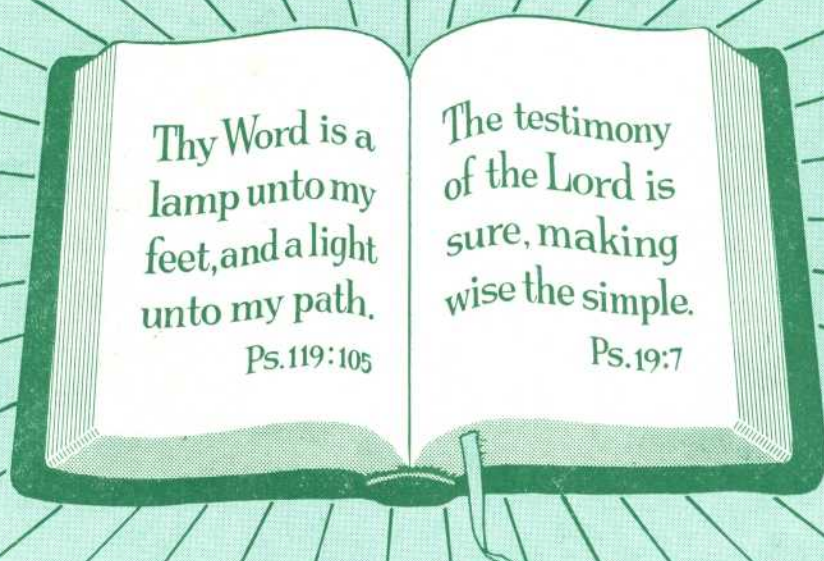


Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST



Plus Ultra--Everything Beyond!

What Do You Value?

John Mark - From Profitless to Profitable

Two Ascensions, Two Comings

Megiddo Message

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The MEGIDDO MESSAGE will

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- Answer perplexing religious questions
- Give you courage for these uncertain times
- Help you live above the world's moral corruption
- Reveal to you how to develop a character acceptable to God
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Editorially Speaking...

God Is Love--and Severity

WHEN we ponder the love of God, we feel the warmth and reassurance of a divine promise; yet there is great danger that we may misunderstand the term.

God shows a certain love toward His human family in numerous ways. He provides this earth for our home. He supplies air to breathe, sunshine for light and warmth, rain for water, vegetation and animals for food, and minerals and lumber for physical needs and comforts. More important than all this He has supplied the knowledge of how we may perpetuate our existence—live eternally. All these manifestations of His love are ours to see and experience.

But let us not become so involved in enjoying God's incomparable goodness that we forget what the apostle Paul calls His "severity": "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22).

If there is any one lesson to be learned from the Bible, it is that God's love, though ineffable, is conditional—the condition being that we make ourselves worthy of that love. Too many sermons today on radio and TV are stressing God's love to mankind regardless of man's moral status. From many a pulpit it is proclaimed that the drunkard, the drug addict, the adulterer and adulteress, the liar, the swearer, even the murderer are all loved by God. God is said to hate sin, while loving the sinner. This simply is not true. Sin is willful breaking of the divine law, and it cannot exist outside the sinner. Sin cannot be packaged, confined in a Pandora's box to be opened on occasion. Sin is an act of the sinner, and the perpetrator of the sin merits the penalty of divine Judgment. While the penalty is withheld at the present time, we must not forget that it *will* be exacted. The day of the return of the Judge is drawing closer, when all under divine law will be rewarded according to divine Judgment—by merit.

God's love is vast; it is just and equitable. In the words of the apostle Peter, "He is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." By our diligence we can be a recipient of God's love through eternity, or a victim of His severity due to our own negligence.

Which shall we choose? ●●

Plus Ultra-- Everything Beyond!

PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, we draw nigh again this morning, thanking Thee for the many, many blessings that are showered upon us. We thank Thee for life, for health, and the abundance of all things which combine to make life pleasant and agreeable.

We rejoice that Thou hast looked upon us in our lowly estate, and in Thy mercy hast provided us with a way of escape from the smallness and pettiness of our nature, and that if we fully avail ourselves of this opportunity we can one day be raised to the heights of immortality.

We thank Thee that we have been imbued with a desire for something better than the things of this life, for something eternal in its duration, but grant that this desire may not be a fruitless thing, but that it may ever grow and expand until we have made a complete surrender to Thee.

As we behold the crumbling of the nations, sin and iniquity running rampant on every hand, help us to realize that it is the darkness before the dawn and that soon Thou wilt break Thy long silence and arise to shake terribly the earth.

In view of the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" which Thou hast promised, may we count the little crosses that we must bear as we walk the strait and narrow way as mere "light afflictions," unworthy of our serious concern.

May we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen, realizing that the "invisibilities are the realities, and the intangibles are the permanencies." The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal.

Bless all who are striving to learn and live Thy blessed precepts. Be with those absent from us today. Be with those in sickness or trouble, and those who have not our privilege of constant assembly. Sustain and bless as Thou hast promised, and grant us strength to continue faithful to the end, that having finished our work a full reward may be granted us in Thy glorious, never-ending Kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DISCOURSE

IN the ancient times there was an inscription upon the mighty Rock of Gibraltar at the exit from the Mediterranean which read "*Ne plus ultra*," meaning, "Nothing beyond." As daring mariners ventured out into the treacherous Atlantic and discovered there were important land masses lying beyond, the inscription on the rock necessarily had to be changed to "*Plus Ultra*," "Everything beyond."

Today we are surrounded by a world which, gazing upon the mighty Gibraltar that looms large upon their horizon, see there an inscription placed ignorantly by men with darkened minds—even in this most enlightened of all ages—"Ne plus ultra," Nothing beyond. Bound within the limits of mortal life, they see nothing—or at least nothing of reality—beyond.

The true Christian's viewpoint is extremely opposite. He is confident that beyond this turbulent life, beset with its sorrows and heartaches, its brevity, uncertainty, and an untimely end to the best that can be wrested from its toils—lies *everything* man's loftiest aspirations could desire. *Life* is there, abundant, eternal, and glorious. Riches, honor and majesty await those who shall attain it. Peace, sweet peace, unmarred and boundless, bathes the inmates of that wonderland. There abound matchless beauty and grandeurs, magnificence and splendor embellished by all the terms our most fantastic imagination could conjure to lavish upon it.

With faith dominating, that world becomes surpassingly real and vivid.

But alas! How oft would the subversive forces of doubt and unbelief storm in upon the mind and obscure all the grand and lovely things of the future.

In the life of every Christian, there is warfare—intense, awful—between faith and doubt. Doubt has gravity and terrific grounding force, pulling downward toward the dust; while faith, inspirational and exalting, is ever calling upward away from our natural selves, to the best that is in us.

The Forces of Doubt and Faith

The mind of every striving Christian is the battleground of what he is determined to be and what he is, the army of the mountain height and the forces of the pit; the doubts that arise and the faith that subdues. But faith—we are reminded—is the victory that overcomes the world.

Faith means the putting of all confidence in the things we hope for; it means being certain of things which we cannot see. It was this kind of faith that won reputation for the saints of old. And, after all, it is only by faith that our minds accept as fact that the whole scheme of time and space was designed by God—that the world which we can see is operating on principles that are invisible.

Without faith we could not accept the evidence of the things that are about us.

Faith in the future is founded on evidence from the past. We have food to eat today because the farmer had faith that the seed he placed in the earth would germinate, grow and bear fruit, as seed has for uncounted seasons in the past. That miracle of Nature which has captured the faith of humanity is but a familiar, minute sample of the handiwork of the great Almighty Creator. Likewise He gives us numerous other evidences to justify the existence of the factor which we call faith, unfeigned faith.

But the forces of doubt are always ready to discredit the findings of faith. They always come up with the question: "Well, how do you know?" Doubt says, "There has been much speculation upon the subject in question, *Plus Ultra*, everything beyond, but it remains wholly unproved and unsatisfactory. Without doubt, this is a most futile doctrine. *Plus Ultra*—more beyond—everything beyond this life. Our five senses tell us that everything we can be sure of is *during* this life. That which we see, feel, hear and experience in the great and beautiful world, is ours to delight in and enjoy to the fullest.

But Doubt continues, "No individual has ever lived beyond the present moment. Why allow faith to speak to you longer of things that are uncertain, unreal; of distant hopes that draw away from all that is familiar and beloved? No longer build your hopes on far-off uncertainties. Faith is outmoded in this day, outdated; she is the scorn of this generation. Cling to her no more."

But our ready answer to any such seductive blandishments will be, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

In the courtroom of the soul of every Christian, the Word of God is alive, animated. No stronger evidence exists in *Plus Ultra* than can be called from hence.

The Testimony of Prophecy

There is much in the Word of God to inspire faith in the *everything beyond* which that Word foretells. All of the things foretold of coming times which are now past have proved historically correct. The Lord informed Noah of the approaching flood one hundred twenty years in advance, and the Deluge came just *as* and *when* predicted. Joseph was pre-informed of the departure of his brethren from Egypt, and when he was dying, gave commandment that his bones should be removed at the Exodus and not left in that land. Moses foretold the curses that should come upon Israel if they departed from following the Lord, and that they would be returned to slavery in Egypt, and that forecast was literally fulfilled at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, A. D. 70.

The prophet Daniel was able to foretell the existence of four world kingdoms that should come into being, and he made his prophecy when only the first of these was in existence. Both Jesus and Paul foretold the condition of the world at the time of the Second Advent, and their forecasts coincide perfectly with the conditions that we see in the world at the present time.

And the forecast of the immeasurable blessings awaiting God's faithful servants will likewise meet its literal fulfillment.

Faith then says, "Yes, it thrills my heart anew to think about that blest abode, and the dawning of that better Day. Lift up thine eyes. Look now and see. Lo! the eastern heavens are already aflame with the foreglory of the breaking day! The morning cometh! A thing sublime and unprecedented! The night is far spent. The day is at hand. It is the testimony of patriarchs, prophets, apostles. The scroll of history affirms it. The sun, moon and stars of man's heaven attest it. A thousand signs declare it. The morning cometh! O that every tongue might swell the cry! that every ear might catch the heaven-borne word! that every heart might be cheered by its radiant hope! that every sin-burdened soul might heed the warning of the ancient prophet, 'Prepare to meet thy God!' "

Everything Beyond

The rewards that God holds out to His earthly children are of such magnitude that even as broad a term as "everything beyond" does not do justice to them. Indeed the great apostle Paul expresses them in the superlative degree: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). And again in I Cor. 2:9 the same apostle quoted Isaiah as follows: "Eye

hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Peter was not content until he had expressed the rewards for the righteous in the most glowing terms: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). Can we picture the bliss of being a partaker of the divine nature? We shall be placed beyond death: "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, . . . neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels" (Luke 20:35-36). There will be no gray hairs, no bending forms, no dimming eyes, no impaired hearing, no failing memories, no fatigue, no frustrations, no disappointments; but life, life, immortal life, along with unspeakable bliss and happiness. This and a thousand times more will be the reward of those worthy to be partakers of the divine nature.

