

Megiddo Message

*Let justice flow like
water, integrity like an
unfailing stream.*

—Amos 5:24 JPB

March 1995
Vol. 82, No 3

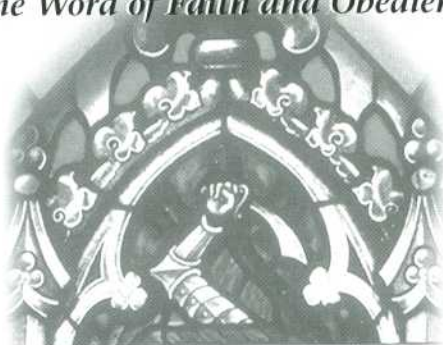
NEVERTHELESS...

The Word of Faith and Obedience

One of the distinguishing marks of genuine character is the spirit that refuses to give up. How easily in the face of an obstacle we may be gripped by fear, or by a feeling of "What's the use!" Or, on the opposite side, we may take the stalwart attitude of "Be that as it may—nevertheless—in spite of everything—I will go on."

There are three incidents in the life of Jesus which focus upon this test of character. One was when certain of the Pharisees came to warn Jesus that He was in grave danger from the old political fox Herod, Governor of Galilee. Jesus knew full well the gravity of the danger. But He knew also that the will of His Father could override or overrule the fiercest mandate of Herod. Jesus did not make light of the warning about Herod. But neither did He allow it to change His planned course of action. Faced with adverse circumstances, He made His choice. And He made it with one incisive word: "Nevertheless." In spite of Herod's threats—being mindful of the worst that Herod might conceive—"Nevertheless," said Jesus, "Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following" (Luke 13:33). His first need was to be about His Father's business; the will of Herod could have no more than second consideration.

As it was with Jesus, so it must be with anyone who follows Him. There will be challenges to our faith and to our character. It may be a frustration that shackles us, or a cruel criticism that pierces us, or a disaster that threatens. What shall be our response? Shall we say, "What's



"Nevertheless" says we are going to give up our judgment and our opinion in deference to a Higher will.

the use? I give up"? Or shall we, catching something of the spirit of Jesus and placing loyalty to principle ahead of physical security, say in the face of the challenge, "Nevertheless...be that as it may, I am here on business for my King, and no amount of threat from any self-seeking Herod can interfere with the claim of my King upon my life. God helping me, I shall go on."

All the great souls of history have had to make such replies. Adversities there were, but in the face of each they were able to say a firm "Nevertheless," and go on as God gave them the power and strength, without regard to physical security or comfort.

Consider the young Ezekiel at the time of the Babylonian conquest. If ever one had reason to give up, it was he. Seeing his nation reduced to shambles, homes destroyed, the sacred Temple in ruins, the people—his people—scattered or captured or dead—how could he ever hope to serve God after facing such a calamity?

But Ezekiel was one of those

great souls who can rise up at the critical hour and say "Nevertheless..." and go on with his life of service to God. These individuals have something greater tugging at their heart-strings, something more powerful than the threat of the enemy at hand. Yes, they know danger. Yes, they know trial. But they refuse to let their service to God be constricted by that danger. True, they cannot remove the danger; but they can go on in spite of it. They can say like Jesus, "Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following."

Some of the greatest turning points in history have been the result of faith that refused to be discouraged.

Have you ever heard the story of Abraham Lincoln and his many failures? His first effort in political life, when he ran for the legislature in Illinois, ended in defeat. Then he turned to business and failed there, and spent the next 17 years paying off the debts of a worthless partner. Elected to Congress in 1846, he was defeated for re-election. Then he tried to get an appointment to the United States Land Office and failed. After that he was defeated as a candidate for the United States Senate. In 1856 he was beaten as a candidate for the Vice Presidency, and two years later went down in defeat again, this time before Stephen Douglas. What was his response to defeat? It was that one word: "Nevertheless..." He kept lowering the nets, as it were, facing failure with faith, defeat with determination, broken hopes with patient courage.

There is another great "nevertheless" recorded in the Gospels, (Continued on page 27)

MEGIDDO MEANS ...

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

WE BELIEVE ...

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

SOON-COMING EVENTS ...

The Herald and the KING

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

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

The Bible pictures all events, all men and all nations moving together toward this one God-ordained climax, when "the kingdoms of this world" will become "the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15), a kingdom in which all who live will enjoy the blessings of peace, equity and prosperity. When the task is complete, our earth shall be numbered among the heavenly, glorified worlds and filled with immortal inhabitants, bringing to reality the promise of our Lord in His prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

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Cover: Our cover photo was taken at Bog River near Horseshore Lake in Adirondack Park, New York, by David and Marie Sutton.

Megiddo Message

March 1995
Volume 82, No. 3

A religious magazine devoted to the cause of Christ and published for the dissemination of Bible truth alone. Official organ of the Megiddo Church, L. T. Nichols, *Founder*; Newton H. Payne, *President and Editor*; Ruth E. Sisson, *Executive Editor*.

The *Megiddo Message* is available in microfilm from University Microfilms, Inc., Serials Acquisitions, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

The *Megiddo Message* (USPS 338-120) is published monthly (except July) by the Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619. Second Class postage paid at Rochester, New York. SUBSCRIPTION RATE: One year (eleven issues) \$5.00. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697.

Unsolicited manuscripts for publication are not accepted.

Bible Quotations: Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version. Other versions are identified as follows: NEB—New English Bible; NIV—New International Version; NASB—New American Standard Bible; RSV—Revised Standard Version; TLB—The Living Bible; JB—The Jerusalem Bible; Phillips—The New Testament in Modern English; Moffatt—The Bible, A New Translation; TCNT—Twentieth Century New Testament; NRSV—New Revised Standard Version; NCV—New Century Version; NKJV—New King James Version; Knox—The Holy Bible authorized by the Hierarchy of England, Wales, and of Scotland, tr. by Monsignor Knox.

A Holy Trust and Challenge

A Study of II Timothy, chapters 1 and 2

We are privileged to have in our possession two letters by the beloved apostle Paul to his son-in-the-faith Timothy. In his first Epistle, Paul wrote to Timothy about *"How thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God"* (I Tim. 3:15). Timothy's church, his little family of believers in the city of Ephesus, was an island of hope in a sea of paganism, and Paul was admonishing Timothy of how scrupulous he must be with his own heart and

character, surrounded as he was by the tarnishing atmosphere of evil. While he struggled with the bent of his own nature, as everyone must, he had also to combat the growing threat of heresy. *Plus* the tirades and polish of intellectualism. *Plus* the growing popularity of Greek philosophy. *Plus* the growing trend toward ritual and form. For this was the age just before the apostasy. Timothy's cup of duty was full indeed.

WHATEVER WILL HELP US
TOWARD GOD'S HIGH STANDARD
OF HOLINESS, WHATEVER WILL KEEP US
FROM THE EVIL SURROUNDING US,
LET US HOLD IT TIGHTLY.

But above all rang a heavenly call. Timothy had a sacred trust: to be a faithful minister of the Word of Life. And so Paul wrote to him: *"Concentrate until my arrival on your reading and on your preaching and teaching....Give your whole attention, all your energies to these things, so that your progress is plain for all to see. Keep a critical eye both upon your own life and on the teaching you give, and if you continue to follow the line I have indicated, you will not only save your own soul but the souls of many of your hearers as well"* (4:13-16 Phillips).

Still thinking about Timothy's responsibilities, Paul concluded his First Epistle with these fatherly words: *"Oh Timothy, guard the treasure which is committed to your trust"* (I Tim. 6:20). Timothy had a responsibility—to his church, to Paul his sponsor, and to himself; but above all, to God. On-the-job training we would call it today, with no time off the job; but to what better cause could Timothy give his life?

Paul's words to Timothy, written nearly 20 centuries ago, still move us today. Oh, let them move us with power, we who share the same

faith, the same hope, the same holy trust and challenge as Paul and Timothy. Whatever will help us toward that high standard of holiness, whatever will keep us from the evil surrounding us, let us hold it tightly.

Let us turn our attention to the first two chapters of Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy. In this letter is even more stimulating advice. We have no reason to doubt but that Timothy was doing well. Still he was young—and probably timid—and needed to be strengthened to keep his courage high and his efforts strenuous.

Paul opens his letter with a warm greeting of his deep brotherly affection: *"Paul, messenger by God's appointment in the promised life of Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my own dearly loved son: grace, mercy and peace be to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord. I thank the God of my forefathers, whom I serve with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day, I am longing to see you, for I can't forget how moved you were when I left you, and to have you with me again would be the greatest possible joy. I often think of that genuine faith of yours—a faith that first appeared in your grandmother Lois, then in Eunice your mother, and is now, I am convinced, in you as well"* (II Tim. 1:1-6, Phillips). If Timothy received his calling and commission from Paul, wasn't he prepared for that work by his heritage? How many have been privileged to have a mother and grandmother in the faith?

