

# Megiddo Message



MARCH/APRIL, 2004

*For as the earth brings forth its bud,  
As the garden causes the things that  
are sown in it to spring forth,*

*So the Lord God will cause  
righteousness and praise to spring  
forth before all the nations.*

Isaiah 61:11



# WHAT IS TODAY'S LESSON?

**D**o you believe that God helps you by giving you actual daily lessons in Christian living? I do!

Do I mean God actually cares about members of His human family enough to teach them one-on-one? If we look at the Scriptures, the answer must be "yes"! How else could He fulfill His promise to guide and discipline His children? Doesn't the Bible say that God disciplines the one He loves just as a father disciplines his children? (Heb. 12:5-6). And isn't it one of God's promises, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye"* (Psalm 32:8)? Wouldn't God be extremely unkind and unreasonable if He left us to learn on our own without any teaching?

Yes, God has arranged for our teaching. My worry is, how many lessons do I miss while I am preoccupied with my own agenda?!

To make a simple analogy, say there is a spectacular sunset. We miss it until it is gone—because we had our eyes closed, or were looking in another direction. In the same way we can miss what God is doing to help us.

Think of all the skills we need to develop to take on the character likeness of Christ (Rom. 13:13-14); to come to *"the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13); to become *"upright"* (Prov. 2:21), *"pure in heart"* (Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:3), *"meek"* (Matt. 5:5), and filled with all the *"fruits of righteousness"* (Phil. 1:9-11)—we surely need many lessons! And don't we want to take advantage of every lesson? Wouldn't it be sad to reach the end of the term and find we had missed a lot of assignments—simply because we didn't have our eyes open to see them?!

I want to look upon every thing that comes into my life, whether good or bad, as help from God. Yes, I want to see everything that happens in the course of a day as so many priceless learning opportunities.

And when I come to the end of the day, I want to kneel in humble prayer, thanking God for the special attention He gave me today. I want to ask: How well did I do? Did I pass each test? Where do I need to work

harder? Did I do my best? Or do I need to ask His forgiveness for not paying respectful attention? Perhaps I need to ask His forgiveness for not even noticing that golden opportunity!

And what about those awful failures? Did I thank God for forgiving me and giving me one more chance?

And those terribly embarrassing moments—was God perhaps showing me that the root of the problem was my pride? Was I thankful to be humbled, so I could learn to be less self-centered and more God-centered? Did my embarrassing failure give me more understanding for others who fail, and more desire to help them succeed? Did it make me less critical of others and more critical of self, and more determined to conquer that miserable spirit of pride? Or will I stubbornly reject the lesson—and fail again?



*God's "helps"  
are like His  
blessings, more  
than we can  
count!*

Maybe I passed unfavorable judgment on my fellow laborer today. Did I take that opportunity to think of my own shortcomings, where I have failed so many times? Did I think also of the needless hurt I caused him by discouraging him?

And that sharp word I spoke so thoughtlessly. Did I stop to think that God's angel heard—God's angel saw—God's angel recorded my failure?

Will He give me a second chance at that lesson tomorrow? I sincerely hope so!

If we could exercise our minds in this sort of thinking until it becomes second nature, it seems we could overcome our old natures more quickly, just as Christ overcame (Rev. 3:21). Our conscience can help us, but of course, our conscience is useful only as it is rightly guided by a thorough knowledge of God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Who knows how many lessons we miss—and never even realize it! How many lessons we never even recognize because we see them only as troubles, aggravations, irritations—not opportunities!

Somehow I believe God's "helps" are like His blessings, more than we can count!

If we may judge by reading the Bible, God is probably doing a whole lot more to arrange for our training than we BEGIN to realize.

Think of the work that goes into preparing all the lessons for a complete 6-year program of study so that one can become fully qualified in a chosen field. Compare that with the training the heirs of the Kingdom need to develop all the qualities of character God is looking for! Doesn't it seem that a host of circumstances have to be "arranged" to give the candidates all the necessary lessons? If WE had to plan it, I'm sure we'd fall short!

God helping me, I hope this year to not let a single one of these special blessings go by unappreciated because I was not in a frame of mind to receive it!

PS: Wouldn't it be great to do some "lesson planning" for some of our (mortal) brothers and sisters on another planet someday?!! It just might be our assignment one day...if we pass the tests God is giving us today. ♦



# Why the Passion?

Everybody is talking about it! Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of The Christ*, has received wide acceptance and acclaim. "Every time I preach or speak about the cross, the things I saw on the screen will be on my heart and mind," said Billy Graham. "The film is faithful to the Bible's teaching that we are all responsible for Jesus' death, because we have all sinned," Graham continued. "It is our sins that caused His death, not any particular group. No one who views this film's compelling imagery will ever be the same."

Why such enthusiasm? Even writers for magazines that publish accounts of horrible crimes describe *The Passion* as the most gory film ever made. According to a reviewer for the *New York Times*, it is a "technically sophisticated film whose power rises primarily from his [Mel Gibson's] obsession with violence and gore," which has "no context, no true narrative, no spiritual uplift." The violence in it is described with such words as stunning, obsessive, overkill.

Why is the Christian community lauding the film? Is it because it is Biblical? Some critics have analyzed that only about 20% of it comes from the Bible. And the other 80%?

Apparently Mel Gibson drew his inspiration for major portions of the film from a book by a mystic nun named Anne Emmerich. By his own statement, he felt guided to the book, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to the Meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerich*. Gibson claims that like "magic" this book opened up a new world of "amazing images."

Anne Catherine Emmerich was a mystic Catholic nun born in 1774 in Germany, who wrote in her book about her "supernatural visions." Emmerich also claimed to bear the actual, physical wounds of Jesus Christ, called the Catholic Stigmata, where the actual wounds of Christ supernaturally appear on the hands, feet and head....According to Mel Gibson, these "visions"—not the Gospels—became the "supernatural imposed" script and inspiration for the passion.

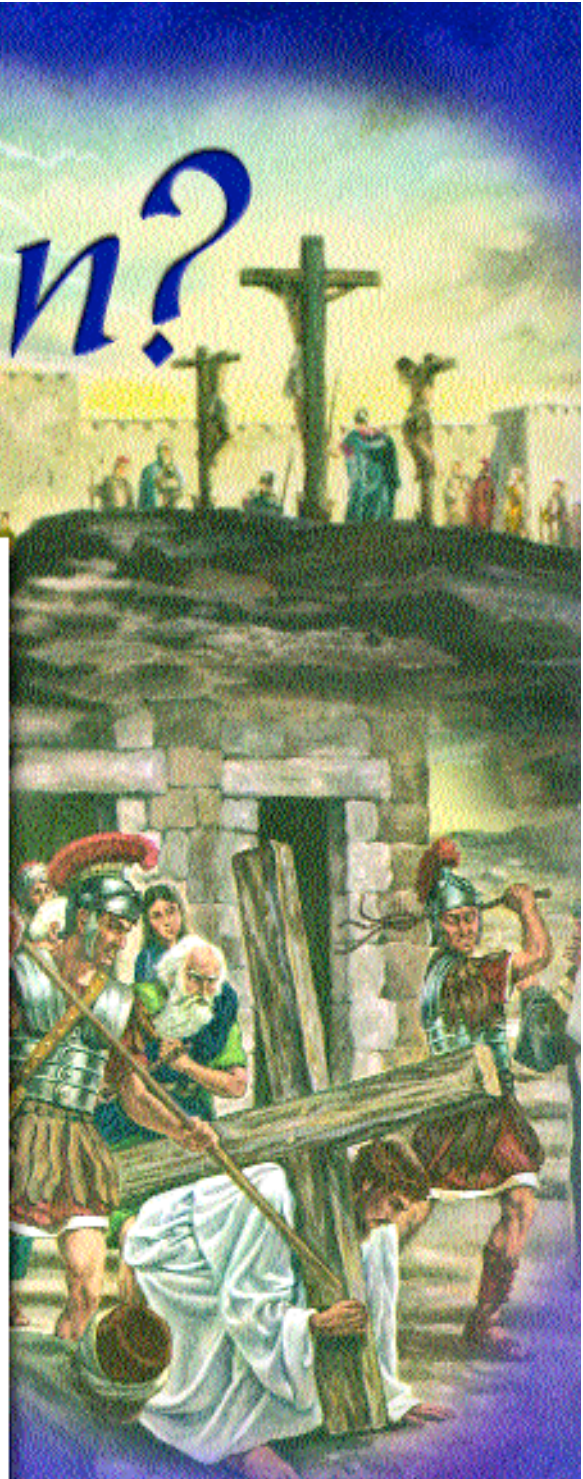
## The Purpose?

Many are seeing the film as a means of drawing unchurched people to Christianity. If a Hollywood production could call attention to Jesus Christ, if it could draw anyone to seek the true Jesus, what He taught and who He really is, we would be grateful. If the film could move one who has grown up in the present culture to seek the God of the Bible, we would be grateful. If it caused any to be more compassionate, more loving, more forgiving, more humble (the hallmark of the true Christian), we would be grateful.

But there is another reason for the enthusiasm. The film focuses on the point that is at the heart of most Christian faith: the death of Jesus Christ as the penalty paid for sin. By emphasizing the torture and cruelty Jesus had to endure, the message of the film is, "Look at what He had to suffer because of my sins."

Is this the core of the Bible teaching? What was the central teaching of Jesus and His Apostles after Him?

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**What Have We Done Today?**

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FRONT COVER: NEW YORK'S APPLE BLOSSOMS. PHOTO BY DAVID AND MARIE

## MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

## WE BELIEVE...

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

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

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

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

## THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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



## WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?

We do not want to undervalue Jesus' suffering and death. It was real. It was terrible. It was the ultimate in cruelty inflicted by heartless, murderous, envious enemies,\* on One who was totally innocent, sinless, the beloved of His Father. Jesus Himself dreaded it, even prayed to His Father if He could be spared from it (Luke 22:42). At the same time, we want to see the crucifixion as Jesus saw it, and as God intended it to be seen.

If Jesus' crucifixion on the cross was to appease the Father's wrath, and so pay the penalty for the world's sins, it would seem He would have been anxious to do so. But no, we hear Him pleading with the Father that He might circumvent this horror of horrors. He asked that this cup be taken from Him not once but three times (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44). Plainly He did not want to go through it.

What was the central point of Jesus' ministry? Was He teaching everywhere that He had come to die for their sins? Let us look at the Scriptures.

### 1) Jesus preached the Kingdom of God.

The kingdom is mentioned more than 100 times in the four gospels.

Throughout His ministry, "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom" (Matt. 4:23). Again we read in Matthew 9:35, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom." The gospel of Mark records the same (Mark 1:14-15). Luke said it again (Luke 8:1). Jesus' Sermon on the Mount focused on those who would be blessed in the Kingdom. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 3:5, 10).

### 2) Jesus taught His disciples to pray for the Kingdom and to seek the Kingdom first.

In His prayer, Jesus focused on the Kingdom. "After this manner pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Here was the core of Jesus' teaching. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). Looking ahead He foresaw the time when "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets" would be gathered "in the kingdom of God...They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:28-29).

When Jesus ate with His disciples at the Last Supper, He said that He would not eat it again "until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16).

### 3) Jesus' disciples preached the Kingdom.

Jesus sent His disciples out "to preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2). When a would-be disciple hesitated to follow Jesus, He said, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).

When the disciples started preaching, we read that Phillip "preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12).

### The Passion in Review

Comments from many parts of the Christian community have been strongly positive. Says one religious reviewer, "Never in history has a movie so captured the attention and admiration of the Christian community. No movie, no movement, no sermon, no revival, no event—nothing in modern history has caused such a moving among the Christian world."

"I can't stop thinking about it nor can I stop talking about it. I have never seen a film that has so affected my life," says Del Tackett, of Focus On The Family.

Greg Laurie of Harvest Crusades says, "I believe the Passion of the Christ may well be one of the most powerful evangelistic tools of the last hundred years, because you have never seen the story of Jesus portrayed this vividly before."

