

Megiddo Message

Summer 2011



*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of
the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

Habakkuk 2:14



IF...THEN...ELSE

Have you thought, as I have, about being face to face with Christ for the first time? He looks directly at you—through you—and you know nothing is hid from His view. Though you may have tried to push the thought into the background, when you made a covenant with God you knew this day was coming. And you knew you should be getting ready for it. You knew also the possible outcomes: either “*Depart from Me,*” or “*Enter into the joy of your Lord*” (Matt. 25:41, 23). You may *assume* that Christ is your friend, and will approve the record of your life and usher you into His Kingdom, but do you *know*? Do you *know* that the outcome of that meeting will be in your favor?

As you stand facing Christ, a thousand thoughts race through your mind, along with passages direct from the Word of God and vital to salvation: “*You are My friends IF you do whatever I command you. ... IF you earnestly obey... IF you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings ... IF you diligently obey ... IF you keep My commandments ... IF you are willing and obedient ... IF you do these things...*” (John 15:14; Deut. 11:13; Jer. 7:5; Deut. 28:1, also Zech 6:15, Ex. 20:6, and Prov. 4:4, 7:2; Isa. 1:19–20; 2 Pet. 1:10–11).

God is serious about what He requires, and He will accept into His eternal Kingdom only those who give Him the respect He is due by obeying Him. That is why every promise of eternal blessing is preceded by an IF, either stated or implied. He will accept only those who grow to become like Jesus in character—pure, upright, kind, patient, humble, courageous, unselfish (Rom. 13:13–14; Eph. 4:31–32), who cut out of their lives anything and everything God forbids (see Col. 3:5–10; Mark 7:21–23). Even though many well-meaning “Christians” may believe “once saved, always saved,” or “Jesus is a friend of sinners (like me),” or “come just as you are, God loves you,” the Bible does not uphold any idea of an automatic, guaranteed friendship; no once-and-for-all forgiveness; no substitute to take the penalty for our unrepented-of and unforsaken sins. If we disregard any of God’s commands, we are not Christ’s friend and will be rejected in the day of Judgment.

Aren’t we grateful that the Day of Judgment has not arrived, that God in His mercy is still giving us time to heed the IFs in His instructions?

Like it or not, when Jesus returns every person living will come face to face with God’s justice. I am not talking about the “do good to everybody” social justice that is popular today. I am talking about the justice that will soon make God’s laws universal. When Jesus comes, the edict will go forth: “*Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come*” (Rev. 14:7). Everyone living will have to decide: Shall I submit to the new authority—and live? or shall I resist—and die? This choice has always been the principle underlying Divine justice, to give to “*every man according to his works,*” according to “*the fruit of his doings*” (Isa. 3:10–11). From God’s statement to Cain in Genesis (4:7) right through the very final judgment in the book of Revelation, all are “*judged according to their works, by the things which*

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.

Do you KNOW
that the outcome of
meeting Christ will
be in your favor?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

Megiddo Message

The *Megiddo Message* (USPS 338-120) (ISSN 0194-7826) is published quarterly by the Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619. Telephone: 585-436-1614. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, New York.

Publication Staff:

Ruth E. Sisson, Editor; Gerald R. Payne, Executive Editor. Art and design by Margaret A. Tremblay; Subscriptions Manager, Donna R. Mathias.

Subscription Rate and Renewals:

One year (four issues) \$10.00. Send to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697. Or e-mail megiddo@megiddo.com. Or call 585-436-1614.

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

Address Changes?

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

URL: www.megiddochurch.com

E-mail address: megiddo@megiddo.com

Manuscript Policy: Unsolicited manuscripts for publication are not accepted.

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

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

Publishing Frequency: The *Megiddo Message* published with the seasons—Spring (March), Summer (June), Fall (September), and Winter (December).

Bible Quotations: Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version or the New King James Version. Other versions are identified as used.

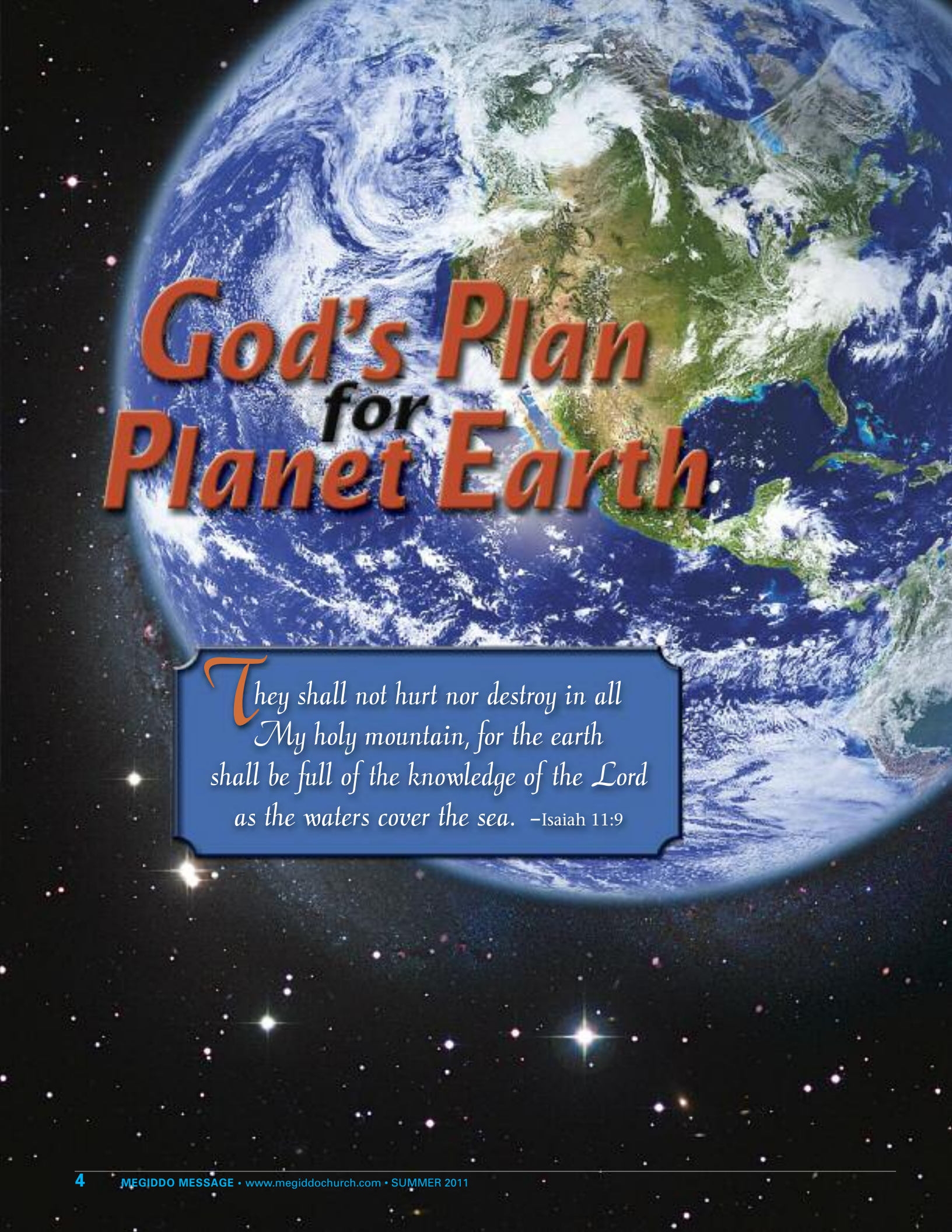
The following lexicons are abbreviated as:
BDAG—Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature;
DBL—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; **EDNT**—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; **GES**—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldean lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; **HAL**—Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; **LJS**—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; **LN**—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains; **SHG**—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. **THAYER**—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

In this Issue...

- 2** EDITORIAL
If...Then...Else by Gerald R. Payne
- 4** SPECIAL FEATURE
God's Plan for Planet Earth
Where Is History Headed?
 A pictorial timeline of God's work on Earth from Adam to Eternity
- 12** DRAMA
The Runaway's Return
 SCENE FOUR: In Paul's Hired House
- 16** QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Who Is Greater? by Gerald R. Payne
How is Jesus our propitiation?
- 20** MAGNIFYING THE WORD
Did Jesus Raise Himself from the Dead? by Ruth E. Sisson
 A closer look at John 2:14, 19-21
- 22** ARTICLE
Is Your Lantern Lit? by Shirley B. Byers
- 23** KNOW YOUR BIBLE?
Questions From Matthew • Parables in Matthew
- 24** AWESOME DESIGNS
The Moray Eel by Patricia A. Fleming
The Snake-like Fish
- 26** YOUTH IN CHRIST
Drive Them Deep • True Freedom
- 28** ARTICLE
The Muscles That Matter Most
- 30** POEM
Watch! by Liot L. Snyder
- 31** LINES TO LIVE BY
Striving for Excellence
- 32** BACK COVER POEM
We Must Advance by Liot L. Snyder

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).



God's Plan for Planet Earth

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all
My holy mountain, for the earth
shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea. —Isaiah 11:9*

Where Is History Headed?

GOD'S PLAN FOR PLANET EARTH

Refer to chart on pages 6 to 9

God has a plan for Planet Earth. "He created it not in vain," said the ancient Prophet (Isa. 45:18), "He formed it to be inhabited." He formed it to be ultimately a perfect and ideal world, filled with His glory (Num. 14:21), inhabited with people who have been made immortal like the angels (Luke 20:35–36) with bodies that cannot die, enjoying the fulfillments, adventures, challenges and limitless opportunities of life in the finished Kingdom of God.

This plan is the theme of our Lord's Prayer: "Your Kingdom come. Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

It is the focal point of the entire Bible, a plan that stretches as far as God's mercy—"from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. 103:17-18). It is all according to the Great Creator's "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:10–11).

As described in the Bible, the plan has three distinct periods:

Phase 1: SELECTION of Kingdom Rulers:

6000 Years From Adam To The Second Advent Of Jesus Christ

Phase 2: EXPANSION and SELECTION of Kingdom Populace: 1000 Years Of Peace (The Millennial Reign Of Jesus Christ)

Phase 3: COMPLETION: The Eternal Age—God's Finished, "All New" Earth

This, in summary, is the message of the chart that follows (see pages 6-9).

PHASE 1: SELECTION

From Adam to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ

The first of Genesis (chapters 1–3) uses symbolic pictures to describe "creation"—not of the physical heavens and earth but of a new, ideal people for His finished world. The Master Mind behind the plan, the Designer and Executor of this vast project is our Creator, God Almighty.

Genesis describes the first phase of God's work on earth as taking place in six days which represents, in prophetic time, six thousand years (one day = one thousand years—2 Pet. 3:8). At the end of this six days, or six thousand years, God will send His Son (Acts

3:21–22) to take over the governing of the earth (Zech. 14:9).

During this 6000 year period, God is seeking and developing individuals to be co-rulers with His Son in His eternal finished Kingdom on earth. The qualifications are high, and candidates are few (Matt. 7:13–14), for each must attain the character likeness of His Son (Eph. 4:11–13). But the Bible tells of some individuals who responded during this time.

Adam. The first to answer God's call to serve.

Noah. A "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5) to whom God revealed His plan to destroy the world of the ungodly, assigning him the task of building an ark to save any who would believe. Picture Noah preaching year after year, year after year, for 100+ years to hard-hearted, cold, unbelieving, scoffing neighbors and passersby, while he obeyed God's command and worked untiringly on the ark.

Abraham. Called out of the land of his birthplace (Ur of the Chaldees—Gen. 12:1–5), Abraham obeyed, and received in return the honorary title "Father of the Believers" and the promise that in him "all families of the earth [world]" would be blessed.