Eternal Life Beyond

We are promised eternal life as a part of everything beyond this short mortal life. The promise is: "But Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end" (Isa. 45:17), a life without cessation. We cannot begin to comprehend the meaning of those words. After a year has been counted for each leaf that grows on every tree in the mighty forest; after a year has been counted for each blade of grass that grows on every part of the earth's surface; after a year has been counted for each sand grain that lies on all earth's seashores: eternity shall have just begun.

And the apostles agree with the Prophet that eternal life is beyond: "In hope of *eternal life*, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began," averred Paul. And the beloved John attests: "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (Titus 1:2; I John 2:25).

Salvation is Beyond

Salvation should be the highest goal in the Christian's life, and that priceless boon is *ahead, beyond* the vale of mortality. The apostle Paul was fully aware of the divine arrangement. He knew that he could and would receive his reward when Christ should come. After stating his case: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," He said confidently, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7-8).

The patriarch Job was confident that everything was ahead, even though death should terminate his short stay upon earth. He said: "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (19:25-26). He also knew that if we prepare our hearts and stretch out our hands toward God, if iniquity we banish from our lives, and evil from our dwellings, then at that coming day we too can face the Judge unashamed. Our lives then will rise more radiant than the noon; our shadows will be like the dawn, and we can have hope and feel secure.

Isaiah spoke warmly of that great Day when *everything beyond* will be the reward of the righteous: "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; we have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you . . . And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 26:1; 35:3-4, 10).

An eternity of joy and pleasure awaits the overcomer. It is just beyond! "Everlasting joy" will be upon the heads of the redeemed of the Lord. How important it is then for us to live so as to be worthy of being redeemed in that glorious coming day.

Authority Unlimited Beyond

Furthermore, we are promised *unlimited authority*. Authority over others is a privilege that we naturally value very highly. Unless properly controlled, this privilege may go to our heads and lead us into many a pitfall. However, it is one of the outstanding features of *Plus Ultra*, of the everything which lies beyond. God has promised it with no strings attached if only we fit ourselves to receive it. Said Jesus: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations . . . To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 2:26; 3:21).

Paul condemned certain individuals of the church at Corinth for taking matters upon which they disagreed to a pagan court to be settled, rather than bringing their differences before the saints. And in the same breath he reveals the position of authority the saints will hold during the Millennial reign of Christ. "Do you not know that the saints

are to manage the world? If the world is to come under your jurisdiction, are you incompetent to adjudicate upon trifles?" (I Cor. 6:2, Moffatt).

Isaiah the prophet did not keep silent about the authority to be given the faithful when God's new order is established upon earth: "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated... I will make thee an eternal excellency" (Isa. 60:14-15).

How shortsighted for us to seek honor one of another, or the plaudits of men, when such unlimited honors await the overcomer in the world to come!

Exalted Recognition is Ahead

Every normal person enjoys recognition. He wants to possess some features that will set him apart from the crowd. The last thing he cares for is to fill a nameless place as a spoke in a wheel, or an unidentified cog in a piece of machinery. And while this desire is apt to prompt us to think too highly of ourselves, while it may have in it the potential to impel us to seek the honor of men (a thing we are strictly forbidden), yet it is a craving which is justifiable when properly timed.

For example, God plans that His children shall have rest, but not yet. Rest comes later. Rest must follow labor; the day is for work. We now are in the day. He plans that His children shall have fabulous wealth, but not yet. Today, actually, we possess nothing that is our very own. If now we are faithful in that which is another man's, the day will come when we shall be given that which is our own. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not," said the Prophet of Israel (Jer. 45:5). The time is not yet.

Some people have an insatiable desire to go places and see things. But now is not the time. The man with his eyes in the ends of the earth is classed as a "fool." He wants to see all that is to be seen even at the expense of his growth into holiness. God forbids this. This man so busily looking around fails to *look ahead*. He is unwilling to bide his time until the day when the Lord shall "cause him to ride upon the high places of the earth," and takes him around and shows him His salvation (Isa. 58:14; Ps. 50:23) and the wonders of His mighty universe. It is a case of proper timing.

And the same is true of the desire for recognition and the praise of men, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you," said Jesus. It is a

sign of unfaithfulness to God. Yet the desire for approbation is one of the human factors the Almighty employs to attract men and women to serve Him. If properly controlled, and correctly timed, it is an invaluable stimulus. And it will be a part of the reward of the faithful. Malachi 3:12 reads: "And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts." In that day we shall be unto Him "for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory" before the nations (Jer. 13:11). While today he that will "depart from evil is accounted mad," yet in that day the overcomers will be men to be "wondered at"; the fame of their outstanding accomplishment will be heralded from one end of the earth to the other. Their great King will honor them by coming forth and serving them. He will serve them with immortality.

Perpetual Peace is Beyond

In the world today there is a great craving for peace among the common people. Within many of the nations there is an honest probing for a basis for peace going on. Humankind as a whole are peace-loving; but too often the belligerent elements, while in the minority, are much more articulate, hence have the last word. But this unhappy situation is not always to prevail. There will be a change. God's Word speaks forcefully and directly of a time when war shall no longer plague mankind. "But in the last days," the Lord's house shall be established in the "top of the mountains,... and many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Mic. 4:1-3).

Today our nation invests more than forty billion dollars a year on the war machine, and some 70% of our federal taxes are used to support wars—past, present and future. But that will not always be. Beyond this rule of man the Lord shall make "wars to cease unto the ends of the earth" (Ps. 46:9). The song of the angels at Jesus' birth will then have become a joyous reality. There will be "on earth peace, good will toward men." Then there shall be "abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth."

(Continued on page 22)

Timely Topics

"DEATH is a black camel, which kneels at the gates of all." Without respect for person or station, he comes alike to king and commoner, rich man and pauper, president and common citizen.

Of this fact we are poignantly reminded as we ponder the deaths of two of our former Presidents. Even as the elderly Harry S. Truman was being mourned, the younger Lyndon B. Johnson succumbed to heart disease.

As men of repute and eminence who gave largely of their time and talent to serve their country and the world, they deserve our recognition. In statesmanship, diplomacy and international relationships they contributed their best, we can be confident. And so far as this world is concerned, they achieved; history will assess their merits.

Honor:

Present

vs. Future

But what did they receive in return for all their labors? They had the measure of popularity, honor and fame—and criticism—which accompanies the office they filled. But all was shortlived and transient. Their career is done; their life story must be written in the past tense; it is action completed forever.

It is interesting to note Harry Truman's desire that his gravestone bear the highlight dates of his lifetime. Such is the human longing to be remembered and to take pride in one's earthly accomplishments. But in the fitting words of Thomas Gray,

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

And so the lesson comes to us. A man may aspire to great things, may rise from obscurity to eminence and renown, may lay up a notable store of works for the benefit of the world and the profit of humankind, and yet his end is the nonentity of the commonest citizen. "For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be

many. All that cometh is vanity" (Eccl. 2: 22; 11:8).

The Indian leader Crowfoot gave a graphic description of life's brevity in the following words: "What is life? It is a flash of a firefly in the night. It is a breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is as a little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset."

"A flash of a firefly in the night," a "breath of a buffalo," a "little shadow that runs across the grass"—are we satisfied with this? Do we not instinctively cry out for something more lasting, more satisfying?

We echo the cry of the Psalmist, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am" (39:4). But if we share the Psalmist's sincere love of life we will pray also with him, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (90:12).

Thank God, there is an escape! There is promise! There is hope! And it is made available to us through the wisdom of God, that wisdom of which we read: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee" (Prov. 4:7-9). Wisdom offers us life—glory—honor—exaltation in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Let us who aspire to life beyond the grave, to honor and grace and a crown of glory that will never fade, hearken to the words of God: "Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live" (Prov. 4:4). Content now to be counted among the insignificant of earth, the "fewest of all people," our laboring must not be to gain the riches and honor of the fleeting present but to labor for that which "endureth unto everlasting life."

The Wise Man warns: "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom" (Prov. 23:4). And the apostle Paul exhorts, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58).

We must be careful to keep our life-goals in the right perspective, our eyes fixed on the time when "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. 21:4). For if worthy to live in the soon-coming Kingdom of God, we shall be much more than world figures—we will belong to the ages of eternity!●●

WAIT--and Murmur Not

HAVEN'T you often found it harder to wait than to work?

The significance of waiting is remaining in readiness for the proper or favorable time for action, or looking for the arrival of some person or event. Periods of waiting may be long or short, according to circumstances, but they always require patience and the power and determination to continue without wavering until the expectation becomes reality.

To wait is foreign to our natural desires and longings. We worry and fret at what appears an unnecessary delay; or we become restive and weary and give up in despair. Many times unforeseen circumstances thwart the hopes and waiting is found to be in vain. Such is the tendency of things temporal; we wait today for that which vanishes tomorrow.

God in His dealings with His people often required them to wait, thus putting their faith to the extreme test. We recall the time when Moses and his minister Joshua at divine bidding went up into the Mount of God. Moses' departing message to the elders was "to tarry here for us, until we come again unto you; and behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; if any man have matters to do, let him come to them." Having provided for the welfare of his followers, Moses went up in the mount and the mount was covered with a cloud. The glory of the Lord abode on the mount and the sight of that glory was "like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel." Before forty days had passed, the impression of the glory they had seen, the miracle of their recent deliverance and the admonition of their leader faded from memory, and they began to complain and murmur. "As for this man Moses that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what has become of him." Their faith waned, they wearied of waiting and resorted to idol worship, bringing upon themselves the plague of the Lord.

Centuries later the disciples at the ascension of Jesus were comforted by the promise of the angels that He would come again. Time and again the New Testament writers confirmed the promise, that to those who look for Him He would appear

"the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

This is the Father's promise to His children, and we are told that His promises are Yea and Amen. A noted writer once said, "Every divine promise is built upon four pillars: God's justice or holiness which will not suffer Him to deceive; His grace or goodness which will not suffer Him to forget; His truth which will not suffer Him to change, and His power which makes Him able to accomplish." Could any promise be more binding, more secure, more precious?