Jack Hayford calls the film "deeply moving, factually accurate and unprejudiced in its presentation."

Jim West of Faith Television Network says, "'The Passion' is the most graphic, gritty, and gripping depiction of Christ's arrest, trial and execution ever made. As a film, it will become a classic work of art."

Lee Strobel, former atheist and author of "The Case for Christ," says the film will "stun audiences and create an incredible appetite for people to know more about Jesus."

Dr. Robert Schuller describes it as "an accurate account of Jesus' real sufferings for the sins of the whole world."

Archbishop John Foley says, "If they're critical of the film, they will be critical of the Gospel."

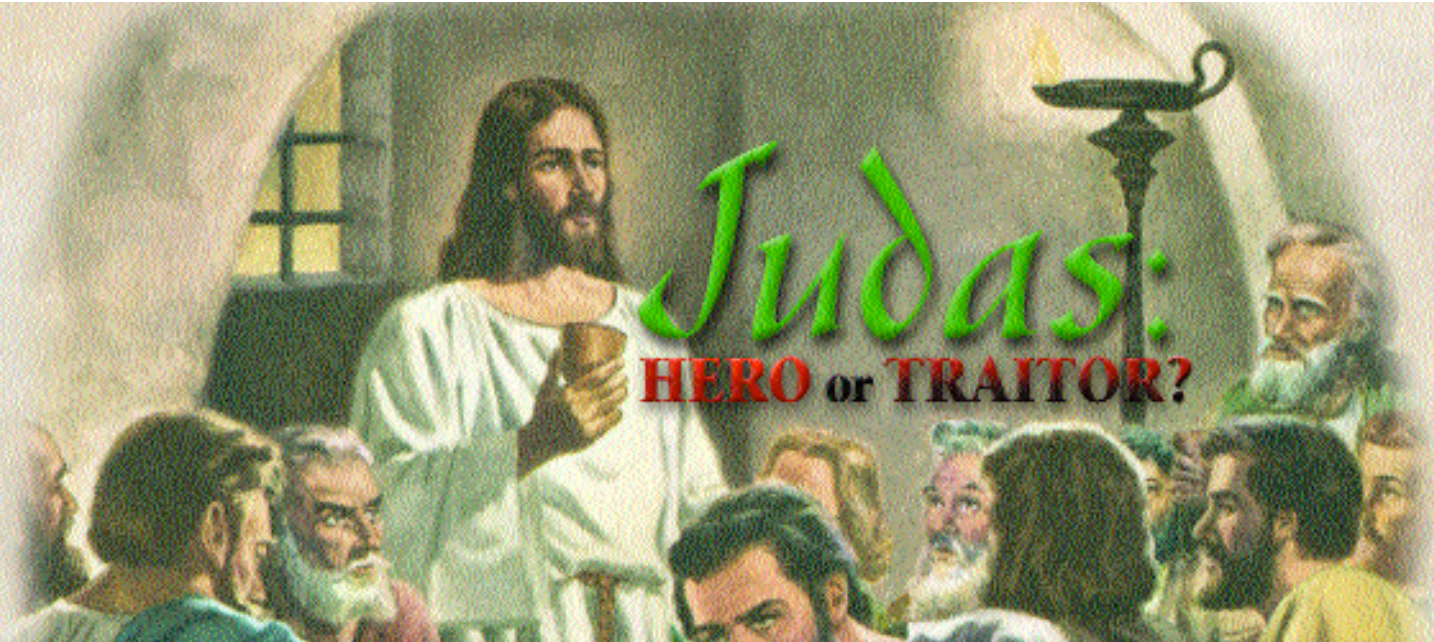
"'The Passion of the Christ' is impacting, compelling, transformational and truthful. It is a powerful retelling of the most important story in history," says Jon R. Wallace, president of the Azusa Pacific University.

Why is the reaction so consistent?

\*We do not blame the Jews for this any more than we blame any other people for the misconduct of some of their religious leaders. (Matt. 20:19, 29:31; Mark 14:43)

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*[This] Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a mob that was armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent out by the leading priests and other leaders of the people.*

*Judas had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I go over and give him the kiss of greeting."*

*So Judas came straight to Jesus. "Greetings, Teacher!" he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.*

*Jesus said, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for." Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him (Matthew 26:47-50 NLT).*

*When Judas, who had betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and other leaders.*

*"I have sinned," he declared, "for I have betrayed an innocent man."*

*"What do we care?" they retorted. "That's your problem."*

*Then Judas threw the money onto the floor of the temple and went out and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5 NLT).*

The night before Jesus chose the Twelve, He spent all night in prayer. Surely He saw higher possibilities in Judas. Like the others, he was willing to forsake all to follow Jesus. And he did follow, for three years. He walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, broke bread with Jesus. Judas saw the dead restored to life. He witnessed the feeding of thousands with a few loaves and fish (John 6), heard Him say to the storm, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). He even went out with the Apostles preaching and performing miracles himself (Matt. 10:5).

As far as we can know from the record, Judas was among those who

heard firsthand the Sermon on the Mount. He was present when Jesus spoke His parables, and as He expounded their meaning to the Twelve. He heard from the lips of the Master that the wicked shall be cast out (surely he did not think he was one of them!), and when Jesus talked of dividing the sheep from the goats, he pictured himself among the sheep. When Jesus answered Peter's query, "Therefore what shall we have?" can we not imagine that he thrilled with the eleven at Jesus' words: "You...will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28)?

The fact that he was treasurer of the group speaks of the confidence the other eleven and Jesus had in him at the beginning. Surely such a position would not have been given to one thought to

Judas. His very name is anathema. Nineteen centuries after his criminal act, his name lives on in infamy. Even the sound of the name sends a chill down the spine. "Iscaiot" means "daggerman," suggesting that he was a Zealot. Did he become frustrated when he saw Jesus was not resisting the Roman authorities? Why would anyone design to betray such a great, good man as Jesus Christ?

Webster's Dictionary defines traitor as "one who betrays under the guise of friendship." Judas was a traitor in every sense of the word. He was the betrayer par excellence. Yet Judas had been among Jesus' closest friends. Certainly he was no traitor when Jesus chose him. The fact that Jesus chose him as one of the Twelve indicates that he had the same potential as the eleven.

be irresponsible or untrustworthy. Matthew, because of his previous experience with money as a tax collector, might have seemed the most likely candidate for the position, yet it fell to Judas. He must have had an aptitude for business and must have appeared honest and devoted at the time, else he would not have been chosen.

But in spite of all he had seen and heard, in spite of all he knew of the Master's teachings, Judas knowingly betrayed his Master. No one asked him to do it. He conceived the idea himself and went to the religious hierarchy to learn what would be in it for him.

### WHY DID JUDAS DO IT?

This question has been asked again and again. Generally speaking, there are three possibilities:



1) *God, not Judas, was responsible*, Judas being only the instrument to accomplish God's purpose. This belief is usually known as predestination, and claims that humans are puppets in God's hands.

2) *Judas was only mildly responsible*—he was weak and could not resist the temptation, fully expecting that Jesus would be forced to declare His kingship, overthrow the Roman rule, and set up His own Kingdom.

3) *Judas was entirely responsible* for both the idea and the act of treachery.

How responsible was Judas for what he did? Let us look closely at each option.

### 1) GOD, NOT JUDAS, WAS RESPONSIBLE

One common idea is that Judas was only playing the part assigned to him by Providence, that Judas could not help behaving as he did.

If so, then why the entire plan of salvation? Why reward the man or woman who does right, if they are not responsible for it? And how unjust to punish anyone for evil-doing if the individual is not responsible for perpetrating evil!

If Judas could not keep himself from the evil deed, we are in effect blaming God. This we cannot do, *"for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone"* (Jas. 1:13). Neither can we say that Judas was chosen to be the traitor, for Judas took responsibility for his own actions when he said, *"I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood"* (Matt. 27:4). Like David, when Judas was confronted with his sin, he said *"I have sinned...I have betrayed the innocent blood."* He knew it was his fault; he did not try to shift the blame to anyone else.

If God was ultimately responsible for Judas' sin, should not God be condemned instead of Judas?

### 2) JUDAS WAS MILDLY RESPONSIBLE

The second possibility of why Judas betrayed Christ states that Judas was only weakly responsible for the transgression, not being humanly strong enough to resist; or that he was seduced by false reasoning for which he was not to blame. This position is equally untenable, for it says that God allows temptations to come upon us that we are unable to resist; thus,

when we are overpowered, God is at fault. The Bible addresses this point directly, saying that we are not tempted beyond what we can resist if we will. In the words of the Apostle, *"God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13).

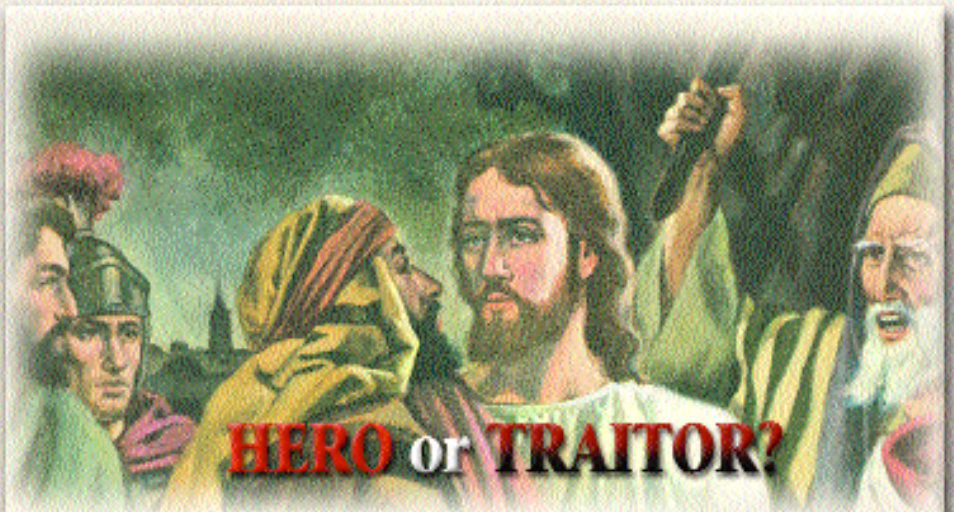
### 3) JUDAS WAS ENTIRELY RESPONSIBLE—AND CONDEMNED

The third position, that Judas was entirely responsible and condemned, is supported by the teaching of the Bible. We choose our destiny as we choose our conduct (Gal. 6:7–8). If we are disobedient and self-seeking, we will receive God's wrath (Rom. 2:8). But if we continue patiently in doing

right, we will be given eternal life (Rom. 2:6–7).

What was God's part in Judas' act? None. God foreknew that Judas would betray Jesus, and in this sense we might say that the betrayal was part of God's plan, but the betrayer was entirely responsible for his actions. God foreknows, but He does not predestinate one to do good and another to do evil.

Jesus showed His understanding of the plan when He said of Himself, *"The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born"* (Mark 14:21). God foreknew, but foreknowledge is not predestination. Judas decided his own destiny when he decided to betray Jesus. As in all cases, man is a free moral agent.



How are we to understand Judas' part in Jesus' death? Should not Judas be the hero rather than the villain, if Judas was performing God's will?

The idea of Judas' responsibility is closely linked to the purpose of Christ's life. If we allow (in accordance with the average church) that the total purpose of Jesus' life and death was to free mankind from the guilt of sin, then Judas is in reality the hero in the drama, because it was necessary for Jesus to die for the salvation of mankind, and Judas was an essential link in this plan.

However, nowhere does the Bible place Judas on God's honor roll. Nowhere does a single Bible writer give Judas a place among God's great. The Apostle Peter says of Judas that he received *"the reward of iniquity"* (Acts 1:18). Jesus called him a *"devil"* (John 6:70).

Far from honoring Judas, the Bible condemns both Judas and any others who had part in bringing about the death of Christ. Those who *"killed"* Jesus were called *"murderers," "wicked men,"* men with *"lawless hands"* (Acts 2:23; 7:52).

