God is not the author of evil, but the time has not yet come for Him to act. When it does arrive, all the forces of evil will be conquered. Jesus Christ is coming with authority to put down *all* that opposes Him, and to inaugurate a kingdom of righteousness and peace that will extend from "sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Ps. 72:8) and all iniquity shall "stop her mouth" (Ps. 107:42).

The major problems that confront the world today—grinding poverty, unbalanced economies, energy shortages, rising crime, dissipating morals, frustration and despair—all will be solved with the advent of Christ when He comes to make "all things new" (Rev. 21:3-5).

We are not creatures of chance. We are not in the struggle alone. Existence has meaning because God is at the helm. Silently, ceaselessly He "standeth in the shadows keeping watch above his own," and in due time He will act. God's ways of working and His wisdom are beyond our fathoming, but we know that He is in control. History has direction and destination. All that we can do is stand in awe of God's power and watch and pray, while we busy ourselves getting ready, bringing our lives to fit His pattern. Then, when the goal of history is realized, we can have part in the new creation which will continue ages upon ages, world without end.

Indeed, history *does* have direction.

Opportunities Unlimited

The Glory of God's Second Chance

Part 6: *The Story of John*

*From unpromising and even hopeless beginnings, men have risen and may yet rise to the heights of character and achievement, by the power of faith and the help of the Eternal.
"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (Eccl. 7:8).*

Scene 1: *Grief and Remorse*

Introduction

The black depths of despair come to every life soon or late, seldom or often, but they come. Shattered hopes and knowledge of failure plunge one very deep. The higher and more worthy the hopes, the deeper the despair that comes with disappointment. But the situation entirely without hope is rare indeed. Tomorrow's dawn is always anticipated. And when that dawn is the promise of God Almighty, it can be depended on.

When failure seems to be our portion, let us take courage. God never fails His own. If we serve Him faithfully, we cannot fail permanently.

So near to ideal is the tradition about the apostle John that we are inclined to think of him as almost another species, too good for this world, far beyond our reach, utterly unlike the very human Peter.

Yet the known facts do not justify this picture. John, too, had his troubles. Not for nothing did Jesus name him a "son of thunder." Unlawful pride and ambition more than once led him into transgression; a somewhat vindictive nature earned him more than one sharp rebuke.

John, too, slept in Gethsemane; he, too, ran for his life when his Lord was taken. Yet even these grave lapses were forgiven, by the grace of God's Second Chance.

Jesus had the rare ability, as in the case of Peter, to see what a man might become, in spite of what he was. Knowing the triumph yet future, He forgave the failures of the present.

John is often called the "disciple whom Jesus loved," and it may well be so. Jesus' love was never misdirected, and it was not by chance or caprice that John became one of the "inner circle." The makings of a great man were there, ready to be developed by the storms of life's racking experiences and the sunshine of an understanding love.

John, too, needed the second chance; and he, too, made the most of it.

It is the close of the black day of the Crucifixion. John, in utter despair, faces a bleak future with only his brother James to comfort him.

But, "better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." The one ray of hope visible is that of being needed.

Characters:

John apostle of Jesus
James brother of John, also apostle

Narrator:

It is night, in the simple furnished home of Zebedee's sons. A lamp burns overhead. The two brothers sit at a table in deep dejection, it being the evening after the Crucifixion.

John: And so—He's dead. It's all over.

James: Yes, it's all over. I never thought it would end like this.

John: How *bright* our hopes were all those three years—those three wonderful years. We believed He was the Messiah, the King. James, He *must* have been. He would not deceive us. But why did it have to end like this?

James: I don't know, Brother. I cannot think clearly; all my life, like yours, is in ruins. We loved Him so...The ways of God are strange. We knew He was a teacher sent from God, but—

John: When we saw Lazarus come forth from the tomb, it seemed certain that the Kingdom was at hand.

James: Who could fail to believe, in the presence of such mighty power? But what was the end of it all? He saved others; Himself He could not save.

John: How He suffered!—even though it was cut short by death. [arises and walks about in abject despair] Would that I could have borne His sufferings for Him! Would that I could have died in His place! Life is unbearable without Him...But in my heart I know I am not worthy to suffer in His place.

James: Why do you say that, Brother John?

John: Why? *None* of us are worthy—because we forsook Him in the hour of His need, because we ran away, *afraid* of what man could do to us. [disgustingly] We will bear the shame of it to the end of our days!

James: He must have forgiven you. It was a great honor He gave you today, the care of His mother.

John: Too great. I am unworthy. What can I say to her? How can I console her—*coward* that I was?