In such promises we can place the utmost assurance. And so we wait for the coming of our King. God forbid that we should murmur or complain, or become scoffers saying, "Where is the promise of his coming, for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." We must not "grumble as some of them did, for they were destroyed for it by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as a warning to others, but they were written down to instruct us, in whose days the ages have reached their climax" (I Cor. 10:10-11, Amer. Trans.).

Waiting for His return implies an attitude of watchfulness, watching to keep our spiritual tension tight; watching that we be ready, for it can never be truly said that we are waiting unless we are ready; watching that we lose not those things we have wrought but that we receive a full reward.

Will our waiting watchfulness be so eager and so intent that our faith will not be penetrated by the darts of doubt and distrust?

Will Jesus find us watching, waiting for that hour ready to embark with Him for that eternal shore?

Not unless we wait—and murmur not. ●●

Abib Is Coming!

We are happy to announce the approach of another Bible New Year. The first new moon following the spring equinox this year occurs on April 3; therefore Abib First, the New Year will begin the evening of April 3 and continue through April 4.

Special programs and services will commemorate the dawn of the New Year on April 3 and 4 at the Megiddo Mission Church, at which time we will also commemorate the birth of Christ. Friends and interested readers are cordially invited to join us at this season. ●●

What Do You Value?

WEALTH, station, beauty, knowledge, achievement, virtue, life—what do you value most? If Jesus should come to you and say, “Come, leave your nets [or whatever you value most] and follow me,” would you, like the humble fishermen straightway forsake your nets and follow?

To secure temporal values people often expend unstintingly their time and energy; they forgo personal comfort and desire and endure untold disciplines to lay hold on what they value most.

Jesus established the severest criteria for judging values when He said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). In other words, let him really show what means most to him—the promises I offer or the transient things within his grasp.

In Luke 14 we read of a certain man who “made a great supper and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” All these pursuits were legitimate in their proper time and place, but in this parable they represented interests valued above God.

That “certain man” has bidden us to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and He is ever saying, “Come, for all things are now ready.” We may not make excuses in terms of our lands and oxen, etc., but with full consent our old man, our unrestrained nature, may begin to make excuses in terms like this: “Lord, I have inherited a rich field of selfishness and greed. I just simply must keep it flourishing. I pray thee have me excused.” Or, “Lord, I have had my own way all my life. Everybody has always pampered me, and I cannot now have Thee rule over me. I pray thee have me excused.” Or, “Lord, I desire the honor of men. I cannot live without it. I pray thee have me excused.”

God places highest value on those virtues which He most desires—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5:22-23). Even those Christians who enjoyed

the special privilege of tasting the power of God through the Holy Spirit were taught to “covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way” (I Cor. 12:31). They were admonished to keep their values set not on outward signs but on inward virtue. Said the apostle Paul, “I may speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, but if I have not love, I am become no better than echoing brass or clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, I may understand all sacred secrets and all knowledge. I may have faith enough to remove mountains, but if I have not love I am nothing. I may dole out all I have, I may surrender my body that I may be burned, but if I have not love, it is no good to me.

“Love is patient; love is kind; love knows no envy; love never boasts; it is not inflated with its own importance; it does not behave gracelessly; it does not insist on its rights; it never flies into a temper [when we lose our temper we lose all!]; it does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received; it can cover, or endure anything; it is completely trusting; it never ceases to hope; it bears everything with triumph” (I Cor. 13:1-7).

Just as we establish our values, God sets values on us. The chastening process of trial has been God’s age-long method of measuring—and developing—human worth. What He wants is a new creature, a remade man, a Christlike man. When we value other ambitions above the virtues that fashion a new creature, we barter off growth of character and lower our value in the sight of God Almighty.

If we want to be of value to God, we will have to place a high price tag of value on all the seconds, moments, hours and days that are noiselessly slipping into eternity. We will have to seize every opportunity that comes our way and constantly check our values, for “the Judge is at the door.”●●

Letters

Deceased

We were notified that our friend and brother, W. H. Torski, of Insinger, Saskatchewan, passed away December 1, 1972, after a long illness. He was a regular reader of the *Megiddo Message* for many years, and corresponded with us often. He is survived by his wife, Paraska Torski, of Theodore, Saskatchewan. Interment was in the family plot in Yorkton Saskatchewan Memorial Gardens.

How uncertain is this short life of ours; and unless our Master finds us doing His commandments, there will be no hope of future life for us.

Vernon, British Columbia, Canada

Z. S.

John Mark | From Profitless to Profitable

"Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry" II Timothy 4:11

DO you notice this man's name? Paul is in the midst of trying circumstances. He is in prison. He is surrounded by danger. Death is rattling the latch of his door. He needs men who can be trusted, men who are ready to face the sternest realities of life. Fair-weather friends are of no use now. Disheartened soldiers are worse than worthless. He must have men of steady courage, men of hardy heroism, men who stand ready to give the first full measure of devotion.

And when he looks over his wide circle of acquaintances, for whom does he write? On whom does he call? Listen! "Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." We read that sentence with amazement. Can it be that John Mark is profitable? Can it be that that worthless youth has grown to worthful maturity? Has this human liability changed into an asset? The last we heard of Mark, he was far from the type of man Paul would call upon for a demanding heroism.

About a dozen years ago when Paul and Barnabas were on the point of setting out on a second missionary journey, this man John Mark offered his services, but Paul would not accept. He did not say then, "Mark is profitable to me for the ministry." He said the opposite. "Paul thought it not good to take him." If you had asked Paul his opinion of this young man, Mark, he would have been obliged to tell you in all sincerity that he looked upon him as absolutely useless.

And worse. In a trying situation Mark would be a hindrance rather than a help. Paul loved Barnabas. Barnabas had befriended Paul when friendship counted. When Paul went to Jerusalem the first time after his conversion, everyone had suspected him—everyone except one man—Barnabas. Barnabas believed in Paul and stood by him.

Later, when Barnabas went down to Antioch and saw how God was working in that great city,

he sought some capable man as an assistant. That man was Paul. He introduced Paul to this vigorous church at Antioch. Then he and Paul had gone forth on their first missionary journey together. They had been brothers in a common enterprise. They had been the seers of a common vision, the seekers of a common goal. They had preached together and suffered together and prayed together.

This "son of consolation" was a tremendous help to Paul. But as much as Paul desired the bracing and inspiring fellowship of Barnabas, he declared that he would rather go on his missionary journey alone than to go with Barnabas and John Mark. He considered that John Mark would be a greater hindrance than Barnabas could possibly be of help.

Yet some ten or twelve years later, we find Paul speaking again of this man, and his tone is entirely changed. Instead of saying that Mark is a positive hindrance, Paul writes this thrilling sentence: "Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

How did Paul come to change his opinion of Mark? The answer: Paul had not changed, *Mark* had changed. Mark had recast his life; this bit of human waste had become wealth.

Why did Paul think so meanly of Mark in the beginning? Certainly he did not distrust him without reason. Paul had had experience with Mark. He knew him well. When Paul and Barnabas had set out on their first missionary enterprise, this young man was selected as their assistant. He had been greatly trusted; he had been signally honored by his Lord and by his Church.

This missionary campaign launched by Barnabas and Paul and Mark was the first that was entered by the Christian Church. Certainly John Mark had been greatly trusted; he had been highly honored.

What response did he make to this great confidence? He proved utterly unworthy. He went over

to the Island of Cyprus with his two friends. From there he sailed with them to the continent and landed at Perga. By this time the romance of the adventure had vanished. Mark saw that the delightful lark upon which he fancied himself entering when he left Antioch was a stern and exacting campaign. No sooner had he reached the city of Perga than he turned his back on his friends and their discomforts and their hardships and made his way to the comfortable home of his mother in Jerusalem.

Mark was a quitter. The Church honored him with a task, and he threw it down. They trusted him with a position of responsibility, and he turned his back on it. He could do very well when nothing was expected of him except to parade, but when the real fight came, he threw down his weapons and fled. He was like the contemptible drama character who said, "But for these vile guns, I would have been a soldier."

Why did Mark quit?

He did not quit because his two friends wanted him to quit. Paul and Barnabas did not drive him away. He could not say when he reached home, "I quit because of the unbrotherly treatment of my companions."

Nor did he quit because he was no longer needed. Mark knew the trying situation in which his two friends were laboring. He knew the odds against them as two lone men they faced the perils ahead. He knew he was needed. He knew he could render real service—if he would only stick. But in spite of it all, he left.

There was no justifiable excuse for his leaving. Had Mark had a good reason, Paul would not have censured him as he did. And Paul did censure him most severely. In no way could he justify his having quit. In this respect he is like ourselves when we are tempted to quit. No man can justify withdrawing from the fight and giving over the battle. No man can justify deliberate idleness. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Mark quit because he was afraid of the hardship, the self-denial, the dangers that confronted him. He had been raised in a home of wealth. Perhaps he had been petted and pampered. He was a bit soft. And when he found that being a missionary meant downright hardship and privation and hard work and danger, he soon decided that the price was too high.

Thus he became John Mark the quitter. But he is not the only quitter. Their name is legion to this day. Quitters are those unwilling to meet the tests of discipleship laid down by the Master Himself: "If any man will come after me, let him deny him-

self, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). They were not willing to bear the burden or to face the reality of self-crucifixion. Their faith in the promised crown simply was not strong enough to impel them to pay the price.

And there is a subtler type of quitting of which each of us must be wary. If not exceedingly careful, we may, little by little, let the fires of faith die down upon the altar of our soul. We may take an active part in the work of the church and yet be unknown in the Lord's book of remembrance. We may be faithful in daily devotions, in repeating prayer, and in outward conformity, and yet betray our apparent sincerity by our poor example in a moment of testing.

But what says Paul of this man who deserted his post? Listen! "Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." Mark has come back. The coward of yesterday has become the hero of today. Here is a story of thrilling hope for ourselves. If a weak man could mature into a man of towering strength in Paul's day, the same is possible in our day.

How do we account for Mark's recovery?

Probably the most effective agent in the remaking of John Mark was the apostle Paul. Mark had a great tendency to be soft and indolent and weak. He needed somebody to cut him to the quick. He needed a good sharp rebuke. He needed to be shaken into wakefulness.

And this, by God's help, Paul did for him. When Paul refused to endanger his enterprise by taking along such a weakling, when Paul told him frankly and lovingly what he thought of him, Mark began to come to himself. He began to see himself as he really was, to realize how shameful was his sin. And until he realized that, there was no hope for him. Mark needed this seeming harshness.