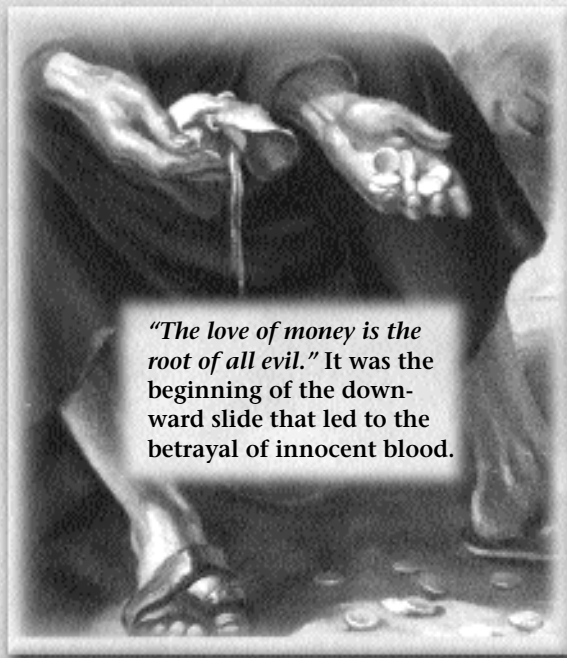
Nor does the Bible say that Christ died to pay the price we could not pay. Jesus Himself stated clearly the purpose of His life. When asked by Pilate, *"Art thou a king?"* He replied in these immortal words: *"Certainly I am a king. This is why I was born, this is why I came into the world"* (John 18:37 Moffatt Bible).



He himself chooses to obey and live, or to disobey and die (Josh. 24:15; Deut. 11:27-28).

### THE DOWNWARD SLIDE

What led Judas to betray Jesus? What caused him to be a traitor? We can



only speculate. But this we know, that evil men do not become evil overnight. Judas did not act on an impulse that suddenly crossed his mind. The heinous crime was the end result of a slow, downward slide. When he started following Jesus, he never dreamed of betraying Him. Perhaps the change was so gradual no one noticed. He may have become disillusioned because things did not seem to be working out as he had expected. Like the other Apostles, he no doubt expected Jesus to set up His Kingdom and overthrow the Roman rulers at that time. When he realized this was not happening, he may have become disillusioned and decided to help the opposition. Or he may have even thought he was precipitating an uprising by handing Jesus to his enemies. Again, he may have loved the excitement of revolt, and there was none of that in being just a humble follower of the lowly Jesus.

As time went on, and Jesus talked about His impending death, although the Twelve could not understand it they must have sensed they would soon be leaderless, for they could see His ene-

mies plotting against Him. Judas' disillusionment was evident when he criticized Mary for using expensive ointment to anoint Jesus. These are his words: "*Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence* [about one year's wages for the average worker—

see footnote in NKJV], *and given to the poor?*" (John 12:5). But Jesus rebuked him. He saw what the other Apostles could not see, that Judas' motive was evil and Mary's was noble. Judas had no special love for the poor; he was overanxious to get his own hands on the money because he "*held the purse.*" John's gospel even calls Judas "*a thief*" (John 12:6).

Judas was covetous; he bargained to do the evil deed for money. "*The love of money is the root of all evil,*" said Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:10). Perhaps Judas had often heard Jesus warn about that very thing, but he never thought to apply it

to himself. After all, money was handy to have; it was pretty hard to get along without it, and so he reasoned to himself, What's so bad about it?

Greed was the first step in the downward slide that led to the betrayal.

### WARNING, BUT NO REPENTANCE

Judas could have repented. He could have taken Jesus' words as a warning. When Jesus was teaching, He said to them all, "*Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?*" (John 6:70). Jesus could read the heart, and he "*knew what was in man*" (John 2:25). Judas was the one not clean; Judas was the Satan. Yet, did Judas say, "*Lord, I am wrong—forgive me?*" No, he continued entertaining thoughts of betraying his Master and pursued his evil course headlong.

Again at the Passover Supper, Jesus gave Judas further warning—and more opportunity for repentance. When He washed the disciples' feet, Jesus said: "*He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you. For He knew who would betray Him*" (John 13:10-11). How did Jesus know? He knew the heart. But

Jesus' remark did not soften Judas' heart and move him to repent; he only hardened his heart the more.

Later the same evening at supper, Jesus startled the Twelve with the announcement: "*One of you shall betray me.*" The quick response, "*Lord, is it I?*" showed their disbelief (Matt. 26:21-22). They were still unaware of what was happening. No one turned and accused Judas. And after Jesus identified Judas as the traitor, they still did not understand or even suspicion Judas of mischief (John 13:28-29).

At this point, Judas had gone so far that there was no turning back. Knowing where Jesus and the Eleven would be going after supper, he went to the chief priests to lead them and the soldiers to Jesus (Matt. 26:14-15).

Jesus taught, and surely Judas knew, that evil comes from within (Mark 7:21-23). Had he squelched the first thought, he would not have committed the act. Judas was wholly responsible for his own actions. God had no part in it; He leaves men to make their own choices.

### LOST OPPORTUNITY

Judas had not committed an unpardonable sin. He could have repented as Peter did, and been forgiven. Judas could have been at Pentecost to witness and partake of the Holy Spirit power.

Judas could have stood by Peter and John at the gate Beautiful and given the lame man a healing hand that raised him to his feet.

Judas could have gone with the other Eleven throughout the then-known world, witnessing to the resurrection of the Master and proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God. He could have been remembered for his dedication, self-sacrifice, and missionary zeal, as are Peter, Paul and John.

A permanent place of honor could have belonged to Judas. The name of Judas could have been one of the Twelve that John saw inscribed on the foundations of the wall of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).

But instead, the name of Judas lives only in infamy, the chilling echo of lost opportunity. Instead of being one of the chosen, he is only "*Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him,*" a traitor, not a hero. ♦



**4) After Jesus was crucified and resurrected, He was still preaching the gospel of the Kingdom.**

We read in Acts 1:3 that He presented Himself alive to His disciples, *"by many infallible proofs, being seen of them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."*

When the disciples started preaching, we read that Phillip *"preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ"* (Acts 8:12).

**5) Jesus never said that the purpose of His life was to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He preached a gospel of repentance.**

When Jesus started preaching, He surely knew that He would die by crucifixion—He could read the Old Testament Scriptures as well as anyone. Yet His first message was, *"The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). What need to repent if His death was to atone for their sins?

After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the apostles at Pentecost were still preaching *"Repent."* *"Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out"* (Acts 3:19), not, Trust in Jesus' blood to cover your sins.

**6) Jesus did not put himself on the cross.**

When He surrendered His will to the will of His Father, He gave the final obedience in a life of total obedience (Phil. 2:8). But He did not put Himself on the cross to appease the Father's wrath, or to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. Stephen, Divinely inspired, called Jesus' crucifiers *"murderers"* (Acts 7:52). Peter said that they *"killed the Prince of Life"* (Acts 3:15).

**7) After Jesus had died, been resurrected, and ascended to heaven, He still taught the necessity of repentance and obedience.**

After Jesus' resurrection, He commanded His disciples to preach *"repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sins."* Even though He had died and been resurrected, it was still necessary for people to repent in order to get forgiveness. *"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:46–47).

After Jesus' resurrection, He told His disciples to teach the necessity of obedience: *"[teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Matt. 28:20).

If His death had been the remedy for sin, Jesus should surely have mentioned it in His post-ascension message to John on Patmos. But even then He was still teaching obedience. In His letter to the seven Churches He repeatedly said that the blessings would be given to *"he who overcomes"* (see Rev. 2:7, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). He still was teaching, *"Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to everyone according to his work"* (Rev. 22:12).

**PETER AND THE CRUCIFIXION**

How did Peter understand the meaning of Christ's crucifixion? He said that Jesus died as an example to us. *"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps"* (1 Pet. 2:21). If Peter was speaking of Christ's literal crucifixion as the death we must copy, then we must be crucified to follow His example. But was this Peter's point? Not at all. He wanted us to follow Jesus in His life of total commitment, even to giving up His physical life if need be, so that He was wholly obedient to His Heavenly Father. Peter even mentioned some details of Jesus' character in this context, *"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously"* (1 Pet. 2:22–23).

**WHAT DID PAUL TEACH ABOUT THE CRUCIFIXION?**

Paul did not depreciate the crucifixion. He saw it in all its horror, perhaps even more because he had been among those whose sins put Jesus on the cross. Sinful men crucified Jesus. But again and again Paul emphasized that *"God raised Him from the dead."*

It is noticeable that in his epistles whenever the Apostle talked about Christ's death, he also mentioned His resurrection. He speaks of *"Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God"* (Rom. 8:34).

Paul also used Jesus' crucifixion as a symbol of the offering all of us must make to God. We must crucify, put to death, our old man of sin, he said, so that the new nature can live and grow. We are *"buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:3–6).

We must follow Jesus through self-crucifixion (a crucifixion of our old nature—Gal. 5:25–26; Col. 3:5–6), if we would know the glory of His resurrection. We must die as He died. The comparison is shocking, because death by crucifixion is not a death anyone would choose. But just so we must crucify our lower nature, even as Christ did, so that we may grow Christ's character in our lives.

continued on page 10



# All HOPE DEPENDS on the

# Resurrection

Were it not for Jesus' resurrection,

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we would be without hope. The fact that Jesus was

crucified does nothing for us. He must be resurrected. That is the point Paul was making in 1 Corinthians 15. The entire chapter discusses the resurrection and its importance to our faith.

If Christ didn't rise, "*our preaching is empty*" (1 Cor. 15:14). There is no point to any preaching or teaching about future life except the resurrection be true!

If Christ didn't rise, "*your faith is also empty*" (1 Cor. 15:14). The crucifixion was necessary to come before the resurrection, but without the resurrection we have no reason for faith!

If Christ didn't rise, "*we are found false witnesses of God*" (v. 15). What is worse than a false witness! We're liars, said Paul, if Christ isn't alive, because we have testified that He is living!

If Christ didn't rise, "*your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*" (v. 17). If Christ's death paid the penalty for sin, the resurrection should not be a major concern; if Christ died in our stead, we should have no fear of punishment. So why would Paul say that without the resurrection "*You are still in your sins*"? Our only hope of deliverance from sin is through the hope the resurrection gives, because it is the risen Christ who will be our Judge (2 Cor. 5:10). Christ will give us eternal life if worthy (John 5:21, 29). Because He lives, we, too, may live.

If there is no resurrection, we have only hope in this life, and if that is all we have, Paul says "*we are of all men the most pitiable*" (1 Cor. 15:19). Why? Because we have given up the benefits of this world in hope of the future; and if there is nothing future, we have lost everything.

But hear Paul's ringing climax: Jesus Is Alive! "*...Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep...But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming*" (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Because Jesus is alive (not because He died), we are looking forward to life when He returns.

Jesus, after the crucifixion, after the resurrection, after the ascension, sent His angel to John. The angel testified, "*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still [where is the benefit of Jesus' paying of penalty on the cross?]; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; [again, where is the benefit of Jesus' paying of penalty on the cross?]; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie*" (Rev. 22:11, 14-16).

The crucifixion was part of the picture, but the least significant part. The crucifixion left the Apostles downcast and scattered. The resurrection brought them to their senses, strong and determined, and sent them out into the world with a fervor and a message that even the fiercest persecution could not silence. "*We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard,*" said Peter.

The resurrection of Jesus is the core of the Christian gospel, and obedience to that gospel is the key to obtaining Christ's forgiveness and eternal life when He returns. Remember Jesus' words (Rev. 22:12), "*Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to everyone according to his work.*" ♦

(For a more complete discussion of this subject, send for the booklet, "*The Atonement.*")





### SPRINGTIME SPLENDOR!

We are really beginning to get signs of Spring here in Texas. Many of the spring flowering bulbs are finished, the flowering annuals are starting to show their colors, and the redbuds are starting to bloom as well. I have enclosed some pictures from our yard.