Moses. Great Hebrew statesman, lawgiver and God-appointed leader to take the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to become an independent nation in Canaan.

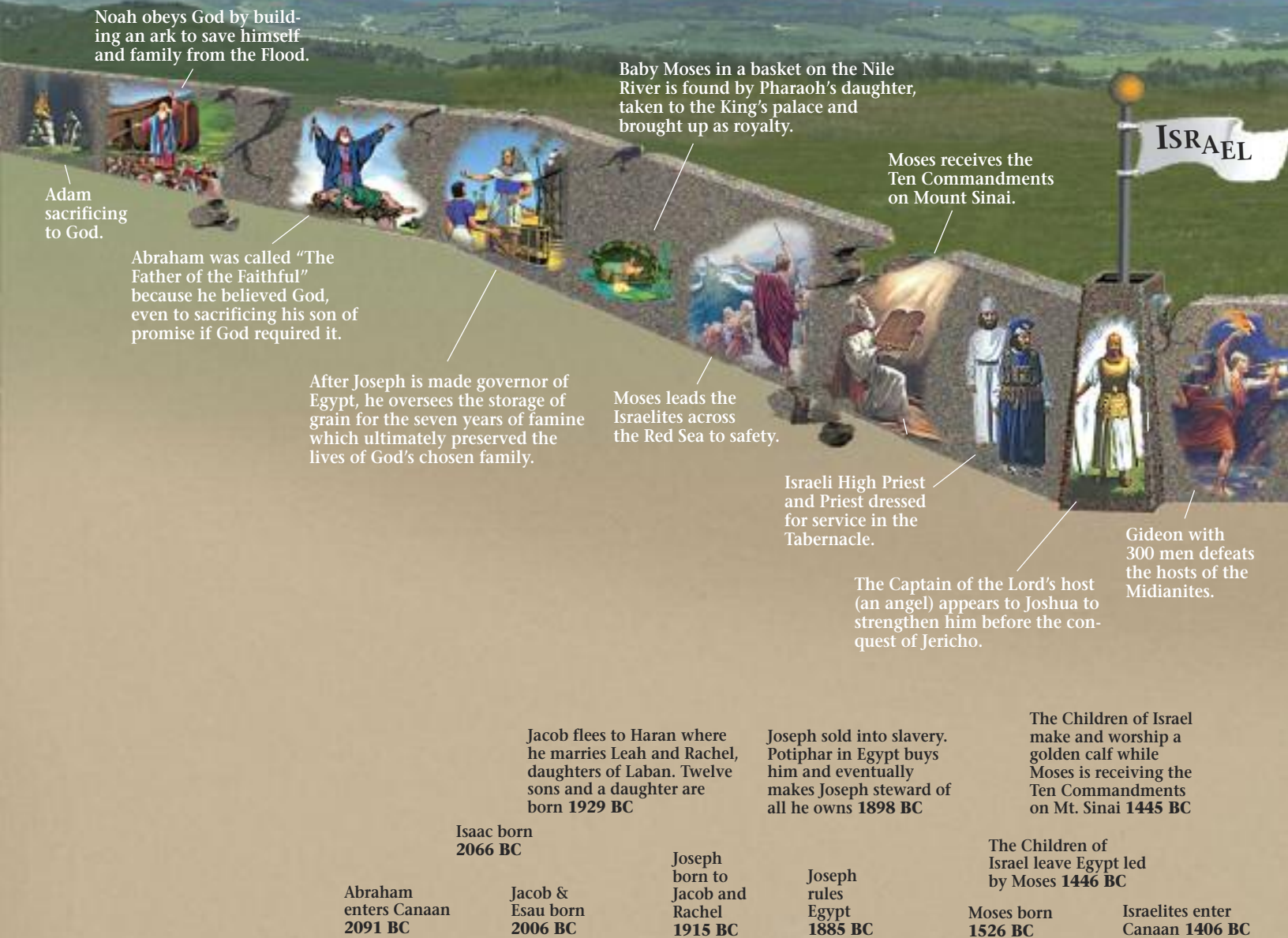
THE UNITED MONARCHY OF ISRAEL

During the earliest days of the Israelite nation, God arranged that the people should be directly under His rule (a theocracy), subject to His laws, their prosperity depending on their obedience and faithfulness to Him. When they deserted Him and turned to worshiping idols, God let them fall into the hands of their enemies. When they turned back to Him, He arranged for their deliverance and once again they enjoyed peace until they turned back to idolatry and the cycle began again.

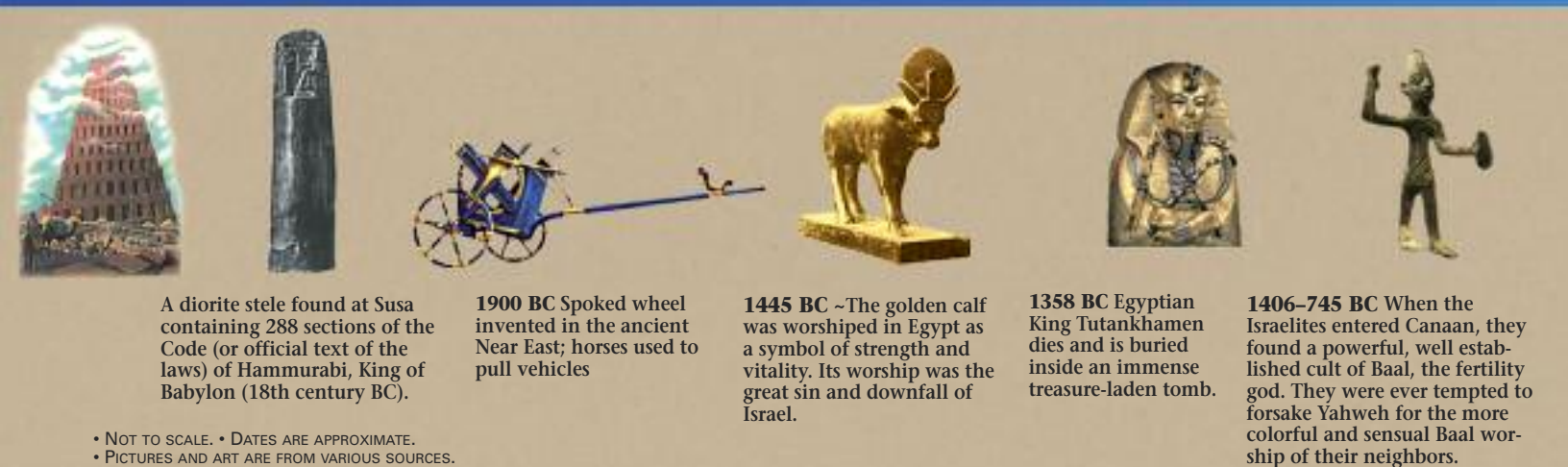
Despite the errant behavior of a people more bent on seeking their own pleasure than on obeying God, the era produced some great leaders, among them Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samuel. Then the people clamored

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Where Is History?



← **6000 Years from Adam to the**



ry Headed?

Ruth the Moabitess
gleans in Boaz's
wheat fields.

King David rules Israel
wisely and justly in the
fear of his God.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon
has a divinely inspired dream. In
it he sees a great image of a man,
which represents FOUR world
kingdoms to be followed by a
FIFTH kingdom, the Kingdom of
God, which will fill the whole
earth. (Daniel 2)

Nehemiah rebuilds
the wall of Jerusalem
after the Captivity.

Jesus' birth

Resurrection
of Jesus Christ

Samuel anoints
Saul the first king of
Israel.

God sends fire from heaven
to consume the sacrifice in
answer to Elijah's prayer.

Israel (northern king-
dom) falls; destroyed by
Assyrians 722 BC

Samuel born; great
spiritual leader and last
judge of Israel 1105 BC

Elijah prophesies
in Israel 875 BC

1st
BABYLONIAN
KINGDOM

2nd
MEDO-PERSIAN
KINGDOM

3rd
GRECIAN KINGDOM

Gideon judges
Israel 1162 BC

David becomes
Israel's second
king 1010 BC

Kingdom
of Israel
divides
930 BC

Nebuchadnezzar defeats
Assyrians; becomes king
of Babylon. Daniel taken
captive to Babylon 605 BC

Judas Maccabeus begins
a revolt against
Antiochus IV 165 BC

Jesus crucified, resurrected,
ascends into heaven;
Pentecost; early church
beginnings 30 AD

Judges begin
to rule Israel
1375 BC

Saul becomes
Israel's first
king 1050 BC

Solomon
becomes
Israel's third
king 970 BC

Jeremiah
becomes a
prophet
627 BC

Cyrus of Persia
overthrows
Babylon 539 BC

Esther becomes
queen of Persia
479 BC

Nehemiah
builds Jerusalem
wall 445 BC

JESUS CHRIST
born 6/5 BC

Jesus begins
His ministry
26/27 AD

BC AD

2 Second Advent of Christ Jesus



Golden cup from
Egyptian tomb



538 BC Cyrus the
Great decrees on this
cylinder that the
Jewish captives may
return to their home-
land and rebuild it.



331 BC Alexander the Great
defeats the Persian empire.
Though he dies at 32 years
and his four generals divide
the empire, Greek learning
and influence are spread
throughout.



54 AD Nero becomes emperor
of Rome. He persecutes the
Christians. To Nero the
Apostle Paul appealed and
later was martyred.



64 AD Fire burns much
of Rome. Nero blames
Christians for setting it.

70 AD Romans
destroy Jerusalem

Paul's conversion on
Damascus road 35 AD



The Apostle Paul writing from prison

The Apostle John sees New Jerusalem coming down in vision on the Island of Patmos.

The Angel guarding the "waters" during the 1260 years of the Apostasy. (Daniel 12:7)

Elijah-Forerunner

Christ Returns

60 AD Paul writes "prison letters"

THE APOSTASY

RESURRECTION
JUDGMENT
ARMAGEDDON

5th THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

The Millennium—Christ and His 144,000 co-rulers reign with justice and in righteousness over a happy and prosperous mortal populace.

4th ROMAN KINGDOM

- Roman state weakened by corruption, violence, license;
- Roman empire invaded by barbarians

- Muslim religion grows strong.

- Christianity spreads, grows strong; accepts pagan philosophy and rituals; emerges as ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

- The Inquisition, Renaissance and Reformation;

- Discovery of Americas

- Knowledge increased; space travel, computer revolution, medical science advanced

John the Revelator completes the New Testament by 70 AD

68 AD Romans destroy a Jewish religious commune of the Essene sect. Before the Essenes were captured they hid their library of Bible manuscripts in a cave in Qumran by the Dead Sea (discovered in 1948).

1000 YEARS OF

Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy.

"I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more.

"They will not work in vain, and their children will not be doomed to misfortune. For they are people blessed by the Lord, and their children, too, will be blessed." – Isaiah 65:18–19, 23 NLT

You Are Here

Where are we on the earth's timeline? Where are we in relation to our Creator's long-range plan for Planet Earth? When can we expect the beginning of the Millennium?

The sequence of history and currently fulfilling prophecies place us at a point in time just prior to the return of Jesus. The first period of 6000 years, during which all are free to serve God or ignore Him as they choose, is nearly spent. In the words of the ancient Prophet, "The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly" (Zeph. 1:14).

