

Megiddo Message

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

...virgin will give birth to a Son, and will call Him Immanuel. —Isaiah 7:14



Vof. 86, No. 3
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THE INSIDE CONQUEROR

No more worlds to conquer!" was said to be the despairing cry of Alexander the Great after his Grecian armies had swept across the then known world. Bold and impulsive, Alexander was one of the few in history to whose name has been added the appellation "great."

But what is the measure of his greatness beside those whom God calls great? What is the Divine standard? According to the wise author of Proverbs, greater is he who rules his spirit than he who conquers a city (Prov. 16:32). And Alexander did not rule his spirit.

Anger was not generally a part of Alexander's nature, but several times in his life he was tragically defeated by temper. On one of those occasions, we are told, Cletus, a close childhood friend of Alexander and a general in his army, became intoxicated and began to ridicule the emperor in front of his men. Blinded by anger, Alexander snatched a spear from a soldier and hurled it at Cletus. Although he had only intended to scare the drunken general, his spear took his friend's life.

Deep remorse followed his anger. Overcome with guilt, Alexander attempted to take his own life with the same spear, but his men stopped him. For days he lay sick, calling for Cletus, chiding himself as a murderer.

Alexander could conquer cities, but he failed miserably to rule his own spirit.

Throughout history many have destroyed their lives by passion and pride. James offers a tried and proven remedy: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19).

"Be swift to hear." Swift to hear what? Swift to hear the Word of God. The first step in learning is hearing. The Bible tells us that "... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The more we apply ourselves to hearing, the more we will learn. The more we learn the more we will want to learn, and the more our desire for the knowledge of God will grow.

It is sad when men and women

fail to listen to one another. But it is fatal when they fail to listen to God.

"Be...slow to speak." One of the ancient philosophers once said, "We have two ears and one mouth; therefore we should listen twice as much as we speak." Unfortunately, this is not our natural inclination. Whatever the issue, we usually have something to say. Learning to control this impulsive speaking is an essential part of our Christian discipline, learning to taste our words before we speak them to be sure they carry the flavor we intend.

Solomon wrote, "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21:23).

"Be...slow to wrath." In fact, be so slow that you always keep your spirit under control and never give way to wrath or anger. Why? Because we are commanded to "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath." James tells us also that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). The two cannot work together. As surely as we allow our feelings of wrath or anger to control us, we are working against God. And as surely as we work against God, He will work against us and we shall never receive the eternal blessings He has promised.

God wants His people to be calm, self-controlled men and women who can rule themselves and whatever the circumstances, make level and balanced decisions. This will not be easy. It will require a battle—that is why the comparison between conquering a city and conquering one's spirit. No city was ever subdued without a fight, and no spirit was ever ruled without the firm, military hand of self-discipline. But it can be done—it must be done—if we ever become an eternal part of the family of God.

Yes, there's a whole world to conquer—inside. This very special conquest is our singular commission. But no general ever found greater joy in victory

than we shall find when Jesus invites His conquerors to share the eternal joys of His kingdom. ♦

Our Motto

*"Forward" is the motto of those who seek for light;
"Forward" is the clarion call of heroes in the fight;
"Forward" is the watchword of the higher, nobler life.
"Forward" and we conquer, though hard and long
the strife.*

MEGIDDO MEANS ...

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

WE BELIEVE ...

- in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.
- in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- in ourselves as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

The Herald and the KING

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

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

IN THIS ISSUE ...

Editorial

THE INSIDE CONQUEROR..... 2

Sermon

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL..... 4

AND HE WAS CALLED... .. 5

Questions and Answers

JESUS' GENEALOGY..... 11

Articles

DON'T MISS YOUR NEW YEAR OPPORTUNITIES..... 12

THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEW..... 13

13 WAYS TO RECHARGE YOUR SPIRITUAL BATTERY..... 14

Poem

PILATE REMEMBERS..... 18

Know Your Bible?..... 19

About Jesus ♦ Know the Apostles

Bible Study

THEY DID IT THEIR WAY (Part Five)..... 20

Gideon, The Lord is With You ♦ Israel Cries to the Lord

♦ The Call of Gideon ♦ Gideon's First Assignment

♦ Summoning the Troops

The Midianites..... 21

ARE YOU Y2K READY?..... 24

"The Millennium Bug"

Back Cover

YOUR KINGDOM COMES!..... 28

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Megiddo Message

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O Come, O Come Emmanuel

virgin will give birth to a Son, and will call Him Immanuel. —Isaiah 7:14

An effort to perceive God dwelling among them intrigued worshippers in the earliest times. Something in us wants to feel close to the object of our worship, as if to draw upon its strength and power. Alone we feel inadequate. The forces against us are too great. Our human powers are too limited, too weak, too failing. We need a power beyond ourselves, for we cannot give life to ourselves.

"God with us" is the Divine answer to this human need.

Such needs cause us to cry out, "Come, O come, Emmanuel." "Come!" because we need Your strong and guiding hand. "Come!" because we want to become all that You have made us capable of becoming. "Come!" because we want the power, the security, the wisdom that only You can give. "Come!" because You alone can give life!

Instinctively we humans want to be close to that in which we place our confidence. We take comfort in being able to see and touch that in which we believe. This was the thought underlying most ancient (and modern) forms of idol worship, for idols were gods near at hand.

How does "God with us" belong to true faith? When pondering the greatness of the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, we surely can't think seriously that He leaves His heavenly throne even for one brief hour to come to dwell among us. Such thinking is medieval, or at best childish.

How did the patriarchs and prophets perceive God? Let us look briefly at a few examples.

THOSE WHO KNEW GOD

In Old Testament times the presence of God (i.e., an angel as God's messenger) was a coveted experience. To see God, feel God, know God was among His people the highest of high aspirations. To have God near at hand, within the sound of one's voice, within the reach of one's hand, to help in time of need; to save, succor, or sustain was the longing of each of His loyal servants.

Abraham's meeting with God's angel on Mount Moriah turned the supreme trial of his life into a supreme joy and promise of eternal reward.

Jacob treasured the memory of Bethel because, as he said afterward, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16).

For the youthful Joseph, the presence of the Divine messenger transformed the prison into a portal of hope. God's presence was the assurance Moses needed to face an unpredictable Pharaoh.

"Emmanuel:
of Hebrew origin [H6005], God
with us"—Strong's Concordance

And He Was Called...



Shiloh
Star
Scepter
Emmanuel
Wonderful
Counselor
The Mighty God, The Prince

of Peace, The Everlasting Father
(Father of the world to come)

The Branch
The Rod
The Root
Ensign
Eliakim
Precious Corner Stone
Judge
Law Giver
King
Jacob



Servant
Redeemer
Righteous Branch
The Lord our Righteousness

David
Plant of Renown
Messiah
Michael
Ruler in Israel
Desire of All Nations
My Servant the Branch
Messenger of the Covenant
Sun of Righteousness
Jesus
King of the Jews
Governor

Nazarene
Son of God
King
Master
Son of man



Friend of Sinners
Stone
Holy One of God
Temple
Son of the Highest



Horn of Salvation
Saviour
Consolation of Israel
Salvation
Son of God Most High
Only Begotten of the Father
Lamb of God
King of Israel

Gen. 49:10
Num. 24:17
Num. 24:17
Isa. 7:14
Isa. 9:6

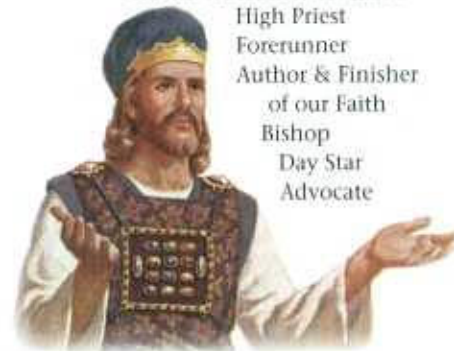


Teacher
The Bread of Life
The Door of the Sheep
The Good Shepherd
The Resurrection and Life
The Way, Truth, and Life
The True Vine



The Prince of Life
Prophet
Holy Child
The Just One
Man
Lord
Deliverer
The Lord of Glory
Passover
Firstfruits from the dead
Second Adam

Mediator
Blessed and Only Potentate
Heir of All Things
Apostle of Our Faith



Author of Eternal Salvation
High Priest
Forerunner
Author & Finisher
of our Faith
Bishop
Day Star
Advocate

First Begotten
First and Last
Morning Star
Faithful and True Witness
Lion of Tribe of Judah
The Word of God
King of kings, Lord of lords
Alpha and Omega
Root and Offspring of David
Bright & Morning Star



Rev. 19:16; 17:14
Rev. 22:13
Rev. 22:16
Rev. 22:16

Rev. 1:5
Rev. 2:8
Rev. 2:28
Rev. 3:14
Rev. 5:5
Rev. 19:13

John 3:2
John 6:48, 51
John 10:7
John 10:11
John 11:25
John 14:6
John 15:1
Acts 3:15
Acts 3:22
Acts 4:30
Acts 7:52
Acts 17:31
Rom. 1:3
Rom. 11:26
1 Cor. 2:8
1 Cor. 5:7
1 Cor. 15:23
1 Cor. 15:45
1 Tim. 2:5
1 Tim. 6:15
Heb. 1:2
Heb. 3:1
Heb. 5:9
Heb. 5:10
Heb. 6:20

and an irresponsible people: "Certainly I will be with thee" (Ex. 3:12). "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you" (v. 15).