There are times when the greatest cruelty we can do our friends is to be too gentle and too kind to tell them the truth. Many a man has been saved by some brave Nathan who looked him squarely in the eye and told him exactly what was wrong.

It is likely that Peter also contributed to Mark's recovery. When Mark had been made to realize his sin, when his heart was broken, then it was Peter who could speak to him as no one else could. Peter himself had fallen. Peter himself had been a quitter. Peter himself had known the bitter disgrace of failure.

You can almost see the kind old preacher talking to John Mark. "Yes, my son, I know. One time I boasted to my Lord that I was ready to go with Him to prison and to death. And a few hours later a little servant girl asked me if I was a disciple of His. Of course, I had been perfectly confident of

what my answer to that question would be. I had been absolutely sure a little while before of what I would say under the circumstances. I was going to say: 'Certainly I am His disciple. It is the one thing of which I am most proud. I would gladly die for Him.'

"But I said nothing of the kind. My heart failed within me. Panic seized me as I thought of what might lie ahead, and I lied and said that I had never known Him. But you know, my boy, even for that Christ did not throw me away. He passed by and looked at me; and with that look my heart broke. My knees went to water, my throat choked with sobs, and I went out and wept bitterly. And when He was risen from the dead, this is what He said: 'Go tell my disciples and Peter.' He took me back and let me go on in His work, and that is what He will do for you."

Mark heard and believed and started again. And the man who yesterday was useless and worse became profitable. He was profitable to Peter. He

was profitable to Paul. And he has been profitable to all the men and women since who have been inspired and encouraged by the pages of his Gospel.

Mark's comeback is heartening to all of us. For we have all known failure. We have all been in some measure quitters. We have not done our best. We have not realized our largest possibilities.

The difference between the finally defeated and the finally successful is not so much that one sinned and the other did not. It is the fact that one had the courage to begin again while the other let failure overcome him. No failure need be final or fatal.

Each day is a new beginning.
Each morn is the world made new.

Thus it was with Mark. And thus it may be with each of us. However great our failure, we may yet have written of us this sentence: "He is profitable for the ministry." ●●

From A Reader—

No Time for Moods!

How much have we added to our stature in Christ—or maybe we have detracted from it. We ourselves know all too well what we are doing, or not doing.

Someday soon we shall reap what we have sown. Let us remember now is the time to make our calling and election sure. In postponing the work on some besetting sin that has been plaguing us for some time, we make that sin the more dangerous. We must attack the more vigorously to save time. Immediate action and sticking to it is of the greatest importance to the practicing Christian. We cannot afford to wait and to put off, wait and put off. Every minute step used wisely is a stride closer final independence from the evils that hinder us.

This day and age has given us so many things to make life easier. But they can prove too attractive, to the sad neglect of higher things. When the tempest breaks we want to be all prepared and not let the interesting things of this present life rob us of entering the most wonderful of all ages. So very much is at stake.

We should be all wrapped up in the business of our King. Should we let the tongue slip or let loose our temper because someone did not say just the right thing to us, let us not excuse ourselves with the thought that we were in no mood to take it. None of us has the right to have moods. They are great

robbers of peace and of valuable time, and especially now when the Day of Christ is so near. If we really decide to do it, we can banish all our moods and ill feelings. Sternness with self is the answer. To suffer for Christ's sake and deem it a joy and a privilege will gain salvation for us. ●●

A Reader in New Jersey

Words to WALK By

Good temper oils the wheels of life.

It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation; it may be lost in a moment.

Prayer is the key to the day and the lock of the night.

Until a man has found God and been found by God, he begins at no beginning and works to no end.

No virtue comes unasked, or stays unurged.

Nothing makes men rich and strong but what they carry inside of them. Wealth is of the heart, not of the hand.

Self-care is the first law of nature, but self-denial is the first law of God.

Don't see how little godlikeness you can do with; see how much you can get.

Prayerless pews make powerless lives.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God."

Original Sin

"THE Lord's message came to me [Ezekiel] again: 'Why do people use this proverb about the land of Israel: The children are punished for their fathers' sins? As I live, says the Lord God, you will not use this proverb any more in Israel, for all souls are mine to judge—fathers and sons alike—and my rule is this: It is for a man's own sins that he will die' " (Ezek. 18:1-4, **The Living Bible**). God's message was no different to Jeremiah: "Every one shall die for his own sin" (Jer. 31:30). The wise Solomon, who received his words of wisdom from God Himself, spoke similarly: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins" (Prov. 5:22).

The truth that all will stand or fall for their own righteousness or their own evil is proclaimed throughout the Bible. The idea of individual responsibility was confirmed by Moses, the Psalmist, the prophets and the apostles. God will reward everyone according to his own works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

Where then does "Original Sin" come in? Through theology, not through the Scriptures. God changes not. The words that He spoke through the prophets are as meaningful in our time as they were when written. It is still every man for his own sin and not for the sin of some distant ancestor.

There is nothing in the Genesis allegory to suggest that it was intended as an explanation of the cause of universal sinfulness, neither does it suggest that Adam originally differed from any other man in his capacity for doing good. Nor does Genesis so much as infer that Adam would have been immortal had he not sinned. All these ideas have been read into the text by those seeking an excuse for man's natural moral weakness. There is no such thing as an "original" human nature from which man has fallen. Such reasoning is purely the product of man's mind and not the mind of God.

We have learned in our two previous lessons on the subject that the doctrine can be traced to the

early Catholic Church fathers, the most notable of whom was Augustine. The doctrine as it survives today is largely the same as that set forth by Augustine and defined by the Council of Trent in the 16th century. Such a doctrine can be found in the creeds and catechisms of most major denominations, but not in the Bible.

Having completed the study of the subject as presented by theology we will study the subject of sin from the Scriptures, following our outline:

- IV. Sin According to the Scriptures
 - A. The Origin of Sin
 - B. Sin is Optional
 - C. Sin is Personal

We are confident that no man enters the world a pre-condemned sinner. Such a teaching is not to be drawn from the Holy Scriptures, but is only a doctrine of men. Reasonable men and women are repulsed by the idea of anyone being held responsible for a sin he has not committed. Would an All-wise Creator be any less reasonable?

IV. SIN ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES

"To commit sin is to break God's law: sin, in fact, is lawlessness." This is a concise Bible definition of sin as stated by the beloved apostle John. Our Common Version states plainly: "Sin is the transgression of the law." We need no better definition of sin.

There is no such thing as an "original" sin or a first sin. We know from scientific discoveries that Adam was not the first man upon the earth, though according to the Biblical record he was the first man called in the service of God, hence was the first to sin under law. The early chapters of Genesis are not an account of the literal creation of the earth. That God did create the earth, even the whole universe, we do not deny; but the how and when of the actual creation is one of the secret things not yet revealed.

A dictionary definition of sin reads, "The willful breaking of religious or moral law." Sin is not some-

thing with which man is born; it is willful or deliberate. A study of the Bible reveals that sin is something for which God holds a man guilty if he sins after knowing His law, something of which men are called upon to repent, something for which men need forgiveness. These characteristics lead to the unmistakable conclusion that sin is not something necessary, not something inherited and unavoidable, but something that can be overcome.

The doctrine of original sin according to theology having been thoroughly investigated and found wanting, we will now turn to the Scriptures to ascertain the origin of sin and its entrance into the world.

A. The Origin of Sin

Since we have determined that original sin is nothing but tradition and not a doctrine of the Scriptures, we know that what it teaches concerning the origin of sin is false, hence we must look further for the answer to the question of the source of sin.

A contemporary writer states plainly: "As an examination of the scripture passages will show, scripture teaches the origin and propagation of sin only so explicitly as to say that after the creation of mankind sin entered the world and spread quickly; the idea of inheriting sin is not a biblical concept."*

As stated in the above quotation, sin cannot be inherited. The sin of Adam had absolutely nothing to do with the sin of later generations. Neither the patriarchs, prophets or Jesus mentioned the sin of Adam or such a thing as original sin.

For the true origin of sin we go to the words of Jesus: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). **Sin comes from within, out of the heart or mind of man. These evils conceived in the mind "defile the man."** Jesus did not say that man was defiled by the sins of Adam, but only by his own sin. Sin cannot be inherited.

B. Sin Is Optional

As before stated, sin is not something hereditary and therefore unavoidable, but something that can be avoided by making the right choice. God created man with mental powers above those of the lower

animals. He endowed man with an intellect capable of understanding laws and commands, but He left man free to choose for himself. This fact is plainly taught in the Scriptures. Man is a free moral agent with the mental capacity to choose between good and evil (Josh. 24:15). God offers every inducement for man to choose the good; but unfortunately, man often chooses the evil.

It was the same from the beginning. Cain, who committed the first recorded murder, did so because he was angry, not because his parents had sinned. He was given the opportunity to choose, but he made the wrong choice. The Lord said unto Cain, "Why art thou angry? . . . If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door . . . But you can conquer it" (Gen. 4:7, KJV and **The Living Bible**) Cain did not conquer the evil thought and he killed his brother.

1. In the Old Testament. Sin is optional. God has from the beginning given His people a choice: they could obey or disobey. It was His desire that they should obey as He said through the prophet Ezekiel: "I will judge each of you, O Israel, and punish or reward each according to your own actions. Oh, turn from your sins while there is yet time" (18:30, **The Living Bible**).

Adam and Eve, the first called into God's service, were given a command: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." **The choice was to obey or disobey the divine injunction: they could eat of it or not eat of it; the reward would be accordingly death or life. For keeping God's law they could inherit eternal life; for breaking His law they would be condemned to eternal death at the Judgment. Death that is the result of breaking God's law is penal death, not natural death. Natural death was in the world long before Adam and Eve and comes to both sinner and saint alike. We will study other Scriptures showing the choice offered.**

a. **A blessing vs. a curse.** Moses, speaking God's words, said, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, . . . and a curse, if ye will not obey" (Deut. 11:26-28). **If they obeyed they could receive the blessing of eternal life; if they disobeyed, they would receive the curse, eternal death. The curse would not come upon them because Adam sinned, but because THEY sinned.** We learn from Deuteronomy 8:2 that it required a forty-year trial in the wilderness to "prove" them, to educate them in God's law and learn whether or not they would keep it.