I really do enjoy this time of year. I am always awed by the splendor of God's creation. There is such an amazing variety of plant and animal life, each ideally suited to its environment. But at the same time many things are very adaptable to other situations.

We have to remember that we are here for one purpose only, and that is to prepare ourselves for the life in Eternity. We don't want to adapt ourselves to this world. The only way we can bring forth the kind of fruit that the Lord will accept is to stay out of the rocky, shallow soil of the world and put our roots down deep in the Word of God. Only here will we find the right nutrients to feed our minds and bear much fruit.

The season of our growing time is very short, so we will have to make every effort to stay in the Sunshine of God's Truth and be rooted and grounded in the Word, if we are to reach maturity.

We are finding the new E-sermons very inspiring. We always look forward to the "Message" and the daily e-thoughts sent our way give us lessons to help us. The monthly letters also have many good nourishing thoughts to help keep our minds on the right things.

P. Fleming, Texas

### THE TRUE WITNESS OF CHRIST

In our day, as ever in the past, there are those whose teachings differ widely from the truth revealed in God's Word. Some think it is because the Bible is so imprecise that every interpretation is equally as true as the other.

This is a delusion. False prophets are no more the product of the Christian Church and of the Holy Scripture than are counterfeit bills the product of the United States Mint.

Our Lord, Himself the true Prophet, made very clear that there would be those teaching contrary to His Word and whom we can know as such. "By their fruit you will recognize them," He said (Matthew 7:20). What one teaches and the kind of life he lives—that is

his fruit. When the fruit of a prophet's lips is the true and pure Gospel, then we know he is a true prophet. Always we must compare with God's Word.

Jesus Christ, to whom the Holy Scripture testifies (John 5:39), must be the heart and center of all our teaching. "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God," writes the Apostle (2 John 9). When we stay with the biblical teachings about Christ—that He was born of a virgin, suffered, was crucified, was resurrected, taken to heaven, and is soon coming again—then we have Him as our Savior and King.

We need to dig deeper into the Holy Scriptures which bear true witness of Christ.

Many questions are being asked because of the movie of Christ being nailed to the cross. Our son asked if the Megiddo Church had commented on the movie. I told him I had not heard any comments yet. From the short review I saw of it, it was far from following the Bible. Pilate was mentioned, but I did not hear much else that was familiar. I will be interested in what the Church thinks. Maybe it will make people start thinking and get them back into some church going.

B. Crum, Iowa



### Martha or Mary?

**M**artha in the kitchen, serving with her hands;  
Occupied for Jesus, with her pots and pans.  
Loving Him, yet fevered, burdened to the brim,  
Careful, troubled Martha, occupied for Him.

**M**ary on the footstool, eyes upon her Lord;  
Occupied with Jesus, drinking in His word.  
This one thing was needful, all else strangely dim;  
Loving, resting Mary, occupied with Him.

**S**o may we like Mary, choose the better part;  
Resting in His presence, hands and feet and heart;  
Drinking in His wisdom, strengthened by His grace,  
Learning of His wisdom, eyes upon His face.

**R**eady, always ready, spirit, will, and nerve;  
Mary's heart to worship, Martha's hand to serve;  
This the rightful order, as our lamps we trim,  
Occupied with Jesus, occupied for Him.

—Selected



## Knowledge Increased?

***I have heard some people quote Daniel 12:4, "knowledge shall be increased," and apply it to the upsurge of information in our day. Would you care to comment?***

The text in question reads, "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Whether this applies to the level of knowledge and information in the world at large at the time of the end, or whether it applies to a fuller understanding of the plan of God as the time of its fulfillment approaches, it is difficult to know. The translations of the passage vary, but many of them do suggest that it is a statement concerning the level of knowledge at the time of the end. For example, Lamsa reads, "Many will want to know the end, and knowledge shall be increased." The Septuagint reads, "Wisdom is increased." The Douay version reads, "Knowledge shall be manifold." Rotherham reads, "Knowledge shall abound."

It is certainly within the scope of Divine knowledge to have been able to prophesy the tremendous upsurge in knowledge in our day. Whether or not this is the intent of the author of a passage, we cannot say. But if it was, there is no question about its fulfillment. Comparisons have been made, that knowledge increased more in a certain number of years than in all time previous. We are not prepared to defend these statements, but the knowledge that has made possible even very limited space exploration, travel to the moon, and satellite launching—not to mention the tremendous advances in medicine and communications—is without parallel in history.

It is also possible to apply this passage to the understanding of the Plan of God. Those living at the time of the end have the privilege of seeing the Plan most comprehensively, from beginning to

almost the end, and from this standpoint, have the fullest understanding of it. As the time extends, we can see the fulfillment of many Bible prophecies, and know that the culmination is near. All of this strengthens our faith in the Word of God, and makes us thankful for the privilege of living in this very special time of the end that the Prophet Daniel foresaw far in the future by the eye of Divine prophecy.

### • Prophecy By the Holy Spirit Today?

***What is the difference between prophecy and the word of knowledge? What exactly is prophecy, and who is a prophet in today's world? If prophecy pertains only to the prophecies in the Bible, what is the word that comes through the Holy Spirit called?***

The term prophecy as used in the Bible generally refers to knowledge from God, knowledge revealed directly by Him, in contrast with knowledge from a human source. The Bible testifies to the source of prophetic utterances. For example, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20–21). Or this passage from the book of Revelation: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy" (1:3). Or, "Blessed is he who keeps the words of the

prophecy of this Book" (22:7). The original Greek word is *propheteia*, and is defined as "prediction (Scriptural or other): prophecy, prophesying; derived from *prophetes*, which means, by analogy an inspired speaker, a foreteller (prophet)"—Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary.

Thayer's Greek English Lexicon offers more detail: "Propheteia, prophecy under i.e., discourse emanating from Divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; esp. by foretelling future events. Used in the New Testament of the utterances of the Old Testament prophets (see Matt. 13:14; 2 Pet. 1:20–21)...Of the prediction of events relating to Christ's Kingdom and its speedy triumph, together with the consolations and admonitions pertaining thereto."

Prophecy, in this sense, can pertain only to the prophecies of the Bible, because only God can foretell the future.

All through the Bible God revealed His knowledge through the Holy Spirit. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Elijah, Zechariah were among many human instruments God used to deliver knowledge of the future to His people.

The Apostle Paul, who had Holy Spirit power himself, told how different ones received different gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:4–8).

No prophecy comes to anyone today through the Holy Spirit because no one today has Holy Spirit power. That power was given to the believers at Pentecost for the purpose of confirming the Divine authority of those who preached the Word, and was withdrawn at the end of that age. (For further discussion of this topic, see our booklet, "The Holy Spirit.") ♦

### THE THINGS I DO

*The things I do, the things I say,  
Will lead some person aright or astray.  
So the things I do should be the best,  
And the things I say should be to bless.*

—Selected



# The Priority of Discipleship

*Following Jesus demands our total allegiance*

by RUSSELL HAMBY



*And he [Jesus] said unto another, "Follow me." But he said "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Jesus said unto him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-60).*

**L**et the dead bury their dead!" (v. 60). How does one come to terms with a statement like that? Did Jesus really demand that His disciples abandon all earthly responsibilities in order to follow Him?

Jesus was not recommending an abandon of normal responsibilities but was saying rather, What comes first? What is your first priority? Because following Him takes priority over all of life.

How are we to understand His examples? Are they merely figures of speech or did Jesus really intend these as literal examples? The three that appear in Luke 9:57-62 cover the major areas of life's normal priorities.

## **Priority #1: SECURITY**

*"Lord, I will follow You wherever You go" (v. 57).*

Did this inquirer realize the meaning of what He was saying? Had he truly counted the cost? Was he willing to forego the comforts of home to follow Jesus?

Jesus' reply shows the reality the would-be follower would face. *"Foxes have holes...but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*

One of the most basic human needs is the need for security. For most people, the refuge of home, a place one can call one's own, is the key element. Jesus, in effect, told the would-be disciple that to follow Him would be to make such security second place. Actually, discipleship demands a leap of faith, giving oneself to a life of following an unseen Lord down an undetermined path, wherever that path may lead. One simply cannot cling to the old securities and reach the new goal, the commitment that following Jesus requires.

## **Priority #2:**

### **HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**

*"Let me first go and bury my father" (v. 59).*

The request seems reasonable enough to anyone having a sense of human responsibility. This was particularly true for first-century Jews. Even the high priest was allowed to interrupt his solemn duties to give proper regard to his father's burial.

Isn't Jesus' reply almost callous? Let us remember the lesson He is teaching. The basic principle of discipleship is at stake. Many people live their lives solely out of a sense of obligation to family and community. These duties become all-consuming, and when they are fulfilled, one is satisfied. Such an attitude, says Jesus, is a hindrance to following Him. Such a one is simply too busy already, and has no place for Him. Christ's interests must be first.

## **Priority #3: FAMILY**

*"Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are in my house" (v. 61).*

Here again is the test of priorities: where are one's family responsibilities on the list of priorities for the Kingdom? What comes first, and what comes second?

Elisha made a similar request when Elijah threw the mantle of discipleship upon him, and Elisha's was granted (1 Kings 19:19-21). Why then should Jesus say that following Him requires more than Elijah had required from Elisha? Jesus who could read the heart, and possibly knew this man's answer was simply an excuse, because He answered him (v. 62), *"No one having put his hand*

*to the plow, and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

The principle is the same as in the other two examples. Not even family ties are to take precedence over the demands of discipleship. Not infrequently believers have had to choose between loyalty to their family and their faith. The principle, however, is intended for all. Following Jesus demands total allegiance, even over the pull of family ties.

## **In Summary**

What is Jesus saying? One cannot simply draw up a list of priorities with discipleship ranking first. Following Jesus is the one priority to which all other priorities of life must yield.

But in yielding each of life's priorities to Christ, the sacrifice becomes gain! For when one commits to following Him, just as Jesus promised, all needful things are added (Matt. 6:33).

The *security* in belonging to God and following Jesus transcends all earthly securities.

The *responsibilities* of following Christ are more satisfying and fill all life's responsibilities with that special quality of Christian commitment.

The *new family* one joins in following Christ opens into a greater family, even the whole family of God in heaven and on earth (Eph. 3:14-15). And for all who truly belong to that family by making Christ their number one priority, the door will be opened to a whole new community where *"they will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God"* (Luke 13:29), all inheritors of Christ's kingdom, all sharers in His glory forever. ♦



# FAITH in Action

## Bible Text: Acts 15:1-2

1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.



### Insight

#### **No Relative Values**

The Apostles lived before the time of relative values. The Jews viewed God as absolute, and as having rules that cannot be broken, laws (given to Moses) binding for all time future. The Gentile Christians, on the other hand, could not understand why they (non-Jews) should be compelled to obey Jewish laws.

From one standpoint, we have to admire the Jews' concerns. They did not want each individual to decide for himself. They believed that God's law to Israel was given to be obeyed, then and forever.

They failed to realize that Jesus superceded the Law of Moses. (Matt. 5:17-22, 27-28, 31-37). He did not open the way for lawlessness, but rather reinforced the Law of Moses, expanding it to a level where the thoughts and intents of the heart are judged. He took a law governing outward conduct and applied it to the heart, the inner conscience. He wanted His people to be intolerant of every form of wrong at every level.

We cannot love Christ without obeying Him, because right is right, and wrong is never right. Jesus said, "If you love me, obey my commandments" (John 14:15 NLT).

by RUTH E. SISSON

## JOURNEY'S END, BUT NO REST



READ ACTS 15:1-5

When the missionaries reached Antioch, they stayed "a long time with the disciples." There was more than one reason for this. They needed rest. But more than this, they needed to help settle a dispute that was brewing in the Jerusalem Church.

Until now most followers of Christ and most of the followers of His apostles had formerly been Jews. With the large number of Gentiles coming in, very soon the Jews would become a minority and the Gentiles would be dominant. How would the Jews, especially the "old-timers," adjust to this change? How should the Church view this new balance of power?