The presence of God was David's strength. "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him" (Ps. 28:7).

The Lord Himself gave this assurance to Isaiah: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10).

How, then, was God's presence known to His people? There are several ways revealed, and probably many more not revealed. Numerous times in Scripture angels came with specific messages. God's presence came through His representative, visible or invisible. Sometimes "the angel of his presence saved" (Isa. 63:9), protected and assisted those who were to be heirs of salvation.

EMMANUEL COMES

With the coming of Christ, the presence of God took on a new dimension and new meaning: it was the special mission of the Son to reveal the Father.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise." In these few words the gospel writer Matthew introduces the story of the Man who changed the course of history. But Matthew does more than relate history. He gives meaning and beauty to the account by setting the event in the framework of the Divine plan. Jesus' birth, according to Matthew, was not a chance occurrence in

the course of nature but a striking fulfillment of a Divine prophecy given some 700 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah. This is Matthew's understanding of the event: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:22-23).

Emmanuel! Matthew comprehended its profound meaning: "which being interpreted is, God with us." How appropriate the name for Him who was born to be the Son of God with power, the Savior of men, the Master that Matthew himself was privileged to know. Doubtless as he wrote his Gospel, he pondered long on the meaning of that name: Emmanuel.

During the years between Isaiah and Matthew, many sons of Israel had been born—among them some great souls—but none worthy of bearing the name "Emmanuel." There was a Jeremiah, mightily declaring the word of the Lord to an apostate people; Ezekiel and Daniel, stalwart prophets of the captivity; Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, brave men of God during the time of the restoration; besides all the unnamed servants of God during this time. All were loyal servants of God, bravely standing for truth and right. But none were named Emmanuel, because none measured up to the full and exacting qualifications of that name. With its highest representation, that name was too big for them, too demanding. Of none before Christ could God truly say, "Here in human flesh and blood is the perfect character image of Myself; here is the exact pattern for you to copy; here is One to whom I have given My Name, to be indeed My representative among you." Only Christ could bear this honor, by virtue of His life of perfect obedience. Only *He* never sinned once He knew the law. Only *He* could fulfill the glowing meaning of Emmanuel, which "being interpreted is God with us."

How the thought of Emmanuel fortifies our faith and inspires our courage, as we consider the right of our Lord to bear this title. Emmanuel. The word slips easily from our tongue, for centuries of use have dulled our sense of its wonderment. But what it says must not be undervalued, for

O come, O come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel;
That dwells in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear!

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

He who bears that name is "God with us." A mortal like ourselves, tempted in all points like unto His brethren, yet He is "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God," a perfect pattern of the life that pleases God, one bearing the character likeness of God Himself, whom the Heavenly Father has arranged to be "God with us."

Someone has suggested that "God with us" makes Christ's presence the guarantee of the presence of God Himself. This is true, in the sense that Christ bore His Father's name. We must be careful, however, not to draw the conclusion that Christ is God, for this is not the meaning intended or implied by the name "Emmanuel."

Theologians through the centuries have gone to great lengths to convince the world that Jesus Christ was both Divine and human, that He was literally God incarnate, the great eternal God in human flesh and form. Nowhere do we find Scripture teaching that Christ is co-equal or co-eternal with God. Christ being "God with us" in no way suggests that He is God Almighty or that He is the great Creator of the universe. Christ is "God with us" in that He fills the role of God to us, meeting our needs for strength, protection, guidance, and instruction as lowly aspiring mortals. In no way is He part of an eternal triune Godhead or co-existent with the Father.

Christ fills a unique position in the plan of God. Being Emmanuel, He determines our understanding of God. The perplexing question, "What is God like?" can be answered by "looking unto Jesus." As the apostle Paul put it, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). There is no confusing of the two personalities. But Jesus does reveal the Father. As Jesus Himself stated it—simply but no less profoundly, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Why did the prophets place this

important aspect on the life of Christ, that He should be "God with us"? Why should Christ be so linked to the relationship of God to men? Because God sent Christ as a fulfillment of His promise to men. God wanted us to know what is the perfect illustration of the life that pleases Him, so that in seeing Christ we may see God; in knowing Christ we may know God; in obeying Christ we may obey God. In Christ we have our clearest, fullest, truest possible revelation of God, a living transcript of the love, wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, holiness and perfection of the Omnipotent God of the universe! What a privilege! What an honor!

No higher concept of God's work in behalf of His human family is conceivable. Indeed, there are three essential roles in God's plan for our salvation. There is a part for God, for Christ, and for us. The apostle Paul phrased it in these words: "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself...and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:19-20). How was God "in Christ"? In a symbolic sense, God's power, His truth, His word, His law governed, motivated and impelled Christ from His birth to His death—and beyond. Jesus thus became the personification of man's persistent quest for the knowledge of God. God was indeed "in Christ" as He had never been in or with any other human being.

What is the effect of His life on us mortals?

- ◆ It opens to us the avenue to life, glorious, immortal life, for it is through the living Christ that we, too, may find life.

- ◆ It brings us face to face with the issue of our own future. We can take heed to His message, amend our lives, and live; or we can go our own way, be satisfied with the paltry benefits of this life, and die. We can live to please Him and receive His recognition, or we can live to please ourselves and a handful of others, and receive His disapproval. This was the reason behind those pointed words of Jesus: "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). The combination is impossible. We cannot be seeking and receiving honor of one another and be eligible for the honor that "comes from God only."

When we consider "Emmanuel, God with us" and all He has done for us, pleasing people should not be our concern. Our concern is with pleasing Jesus, and thereby pleasing God, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Jesus being Emmanuel, "God with us," tells us one more important fact about Jesus: that He is not simply one among others; He is one *exclusively*. That exclusiveness may offend some, but it cannot be changed. He, Emmanuel, God with us, if He is to be with us, must have our undivided attention. No other interest or authority in our lives can compete for this first position, nor can any even approach its value. The claims of Jesus upon us are absolute. He is more than teacher, or prophet, and His words are more than mere human opinion. He alone can say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Whence comes His right to such

How shall we feel in the presence of Emmanuel?

authority? It comes from the fact that He is the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). It comes from the fact that He is the one "declared to be the Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4), our Judge, our Master, our King. It comes from the fact that He offers us life! "I am come," He said, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

The author of Hebrews adds emphasis and insight to the unique position of Jesus in the plan of God in a thoughtful review of God's means of ministration to the human family. We quote from the opening chapter of the book: "At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything....He is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature" (Heb. 1:1-4 JB).

Here we have Christ's role established: He is Emmanuel, God with us, the "perfect copy of" the nature of His Father.

THE TABERNACLE AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

At certain times in history God made special arrangements whereby His presence could be visibly known among His people. One of the earliest examples of this was the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent especially designed to serve as a portable place of worship for Israel. With all its singular appurtenances, it was meant to bring God into the presence of His people. Even the Hebrew word for "tabernacle" suggested this purpose, its literal meaning being "tent of meeting"—meeting between God and men. It was a place where God's glory could be seen, His power felt, and His presence known.

The whole design of the tabernacle and the religious life that centered around it was to teach reverence and honor for God, and all the directions and laws concerning the tabernacle reflected this purpose. Every

detail of material and construction was specified, and all parts were to be assembled according to precise directions. Nothing ordinary could be used in this special tent, nothing inferior, nothing but the very best, for this tabernacle was no ordinary building. This was God's tabernacle.

There is something else that is singular about the tabernacle. God instructed Moses to set up the tabernacle at a specific time. "On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation" (Ex. 40:2). How precisely Moses complied: "And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up" (vs. 17).

This directive seems especially significant. Christ being the antitype of the literal tabernacle, the provision of God for His people; their Example, the Mediator between Himself and them; the one God chose to bring to fruition His promises to His people; the one who was to be the presence of God among them, even Emmanuel, God with us—is it not fitting that Christ should be born on the anniversary of the setting up of the tabernacle?

The tabernacle symbolized the presence of God among Israel, and into that tabernacle came the actual glory of God. We read of this in Exodus 40:34-35, "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Imagine the tabernacle literally filled with the glory of the Lord! How fitting, when the tabernacle symbolized the presence of God!

THE TEMPLE AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The temple built by Solomon filled a similar need to the people of God, as a visible representation of His presence. And when it was dedicated there was no question in any one's mind—God's power was there.

The claims
of Jesus upon us
are absolute.

We read: "And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord. Then spake Solomon, The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever" (1 Kings 8:10-13). He prayed, and when he had finished his prayer, "fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house" (2 Chron. 7:1). Can we not imagine how knees shook and hands trembled at the sight of that demonstration of the Divine presence? But neither temple nor tabernacle could equal the presence of God's own Son, Emmanuel, God with us.