James: Now, John, you must control yourself. After what we have been through, we can't help feeling let down, and the future looks black. But tomorrow will come.

John: Will it?

James: Yes, Brother, you can't hold back the dawn. Tomorrow will surely come, and—who knows—it may be better.

John: Or worse.

James: The future is in the hands of God. It is for us to adjust ourselves to His plan. Life must go on.

John: How *can* it go on, James? What is there to live for?

James: You have much to live for. I am satisfied that God still has a great work for you, somehow, somewhere. You have Mary, the Lord's mother.

And you have me. I'm depending on you, Brother. You can't quit.

John: Promise me, James, that if anything happens to me, you will take good care of her.

James: Of course I will. But nothing's going to happen to you. Tomorrow you will—

John: [with feeling] Tomorrow! How can there be a tomorrow for me? I, who was the beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ, I, who slept while He prayed in His agony, and ran away when His enemies came to take Him. I have *failed*. How can the Eternal ever trust me again? What is there left—

[A bell tinkles softly in inner room. They rise]

James: It is Mary. Go, John; she needs you. Try to help her.

[John goes through door, his head up, brought back to life by the simple fact of being needed.]

Scene 2: Ecstatic Experience

Narrator:

A man who failed and ran away was used of God to bring to us the most hopeful book in the Bible, Revelation, a preview of the future. But he stopped running and faced up to his failure.

The last historical glimpse we have of John as an apostle is that of coadministrator in the growing church of Jerusalem, at the time of the first general conference.

Tradition, probably reliable in most points, gives him a long and eventful life. There is little doubt that at some time he left Jerusalem and settled in Ephesus. In the persecution under Domitian he is said to have been taken to Rome. He is then sent to labor in the mines of Patmos, where we now see him.

If indeed, as we believe, the Revelator of Patmos is the same individual as John the apostle, the glorious privilege of being the vehicle of the Eternal's last message to humanity is a fitting reward for a long life of outstanding service.

Revelation is also the most misunderstood book in the Bible, officially held to be a book of mystery and shunned by many. Its claim is simple.

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein..." (1:3). Only investigation, understanding and doing can make us eligible for God's promised blessings.

Characters:

John now-aged apostle
Two Angels
Voices

Narrator:

John is an old man, on Patmos. There are thunder-crashes, flashes of variegated colors simulating

celestial radiance, suggesting a state of ecstatic experience as the Revelator receives the divine Message.

Voice: I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia...[John turns and beholds, and after a long, rapturous look, he kneels and bows his head].

Voice: Fear not; I am the first and the last. I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

[He writes at table...Angel appears]

Angel 1: Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

John: [standing and looking into distance] And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

[Musical background]

And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth.

These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

[With thunder or appropriate music]

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice,

Voice: Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come.

[Second Angel appears. Turbulent music, crashing, wailing]

Angel 2: Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

Voices: [in concert off-stage, to joyful music] Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

Angel 1: And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Angel 2: Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[John falls at feet of angel]

Angel 2: [raising him up] See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God.

[There is a long, crescendo of rolling thunder ending with a crash and rapturous musical sounds, as John speaks in a spirit of awe and great wonderment]

There is no virtue in not doing
what you are not tempted to do.
There is virtue in not doing what
you can do and what you feel an
inclination to do.

John: And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand.

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them, and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

[There is a crescendo of majestic music, as the three on stage gaze raptly at a thrilling sight. Music softens, but continues as background.]

John: And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,

Voice: Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be

his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.

Voice 2: BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW
...WRITE, FOR THESE WORDS ARE TRUE
AND FAITHFUL.

.....

Greater characters than we have needed God's second chance and His *opportunities unlimited* to rise from the depths of failure to heights of glorious achievement.

If divine forgiveness be so vast and boundless, how can human forgiveness be so dwarfed and shrivelled? If we have needed God's forgiveness and His second chance, shall we not grant it to our fellow men? "Shall I forgive my brother until seven times?" queried the seemingly big-hearted Peter.

"Until seventy times seven," replied the greater-hearted Master!

The End

TALL THINKING

A doctor, lecturing on maintaining health, stressed tallness: "For better health, sit tall, stand tall, and think tall."

We readily can understand how to sit tall and stand tall. But tall thinking may require some thought.

Too often our thinking becomes dwarfed. We are concerned with petty interests, insignificant happenings, the opinions of people more than God's standard of holiness. If we would produce a superior inner character, we must reach for the heights.