Our present calendar being of Roman time and not Bible, we cannot know precisely our place in God's scale of time. But the record of the history behind us is enough to convince us that the six thousand years is running out. If Adam lived approximately 4000 years before Christ; and if we add the years we count since the birth of Christ, even though they are not an exact measure of the time, we have an approximation which tells us that we are very near the end of this era. The present age is rapidly drawing to a close. The seventh day of rest, the glorious seventh thousand-year day, the Millennial reign of Christ, is almost here!

This is no dream or fanciful imagination. It is all revealed in the Bible. It is all according to our Creator's eternal purpose in creating worlds, populating them, developing them, and finally glorifying them (Eph. 3:11, 14-15, Ps. 103:17-18). He has been following this plan on other spheres through eternity past; He shall continue through eternity future. Ours is the special privilege of being HERE at this highly significant point in the plan of Almighty God for Planet Earth, right on the verge of the culmination of all that has been prophesied.

What a great time to be alive!

Life! Life! Life!

Immortality!

SECOND RESURRECTION
SECOND JUDGMENT

PEACE

ETERNITY →

Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

"He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true...."

"He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." – Rev. 21:3-7 NIV

• NOT TO SCALE. • DATES ARE APPROXIMATE.
• PICTURES AND ART ARE FROM VARIOUS SOURCES.

God's Plan for Planet Earth

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

for a King, and God granted their request.

King David. Second, God-anointed king of the United Monarchy, David extended the nation to its farthest boundaries, with the intent that it should be a strong and God-fearing nation.

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED: ISRAEL AND JUDAH

Within 120 years of its founding, the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms.

The history of the divided kingdoms is a record of almost perpetual backsliding. Again and again God raised up Prophets to warn the people to turn from their evil ways and serve Him alone or experience suffering, defeat in battle, and ultimately the loss of their national sovereignty. These Prophets taught and warned the people by delivering messages from God—sometimes spoken, sometimes by miracles, sometimes by open demonstrations by divine power, sometimes by drama enacted in the street. But the people were, for the most part, unheeding and often showed their rejection of God by mistreating—even killing—His prophets.

Bent on idol worship and following the pattern of the surrounding nations, they refused to live according to God's laws. After a few hundred years, a few revivals, and many apostasies, the promised disaster came, just as God's prophets had foretold, in 586 B.C. God allowed the wayward kingdoms to be conquered, Jerusalem was besieged, destroyed and burned, and the people were either killed or taken into captivity.

THE CAPTIVITY

But even when the nation was captive in a foreign land, all was not lost. The seventy years of captivity in Babylon, foretold by the prophet Jeremiah (25:1–12), produced some people of high character, among them the noble Daniel and his three companions. Even though living in the king's court, in Babylon itself, Daniel kept himself undefiled, and merited this high commendation from the angel Gabriel: "a man greatly beloved" (Daniel 9:23).

THE RETURN

The Israelite people were still captives in Babylon when Babylon was attacked and fell to

the Persians led by Cyrus. Unlike most conquerors, Cyrus issued a decree that the captive Israelites could return to their homeland. Thousands went back, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and later Nehemiah. Life was hard, but this period yielded some outstanding God-fearing leaders, among them Ezra, Nehemiah, and the prophets Haggai and Zachariah.

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

Four hundred years of silence separate the close of the Old Testament from the beginning of the New. But when the time was right for the Messiah to be born, there were faithful believers waiting and ready.

LANDMARK: JESUS CHRIST

Most of the prophecies in the Old Testament focused on the coming of one person: Jesus Christ, the Messiah. His birth, His birthplace, His life, parentage, lineage, His high character, His ministry, His teaching, His miracles, and numerous events associated with His betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, all had been foretold by the Hebrew prophets. Jesus was the perfect pattern for all time. Everywhere He went He was revealing the plan of God for the earth and its inhabitants. Everywhere He went He was preaching the kingdom, of which He Himself was to be the king. Before He ascended, He personally chose and trained twelve men (the apostles) to carry on in His absence.

THE APOSTOLIC AGE

During the time immediately after Jesus' ascension, the Church expanded rapidly from a local ministry in the area of Jerusalem to all parts of the then known world. For this task, Jesus sent special power on the Day of Pentecost, as had been prophesied (Joel 2:23). Equipped with divine power, the apostles could teach with conviction, and those who heard knew that they were divinely sent. The result was the establishment of many churches, and numerous bodies of believers.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

With the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in AD 70, as Jesus had foretold (Luke 21:24; Matt. 24:15–20), the Jewish age ended, the Jews were disbursed, and the movement the apostles had begun changed dramatically. About this same time the Holy Spirit power

was withdrawn, that power by which the early believers had been able to make phenomenal progress in spreading the gospel of the kingdom. At the same time, the writing of the Bible was completed so that any desiring to learn God's ways would not be left without guidance.

APOSTASY

The most dramatic change during this era was the slow turn away from the true teachings of Jesus to the philosophies and religions of the Empire. New converts, thinking to modernize and update the teaching of Jesus, brought ideas from their Greek and Roman backgrounds, which little by little they incorporated into the teachings of the Church. It was a slow transition, but within a few centuries the apostasy was complete, and all were turned from truth to fables, again as prophesied (2 Tim. 4:3–4; 2 Thess. 2:3–5; Matt. 25:5). The religion of Jesus Christ was silenced, and in its place a new monolith called Christianity spread throughout the Empire, and became the instrument of political power for more than a thousand years.

During this time, the “wall” representing the people serving God was broken down, as no one was even aware of the work that God had begun or was doing toward the coming kingdom of Christ.

RENAISSANCE, REFORMATION, AND REAWAKENING

With the growth of independent thought in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, increased trade and travel brought new and challenging ideas as well as the weakening of the power of the Church. Slowly and painfully, against fierce opposition, the Bible, preserved through the Dark Ages in the careful custody of the Church, was translated into the languages of the people and the invention of the printing press and movable type made the Bible available to the common people. All this was part of the plan of God, so that when the time was right the true teachings of the Word of God could be rediscovered and a people prepared to meet the returning King.

As Jesus explained in the parable of the Ten Virgins, “*all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.*”

We today are still in this period of time, when the Word of God is available and the return of Jesus Christ is imminent.

LANDMARK: THE SECOND ADVENT OF JESUS CHRIST

PHASE 2: EXPANSION

1000 Years of Peace (the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ)

The end of the first phase of the Divine plan will climax with the return of Jesus Christ, who comes to establish His kingdom and subdue and conquer all opposition and evil, bringing to an end all war, suffering, oppression, terror, and the inhumanity of man to man.

The second advent of Jesus will open the way to earth-transforming events, as Jesus Christ is crowned king of the earth (Rev. 17:14), as He selects and crowns His co-rulers with immortality (at the judgment of the saints—2 Cor. 5:10), as He conquers the nations of the earth (the Battle of Armageddon—Rev. 16:16), and sets up His new government to reign in peace and righteousness for a thousand years (The Millennium—Isa. 32:17–18; Rev. 20:4).

The Millennium will be probation day for the multitudes who will comprise the populace of the Kingdom. They will enjoy the richest, happiest, most prosperous living ever experienced by any people on this planet. At the same time, they will be disciplined, tested, and taught the right ways of God.

PHASE 3: COMPLETION

The Eternal Age—God's Finished, “All New” Earth

At the end of the seventh day of millennial rest, those who lived during the Millennium will be judged “*according to their works,*” and those who are approved will be made immortal (Rev. 20:7–11). At this point, all the evil doers will be finally removed, death will be destroyed, and the endless ages of ETERNITY will begin, bringing eternal expansion, eternal growth, eternal happiness, and eternal life for everyone on earth.

At this point, planet Earth will become a finished part of God's finished creation (heaven). Everyone on earth will be immortal. Death, sickness, suffering and sin will be eliminated forever, and God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven—the ultimate goal of our Great Creator! ♦

For further information on this subject, see our booklet, “*The Kingdom of God*” available on our website: www.megiddochurch.com

From: Paul, prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ, and brother Timothy
 To: Philemon our much-loved fellow-worker, Apphia our sister and Archippus who is with us in the fight; to the Church that meets in your house:

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank God for you, Philemon, in my constant prayers for you all, for I have heard how you love and trust both the Lord Jesus himself and those who believe in him. . . .

And although I could rely on my authority in Christ and dare to order you to do what I consider right, I am not doing that. No, I am appealing to that love of yours, a simple personal appeal from Paul the old man, in prison for Jesus Christ's sake.

I am appealing for my child. Yes I have become a father though I have been under lock and key, and the child's name is - Onesimus! Oh, I know you have found him pretty useless in the past but he is going to be useful now, to both of us.

I am sending him back to you: will you receive him as my son, part of me? I should have dearly loved to have kept him with me: he could have done what you would have done - looked after me here in prison for the Gospel's sake. But I would do nothing without consulting you first, for if you have a favour to give me, let it be spontaneous and not forced from you by circumstances!

It occurs to me that there has been a purpose in your losing him. You lost him, a slave, for a time; now you are having him back for good, not merely as a slave, but as a brother-Christian. He is already especially loved by me—how much more will you be able to love him, both as a man and as a fellow-Christian! You and I have so much in common haven't we? Then do welcome him as you would welcome me. If you feel he has wronged or cheated you put it down to my account.

I've written this with my own hand: I, Paul, hereby promise to repay you. (Of course I'm not stressing the fact that you might be said to owe me your very soul!) Now do grant me this favour, my brother - such an act of love will do my old heart good. As I send you this letter I know you'll do what I ask—I believe, in fact, you'll do more. . . . Amen.

From the Book of Philemon
 as translated by J. B. Phillips

When the apostle Paul wrote this short letter, he was in prison in Rome. Yet he calls himself Christ's prisoner.

The letter is from the heart of Paul to the heart of Philemon, "our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer" in the church in Colosse. Philemon was another of Paul's sons-in-the-faith.

Some of the people in this book are only names and unknown to us. But we know human nature, and we serve the same God. When these two facts are taken into account, we feel that we know considerable about them. When a person submits to being remade and reshaped by the law of God, he or she has much in common with others who are undergoing the same process. We speak the same "language," as it were, face the same struggles, confront the same enemies, and know the same joys of victory. We can even guess how they may react in some of the very difficult situations life presents—those character-building situations so needful to all. Slavery is not our problem, but how one person treats another is still relevant.

The result is not character alone, it is Christ-like character—the beautiful lives God is seeking for His eternal Kingdom on this earth.

One of the remarkable things about developing a Christian character is that neither wealth, genius, great cathedrals, multitudes, nor even freedom, is required. A correct knowledge of God's will for man and a rock solid determination to live by it are the only requirements. This challenge is open to any level or station of life, from the heights of wealth to the depths of slavery. God is not partial; He regards only character. All whom He calls share the same opportunity. Whatever one's situation, no one can harness another's mind; and that is where the new nature is formed, slowly, carefully, thought by thought. As one "thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

The Book of Philemon has only twenty-five verses. Not much for size, but the life principles it teaches in a harsh and violent world are unsurpassable.

The Runaway's Return

SCENE FOUR: In Paul's Hired House

CHARACTERS:

PAUL: the apostle

ONESIMUS: young household servant of Philemon

SOLDIER:

SETTING:

Paul's hired house in Rome. Paul and Onesimus face each other across a rude table. Onesimus has writing materials before him. The soldier in the corner is bored and listless.

PAUL: Onesimus, my son, I want you to know how very much I appreciate your help. With so much writing to do to the various churches, and my eyes getting worse all the time, God was very good to send me a strong, capable young helper like you. Right now you are my only support. Everyone else is away on Church business...Titus, Mark, Aristarchus, even Luke is away. I hope nothing will happen to take you away.

ONESIMUS: And I much more, my father. The debt is all on my side. You have done so much for me that I can't even express it, let alone repay it. Life wears a brighter face now that I live in a better world.