The promise of God's presence gives warmth and reality to many a Divine assurance. What could be grander than the vision of dwelling in God's presence forever, belonging to His family, sharing His wealth, reveling in His delights! And all these are among the rapturous promises to the saints. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:8-9). Again, "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11). How much closer to the Divine could we ever seek to come, than to be at the right hand of the Father, enjoying pleasures forevermore!

The prophet Zephaniah shared the same bright hope of the presence of Emmanuel, God with us. These are His confident words: "The king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee:"—and what is the consequence of His majestic presence? "Thou shalt not see evil any more" (Zeph. 3:15). Oh, the power that will come with that presence!—power, glory and joy, as the following verse outlines: "The Lord

thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (v. 17). Can we imagine God, Emmanuel, God with us, rejoicing over us with joy? What greater incentive do we need, to make our lives pleasing to Him!

Zechariah the prophet shared the same prophetic picture of joy. "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord" (Zech. 2:10). Here again is the presence of Emmanuel, God with us. "And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee" (v. 11). Who sends Emmanuel to dwell among us? It is none other than "the Lord of hosts," the God of heaven. And oh, the glory and joy that will accompany that holy presence!

The prophet Isaiah, too, had glorious glimpses of the future day when Emmanuel should dwell among men, fulfilling His mission as "God with us": "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. 25:9).

Jesus, knowing full well what delights would attract far-sighted mortals, pictured the reward for heart-purity in these transcendent words: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). And He provides even more details of His own presence among men in His post-ascension message. The picture is vibrant with life: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;

and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:3-4). They His people, and He their God!—what blessings come with the presence of Christ, Emmanuel, God with us!

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE
God among us! The picture is glorious beyond anything our mortal minds can fathom. But what is its significance? What does this Divine presence mean to us?

Foremost among the benefits of the Divine presence is protection, safety, surety from harm. When God's protecting presence is near, "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Ps. 91:10-12).

All who are worthy of the Divine presence shall be protected. This does not mean they will not encounter sickness, pain, hardship, suffering; but it does mean they will be protected. Nothing shall befall them that would prevent their securing the reward upon which they have set their hearts.

Jeremiah described this same protection using another simile, that of a fruit-bearing tree. This tree "shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. 17:8). Come heat or cold, drought or fair season, nothing can prevent this tree from yielding fruit.

Christ fills
a unique position in
the plan of God.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD MEANS JUDGMENT

There have been times when the reality of the Divine presence invoked a

feeling of fear, not joy. Why? Because the people were not prepared. In the allegory of Genesis, Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). Why did they hide? Because they had been disobedient. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, unable to face the reality of his guilt and shame. Job felt "troubled" at God's presence: "when I consider, I am afraid of him" (Job 23:15).

The unfaithful in Jeremiah's time reacted to the Divine presence with fear. They may have been unwilling to admit any guilt, but in the presence of the Divine they were afraid. "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" (Jer. 5:22). The unfaithful Jonah "rose up" to "flee from the presence of the Lord," also in a vain attempt to escape Divine judgment.

The question comes to us: How shall we feel in the presence of Emmanuel, you and I? To know that we are in the presence of One to whom the thoughts of our heart are as visible as the lines on our faces—how will we feel?

The thought is sobering, for Divine judgment is not an idle speculation. Someday we shall find ourselves directly in His presence, face to face with our Lord and Master. And how will it be with us then?

For this reality the ancient prophets advised preparation. Indeed, this is the whole purpose of life here and now, to prepare for that Divine inspection. The thought of God's severity stung the herdsman Amos into a vivid rehearsal of God's patient warnings, culminating in a thunderclap announcing a personal encounter between the Lord and his

obtuse and recalcitrant people: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." Today's placid forgetfulness of the Divine is a far cry from the prophet's conviction that the judgment meeting of men and God is the one inevitability in history. Amos wanted to arouse a general foreboding of Divine retribution among a careless people. God is going to give you, he says, a chance to show your worth. He is going to call you to answer for what you have done.

You—I—we shall meet our God. How will it be with us then?

Jesus also warned, employing different speech, but with the same imperious accent upon the need for human penitence in the face of pending Divine judgment. The parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25) projects the warning and also the fate of those not prepared. "And while they [the five unprepared virgins] went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." What a message in those last five words: "and the door was shut." A closed door. Closed opportunity. The end.

It is a solemn warning. Opportunity does not go on forever. The time arrives when the door is shut.

THE PRESENCE OF EMMANUEL MEANS LIFE!

For those who are prepared for His presence, for those who have fulfilled the terms of their sacred covenant with Him, the presence of Emmanuel will mean the fulfillment of their highest longings, the realization of their life-long quest: life. For "by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life" (Prov. 22:4). Again, "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

Oh, the glory of that presence! Oh, the joy of that moment when every faithful one shall realize suddenly that all sacrifice, suffering and strife are forever gone and all eternity lies ahead! ♦

Emmanuel,
God with us, if He is
to be with us, must have
our undivided
attention.

JESUS' Genealogy

How do you reconcile the differences between the two genealogies of Jesus, in Matthew and Luke? In Matthew 1:6 Jesus' ancestry is traced through Solomon, while in Luke 3:23 it is traced through Nathan.

Matthew 1:1-16 gives the genealogy of Joseph, whom the Jews considered to be legally the father of Jesus. As Joseph's adopted son, Jesus became his legal heir, so far as his inheritance was concerned. Note carefully the wording of verse 16: "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (see also this text in the New American Bible: "Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, and of her was born Jesus who is called Christ").

The entire succession of ancestors mentioned in the previous verses records the line of Joseph not the line of Mary (who was Jesus' only human parent). Joseph was "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus"—he is not said to have begotten Jesus.

Luke 3:23-38, on the other hand, records the genealogy of Mary, all the way back beyond the time of Abraham to Adam. This is implied by the wording of verse 23: "Jesus...being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph." Jesus was not the biological or physical son of Joseph, even though this was commonly assumed. It further calls attention to the fact that Mary was the sole human parent through whom Jesus could have a line of ancestors. Her genealogy is then listed, starting with Heli, (who was actually Joseph's father-in-law—Joseph's own father was "Jacob"—Matthew 1:16). Mary's line of descent came through Nathan, another son of David by Bathsheba (or "Bathshua," according to 1 Chron. 3:5).

From which of David's sons, then, was Jesus descended? The answer is both Nathan and Solomon, because both lines of descent from David converged in Zerubbabel, who was in Mary's direct line of descent. One side descended through Nathan and the other through Solomon (Matt. 1:13; Luke 3:27). ♦

Genealogy of Mary
as Given by Luke

David

Genealogy of Joseph
As Given by Matthew



Don't Miss Your

New Year Opportunities



BY DR. NAT HARRISON LONG

When I was 14 years old, I left home in order to go to the Webb School for Boys in Bell Buckle, Tenn. That school was very different from the public schools in Atlanta where I had been up to that point in my education. At Webb School we studied English, science, math and Latin.

In the classes we had what we called the "Trapping" system. Each class was set up sort of like a spelling bee. The teacher would ask all kinds of questions and if a student was not able to answer a question the teacher would go to the next student on down the line until the teacher came to a student who could answer the question correctly. The student who gave the correct answer then went to the head of the class, and the grade each month in the class was determined by how many spaces a student had moved forward.

To say the least, the classes were very exciting. When I was able to move ahead, having answered a question correctly, I felt very good. When I was not able to answer a question I got rather depressed.

I went to Webb School for four years, and I remember that in January each year my father said to me the same thing. He would say, "Bud, you have a wonderful opportunity as a student at Webb School. Do everything you can to take advantage of the chance you have at a good education."

Whenever a new year began I was happy because a new year meant a new opportunity, a new chance, a new period in which I might do better.

Aren't we all like that when it comes to life itself? Haven't you had the experience of a relationship going awry? Haven't you had the experience of needing a loved one, a friend, a neighbor to forgive you? Haven't you had the desire to start over? Can't we all say with Louise Tarkington:

*"I wish there were some wonderful place,
In the Land of Beginning Again:
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches,
And all our poor selfish grief,
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,
And never put on again."*

As we begin this new year, let us keep in mind two ideas.

First, we must be ready to make the most of the new year. God can't give us all He wants to give us unless we are ready to receive.

A young mother wanted to have her little son meet a very famous man. She took the little boy up to the man and said this: "I would like to have my boy shake hands with you."

Noticing that the little boy offered him his left hand, the famous minister asked for the boy's right hand. The little fellow shook his head and replied, "I can't shake with my right hand because I have marbles in it."

We can be like that little boy. We can be so preoccupied with the things that seem immediately important that we fail to take advantage of the opportunities which God puts right before us.

Another thing we need to keep in mind as we enter the new year is this: Some of our finest opportunities this year may come to us in hard, difficult, trying circumstances.

Mark Twain, after losing money several times on practical inventions, was one day approached by a stranger. The stranger said this: "I'm not asking you to invest a fortune. I just want you to help me get started with my invention. You can have as large a share as you want for \$5.00."

But Mark Twain said, "No."