* Herbert Haag, *Is Original Sin in Scriptures?*, p. 73.

b. **"Choose you this day."** These were the words of Joshua, successor to Moses. Joshua's words show unmistakably that the choice belonged to the individual. "But if you are unwilling to obey the Lord, then decide today whom you will obey. Will it be the gods of your ancestors... or the gods of the Amorites...?" (Josh 24:15, **The Living Bible**). They could choose to serve the true God or gods of their wicked neighbors. Again, we find no mention of **Adamic condemnation**. Their fate was dependent upon their choice.

c. **Obey and live; obey not and die.** This was the choice as stated by Elihu, one of Job's counselors who spoke "on God's behalf" (Job 36:2, 11-12). "If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge," or as rendered in the **New English Bible**, "they die, their lesson unlearned." These alternatives are comparable to those of Moses in Deuteronomy; they would be blessed if they obeyed, but if they chose not to obey, they would perish forever. Here again, death is penal death, not natural death. Their obedience or disobedience, not the sin of Adam, would decide their destiny.

d. **The big "if".** Many times and in many ways God states His promises, but almost without exception an alternative is given or implied. These statements are often prefixed with that big little word "if". Said Isaiah, "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword" (1:19-20). Said Jeremiah, "If ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment... then will I cause you to dwell in this place, ... for ever and ever" (7:5-7). They were given a choice; their end would be according to their own choice. No prior condemnation is suggested.

King David, counseling his son Solomon, pointed to God's promised reward, but it was "If..." He said, "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." Solomon died "an old and foolish king," and at the judgment he will be cast off, but it was his own choice to do evil. Choosing to do wrong was voluntary; **Adamic condemnation is not suggested.**

e. **The results of choice.** No book of Scripture shows more vividly the results of choice than the book of Proverbs. Almost the entire book is a study in contrasts—the reward for right doing compared to the reward for wrongdoing: "The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools... The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.... Treasures of

wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.... The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.... As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.... The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. 3:35; 10:16, 2, 30; 11:19, 30).

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." These, and other pointed statements from the Scriptures should aid the life-seeker in making the right choice. Sin is the result of making the wrong choice, therefore we must have our "senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14).

2. **In the New Testament.** Jesus and the apostles taught nothing different concerning sin than we have learned from the Old Testament. There is nothing in any of their writings that, when properly understood, supports the doctrine of original sin. On the contrary, their statements show that sin was optional, not inherited. We will study a few examples.

a. **The broad way vs. the narrow way.** Both by direct command and by parable Jesus taught man's responsibility in choosing the way he will go. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14). The emphasis is on the strait gate that leads to life, but it is up to the traveler to choose the road he takes: the road of sin to destruction, or the road of obedience to life. Adam's wrong choice and consequent sin was never mentioned by Jesus.

b. **Other examples by Jesus.** Throughout His teachings, Jesus often indicated a choice. He rebuked Martha for being too concerned with the temporal and praised Mary for having "chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." He indicated that a man must sometimes choose between God and his own family. The statement "No man can serve two masters," shows that a choice must be made; He exhorted the rich young ruler to make the right choice and follow Him. Throughout His ministry He counseled His hearers to make the right choice that they might inherit life in the Kingdom of God. He made no mention of **Adamic condemnation** nor did He go about preaching that His death would mean their salvation. His teachings emphasize man's responsibility, not an "original" sinful state from which men cannot escape.

c. **Paul's teaching.** According to theology, Paul

is the author of the doctrine of original sin, but nothing could be further from the truth. We cannot take one text from Paul's writings and use it as the basis of a doctrine that is contrary to his other statements and to the whole tenor of Scripture as well. We will not discuss Romans 5, the supposed basis for the doctrine, at this point of our study, but will cover it in a later lesson.

Paul clearly taught that sin is optional, that men sin because they choose to do so. Some of Paul's well-known maxims are: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. . . . But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonour. . . . Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? . . . For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. . . . Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Gal. 6:7; II Tim. 2:20; Rom. 6:16; 8:6; 11:22). **There is not a hint of original sin in these and many other verses we could quote from Paul. Men are not condemned because Adam sinned, but because they themselves sin.**

C. Sin Is Personal

From the beginning men have tried to make excuse for their sinfulness. The narrative of Adam and Eve in the garden, written in modern English, runs thus: "The Lord God asked, 'Have you eaten fruit from the tree I warned you about?'"

"'Yes,' Adam admitted, 'but it was the woman you gave me who brought me some, and I ate it.'"

"Then the Lord God asked the woman, 'How could you do such a thing?'"

"'The serpent tricked me,' she replied." (Gen. 3:11-13, **The Living Bible**)

Admittedly Adam and Eve transgressed the law; they ate the forbidden fruit; they were subject to the penalty, death. Theology, assuming that all mankind are descendants of Adam, teaches that this "first," or "original" sin condemned the whole human race.

Again we state, **THIS IS NOT THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE.** The prophet Ezekiel states without reservations: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Sin is personal; only the sinner himself shall receive the penalty for sin. We have many examples in the Scriptures of those who acknowledged their sin, admitting their guilt before God and the people. We will review a few case histories:

a. Balaam. In the case of Balaam, the prophet sent to bless Israel, God used an animal to rebuke the prophet for failing to perform the will of the Lord. Balaam's answer to the angel placed the blame squarely on himself. He said, "**I have sinned**; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me" (Num. 22:34).

b. Achan, whose deceit was the cause of the defeat of Israel's army at Ai, admitted his covetousness. When singled out among the thousands of Israel he confessed, "**Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done**" (Josh. 7:20).

c. Job, after being reminded of God's justice and judgment and His faithfulness, said "**I have sinned**" (Job 7:20).

d. Pharaoh, after eight of the ten plagues had befallen his people, begged Moses to entreat the Lord that there be no more. He said, "**I have sinned this time**; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (Ex. 9:27). But when the plague was ended, he retracted and yet another plague was sent upon the people. Again he called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, "**I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you**" (Ex. 10:16).

e. Saul, victorious in battle, but confronted by Samuel for saving the king of the Amalekites and taking of the spoil, said, "**I have sinned**; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (I Sam. 15:24). Saul also made a like confession concerning David whose life he had sought. "Then said Saul, **I have sinned: . . . behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly**" (I Sam. 26:21).

f. David, after being shown the error of his ways in coveting the wife of Uriah the Hittite and planning Uriah's death, said, "**I have sinned against the Lord**" (II Sam. 12:13). David made a similar admission when he was rebuked for numbering Israel and he said, "**I have sinned greatly in that I have done; . . . for I have done very foolishly**" (II Sam. 24:10).

In each instance the guilty one acknowledged that he had sinned. None of them blamed Adam, even to the erstwhile prophet Balaam and the wicked Pharaoh. The words of the prophet Jeremiah befit their conduct: They "walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart," which, said the same Prophet, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 7:24; 17:9).

Reprints of these studies are available upon request.

Two Ascensions, Two Comings?

AMONG the modern students of the Bible are some who expound a belief in two ascensions and two comings of Christ. For the benefit of those who may have heard or seen in print either of these beliefs, we are publishing this article.

We will quote from an article published in the *Radar News* from St. Petersburg, Florida, "Christ's Ascension? One or Two Events?" as we discuss their position from point to point.

They say, "Today we'd like to ask—what about our Lord's ascension? Was it two major events? or one event?"

"For instance, in Luke's Gospel we see our Lord ascending at Bethany nearly two miles from Jerusalem after which the disciples were seen returning back to the temple. Whereas, in the book of Acts we read of the ascension occurring on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem after which the disciples go to the upper room to await Pentecost.

"Are these two different ascensions? And do they depict our Lord's second coming which we believe will be two events—the Rapture and the Revelation?"

Two Ascensions?

Let us consider first the claim of two ascensions. The aforementioned article makes the point that Luke gives two accounts of the ascension, at two different times and from two different locations. "In Luke 24, verse 50, we read where our Lord leads the disciples to Bethany, home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. While there at Bethany, we read: 'He lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.'

"Then, following His ascension here at Bethany, we read where the disciples returned to Jerusalem 'with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.'

"Now turn to the book of Acts. Notice how Luke begins the book. He writes to Theophilus, reminding him of his former treatise which relates all that Jesus did 'until the day in which he was taken up' (referring to Bethany)."

Then Luke relates how the disciples talk with Jesus about restoring the kingdom to Israel; Jesus

reminds them that they shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them. And "when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). After watching Him ascend, the disciples returned back from the mount of Olives to Jerusalem.

While this narration of events is true, as recorded in Luke 24 and Acts 1 respectively, it doesn't seem that the two accounts actually picture two ascensions. In many instances, the different Gospel accounts of the same incident vary to some degree. And we should remember that most of these accounts were written years after the events reported actually occurred.

The *Interpreter's Bible*, commenting on Luke 24:50-53, states the following: "...there are no reasonable grounds for doubting that this is the story of the Ascension that Luke elaborates in Acts 1:6-11. One difficulty is created by the statement in Acts 1:3 that Christ's resurrection appearances continued for a period of forty days, whereas the implication of the gospel story is that the risen Lord parted once and for all from his disciples on Easter Sunday [as the resurrection day is termed by the religious world]. Probably Luke was not interested in matters of chronology when he wrote his first version of the incident. At any rate he was not conscious of any discrepancy between the two accounts."

And concerning Acts 1 we read the following: "True, the (foreword) of Acts is incomplete: we have a summary of the first logos, but not the usual sketch of the contents of the second. This suggests to some critics that the preface has been mutilated by a later editor, who at the same time has introduced a second and discordant account of the Ascension, an incident already narrated in the Gospel, and alluded to in verse 2—*until the day he was taken up*. It is surely better to recognize that Luke is not slavishly bound by literary convention, and that the opening sentence is in fact balanced by the whole succeeding narrative."

The suggestion by some critics that the account in Acts may have been edited and enlarged doesn't seem realistic. Surely Jesus' ascension on

the day of His resurrection would have left much unfinished business. Paul's listing of Jesus' appearances in I Corinthians 15 suggests a much longer period of elapsed time than could possibly have taken place during the day of His resurrection. And again there is the conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus the evening of the day of His resurrection.

The aforementioned article states also: "Of course, it may be true that our Lord ascended to heaven many times following His resurrection." This could be possible, but it is pure conjecture.

The article continues: "For instance, on the same day that He rose from the dead, He said to Mary, 'Touch me not; for I have not yet ascended to my Father, and your Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God' (John 20:17). Then the same day at evening our Lord is seen appearing unto His disciples. So it is evident that He ascended to heaven and returned to earth all in the same day." No statement could be more unfounded. Because Jesus stated to Mary that His destination was to ascend to the Father, He did not say or even infer that He would be departing *that* day. There is absolutely nothing to prove such a statement.