It is sometimes said that principles are *caught* more than *taught*. If as a child he was of a receptive mind, can't we picture little Timothy at his grandmother's side, learning all about the life that pleases God, and how people served God in ages past?

Stir Up That Fire

Then Paul speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit which Timothy had received of him, as well as that spirit of faith which all believers share. *"Because of this faith, I now remind you to stir up that inner fire which God gave you at your ordination through my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but a spirit of power and*

love and a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:6-7, Phillips).

What need to stir up that inner fire—Timothy's and ours! Timothy had received a formal ordination by Paul, which he would never forget. But even the fondest memories grow cold if not stirred. An impression may remain, but the fond affection will be missing if it is not renewed. Hence Paul's words: *"Stir up that fire."*

God does not want us dwelling in the past, but where we can look

love...a sound mind."

When ten of the twelve spies which Moses had sent to spy out Canaan gave their evil report, they told of "giants" in the land. In their presence the Israelites would be but grasshoppers—powerless. Why? because they refused the power of God. They were fighting alone. At the same time, Joshua and Caleb, standing on God's side, depending on His power, were fearless. *"They [the giants] be bread for us,"* they

A SOUND MIND IS A DISCIPLINED MIND,
A MIND UNDER THE DIRECTION
OF THE LAW OF GOD, RESTRAINED,
FOCUSED.

back and recall some experience or lesson that brought us to fresh faith, or new insight, or deeper love for God and holiness, let us do it! Stir up that fire!

There is no place in the Christian life for cold detachment. What happens to a fire that is untended, or an ember that is pulled aside? The fire dies. But feed the fire, pump the bellows and poke the coals, and watch it blaze.

The Christian has every reason to be stirred. With such a fearless, peerless leader as Jesus Christ, He who testified that He had *"overcome the world"*; who though He was dead, yet now He was *"alive forevermore,"* who went the whole way in the battle against sin, even to being able to say triumphantly, *"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"* (John 17:4)—should not the very thought of Him stir us? With Him pointing the way, we need never yield to the temptations of the flesh.

Nor need we fear, for *"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"* (II Tim. 1:7). Here are three counter-agents of fear: "power...

said—their enemies would actually make them stronger! With God on their side, they had power unlimited. God made all the difference.

And this is what Paul wrote to Timothy: that *"God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power...."*

Power is of God, but we must take the first step. When we have done our best, then God gives us the spirit of power, an all-embracing power, power to overreach ourselves, to do that which of ourselves we could not do. *"The gospel...is the power of God unto salvation,"* giving strength to everyone that believeth (Rom. 1:16). What greater power could we seek?

Along with the spirit of power comes a spirit of love—love that is a fervid devotion to a cause held dear; love which stimulates courage, conquers evil, grips the emotions, and holds all one's powers of body and mind in subjection to the one it loves. And when that One is God most high, think of the transformation of heart and life that will follow! All-compelling, all-absorbing, all-possessing, all-enabling is such love, a love known only in the higher realm of the spir-

it, where the human will is lost in the glory of submission.

And we must not forget the third aspect of God's gifts—a sound mind. The soundness of our mind is determined in a large part by the strength of life-purpose that we maintain, the demands we place on our mind, and our enthusiasm for life. Put all this in a Christian context, and you have the best possible situation to maintain a sound mind all through life.

What is a sound mind? Other

And so he wrote to Timothy (II Tim. 1:8), *"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."*

What can this testimony say to us? Yes our cause is, at the moment, unpopular. Yes we are few. Yes we are weak. Yes we are at present unknown among the nations. But what does any of that matter...if God be for us? Remember, one with

wilderness and in the sea, perils among false brethren, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness. Today our afflictions are of a different nature, and mostly of our own making. But no active member of God's true Church can escape affliction. At the very least, our old nature must be afflicted, member by member, until it dies. No cross, no crown.

We should count it our highest privilege to be among the partakers of the afflictions of the Gospel *"according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began"* (II Tim. 1:8-9). God will not save any according to their own works, the works of the flesh. We may think ourselves good enough, but God does not see as we see. He judges according to His own standard, according to His own purposes and grace, and His purpose is that we be *"rich in good works,"*—good by the Divine standard—*"which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (I Tim. 6:18; Eph. 2:10).

God's purpose, says Paul, *"is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (II Tim. 1:10). What is the route to "life and immortality"? *"Through the gospel."* As Jesus said, *"[My] words... are spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63). Only through the Gospel can we know how to prepare for real life.

What would we not give to be free from mortality and be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven! No more headaches, no colds, no injuries—just think of it!—being made equal to the angels. What a reward!

A Gospel of Conviction

Paul continues: *"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles"* (II Tim. 1:11). William Barclay translates Paul's first appointment as "herald" and comments that the Greek word Paul used, *kerux*, has three lines of meaning. "The *kerux* was the herald who brought the announcement

"STIR UP THAT INNER FIRE WHICH GOD GAVE YOU." THERE IS NO PLACE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR COLD DETACHMENT.

translations of the passage read *"of sobriety," "sound judgment," "self-control," "self-discipline," "self-restraint," "wise discretion."* A sound mind is a disciplined mind, a mind under the direction of the law of God, restrained, focused.

Be Not Ashamed...

Paul's next word—"therefore"—means that the previous statement has results. With such God-given gifts, Paul says, you have no reason to feel any shame for your cause—did Paul know Timothy's weakness? If Timothy had a problem in this respect, we should hardly be surprised—in an age when the Christians were a little sect *"every where... spoken against"* (Acts 28:22). And when word spread that their most dynamic leader was in prison as a malefactor...imagine what the gossips could make out of that! For snobbish heathens, the Christian leader's imprisonment might easily have been the final breaking point. Why should they support one whom God had clearly abandoned?

But Paul would have none of this. He was not the *emperor's* prisoner but the *Lord's* prisoner, brought into custody for doing his *Lord's* work. He felt no shame in his confinement.

God always has been and always will be a majority. Nor have we reason to be ashamed of any change the Gospel makes in us. Rather, let us glory in it, proud to be among its select representatives! Any reluctance to be different, any hesitation to identify openly with the cause to which we belong only reveals our lack of faith and courage.

Far from feeling shame for the Gospel, Paul challenges Timothy to share in what he calls *"the afflictions of the gospel."* As for Paul's sufferings, Timothy must get ready to join him, if need be: *"Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God"* (II Tim. 1:8). Paul was saying, in effect, "suffering is part of life, Timothy, and you must take your share like I do, in the strength of God." Paul and Timothy were living during the "heat" of the day of salvation, and Timothy undoubtedly would have to suffer for the Christian cause. But Paul is urging him on: even though he might be suffering and in prison, he would still be within the sphere of God's power, which would be adequate to his need.

For Paul, affliction took the form of stripes, imprisonments, shipwreck, perils in the city and in the

from the king. The *kerux* was the emissary when two armies were opposed to each other, and who brought the terms or the request for truce and peace. The *kerux* was the auctioneer or merchantman who invited people to come and buy." How faithfully Paul filled the position of *kerux* for God.

Paul continues (v. 12): "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," that future Day of reckoning. Paul did not say "I imagine" or "I wonder if" or even "I hope" but "I know." He had faith built on solid evidence. He had seen Jesus, and he knew whereof he spoke. Paul believed God.

"I know in whom my trust is fixed," he said. In the days of Paul, it was the custom for a man who possessed something of value to entrust it to the keeping of some eminent person. This is what Paul had done: He had deposited his life record with God, in full confidence that He would be well rewarded. To Paul it was incredible and inconceivable that God should fail him or let him down.

Then the great Apostle adds, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 1:13).

Oh, let us hold fast. We need not be swayed by every contrary wind, we need not fear every opposer. We have no reason to doubt the foundation of our hope. Like Paul we can say, "I know...."

His stirring message continues in verse 15: "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and

the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 2:1). How can we be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus? As in the physical life we gain strength by eating, so in the spiritual life we must eat to grow. As Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15:16). The more we feed on these

KEEPING THE GOSPEL PURE IS OUR SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY.

Hermogenes." Only a short while before Paul had had many in Asia; now they all turned from him. He mentions two such unfaithful ones. Then his mind immediately turns to the brighter side. "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain" (v. 16). We would like to meet Onesiphorus, the one who was not ashamed of Paul's chains.

Be Strong!

The fatherly apostle continues: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in

words of life, the stronger we shall grow.

In the following verses (II Tim. 2:3-7), Paul uses three illustrations to convey his thoughts: soldier, athlete and farmer. Like a soldier, Timothy should expect hardship and keep the right priorities. Like an athlete, he should recognize the need for training and of maintaining a high standard. Like the farmer, he could expect a Divine blessing on his labors.