Looking deeper, the real issue was not about authority or privilege but about salvation. What should one do to be saved, Jew or Gentile?

Most of the Jews saw the problem as having a simple solution: The converted Gentiles should be made to adhere strictly to the customs of the Law of Moses. It was the only fair way! But the missionaries and apostles, who knew the plan of God firsthand, said "No!"

Even though this was a time when the apostles had guidance by Holy Spirit power, the Church leaders used the same method we would use today: they called a meeting to discuss the issues, reviewed all the facts and evidence, and then did their best to reach the right decision.

### **When Believers Disagree**

1. What was the position of Paul and Barnabas regarding the new Gentile disciples? (15:1-2) \_\_\_\_\_
2. What did Paul and Barnabas decide to do because of the dispute? (15:2) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where did they stop on the way to Jerusalem? What did they talk about to these people? (15:3) \_\_\_\_\_





4. When Paul and Barnabas reached Jerusalem, how were they received by the Church? What did they report? (15:4) \_\_\_\_\_

We can almost hear the brothers' glowing reports about new believers on Cyprus, and in Perga, Pamphilia, Antioch, Derbe and Lystra. Yes, they had risked their lives, but they had left new believers behind them in every city they had visited, people who were willing to leave the idolatrous worship to serve the true and living God.

### ***They Called a Council***

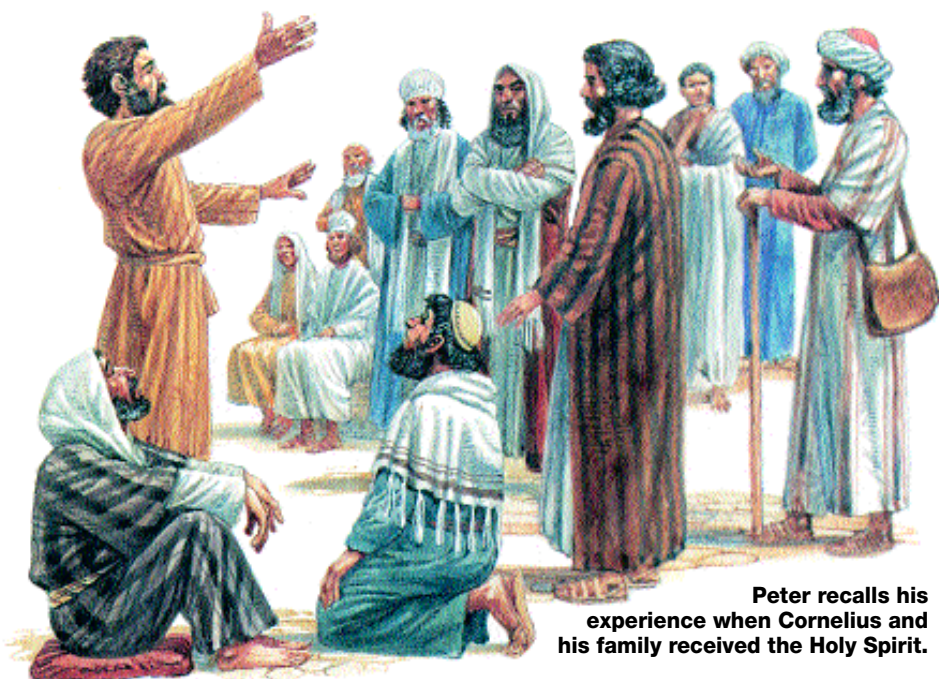
 READ ACTS 15:6-21

In the minds of the people in the Jerusalem Church, there was the one big problem: these new believers were largely Gentiles, and therefore unwelcome by full-blooded Jews. In fact, some who belonged to a "*sect of the Pharisees*" were adamant that it was even necessary to "*circumcise them* [an outward ritual that separated Jewish people from non-Jews], *and to command them to keep the law of Moses.*"

5. What action did the apostles and elders take to resolve the matter? (15:6) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Who was the first speaker at the council meeting? (15:7) \_\_\_\_\_ What was his position? (15:7-9) \_\_\_\_\_
7. What point convinced Peter that in God's sight the Gentile believers were accepted equally with the Jews? (15:8) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Who did Peter feel the Jewish brethren were testing by resisting the Gentile believers? (15:10) \_\_\_\_\_

Peter was no doubt still thinking about the lesson he had received when he was sent to visit Cornelius. "*God is no respecter of persons*" (10:34). This meant that the Jews are in no way preferred above the Gentiles. All start at the same point when they become believers in Christ. Peter still remembered that God gave the Holy Spirit "*to them, just as He did to us*" (15:8).

Peter felt it was unjust to ask the Gentiles to submit to a "yoke" (a



**Peter recalls his experience when Cornelius and his family received the Holy Spirit.**

### ***Bible Text: Acts 15:3-10***

3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.

4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us,

9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?



A closer look

### **Meet Brother James...**

While Jesus was preaching and ministering among the people, James the brother of Jesus could not believe his brother was anything more than a big brother. But soon after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, James is taking a leading role in the Church.

No doubt James had some belief earlier, but likely with reservations—how could his own brother be so superior to himself? How could He be the long prophesied Messiah? Jesus was just one of the family!

But when he saw Jesus resurrected, nothing could hinder his faith. At the Jerusalem council, we find James presiding, even handing down the decision. His statements reflect a depth of understanding of the plan of God as he looked back into history and ahead to the time when Jesus will return and "*rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down...that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name*" (15:16-17).



**Bible Text: Acts 15:11-21**

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

13 And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me:

14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

16 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up;

17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.'

18 Known to God from eternity are all His works.

19 Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,

20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.

21 For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."



**From the Word**

**"Decently and In Order"**

We have to admire the methods of the Early Church in settling a dispute. They called a conference at which representatives of the different views were present, let each explain his side, and then let the group evaluate and reach a decision that was in line with the will of God as revealed to them through the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28).

We also want to observe that the meeting was not a shouting match, with each trying to out-talk the others. As far as we are told, everything proceeded in an orderly and dignified, God-honoring manner, just as Paul commanded for his Churches (1 Cor. 14:40). And it was done in a spirit of brotherliness, giving honor to God, "who knows the heart" (Acts 15:8). When a decision was reached, the group appointed some of their number to write it into a letter and deliver it to each of the concerned Churches.

How good is God to give us a pattern to follow! The only difference for us today is that we must make sure our decisions are in line with the will of God as revealed in the Bible—because we do not have the Holy Spirit power.

bondage—Gal. 5:1) that even the Jews themselves or their fathers had not handled well (15:10).

9. Who spoke second at the council? (15:12) \_\_\_\_\_

10. What was their main point? (15:12) \_\_\_\_\_

When Paul and Barnabas took the floor, they reviewed their experiences among the Gentiles on their recent missionary journey. They had seen God working powerfully among the Gentiles! There was no question in their mind but that the Gentiles were fully accepted into the Church family.

11. Who was the third and concluding speaker at the council meeting? (15:13) \_\_\_\_\_

What prominent person was he related to by blood? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What was his point in citing prophecy from the Old Testament? (15:16–17) \_\_\_\_\_

13. What Jewish requirements did he think should be placed on new Gentile converts? (15:19–21) \_\_\_\_\_

14. What do James' conclusions show about his view of the Christian religion? \_\_\_\_\_

**Welcome, Gentiles!**



READ ACTS 15:22–35

The conclusion of the council: Gentile (non-Jewish) believers should not have to conform to all the Jewish customs, and they would be accepted on an equal basis for salvation. In other words, being a Jew gave one no advantage for salvation. The Gentiles were welcome in the Church!

James suggested the decision, and it carried. The Apostles and elders accepted the decision, and as soon as it could be written into a letter, Paul and Barnabas, along with several of the local brethren, were on their way to Antioch. They wrote the following:

*From: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren,  
To: The brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.  
Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—  
...For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.  
Farewell.*

15. What means did the Jerusalem Church use to get word to the Church in Antioch? (15:22) \_\_\_\_\_

16. How do we know the decision of James and of the council was Divinely guided? (15:28) \_\_\_\_\_

17. Who delivered the message to the Church at Antioch? (15:30) \_\_\_\_\_

Can we imagine the tremendous relief felt by Paul and Barnabas as they thought about the new Gentile believers in Galatia? Little wonder they started almost immediately to plan their next missionary journey! (Acts 15:36). ♦





# Know Your Bible?

## LAWS

1. The ordinance decreed the death penalty for anyone who cursed \_\_\_\_\_.
2. This law limited retaliation: \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_.
3. If a man stole an ox, donkey, or sheep, he had to restore \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The punishment for homosexuality and bestiality was \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What interest was to be charged on a loan to another Israelite who was poor? \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The hare and the camel were (forbidden or allowed) to be used by the Israelites for food. \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Of the living things in the seas and rivers, the Israelites were allowed to eat only those having both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. What were some of the birds forbidden to the Israelites for food? \_\_\_\_\_.

## WHO WAS THE CHILD?

1. An angel prophesied his birth, saying, "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God." \_\_\_\_\_.
2. An angel prophesied his birth, and added that "he shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him." \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The Prophet said of Him, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder." \_\_\_\_\_.
4. His birth was kept secret from the authorities for three months. \_\_\_\_\_.
5. His birth was prophesied by an angel to fulfill a covenant made many years earlier. \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The father was not able to speak from the time he received the prophecy of his son until the child was born. \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The mother dedicated this child "because I have asked him of the Lord." \_\_\_\_\_.
8. This child's mother had been a poor foreigner before she married a wealthy Israelite. \_\_\_\_\_.

## TREES

1. Jesus said, "I will give to eat from \_\_\_\_\_" (Rev. 2:7).
2. What kind of a tree did the Psalmist say we could be? \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Jesus told us about two kinds of trees. What were they? \_\_\_\_\_ (Matt. 7:17)
4. What are the leaves of a certain tree used for? \_\_\_\_\_ (Rev. 22:2)
5. "The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord are full of \_\_\_\_\_" (Ps. 104:16).
6. Philip found Nathaniel sitting under a \_\_\_\_\_ tree.
7. God calls His people "trees \_\_\_\_\_." Who plants these trees? (Isa. 61:3)

## ANSWERS TO BIBLE QUESTIONS

### TREES

1. "the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7)
2. "a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season." (Ps. 1:3)
3. "good tree" and "bad tree" (Matt. 7:17)
4. "the tree of life,...for the healing of the nations." (Rev 22:2)
5. "trees, sap" (Psalms 104:16)
6. fig tree (John 1:45-48)
7. of righteousness. The Lord plants them. (Isa. 61:8)

### LAWS

1. his father or mother (Ex. 21:17)
2. eye for eye, tooth for tooth (Ex. 21:22-25)
3. double if the beast was found alive in his possession (Ex. 22:4)
4. death (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 18:22,23,29)
5. 0% interest (Ex. 22:25)
6. forbidden (Lev. 11:3-8)
7. both fins and scales (Lev. 11:9)
8. eagle, vulture, owl, kite (Lev. 11:13-19)

### WHO WAS THE CHILD

1. John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-16)
2. Ishmael (Gen. 16:10-12)
3. Jesus (Isa. 9:6)
4. Moses (Ex. 2:2-10)
5. Isaac (Gen. 17)
6. John the Baptist (Luke 1:20-22)
7. Samuel (1 Sam. 1:20)
8. Obed, son of Ruth the Moabitess and Boaz (Ruth 4:10, 17)



## “FOUR EYES”

*Anableps Anableps*

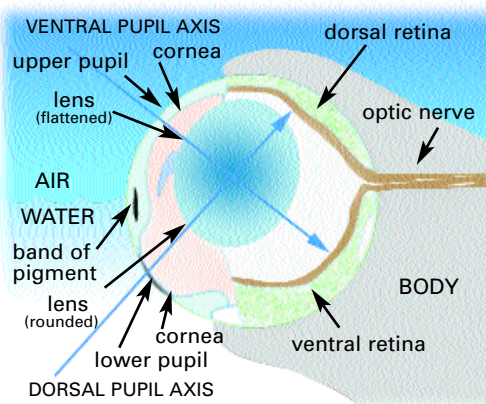
*They look like bubbles on the surface of the water. Looking closer, you see they are actually eyes which float just above the surface of the water. They belong to the anableps, a minnow-sized fish often referred to as “four eyes.” Isn’t that awesome!*

I’m a minnow—you don’t get much more ordinary than that! But wait until I tell you about myself, and especially about my marvelous Creator. I think you will be surprised.