Guess what the invention was? It was the telephone. Alexander Graham Bell left the home of Mark Twain with not a cent. Mark Twain had a wonderful financial opportunity but failed to take advantage of it because it was right in the middle of that which seemed to be a very inopportune circumstance.

Don't ever forget it. Some of our greatest opportunities this year will come to us in seemingly very inopportune circumstances.

Do you know the story behind Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome? When Michelangelo was converted, a man who was very jealous of Michelangelo persuaded the Pope to order Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The jealous man believed that Michelangelo could never learn to use the paintbrush as he had used the chisel. The jealous man thought that failure and disgrace would come to Michelangelo.

For four years Michelangelo lay on his back as he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But he certainly did not come to failure and disgrace. When he was finished someone described his work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel as "the mightiest series of paintings the world had ever seen." Michelangelo's greatest opportunity was right in the middle of a most difficult situation.

It very well may be that way for us this new year.

As God extends the days and the weeks and the months to us, He gives us a glorious opportunity. Let us open our-

selves fully to what God offers us. Some of our greatest chances in this new year for life good and great and glorious may very well come to us in seemingly inopportune, hard, difficult circumstances, but we can be sure that this new year will be filled with great opportunities for us every single day.

Therefore, in the spirit of St. Paul, let us say just this: "Forgetting what lies behind, I press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). ♦

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The Challenge of the New

LITTLE Johnnie begs for a new toy, promising "Then I'll be a good boy." The teenager blames his poor performance on a "poor" teacher. "Give me a new teacher, and then I'll do better." The man whose business is not doing well blames circumstances. "Give us a new year, and we'll show what we can do." There is some mysterious magic in newness, as if the new would automatically take care of the old problems.

There is something of the same aura about the new year, as though we feel it is almost impossible *not* to do better with this new beginning.

What about *this* new year? And our expectations for it? Yes, we have resolved that we will do better. Better than ever before. But do we realize that a new year does not make the new man? It is the new man that makes the new year. There is a new leaf in the calendar—that is easy! But the new leaf is not in our character until we place it there.

Making new resolutions is entirely different from carrying them out. The basis of the problem is simple. Changing human character for the better is not a matter of making new things out of nothing; it means making new things *out of the old*. God gives us each morning a new day, and we have the opportunity to make it *all* new, to leave behind our old sinful ways and enjoy a totally new day. The problem is that we have to make that new day not out of anything new but out of what we already have—which means that very, very easily we can come up with the same old product! Old habits are not easily broken. Old ways are not easily changed. Old thoughts are not easily disposed of.

Yet this is our assignment, to make ourselves new using the raw material of what we already are. We must deal with ourselves beginning where we are and as we are, and work toward newness.

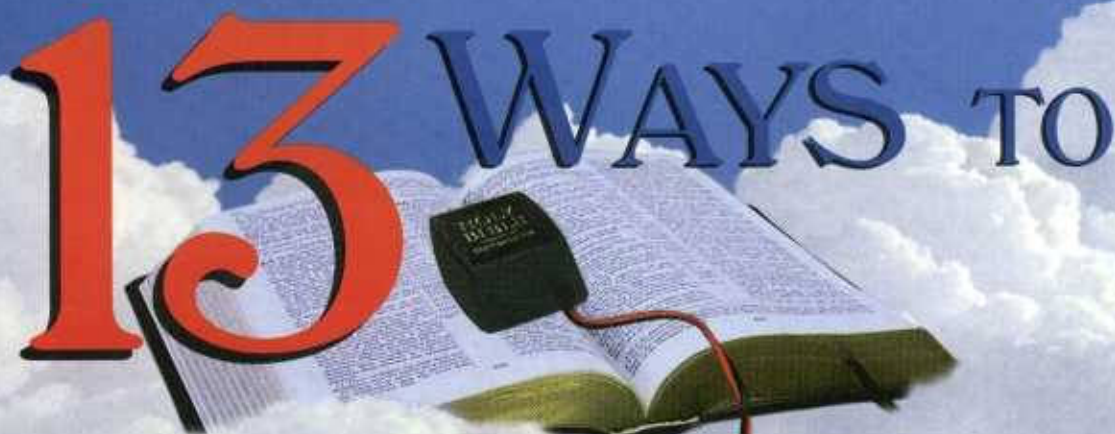
Here is a challenge. Here is what the new year is all about. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). New, through and through.

It is not automatic, but it is possible.

May God grant us the strength and the endurance to see it through to a successful conclusion. ♦

*Come, let us anew
Our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still till the Master appear.
His adorable will
Let us gladly fulfill,
And our talents improve,
By the patience of hope and the labour of love.
Our life is a dream;
Our time as a stream
Glides swiftly away,
And the oncoming moment refuses to stay.
The arrow is flown
The moment is gone;
The millennial year
Rushes on to our view, and eternity's near.
O that each in the day
Of His coming may say
I have fought my way through,
I have finished the work that You gave me to do!
O that each from his Lord
May receive the glad word:
'Well and faithfully done:
Enter into My joy, and sit down on My throne!'*

13 WAYS TO



What can I do to make the Word of God fresh, vital, and meaningful in my life? How can I keep growing my desire for that peaceful, upright, sin-free life that pleases God? What can I do to intensify my longing for a wholly consecrated life that will receive God's richest blessings?

It is always time for self-evaluation. I need to recheck my goals, and the speed of my progress toward them. How is my faith, my self-control and patience? How well am I doing at keeping my mind focussed, not letting it wander at will from this to that? What am I doing to keep my faith alive, vital and growing? Perhaps there is sin that needs to be dealt with—little or great, any sin that remains on the heavenly record will effectively bar me from the eternal crown.

To help us in our daily struggles, to keep our inner reserves strong and steady, God has given us His Word, a "thorough furnisher unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible is a powerhouse of spiritual energy that we can draw on continually.

But we cannot be reading the Bible all day (nor would we be automatic "saints" if we did). What can we do so that our spiritual energy can carry us through every situation however long and trying? What can we do to be always strong inwardly, whether we are physically rested or tired, whether we are at work or relaxing, whether we are on duty or off? What can we do to renew our inner resources, to recharge our spiritual batteries?

To keep us spiritually robust and strong, God has arranged that we be continually renewed by spiritual disciplines. These include Bible study, meditation, prayer. They also include inspiring reading, edifying conversation, heart-lifting thoughts; high, focussed thinking; and even what has been called "sanctified imagination." God has given us minds, and we must use them—not to absorb and dwell on every detail of the day's news but to think about and prepare for His coming New World. We must use our minds—not to keep abreast of current trends but to strengthen our knowledge of His ways, think His thoughts, and bring ourselves to His exalted standard.

How vital are spiritual disciplines, yet how easily they

become dry, meaningless and perfunctory. What can we do to keep them fresh and meaningful to us?

Here are a few suggestions. Perhaps you have others to add.

1 START EACH DAY WITH A BIG SPIRITUAL BREAKFAST.

"If you believe in goodness and if you value the approval of God, fix your minds on the things which are holy and right and pure and beautiful and good"—Philippians 4:8 Phillips.

You cannot expect to have energy today from the nourishing food you ate a week ago, a month ago, a year ago, ten years ago. Nor can you have spiritual thrust from the profound impressions you received in the past.

Just as God's goodness is new every morning, so we need every morning to refresh and renew our minds at the table of the Lord.

Our spiritual "food" is what we put into our minds to control and direct our actions, thoughts and attitudes throughout the day.

In the days of the tabernacle in ancient Israel, God mandated that every morning there should be fresh bread on the table—a symbol of our need for daily spiritual nourishment. Said Jesus of Himself, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man shall eat of this bread, he shall live forever" (John 6:51). He said also, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Spiritual food is as vital to spiritual life as natural food is to natural life.

When God has provided for us so abundantly, don't we show ourselves irresponsible if we are spiritually undernourished? If we do not draw from the heavenly resources He has provided—living bread, life-giving water, and a great variety of spiritual delicacies—we have only ourselves to blame. It is all in the Word of God, free for the taking.

The table is spread; let us be sure to eat abundantly!

RECHARGE YOUR SPIRITUAL BATTERY

2 SET YOUR MIND ON CHRIST.

"Let Christ himself be your example as to what your attitude should be."—Philippians 2:5 Phillips

One cannot read the New Testament without realizing the special privilege the apostles felt in personally knowing Christ and following His example. The apostles were all deeply impressed by this rich gift from God, and made Christ the subject of many of their writings.

We, too, can benefit from fixing our minds on Christ—His life, His example, His purpose, His destiny.

How about trying this Christ-centered exercise. Each day for one week, think about a different virtue in Christ's character. For example, on Monday think about His meekness and humility, and how it can affect your life. On Tuesday think about Christ's unhesitating obedience, and all that it means for you to let Him be your

Master and Lord. On Wednesday think about Christ's purity and holiness. On Thursday think about Christ's love, its demands and rewards. And so on through the week.

Thinking more deeply about the exemplary character of Christ will inspire us to imitate Him. At the same time it will increase our desire—and our readiness—to see Him when He returns in glory.