Verse 3: "Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." "Soldier" and Timothy are unexpected

O God who art the Creator of all beauty and loveliness, and who causest the heart of man to sing for joy, we are deeply grateful for all the beauty and loveliness that are a part of our lives. Keep us attuned to them, and make us aware of them constantly. For the beauty of form and sound, of voice and instrument, of music and nature, we thank Thee. For the gift of expression and the power to create which Thou hast planted within us we express our debt.

We thank Thee for Thy word which enlightens and inspires us, which shows us what we are, and corrects us when we go astray.

Help us to use these gifts for the edification and inspiration of Thy children and for Thy glory. Cause us to understand that in praise and worship we put them to their highest and noblest use.

Grant, Father, that we may keep the vision of the future glory and beauty that can be ours ever shining vividly before our mind's eye, and as a constant stimu-

lant to right living. Help us to keep climbing higher. May we never be satisfied with ourselves as we are. May we be so dissatisfied with the ugliness of our old nature that we will make an untiring effort to reform our ways, becoming the new creature such as Thou wilt desire to own and bless and save eternally.

We pray for the honesty to see ourselves as we really are in Thy sight, and for the strength to make a full surrender of all our ways and thoughts before it is too late. May we never plan any circumstances such as will entertain the fleshly cravings and provide no stimulus toward holiness.

Wilt Thou be with Thy people wherever they may be, and strengthen us all to perform Thy work more perfectly, to use the power of Thy word to transform us from the worthless creature we naturally are into the likeness of Thy Son, that we may share with Him and all the faithful the delights of the earth made new. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

ed companions. Timothy is not the military type. But there is a lesson Timothy can take from the military for his spiritual warfare. Like the soldier he will need courage, the high moral kind. And like the soldier, he can expect hardship.

But being a soldier also had special compensations. Even when a soldier is alone as a sentry, or on a secret reconnaissance, he belongs to a company larger than himself. Just

ing the Gospel message to please the people (II Cor. 11:9; I Thess. 2:9; 3:8). At the same time, he wanted to warn Timothy against being so absorbed in temporal affairs that he neglected the Gospel. Don't get distracted! urged the Apostle.

Entangled is a highly expressive word for involvement in irrelevant matters. It carries the idea of interweaving or entwining. Even while earning his own living he could

must not neglect his own spiritual life, getting right with God in his own inner heart. He must manifest the very highest personal holiness.

Also like the athlete, the Christian knows that there is a prize—a very great prize—and that *it can be his*. So Paul says, in effect, "*Work hard, Timothy—as hard as you can—and we can share the prize together.*" What more did Timothy need to keep him in running mode, on tiptoe!

"Remember the prize." This was the point of the farmer: The thought of "results" was meant to inspire toil and labor. "*It is the hard working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.*"

What are the lessons for us?

- ◆ Concentration—no distractions!
- ◆ Exertion—no halfheartedness!
- ◆ Persistence—for the reward!

Glory for the Elect

Paul calls us to remember Jesus, who experienced a real death and a real resurrection. Yes, suffering is at the heart of the Gospel. There would be testing, there would be trouble, but hear the great Apostle's triumphant salute: "*Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake.*" "*Therefore I endure everything*"—how could the most timid part of Timothy shrink from that! Why such rugged endurance? "*That they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*" (II Tim. 2:10).

Think of that—*eternal* glory! Does it not send a thrill through our very being? How men and women will work and toil for a moment of earthly glory, but to get that *eternal* glory will be past all comparison. Paul knew he would get it. And he wanted Timothy to have it, too. There will be an abundance for all — if we just prove faithful.

What is the route to that glory? "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself*" (vs. 11–13).

"*If we be dead with him....*" When do we die with Christ? Paul has already discussed this in an earlier

TIMOTHY MUST NOT NEGLECT HIS OWN SPIRITUAL LIFE, GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD IN HIS OWN INNER HEART. HE MUST MANIFEST THE VERY HIGHEST PERSONAL HOLINESS.

so Timothy was part of a very large organization—and a very prestigious one. He had been called to be "*a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" What did Paul mean?

No Distractions!

Verse 4: "*No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him*" (NRSV). The statement holds whether a soldier is engaged in hard campaign or just on service doing quiet duty. His time is not his own. Even when he is off duty, or supposed to be sleeping, he is always on call. As a plain statement of fact, the soldier has but one duty, to obey orders 24 hours a day. His dominant interest and only purpose must be the success of the army to which he belongs.

What was Paul saying? *No distractions!* Though we are not told, it is likely that Timothy engaged in some type of trade or occupation in addition to his ministry, if he followed Paul's example. Paul made a definite point to be self-supporting and "*chargeable to no man,*" recognizing the insidious danger of compromis-

have but one purpose: of preaching, teaching, and living the Gospel. Whatever he did, he was preaching. His whole time belonged to his commanding officer. So, says Paul, no entanglements!—in order to please the Chief.

Learn from the Athlete

Then comes another illustration, and another lesson (V. 5): "*An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules*" (NRSV). Everyone knew the severity of the rules binding an athlete. One infraction, however slight, and the athlete forfeited all laurels for that event. Also parallel was the athlete's training. The professional had to undergo severe training for a year or more before a major event.

Timothy, too, had to undergo training—in godliness. In his work for Christ he must have a true aim; he must run to win. A halfhearted effort would not suffice. To him had been given the task of guarding the deposit of Christian truth, and preaching and teaching it without fear or favor, even if it be at great personal cost. At the same time he

Epistle (Rom. 6:1-11). It is the same death our Lord spoke of, taking up one's cross daily (Luke 9:23). The crucifixion of self has to take place daily. "You must die to sin," said Paul again (Rom. 6:11). If you do not, you will find yourself alive to the wrong things.

"If we deny Him...." If we are ashamed to own and defend His cause, His Word, His truth, His authority, how can He use us?

"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Paul was looking ahead, to the time when "we shall reign with him"—when? When He would return (see Rev. 3:21; Luke 1:31-33; Rev. 22:5).

"If we deny him, he also will deny us." Shall we believe it? Yes! God is looking for those who will be true, who will not deny Him under any circumstances, through any fire, in any test. If we refuse God's proffered goodness when it is available, He will refuse us in our time of need (Prov. 1:25-28). The principle is absolute. The responsibility is upon us.

"If we are faithless, yet he remains faithful—he cannot deny himself" (v. 13, NRSV). It seems in harmony with the spirit of the passage to take "faithless" as meaning "lacking in loyalty," "wavering in faith," "weak in faith" (Rom. 4:20) rather than "without faith" or even "unbelieving." The attitude is that of acknowledging their need for help: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

Avoid Godless Chatter

Then Paul takes up a new topic: useless—ruinous—argument. Not only avoid it, but have the courage to silence it when necessary. This is a command, which he means to be taken seriously. "Charge them... before the Lord," in His presence and with His authority, lest his own sterling character as a faithful minister of the Word be compromised by godless chatter. "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers" (II Tim. 2:14).

On the one hand we must "contend for the faith which was once

delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). On the other hand, strife about mere words *does no good, and can actually be harmful*. Paul was not advocating peace at any price. He was concerned about words, because words can nourish or they can infect. In the heat of controversy, men may lose sight of the great principles for which they have been contending. Such disputing seeks not the glory of truth but the glory of the speaker. Instead of quietly reasoning with his opponent, such

where it will lead. "Shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness" (II Tim. 2:16). "They will increase" is literally "They will advance," metaphorically "They are cutting their way forward." The picture is that of pioneers making their way through a virgin forest, cutting down trees and branches and making a trail. The "chatterers" are making progress and are advancing more and more—into *ungodliness*! It is possible to advance down the

ONE WITH GOD ALWAYS HAS BEEN AND
ALWAYS WILL BE A MAJORITY.

a one blusters and blasts, and does no good.

What is the right approach to the Gospel? "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15, RSV). "Do your best" combines the ideas of speed, eagerness, seriousness, and deep desire. We cannot drift into a life of conscientious service; we must be enthusiastic about it. We must give it the weighty attention it deserves.

I like that personal challenge: "Do your best, Timothy..." How could he ever forget it? Timothy would be tested, just as Paul had been—just as each of us must be tested.

To pass the test and be "approved," Timothy must devote himself to "rightly handling the word of truth." The picture may be that of a mason squaring his bricks; or a plowman cutting a straight furrow; or a man building a road straight to its destination. The thought suggests the ongoing nature of the work. The Christian character is erected not with great marble slabs but with small bricks which must be placed one at a time.

Then Paul gives one more warning about "godless chatter" and

wrong road, as many a motorist will agree.