The suggestion that Christ may have ascended twice poses another problem: His return between the two ascensions; nothing whatever is said in Scripture about such a return. And two ascensions would mean that His advent at the end of the ages would be a *third* coming. But the coming of Christ to bring salvation is specifically described as the *second* coming: "...unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

The Rapture

The popular theory of two comings, a rapture and a revelation, is likewise untenable. The idea of a "rapture," or the transporting of the saints to heaven—whether for a thousand years while the earth is on fire, as taught by the Seventh Day Adventists; or during a period of cleansing, the great Battle of Armageddon, as other groups believe—is foreign to Bible teaching. Psalm 149 tenders to the saints the privilege of binding the kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron. The promise to the "Son" (Psalm 2) is that He will be given the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." It would be strange for all this to be accomplished from heaven. The challenge to the nations follows:

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way..." How could they kiss Him if He were in heaven?

Malachi 4:1-3 is even more specific: "...Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.... And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts." During the Battle of Armageddon, the righteous will be on the scene directing the cleaning-up operation firsthand.

Furthermore, the Bible discredits the belief that any part of the human family shall be taken to heaven for any specified time: "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.... The righteous shall never be removed; but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth" (Prov. 2:21; 10:30). We should also observe that I Thess. 4:16-17 says not one word about the raptured saints being taken to heaven. These verses read: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air..." not to meet the Lord in outer space, but in the "air," and the air or atmospheric layer surrounding the earth is only about 600 miles thick. No, I Thess. 4:17 provides no proof that Christ will take the raptured saints to heaven.

The popular theory of the rapture presents another incongruity: It places all covenant-makers, living and resurrected, in heavenly bliss even before they have been judged.

The Tribulation Period

Some religious groups, unaware of God's plan for the populace of His future Kingdom upon earth, have a vague theory of a resurrection of 144,000 sainted souls, which then are transported to heaven during a "tribulation period," to return a thousand years later to the earth when the "rest of the dead" will be resurrected and judged. They feel they obtain authority for this belief from Revelation 20. Some even believe that the resurrected dead will be placed on probation and given a second chance to qualify as saints. The evidence against this consideration is not relevant to this discussion, but is too overwhelming to allow any credence to the second-chance theory.

The true plan for the populace of God's kingdom on earth is pictured in Revelation 7. Verse 7

pictures the 144,000 righteous servants who have been chosen to be rulers in His kingdom. (These are pictured again in Rev. 14:1). Beginning at verse 9 of chapter 7, the subject class are depicted: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." Should we stop at this statement, we could assume these were people who had previously lived and had just been resurrected.

But thank God, He did not leave us in darkness as to their identity. In verse 13 one of the elders asks, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation." These have not been recently resurrected but have come through the great tribulation, the Battle of Armageddon. They are a class of individuals sifted out by the judgments of God; thus they are the survivors of the Battle of Armageddon, and their descendants. These "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple" (vs. 13-15). Notice that the 144,000 sit upon the throne of power with the Lamb; the great multitude stand before it and serve. This vast number includes all who have lived and died during the thousand-year period, and they are the "rest of the dead" who will not be resurrected, once their life terminates during the Millennium, until the thousand years be finished.

The last sentence of Rev. 20:5, "This is the first resurrection," refers to the exaltation of the 144,000 at the time of the arrival of Christ. These are they who will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. But the theory that only the righteous will be resurrected at Christ's coming, and the wicked a thousand years later, flies in the face of the oft-repeated plan that the righteous and wicked are both to stand before the Judgment seat together—not one group to be judged at Christ's return, and the other a thousand years later. Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares illustrates this fact: "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn"—both wheat and tares are harvested at the same time. Also Jesus' illustration of the Judgment, as separating sheep and goats: "and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats"—

both sheep and goats are present at the time of separation.

Revelation 20:6 gives an insight into the meaning of the words "the first resurrection." "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power." They will be the select from the vast horde of one hundred million (Dan. 7:10) who will stand before the Judgment seat of Christ. As already pointed out, an arrangement whereby only the righteous would be brought to life would cancel the need for a judgment, as the faithful would already be separated from the unfaithful dead by the very act of resurrection. Hence, the resurrection at the time of Christ's coming must include *both* faithful and unfaithful servants, if both are to be judged and rewarded together.

What then is the meaning of the "first resurrection" in which every participant is "blessed and holy"? An enlightening glimpse into the meaning of this term is provided in *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*. In a footnote on verse 5 we read: "First—probably in dignity or importance." And among the definitions of *protos*, the Greek word here translated "first," we find the following: "First in rank, influence, honor; chief; principal."* What is indicated is more than a restoration of mere physical life. It is rather a lifting up to immortal life. Verse 6 fits in well with this concept: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first [or most important] resurrection; on such the second death hath no power."

The aforementioned article in the *Radar News* makes the point that "a comprehensive, thorough study of the Word leads us to believe our Lord's coming has two aspects." The author refers to II Timothy 4:1, which reads: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." The author attempts to make a distinction between Jesus' coming and His kingdom, hence two comings. But this seems to be stretching a point for the sake of building up a theory. Christ's coming and His kingdom are parallel events. To set up His kingdom is the very reason for His return to earth. The newer versions carry the thought that the "appearing" and "kingdom" are terms used to express the same situation: "his appearing and his reign" (*Moffatt Bible*); "his advent and his kingdom" (*Concordant*); "his coming appearance and his reign" (*NEB*).

Malachi 3:2 is also adduced as proof of two comings: "But who may abide the day of his coming and who shall stand when he appeareth?..."

* *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.*

But to take such a position is certainly to stretch the point beyond its meaning. Obviously the two parts of the statement are identical, the repetition being made to emphasize the thought. The *New English Bible* translates the passage: "Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand firm when he appears?" If His first arrival were for the purpose of the Rapture, as is commonly thought, what about such a coming would require "endurance"?

Christ was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9-11) and He is coming again—to judge His servants, to conquer His opponents, and to establish a Kingdom that shall extend "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." One ascension and one coming—and that coming shall fulfill all the promises of God in Christ. ●●

A Story for Children—

When the Clock Forgot

BENNY Barton had a brand new alarm clock. His mother had given it to him for his birthday, and how important he felt the first time he set the alarm! He would wake up like a man now, and not have to be called like a little boy!

One night he rushed home from school and like a small whirlwind ran all through the house calling his mother. She was on the back porch, fixing strawberries for the shortcake for supper.

When she heard him coming, she guessed that something unusual had brought him home in such a hurry.

"Mother," he gasped. "Gerald Davis is going fishing at the Big Rocks in the morning, and I want to go with him. May I Mother?"

"Wait until Father comes home, and ask him," she answered.

Benny was on the front porch waiting when his father drove up, and he ran down to the car to ask him about the fishing trip.

Mr. Barton thought a minute and answered slowly, "I'm sorry, Son, but I can't let you go fishing with Gerald tomorrow."

"Why not?" asked Benny impatiently. "Gerald's father is going, and he will take good care of me."

"I said you couldn't go, and I can't tell you why just now. So forget it for tonight."

Benny walked back into the house looking *very*

gloomy indeed. But during supper he thought of a plan. His alarm clock! He could wind it up and set it at four o'clock. He knew he could hear the little "ting" it always made when it was wound, but the alarm lever would still be set at "silent."

He began to look cheerful again. Mother saw the mischief in his eyes and she wondered what was coming.

At bedtime he was too excited to be tired. He wound the clock and set the alarm at four, then jumped into bed to wait for the "ting" in the morning.

The sun was shining into his room the next morning when he awoke. His father was bending over his bed saying, "Come, Benny, little boys that intend to go fishing with Mother and Daddy at Grandpa's private lake must get up and hurry down to breakfast."

Benny tumbled out of bed, and scrambled into his clothes. Then suddenly he remembered the fishing trip he had planned with Gerald and wondered why he hadn't heard the "ting." He picked up the clock and looked at it carefully. It seemed all right, but when he pushed the lever over to the "alarm" side, it didn't ring. He tried the winding key on that side, and found that in his excitement the night before he had forgotten to wind the alarm spring.

A very sober little boy came down to breakfast that morning. When his mother saw him, she said anxiously, "What's the matter, Benny? Don't you feel well?"

"Yes, Mother, but I—don't think—I can go—to Grandpa's." Then he told how he had planned to get up early and sneak away to Gerald's and go fishing. "So you see, I don't deserve to go to Grandpa's," he finished. "No, Son, you *don't* deserve to go," said Daddy; "but since you have been so frank in telling us about it, I think it would be all right for you to go anyway; don't you, Mother?"

And Mother smiled and kissed Benny, which he knew meant "yes."

Benny rushed upstairs to get his cap and fishing rod. He picked up his alarm clock and looked at it lovingly saying, "I'm so glad you forgot to wake me when I told you to. You're a good clock, Big Ben, and I'm going to be a *good Little Ben*. Good-by!" ●●

It is in the fields of open encounter for the Lord that muscle is made and the soul goes from strength to strength and from glory to glory.

Bible A B C's



L is for Lot. Lot was a nephew of Abraham, the son of Haran who was Abraham's brother. Lot's father died young, and Lot went to live with his Uncle Abraham. Both Lot and his uncle were men who feared God and tried to live righteous lives. Both of them had many sheep, cattle, and servants. Because Lot and Abraham had large flocks of sheep, there was not enough pasture for all of them, and their servants began to quarrel with each other over the pastureland. Abraham and Lot knew that quarreling was not the right thing to do.

Finally Abraham decided it would be better if he and Lot separated. Then there would be plenty of pasture for all of their flocks. Abraham gave Lot his choice of the land. Lot chose to go east to the Jordan Valley and he settled in the city of Sodom. Sodom was a very wicked city. No one living there served the true and living God, and it was more difficult for Lot and his family to live good lives than it had been before they moved to Sodom. Lot also had two daughters who were growing up in

L is for
Lot

that very wicked city. Lot tried very hard to teach his daughters the good and right way. Every day Lot heard the filthy language of the people living in Sodom and he was greatly saddened by it, but he would not do any of the evil he saw these wicked people doing.

One evening two men arrived in Sodom and Lot invited them to stay in his home. This made the people of Sodom very angry and they tried to harm the strangers. When Lot went outside to try and reason with the angry mob, they nearly killed him. But the two strangers, who were really angels that God had sent, pulled Lot inside the house again where he was safe and they struck the whole mob blind. The angels told Lot and his family that the city of Sodom

would be destroyed the next day and that they must get ready at once to leave the city in the morning.