We are native to the tropical waters of the Americas, either brackish or fresh. We aren’t fussy about what we eat either. We like worms, insects, crustaceans—just about anything that comes along. And we aren’t very large. Most of us average three- to four-inches in length, though a few of our kind reach as long as a foot. Being so small, we have one very big problem: surviving. You see, we’re lunch for lots of the bigger fish. So we have to be—you guessed it—all eyes! It’s the only way we can survive.

But if I may brag a little, I think our eyes are wonderful. I had nothing to do about their design—I have to give all credit to our marvelous Creator for

HOW AN ANABLEPS’ EYE SEES



knowing what we needed. Maybe we don’t look spectacular, but we can really see. You think you can catch me off guard? I’ll always be a hop ahead of you! Yes, I had an eye on you (one of my “four”) long before you saw me! Actually, “four eyes” is a slight exaggeration. We have two divided eyes that work like four distinct eyes.

### How our eyes work

Your eyes are designed to see objects in the air (out of water). Each of your eyes has a pupil, and in front of it a large front window (the cornea).

Light entering your eye is focused by a combination of the front window (cornea) and a flat-type lens. If you try to look at objects under water, everything is out of focus. Animals that live under water, like fish, have spherical lenses, which produce a perfect image of the underwater world but would not work in the air.

Now we anableps have a special problem, because most eyes are designed to see objects *either* in the air (out of water) *or* under water. Because we live at the surface of the water, we need to see both through the air and through the water. If we had eyes like yours, we could see very well in the air, but underwater images would be out of focus. If we had eyes like other fish, we would be able to see very well in the water, but objects in the air would be out of focus. And in either case, I can assure you, I would be so hungry, I wouldn’t be able to swim anymore. Or else I’d be eaten so quickly by some predator, I would never need to eat anything!

Well, what do you suppose my Designer did? He designed my eyes with four parts—I can actually see above the water and under the water with each eye at the same time! Really! How?

Each of my eyes has two corneas (front windows), one that looks out into the air, and one that looks down through the water. The same eye looks two directions. Light entering through both of these corneas passes through a lens in my eye. But the lens is neither round nor flat; it is elliptical. (Who thought up that one?!) And it is perfect-

ly aligned so that light coming from above the water passes through the *shorter* axis of the lens and strikes a special retina in the *bottom* of my eye, producing a sharp clear image. And light coming through the other window from underneath the water passes through the *long* axis of the lens and strikes the upper retina of my eye, also creating a sharp clear image. So I am able to see two images with each eye at the same time. Isn’t that pretty wonderful?

That is why it looks like I have four eyes. Really I have only two, but each eye has two pupils and two corneas, one above water and one below the water, separated by a line of pigment at the water level.

Do you see why our eyes are so important? Little minnows are delicious food for many larger animals, so we have to be constantly looking out for predators. Using my “four eyes” and floating right at the water’s surface, I’m able to see both up and down simultaneously. Yes, I can focus on an airborne predator and a tasty underwater snack at the same time. How about that!

Some of your scientists think I have achieved this remarkable feat on my own. They talk about all the years I was developing these eyes. Isn’t that fantastic? Fancy little “me” figuring out how to stay out of the sharks’ mouths while my eyes were under construction! And how would I find anything to eat in the blur under the water? I can’t imagine what I would do.

But then, I’m only a little minnow. ♦





# The Heavenly Kingdom on Earth

## BRIDGE INTO ETERNITY

Can you imagine a thousand years without a crime?

Just try to picture it: A thousand years without a war anywhere in the whole world.

A thousand years without any oppression or open animosity between one nation and another, one family and another, one individual and another.

A thousand years without any industry manufacturing, selling or promoting lust, selfish pleasure, or immorality.

A thousand years without any open dishonesty, theft, or fraud.

A thousand years during which the resources of the earth worldwide will be channeled for the benefit of a God-honoring people.

A thousand years without any whisper of child abuse, elder abuse, muggings, rape, divorce or even any bad language.

Do we wonder why Christ's Millennium reign will bring about a whole new world!

But the Millennium is still not Eternity. When a person who dies at 100 years of age is considered a child, life is long. But people still die. And there is still a subversive element, even though it is held in check. The devil (a symbolic term for sin and all sinners, all opposition to God and Christ), though "chained" (restricted) and in the bottomless pit, is still alive. The words of the ancient prophet are still true: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"* (Jer. 17:9).

What has been keeping evil in check? The new authority, Christ and His associates, will rule with a firm hand of justice—firm, though never cruel. Called a *"rod of iron"* (Rev. 2:26–27), it is law unbreakable. Anyone who would break the law knows he or she cannot do it and live. In this way, evil is held in check. The world is at peace. All would-be troublemakers are restrained by the ever-present reminder: *"Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it'"* (Isa. 30:21).

In Revelation 8:1, that relaxing of law is called *"silence in heaven."* The law that had been always coming from heaven, from those in authority, is suddenly silent. Someone curses God and the rulership of Christ—such a one used to drop dead instantly. Now, nothing happens. So he does it again. Nothing happens. His neighbor, who has also been silently rebellious, hears him and joins the outrage. Soon a whole company are in the street, shouting against Christ and His holy ones, rallying supporters to join the protest. At last they are free to express themselves, and no one stops them!

The subversive, rebellious element, restrained for a thousand years, is not dead. The "devil," a symbol of the opposition, is suddenly out of the bottomless pit and running loose. Even more rebels join the throngs because at this time there is a second resurrection.

The placement of Rev. 20:5 is somewhat confusing. The statement concerning the "rest of the dead" is set off by parentheses in some translations, showing that it is not in normal position. Reading verses 4 through 6 and omitting the first sentence of verse 5, we find the whole passage referring to the first resurrection and judgment, which is followed by the thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints. Reading verse 5 after verse 6 places the events in their proper order, with the second resurrection and rebellion following the millennium.

PART SEVEN  
by RUTH E. SISSON

### Steps Into the Kingdom

1. Elijah the Messenger arrives
2. Holy Spirit power is restored
3. The dead in Christ are resurrected
4. Jesus Christ returns
5. Jesus Christ chooses His co-rulers  
(Judgment of covenant makers)
6. Jesus Christ is crowned King
7. The Millennium begins
8. Battle of Armageddon; one third of the earth's population submit to Christ
9. Satan is bound (no open manifestation of evil)
10. Earth is repopulated and re-trained under new rulership (Christ and Saints)
11. Satan is loosed (strict authority is relaxed)
12. Second resurrection
13. Open rebellion against Christ's government
14. Rebellious element is destroyed
15. Final judgment of mortals who lived during the Millennium
16. Glorified earth is annexed to God's family in heaven and the Eternal Age begins



## THE SECOND RESURRECTION

The first resurrection, at the time of Jesus' coming, restored to life those who had served God and died between the time of Adam and Christ's second advent. They were brought back to life so that they could be judged and rewarded for what they had done, good or bad (Eccl. 12:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:10).

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*When the thrones of monarchs tumble into ruin and decay,  
And the scepters that they wielded are forever put away;  
When the noise of sabers clashing, and the dreaded cannon's roar,  
With the call, "To arms!" are silenced, to reverberate no more;  
When the automatic rifles, and all instruments that kill  
Are converted into plowshares, made to cultivate and till;  
When proud Babylon has fallen, to be trampled in the sod,  
There shall rise upon the ruins the eternal house of God.*

*When the grasping tax collector has his last collection made,  
And the memory of his letters has at last begun to fade;  
When the strife that now exists between employer and employed  
Has been ended, and the fruits of labor are by all enjoyed;  
When the gangster and his cohorts have been banished from the earth,  
And the fear that preys on mortals almost from the day of birth  
Has been changed to joy and gladness; when men sing with one accord;  
Then, my friend, you will be living in the Kingdom of the Lord.*

*When the surgeon lays his scalpel down, because there is no need  
For his operating technique, his consummate skill and speed;  
When the doctor leaves his pill-bag there, to molder in the dust,  
For the reason that his services no longer are a "must";  
When the jails and penitentiaries their doors have opened wide,  
And the guests of state and county shall no more within abide,  
It is evident there's been a drastic change through all the world,  
That the Word of God is now the banner o'er the earth unfurled.*



He who sat on the throne said,  
*"Behold, I make all things new."*  
And he said to me, *"Write, for these  
words are true and faithful."*  
And He said to me, *"it is done!"*

—Rev. 21:5-6

Now it is time for the second resurrection. Those who serve God after Christ's second coming must also be judged and rewarded. This will include all who lived and died during the Millennium, because all will be acquainted with the laws of God. And because many who died near the beginning of the Millennium will have died as rebels of the new authority, they will come back as they died: rebels. The result: full scale rebellion.

Revelation 20, verse 5 tells of this resurrection. *"But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished."* These "rest of the dead" are those who died since the first, or primary resurrection at Christ's coming.

### THE REBELLION

It may be difficult to imagine a rebellion following a thousand years of peace and goodwill, a thousand years of quiet living and universal prosperity. But such a rebellion is foretold by the Revelator. We read, *"They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city"* (Rev. 20:9).

How can it be? Because sin, though held in check under firm law during the Millennium, is not dead. Many, especially the earlier years of the Millennium, likely died because of their determined will to break the law. Perhaps they wanted to show others that they could sin—whether it was to steal, or lie, or murder, or live immorally—and get away with it. Some may have been cut off in the act of crime, as a lesson to other would-be offenders. Restored to life in the resurrection at the end of the Millennium, they will be as they died, sinful and rebellious in heart. It seems reasonable to believe that the rebellion will be instigated by this group rather than by those who lived later during the Millennium.

We read about it in Rev. 20:7-9: *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan [representing evil and evil workers] will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four*

*corners of the earth,...to gather them together into battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints of the beloved city."*

Do they succeed? Do they overthrow the new government, now one thousand years established? By no means! Divine judgment is quick and severe: *"Fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them"* (Rev. 20:9).

Are peace and happiness not acceptable to the human race? Must these be forced on them? Can't they even appreciate them when their benefits are proven? Given opportunity, human nature reverts quickly. Like the children of Israel long ago, who soon forgot the miracles that saved them from the Egyptians, these people, more blessed than any generation who ever lived, will quickly forget their blessings and will be ready to overthrow the rule of Christ and the saints. The Revelator's phrase, *"as the sand of the sea,"* indicates a great multitude of rebels, an unrevealed number.



## THE LAST JUDGMENT

One final stroke of justice at the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ will separate for all time the righteous and the wicked. All living mortals and all who have been resurrected at this time must stand at this judgment and receive for what they have done, whether good or evil.

We read: *"And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books"* (Rev. 20:12). The books are records made by angel witnesses having the power of God, not necessarily physical books. The use of the "books" points to the fact of absolute justice. Everyone's deeds are recorded, and by that record each will stand or fall.

The decision of the Judge will be final. The righteous will receive the crown of immortality and become the glorified populace of the Kingdom of God. The wicked will die. They will not be tormented or tortured, but will simply pass out of existence. In the symbolism of Revelation, they are said to be cast into the *"lake of fire and brimstone,"* which the Revelator clearly defines as *"the second death"* (Rev. 20:10, 14), a death from which there is no reviving.

The *"lake of fire and brimstone"* represents complete destruction (2 Thess. 1:9), not literal hell fire. The Bible does not support belief in a literal, burning hell. The word translated hell in the Scriptures is *hades* (Greek), or *sheol* (Hebrew), and means a place of darkness, the pit, the grave.