There is nothing in the world that can prevent our elevating our thinking if we are determined to do it. It was by tall thinking that the tallest of good men reached the lofty standard of perfection, and

we are commanded to grow to His stature, even "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

We have a sample of His type of thinking in His ready response to the tempter, "It is written." The law of God was constantly on His mind, and immediately available for application. Even in the hour of testing He would not yield to inferior thinking.

If we look closely at ourselves, we will find that most of our problems are caused by small thinking. If impatience rules our minds, there is no tall thinking there. In the words of Prov. 14 :7 (Moffatt), we are advised, "Withdraw from an impatient man; you will not find one word of sense in him."

Our thinking is spiritually subnormal when we allow pride to control us—who could think tall about God and not feel very small! Pride puffs us up to an artificial height which is doomed to catastrophe (Prov. 16 :18).

Jealousy, sensitiveness and selfishness all stem from low rate thinking. Stubbornness narrows and constricts our thinking so that we cannot reach higher levels. A root of bitterness in our heart blights our thoughts and does untold harm.

The Benefits Of Tall Thinking

Tall thinking does away with useless regrets of the past failures. We cannot think tall, and think in the past. The present is our opportunity for reaching higher. We can encourage ourselves toward holiness by the thoughts we entertain.

Our thoughts will grow tall if we center them on God's promises. Given sufficient space in which to grow, their grandeur will overshadow everything of the present and stimulate our minds to grow.

Let us nourish and train our thoughts to grow tall.

Paul was a tall thinker. His mind was engrossed in the hope of

Nourish and train your thoughts to grow tall.

Nothing in the world can prevent our elevating our thinking if we are determined to do it.

becoming part of God's new creation, and he urged us to do likewise so we would be rooted and grounded in the faith, and know the fullness of God. This is his advice: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Phil. 4:8, NIV).

It is said that the taller a tree grows, the deeper it sends its roots to stay it in time of storm. The person who thinks lofty thoughts has deep roots of character. He is not unduly concerned about the trivia of life. His conversation edifies, his presence inspires and lifts.

Growing children often will stand on their tiptoes to make themselves appear as tall as possible, and are thrilled at each new inch. Let us copy this enthusiasm and measure ourselves by the tallest, even the Pattern God gave us in our Lord Jesus Christ, and see how tall we can grow.

It all depends on how tall we think. MM

When You Are Tempted

(Continued from page 11)

ble plan in avoiding accidents. Where there is a point of danger—a sharp curve, a steep descent, a blind driveway, a deer crossing, a narrow place in the pavement, even a bump—they post a sign. How much greater reason have we to mark the way *we* travel, so that we can avoid the pitfalls into which we have fallen before. This was the principle expressed by the prophet Jeremiah: "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps" (Jer. 31:21). In other words, mark the place where you have fallen, so you will not stumble there again. Failure to place such markers along our way where we have sinned is, in reality, planning to sin again.

7: Seek and Depend on Help from God

Above all we need to learn to seek and depend upon the help of God, who has mercifully promised to help us. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (II Pet. 2:9). He has not planned that we should fight alone. He is near, and has promised to stand by faithfully, to provide a way of escape whenever the test becomes too great.

No small thing is this matter of help from God. This is why the apostle Paul says that we are "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37). How is this possible? By meeting the temptation not on our own but *with Him*. And there is One standing near who knows all about temptation, who was tempted in every point as we are, and since "he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). What gracious assurance!

God has not left us to fight alone. If we seek it, we can have His aid and interest in everything. Think we that He would help His people in *other* ages and not in *ours*? Never! The God who lived in Moses' time—or Daniel's, or Samuel's, or Peter's, or Paul's—is just the same today!

The closer we live to God, the more we learn to think His thoughts, share His interests, cherish His opinions of right and wrong, the stronger we will be against temptation. In fact, if we are dwelling in fellowship with God and the tempter comes knocking, the tempter will withdraw immediately—he is not prepared to contend against God!

One way or another, we *can* win against temptation, and, God helping us, we shall! MM

Wise is the person who knows the difference between opportunity and temptation. Opportunity knocks. Temptation only needs to stand outside and whistle!

Using Our Opportunities

What a sacred trust from God is the gospel that saves. But if we fail to apply its teachings to our everyday lives we will bring ourselves into disfavor with God and will be denied the pleasure of fellowship with the good and faithful of all ages.

Let us prize the favor of so good a God, who from His high estate has looked upon us lowly mortals and has called us to work in His vineyard, and given us the opportunity to gain eternal life on condition that we make the most of our opportunities.