PAUL: And working for a still better life, my son, eternal life.

ONESIMUS: True, Brother Paul, true. *(pause)* Someday, when I have more courage, I must tell you something of my past.

PAUL: *(gently)* Have I asked? The past is something to forget, Onesimus, except for the lessons it teaches. "Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto the things which are before," we press toward the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

ONESIMUS: *(total silence)*

PAUL: But if there is something in the past that stands in the way of our spiritual growth, some wrong that can be righted, every sin

must be confessed to God. And if amends are due to our fellowman, they must be made, no matter how much it hurts. So, you see, the past is not always easy to escape. One cannot lay it down at will, if there are things to be made right.

But now, to business. I need you to write a short note for me acknowledging a gift.

You know, Onesimus, things are not what they used to be, and it is a good thing for me, to keep me from growing proud and independent. The time was when I earned my own living and asked nothing of any man. I preached the gospel without charge, and helped those who were in need out of my own pocket. I never thought the day would come when I would be dependent on others, but it has come, and it teaches us how uncertain are the things of this life.

Well, anyway, here's the letter *(Paul stands, paces across stage and back again)*.

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ,...
(Onesimus begins to write as Paul dictates.)
To our beloved brother Philemon
(Onesimus looks up, startled) and to the church that is in your house. In all my prayers I remember you and your wife Apphia and your son Archippus, and all the brethren. The gift arrived by the hand of Demas, and was greatly appreciated. May the Lord bless you for it. The warm clothing for the coming winter will be—
(Paul stops abruptly when he suddenly notices that Onesimus is not writing. Onesimus' face registers shock and distress.)

PAUL: Why, my son, what is wrong? Are you ill?
(Paul places his hand on Onesimus' shoulder.) Come. Onesimus, what is it?

ONESIMUS: *(rising to his feet, unsteadily, then leaning on table)* My father.... I ... I cannot write this letter.

PAUL: Why not?

ONESIMUS: Please, please do not ask me to.

PAUL: Why not, my son? This letter is to a good brother in Colosse whom you have never seen. What is the problem?

ONESIMUS: I...I must tell you. Father...I must tell everything.

PAUL: Go on, Son, go on.

ONESIMUS: It isn't pretty,... but it's true ... I am Philemon's ... slave ... born in his house.

PAUL: *(sitting down, in silence)*

ONESIMUS: He was kind to me....more like a father than a master, but I did not appreciate it....He educated me... made me his secretary.... He trusted me with all that he had. and...and...and... I betrayed his trust! *(breaks into sobbing)*.

PAUL: Go on, Son, go on.

ONESIMUS: I became... dissatisfied.... and while he was absent on business, I ran away. Worse than that...I am a thief! ...I told myself he owed me wages. And when I left I stole money from his treasury. Oh, it was a terrible sin, and how I have suffered for it....

PAUL: But not enough to make it right as yet, I take it. *(pause)* Go on, my son, with your story. You'll feel better when it is all out. You can trust me.

ONESIMUS: I went to Antioch and tried to live as a free man. The money went fast, and work was scarce. I found that freedom had its problems, too. I drifted here and there, to Ephesus, to Alexandria, to Corinth, sinking lower and lower...and at last to Rome, ragged and penniless, and here I fell into very bad company—the band of criminals from which you rescued me. *(pause)* That's my story. Surely I have been the greatest sinner in the world. Can ...can I... can I ever be forgiven? Tell me, do you think God will ever forgive me?

PAUL: My son, if God should hold us to account for the sins we committed before knowing His law, who could stand before Him? I, myself, was a sinner, the very chief of sinners.

ONESIMUS: No...

PAUL: Yes, far worse than you, my son. I persecuted the church of Christ, our very own brothers and sisters. I raided their meetings and broke them up. I flogged them,

men and women. Sent them to prison, even condemned them to death. But I did it ignorantly. I did it all believing I was doing right. Just as you probably believed you were taking only what was rightfully your own when you took money from Brother Philemon. But right is right. And wrong is wrong, and we were both wrong. Regardless of what we thought. How wonderful is God's mercy, that if we repent and turn from our sins, He will completely wipe them out by forgiveness. He will not mention them against us—He will not even remember them!

ONESIMUS: Oh my father. My father!...How wonderful indeed! And how I need that mercy! But... Philemon a Christian!? It seems incredible. He was never very strong for the old gods. But I never dreamed of anything like this.

PAUL: Yes. Philemon is the leader of the Christian group in Colosse, along with his wife. The church there meets regularly in their house, and the little band is bearing much good fruit.

ONESIMUS: And Archippus?

PAUL: Archippus is a zealous young preacher among them. By the way, when did you leave their household?

ONESIMUS: It was eight years ago last month.

PAUL: Eight years...And your master was away?

ONESIMUS: Yes, in Ephesus.

PAUL: In Ephesus...eight years ago last month. Did his wife go with him?

ONESIMUS: Yes.

PAUL: That was it, that was the first time I met Brother Philemon and his gracious wife. It was there that they were converted and baptized... Life is very strange, my son, is it not?

ONESIMUS: Truly it is, my father *(pause)*... Somehow I feel lighter now. I have been bottled up. Tense, for so long. But now what? Now that I have told you my past, ...*(sobbing again)* what shall I do? Where shall I go? Certainly you will not trust me now as you used to.

PAUL: Why not, my son? As I said, the past cannot be recalled. The present and the future are all that matter. I believe in you,

and I trust you. I do not believe you will let me down. But, unfortunately...I will not be able to keep you with me...

ONESIMUS: Oh! (*a soft cry of pain escapes his lips*) I was afraid of this.

PAUL: (*placing his hand affectionately on Onesimus' shoulder*) It is not that I do not wish to keep you, Onesimus. I love you as my own son, and I need you— desperately. I will be sorry beyond words to give you up. But you have a duty that comes ahead of my need. There are things here which you have to make right with your master.

ONESIMUS: But I have no money to repay my debt.

PAUL: No, and neither can I help you, for I am dependent on others myself. But you can and you must return to him and confess your fault and submit to his judgment. (*long silence*) You are aware that the law is very strict in this matter.

ONESIMUS: Yes...I must go back, back to slavery.

PAUL: Back to a victory over yourself. Now I do not want you to think, Onesimus, that I am condoning the institution of slavery. I detest it. I abhor it. Slavery is wrong in principle and wrong in practice. But like other features of human society, it is with us, and there is nothing we can do to change it. To advocate its overthrow would be to invite persecution, and there are better ways of handling it. Perhaps one day the conscience of mankind will abolish slavery in some parts of the world, but not for a long, long time, and never in the Roman world. The Roman world stands on a foundation of human misery and degradation. But since we have not power to overthrow it, we must rise above it.

ONESIMUS: How?

PAUL: There is a freedom which transcends any earthly condition.

ONESIMUS: You mean the freedom from ourselves...

PAUL: Exactly. Freedom from sin, the freedom of the spirit. Today I am in prison for the sake of the gospel, yet I am the freest man in Rome. No man, not even the Emperor, can enslave my soul or separate me from my true Master, who is Christ. No man can say to me, You shall not, when my Lord says, You shall. The things which really count are inside a man; when all is

well there, external conditions don't count for very much.

ONESIMUS: I see...This sort of freedom has a high price, doesn't it.

PAUL: It does. A very high price. It can be gained only by surrendering all other freedoms, including the freedom to think and speak and do as we please. I am free today because I am the servant, yes, the bond-slave of Jesus Christ. His will is mine, and all that I have is His. But His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Sin is the hard master.

In our Christian society, as you have observed, there is neither rich nor poor, bond nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female, but all are one in Christ. The influence of the Gospel is making it increasingly difficult for Christians to hold slaves with a good conscience.

ONESIMUS: What do you think Master Philemon will say?

PAUL: What Philemon's attitude in your case will be, I do not know, but whatever it is, you must clear yourself. We cannot get right with God until we have done all we can to make ourselves right with our fellowmen.

ONESIMUS: (*raises his head and speaks with determination*) Yes...I can do it. I will do it. I am afraid, but I will overcome my fear. I have sinned, and I will take my medicine. When do you wish me to go?

PAUL: Not until Luke and some of the other brethren return, which will be in the early Spring. And it may be that my case will come before the Emperor before that time. If I am set free, we can go together. As for the ship fare, we'll arrange it somehow. I have a few friends here in Rome who can be depended on to help out. But if I can't go I will write a suitable letter to Brother Philemon to send with you. It may help you.

ONESIMUS: Father, I thank you with all my heart. But I cannot rest until this thing is settled, now that my mind is made up. It will be a long winter.

PAUL: In the meantime, let us finish this letter. What was I saying ... Let's see...

(*curtain*)

(TO BE CONTINUED)

WHO IS GREATER?

"I must apologize for bothering you once again, but I cannot understand Matthew 11:11. Have you tackled it?"

The passage reads, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11).

Most religious teachers see in this passage a comparison between one (like John) who lived before Christ's so-called "redemptive death" and one who is in the Kingdom, hence after Christ's death (they would be assuming the mistaken belief that the Kingdom began with Pentecost). The NKJV Study Bible comments, for example, "as great as John was during Jesus' day, his position as forerunner was inferior to that of the least person in the Kingdom of heaven because that person will have seen and understood the finished work of Christ on the cross and through His resurrection—events that John would not live to see." We cannot accept this thinking because it is not according to Scripture. Not in a single passage did Jesus say that His death on the cross was redemptive for others, nor would it make anyone eligible for a place in the Kingdom. In this passage, Jesus states His subjects for comparison, and they are (1) a serious believer such as John the Baptist and (2) one who is "in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus' point is not the time one happens to live but the meaning of being "in the kingdom of heaven."

In the verses just preceding this text, Jesus had painted a glowing tribute to the superior qualities of John as a man. Then, at the close of the tribute, as if to keep things in perspective, Jesus compares the greatness of John, a man of noblest character, with the greatness of one who has been judged faithful and granted an eternal place in the Kingdom of God. Since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50), all who inherit a place there, whether "least" or greatest, must have received the change to the immortal state when Jesus returns (see Phil. 3:20–21).

Jesus is saying, in essence, Yes, John is great among mortals born up to this time, but you should rather direct your attention to the

greatness of being part of the coming Kingdom, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50).

To put it another way, the greatest mortal on earth is insignificant compared to the very least among immortals (those who inherit the Kingdom). Why? Because all who are in the finished Kingdom, whatever their status, have received the change to the immortal state. Having been made like the angels, never to die (Luke 20:36), they are superior to the very best of mortals.

◆ HOW IS JESUS OUR PROPITIATION?

"How is Jesus our propitiation if He did not die to appease God's wrath for our sins? See 1 John 2:1–2. I read in a Bible commentary that 'God is the object of an offering for sin, so that His wrath can be placated.' Isn't this the meaning of Christ's atoning sacrifice?"

You state the basic view of probably 99.99% of Christianity. Convinced that God's standards are so high and God is so holy that we can do nothing that will satisfy Him, mainstream Christianity believes we must look to Christ for our righteousness, that we can do nothing toward our own salvation. They make such statements as:

- "Our own efforts are the cause of our failure...we have to cease from our own working and accept in faith the promise that God will give us life in Christ." (Andrew Murray)
- "The best that man can do will take him to hell but never to heaven. Heaven is too holy to be entered on any such basis as man's works." (*Decision* magazine)
- "Man can exceed his own standards but never, left to himself, can he attain to God's standard of righteousness." (*KJV Study Bible*, 1997)
- "We cannot save ourselves because as sinners we can never meet God's requirements. Our only hope is faith in Jesus Christ." (*The NKJV Study Bible*, 2007)
- "God maintains His righteous character by providing Christ as the perfect and complete sacrifice for sin." (B.B.Barton)

The greatest mortal is "least" compared to the lowliest immortal in the Kingdom of God.