3 GET AN EYE EXAM.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"—Matt. 6:22–23 NIV

Some fish, we are told, have eyes that can look in two directions, each collecting information independent of the others. God has not made us this way. We were designed that we use both our eyes, and that they should work together. Jesus said, *"If your eyes are good [in focus, working together], your whole body will be full of light."* "Good" eyes send one clear message to the brain. Bad eyes

are eyes out of focus, one eye on something of this world, the other on God.

Stop and ask yourself: What am I looking at? Where are my eyes focused?

It is critical how we view life, how we view our faith in God, how we look at ourselves. A proper view of any of these requires focused vision.

Go frequently to the Scriptures to get an eye exam. So easily do distant objects get out of focus, and the near view is all we see clearly.

Jesus fixed His eye on *"the joy set before him"* (Heb. 12:1–2). If our eyes are "good," we will do the same.

4 BE A HISTORIAN.

Have you ever noticed how often the Bible writers looked back to point out lessons from history? Peter, addressing the multitude on the day of Pentecost, reviewed carefully the life of Jesus. He spoke of Jesus' ministry, His



cruel death and glorious resurrection (Acts 2:22-24). He even told of Jesus' ascension to heaven to explain the descent of the Holy Spirit power (v. 33), then told of the promise of His second coming (Acts 2:14-40).

Stephen, in the dynamic address that cost him his life (Acts 7), reviewed the entire history of the Israelite people, going back to Abraham and pointing out Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, and so on to the time then present, to Jesus whom they refused to recognize, whom they betrayed and murdered.

The apostle Paul in his defense before king Agrippa, also in his speech before Festus, covered the same ground, reviewing the ancient history and applying it to the present. It was a means of building faith in God, faith in His work, faith in the future. It was a way of reminding the people of God's historic faithfulness.

Now, what can you do? *Be a historian.* Review in your mind the history of God's work through the ages, right down to the present, then include the history of God's work in our own day. Continue forward with what the Bible reveals about God's plans for the future of our planet. And as you see God working, you will grow stronger in faith and purpose, and more grateful that your own life can be fitted into that eternal, long-range plan.

This is the real value of history: to build a better today. Seeing what God has done in the past will help us to trust Him with the present.



KEEP IN TOUCH.

"O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name."—Nehemiah 1:11 NIV

Do you ever feel alone, as though you must struggle against the giants of sin and evil without help or aid? Remember that God is only a prayer away from every loyal, earnest, true believer.

If He is not there when we need Him, it is only because we have not sought Him as we should.

Did you ever notice how often the apostles prayed? Have you noticed how often the strong personalities in the Bible sent brief sentence-prayers to heaven? Read the book of Nehemiah, and see how he kept in touch with God.

Don't cut yourself off from this supreme privilege. Use it to its fullest. God is ready to hear and help, if only we do our part.



SPEND TIME WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."—Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

No doubt about it, the writer to the Hebrews spoke of meeting face to face. But there are other ways to spend time with the household of faith, and one of them is to do it in our minds.

Do you ever find yourself caught in a maze of traffic, or waiting in a long line at the checkout counter, or sitting in a doctor's office, or... or...? Wherever you must wait, spend the time with your friends. Yes, capture those moments and go visiting. Visit with Peter or Paul, John or Stephen, Phoebe or Priscilla. Think about their lives, their activities, what they were doing, and how they faced the challenges of every day. You will find the time well spent, and the "waiting" a refreshing, invigorating experience.

We may not be able to congregate with those of like faith as often as we would like, we may be physically far removed from the body of Christ. But having the Bible we can still spend time with the heroes of faith, those men and women who dedicated themselves to the cause of Christ, and share their strength. Altogether they make up a very large and happy family.



STARVE YOUR OLD, SELF-SEEKING NATURE.

"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."—Romans 13:14 NIV

Do you feel like "getting even" with someone who has wronged you? Don't give in!

Do you feel like arguing with someone who disagrees with you, sure that you are right and he is wrong? Don't give in!

Do you feel like treating yourself to just a little of a book you know you should not read, or a picture you know you should not see, or a video or TV program you know you should not look at? Don't give in!

As committed followers of Christ we are not free to do as we please, or think as we please, or say what we please, or go where we please, or look at anything we please. The great Apostle advises, "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." We are only free to do as Christ would do.

Starve the old, self-seeking nature. Don't give in to it, and you will find a freedom, an inner strength and a satisfaction that will encourage you to become more and more like Christ.



WRITE YOUR OWN BIBLE PARAPHRASE.

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands.... Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."—Deuteronomy 6:6-9 NIV

Have you ever thought about what the Bible must

have done for those who studied it intensely, translated it, or paraphrased it—if they took to heart what they were reading?

Why not make Scripture your own? Make the impression deeper by choosing a favorite chapter or passage and writing it out in your own words. Don't take the easy route and just copy it word by word. Put it into your own words, taking care not to change its meaning, so that it speaks its message to your heart and conscience and applies to you in your situation.

Suggestion: To help in this process, read the passage you have chosen in several translations, so that you get a better feel for what is being said.

God has given His Word to guide us, and how can it guide until we internalize it?

9 BE AN EXPLORER.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."—2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV

When you are reading the Bible, do you tend to read only what is familiar and comfortable?

Imagine that you are an explorer, and seek new territory. Don't limit yourself to a few comfortable passages. Examine your Bible and note what you have not read recently, then choose a part that challenges you and read it. You will find there is always something new to learn.

The Bible is a thorough furnisher unto all good works, but only if we explore its breadth and depth.

10 WATCH FOR WARNINGS.

"And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."—Mark 13:37

Have you ever noticed how alert the birds and small animals are to danger? Watch a chipmunk, a sparrow, a robin, a squirrel. Notice how they are constantly looking around, as if they are expecting an enemy to attack any moment.

Is our spiritual life any safer? Isn't danger always near, very near?

To help us keep on the alert God has provided warnings.

How can we be superalert men and women? Watch for the warnings! They may come in many forms—a word, a picture, a thought, a situation. They may come from the most unlikely and unexpected sources. It may be a warning from a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker, or a total stranger. It may come from a bit of news, a flash report, or a lesson from the world of nature. Whatever the source, take it as a warning from God. Take it to heart, and heed it for your own good.

Think of traveling down a road. A large sign announces in bold letters: "Caution! Bridge Out!" Do you think that

you would keep driving as though you had not seen the sign? Just so we should be heeding the warnings God gives us each day.

Watch for warnings! It is the only safe way to live.

11 CONSECRATE YOUR WORK TO GOD.

"Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people."—Colossians 3:23 NLT

Do you dislike your daily work? Is it monotonous, troublesome, or difficult? Try consecrating that work, offer it to God, make it a heavenly service and you will be surprised how it changes.

Did you ever think about the heavenly rewards you are accruing for doing your work in the right spirit, with the right purpose, for the Eternal King? Didn't the apostle Peter say that to our heavenly Creator one day is as a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8)? Now try putting this into earthly terms. Just imagine that for every day we spend in service to God He is giving us a thousand years of perfect happiness and bliss. Just apply this to that monotonous job. On such a scale, every single hour is accruing more than 15,000 days in eternity. Every consecrated eight-hours is adding another 121,000 days to my account. And these are days to be enjoyed in the fullest pleasure I can imagine!

Does it seem like too much to be true? It's still *far* short of Eternity.

Work need not be dull if it is done with God, for God, and under the eye of God. And remember, God has promised every faithful one eternal life in exchange for persevering in the right way (Rom. 2:7).

12 GRIP A VERSE.

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."—Psalm 119:11 NIV

Take a meaningful verse and grip it firmly. Hold to it all day, keeping it constantly near the front of your mind. Apply it at every opportunity, and you will find it a strong defense against sin. Just as the Psalmist said, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*

There is power in the Word, power to defend us against all that is low, corrupt, defiling and mean. The Word of God held tightly in our mind can keep us safe from the evil around us.

How does this work? Because when we have our mind committed to a goal, a purpose, a destiny, what happens around us simply will not matter. Our inner purpose will keep us strong and steady.

A mind fixed on God cannot yield to temptation.

(Continued on page 26)

Pilate Remembers

I wonder why that scene comes back tonight,
That long forgotten scene of years ago?
Perhaps this touch of spring, that bright-orbed moon?
For it was spring, and spring's fair moon hung low
Above my garden on the night He died.

I still remember how I felt disturbed
That I must send Him to a felon's cross
On such a day when spring was in the air
And in His life; for He was young to die.



How tall and strong He stood, how calm His eyes,
Fronting me straight the while I questioned Him.
His fearless heart spoke to me through His eyes.
Could I have won Him as my follower,
And a hundred like besides, my way had led

To Caesar's palace, and I'd wear today
The imperial purple. But He would not move
One small iota from His wild madcap dream
Of seeking truth. What wants a man with 'truth'
When He is young and spring is at the door?

He would not listen, so He had to go;
One mad Jew less meant little to the State,
And pleasing Annas made my task the less...
And yet for me He spoiled that silver night
Remembering it was spring and He was young.

Know Your Bible?