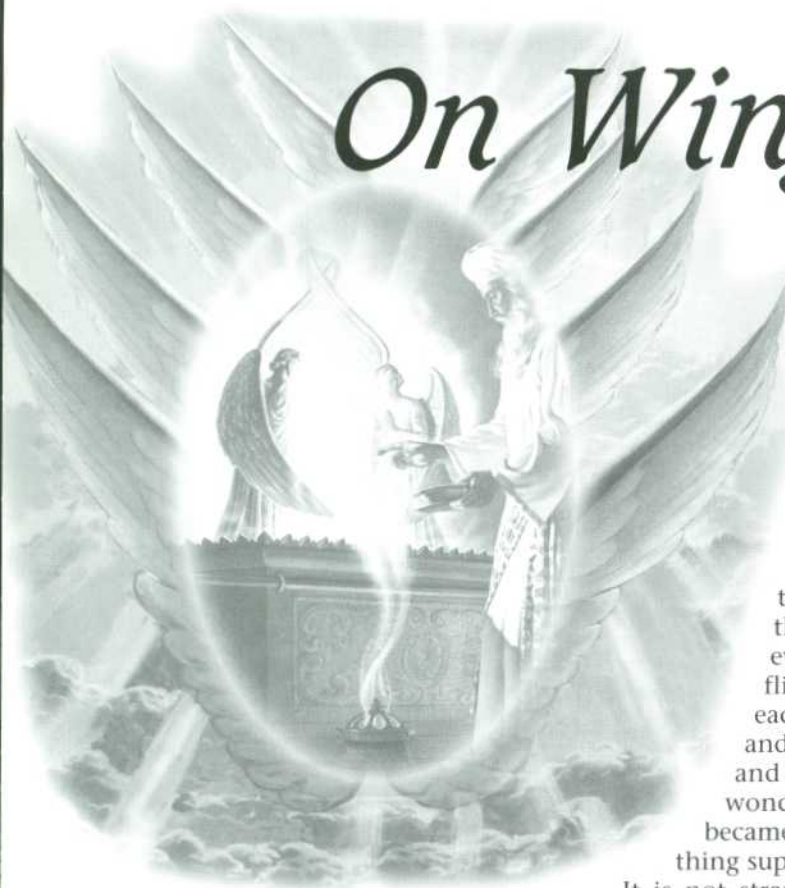
For the Christian, all words, comments, speculations, judgments, criticisms, objections, complements, concerns—in short, all words of every kind—must always be under the control of God's law.

"Godless chatter," as Paul called it, was not only the buzzing conversation of social butterflies. He was thinking also of false doctrine, as he continues in the next verse: "Their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus." Here is another illustration of "progress"—"eat its way" suggests advancement, but it is not constructive. It is deadly, like "gangrene." Keeping the Gospel pure is a solemn responsibility.

Perhaps Hymenaeus was one of the casualties of "disputing about words, which...only ruin the hearers" (v. 14). Started in the wrong way, he may have advanced "into more ungodliness," until at last he was without hope or God, and leading others into the same pit. Paul says of these traitors that "they overthrow the faith of some"—more spiritual gangrene. To Timothy it was a real problem, with which he would have to deal—all the more reason to keep himself spiritually in top

(Continued on page 19)

On Wings Divine



The Bible uses wings as a symbol of the protection, care, strength, and power God provides.

The ability to fly has intrigued and challenged the human mind since the beginning of time. The gracefully soaring hawk, the eagle, the vulture, the swift darting of the smaller birds; even the eerie, zigzag flight of the bat—each is able to ascend and descend with ease and grace. To man's wondering mind, wings became a symbol of something supernatural.

It is not strange, then, that the early civilizations should equip their gods, demons, and other supernatural beings with wings. With this ability, they would not be earthbound, but free to travel through the unknown reaches of space. This naive idea persisted even into the medieval Christian era, where angels were invariably—and erroneously—pictured as having wings.

The term "angel" is used some 300 times in Scripture, but never once is the angel described as having literal wings. Often when the angels were seen, they were thought to be ordinary men—hardly possible if they had had the gigantic wings the artists have given them.

Wings...Symbol of Praise

While we have no Bible evidence that angels have wings, the concept in its purest form (as a symbol of power) found exalted place in the language of the inspired writers of the Bible.

In the first of Genesis, cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). A pair of 15-foot gold

covered cherubim dominated the inner sanctuary of Solomon's temple, their immense wings spanning 30 feet wall-to-wall.

Carved cherubim hovered over the mercy seat which covered the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:20). When Isaiah had a vision of the throne room of heaven (Isaiah 6), he saw six-winged creatures standing above God's throne, which flew through the temple, their calls thundering "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.*" When Isaiah, overwhelmed by his own sinfulness cried out "*I am unclean!*" a seraph pressed a hot coal to his lips to purify him.

When Ezekiel had a vision of the throne of God (Ezekiel 1:1, 10), he described four cherubim below it. What did they look like? Each faced "*forward*" no matter which direction they flew. And each had wings concealing human-like hands and thundered as they beat the air. Their straight legs ended in calves' hooves. They flashed fire so bright that it reminded Ezekiel of lightning. And what about their wings? We are not left merely to assume that their wings are symbolic of Divine power, but in the 24th verse (chapter 1) we have evidence of this fact in the statement that the sound of their wings was "*as the voice of the Almighty.*" Of the living creatures it is said that the sound of their wings was "*as the noise of an host.*"

Wings...Symbol of Protection

Another concept of wings, lying perhaps even nearer to the heart and life of our race, is that of protection. As the eagle incubates her eggs and later covers her young with her wings, shielding them from sun and rain, wind and enemies, so the Eternal's power guards and protects His children from harm. This promise of Providential care is beautifully por-

trayed in Psalm 91: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler" (vs. 1-4).

The recorded history of God's people testifies abundantly to the watchcare of Jehovah. His wings—His support, His power, His compassion—have never failed, and they never will. When the plan of the Eternal is not involved, "time and chance happeneth to them all." But when it is involved, all becomes part of a definite pattern, perhaps not visible at first, but nonetheless real.

It is natural to speculate what might have been if things had not gone just as they did. If Abraham had failed when tested; if the ark of bulrushes in the Nile had been found by a hungry crocodile instead of a compassionate princess; if the grand strategy of Cyrus at Babylon had been countered by a grander strategy of Belshazzar; if Pilate had stood firm against the mob; if St. Paul had perished in the streets of Jerusalem, or in the sea off the Maltese Coast; if the Apostasy had not come, or if it had not ended when it did; if we had been born in the heart of India, or Malaysia, instead of in America—so many "ifs," and yet there are none at all. Under the wings of the Almighty there is no "if" except in the dictum, "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isa. 1:19). All else is under His absolute control and direction.

When a man's ways please the Lord, all the powers of earth cannot prevail against him until his work is complete. Persecution and trials may come, but the promise stands—the assurance of this life in which to complete the work (1 Tim. 4:8). Even in a physical, material sense it has been demonstrated again and again that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7).

That proffered protection is beautifully expressed by Jesus in Matt. 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" How gladly the Master would have protected them from the terrible retribution that was soon to burst in fury upon them. But—"Ye would not." Hence the consequences: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." The prophecy was fearfully fulfilled. All those perished who refused the protection of the mighty wings of the Everlasting God.

This very hour the wings of the Eternal are protecting us from war, from famine, from pestilence and danger. Do we give thanks daily and hourly for these great blessings, the "hundredfold in this life"?

The Ultimate

Yet all this is not enough. The years go by, silently, relentlessly, and before we are scarcely aware of it our hair is white, our eyes dim, our steps faltering. We long for security, for something better and lasting. And—God be praised—under the wings of the Almighty we have it. There we may rest secure in hope of

a better life, a life where strength will increase instead of diminish, a life in which we will go from glory to glory, ever learning, ever expanding the horizons of our knowledge, ever sharing more and more of the glory of God, and becoming acquainted with myriads in His eternal family. Are we imagining too much? Not when it is written that "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" (1 Cor. 2:9).

Nothing less will satisfy us than to be made physically partakers of the Divine nature, put on immortality, and be given the indwelling power to move with the freedom of the wind (John 3:8); to be made equal to the angels, never to be sick, never to suffer, never to die. All of this comes with God's wings of power—not literal wings, but wings as symbols of Almighty might.

So what do we understand when we read that "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint"? (Isa. 40:31). Such "wings" are symbols of endless youth, endless vigor, endless strength, endless life.

MM

Called To Be

Angels

God has called us to become angels, to be made "equal unto the angels." At the present, angels are aiding those who will be heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). They carry out God's commissions, deliver His messages, and are able to travel through the far reaches of space.

*Wonderful angels! who would not be like them!
Sharing the joys that are theirs;
Theirs is a glory and beauty resplendent,
With which no mortal's compares.
Years in their flight they have long ceased to number
Going from strength unto strength;
Having no fear that in death they shall slumber,
Theirs is eternity's length.*

Contending for the Sabbath

"Your answer about Seventh Day Adventists and the Sabbath (*Megiddo Message*, November, 1994, page 20) seems to wander around quite a bit. So what do you do with the whole nation of Jews?