The prophets of old used their opportunities to the utmost. Even though many times ill-treated, they persistently tried to live in peace, taking the evil given them and repaying with good. Jeremiah loved God. Again and again he confronted the Jewish nation with messages from God, that they might turn away from their own ways and accept God's superior ways of thinking and living, but all in vain. God gave them the opportunity to change if they would, but they replied, "We will not"—we will not hearken, we will not listen, we will not obey. Their unrelenting stubbornness was their ruin.

In despising His prophets, they despised God. In choosing their own perverted ways they disqualified themselves for the friendship of God.

Have we not often done the same? Still the mercy of God waits patiently. But it will not always wait. Some opportunity will be our last.

New Jersey

L. K.

A Friend of God

The greatest of all honors is to be a "friend of God." And the greatest shame is to be counted an enemy. Being a friend of the world puts us on the side of the enemies of God. We cannot serve God and mammon. God is a jealous God and He expects our wholehearted devotion.

There are many tragic accounts in the Word of God of those who became friendly with the world only to suffer a downfall: Solomon, and Demas come to mind. They were weak and gave in to their lower natures, their own fleshly desires, exchanging the wonderful gift of eternal life for a fleeting moment of pleasure.

How many times has it been said, "Self is our greatest enemy." The only way to be acceptable to God is to do what He bids us do, never letting self get in the way. We must push aside all our own ways, thoughts, and actions, and become a completely new person, for we must become new creatures.

We need to take heed and realize how precious time is. With each tick of the clock opportunities pass never to be recaptured. We must work out our salvation now, while we're able and possess all our faculties. No one can do this for us; it is a personal matter. The angels are recording every aspect of our lives.

When the reckoning day arrives, will it be said of us that we were a friend of God?

Georgia

B. P.

Keep the Prize in View

We need to be reminded of what we must do to gain the wonderful blessings God has promised. Peter saw the necessity of refreshing the memory of the people of God although he knew they were well grounded in the faith. He did not hesitate to keep reminding them again and again, for he wanted them to remember these things after he was gone. We also must remember to do the same "These things" before we can be partakers of God's exceeding, great and precious promises.

If we would keep this wonderful prize in view, we would work harder to obtain it. It seems we could never forget it, for it is so easy to get engrossed in temporal things and foolishly fail to take time to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

It is what we are within that will decide our fate. This great prize can indeed be ours if we lay up God's Word in our heart and work to keep ourselves pure within.

There is so much trouble in the world that even people who do not know God's plan realize that something must happen soon. But we who are aware of Bible prophecy for these last days should feel the urgency of being prepared. Let us look to our ways and hasten to accomplish that which we have set out to do, for every day is bringing us nearer to the time when our probation will be over.

Let us make every effort to make our calling and election sure and to obey the command of Jesus to "watch".

South Wales

R. B.

Self-Denial Week

This year, the week of February 5 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.

The practice of self-denial is a Bible principle. As disciples of Christ, we must be disciplined, and if we cannot practice self-control in the physical,

how shall we ever be able to succeed in things spiritual, the things that pertain to our eternal welfare?

God does not want ascetics; there is no virtue in mere denial. There is no credit in self-imposed discipline. The virtue is in the strength of character behind it. God wants men and women who have inner strength, who are self-controlled, who can say "No" on the lower level so that they may be able someday to say "Yes" on the higher.

Let us strive harder to be more and more like Christ in *all* things, even in denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily, and following Him (Luke 9:23). This was the command of our Master; let us follow all the way.

Confess and Forsake

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13)

It is not true, say the naturalists, that the ostrich buries his head in the sand and imagines he is concealed. If it were, ostrich hunting would be a tame affair and the species long ago extinct. Possibly an unusually stupid individual did such a thing once upon a time, giving rise to the legend.

But the reputed action of the bird is so thoroughly characteristic of a familiar trait in human nature that the myth survives among our figures of speech. For we have all, without exception, been "ostriches" in our efforts to conceal our shortcomings, and with about as much success.

We may deceive ourselves—that is easy. All we have to do is to shut our eyes, so to speak, and we can imagine anything. Man is a *rationalizing* being, rather than a *rational* one, and seldom knows—at least, to the point of acknowledgment—the real motives underlying most of his acts. In order to "save face" with himself, he selects a reason which places him in the most favorable light, and proceeds to convince himself of its genuineness. A dispassionate, completely objective appraisal of one's own motives is one of the most difficult tasks in the world.

We may also deceive our fellowmen in regard to our failings—all of them some of the time and some of them all of the time, as Lincoln said—but the deception is seldom as successful as we imagine. Besides, it involves us in an endless sequence of embarrassing complications. All in all it would be far less of a strain to avoid the transgression in the first place, if we but thought so.