Keep in mind that the above quotations are by human authors, not from the Bible. Since any sin violates God's holiness, most people see no remedy but Christ's atoning sacrifice, which they say anyone can claim by simply believing in Jesus.

From a serious study of the Scriptures, we as a church reject all of the above, because we believe that the Bible, when understood correctly, does not teach Christ's literal blood atoned for the sin of mankind. The Bible is, basically, a book of laws and commands to be obeyed, showing God's people how to live—else, why do we have it or need it? The principle is stated in God's command to Israel, *"Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God"* (Deut. 11:26–28). God knows that we will transgress His law, but He pleads with us through His prophets, apostles, and Jesus Himself to repent and turn from our evil ways. Then He will forgive. *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19). *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy"* (Prov. 28:13).

The text you refer to (1 John 2:1–2) mentions a special provision: Jesus Christ to be our mediator or intercessor. John says that we have *"an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"* (1 John 2:1). Jesus is qualified to be our advocate with the Father because He was made in all things *"like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God"* (Heb. 2:17); because *"He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted"* (v.18). He knows what it is to be tempted, because He Himself was tempted *"in all points...as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb. 4:15). Nowhere does the Bible say we are powerless to resist temptation; on the contrary, we can and must resist the temptation to sin.

This is where Christ's High Priestly role benefits us, because He knows what we must do to attain to the standard of holiness that God requires (1 Pet. 1:15–16). If we still have sins standing against us at the end of our probation day, sins unrepented of and unforsaken, we will be denied an entrance into His kingdom. And no sacrifice of Christ or anyone else will

be able to change that verdict. This is why Jesus said there will be *"weeping and gnashing of teeth"* when we see *"Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God,"* and we ourselves are thrust out (Luke 13:28).

God is just and fair. Each will receive according to what he has done. The apostle Paul gives a very detailed description of the plan in Romans 2. He tells both who will receive God's wrath, and who will get God's eternal favor and life and immortality. He also tells when these rewards will be given. We read that God *"will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."* Then Paul tells the basis for God's fair judgment: He will be judging only those who have agreed to keep His law, those who are under covenant with Him. *"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law...in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 2:6–11, 12,16).

What is propitiation?

The lexicons tell us the means of appeasing, atonement, sin offering, appeasement necessitated by sin, expiation (from LSJ, SHG, Thayer, BDAG). These definitions assume the general belief, that our sins have incurred the wrath of God and a special sacrifice is necessary to placate or turn away that wrath. The phrase you quote from a Bible commentary is typical, that *"God is the object of an offering for sin, so that His wrath can be placated."*

How can Jesus Christ be both our intercessor, the role of the High Priest, *and* our sacrifice? In the Levitical system, the High Priest offered the sacrifice, he was never the offering. In fact, God hated human sacrifice (Deut. 18:10; Lev. 18:21)—why would He practice it Himself?

We have to conclude that the lexicons have been influenced by the common teaching. If we take our definition from the Bible, we find the word *hilasmos* relates to the mercy seat, the place where the High Priest took an offering in obedience to the command of God and in that

Jesus is our mercy-seat, our Advocate with the Father. When we sin, He intercedes in our behalf, to give us another chance, so that we can be forgiven.

Appeasement has no place in Scripture. God simply wants people to turn and do right. He does not have wrath to be appeased.

way appealed for mercy from God. This fact is in line with the Apostle's own statement in verse 1, that Jesus Christ is our "advocate," that is, our intercessor.

The statement of the commentator you quote does not agree with John's statement in 1 John 2:1. Let us read the text again: "*My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*" John says Christ is our advocate; that is, our intercessor with the Father. When we sin, Christ makes intercession for us before the Father, to give us another chance. In the next verse (v. 2), John makes the same point, calling Jesus our *hilasmos*, which is literally the Greek word for the lid of the ark (in the temple), the mercy seat (see SHG).

Under the Levitical system, once every year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest took both the blood of the people's sacrifice for sin and the blood of his own sacrifice into the Most Holy Place, and sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat. By this ritual, the High Priest went into the presence of God to intercede for the people and petitioned God on their behalf for mercy, that He would not destroy His people for their sins against His law. God's plan was, "*I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat*" (Lev. 16:2).

Jesus is definitely stated to be our High Priest. That is why He was "*made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God*" (Heb. 2:17). See Hebrews 3:1, "*...consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus.*" Also Hebrews 4:14, "*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*" Again in Hebrews 4:15, "*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*" And Hebrews 5:5-6, "*So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: You are My Son, today I have begotten You. As He also says in another place: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*" Nineteen times in the Book of Hebrews Jesus is called our High Priest. Nowhere is it stated that His death on Calvary was a sacrifice to appease the wrath of an offended Deity (the usual definition of "propitiation").

If we look more closely at 1 John 2:1-2, the apostle is not even speaking of Christ's death

at all. That thought must be *read into* the text, as it is not in John's words. Furthermore, John goes right on to explain our responsibility as individuals: "*Now by this we know that we know Him,...*" if we trust in His atoning sacrifice for us? No, John says we know Him "*if we keep His commandments.*" And John emphasizes the importance of our obedience: "*He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked*" (1 John 2:3-6).

The idea that God has wrath because of human sin and that wrath must be appeased by an appropriate sacrifice has no place at all in Scripture. This definition of propitiation is a teaching of theology which came about in the early centuries after Jesus was taken to heaven. It was not the belief or teaching of the apostles. God's attitude toward the transgressor is that He is "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet. 3:9). It is His wish to have "*all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Tim. 2:4), though the reality is that they will not come (John 5:40). God says through His prophet Ezekiel, "*I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live!*" (Ezek. 18:32).

God's wrath is against those who agree to keep His laws and then persist in violating them and rebel against Him. For these, no sacrifice—of Christ or any one else—will atone. Second Thessalonians 1 says that "*when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,*" He will be "*taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that day, to be glorified in His saints*" (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

Appeasement has no place in Scripture. God does not have wrath to be appeased; He simply wants people to turn and do what is right.

The Bible—not any commentary or lexicon—must be the final authority for the meaning of Scripture. God tells us to obey His commandments, and provides "*an advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous,*" our "helper along side," so that we can repent and turn from our sins and receive forgiveness, and in the end eternal life. ♦

IF...THEN...ELSE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

were written in the books" (Rev. 20:12)—the record we ourselves write daily. In another metaphor, we reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7-8).

I have to observe the likeness between this plan and the basis of a common statement across many programming languages, **IF**, **THEN**, **ELSE**. In essence God says,

IF (you obey My laws),

THEN (I will bless, recompense, reward—abundantly),

ELSE (you will perish).

IF ... THEN

God has built His entire plan of salvation on the little word "**IF**." *Salvation is the THEN, conditioned on one's obedience to His laws.* In some passages of Scripture, the **THEN** or the **ELSE** is implied, but the fact of the condition is clear. Read Isaiah 58:13-14 for a picture of the ultimate blessings. The prophet, speaking for God, says, "**IF** you 'honor [God], not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, **THEN** you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

The apostle Paul taught the same gospel, that we will reap everlasting life **IF** we sow to the spirit and "*IF we do not lose heart [give up]*" (Gal. 6:7-9). Jesus said, "**IF** you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, [**THEN**] you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ... **IF** you keep My commandments, [**THEN**] you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:7, 10). And, "**IF** you abide in My word, [**THEN**] you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

The Bible is filled with the **IF**s that are the condition of our salvation and steppingstones to holier living. **IF** we come out from the world, **THEN** we shall be God's own sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:17-18). **IF** we cleanse our heart, **THEN** we can face Him unashamed (Job

11:13-15). **IF** we seek and search diligently, **THEN** we shall understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:4-5).

ELSE

Is God unfair to have an "**ELSE**" in his program? He would be unfair if He did **NOT**. How can a just God reward goodness if He does not remove evil? How can He love the upright if He does not abhor and hate those who do wickedly (Ps. 7:11)? Our just God has severity as well as goodness. Paul says, "*Consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, IF you continue in His goodness. Otherwise [ELSE] you also will be cut off*" (Rom 11:22). The **ELSE** is a necessary part of the plan.

Jesus states the **ELSE** clearly. "*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire [symbol of eternal destruction]. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. 13:41-42).

The blessings are for the obedient, but there is always the **ELSE**, sometimes stated as a **BUT**. "*For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; BUT the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it*" (Prov. 2:21-22). Could God have peace in His Kingdom and allow in it those who oppose Him, who hate Him, and work against Him? Certainly He could not.

In view of **IF**, **THEN**, and **ELSE**, let us be like Brother Paul, running our race with zeal, patience and a single eye fixed steadfastly on the greatest of all prizes: eternal life and joy in the presence of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ. With His help we can fulfill the **IF**'s, receive the **THEN**, and avoid the **ELSE**.

Let us, like Jesus, keep going forward whatever the cost, determined to fulfill every **IF**. Then we can stand before Him unafraid and look forward to seeing an expression of love and acceptance in His face as He welcomes us into His Kingdom as His dear friend. ♦

How can a just and righteous God truly love the good if He does not ultimately remove those who work against goodness?

*They are never alone who are accompanied
by noble thoughts.*

Did Jesus *Raise Himself* from the Dead? **NO!**

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN?

19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

—John 2:19–21 (NKJV)

Did Jesus raise Himself from the dead? Scripture is clear that He did not. There are many, many statements in the New Testament that say *God raised Jesus from the dead*. For example Peter said, “... whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10); and “[you] killed the Prince of life, whom God has raised from the dead” (Acts 3:15; see also Acts 13:30; 34; 17:31;

1 Cor. 15:15; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10). In fact, we do not know of any statement in Scripture that says Jesus raised Himself. If the passage you cite is saying Jesus raised Himself, we have a contradiction which needs to be resolved. The Bible says “...there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.” Jesus was no exception. There is no consciousness in death.

So what did Jesus mean, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*”?

Jesus made many statements that cannot be understood by surface reading. The key to understanding this statement is in the word He used for “temple.” Jesus did not use the word commonly used of the temple where He had just driven out the money changers (see the word mapping of John 2:14 on the following page). The Greek word for Herod’s temple is *hieron*, and “designates the whole compass of the sacred enclosure, embracing the entire aggregate of buildings, balconies, porticos, courts belonging to the temple” (Thayer). However, when Jesus said, “*Destroy this temple*,” the Greek word He used for “temple” was *naos*, which was a term applied to the “inmost part of the temple” (LSJ). The *naos* is “used of the temple at Jerusalem, but **only of the sacred edifice (or sanctuary) itself, consisting of the Holy place and the Holy of Holies**” (SHG). *Strong’s Greek Dictionary* also tells us that *naos* is used “metaphorically of a company of Christians, a Christian church” as in 1 Corinthians 3:16, or 2 Corinthians 6:16,

which says, “*you are the temple of the living God*” (SHG).

When Jesus said, “*Destroy this temple*,” this *naos*, this inner “*Holy of Holies*,” Jesus was using the term as a symbol of the true worshipers of God, His followers, who would become “*the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Why did John say, then, that Jesus “*spoke of the temple of His body*” (v. 21)? Because in New Testament terminology, Jesus’ followers are often called the “body of Christ” (see Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:24).