When the next day dawned, the angels took Lot, his wife and two daughters and urged them to escape for their lives. They told them not to look behind but to keep pressing forward to the little city of Zoar.

As soon as Lot and his family were a safe distance from Sodom, God sent fire to destroy it. Lot and his daughters looked straight ahead and hurried toward Zoar, but Lot's wife looked back to see what was happening and she lost her life. She did not obey the commandments of the angels.

Lot is an excellent example of how a Christian should live when he is surrounded by evil-doers. We cannot follow them and do as they do or talk as they talk. We must let our light shine before men that they may see our good works. ••

"Love your neighbor as yourself. Love cannot wrong a neighbor; therefore the whole law is summed up in love" —(Rom. 13:10, NEB).

Plus Ultra-Everything Beyond

(Continued from page 6)

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb Is Beyond

A wedding ceremony is considered one of the most joyous functions of society. In like manner just *beyond*, the marriage supper of the Lamb is one of the glorious experiences awaiting the successful Christian. And that event will be a time of rejoicing such as human beings have never before experienced. The Revelator pictures it in the most glowing terms: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-9). This blissful experience is a part of *Plus Ultra*, everything beyond. Life, glory, riches, pleasurable pursuits do not have to end at the Straits of Gibraltar, with nothing beyond. The joy and happiness and contentment that accompany a careful walk in the strait, narrow way are not an end in themselves. They are but the prelude to *everything beyond*.

A Perverted Sense of Values

In view of all that lies beyond, it seems one's inescapable reaction would be, How could I be so shortsighted as to choose the present, when such a magnificent future can be mine? There is but one answer: lack of faith. We do not believe these things are real. Our sights are set too low. In place of setting our affections on things above where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and working to prepare ourselves to be seated with Him on His throne, we have them fixed on the things that are seen, on the things of the earth.

When attracted too easily by the cheap glamor of self-gratification we are much like the domesticated magpie. While he makes a good pet he is an inveterate thief, and he has a perverted sense of values. He judges worth by exterior appearances. If he sees a colorful button, a piece of shining metal, or even bits of broken glass—if they happen to lay so that they reflect light—he steals them and places them in his collection. And of course jewelry must be kept out of his sight. Let us be wiser than the magpie. Let us take home to ourselves the lesson not to set our affections on the

things that are seen; they are always temporal.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:17-18).

We should beware lest the world be too much set in our hearts, lest our affections be set on things that are earthly, sensual, and soon to pass away. God permits us to act upon our perverted sense of values if we choose to do so. He cannot do otherwise if we are to retain our free moral agency. There is a verse in Ecclesiastes 3 that voices this thought. Let us begin reading at verses 10-11: "I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart." He has permitted the world to be set in our hearts. He leaves us to make our own choice. We can be all absorbed with the fleeting present and lose the eternal future; or we can hold the things of this life with a loose hand, using them as steppingstones to eternity without setting our affections upon them, and gain everything beyond. What a foolish blunder we will make if we allow the world to be set in our hearts to the exclusion of things heavenly.

Some of the newer translations give a different meaning to verse 11, viewing the situation from the opposite angle; but it also provides a timely lesson. The *Revised Standard Version* words it: "He hath set eternity in their hearts." God has set eternity in the hearts of men. We have the potential to seek the things above if we will but use it. With eternity set in our hearts we see the emptiness of all mundane things. It reminds us of the instability of the things connected with our earthly life. A soul with eternity set in its heart yearns after the eternal, it has constant anticipations of the future. If eternity has been set within us as a part of our being, then the eternal will seek God, the Eternal, and no one but the Eternal will satisfy it.

We cannot persuade ourselves that this present state of things is all with which we have to do, for God hath set eternity in our hearts. Hence we will use the things of this world but not be too much taken up with them. At the same time we will always remember our sacred covenant with God, aware that one day we must appear before the Judgment seat of Christ to receive for what we have done whether good or bad.

Furthermore we cannot rest content with this present world if God has set eternity in our hearts. Our aim will be, "everything beyond." Fourscore

years of mortal life, though every moment be filled with joy and ecstatic delight, will not satisfy us. With eternity set in our hearts, any life-span that has an end cannot satisfy.

What meaning, what dignity, what surpassing hope should lie in this fact that God has set eternity in our heart! How it should inspire us, what an impression it should make on our mind when we realize that a way has been opened up to us whereby we can live on forever! How it should steady and calm us, giving amplitude, strength, gentleness, longsuffering, forbearance. How it should ennoble us. Man is made up of body and mind, flesh and spirit, or aspiration, capable of being acted upon by an ideal. But there are people who live in the body only. They do not live in the spirit, hence cannot walk in the spirit. We cannot live with true nobleness unless those high energies are at work whose impetus is originated by the presence of the hope of eternity in our hearts.

Two Voices

Two voices are calling, each clamoring for attention. Flesh is crying, The present! the present! *Ne plus ultra*. Nothing beyond! nothing beyond! A bird in the hand is worth much more than two in the bush. The voice of the Spirit is saying: *Plus Ultra, Plus Ultra!* Everything beyond! Which of these voices shall we heed?

A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, everything beyond, awaits the overcomer. But, oh, there is such danger of our placing the weight on the wrong side, on the petty trials and irritations of the road, rather than on the glory ahead! Doubt is always ready to interpose with the argument: "Look around you at the things about your very feet! Not even at arm's length, but at your finger tips. The things of here and now—no waiting. Multitudes are enjoying them every day. Grant that godliness is lofty and ennobling, but such a strain. It isn't natural to be so different. It is possible there is a great Day to dawn—some day—but do you realize how many times it has seemed so near? You may grow old and wrinkled waiting!"

Brethren, let us close our minds to such faith-destroying arguments of the flesh. Our daily cry should be, O Faith, lead thou me on! I know of a certainty there is more beyond, yes, everything beyond.

Let us gaze for a moment into the past and view the ministry of faith through the ages as ministered to Abraham, the very father of the faithful. The voice of the Lord said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, and unto a land that I will show thee:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing . . . And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3).

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the summons to go out to a place which he would eventually possess, and he set out in complete ignorance of his destination. It was faith that kept him journeying like a foreigner toward the land of promise, with no more home than the tents which he shared with Isaac and Jacob, co-heirs with him of the promise. For Abraham's eyes were looking forward to that City with solid foundations of which God Himself is both Architect and Builder.

Even as Abraham, the father of the faithful, we seek a city to come. With our eye fixed on *Plus Ultra*, we journey on to that fair land unmindful of present attractions.

Behold the young Moses when faced with the same crisis that comes to each child of faith in greater or lesser measure. As heir-apparent to the throne of Egypt, fame, honor, wealth—all was his for the taking. What a momentous decision was his to make. What a struggle it must have been for him to choose to suffer affliction with the down-trodden people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season! But he did it. How he must have been gripped by the hope of everything beyond. Like a wise man, Moses wanted the best. Egypt could not give it; God could.

Looking ahead by eye of faith, he saw the day when Egypt's splendor and that of a thousand man-made kingdoms which followed it should be faded, crumbled, forgotten, and upon their ruins should stand the eternal Kingdom of God. Not only so, but he visualized himself as a ruler, an immortal ruler in that New Order of the ages. With faith controlling, the decision was simple. By the power of faith, and with his eye fixed on *Plus Ultra*, he rendered that decision, for "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Let us take a scrutinizing look at Christ on temptation's mount. The kingdoms of this world might have been His, but in one decisive gesture He placed them all behind Him—vision focused, energies bent, heart fixed on everything beyond. In that one expressive attitude of the Master we see our great ideal. He put lesser things in their proper place—behind. For everything beyond we should spurn everything here. With Him there was no doubt, no wavering. He *knew* that what God offers is far in excess of anything the world could give.

He looked to a kingdom beyond, universal, eternal, a kingdom of righteousness over which He was destined to reign supreme. The tempter came to Him and departed, astonished that he had found a

Man who could not be tempted. And why? His vision, His energies, His heart were fixed on things ahead!

Look again at our perfect Pattern in the closing hours of His day of probation. With horrible martyrdom awaiting Him, He was heard to say in the Upper Room, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid . . . These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full . . . In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Whence came the Master's perfect peace in the face of such a dire hour? Whence His good cheer? By faith He looked beyond that brief interlude of humiliation, suffering and death, to a meeting with His Father, and a crowning with immortality and kingship. It was *Plus Ultra* that enabled Him to say in what looked like the darkest hour, "Be of good cheer," and to share with the Eleven His boundless peace and joy.

Then let us take a look at the accomplishments of the great apostle Paul. From the moment of his conversion his life-story could have been written in tears, blood and torture. His own countrymen tried to murder him; the Greeks plotted against his life. He was beaten and stoned, chained and imprisoned. He was fiercely beset by hunger and thirst. Repeatedly he was left naked and homeless. He was cast out of synagogues and into the sea. But above the suffering, hardship, persecution, he was heard to exclaim, "These light afflictions!" "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." The weight of these examples should be overwhelming. With faith close by to minister in the hour of need, we too can conquer and win everything beyond.

The All-wise Father has a plan for this earth. For His faithful children, who, having covenanted to serve Him and obediently performed His will, He has in store a bounteous reward in the eternal future on this earth made glorious with righteousness and immortality. That, in a nutshell, is the doctrine of *Plus Ultra—everything* grand, beautiful, eternal, in the joyous future in the Kingdom of Christ.

As the flood came, the destruction of Jerusalem came to pass, and the four world-kings came into being, so surely will the fifth or Christ's universal Kingdom become a blissful reality. It shall roll out ere long into eternity. That fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God's own Son, shall supersede and dwarf the glory of man's mightiest domain as the sun in its meridian splendor dwarfs the glow of

the firefly! It shall be a kingdom of righteousness and peace upon this planet made luminous, with the radiance of immortality, as the stars that stud night's ebon vault. That, too, is promised in the unchangeable Word.

God is "no man to break His word, no mortal to change His mind; He promises, and does He not perform? Does He not carry out His word?" Does not such evidence justify the proclaiming of *everything beyond*?

Who ever derived any joy or happiness from doubt? Her adherents are torn and harassed by disbelief, burdened and paralyzed with uncertainty. They shall be grieved at last when it is irretrievably too late; they must perish in sight of the prize. Then faith's votaries shall "go sweeping through the gate to a royal King's estate," where rivers of pleasure issuing from the throne of God wend their way through elysian fields, on out upon the plains of sublimest joys for evermore. *Plus Ultra—everything beyond!* ●●

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"I have heard some say that Christ preached the gospel to the dead to give them a further chance for salvation. To prove this they quote I Peter 4:6. This seems illogical to me, especially if the dead are unconscious. What do you think?"