But all these cheap dissimulations, whether deliberate, habitual or unconscious, are a waste of time and effort, for one colossal fact stands like a mountain athwart our crooked path—we *cannot* deceive God. And, after all, that is the only thing

that matters, if we are really in earnest.

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit?" cried the Psalmist, pursued by dark memories of an unsuccessful attempt to conceal a darker sin, "or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Psalm 139:7, 11, 12, 3, 4).

Ezekiel the upright warned a people unusually prone to double dealing: "Thus saith the Lord; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (11:5).

Those who cover their tracks seldom prosper in this world, and in the Day of Judgment, when the secrets of the heart are revealed and the true motives of our every action stand naked before our Judge, instead of prosperity there will be grief and desperate sorrow (Isa. 17:10-11). Since "the eyes of the Lord are in every place" (Prov. 15:3), since He knows our every thought, word and action, what profit shall we find in concealing temporarily from our associates? Why will we allow a "proud look" to lead to "a lying tongue" (Prov. 6:17) in a vain—and shameful—attempt to bolster our credit with mere mortals? It isn't worth it. It is far more sensible, and, as we said before, in the long run simpler and easier to wash our "face" instead of trying to save it.

This washing is a twofold process, and its elements are *confession and forsaking*. The second is impossible without the first, and the first is worthless without the second. There has been a

great deal of confessing done in the religious world since the founding of the post-apostolic church, but very little forsaking—which is by far the “bigger half.”

Since we have all sinned, and the commandment is definite that we must confess our sins, the question presents itself, To whom are we to confess? Well, that depends upon the nature of the transgression. The confessional, as practiced by the formal churches, is thoroughly unscriptural, being based upon the false doctrine of a succession of Apostles with delegated power to forgive sins. As it seems to work out in actual practice, it is an endless round of sin and confess, sin and confess, go and sin some more, always hoping that the end of the way will find you in a position to make one last confession and receive final absolution.

Nevertheless, in spite of its illegitimacy and its abuses, the institution of auricular confession fulfills a deep psychological need; and while our secret sins and our struggles with self may be confessed privately to our Heavenly Father, we shall often find it helpful to “talk it out” with a trusted spiritual advisor, and then make a new start with a lighter heart. The personal counselor is as important to the health of the soul as the physician to the body, and more so. It goes without say-

ing that an injury to another must be acknowledged to him or her personally, and that flagrant public offenses require public repentance.

It is far preferable, of course, not to sin, and that is the peak to which we must attain; but all of us have offended against Divine law in the past, even after knowing its requirements. But the God who enacted that Law and who knows our frame, remembering that we are dust, has decreed in His mercy that the old score need not stand against us. From the beginning of the plan of salvation, the hope of mankind has been the forgiveness of sins. It requires no penalty, no bloody sacrifice of an innocent man, to wipe out the dark record of the past, but only a reformation of our lives, a turning away from every evil way and the performance of all good works.

The cleansing formula is given by Isaiah (1:16 - 20): “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well.” Then, on these conditions and no other, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” MM

Great God, our Creator and our Father,

Thank You for the gift of life.

Thank You for the gift of work.

Thank You for the skill of hand,

for accuracy of eye and mind and brain

that make me able to do that which is useful.

Thank You for the friends and comrades You have given me,

for those in whose company joys are doubled,

and in whose presence sorrow and pain are soothed.

Help me today to be so cheerful

that my life may make others brighter.

Help me today to be so true

that I may be strength to those who would be tempted.

Grant that I may lose my anxieties

in the certainty that You are,

and that Your care for Your own never fails. Amen.

God, Evil and Free Choice

“An article in the February 1988 issue of the Megiddo Message entitled ‘Does God Create Evil?’ brings up another question. The article is an explanation of Isa. 45:7. The explanation of the verse is reasonable and harmonious with other texts, and I accept it. But please explain other texts. For instance, ‘Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?’ (Lam. 3:38); as well as, ‘Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?’ (Amos. 3:6).”

Were we to accept the idea that God is the author of evil, that He is responsible for sin and transgression, we would find ourselves believing in predestination, an arrangement that would make void His contract with the human race which allows them the freedom to choose their course of action, good or ill. Freedom of choice is fundamental to God's dealings with humankind (Josh. 24:15). He is seeking those who will choose the best; if our choices were predetermined, He would be grossly unfair in rewarding good or punishing evil, both of which He has promised to do.