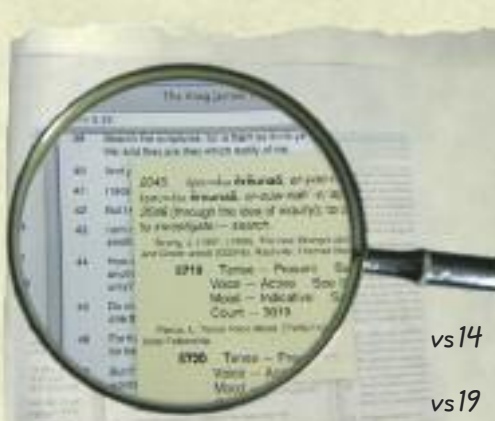
Those who crucified Jesus did in fact “*destroy this temple*”—His inner circle of followers. When He was crucified, they all forsook Him and fled, frightened, dispirited, and would never have been heard of again had it not been for His resurrection. But three days later when God raised Jesus from the dead, the “*temple of His body*,” the body of Christ (the Church) began to be rebuilt when the “head” of the body came back, and subsequently the whole movement began again.

When Jesus was on trial just before His crucifixion, the Jews who were accusing Him misquoted this statement. They said, “*This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days*” (Matt. 26:61; see also Mark 14:58). They testified that Jesus said, “*I am able to destroy the temple of God*.” But Jesus did not say, “*I am able to....*” Jesus did not put Himself on the cross, as this wording would imply. Jesus said, “*Destroy this temple*,” the subject “you” being understood. “(You) *destroy this temple*.” He was speaking directly to the Jews who opposed Him.

John says further that “*when He had risen [literally, had been raised] from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said*” (v.22). The resurrection of Jesus raised the believers from the depths of despair, and the spiritual temple, the true Church, began again. ♦

The “temple of His body” that Jesus raised up was the body of true believers, the Church.

Did Jesus *Raise* Himself from the Dead?



John 2:14, 19-21

Gr. "hieron"

- designates the whole compass of the sacred enclosure, embracing the entire aggregate of buildings, balconies, porticos, courts.
- of the temple at Jerusalem, including the whole temple precinct with its buildings, courts.

vs14 And He found in the **temple** those ... doing business."

vs19 "Destroy this **temple**, ... in three days **I will raise it up**."

Gr. "naos"

- used of the temple at Jerusalem, but only of the sacred edifice (or sanctuary) itself, consisting of the Holy place and the Holy of holies
- denotes the central sanctuary itself.
- set aside for God

vs20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build..."

vs21 But He was speaking of the **temple** of His **body**.

Gr. "naos"

- the sacred edifice (or sanctuary) itself.
- the Holy place and the Holy of holies
- denotes the central sanctuary itself.

Gr. "soma"

- body of animal, human, even plants;
- church, believers in Christ, implying unity as well as functionality -DBL

Key: In making this statement, Jesus did not use the same word for "temple" that was commonly used of Herod's temple (*hieron*) in Jerusalem. The word He used was *naos* which referred to the inner sanctum of the temple, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, and was also used in a figurative sense of true believers (as in 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20-21).

Two Greek words translated "temple":

- 1) Greek, **hieron** – "designates the whole compass of the sacred enclosure, embracing the **entire aggregate of buildings**, balconies, porticos, courts" (Thayer)
"of the temple at Jerusalem, including the whole temple precinct with its buildings, courts, etc." (BDAG)

Examples of the use of **hieron**, translated "temple":

Mark 11:15, "Jesus went into the **hieron** and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves."

Luke 21:5, "...some spoke of the **hieron**, how it was adorned with beautiful stones..."

Matt. 24:1, "Then Jesus went out and departed from the **hieron**, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the **hieron**."

Acts 3:2, "a certain man ... laid daily at the gate of the **hieron** which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the **hieron**."

- 2) Greek, **naos** – "used of the temple at Jerusalem, but only of the **sacred edifice** (or sanctuary) itself, consisting of the **Holy place** and the **Holy of holies**" (Thayer)
Strong's Dictionary compares the two terms: "**hieron** is used of a sacred place, i.e. the entire precincts of the Temple (at Jerusalem or elsewhere), whereas **naos** denotes the central sanctuary itself."

Examples of the use of **naos**, translated "temple":

Matt. 27:51, "... the veil of the **naos** was torn (the veil covered the innermost sanctum, the Holy of Holies)

1 Cor. 3:16, "you are the **naos** of God (**naos** used of individual believers)

2 Cor 6:16, "what agreement has the **naos** of God with idols? For you are the **naos** of the living God."

Eph. 2:20-21, [you are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone [of this spiritual **naos**], in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy **naos** in the Lord (believers comprise this sacred spiritual temple).



Is Your Lantern Lit?

Teaching by Example

When Benjamin Franklin wished to interest the residents of Philadelphia in street lighting, he knew talk would be useless. What did he do instead? He set a beautiful lantern on a stone post near his front door. Then he kept the glass brightly polished, and every evening, just at

the approach of dusk, he lit the wick.

Before long Franklin's neighbors began placing lights in front of their homes. Soon the entire city awoke to the value of street lighting and took up the matter with interest and enthusiasm.

Benjamin Franklin was teaching by example. His neighbors liked what they saw and did likewise.

We all are examples of one kind or another, but the question is, what kind of examples are we? Does our life's example inspire others to do better?

Words are essential, but a pattern to follow is far more effective. A good life is the strongest argument against the skeptic. No words are so potent as the silent influence of example.

One can say, "It's my own life, what I do is my business." But it isn't. We need to choose carefully the seeds we sow in our garden of life because our seeds blow into others' gardens. Sometimes the seeds are of weeds, not flowers. Have you ever noticed a weed in another's garden that was due to your careless sowing?

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount left no doubt in the minds of His followers what He expected. He said, "*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world*" (Matt. 5:13-14). Others are watching. What do they see? They can learn most about what we *believe* by what they see us *do*.

To be of value knowledge must be applied.

We can do more good by *being* good than in any other way.

Christian principles give stability to life and a peace of mind that nothing else can give. Jesus emphasized that His way is not *part* of life but *all*. "*Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it*" (Mark 8:35). Our aim is to save our lives, so what must we do?

To devote the remainder of anything to God, whether it be time, talents, money, or whatever, makes our service insincere. "*And you shall love the Lord your God with all*" (Mark 12:30)—not the loose change, not the leftovers, not the remnant, not the fag-end, but—"with all your heart."

At times we may fret and chafe at having to give up things which seem harmless. But the very fact that we fret tells us we need to let them go.

By nature we cling to things—things perhaps not evil of themselves but dangerous in that they cannot bring us closer to our goal. Jesus was not enslaved by things around Him, neither should we be.

As we travel the road of life, some things must be sacrificed to assure us easier, safer traveling. We need to be able to give up cherished treasures to follow Jesus. Some of the greatest happiness in life is in surrendering the things we could have for a greater good.

When we are confronted with a decision, the question to ask is, Will this strengthen my spiritual life or weaken it?

Jesus our perfect example saw in His position a responsibility and an opportunity for service to others. He said of Himself that "*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve*" (Mark 10:45). His influence lifted and inspired His followers. May we so live that the light from our lantern will help others.

Let us resolve to keep our lantern burning brightly. ♦

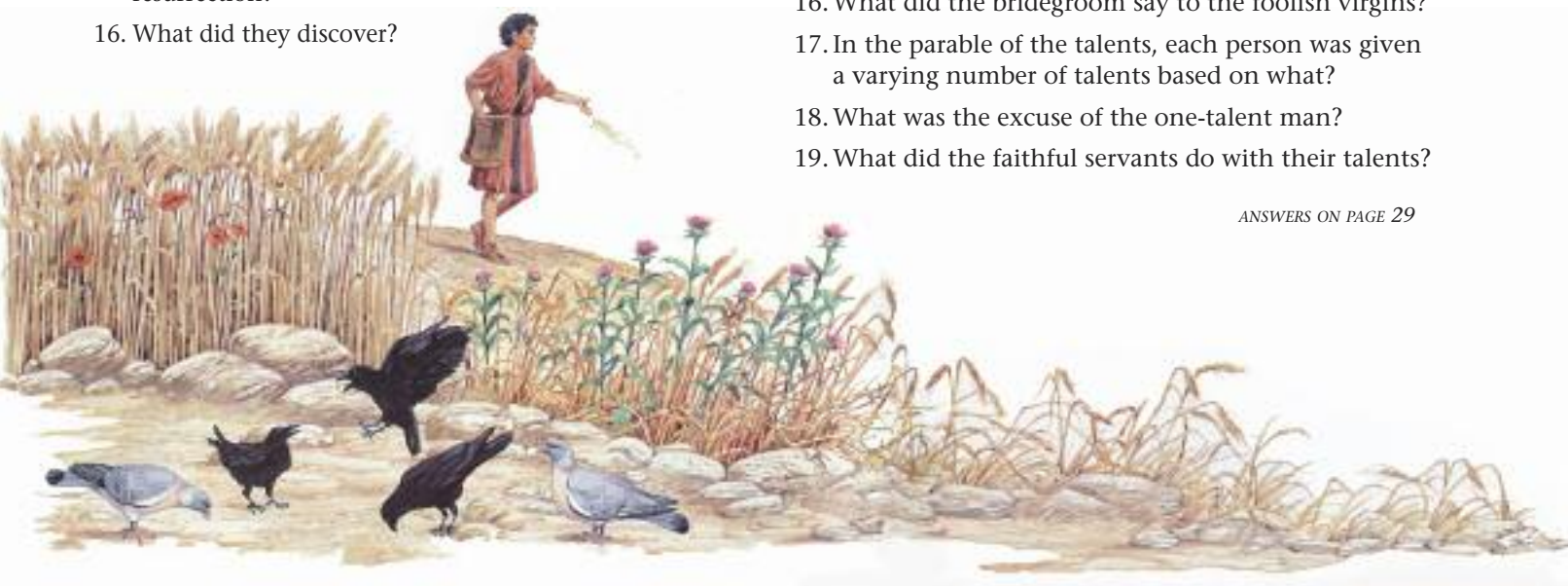
QUESTIONS FROM MATTHEW

1. Who said the following words: *"Yes, Lord: yet even the little dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."*
2. Who said the following words: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*
3. Which three disciples went with Jesus to the Mount of the Transfiguration?
4. Whom did the disciples see in vision on the Mount?
5. Who said the following words: *"All these things have I kept from my youth: what do I still lack?"*
6. Who said the following words: *"Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand, and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."*
7. Finish the quote: *"It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it..."*
8. Finish the quote: *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's..."*
9. Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees tithed the mint, anise and cummin, but had omitted the weightier matters of the law. According to Jesus, what were the *"weightier matters of the law"*?
10. Finish the quote: *"The spirit indeed is willing, but..."*
11. Finish the quote: *"All who take the sword..."*
12. Who said the following words: *"Have nothing to do with that just Man: for I have suffered many things in a dream today because of Him."*
13. Who said the following words: *"I do not know the Man!"*
14. Who said the following words: *"You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how."*
15. Who came first to the empty tomb after Jesus' resurrection?
16. What did they discover?