You are correct in suggesting that the dead are unconscious, for this is a basic teaching of Scripture. Death is called the "land of forgetfulness": "Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps. 88:12). "The dead know not anything" (Eccl. 9:5). "For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth" (Isa. 38:18). Statements such as these definitely preclude any possibility of Christ's having preached to the dead to give them a further chance for salvation.

First Peter 4:6 is a text which is often misunderstood and misapplied in an effort to establish doctrines which are not Biblically founded. It reads in our Common Version: "For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." This verse is somewhat clearer in more recent translations: "For this reason the Gospel was preached to the dead" (Berkeley Translation), and in a footnote

we read: "Probably, 'to those now dead.' " *The New Testament in Modern English* renders it, "Don't worry: they are the ones who will have to explain their behavior before the one who is prepared to judge all men, whether living or dead. (For that is why the dead also had the Gospel preached to them—that it might judge the lives they lived as men and give them also the opportunity to share the eternal life of God in the spirit)." *The New English Bible* reads, "Why was the Gospel preached to those who are dead? In order that, although in the body they received the sentence common to men, they might in the spirit be alive with the life of God."

What is the apostle saying? The gospel was preached to those who are now dead; but this does not say that they were dead when the gospel was preached to them. It is as Paul tells us in Gal. 3:8, that the "Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, declared the gospel to Abraham beforehand: 'In you all nations shall find blessing.'" At the time Paul was writing, Abraham was dead; but the Gospel was preached to him during his lifetime.

"That they might be judged according to men in the flesh," or as rendered in the *New English Bible*, "although in the body they received the sentence common to men"—this phrasing suggests the thought that those who heard the gospel during their lifetimes suffered physical death, i. e. the "sentence common to men" at the conclusion of mortal life. Green's *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* reads, "For to this end also the gospel was preached to the dead, so that they might be truly judged according to men in the flesh." The phrase "according to men in the flesh" can suggest the above-mentioned thought, as the original words translated "according to men" may mean literally, according to physical human life as a standard for judgment, "with the added notion of weakness" (Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon*).

The next phrase of the verse contrasts with this physical human weakness and suggests the power by which God is able to quicken them again to life: "but live according to God in the spirit." These persons who received the gospel during their lifetime, though at present sleeping in death as all other men, are, according to God, alive in the spirit. This is the very thought Jesus conveyed to the Sadducees who questioned Him concerning the resurrection. "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him" (Luke 20:37-38). Though temporarily asleep in death, they are

alive "in the spirit with the life of God," for they are written in His book of remembrance.

"I have one more question concerning Christ's being God or not. It is the particular verse found in Isaiah 48:16. Where is the change of speakers? *The Scofield Reference Bible* in comment says the Lord (I believe he means Christ) is speaking and 'me' is Him—'God' (father), 'Spirit' (Holy Spirit) and 'me' (Christ). He says also that this is one of the 'clearest of the Old Testament intimations of the trinity.' Could you explain?"

It would seem to me that the commentator in the Scofield Bible is unduly anxious to uphold the theory of a trinity of Gods when he tries to picture the speaker in the last part of verse 16 as Christ.

The text reads: "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning: from the time that it was, there am I"—then the remainder of the verse appears to be a different speaker—"and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me." This last part of the verse is credited to a pre-existent Christ as a part of the godhead. But no, Christ did not pre-exist; hence the above cannot be true.

Bible scholars seem to agree that the wording here is confusing. The latter part of verse 16 "is either misplaced or textually corrupt. Possibly something has fallen out of the text at this point."

The *American Translation* reads: "Draw near to me, listen to this! From the first I spoke not in secret, from the time that it happened I was there; And now I the Lord God have sent him, endowed with my spirit." The "him" here referred to would have been Cyrus, as referred to in verses 14-15.

The *Knox Bible* translates the latter part of verse 16, "And now that it is happening, it is the Lord God, it is the spirit of the Lord God, that sends me to you." And in a footnote we read: "It is presumably the prophet who speaks here in his own person."

Dr. Moffatt's translation leaves the last part of the verse entirely off, as does the *New English Bible*, which prints the deleted words in footnote.

The *New World Translation*, observing the incongruity, makes the last part of verse 16 a part of verse 17: "Come near to me, you people. Hear this. From the start I have spoken in no place of concealment at all. From the time of its occurring I have been there. And now the Lord Jehovah himself has sent me, even his spirit. This is what Jehovah has said," etc. (the first part of verse 17).

The foregoing agrees with the rendering in the Concordant Version. There is nothing in Isaiah 48:16 to uphold the theory of a trinity. ●●●



Meditations

On the Word

THE Elizabethan idiom of the Authorized Version does not, perhaps, make this passage too clear to the modern mind. The Douay translation renders "untempered mortar" as "dirt without straw." Either way, we get the idea of poor or insufficient binder, which is what the inspired writer intended. A masonry structure is no stronger than its mortar.

Dr. Moffatt's translation seems to clarify the wording to a great extent: "Since they [the false prophets] mislead my people by saying 'All is well,' when all is not well, since these daubers whitewash any flimsy wall run up to safeguard the people, tell such daubers that a deluge of rain is coming, huge hailstones shall come down, and a stormy blast shall break out, till down falls the flimsy wall; and then you will be asked, will you not, 'What about your whitewash?' "

Literal whitewash has its uses, but it does not rate very high in durability. It is a poor substitute for real paint, and no substitute at all for mortar. Figuratively, the word appears in the Bible (modern translations) always in a sense of reproach, as a symbol of hypocrisy. Jesus assailed the Pharisees as "whitewashed sepulchers"; St. Paul denounced the corrupt high priest as a "whitewashed wall." Today the term is widely used in the sense of covering faults or mistakes. A committee, investigating a scandal, reports nothing wrong; the party out of power immediately cries, "Whitewash!" which, as likely as not, it is.

This is exactly what the false prophets have been doing through the centuries, and still do. From the very beginning the strait and narrow way was too strait and too narrow for the masses and their leaders, and easier ways were invented. Knowing

"Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar"
—Ezekiel 13:10.

that the people prefer to hear "smooth things" even though they may be "deceits," the spiritual guides have cried, Peace—"all is well"—when there was no peace and all was not well.

The only basis of peace between human beings is peace with God, and the only basis of that peace is revealed in Psalm 119:165, "Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." "This is the love of God," said the Apostle of love, "that we keep his commandments." Peace, then, comes only by keeping the commandments—not part of them, but *all*. Ezekiel, in another memorable passage (18:31), states the formula in the plainest of terms: "Cast away from you all your transgressions... and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

But this is not easy. It is too demanding for the popular taste, so over the "old man" the leaders apply the whitewash of the impossibility of perfection and the uselessness of good works as the basis of salvation.

Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48); St. Paul commands, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

Too much work, so on goes the whitewash of the finished work of Jesus Christ, and His blood shed on Calvary to atone for the sins of the whole world. Lay it all on Jesus—"not try, but trust." And if worst comes to worst, there is always the deadly whitewash of deathbed repentance, to make it easy to postpone repentance and reformation. "Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad,... and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked

way, by promising him life" (Ezek. 13:22).

These are the lying promises which have lulled the people into a deadly slumber. Why work for a reward which can be had without working? Why exert yourself to do what another has already done for you? Why make our ways clean now, when all things can be righted at the last moment of life? Why, indeed? If this is not a lazy man's religion, what is it? Yet it is the rampart behind which all nominal Christendom shelters, the "flimsy wall" run up to safeguard the people. Equally flimsy is the modern idea, so broad that it has lost its depth, that belief is unimportant, that all roads lead to glory, if there be any glory; which adds up to no right or no wrong, and each may, within the limits of social demands, do as he pleases. Whitewash—poor material.

There are two walls in the Scriptures, just as there are two ways, two houses, two vineyards, two of everything. Always, everywhere, there are right and wrong, not part and parcel of each other, but separate and opposed entities. There has never been and never will be any fellowship between light and darkness. The Lord's wall is described in Isaiah 26:1, "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Its jewelled foundation is the words of Jesus, the prophets and apostles (Eph. 2:20); upon its gates of pearl are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of spiritual Israel, the true soldiers of God (Rev. 21:12--21).

Over against this magnificent structure stands the flimsy, whitewashed wall of human thought and behavior, of error and false doctrine. True, it is great and high, and it has stood for a long time, yet not so long as God's salvation, which is from everlasting to everlasting. But it has never yet been tested by such a storm as is coming, a "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" (Dan. 12:1). Both walls will be tested by the furious tempest of divine Judgment, and the wall founded on the mighty *Petra*, the massive rock of Truth and cemented fast by the words of Jesus, the prophets and apostles, will survive; while the vast, sprawling wall of error, built on sand and held together by whitewash, will collapse, and its ruin will be great (Matt. 7:24-27).

When the false prophets see great Babylon, their splendid capital, falling (Rev. 18:2), their flocks melting away toward the mountain of the house of the Lord (Mic. 4:1), aware at last that they have been taught "lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit" (Jer. 16:19), when in desperation they cry, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" the stern and final sentence, "Depart,

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I know you not," will be the substance of Ezekiel's taunt, "What about your whitewash?"

Let *us* not make the mistake of thinking this matter through in the third person. We are all too prone to whitewash ourselves. We have our own way and then call it by the best name available. Let him who has never done this cast the first stone. The capacity of human beings for self-deception is unlimited, and while we vigorously condemn the other man's whitewash, we ourselves may be putting our trust in something equally flimsy. Paul, who knew human nature, including his own, as few men have known it, drops all figures of speech and writes in the very plainest of words of this very dangerous human trait (I Cor. 9:27), "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." ●●

There is nothing more buoyant than a rumor. It is easy to float one and hard to sink one.

He Leads

*I cannot always trace the onward course my ship must take
But, looking backward, I behold afar its shining wake,
Illumined with God's light of love, and so I onward go
in perfect trust that He who holds the helm
the course must know.*

*I cannot always see the plan on which He builds my life;
For oft the sound of hammers, blow on blow, the noise of
strife, confuses me till I forget He knows and
oversees, and that in all details with His good plan
my life agrees.*

*I cannot always know and understand the Master's rule;
I cannot always do the task He gives in life's hard school;
But I am learning with His help to solve them, one by one,
And when I cannot understand, to say, "Thy will be done."
"Thy will be done."*