In the ancient Law given to Moses, God set before them two alternatives: life and good, and death and evil (Deut. 30:15). The choice was theirs. The credit for doing good was theirs if they obeyed; the blame for doing evil was theirs if that was their choice, and they were rewarded accordingly.

The book of James tells us that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). God is not the author of evil. All sin and evil is of human devising.

How then are we to understand such passages as those in question?

The Bible uses the word “evil” with more than one meaning, just as many words in our English language today have different meanings. The

original word translated “evil” in our Common Version has among its meanings “adversity, affliction, bad, calamity, distress, sorrow, trouble,” as well as the commonly understood meaning of disobedience or sin. It is derived from the Hebrew word *rawah*, meaning “to spoil, to make good for nothing, to entreat, to do harm, hurt, ill, punish” (definitions from *Strong's Analytical Concordance*).

The choice between doing good and doing evil is man's solemn responsibility. We can do wrong if we choose, but God reserves the sovereign right to punish by sending “evil” upon us for our disobedience.

This is the picture in Amos 3. Israel was a nation especially favored of God, and special favor brings special responsibility. In verse 1 the Prophet, speaking for God, addresses the “children of Israel” as “the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (3:1-2).

Then the Prophet continues to remind Israel of how highly she has been favored, also of her waywardness, and the repeated warnings she has spurned. Verse 6 records one more warning of impending punishment if they continue to do evil. This is the thought in the passage as translated in the *New English Bible*: “If a trumpet sounds the alarm, are not the people scared? If disaster falls on a city, has not the Lord been at work?” And in a footnote we read, “If there is evil in a city, will not the Lord act?” Indeed He *will* act; this was the whole purpose of Amos' message, to warn them so that punishment could be averted. God will not always let evil go unpunished where men and women are responsible for doing good and have had the opportunity to do right.

The same thought appears in the Scofield Bible (marginal reading): “Shall there be evil in a city, and shall not the Lord do somewhat?”

The next verse in the chapter reinforces this point. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." Or as it is translated in the Torah, "Indeed, my Lord God does nothing without having revealed his purpose to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). The Prophet is saying that God will punish, He will take action; but He will first warn, He will first make known His intentions to His servants the prophets.

A footnote in the New Catholic Version is also helpful. "He speaks of the evil of punishments of war, famine, pestilence, desolation, etc., but not of the evil of sin, of which God is not the author."

The thought in Lamentations 3:38 is similar. "Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" The Lord can recompense with either blessing or ill, according to one's just deserts. And when He does, says Jeremiah, what right has any man to complain when he is being punished for sin.

This thought is even clearer in the Moffatt Translation of this text: "Are not weal and woe alike decreed by the Most High? Then why should mortal men complain, when they are punished for their sins?" The "evil" that proceeds from the Most High is not sin but punishment for sin, a legal enforcement of His law, punishment for the violation of His orders which a covenant people have agreed to obey.

The Hebrew nation had been established by God and were under covenant to obey His laws. When they were faithful, they prospered; when they disobeyed, they suffered the consequences.

This same "evil" is the punishment which the prophet Jeremiah said the Lord was framing against His people for their sins (Jer. 18:11). And accompanying the threat of judgment is the means by which it may be averted. "Return ye now everyone from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good" (Jer. 18:11). This text shows clearly that the "evil" was punishment for sin, and could have been avoided.

The same thought is repeated by the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 6, verse 19: "Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it." The "evil" that He would bring upon the people was to be the direct result of their misconduct, it would be "even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it."

• Is Jesus the Messiah?

"Christianity has always tried to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. However, the Messiah comes in 'the last days,' not 2,000 years ago.

"The Messiah really has many titles, including 'Elijah', the 'herald' of God who was promised to come in 'the last days.'

"Elijah is the herald of God, not of Jesus. Elijah, the 'one like Moses', the 'chosen one', Israel etc., becomes the 'Messiah' to the Jews and 'light' to the Gentiles, as recorded in Isaiah 11. It will be God's Kingdom, not Jesus'."

From the force of Bible evidence, we have to disagree completely with your stance.

The Bible leaves no question that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The title "Christ" means "the anointed, i.e., the Messiah" (*Strong's Analytical Concordance*), a term derived from the practice of consecrating a priest by anointing with oil.

What did the apostles believe? We have the testimony of Simon Peter, "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69). When some question arose as to Jesus' true identity, we read that some said that He was John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah or "one of the prophets." Jesus asked His disciples directly, "Whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:13-16).

On another occasion, when Jesus had stilled the waves and rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith, the disciples responded, "and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14:30-33).