ABOUT JESUS

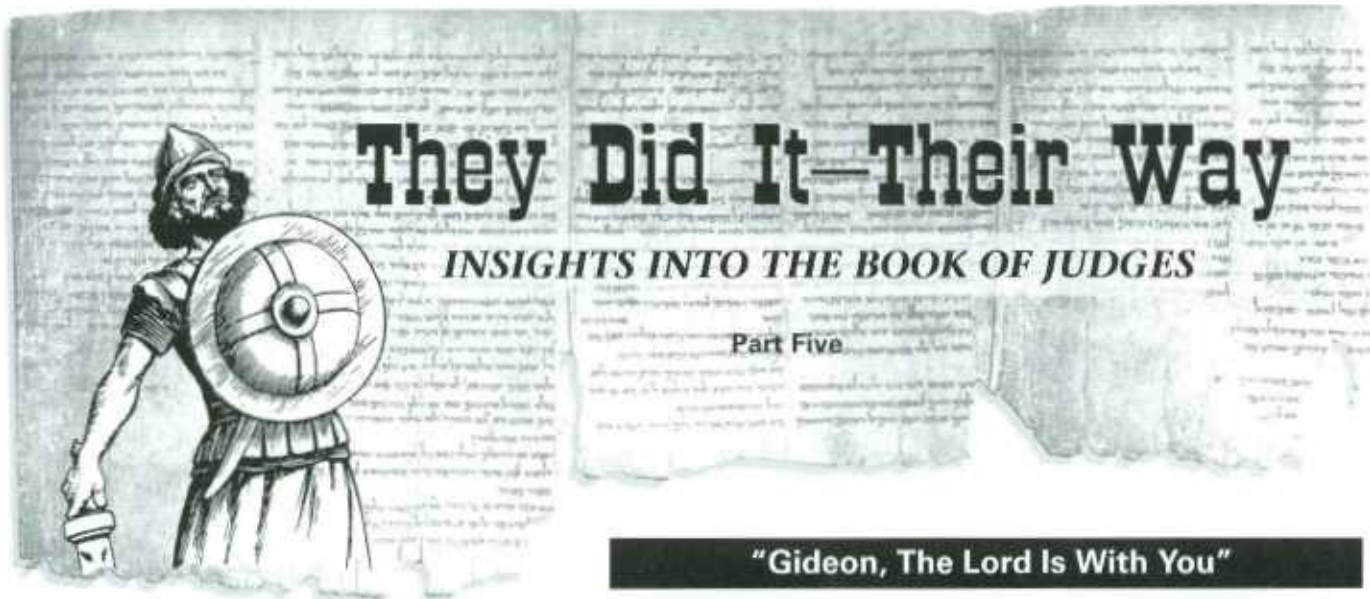
1. Where was He born?
2. Who was His mother?
3. Who was her husband?
4. In what town did they live?
5. Who first heard the news of His birth?
6. Who told the shepherds?
7. Who tried to kill baby Jesus?
8. How was He saved?
9. How long did they stay in Egypt?
10. Where did Jesus live as a boy?
11. Who were the "doctors" of the temple?
12. What did Jesus want to do at this time?
13. What did He do for a living?
14. How old was Jesus when He began to preach?
15. What relation was John to Jesus?
16. How many lepers did he once heal?
17. How many came back to thank Him?
18. What friend did Jesus raise from the dead?
19. Where did Lazarus live?
20. To whom did Jesus say, "*Come with me and I will make you fishers of men*"?
21. What did Jesus use to feed the five thousand?
22. Where did we get the Lord's Prayer?
23. Where are the Beatitudes located?
24. What is a parable?
25. Name five parables.

26. What did Jesus say were the two great commandments?
27. What did Jesus do to teach the disciples humility?
28. What did the disciples do when Jesus was arrested and led away?
29. Who first saw the risen Jesus?
30. What did the angel say?
31. What two disciples ran to the sepulcher?
32. Who doubted the resurrection until he felt the nailprints?

KNOW THE APOSTLES

1. What is an Apostle?
2. How many special ones did Jesus have?
3. Which two were sons of Zebedee?
4. Whom did Jesus call "an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile"?
5. Whom did Jesus rename "a stone"?
6. Which two apostles wrote Gospels?
7. Who was treasurer of the group and "carried the bag"?
8. Whose mother-in-law did Jesus once heal?
9. Who was Simon Peter's brother?
10. Who were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration?
11. Who was Philip's friend whom he brought to Jesus?
12. Which apostles were present at the Last Supper?
13. Who fell asleep in Gethsemane when Jesus was praying?
14. Who betrayed his Master with a kiss?
15. Who denied his Master three times the same night?
16. To whose tender care did the crucified Jesus commit His mother?
17. Who would not believe that Jesus was alive until he saw the prints of the nails in His hands and feet?
18. Who reached the tomb first on the morning of the Resurrection?
19. Who went inside the tomb to see for himself the linen clothes there?
20. Who was exiled to the island of Patmos?
21. How did Judas Iscariot die?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 26



“Gideon, The Lord Is With You”

Read about it in Judges 6:1–40

And the land had rest forty years.” This was long enough for the people to enjoy their freedom from the bondage of Jabin, king of Canaan. It was long enough to settle down to religious indifference, long enough to go back to their old ways, long enough to forget God and turn once again to the evil practices of the Canaanites whom they had failed to expel from the land.

And so we read in Judges 6:1 a repeat of the same old story: “*And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.*”

For eighteen years the people had been in bondage to Eglon king of Moab (3:14). They had been under Jabin king of Canaan twenty years (4:3), before they cried to the Lord. This time the suffering was so intense that they could stand it for only seven years.

This says something about the intensity of the oppression. Who were the oppressors? They were principally the Midianites, along with “*the Amalekites and the children of the east*” (Judg. 6:3).

The area on which they concentrated their oppression was mainly the fertile Esdraelon Plain, also called the Valley of Jezreel, the area which had been directly involved in the victory of Deborah and Barak.

Why did the invading Midianites swoop down upon this Plain? Because this valley was the breadbasket of Israel, and the Midianites, a roving tribe anyway, simply chose to do their roving in Israel at the harvest time. Strangely, there was no attempt in Israel to fight against this outrageous type of robbery. The Easterners simply came, took what they wanted, stayed as long as they wished, and left. Meanwhile the Israelites holed up in dens, caves, and strongholds of the mountains (Judges 6:2).

What a sad sight to see Israel making holes and burrowing in like frightened rats in their God-given land, when they might have faced their enemies in the power of God and compelled them to go back!

But Israel had sinned, and that is why they were weak. That is why God was not at their side to defend them.



Gideon was threshing wheat in Ophrah when God called him to deliver Israel from their oppressors.

The Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and camped in the Valley of Jezreel near the hill of Moreh. Gideon and his men camped at the spring of Harod.

With only 300 fighting men—and the help of God—Gideon routed the Midianite thousands.

Israel Cries to the Lord

The Israelites, suffering badly, finally cried to the Lord for relief (Judg. 6:7).

What was the Lord's reply? He did not immediately send a deliverer. Instead, he sent an unnamed prophet to speak in His behalf, one who could say "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel" (Judg. 6: 8). The prophet told what God had done for His people in bringing them out of Egypt into Canaan, and ended with a sharp rebuke which revealed the real cause of their suffering: "Ye have not obeyed my voice." This statement was an echo of the familiar words in Judges 2, except then the Lord had asked the question: "Why have ye done this?" This time there was no need to ask the question—they knew!

Then the Lord in His mercy began to prepare a man to deliver His people. That man's name was Gideon.

The Call of Gideon

Gideon's story opens with a record of his unique call to service. Gideon was not sitting by the wayside waiting for the call. He was working, doing his best in a bad situation. In fact, the angel (Judges 6:14-16 says it was an angel) found Gideon threshing wheat for his family.

Gideon lived near Ophrah in the grain-growing Esdraelon Plain, and when the angel came, he was at work



threshing his grain in a winepress, an out-of-the-way place where he hoped to hide his precious crop from the Midianites.

The angel's first words to Gideon were enough to take him completely off his feet: "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!" (Judges 6:12, NLT). Either statement by itself would have been overwhelming. But combined, it was almost too much to believe. To think that God was with him—when

the people were being so terribly oppressed by their enemies! And to address him as a "mighty hero" when he was threshing his wheat in hiding!—where was his heroism?

But before he had time to think about all this, he learned that God had chosen him for a very special—strategic—dangerous assignment.

It's no surprise that Gideon protested. If this was indeed a Divine call, why hadn't God been revealing Himself to His people in miracles all along, as He had done in Egypt? Wasn't there every evidence that God had forsaken His people?

But Gideon was not complaining. In fact, as he continued, Gideon spoke in a true spirit of humility, and humility and complaining do not go together. Further on, Gideon showed that he had been willing to stand for God, even if he had to stand alone against the rest of the community. So perhaps this one-on-one visit with the angel was a rare opportunity to get answers to his questions. And the questions need not have come from bitterness; they could have come as well from a loving and committed heart—which seems likely, as the angel offered no rebuke but only encouragement.