PARABLES IN MATTHEW

1. Why did Jesus use parables?
2. What was the main theme of Jesus' parables?
3. In the parable of the sower, what were the four different types of soil?
4. What happened to the seeds that fell by the wayside?
5. What turns away those who received the seed in stony places?
6. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of what small seed?
7. According to Matthew, *"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and ____."*
8. What did the merchant man do when he found the *'pearl of great price'*?
9. A certain king was taking account of his servants, and one was brought which owed him ten thousand talents. What was the king's first plan of action?
10. At what times of the day did the householder go out to hire laborers?
11. In the Parable of the Laborers, what wage did all the hired laborers receive?
12. A landowner leased his vineyard to vinedressers. The vinedressers killed the landowner's son because _____?
13. Why was one of the wedding guests cast out?
14. What distinguished the wise virgins from the foolish?
15. At what time was the approach of the bridegroom first heard?
16. What did the bridegroom say to the foolish virgins?
17. In the parable of the talents, each person was given a varying number of talents based on what?
18. What was the excuse of the one-talent man?
19. What did the faithful servants do with their talents?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 29



The Moray Eel

The Snake-like Fish

In warm salt water bodies all over the world are found some creatures that are rather repulsive, but awesome in design. One is a snake-like fish—the moray eel.

Second set of jaws

It isn't the moray eel's snake-like shape that is unique in the fish world but the design of the mechanism they have to catch and eat their prey. Moray eels often feed in the tight confines of their dens or crevices in the coral reefs. Grabbing its prey with strong jaws filled with sharp teeth, it then launches a second pair of pharyngeal jaws from its throat right

into its mouth to grasp the prey and draw it into the esophagus. These pharyngeal jaws are lined with more sharp teeth. And the muscles that control them are elongated and allow for great mobility of these secondary jaws. A biologist who was part of the team that discovered this wonder said that "They look like a fancy pair of forceps with large, sharp re-curved teeth."

Can anyone think the eel's jaw developed gradually by unguided, purely "natural" processes? Doesn't its truly awesome design point to the Master Designer?

Moray Eel

Pharyngeal Jaws

Pharyngeal Jaws

All moray eels are carnivorous. They eat mostly fish, crabs, shrimp, octopuses, and squid which they smell out, then lunge out of their dens to grab and eat.

(right) Head of a Ribbon Eel

Variety of species

There are about 200 different species of moray eels. The smallest, the Red-faced Eel, is only 8 inches long. The Giant Moray is the largest and reaches lengths of 11 feet and can weigh as much as 80 pounds.

Moray eels are found in many colors, bright and drab, and with many varied designs on their skin of spots and mottled shapes which help to camouflage them.

The Giant Moray

Moray eels are fish

Though moray eels look like snakes, they are true fish. They have a dorsal fin that starts just behind the head and runs down the back joining seamlessly with the caudal and anal fins.

Morays breathe through small circular gills far down the flanks from their mouths. They must keep their mouths agape to facilitate breathing.

Special protection

Morays do not have scales but instead have glands that secrete thick mucus that coats their bodies. This mucus protects them from parasites and infection from bacteria or fungus. It also prevents their predators from getting a firm grip on them.

Moray eels are shy and secretive. They spend most of the daylight hours hidden in their dens in a cave or crevice of a reef or on the sea floor.

They swim with an undulating, slithering motion, their streamlined shape and slick skin aiding swift movement through the water.

Morays have poor vision but rely on their keen sense of smell to locate their prey. The moray will instinctively turn in the direction from which it senses the heavier scent.



Cooperative hunting

Moray eels are known to engage in cooperative hunting with coral groupers, a large fish that lives around the coral reefs. The groupers initiate the invitation to hunt with them by headshaking. It is believed that they invite the morays to hunt with them because the morays can enter narrow crevices and flush the prey out. So far, this is the only instance of cooperative hunting that is known among different types of fish.

If the moray naturally originated this unique idea of cooperative hunting, why haven't other fish done the same?

What awe fills our hearts when we learn of these wonders and realize how little we really know about the creation all around us—knowledge that is common to the angels of

God! What an incentive to work so as to be worthy to share in designing and developing these wonders through Eternity, when we will not be limited by mortality! ♦

References:

<http://www.marbef.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=198>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moray_eels

Keeping Moray Eels in Aquariums, Phillip Purser, T.F.H. Publications
One TFH Plaza, Third and Union Avenues, Neptune City, N.J., pub. 2005

OBITUARY

David A. Sutton

On March 26, 2011, a long-time member of our Rochester congregation, David Sutton, fell asleep in death at the age of 92.

Born to Birge Sutton and Cecil Lewis in 1918 in Fairfield, Iowa, he had four brothers, Lewis, John, Wayne and Kenneth; and one sister Viola Taylor, all of whom are deceased. He was married to Marie Mathias in 1946 and they relocated to Rochester, where they shared life together at the Megiddo Church for the next 65 years. He is survived by his wife, and a number of cousins, nephews and nieces.

Brother David was hard-working, thrifty, and creative. His primary service to the Church was in the Print Shop, where he and his wife, Marie, worked side by side printing the *Megiddo Message* and other Church publications until he retired in 1987. Outside working hours he gave generously of his time to help keep the gardens and church grounds. Whatever needed to be done out of doors was his delight.

He also assisted in the Church's recording studio, and contributed to numerous creative projects.

A lover of nature, he and his wife spent time in the country at every opportunity. A special project that they enjoyed together was their photography, capturing nature scenes suitable for use in the *Megiddo Message*. Many of the Message covers in print are the result of their work.

Death is truly termed an enemy; but it is not the worst enemy, for Christ has shown us how death can be defeated. He has not only told us but shown us beyond all doubt that death can be conquered. Death need not be the end. In that soon coming Day the "dead in Christ shall rise" (1 Thess. 4:16). ♦



Brother David and Sister Marie in their retirement years — planting their vegetable garden.



Even when partially crippled, he found ways to work from his battery-powered cart—even to shoveling or blowing snow.



DRIVE THEM DEEP

When Robb and his dad arrived at their camp site, Robb quickly got the tackle box and his rod and reel out of the trunk. "C'mon, Dad," he said as he started for the lake.

"Wait a minute, Robb!" Dad called after him. "We've got work to do *before* we go fishing. We've got to get the tent up so Mom can get things settled and start our dinner."

"Aw, can't we fish a little first?" But Robb already knew the answer.

Dad shook his head. "Fun follows work," he said with a smile. "It doesn't come first."

Robb reluctantly put down his fishing gear, and together he and Dad stretched out the tent and began to pound the stakes into the ground. Robb finished before Dad, but soon they were both ready to go.

During the next couple of hours they pulled in several good-sized fish. Suddenly a wind came up, and when a light rain began to fall, Robb and his dad hurried back to the tent. Much to their surprise, one side had collapsed—the side that Robb had worked on. "What happened?" he asked, looking first at the tent and then at his father.

Dad stooped over and picked up a stake that was lying on the ground. "See this?" he said pointing to the ground. "You didn't pound it

deep enough. One blast of wind and rain took it down." Robb was embarrassed. He knew he had been in too big a hurry.

Putting up the tent was more uncomfortable this time, because they had to work in the rain. Robb knew it was his fault. "Sorry, Dad," he apologized.

As they cooked the fish later, Robb grinned at Dad. "We studied some verses in Sunday school," said Robb. "Something about being rooted in Christ and established in our faith. Our teacher said if our spiritual stakes go deep and we are well rooted in Christ and in God's Word, we won't be tossed about by 'winds' of false doctrine or by difficult circumstances. I guess that means we wouldn't collapse like this tent did."

Robb's mother smiled broadly. "Well, Son" she said, "you may not be too great at pounding in a tent stake, but if you continue listening and learning as well as you did last Sunday, I don't think we'll have to worry about your spiritual stakes."



"I think you've got a bite!" Robb pointed excitedly.

"Oh, you're right!" exclaimed Dad. He quickly raised the line and brought up a fish. The boat bobbed gently in the breeze as he took the fish off the hook and put it into the bucket.

"You almost lost him, Dad," Robb said. "Were you daydreaming?"

Dad smiled. "Well, I wasn't exactly daydreaming. I was just thinking about a Bible verse I memorized this morning before you awoke," he explained. "I don't want to forget it."

"I thought only we youngsters had to memorize verses," said Robb in surprise. "You already know so many Bible verses." Then he added with a chuckle, "I guess I figured once a person was grown up, you wouldn't have to memorize verses anymore."

Dad shook his head. "It's important to memorize verses *all* your life, Robb. Knowing God's Word by heart lets you think about it when your hands are busy — like right now, while we're out here in the boat."

Robb grinned. "I guess it would be kind of

Read: Colossians 2:6–9

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Are you easily swayed if someone tries to tell you something about the Bible that you know is not true? Do doubts come quickly? Are you soon discouraged when troubles come?

Drive your spiritual stakes deep by reading God's Word, listening well in church and Sunday school, and studying your Bible. Then you will be "built up in Him."



DRIVE YOUR FAITH STAKES DEEP.

hard to hold a fishing pole and read the Bible at the same time."

Dad laughed. "That's right. Another thing I like about memorizing Scripture is that it will come to your mind over and over. For instance, when I was pulling up that fish, I suddenly thought of the verse in Matthew where Jesus said *'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'* When your mind is full of Scripture, there isn't much room for unkind thoughts and ungodly ideas."

"Mom says Bible stories help her make better choices every day," Robb commented.

"We get help for our daily lives from the Bible in many different ways," Dad added.

Robb was thoughtful. "There's lots more to memorizing Scripture than just winning contests, isn't there?"

"Yes, there is," agreed Dad. "Take every opportunity to learn verses — and keep reviewing them. Bible verses are like those tent stakes — you need to drive them deep. Then they'll keep your life secure, even in a storm." ♦



MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD

TRUE FREEDOM

Christina wanted to go to the slumber party at Sarah's house, but her mother wouldn't let her go. "The girls are much older than you are and rather wild," Mother had said. "And Honey, I'm afraid that..."

But Christina wouldn't listen. "You never give me any freedom," she stormed. "I don't think you even want me to have any fun!" She ran into her bedroom and slammed the door. Then she flopped on her bed and sobbed. How unreasonable can Mother be! she thought. She doesn't understand at all!

Christina was still sniffing when she heard a sound at her window. Looking up, she saw a sparrow pecking at the window screen. It seemed to be trying to get inside. When she got nearer she realized that it was a sparrow she had thrown crumbs to. As she watched, Mother knocked on her door. "I have some clean laundry, Christina. May I come in?" Reluctantly Christina opened the door.

As Mother set the clothes on the dresser, she noticed the bird still trying to get in. "Christina," Mother said softly, "lift the window screen and let the poor little bird in. It's cruel to keep it out when it so desperately wants to get in."

Christina gave her mother a puzzled look. A wild bird in her bedroom? "Mother, you can't be serious!" she said. "The little bird wouldn't know what to do once it got inside. It would be trapped and frightened and wouldn't know how to get out again! It might even get hurt."

"But, Christina, don't you want it to have its freedom?" asked Mother.

"The bird has more space and freedom outside," Christina said emphatically.

Mother smiled and nodded. "So by saying 'no,' you're really giving it freedom and protecting it," she said. "I know it doesn't make a lot of sense to you right now that I said 'no' to the party, but God gave me the responsibility of protecting you. Just as you don't want the bird to be caught in a bad situation, I don't want you to get caught in a situation where you might get hurt, because I love you."

Christina looked at the foolish little bird. Then she ran over and hugged her mother. "I'm sorry for what I said," she whispered. "Mom, I love you, too, and I know you really want what's best for me." ♦

**TRUE FREEDOM
IS INSIDE BOUNDARIES.**

Read: Proverbs 6:20-23

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Do you feel that your parents are restricting your freedom by giving you rules and expecting you to obey? They are actually protecting you from situations or things that could harm you. Trust their judgment and obey their decisions.

True freedom includes living within boundaries set up by God. He knew what He was doing when He established the parent-child relationship.