"Do you mean to tell me they all slept through some Sabbaths? Or maybe a whole nation forgot what day it was? Sometimes one person may get the days of the week mixed up, but the whole nation? No. From the time in Genesis 2:3 when God blessed the day and hallowed it, the week has never been lost. It has come down to us from creation, and the Sabbath with it.

"Believe me, you are missing a blessing by not observing it. As for commands, it is very plain in the Fourth Commandment. Do me a favor, and before you pray read Prov. 28:9."

Our friend is confident that a succession of seven-day weeks can be traced and proven from the time of the creation. It is our firm position that evidence for that position is totally lacking.

First of all, our friend must be assuming that the literal creation took place approximately 6000 years ago—an assumption which cannot be proved either by the Bible or by scientific evidence. On the contrary, just about everything regarding the history of the earth gives testimony that it is thousands of millions of years old.

But if we assume, for the sake of argument, that the earth is only 6000 years old, then our friend's statement still has a problem, because she is stating that the Jews, being Sabbath keepers, kept accurate track of the succession of Sabbaths from the beginning. If so, there were something like 300 Sabbaths before the Jews came into existence. When God called Abraham, more than 2,000 years had already passed since the time of Adam, and a few more hundred years were to pass before the Israelite nation was instructed to keep and observe the Sabbath day (Exodus 16). Abraham being the progenitor of the Jewish race, did not live until the nineteenth century BC. And not until several hundred years after Abraham were the Jews recognized as a people, much less a nation.

As far as any blessing we may be missing by not observing it, we feel no compulsion to observe a law which was given to the nation of Israel expressly and terminated with Christ. Furthermore, every law that God gives is, in reality, a law to govern the heart, not merely

the outward form. Paul warned that no one should judge another "in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:16-17). Many aspects of the Israelite law were temporary institutions, given to train and discipline the people and to bring them to Christ, at the same time revealing important parts of God's great plan of salvation. Hebrews 4 speaks clearly of the significance of the Sabbath, that it was a type of a "rest" yet future: "for if [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest [Sabbath] to the people of God....Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:8-11). The Sabbath observance, the setting aside of one day in seven, was a type of God's plan to give His people a thousand-year rest, during which all evil would be brought under control and the earth would come under the direct supervision of God's chosen rulers (Rev. 20:4; Luke 1:31-33; Zech. 14:9; Rev. 5:9-10). This is a rest far greater than was promised to those observing the literal Sabbath ordinance of Moses' law.

We regret that our friend cannot appreciate these facts, but we must adhere to what the Lord has written.

◆ "Does the Megiddo Church practice feet washing?"

If you are thinking in terms of literally washing one another's feet, the answer is no. When Jesus instituted the practice at the Last Supper, it is obvious from the reading of the text that He had something deeper in mind than literal washing. Note His words in John 13:7: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." The Apostles could not help but know what He was doing right then, in washing their feet. But Jesus was teaching a deeper, spiritual lesson. He was trying to impress upon them the necessity of cleansing their hearts from all evils of their carnal nature. They might not grasp the significance of what He was doing right then, but after they received the Holy Spirit power they would understand more. Verse 10 reads, "Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean."

Again, Jesus was not talking about literal uncleanness, as the passage clearly indicates. The one who would betray Him was "unclean"—not a literal condition but a heart condition.

Spiritual feet washing consists of helping one another in the process of overcoming the evils of our lower nature, and this we do practice. If we see a brother or sister in transgression of God's law, it is our duty to warn that brother or sister of their danger. Members of the body of Christ are under obligation to one another to aid one another in cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Cor. 7:1).

Human nature has repeatedly substituted form for force in religious life. It is so much easier to wash the feet than to wash away the evils of the heart. It is so much easier to worship the Lord on Saturday or Sunday than to keep every day holy to Him. It is so much easier to be baptized with literal water than to wash away all the evils of the heart and form a character pleasing to God. Many religious groups focus upon some outward ritual, which can be observed without too much sacrifice, while leaving the inner life untouched.

Literal feet washing was a social custom in Jesus' day, and Jesus used it as an object lesson. We are reminded of the words of the Psalmist (51:17), *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."* This is the sacrifice and cleansing God requires of us.

◆ About Christmas

"I would like to ask a question about Christmas. If the world would keep Christ and religion out of it and it was a holiday of man and you bought your wife a gift at that time of year, would it be wrong? I know that Christmas is pagan the way it is now, it is just for greed, a way for the merchants to get more money."

Probably almost everyone today would agree that the holiday season is, as you say, motivated by greed and money-making. There is little if

any thought of the meaning that is supposed to be associated with the season.

However, aside from the merchandising, you raise an interesting proposition: If Christ and religion were kept out of Christmas and it were just a regular holiday, would it be proper for a Christian to observe the day in some small way?

We have no specific guidelines on many matters, but we do have one general principle given by the apostle Paul: *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"* (I Cor. 10:31). The question to ask ourselves is, Can we celebrate December 25th to the glory of God? Will God be honored by the observance? Is there anything about excessive spending, and partying, and merriment, that can possibly be to His glory? Do we have any record where the Apostles or Jesus or any of the Prophets, or anyone else in Biblical times, joined with the people of their time in merriment, celebration, or festivity? We seek in vain. Instead, they both preached and practiced a doctrine of separation, of wholehearted devotion to God, and of keeping one's self *"unspotted from the world"* (James 1:26). The Lord told the ancient nation of Israel, *"I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people....And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine"* (Lev. 20:24,26). They were also commanded very clearly not to have anything to do with the gods of the pagan nations around them (Deut. 12:30; 13:6-7).

If Christ and religion were kept in Christmas, it would be paganism *plus* Christ—not a desirable combination.

And if Christ and religion were to be entirely removed from Christmas, what would be left but paganism?

And if Christ and religion and paganism were all removed from the day, what would remain to make it a holiday?

No, we can see nothing that can justify the Christian's taking any part in recognizing or celebrating

Christmas. As far as giving your wife a gift is concerned, there are more than 300 other days in the year which have no pagan association. Why not choose one—or more—of them for the purpose? MM



A youth was passing through a prison garment factory. "Sewing?" he asked one of the prisoners who was at work. "No, sir," replied the prisoner gloomily. "Reaping."

Though you cannot always do what you like, try liking what you must do.

The Lord gets His best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction.

Grow Your Tree of Good Habits



THE
HABIT
of work
of honesty
of attention
of politeness
of happiness
of usefulness
of cleanliness
of appreciation
of promptness
of thoroughness
of thoughtfulness
of accomplishment
of correct speaking
of neatness of work
of enjoyment of work
of telling the exact truth



Lift Your Heads, Ye Gates!

When the fog has lifted,
And the vail is rent in twain,
And the darkness o'er the earth
Has been dispelled by light;
When the clouds are rifted,
With all secret things made plain,
We shall see the King of Glory
In His power and might.

Lift up your heads, ye gates,
And let the King of Glory in!
Stand ye so complacent, while
He waits the welcome note?
Raise the Standard higher—
Move to meet the hosts of sin,
And let your shouts of victory
To every nation float.

Lift up your heads, ye gates,
And let the King of Glory in;
He will lead in battle
Till the foe is put to flight.
Step in line behind Him,
And the summit you will win,
Where you can behold the glories
Of the City bright.

With the King of Glory
As your Captain, who can fail?
In His presence timid ones
Grow bold, the weak grow strong.
So unhesitatingly
The forts of sin assail,
With a smile upon your lips,
And in your heart a song.

He is coming soon, the
King of Glory, in His might,
Coming, o'er the earth to reign,
Distributing its stores.
Lift up your heads, ye gates,
Rejoicing at the welcome sight,
And let the King of Glory in,
Ye everlasting doors.

—L. L. Snyder

"And he [the angel] buried him [Moses] in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knew of his sepulcher unto this day." — Deuteronomy 34:6

A TRIBUTE TO MOSES



WHOM GOD LOVED

*By Nebo's lonely mountain,
On this side Jordan's wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab
There lies a lonely grave;
And no man dug that sepulcher,
And no man saw it e'er;
For the angels of God upturned the sod
And laid the dead man there.*

*That was the grandest funeral
That ever passed on earth;
But no man heard the trampling,
Or saw the train go forth:
Noiselessly as the daylight
Comes when the night is done,
And the crimson streak on ocean's cheek
Grows into the great sun.*

*Noiselessly as the springtime
Her crown of verdure weaves,
And all the trees on all the hills
Open their thousand leaves;
So without sound of music,
Or voice of them that wept,
Silently down from the mountain's crown
The great procession swept.*

*Perchance some bald old eagle
On gray Beth-peor's height,
Out of his rocky eyrie
Looked on the wondrous sight;
Perchance some lion stalking,
Still shuns that hallowed spot;
For beast and bird have seen and heard
That which man knoweth not.*

*But when the warrior dieth,
His comrades in the war,
With arms reversed and muffled drums,
Follow the funeral car;
They show the banners taken,
They tell his battles won,
And after him lead his masterless steed,
While peals the minute-gun.*

*Amid the noblest of the land
They lay the sage to rest,
And give the bard an honored place,
With costly marble dressed
In the great minster transept
Where lights like glories fall,
And the sweet choir sings and the organ rings
Along the emblazoned wall.*

*This was the truest warrior
That ever buckled sword;
This the most gifted poet
That ever breathed a word;
And never earth's philosopher
Traced, with his golden pen,
On the deathless page, truths half so sage
As he wrote down for men.*

*And had he not high honor?—
The hillside for a pall!
To lie in state, while angels wait,
With stars for tapers tall,
And the dark rock-pines like tossing plumes,
Over his bier to wave,
And God's own hand, in that lonely land,
To lay him in his grave!—*

*In that deep grave without a name,
Whence his uncoffin'd clay
Shall break again—O wondrous thought!—
Before the Judgment Day,
And stand, with glory wrapped around,
On the hills he never trod,
And speak of the strife that won our life
Through Christ the Son of God.*

*O lonely grave in Moab's land!
O dark Beth-peor's hill!
Speak to these troubled hearts of ours,
And teach them to be still.
God hath His mysteries of grace,
Ways that we cannot tell,
He hides them deep, like the secret sleep
Of him He loved so well.*

—Selected

"YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST"

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" —Ephesians 5:30.