Gideon brought the angel his precious food offering, the best he could provide: a kid that he had made ready, unleavened cakes made from almost a bushel of flour, and a pot of broth. He laid it out upon the rock, and poured the broth over the meat and the cakes. Then...the angel touched the food with the end of his staff, and "there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes." And the angel was gone.

What sign could be more impressive? Here was Gideon working hard to have enough food to sustain his family, and now his food offering looked like a total loss.

But it was not; it was entered to his credit in God's book of remembrance, that he was ready to sacrifice for God's cause.

The incident must have left an indelible impression on him. Every time he counted his goats in the days to come, every time he looked at the dwindling supply of grain, he would be reminded of that sign. Also riveted in his mind would be the picture of that flame, for fire does not normally spring out of a rock.

God knows how to impress His servants.

Gideon's First Assignment

Now Gideon received his first assignment. Was it to attack and rout the Midianites? No, God works slowly. Gideon first had to show his colors (and courage) by destroying the high place to Baal that was located on his father's property (Judges 6:25).

Taking ten of his personal servants that same night, Gideon worked feverishly, and in a few hours they had destroyed the altar to Baal, cut down an Ashera pole, built a new altar to the true God, and prepared a bullock to sacrifice on it, exactly as God had commanded.

Do we think Gideon a coward because he attempted the task at night? It is just possible that had he done it during the day, he would have received so much opposition that he would have been forced to stop.

Morning light saw the job done, and early morning worshippers quickly spread the word that the altar was gone. Almost immediately the whole town was in an uproar. Who was the villain that had dared attack the sacred altar of Baal? Let him die for his evil deed!

The protesters went immediately to Gideon's father Joash, seeking permission to take Gideon's life. Joash, hearing what had happened, apparently felt some shame at his own spirit of compromise, and did not grant the permission. Instead, probably to their surprise, he offered some sage counsel. If Baal was indeed the god they claimed him to be, he ought to be able to bring his own vengeance on his enemy. And further, whoever should take upon himself

to render vengeance in Baal's place should be put to death (Judges 6:31). The complainers, impressed at Joash's words, did as he advised.

When Gideon was still alive the next day, they changed his name to Jerubbaal, meaning "let Baal contend," because Gideon had successfully contended with Baal and had not been harmed.

If God was to deliver these people, they must be turned away from Baal and toward God.

Do we wonder why God gave Gideon this preliminary assignment? First would have been the effect it had on Gideon himself. Destroying Baal's image gave him confidence for the greater challenge ahead, that of defeating the enemies of the nation. And second, it was a necessary step. Before God could deliver Israel, the Israelites needed to get on His side. And before this could happen, the false deity of the Canaanites, to which the people had been turning,

(Continued next page)



The Midianites

Who were these people?

After the death of Sarah, Abraham "took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah" (Gen. 25:1-2). Midian was an actual son of Abraham. It was this son's descendants who some seven or eight centuries later (in the time of Gideon) were causing intense suffering to their brother's (Isaac's) children.

We read that the Midianites had "camels...without number" (Judges 6:5). This is the first mention in the Bible of camels used in warfare. In Deborah's day, Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron. Now the Midianites had countless camelry. The gorilla raids by these highly mobile units caused serious suffering in the farming communities of Israel, and the people were not prepared to fight back.

This was not Israel's first experience with the Midianites. The Midianites were desert dwellers associated with Ishmaelites and Medanites (Gen. 37:28, 36), when Joseph was sold into Egypt. Counted among the "people of the East" (Judg. 6:3, 33), Midianite was a general designation for the nomads of the Syrian and Arabian Deserts. Moses went to Midian as a fugitive from Egyptian justice (Ex. 2:15), where he was befriended by Jethro, the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:16; 3:1). Later Moses married Jethro's daughter Zipporah, and Jethro's son Hobab (Num. 10:29; Judg. 4:11) gave guidance to Israel in the wilderness (Num. 10:29-32).

The next report of Moses' involvement with Midian is in the story of Balak and Balaam, recorded in Numbers

22-25. At this time the children of Israel were coming to the end of their forty years' wandering. They had experienced a great victory over Sihon king of the Amorites, then over Og king of Bashan. This brought them to a confrontation with Balak, who was king of the Moabites east of Jordan near Jericho. The elders of Moab and of Midian consulted about what they should do. The decision was to send for Balaam, son of Beor, who lived in Pethor on the Euphrates, some 350 miles to the north.

Balaam thus became a tool in the hands of the Moabites and Midianites to curse Israel. The Bible has much to say about this very wicked man. Having failed to curse the people of Israel, he advised a scheme designed to ruin Israel by involving their men in the idolatrous and licentious orgies connected with Baal-Peor worship. The Israelites fell for the crafty counsel, took part in the heathen festival, and so brought a curse on themselves. As a punishment from God, a plague broke out among the Israelites, and 24,000 perished (Num. 25:9).

What Balaam could not do with his curses he achieved by his counsel, and Balaam's name became a symbol for all that is impure, idolatrous, and adulterous.

The tragedy was long remembered (see 2 Peter 2, Jude 11, Rev. 2:14) and became a warning for all time to come against licentiousness, immorality, and idolatry.

Some 250 years after Balaam, the Midianites in confederation with the Amalekites and other "children of the east" made war against Israel, and oppressed them for seven years. It was at this time that God raised up Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6:1 through chapter 7).

This is the last we hear of the Midianites. ♦

had to be destroyed. It simply was not right for this pagan center to remain in Gideon's family when Gideon was to be God's instrument in leading the nation against the Midianites.

What did Gideon's destroying the altar to Baal do for him? It identified him as the one who stood on God's side, and one who was willing to take action in favor of God's cause. Suddenly, his loyalties were known.

Prior to this, Gideon had been out-of-step with his community. Now he became a leader, one to whom the town and other centers could look for direction—also one who could be counted on to obey God. Gideon needed this reputation before he could function as a military leader against the Midianites. If this had not happened, who would have joined the cause of one who was the "least in his father's house"? Now he became the only one to whom the people would respond. From a "nobody" he became a prominent "somebody," one who could—and would—do what God wanted done.

Summoning the Troops

Gideon's next step was to assemble his troops. He started in his home community, where his reputation was best known. When the response was good, he did the same for his entire tribe (Manasseh). Then when many came also from this larger number, he extended the call to three other tribes (Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali).

It is noticeable that he did not summon the people of Ephraim. In spite of his apparent courage, he was still fearful of some, Ephraim being the largest and most arrogant of the tribes, Gideon was possibly intimidated by them. In God he felt strong. But underneath, he was still very human.

Because the volunteers had to be discreet in their movements so as not to

**God gave
Gideon visible signs
to confirm his faith.
Today we have
only His written
Word.**

arouse the suspicions of the Midianites (even with precautions, the invaders were aware of what was happening—Judges 7:9–14), it took several weeks for the forces to gather.

It is always hard to wait. We prefer action. Inactivity gives us time to think—too much. Questions arise in our minds.

The delay was hard for Gideon. The waiting time raised questions in his mind too. Would the Israelites support him? How many men would be enough? What type of strategy should he use? What weapons should he provide the men? Where would they come from? Would any plan be successful against so much larger an army so much better equipped and better trained? How could he possibly hope to overcome their superior numbers? And what about their camels?

We have the advantage—we know the end of the story. Gideon did not.

Gideon's questions moved him to ask for another reassurance from God, another sign. This sign is what has become known proverbially as "putting out the fleece" (Judges 6:36–40). Seeing the gathering hosts of Midianites and the inferiority of his own army, Gideon needed his courage fortified. And God did not condemn it.

God knows our need, and He provides for it, just as He provided for Gideon's. When the angel of the Lord had first appeared to Gideon at the winepress, He had strengthened Gideon's faith. And when, that same night, the Lord told him to throw down the altar of Baal, his faith did not waiver.

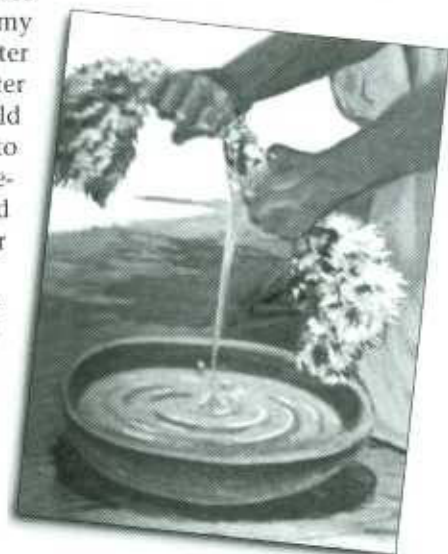
How could Gideon be sure that God was with him? He placed a fleece on the ground and asked God to make it wet the following night, leaving the ground dry.

God graciously complied, and Gideon was able to wring a bowl of water from the fleece.

Then Gideon realized that perhaps his test was not fool-proof. What if someone during the night had poured a bowl of water onto the fleece? So Gideon asked God for a second test, to make the ground all around the fleece wet and leave the fleece dry. The next morning Gideon found it just as he had asked, and felt reassured that God would indeed be with his army.