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



The MUSCLES That MATTER MOST

"Exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." -1 Timothy 4:7, 8

No one today can claim ignorance of the benefits of exercise. Go to Google, type two words: "exercise benefits," and you get 144 million hits in less than one tenth of a second. Note these extracts from just a few of the top items:

- Daily exercise offers health benefits drugs cannot match.
- Consider seven ways exercise can improve your life — starting today!
- Exercise and physical activity reduce the risk of premature death; reduce the risk of developing and/or dying from heart disease ...
- The benefits to exercise are simply countless. The list overflows with benefits that affect overall health and fitness, not only of the body but also of the mind ...
- Running and aerobic exercise have been shown to postpone the development of disability in older adults....
- How exercise and activity helps protect you from heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, back pain, osteoporosis ...
- What are the health benefits of exercise? Exercise has so many great benefits ... just in case you need six more reasons to get moving...
- Health effects of exercise include lower blood pressure and lower LDL cholesterol. Learn about the health effects of exercise and get exercise guidelines.
- People of all ages can improve the quality of their lives and reduce the risks of developing coronary heart disease, hypertension, some cancers and type 2 diabetes ...
- Bicycling health and fitness benefits can be far reaching whether you're enjoying the great outdoors or exercising in the comfort of your own home.

- Exercise can improve senior citizens' health (flexibility, balance, strength) and reduce the risk of injury ...

There is no argument. Our physical bodies were made for exercise. And the apostle Paul knew it two millennia before we came along. "Bodily exercise," he said, "profits a little." But why only "a little" —when research has showed the multiple health benefits of exercising the body? Because Paul is comparing bodily exercise with another type of exercise that gives benefits immensely—immeasurably—greater! What is this exercise? Paul calls it *"exercising to godliness."*

According to Paul, there are issues greater than the health of the body. Those issues have to do with the development of our inner lives. The great Apostle is focused on the spiritual and moral side of life, and if one compares the benefits of physical exercise to the benefits one can derive from *"exercising to godliness,"* there is just no comparison. Why? Because *"godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come"* (1 Tim.4:8).

What is godliness? It is the everyday practicing of all the virtues that characterize the nature of Christ—being always honest, always patient, always sincere, always humble, always future-minded, always pure, always upright. Does that sound impossible? Not when you follow the Master Trainer.

As a well-trained, well-educated youth, Paul doubtless knew personally the benefits of physical fitness. In his view, physical training had value; it helped him maintain the pace in his arduous travels. He could take a beating and survive. But as Paul saw it, keeping his body in tiptop physical shape was a poor second to maintaining optimum spiritual values.

This is true for more than one reason. In the first place, physical strength is only temporary. Most athletes are old men at forty; their bodies no longer perform as they did in youth. Then, too, physical achievements are not to be compared with accomplishments in one's spiritual

life, learning to practice consistently those Christ-like virtues. Suppose you are in top physical trim and can run the four-minute mile. So what? A cheetah can do it in less than one minute, and an ordinary unpedigreed mutt in perhaps two minutes. Who is the winner?

Now, spiritual accomplishments are in a very different category, and are evaluated on a very different level. As Paul says, diligence in exercising to godliness offers promise even now. The man or woman who is exercising to godliness on a regular, daily basis, has assurance from God of sufficient physical life and health to attain the goal. Plus God's promise of eternal life—immortality includes the benefit of everlasting glory and honor (Rom. 2:7).

While physical exercise benefits only this life, godliness enriches life not only for the present but for eternity. And the one who enriches his own life helps other lives also. A star athlete may succeed in entertaining his or her fans, but what is the eternal value in that? When the cheering is over and the game is done, what then?

But the benefits of godliness continue throughout this life and on into eternity. "Exercise yourself toward godliness," Paul says (1 Tim. 4:7). That is the regimen of training to which every aspiring servant of God must commit. Such training covers the whole course of one's daily life. It includes all aspects of

one's speech, attitudes, motives, actions, interests, and commitments. The training is tough and unrelenting; it takes all that one has (Matt. 13:44–46). That is why Paul says, be diligent in these matters, give yourself wholly to them (1 Tim. 4:15–16). There is no other way to succeed, but consider the reward—even eternal life.

So, think about the benefits. What does a long-distance runner get for his effort? Possibly a few years of superior health and strength, if he has the right genes and the right circumstances. Plus personal satisfaction, and hopefully some honor. There should be some acclaim for beating the pack. But sooner or later somebody raised on richer milk or with stronger natural endowments, will break his record.

The one committed to the higher exercise—to godliness, to living the life God honors—gets far more. He or she must stay with it to the end, but the compensations are immeasurably greater—even eternal: eternal happiness, eternal glory and honor, eternal satisfaction, eternal life! (Rom. 2:7).

What good reason to follow Paul's advice: "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Follow Paul's advice and give priority to exercising these muscles that matter most! ♦

The only exercise that gives eternal benefits is exercise to godliness.

ANSWERS FOR PAGE 23

QUESTIONS FROM MATTHEW

1. Woman of Canaan (Matt. 15:22–27); also called the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:26–28)
2. Peter (Matt. 16:13–16)
3. Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1–2)
4. Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:3)
5. Rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16–22)
6. Mother of James and John (sons of Zebedee) (Matt. 20:20–28, Mark 10:35)
7. A den of thieves (Matt. 21:13)
8. "and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:20–21)
9. Justice, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23)
10. the flesh is weak. (Matt. 26:41)
11. will perish by the sword (Matt. 26:52)
12. Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:17–19)
13. Peter when denying the Lord (Matt. 26:69–72)

14. Pilate (Matt. 27:65)
15. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt. 28:1)
16. An angel had rolled the stone away and the tomb was empty! (Matt. 28:2–6)

PARABLES IN MATTHEW

1. Two reasons: 1) He taught entirely by parable (Matt. 13:11–13); and 2) "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.'" (Matt. 13:34–35)
2. The Kingdom (Matt. 4:23; Luke 8:1)
3. Wayside, stony, thorns, good (Matt. 13:3–8)
4. Birds ate them (Matt. 13:4)
5. Persecution (Matt. 13:21)
6. Mustard (Matt. 13:31)

7. hid in 3 measures of meal, till it was all leavened. (Matt. 13:33)
8. Sold all that he had and bought it (Matt. 13:45–46)
9. Sell him and his wife into slavery (Matt. 18:23–25)
10. The morning, the 3rd hour, the 6th hour, the 9th hour, and the 11th hour. (Matt. 20:1–6)
11. The amount they agreed upon—1 denarius or penny (Matt. 20:2, 9)
12. He was the heir (Matt. 21:33–39)
13. He did not have on a wedding garment. (Matt. 22:11–13)
14. The wise had extra oil for their lamps (Matt. 25:3–4)
15. At midnight (Matt. 25:6)
16. "I do not know you." (Matt. 25:12)
17. Their ability (Matt. 25:15)
18. He knew his lord was a hard man (Matt. 25:24)
19. They doubled their value. (Matt. 25:20, 22)



**The Bible is the treasure map
that leads us to God's most
valuable treasure,
eternal life.**

***The Bible is not a newspaper to
be skimmed but a mine to
be quarried.***

**A steady diet of God's Word over
a lifetime builds a healthy soul
and mind.**

***If you only read a recipe
but never cook, you won't be fed.
It is the same with
the Bible. If you only read the
words but never obey them or put
them into
practice, you'll never
get the benefit.***

**All the good advice in the
world is worth very little
if it is ignored. Go to the source
of real wisdom—the Bible—
value and apply its advice.**

“WATCH!”

Set a watch upon your lips,
That they tell no idle tale;
See that nothing from them slips
That will not for good prevail.
Use them oft to help a brother
Up the straight and narrow path;
Never just to harm another—
Never as a tool for wrath.

Set a watch upon your feet,
Making sure that they obey;
Taking you to joys complete
In the coming endless Day.
Teach them to avoid the places
Where the sinners often meet;
And that nothing more abases
Than to sit in scorner's seat.

Set a watch upon your eyes,
Lest they wander here and there.
Keep them ever on the prize;
Let them view the Kingdom fair.
Eyes in covenant ne'er linger
On the sordid, sensual, vile;
But they look to where God's finger
Writes of glories all the while.

Over the affections, too,
Set a guard that naught may pass
Able to endanger you—
Drawing you from God. Alas!
Let them rest on things more certain
Than the present, filled with strife;
Then when time has dropped its curtain
You will gain eternal life.

Most of all, guard well each thought;
For the thought precedes the act:
And when in subjection brought,
Thoughts make living right a fact.
Let not hate or envy enter;
Neither pride, nor selfish greed;
But on God's commandments center
Ev'ry thought as well as deed.

—Liot L. Snyder

You must have long-range goals to keep you from being frustrated by short-range failures.

When you know what your values are, making the best decision is much easier.
"Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" –Daniel 1:8

The happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything. They just determine to make the best of everything.
The Apostle Paul was an outstanding example of this attitude. From a Roman prison he wrote
"...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." –Philippians 4:11, 13

Many receive advice; only the wise profit by it.

Y*ou may not be able to change your circumstances, but you can change the way you respond to them.*

No one can feel mean and happy, any more than an orange can be both sour and sweet.

W*hen we live with expectancy, Awaiting Christ's return, Our diligent obedience Becomes our main concern.*

The greatest act is small if done for self; the smallest act is great if done for God.

N*othing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. How our enthusiasm should abound with the hope of being found worthy to be made like the angels, never to die (Luke 20:35-36)*

The secret of success is to do the common things uncommonly well as an offering to the Lord.



Striving for Excellence

G*iving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love....Be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble, for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. – 2 Pet. 1:5-7, 10-11*

Internationally acclaimed violinist Midori was quoted as saying: "I have to practice for my job and I practice every day.... It's not really the number of hours but the quality of the work that needs to be done. I see with students, that they play and they call it practice, but they are not listening, not watching. If you have your textbook open, it doesn't mean that you are studying."

That same principle applies to our Christian life. It takes more than going through motions to please God. We must keep working—diligently—to imitate the virtues that Jesus showed in His everyday life. As the apostle Peter wrote to *his brethren*, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Diligence implies consistent, earnest effort, and is the opposite of a careless, inattentive approach.

Am I diligently practicing my faith and looking for ways to add patience, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love to my life?

Just as a musician strives for excellence, we as Christians must strive constantly toward excellence in our speech, in our conduct, and in all that we do in serving God. It is the only way to be sure of entering "abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." ♦



We Must Advance

The captain scanned the nearby height
The enemy sought to defend,
And said, "If we would sleep tonight
That slope we must in haste ascend.
We must advance to gain the day,
To idly stand may mean defeat;
So, the initiative we'll take,
And make the victory complete."

The bugle sounded loud and clear,
And, faithful to their captain's will,
Men who would not acknowledge fear
With one accord charged up the hill.
They faced the foe, and faltered not,
When bidden by their leader brave;
And victory was soon the lot
Of those who dared the day to save.

We also have a foe to meet,
A charge to make, a hill to climb,
And if we would avoid defeat
We can not watch, and wait, while Time
With hurried strides bids us adieu.
Instead of leaving all to chance,
If we intend to see it through
We to the battle must advance.

We also have a Captain who
Is able to direct the fight;
Who, leading just a valiant few,
Can put ten thousand foes to flight.
Christ Jesus is our Leader brave—
The enemy, all sin and wrong;
And shall we choose to be their slave?
Or shall we join the victor's song?

Oh, rally at your Captain's side!
Let ring the clarion bugle note!
And stem the overwhelming tide;
Let joyous shouts of vict'ry float
Upon the air. Attack the foe
While of success there is a chance.
With courage true to battle go,
And up Perfection's Hill advance.

—Liot L. Snyder