*If we cannot fill
the place that has
been assigned us,
He will cut us off,
and another will
take our place.*

The Eternal well knew how to express His thoughts appropriately. When He chose the physical body as a simile of the unity among the members of His true Church, He used a figure we can all understand.

Most of us take our bodies for granted, so long as they give us no trouble. But those who study the human body as a science are constantly learning more and more of the inter-relatedness of its parts—the intricacies of its billions of cells, combining mechanics, chemistry, and electronics in a way past comprehension; the delicate balance of its voluntary and involuntary functions; and its unbelievable ability to take punishment and abuse.

They tell us we have some parts we can spare if we have to—fortunately; yet the body remains indivisible. Separate any part and it is no longer a whole body. *"So also is Christ"*—the composite body of Christ, representing Christ Himself as the head, and the members of the Church as His body.

What is the nature of this special *"body of Christ"*? First, this body (*"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular"*—I Cor. 12:27) has a head which directs all its actions. Often termed the mind of Christ, it is in reality the mind of the Eternal God. For *"the head of every man is Christ...and the head of Christ is God"* (I Cor. 11:3). Jesus Christ at the beginning of His career needed the law of His Father just as we need it. We read that He pleased not Himself (Rom. 15:3); He spoke not His own words but the words or thoughts of His Heavenly Father (John 14:10). In fact, He so thoroughly and so successfully identified Himself with His Father in thought and act that the terms *"mind of God"* and *"mind of Christ"* are synonymous. His perfect obedience made Him for all time the *"head of the body, the Church"* (Col. 1:18). And there is no split personality or divided loyalty in this head, only perfect unity (I Cor. 1:10). His mind, His heart, His loyalty were one and

indivisible. And so it must be with those who are part of His body. They must be like Him, must lay aside their own thoughts and accept His without reserve. Said the apostle Peter, "Arm yourselves with the same mind" (1 Pet. 4:1), or as it is phrased in the New Century Version, "Strengthen yourselves likewise with the same way of thinking Christ had."

The Bible projects one grand principle: *unity*. And it is not arrived at by every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes, as was done in the days of the Judges (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). Rather, it is reached by submission on the human side to that which is dictated from the Divine side. Each member of the body must take his place and keep it, never presuming to dictate to the Head. The bride of Christ, the Church, must always submit to her husband. And we can be sure the Head will never say to the feet, "I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). Nor will the feet ever assert their independence of the Head. To get too big for our place is to invite amputation. God wants His body complete. And if we cannot fill the place that has been assigned us, He will cut us off, and another will take our place.

Just how closely united is the spiritual "body of Christ"? So united that when one member suffers, all will suffer; and when one member rejoices, all will rejoice (1 Cor. 12:26).

The Apostle Paul describes the holy union of the body of Christ in the likeness of the marriage vow: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." And that there should be no misunderstanding of his point, the Apostle says clearly, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5:31-32). On that auspicious Day when Christ as the Head of the body comes to claim His faithful bride, the Church, the "body" will be united, the marriage will take place, and Christ will say to the bride, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23, RSV).

By birth we are not naturally part of the body of Christ. We are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), and must

be changed morally before we can become part of His body or true Church. Jesus Himself had to undergo this moral perfecting. He, too, had to "learn obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). He, too, was partaker of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14), and had to learn to discern between good and evil (Isa. 7:14-15).

This encourages us. Jesus had the same struggles that we know, the same temptations, the same battle with the world and the flesh, the problem of wandering thoughts, the pinpricks of petty annoyances, the ordinary days filled with frustrations.

If greater abilities bring greater temptations, Jesus' temptations were greater than ours. And beyond a doubt there were in His life emotions, affections, tendencies and ambitions upon which He had to keep a vigilant watch until the very hour of His triumph. Yet He did it, and at the close of His career He could say with confidence, "I have overcome the world....I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 16:33; 17:4).

Paul in Ephesians 5:30 speaks of being members "of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Several translations omit the reference to flesh and bones, understanding the phrase "members of his body" or "parts of his body" as all inclusive. While this is true, flesh and bones are distinctive parts of the body and may, in a figurative sense, suggest specific areas of service. "Flesh" may mean soft, easily impressed, resilient under the pressures of life. The members of Christ's body are not made of marble, without emotion or feeling. There is need for warm affection and genuine brotherly love in the body of Christ. Read the letters of the Apostle Paul, and feel the outpouring of a warm and tender heart. See Moses giving himself unsparingly to rescue and educate a rebellious people. See Isaiah rapt with many a glorious picture of the future revealed to him. See Jeremiah, tenderhearted and sincere, sick

over the hard-heartedness and rebellion of a people who would not listen. See Jesus going about doing good, preaching the Kingdom of God everywhere He went.

What about being members "of his bones"? Bones suggest strength, stability and hardness. Both the soft and the hard are needed to complete the body. The strongest bones

Jesus had the same struggles that we know, the same temptations, the same battle with the world and the flesh, the problem of wandering thoughts and the petty pinpricks.

will not support the weight of the body if the surrounding muscles are atrophied; likewise, the healthiest muscles are a helpless heap without the bones for framework. So in the body of Christ, emotion and judgment, warmth and strength, sympathy and justice, kindness and firmness must work together; a heart of fire for charity and heart of bronze for chastity, "a pure fervent love for the brotherhood" (1 Pet. 1:22) and a face set like flint against wrong (Isa. 50:7).

May God help us to this unity that makes the perfect body, even the man made in the image of God. MM

NOT DOING WHAT YOU OUGHT TO IS AS BAD AS DOING WHAT YOU OUGHT NOT.

AMOS

VOICE OF POWER



Who was Amos? We call him a minor prophet. From his own words we learn that he was not a college graduate, but a herdsman of sheep in the wilderness of Judea. In his spare time he pruned sycamore trees or gathered figs for market. This rock-strewn wilderness bordering the desert was none too fruitful. Tekoa, the little mountaintop village where Amos lived, was about two hours south of Bethlehem, by donkey. Because of its elevation, it was used for trumpet-blown signals. From its heights Mount Nebo can be seen, east beyond the Dead Sea dunes.

Amos was plain and rugged. His comrades were herdsmen and reapers, plowmen and treaders of grapes. The daily sights he saw were wandering flocks of sheep, farmers sifting grain in sieves, yokes of oxen plowing, and carts pressed down with sheaves. Frequently he heard the roar of a lion in the forest, or saw a bear seeking its prey. He watched the mighty streams down below that rushed through the ravines. He beheld the firmament on high; and there, in the solitary wilderness, Amos often sought and worshiped Him who garnished the heavens.

One day the Lord took Amos from his sheep and said unto him: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

What was the matter with Israel? At the marketplace, the gate, or from the occasional traveler, Amos had heard all about the wickedness of Judah and the corruption of the Northern Kingdom: the luxury of the rich, the cruel injustice, the dishonesty, the immorality, and the worship of strange gods. Amos' moral energies were ready to be used for God. By his stirring message it appears that, like the currents of two electric poles leaping together, he met the call of Jehovah. This herdsman was one who could stand alone, before people, priests, kings and nations.

What showy magnificence Israel had made of Bethel! In the very spot where their father Abraham had first pitched his simple tent, they were sacrificing to idols. King Jeroboam himself often came with his courtiers to sacrifice at the great national sanctuary of which Amaziah was the archpriest.