Not only the Apostles but other believers confirmed this fact. At the time of Lazarus' death, Martha said to Jesus, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God" (John 11:27)—and even before He had raised her brother from the dead. John the Baptist said of himself that he was "not the Christ," but that one was to come after him who would indeed be the Messiah (John 1:30), and who was willing to testify and "bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). The apostle John records that his purpose in writing his gospel was "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

Jesus came as the Messiah, the Christ nearly 2,000 years ago; but the greatest emphasis of the Bible is on His *second* coming. The prophets of Israel clearly forecast *two* comings of Christ, not one in "the last days." For example, the words of the prophet Isaiah: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," and immediately the

Prophet telescopes many centuries to say in the next phrase "and the government shall be upon his shoulder...Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:6-7). The first part of the prophecy was fulfilled. The child was born, but the government is not yet upon His shoulders; however it will be, when He returns the second time. This return was the promise of the angels at the time of His ascension: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The book of Hebrews clearly specifies *two* comings: "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time" (Heb. 9:28).

Many of the prophecies of Christ include mention of both His first and His second coming; others mention only His more important second coming. But both were needful in the plan, and should not be overlooked. Christ came the first time to show us the perfect Example of the life that pleases God, at the same time qualifying Himself for the great work God had prepared for Him. He came the first time learning "obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8-9), learning to "refuse the evil and choose the good" (Isa. 7:15). He is coming again the second time as King, Conqueror, and Eternal Sovereign of this earth. When

Pilate at the time of His trial questioned Him, "Art thou a king?" Jesus testified, "Certainly I am a king. This is why I was born, this is why I came into the world, to bear testimony to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37, Moffatt).

Your statement that "It will be God's Kingdom not Jesus" seems irrelevant. The Bible frequently uses the term "Kingdom of God" to refer to the Kingdom over which Christ will rule (see Matt. 6:33; Mark 1:14; Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:23. But also Matt. 13:41; Matt. 16:28; Matt. 12:26; John 18:36, which clearly ascribe the Kingdom to Christ).

When Christ returns, the entire earth will come under the dominion of Christ, who is God's authorized King.

You say also that "Elijah is the herald of God, not of Jesus." We know of no passage in the Bible which says that the Messiah was called "Elijah or the herald of God." Nor do we read anywhere that Elijah was to be the "herald of God, not of Jesus." Elijah the prophet will be the herald to come before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5), i.e., His second advent. All the prophecies for the last days focus upon the second advent of Christ, who will be "Emmanuel, God with us" (Matt. 1:23), but not the Eternal Creator.

Your statement that "Israel...becomes the 'Messiah' to the Jews and 'Light' to the Gentiles, as recorded in Isaiah 11," is not factual. Isaiah 11 prophesies of a *person*, not a nation. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the lord shall rest upon him" (vs. 1-2), and the Prophet goes on to describe the outstanding qualifications of this great ruler-to-be. He would be "of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth:...and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins" (vs. 3-5). The final result will be that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (v. 9).

We see no reason to apply these prophecies to the nation of Israel, or any one other than the promised Messiah. They clearly describe the victorious reign of Christ when He returns as King of the whole earth. This same righteous reign is described in numerous places in the Bible (see Isa. 32:17-18; Ps. 72:6-8; Dan. 7:27; Zech. 14:1-9; Rev. 19:11-16, etc).

MM

Announcement

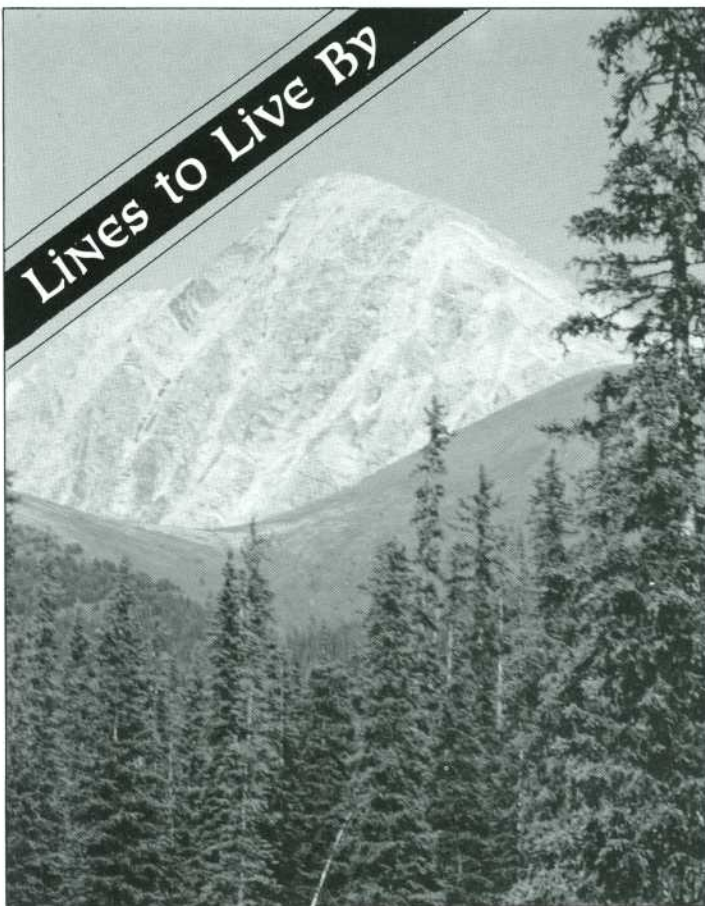
The New Year is coming, this year on Thursday evening, April 6, Bible time being counted from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32).