## THE DEATH OF DEATH

Following the second resurrection and judgment, the Revelator describes the triumph supreme: the death of death (Rev. 20:14). No longer will death claim loved ones. *"Then Death and Hades [the grave] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."* Death, the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26) is finally destroyed. Never again will there be death on the earth, and no need for any more graves. The prophecy of Revelation 21 will be fulfilled: *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* Then He who sat on the throne said, *'Behold I make all things new.'* And He said to me, *'Write, for these words are true and faithful'*" (Rev. 21:3-5).

At last, the Kingdom has come! *"Then comes the end"* which the Apostle Paul described, and what a glorious end it is! Paul says that the *"last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (1 Cor. 15:26). Death is cast into the lake of fire. Death is gone. From this point forward there will be no more death. All will be life, glory, and immortality. All who live will live forever!

*"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him*

*God has promised He would send His Son to sit on David's throne—  
To rebuild again Jerusalem, and make His mandates known.  
In that day He'll stand upon the mount of Olives, in the East,  
And each living soul shall know Him, from the greatest to the least.  
Then will be fulfilled the promise, "God shall wipe away all tears;  
There shall be no pain, no death, or sorrow, through successive years."  
But the ones who wait upon the Lord shall have their strength renewed;  
"They shall run, and not be weary," with fresh vigor be endued.*

*In the Kingdom of the Saviour shall the faithful be set down  
To the King's own marriage supper, being men of great renown.  
Whether they be Jew or Gentile, white, or black, matters not;  
They have washed their robes of character, removing every spot.  
And it matters not if they were rich, or counted very poor,  
They were humble, meek, and lowly, which by God is counted more.  
They have donned the wedding garment, having purified from sin,  
And with Christ shall reign forever—a new era shall begin.*

*Then the subjects—favored nation—shall in peace and plenty live,  
Till a thousand years are ended; their account they then must give  
At the second resurrection—then the worthy ones will sit  
At the Master's second table, and resent it not a whit.  
They'll enjoy a feast of fat things, with their elder brothers share  
Life eternal in the Kingdom, with rejoicing everywhere.  
Then comes "peace, good will" forever, as Jehovah long has willed,  
As with "Israel, my glory" all the earth at last is filled.*

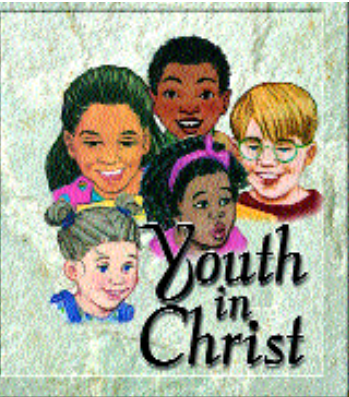
by LIOT L. SNYDER



*who puts all things under Him, that God may be all in all"* (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Here is a picture of the glorious climax. In all the earth there is no more death. Its work is done and all who live are immortal, made like the angels of God. The work on earth is complete. And *"He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold I make all things new.' And he said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'it is done!'"* (Rev. 21:5-6). ♦





**I**t was spring and the forest was a lovely place. The ground was dotted with flowers; pink ones, blue ones—all colors of the rainbow. Birds were singing merrily in the treetops and animals were scurrying around, either playing or working. They were happy because at last the long winter was gone.

Bonnie and Betty Bunny were on their way to Farmer O'Neil's garden. They hoped to find some fresh vegetables just peeking above the ground. They were sure Farmer O'Neil wouldn't mind sharing them with the Bunny family.

But as they came near the creek, they heard the queerest grunting and puffing. It sounded as if someone was in great trouble. Very carefully, Bonnie and Betty peeked around the corner to see where the noise came from. In a few minutes they knew that Wally Woodchuck was responsible for the grunting and puffing. His hole was right there, near the creek bed.

"What's the matter, Wally?" called Bonnie.

The grunting and puffing stopped for just a moment. Wally backed out of his hole to look at the bunnies. But instead of answering Bonnie's question, Wally went back into his hole and started grunting and puffing again.

## Why Wally Woodchuck Changed His Tune

"May I help you?" offered Bonnie.

"Me, too?" added Betty

Once more the grunting and puffing stopped while Wally backed out of his den. This time he sat back and looked crossly at the bunnies, "It's the old creek," he sputtered. "The water came so high that it washed my living room full of mud. Now I must dig the whole place out again. It was a good den and there's nothing more provoking than to have it ruined in this way. I worked hard making it just right."

"That's a pity." "Too bad," sympathized the bunnies.

And because they couldn't think of anything else to say, they stood back and watched. They were sorry Wally's home was ruined. Building a home like Wally Woodchuck's is hard work. The creek bed is hard-topped sand full of roots, and Wally had only his feet to dig with.

He started to dig at the sand by his doorway now. The bunnies watched the sand fly for a few minutes.

Finally Bonnie spoke, "We would help you if we could."

"Thanks, Bonnie, I guess it's my job," answered Wally. "Anyway, you couldn't do as well as I can."

Wally went back to work and the bunnies headed toward Farmer O'Neil's garden.

They were only a few hops from Wally's den when Bonnie stopped. She had thought of something so she hopped back. Wally's nose was deep inside the doorway and his hind feet were kicking out the

sand—only his short tail showed—but when he heard Bonnie call—"Wally"—he came out to see why Bonnie was back so soon.

"I just happened to think of something to make your work easier," said Bonnie brightly.

"What do *you* know about woodchuck burrows?" grunted Wally.

"Nothing. But I know something about work," replied Bonnie. "Whenever there's something hard to be done, it goes easier and quicker if done cheerfully."

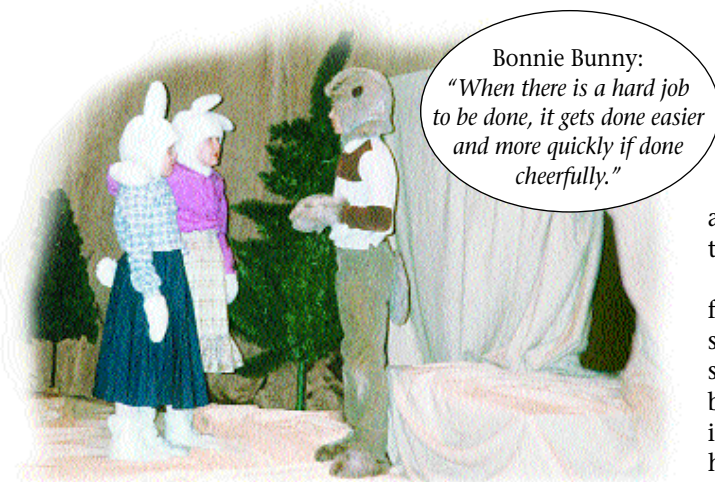
"Cheerfully?" exploded Wally. "Don't tell me to be cheerful when I've got a job like this to do. I wonder if *you* would be cheerful if *your* house was full of mud?"

"I only meant to help," replied Bonnie a little startled.

Several hours later, bunnies Bonnie and Betty on their way back from Farmer O'Neil's garden stopped to see how Wally was doing. They didn't speak for fear Wally might still be angry. But Wally was not in sight. Very cautiously they crept forward and peaked into Wally Woodchuck's doorway. It was a neat round hole, and the sand Wally had kicked out lay in a neat pile beside it. The bunnies put their noses inside the hole and sniffed. It was pitch dark in there but they could smell Wally. They crept in a little farther and then stood still in surprise. They heard something and it didn't sound one bit like Wally's voice; it was a cheery whistle—a merry tune. And then Bonnie and Betty heard shuffling feet.

The bunnies backed out and stopped at a safe distance. Soon Wally was in the

Bonnie Bunny:  
"When there is a hard job  
to be done, it gets done easier  
and more quickly if done  
cheerfully."





doorway looking very cheerful.

When he saw Bonnie and Betty, he greeted them cheerly, "Well, glad to see you back so soon."

"Was that *you* whistling?" Bonnie asked in surprise.

"Of course, it was!" chuckled Wally. "Most folks don't know that we woodchucks can whistle. We only do it in our own homes. But I want to tell you—I followed your advice and it helped! You should see my burrow now. I'm right proud of it. Won't you come in and see it?"

The bunnies gladly followed Wally through the dark doorway. The tunnel slanted downward for about three feet and just as they were getting used to the slope they found themselves groping upward. Soon they came out into a little room, cozy and snug as could be—just the right size for a woodchuck family.

Shortly the bunnies and Wally came back into the sunshine.

"That is a good place for a den," said Betty.

"And it will stay dry," added Wally.

"What's the idea of going downward first and then upwards?" asked Bonnie.

"Well, you see, if I put my nest at the bottom of the tunnel, the rain would run down and drown me and my family. Now the water may run down but soon drains away leaving our den safe and dry up on the higher level," explained Wally proudly.

"Of course! How smart," exclaimed Betty.

Wally Woodchuck:  
"I followed your advice and it helped! You should see my burrow now. I'm right proud of it. Won't you come in and see it?"



"That's very wise," agreed Bonnie. "But *where* did you learn that trick?"

"Learn it?" chuckled Wally. "I didn't learn it, really. You know bunnies, that each of us has been given the wisdom we need to do the work we have to do. Our Creator saw to that! After you left me awhile ago, I got thinking about these things and began feeling thankful and then cheerful and then the work wasn't hard at all."

"Isn't it wonderful," exclaimed Bonnie "how each of us is especially designed! It helps when I feel discouraged to stop and count my blessings. Somehow everything seems so much better."

"That's right," agreed Betty.

"Sure thing!" added Wally emphatically. ♦

TO MEMORIZE:  
"Serve the Lord with gladness."  
—Psalm 100:2

THE LESSON  
Cheerfulness makes every  
job easier.

## Joses, The Brother of Jesus

*Joses, the brother of Jesus,  
Was only a worker in wood,  
And he never could see the glory  
That Jesus his brother could;  
"Why stays He not in the workshop,"  
He often used to complain,  
"A-sawing the Lebanon cedar,  
Imparting to wood its stain?"*

*Why must He go thus a-roaming,  
Forsaking the family trade,  
While hammers are busily sounding,  
And there is gain to be made?"  
Thus ran the mind of Joses,  
So apt with plummet and rule,  
Dreaming whoever surpassed him  
Either a knave or a fool.*

*But he never walked with the Prophets  
He never caught sight of their bliss,  
And of all the mistakes of the ages,  
The saddest, me thinkest, is this:  
To have such a brother as Jesus,  
To talk with Him day by day,  
Yet never to catch the vision  
That glorified His clay!*





# KEEP OUT of the DEBATING SOCIETY

by EDWARD SHAYLER

*Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound—  
The word of life to me,  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind but now I see.*

**I**t is so easy to get involved in things that are not God's business, all the while thinking we are helping in some good endeavor.

In recent years I have been helped by group discussions on how to manage my life, and in many ways these discussions offered useful programs, and the final result was a complete reversal of my life, a complete change of my attitude.

The first requirement was to approach someone I felt confidence in and ask if he would be my sponsor. The man accepted and became my new friend. The very first question he asked me was, "Do you believe in God?" When I replied, "Yes!" he said, "Well, you are half way there."

Even my family found him an easy person to love. But he was not always gentle, and at times used methods that pushed my sensitive buttons. Once he made me sit in the back seat of his car because he said that my attitude was not worthy of sitting with him in the same seat! I was too "far from home to use alternatives." Another piece of advice he gave me sounded like a command. "Keep out of the debating society!" I asked, *What is the debating society?* He said the Oxford Dictionary could explain that better than he could. So that became an assignment that we would discuss. I got the dictionary and read:

- debate** 1. Strife, dissension, quarrelling; (a quarrel)  
2. Contention in argument; dispute, controversy;  
discussion; a discussion; esp. discussion in Parliament  
(It could even mean to fight, or combat)

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
His grace it tells me how to live,  
As I His truth receive.*

My friend was a gentle man, the son of a preacher, and had good habits and good language. He encouraged me to find a way to become teachable. He explained that the best way to do this was to empty my mind of my own opinions, and listen to others. He told me that whatever decisions I had made in the past were not useful; in fact, a lot of those opinions were the reason I needed to seek help. He said the formula for a contented mind was to open my mind, keep out of controversies, and live as I expected others to live. That meant I must do many things to change my habits, and to put effort into living one moment at a time. Eventually I would learn how to live one day at a time, and that would be a sufficient accomplishment. For just this moment I was not to lie, or brag, or make promises I could not keep. And I was to give my employer full measure, not take shortcuts. I was to consider how every action would affect others, and I was to begin making amends to anyone I had harmed, first with my family, then with others. And I was not to consider if anyone else needed to make amends to me. I was to be courteous to everyone.