Here, to the splendid city of Bethel, Amos came to sound an alarm; and let us remember that he, through whom the Eternal speaks, speaks not only for the moment but for the ages. So Amos, while speaking to the Israelites in his day, was also speaking for us in our day. He applied the unchangeable principles of the living God to people who were persons like ourselves. Though their language and cus-

toms were different, their nature was very like human nature today. They were ruled by the same motives and feelings. They struggled with the same temptations as we. What a forceful comparison we can see as we observe the spiritual declension of our own day. Were the people against whom Amos preached warnings and judgments any more wicked than people are today? Was Israel less pure, or the judgments of God any more certain?

We can almost see the crowd around Amos growing as he denounces the neighboring nations, Philistia, Edom, Ammon and Moab. Just like human nature today, they no doubt enjoyed the powerful words of Amos as they bore heavily upon the faults of their neighbors. Directly he changed the burden of his words and cried with startling suddenness, "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees." Judah! That was different! And likewise as he cried against Judah, so also did he denounce Israel for departing from the ways of the Lord. The people looked on astonished. But Amos

went on: "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion,...You lie on beds inlaid with ivory,...You drink wine by the bowlful....He who made the Pleiades and Orion,...the Lord is his name. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Seek good, not evil, that you

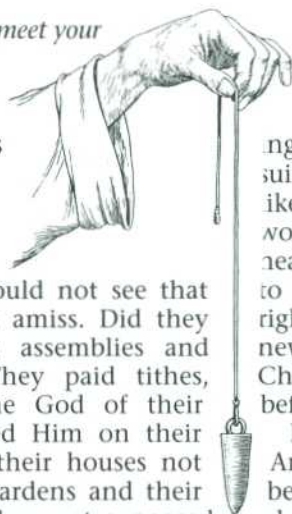


may live. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel."

The people were enraged. They hated Amos for rebuking them in the gate; they abhorred him for speaking uprightly. They could not see that their worship was amiss. Did they not have solemn assemblies and make sacrifice? They paid tithes, sang songs to the God of their fathers and praised Him on their harps. And were their houses not their own, their gardens and their vineyards? Were they not supposed to be happy? They were satisfied with the priest in fine raiment. If only they could forget what this herdsman Amos had said of coming judgments!

It is interesting to note in Bible history that there lived in the city of Jerusalem at this time a youth whose name was Isaiah. It is very likely that this young boy heard Amos preach and was influenced by his words. Later this lad became a great prophet of the Lord. We hope there is some youth in our time who will be impressed to live for God by the words of Amos or some other Bible character.

We ourselves may not be resting



on beds of ivory or drinking wine from bowls; still, we may be at ease in Zion. We may be finding our own pleasure, feeding on our own thoughts, and pursuing our own ways. How easy it is, like Israel and Judah, to set up and worship gods of our own (in our hearts) until our conscience is lulled to rest and our eyes blinded to the righteousness of God. We must get a new heart, put on the mind of Christ that we may walk uprightly before the Lord our God.

In one of several visions which Amos saw concerning Israel, he beheld God standing with a plumbline in His hand measuring a wall. A plumbline measures the uprightness of a wall. It judges every wall alike for its straightness. The wall is straight or it is not. God has one standard only, and that is righteousness. And God said, "Look, I am setting a plumbline among my people Israel." And so, as in past ages, God will judge His people in these last days by His plumbline.

God showed Amos another symbol of His judgments upon Israel. Amos saw before him "a basket of ripe fruit." And the Lord said, "The time is ripe for my people Israel." In the Hebrew, the word for "summer fruit" suggests "end." The end did not come

that year, nor the next, but it was pronounced. God in His mercy was long-suffering, warning and waiting for His people to turn to Him, and it was actually years before the destruction of Israel and Judah finally came.

Even so, in these last days, God has been long-suffering in waiting for His people, but the consummation will come. God said through Amos, "I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground." How we should work to be one of those precious grains worthy to be planted in the paradise of God, never again to be removed.

Amos left on record for us a bright picture of faithful Israel restored in the Kingdom of God, a picture of life and peace, blessing and comfort and joy for evermore.

As we study the book of Amos, we realize that he, like all the prophets, was one to whom God was very near. Some day we should like to meet Amos, that minor prophet, that simple herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees, called by God to denounce the social and moral degeneracy of a generation long past. We must do that same denouncing by imitating his conduct, his separateness from surrounding evil, consecrating our lives to God.

MM

A Holy Trust and Challenge

(Continued from page 9)

fighting trim. Much would depend on his personal faith and courage.

The Firm Foundation

Paul's next word (v. 19) is "But..." Here is the other part of the story. Some have fallen away, "but God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'" "Firm" means "solid." Picture the contrast with those who had been "upset." This foundation is solid. And what is the seal? "The Lord knows those who are his." God knows the identity of His people, He knows them intimately, loves them, protects them, plans for them, elects them, disciplines them, and in the end will save them. Oh, to be among "those who are his"!

And what is the second part of this seal? It is the obligation upon every one, from Paul and Timothy

right through to the newest believer today. The way to avoid hearing the Divine sentence, "Depart from me" is to depart from iniquity.

How powerful is that word "depart"—we either depart from iniquity, or we shall depart from God and life.

We need to keep re-impressing these thoughts on our minds, to keep them fresh and new. We need to go over and over them, so they become a part of us. It is the only way to become new. As Paul said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Cor. 5:17). We must read, meditate, apply.

Let us take Paul's admonitions to heart. Let us act upon them. Let us feel the force of them, inspiring, strengthening, disciplining. Let us be soldiers in Christ's army, concentrated and undistracted. Let us be as all-out as the athlete, wholehearted and enthusiastic, ready to submit to any training, if only we can obtain the crown.

Let us be faithful to the trust committed to us, and answer the challenge—to love, to loyalty, to life!

So shall we stand approved—with Paul and Timothy—and go on serving through Eternity.

MM

The Canon of Scripture— *When and How?*

► *Much more than is generally recognized, the commonly accepted chronology of the New Testament rests much more on supposition than on fact.*

When Was The New Testament Written?

Another challenge to the Bible from the skeptic community is the idea that the New Testament is a collection of hand-me-down traditions written so long after the fact that the information could not possibly be reliable.

Setting aside the issue of inspiration (which we discussed earlier), what can be known about the time the New Testament was written?

If you open your Bible and look for dates on the books of the New Testament, you will probably see that they range from AD 50 to AD 96 or thereabouts. These dates have been assigned by scholars and are not part of any original revelation. Are they valid?

The date of writing of the New Testament might seem to have been a question settled long ago. Yet it is far from settled. And when the evidence is researched, one discovers that the dates commonly assumed in textbooks even today are supported by very thin evidence. One prominent scholar has pointed out that “the reigning assumptions of scientific scholarship can...get challenged for the assumptions they are”—the commonly accepted chronology of the New Testament rests much more on supposition than on fact.

Background On Dates of Writing

Before 1800, with isolated exceptions, dating was dependent on authorship, and the authorship of the various New Testament books rested on the traditions incorporated in their titles in the Authorized Version. The earliest Christian writing was calculated roughly to about the year 50, and as the writings were done by Apostles or followers of the Apostles and the period of the New Testament closed with the death of the last Apostle (John), who by tradition survived until about 100 AD, the span of time for the composition of the New Testament was said to be about 50 years—from 50 AD to 100 AD.

By 1850 the picture looked very different. Professor F. C. Baur, a German scholar, questioned the traditions, and as a result of his research, set the dates much later than had been earlier assumed. Aside from four New Testament books which he allowed were by the Apostle Paul (Romans, I and II Corinthians, and Galatians), plus Revelation which was by the Apostle John, he set the books of the New Testament as being composed up to or beyond 150 AD. The fact that the Gospels and other New Testament books were quoted by Irenaeus and other Church fathers towards the end of the second century alone set an upper limit. The span of composition for him, then, was more than doubled to well over one hundred years—from 50+ to 160+ AD.

By 1900 the scheme had been drastically modified again. J. B. Lightfoot, a professor at Cambridge, discovered the mistakes of Baur, and after more careful investigation succeeded in setting more accurate dates, but still operating with a span of well over one hundred years.

By 1950, the span of composition had settled down to a period from about 50 to 100 or 110 AD, with a single exception of II Peter.

Josh McDowell, a contemporary writer who has researched the history of the Bible and its original documents extensively, tells of lecturing at Arizona State University when a professor approached him. "Mr. McDowell," he said, "you are basing all your claims about Christ on a second century document that is obsolete. I showed in class today how the New Testament was written so long after Christ that it could not be accurate in what it recorded." Mr. McDowell replied to the professor that his opinions and conclusions about the New Testament were at least twenty-five years out of date.

New Evidence for Earlier Dates

A combination of archaeology and scholarship has now provided ample evidence for earlier dates of writing of the New Testament books. For example, William Albright, foremost Biblical archaeologist, has written, "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about AD 80,"—two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 formerly accepted.