Did faith win over doubt? For the moment. But there would be more tests to come, and more need for faith to grow. God forges faith in the furnace of affliction, and Gideon's name being inscribed in God's hall of fame is evidence that he went through that furnace (Heb. 11:32). ♦

(Continued next month)



Are You Y2K Ready?



BY EMANUEL BOYER

In today's modern world, the computer affects all of us either directly, if we use a computer in our daily lives, or indirectly as through a utility company from whom we receive our electricity. The computer processor is so deeply embedded in today's business world that few things are not touched by it in one way or another.

Over the last couple of years, and more so as the year 2000 approaches, there has been a flurry of activity along with a growing apprehension in the industry both in computer manufacturing and among end users over what has been termed "The Millennium Bug." It seems that the original developers of computer technology, in order to save precious electronic memory (a very limited commodity in the early stages of computer development), opted to use a two-digit date to represent the year in the computer's time/date clock. Example: The numbers 97 or 98 are used to represent 1997 or 1998. As a result, when the year 2000 arrives, many computers will not be able to understand a two-digit date that consist of the digits "00" and will interpret it as the year 1900 instead of the year 2000.

According to experts in the field this is going to cause problems with calculations that computers are attempting to perform. Rumors of all dimensions about coming disasters as a result of this oversight are rampant. Some prognosticators are predicting complete major breakdowns in the business community, while others are anticipating only minor inconveniences.

There is, however, basic agreement on a few points: No one in the computer business is recommending a do-nothing approach to the problem, nor a plenty-of-time-to-take-corrective-action attitude. All call for a vigorous and aggressive campaign to ferret out the year 2000 bugs while there is yet time to complete the required changes.

How appropriate this call for immediate action is for professing Christians. Each one should be asking: Am I

Y2K ready? Am I fully prepared for God's coming new millennium, or am I infected with a millennium bug like many of today's computers, unprepared to move into the new age that is so rapidly approaching?

This call for immediate action is the exact message that has been sounding ever since God began working with man's spiritual development.

God has always given ample warning and time before He ushers in a new age. As it was in the days of Noah. "...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing...." It is the same warning we receive today as we read from the Bible God's message to us. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

This message to prepare carries an even more urgent note when we consider what we have to lose if the arrival of the new age finds us unprepared. Hebrews 12:1 tells us, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." The apostle Peter in his First Epistle also tells us how important the arrival of this new age will be for us as individuals. It will be a time of Judgment and reward. "When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

The end of the first 6000 years of God's spiritual creation is approaching. And the prophet's message to us concerning it is no less urgent now than it was at the beginning. We read in Habakkuk 2, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time,

but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." When that day has arrived it will be too late if we are not prepared; the damage will be complete, the time for action will be over. As with some involved in the computer industry, the time to search for flaws will be over, and the price for disregarding the Divinely dictated warnings or taking them too lightly will be high. *"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out"* (Luke 13:28).

Let us search deeply and thoroughly. What do I lack of being "Y2K" ready? Examine every part of your spiritual development. A quick glance will not suffice; a quick glance will not reveal all. It will take an honest and earnest search.

If we truly desire God's promised reward, we will pray as King David did, seeking God's guidance to help find and conquer our shortcomings. He said (Ps. 139:23-24), *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*


We want to be certain that we locate all the hidden millennium bugs and immediately set to work correcting them while there is yet time. Romans 13:11-12 reads, *"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."*

The price we will pay for an incomplete search will be too dear. It is indeed a matter for serious concern. If we leave one "bug" of our lower nature untended to, we will find ourselves left out. Like the five foolish virgins in Jesus' parable (Matt. 25:10-13), it will be too late. And like the computers that will fail at the arrival of the new millennium, we will be discarded, cast out, no longer of any use to God. The time for action and correction will be past. It will be too late to be part of the new order when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom.

Why not act now, while there is still time to take corrective action?

No one wants to be caught unprepared by a millennium bug. ♦

The **ABIB** Calendar



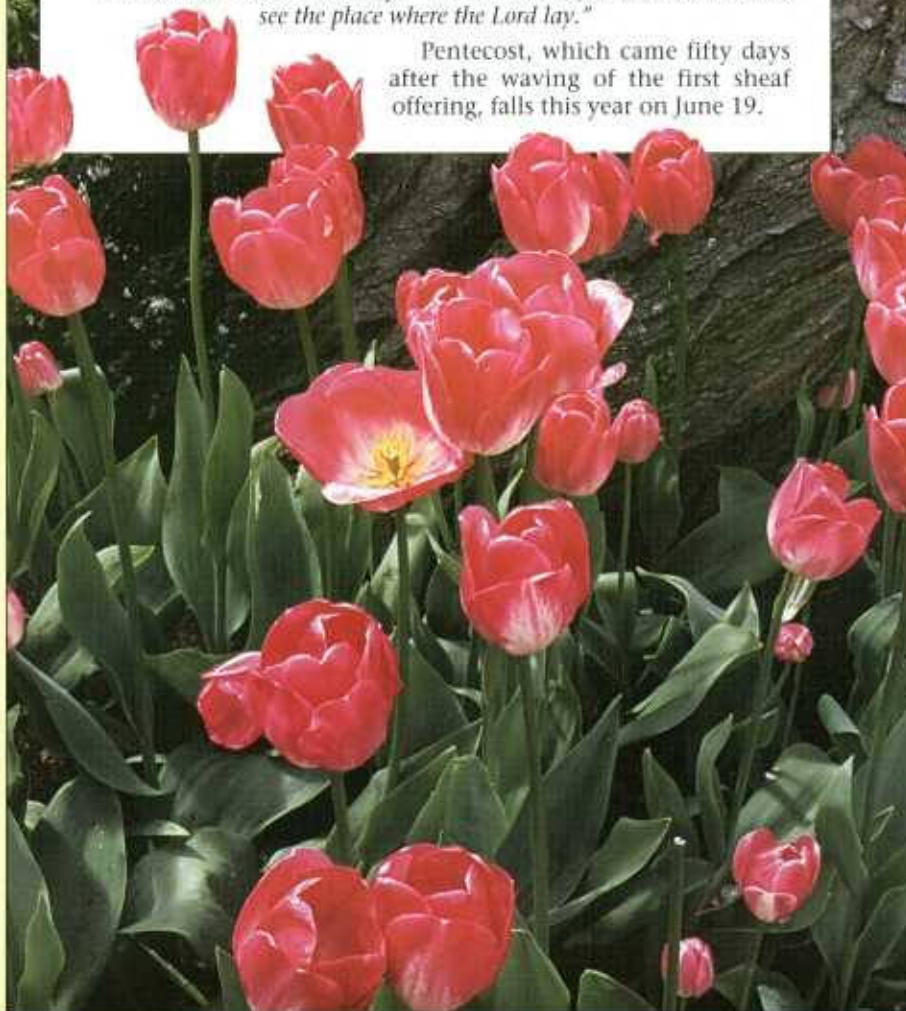
ABIB means "month of green ears," "spring or sprouting month." God commanded Moses to "observe the month Abib" (Deut 16:1; Ex. 12:2; 13:4) in remembrance of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt.

Abib 1 begins this year on Friday evening, April 16, and continues through Saturday, April 17, Bible time being counted from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). It was the pattern of the Hebrew people to begin the new year with the first occurrence of the new moon after the Spring Equinox. Accordingly, Abib First is the first day of the sacred New Year, and the day on which we observe the anniversary of our Savior's birth.

Abib 13 is the anniversary of the night when Jesus partook of the Last Supper with His disciples before He suffered. It falls this year on the evening of April 28. At this time we partake of the emblems (unleavened bread and grape juice) in obedience to the command, *"This do in remembrance of me."* It is a sacred rite, symbolic of our renewing our covenant relationship with God, the bread representing the knowledge of the law of God, and the juice the wholehearted application of that knowledge to our daily lives, the offering of ourselves in total dedication to do the will of God.

Abib 15 is the anniversary of the Resurrection of Christ, occurring this year on the morning of May 1. In ancient Israel, this was the day of the waving of the first sheaf of the harvest before the Lord. On this morning, Christ the firstfruits from death rose triumphant over the grave. On this morning, after the crucifixion, even *"very early in the morning,"* certain women found their way to the tomb. Finding it empty, they heard those immortal words that still stimulate us today: *"He is not here, for he is risen! Come, see the place where the Lord lay."*

Pentecost, which came fifty days after the waving of the first sheaf offering, falls this year on June 19.



Your Kingdom Comes!

O Lord of life, Your kingdom is at hand,
Blest reign of love and liberty and light;
Time long foretold by seers of Your own land,
The cherished dream of watchers through the night.

*L*o! in the heavens shines the morning star,
Shedding its luster on our darkened way;
And we can see, as pilgrims from afar,
The holy dawning of Your perfect Day.

*N*ow gleams at last before our waiting eyes
The glory of the kingdom that shall be;
When truth in conquering grandeur shall arise,
And Christ will rule this world with equity.

*F*orward again we move at Your command,
The flaming pillar leads; we follow on,
Joined heart and hand with all Your prophet band
Until we see Your King upon His throne.

—Selected