I had a great deal of trouble accepting this last advice. It sounded like something coming from a man who had just climbed down from a tree. But I was desperate, and willing to try almost anything, so I promised to give the advice a determined effort.

My friend began to help me with daily living problems. I began to trust his advice. We spent many hours together, and slowly there was improvement; but often I felt that he had a dull life without excitement. At times the fast lane still looked enticing.

*The Lord has promised good to me,  
His word my hope secures  
If He my shield and portion is  
As long as life endures.*

I remember one experience. I had been having a terrible day, and as I was getting ready to close the shop that my employer had given me charge of, I phoned my friend to explain my discouragement.

He was very sympathetic when I told him of all the bad things that happened that day; I explained to him in detail,



thoroughly reconstructing the day. He told me he was just having supper, but I should carefully make a list of the incidents as to their importance and phone him back when finished. His intention was to come to my aid. With help like that, how could I not improve?

I carefully listed all the incidents in proper order, then phoned him again. I was very careful to explain how much thought I had put into the list so that he would know it was a serious matter to me. He answered by telling me that he could not come just yet, but while I was waiting would I take the time to consider each item carefully and write down what caused each incident, and who was at fault in each incident.

Now I had something concrete to work with!

I started to rank the items according to their importance. The first three items took some soul searching, but I answered as honestly as I could. I began to realize what he was about to tell me. Thinking I would beat him to the answer, I phoned him immediately and accused him of trying to show how smart he was. I can still hear his answer: "Get out of the debating society." I felt as though I had just had a relapse. Yes, I had been my own worst enemy. I could have easily walked away from all that trouble.

## RIGHT AND WRONG

ARE NOT OPEN TO DEBATE.

IF GOD COMMANDS IT, IT IS RIGHT.

IF GOD FORBIDS IT, IT IS WRONG.

The "debating society" can cause more trouble than just a little disagreement. It can be the culprit that causes sleepless nights and even chronic illnesses. If we let resentments burn within us, they will grow and fester to a point where they become obsessions, and we will become convinced that a reprisal is necessary. This will cause us to want to get even, when all we needed to do was walk away and stay out of the debating society. In fact it is the single, most important reason why I had so much trouble with my life, I had always tried to impose my opinions on others, mostly to let others see how clever I was, all the while building an ego that could not be supported by logic. My sponsor recognized this fault, but how could he convince me that the problem was my own pride?

I well remember how my peers chastised me with statements like "Make your family...(your school, your teacher, your employer) proud of you." Unwittingly, I used the wrong method and made myself proud. God calls this being "stiff necked." There was a powerful lesson for me to learn. Humility was the lesson. It is not easy to change this attitude, but I realized that if I wanted peace in my life, it had to be done.

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.*

My sponsor gave me a book which contained some very good advice, but advice is useless unless it is accepted and applied. Some of it I still remember. Here are a few thoughts from it:

*The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it. Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles, we think we ought not to urge them. We should not talk incessantly to them about spiritual matters. Our behavior will convince them more than our words. We must remember that ten or twenty years of riotous living would make a skeptic out of anyone.*

*There are some wrongs that we cannot fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. But we do not delay if we can.*

*We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile.*

*As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.*

*"If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom, and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experiences can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.*

There was great improvement in my life, but...there was still something missing. This philosophy could take me so far but no further. The future was the important part.

Later, with this man's encouragement and my wife's example, I eventually approached my Church, visited them, and was surprised to find the tools to make the new life possible. In fact, they offered so much encouragement and Bible truth that if I fail it is because of my own lack of effort.

I am writing this many years after that visit. My life has become a wonderful experience, full of hope and peace, and a chief desire to "Keep out of the debating society."

*When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.*





# ARE YOU

# Salty?

Salt formations along the DEAD SEA.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TODD BOLEN IN ISRAEL

by SHIRLEY B. BYERS

When Jesus said, *"You are the salt of the earth,"* He provided us with an expression which has become the greatest of compliments.

In the time of Jesus, salt was associated with three special qualities:

## (1) Salt purifies

In the ancient world, salt was connected with purity. No doubt its glistening whiteness made the connection easy. So then, if we are to be the salt of the earth we must be an example of purity. The world in which we live is lowering its standards. Standards of honesty, standards of diligence

in work, standards of carefulness, moral standards are being lowered all around us.

Our task as Christians is to set an example of purity. When some questionable thing is suggested, there is no such thing as being neutral; we are either for or against it. Many do not have the moral strength and courage to take a stand by themselves and say, "I will not be party to it!"

As Christians, we need the courage to strive for absolute purity in our speech, in our conduct, and even in thought (I Tim. 4:12). We cannot withdraw from the world, but we must, as James says, *"refuse to let the world corrupt us"* (Jas. 1:27 NLT).

## (2) Salt preserves

In the ancient world, salt was a common preservative. If we are to be the salt of the earth, we must have a certain antiseptic influence on life. There are certain people in whose company it is easy to be good; and there are others among

whom standards are relaxed. There are certain people in whose presence a soiled story would be readily told, and there are other people to whom no one would dream of telling such a tale.

The Christian's task is to be a cleansing antiseptic, by his very presence making it easier for others to do right.

If we are the salt of the earth, our example will be apparent to all we come in contact with, not just within the Church. A Christianity that lives only inside the Church walls is of little use. It should be even more visible in the ordinary activities of life—in the way we treat an assistant, or the clerk across the counter; in how we order a meal at a restaurant, how we treat an employee or work for an employer. Our Christianity should show in the way we drive our cars, in the daily language we use, in the recreation we choose, in everything we look at or read. It will be as apparent in the factory, workshop, office or kitchen, as in the Church.

## (3) Salt adds flavor

The most obvious quality of salt is that salt adds flavor to food. Christianity is to life what salt is to food. It adds the right flavor.

Some say that Christianity takes the flavor out of life, but those who say this only show they have not tasted it. They may have sampled an imitation, but not the real thing. In attempting to mix the two they have lost the true flavor.

True Christianity removes from our lives only that which we are better off without—the jealousy, the hatred, the pride and bitterness, all the animal traits that cause us unhappiness. The Christ-life calls for deep soul-searching, sacrifice, challenge and courage, yet it brings a joy and peace that cannot be found in any other way.

Are you salty? Do you have the salt of goodness, love, peace, hope and goodwill to sprinkle on others' lives? It will make everything better, both now and through eternity. ♦

*"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless"—Matthew 5:13 NLT*



### CHRIST'S RETURN

*The skies are growing darker  
With the passing of the years,  
And life becomes more restless  
And on every hand are fears.*

*But as Christians we are waiting  
For the breaking of the day;  
We are certain Christ is coming—  
He may now be on the way!*

*Deeper still will grow earth's darkness—  
Still more awesome grows its night,  
But for Christ our eyes are looking,  
Soon will come that Day so bright.*

*The heights of happiness and holiness  
are precisely the same slopes.*

*You can keep your faith only as you can keep a plant,  
by rooting it deep into your life and making it grow there.*

*Never fear shadows.  
They simply mean a light is shining nearby.*

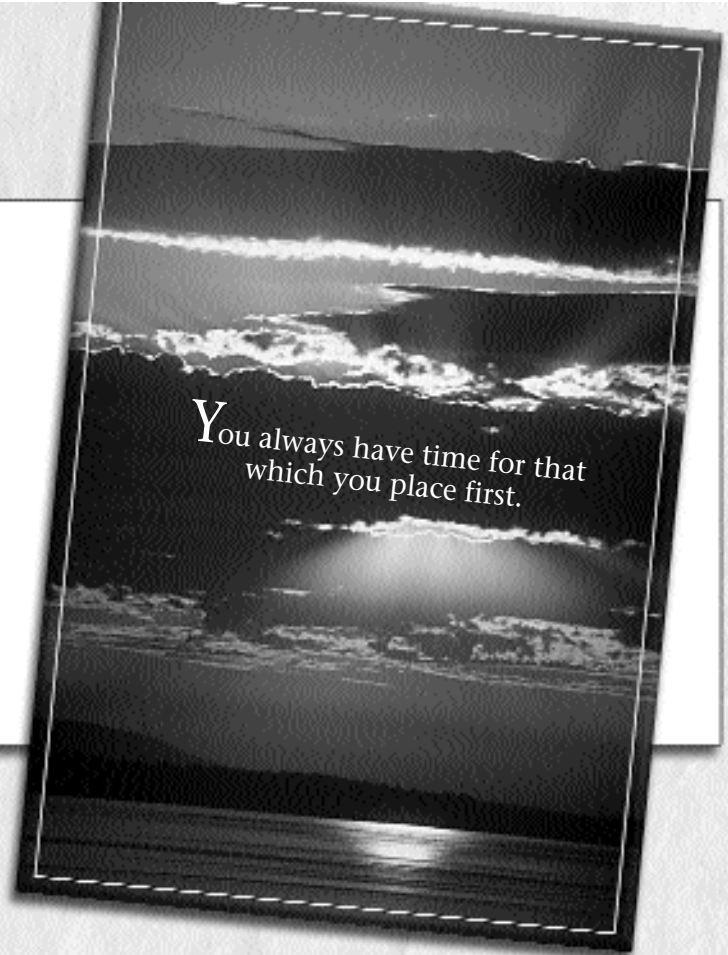
*You can't help someone else up the hill without  
getting closer to the top yourself.*

*God will never leave you without light enough to take  
one step; don't stop walking till the light gives out.*

*Excellence is never cheap. It is costly.  
Constant care, serious preparation, and continual application  
are required. Excellence involves desire plus  
discipline plus determination.*

*We aren't judged by what we want to do and can't,  
but by what we ought to do and don't.*

*Nothing will show more accurately what we are,  
than the way we meet trials and difficulties.*



*You always have time for that  
which you place first.*

*Encouragement is oxygen to the soul.*

*One of the most difficult things to give away is  
kindness—it is usually returned.*

*The best way for Christians to grow is to  
eat the bread of life.*

### MY PRAYER

*To grow a little wiser day by day,  
To school my mind and body to obey,  
To keep my inner life both clean and strong,  
To free my life from guile, my hands from wrong,  
To shut the door on hate and scorn and pride,  
To open them to love, the windows wide,  
To meet with cheerful heart what comes to me,  
To turn life's discords into harmony,  
To share some weary workers heavy load,  
To point some straying comrade to the road,  
To know that what I have is not my own,  
To feel that I am never quite alone;  
This would I pray from day to day,  
That God will lead and guide me all the way.*

AMEN





## What Have We DONE Today?

**W**e shall do so much in the years to come,  
But what have we done today?

We shall give our gold in a princely sum,  
But what did we give today?

We shall cheer the heart and dry the tear,  
We shall plant a hope in the place of fear,  
We shall speak the words of love and cheer;  
But what did we speak today?

**W**e shall be so kind in the afterwhile,  
But what have we been today?

We shall bring each lonely life a smile,  
But what have we brought today?

We shall give to truth a grander birth  
And to steadfast faith a deeper worth;  
We shall feed the hungering souls of earth;  
But whom have we fed today?

**W**e shall reap such joys in the by-and-by,  
But what have we sown today?

We shall build us mansions in the sky,  
But what have we built today?

'Tis sweet in idle dreams to bask,  
But here and now do we do our task?  
Yes, this is the thing our souls must ask:  
What have we done today?

—Selected