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 Tuesday evening, April 18) we will commemorate the anniversary of our Lord's Supper, and the morning of April 21 (Abib 15) will be observed as the anniversary of Christ's triumph over death and the grave.

Pentecost falls on June 9.



Looking ahead is a good way to keep from falling behind.

Self-discipline is one of the foundation stones of character.

A beautiful heart more than offsets the handicap of a homely face.

The best way to get rid of a bad habit is to drop it.

The things that count most in life are the things that can't be counted.

Plant patience in the garden of your soul; the roots may be bitter, but the fruits are sweet.

Good Company Is Safest!

It has been said that we are known by the company we keep. Because we grow to be like those we associate with, the company we keep is very important—it shows where our love is.

He who loves Christ will seek the company of the good, of those of like faith. In Acts 4 we are told that the apostles, "being let go, . . . went to their own company." It was the natural and right thing to do. They needed the support and love of their brethren. Good company is safe company. We are not tempted to do wrong when with the right people.

At some time in our life most of us have no doubt seen a cat creeping from bush to bush in the garden trying to get near enough to a bird for a spring. The bird was apparently unaware of the cat's presence, but suddenly it flew up into a tree and sat there, with head on one side, looking down at the glaring and disappointed cat. Wise bird! It put itself on a higher level where its old enemy could not reach it.

When we do what we can, we put ourselves on a level where temptation cannot get at us.

—Contributed

The High Price of Neglect

Sin thrives on simple neglect. "Little sins" grow into great problems.

A woman noticed a few bees buzzing around the attic of her home, but thought nothing about it. During the summer months, the bees continued to fly in and out of the attic vent, but still the woman was unconcerned.

Eventually, the whole attic became a beehive, where thousands of bees accumulated hundreds of pounds of honey. One day the ceiling of the second floor bedroom caved in under the weight of the honey.

What is the lesson? It is the price of neglect.

The same is true of sin. The thoughtless word, the unkind feeling, the spiteful attitude may seem so small and insignificant that it is scarcely worthy of notice. But let it alone and it will spell disaster to the spiritual structure.

Why? Because little sins do not stay little. They grow, and grow, until eventually they cause serious trouble and ruin.

Big sins do not get big over night. But neglect and inattention to spiritual disciplines foster their growth. A little indifference, a little unconcern, a little hatred, a little inattention to devotion or duty along with a little less diligence or concern in prayer, and the way is open for sin to establish a foothold that soon becomes a beachhead.

Here is the serious danger of sin, that it begins

so small—a thought now and then, a simple act, a compromise here and there, a word ill-spoken. The sin enters, and moves like a giant force through the heart and mind, claiming its victim.

We are told that the mighty Amazon begins as a tiny trickle from an Andes' glacier. But as the Amazon surges across the parched wilderness, hundreds of tributaries pour their waters into it. Torrential rains swell the flood, until the Amazon is no longer a river but a moving sea that drains nearly half of South America, so great that by the time it reaches the Atlantic it floods the ocean with its fresh water for up to 100 miles offshore.

In this same way sin grows in us. Bad attitudes, selfish desires, continued neglects, bad habits, poor disciplines—all are tributaries that help make sin a destructive flood.

The lesson? That little things do make a difference. Little sins must be watched, like little snakes, or little termites, or little viruses, or little ants, or any of the small creatures that can mar our lives.

With God's help we can avoid the dreadful consequences of sin. We can pray, we can meditate, we can grow. By watching diligently our inner life and conduct, by requiring a rigid discipline of our thoughts and attitudes we can avoid the terrible consequences of sin. We can save the awful price of neglect—by being diligent.

MM