Several archaeological discoveries during the 20th century have shown that the New Testament was in circulation much earlier than had been formerly believed. The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, made public in 1931, consist of portions of eleven codices (books), three of which contain most of the New Testament writings. And one of these belongs to the early part of the third century. More recently have been found some papyrus fragments (by H. I. Bell and T. C. Skeat) which date not later than AD 150. Earlier still is a fragment of a papyrus codex containing a portion of the Gospel of John, now in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, and dating from about AD 130. This papyrus seems to have originated in Egypt—which shows that at least a portion of the New Testament was already being circulated at that time. Still another discovery is the Papyrus Bodmer II, announced in 1956, dating from about AD 200. None of these are complete manuscripts, but all show that the books of the New Testament were in existence and in circulation very soon after the first century.

On the side of scholarship, Dr. John A. T. Robinson, lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge, and for years one of

England's most distinguished critics, has conducted an extensive study of the subject. Prior to the study, Robinson had, like most scholars, accepted the consensus that the New Testament was written years after the time of Christ, at the end of the first century. As what he calls "little more than a theological joke," he decided to investigate the arguments for the late dating of the New Testament books. In fact, he took as a challenge the task of finding whether evidence could be found to support a hypothesis that the whole of the New Testament was written before AD 70. Why that date? Because, he writes, "as one began to look at the books of the New Testament, in particular the Epistle to the Hebrews, Acts and the Apocalypse, was it not strange that this cataclysmic event [the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation] was never once mentioned or apparently hinted at?" What began as a joke soon became a serious study, and Robinson found himself driven to look at the evidence for all the accepted New Testament datings.

The results stunned him. Owing to what he described as scholarly "sloth," the "tyranny of unexamined assumptions" and "almost willful blindness" by previous authors, he concluded that much of the past reasoning was untenable. The result of his research is a book, *Redating the New Testament*. In this book Robinson challenges his colleagues to prove him wrong. If scholars investigate, he is convinced, the results will force "the rewriting of many introductions to—and ultimately, the theologies of—the New Testament."

Robinson claimed no great originality in his work. "Almost every individual conclusion will be found to have been argued previously by someone, often indeed by great and forgotten men." But the result was dramatic. According to Robinson, the evidence showed that all of the Epistles of Paul were written during a period of 9 years (between 50 and 58 AD), and that the rest of the New Testament books were completed before the year AD 70.

More Evidence

Another type of evidence for the earlier dating of the New Testament writings is found in the works of non-Biblical writers. The writings of the Apostolic

If the New Testament books were written after AD 70, is it not strange that the destruction of Jerusalem—a cataclysmic event—is not once mentioned or even hinted at?

► *Jesus promised special Divine assistance to those who would be writing the Gospels.*
—John 14:26

Fathers, written chiefly between AD 90 and 160, show their wide familiarity with and recognition of the authority of the New Testament writings. In fact, so heavily did they quote from the New Testament that if the documents of the New Testament had been completely destroyed, they could be reconstructed from the quotations in the works of these early writers.

One scholar believes that "within a generation after John, all 27 books were cited as Scripture by some church leader." He states that "within 200 years, all but 11 verses of the New Testament were quoted in more than 36,000 citations" (Terry Hall, "How We Got Our New Testament," *Moody Monthly*, February 1987).

The earlier dates for the writing of the New Testament books is especially interesting to us because of the teaching of the New Testament itself. According to Jesus, He was going to send special Divine power to those who would be writing the information about Himself,

which would "bring all things" to their remembrance, and certify the completeness and the accuracy of their writings (John 14:26). Such open manifestation of Divine power would not have been possible after about AD 70, because Jesus promised to be with His followers "with signs following" only until the end of that age, which we may reasonably assume to correspond with the fall of Jerusalem and the close of the Jewish Age in AD 70.

The Apostle Paul also stated that the writing of the Scriptures (the "perfect") would be completed by that time (see I Cor. 13:8-13), and that after that time only "faith, hope and charity" would continue. The new scholarship, which establishes the writing of the New Testament Epistles before AD 70, is in harmony with the facts of Scripture. If the former judgment of scholars were true, that many of the books were not written until late in the second century, Paul's words in I Corinthians 13 would be meaningless.

What About the Apocrypha?

The term "Apocrypha" is a Greek word meaning "hidden, spurious (books)." As a technical term it is applied to certain books of the Old Testament which the ancient Jews did not recognize as belonging to the Old Testament Scriptures. The term is usually used to designate a number of books—I Esdras, II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Rest of the Book of Esther RB, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Additions to Daniel (The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, The History of the Destruction of Bel and the Dragon), the Prayer of Manasses, and I and II Maccabees. It also includes additions to certain canonical books in their Septuagint form (Esther, Daniel, Jeremiah, Chronicles).

The books of the Apocrypha are generally considered to have been written during the last two centuries BC by Jewish authors whose names are largely unknown. It is quite certain that the books were written before the Council at Jamnia (circa AD 90), where the Jewish Scriptural Canon was fixed for all time.

What were the criteria by which the

Jewish rabbis distinguished inspired from uninspired books?

Books for including in the Canon had to have the right authorship (known, identifiable and widely recognized), the right date (an early date, preferably prior to the time of Ezra), had to be written in the right language (in Hebrew or Aramaic), had to contain the right teaching (sound orthodox teaching), had to have the right literary quality (in line with the other books of the Old Testament), and had to be widely used and accepted in Jewish circles. A certain rabbi at Akiba (who died about 132 AD) is quoted as saying that "whoever brings together in his house more than 24 books [the Hebrew Old Testament, excluding the Apocrypha] brings confusion"—suggesting that the canon was largely decided by this time. The rabbi was putting a definite limit on the number of books in the Old Testament.

It seems unlikely that the Apocrypha would have survived had it depended upon the Hebrews, because the Hebrew people had no use for it. Its survival is due entirely to the Christian Church's

acceptance of it in the centuries after Christ (after the Church began to apostatize from the teachings of Jesus). But even with this level of acceptance, the Apocrypha did not become part of the Canon.

How can we know that the Apocrypha does not belong to the Canon of Scripture?

1) *The New Testament contains not a single quotation from the Apocrypha.*

Throughout the New Testament are literally hundreds of quotations from the Old Testament, and about 80 percent of these are reproducing the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament. The Septuagint Bible was widely accepted by the Christian Church during the early centuries after Christ, but the Apocryphal writings—which were included in it—were never given recognition as “inspired” texts—a fact which must have been common knowledge among loyal believers, else how could they have been so keenly perceptive to separate the two and to refrain totally from quoting those portions?

2) *Jerome, during the fifth century, excluded the Apocrypha from the Canon.*

During the fifth century, Jerome, when gathering the books of the New Testament and translating his Latin Version of the Bible (the Vulgate), in his preface used the word “Apocrypha” to describe books that were excluded. He writes: “Anything outside of these must be placed within the Apocrypha.”

3) *The reformers refused to include the Apocrypha as part of the Canon.*

The Roman Catholic Church in the West as a whole accepted the Apocryphal books, though those books were recognized as spurious by Irenaeus and Tertullian in the third century; also by Athanasius and the Eastern Church in general. The Western Church generally accepted the Apocrypha. Writes the historian, “The authors of the so-called Apocrypha books being unknown, it was sought to gain respect for these unknown writers by tacking upon them well known names, so that, particularly in the Western Church, ‘Apocryphal’ came to be almost synonymous with false authorship.”

When the reformers made the Scriptures the supreme guide to all matters of faith and conduct, they recognized the critical need to determine the exact con-

tents and wording of the Scriptures, and to separate spurious from genuine books. One by one those who took up the task of verifying the Bible set aside the books of the Apocrypha. Luther refused to include them, and his example was immediately followed by Coverdale. Soon the word “Apocrypha” was used only in a disparaging sense, of works excluded from the Canon. In time it came also to mean “excluded from public use,” as Canonical books were being widely used in the churches while the Apocryphal books were not. The term came also to mean “inferior” because the writings were withdrawn from general use—because they were inferior.

Earlier, Augustine had used the term to denote works “obscure in origin or authorship” but not necessarily unedifying or unreliable. But when Protestantism came along and determined to be “the religion of the Book,” what that Book said became all important and its verity had to be proven. The Protestants wanted to be sure that the sacred volume on which they based their faith contained no book which had not the strongest claim to Divine authority.

During the Middle Ages the Roman Church, according to the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, “almost never applied” the term *apocryphal* to those portions of the books which were foreign to the Hebrew Canon. Rather, these books were incorporated into the Greek and Latin Bibles in use at the time, and were seldom spoken against. It was the Protestant Church that researched the origin of these questionable volumes and rejected them. “The first edition of the Bible in which the writings in question were expressly called Apocryphal was that of Frankfurt, 1534, which was followed in the same year by Luther’s First Edition.”

On the basis of the above, we feel compelled to reject the Apocryphal writings, not giving them any place among the inspired Scriptures.

MM

***In time,
the word
“Apocrypha”
came to be used
only of works
excluded from
the Canon.***

Above historical information is from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, published by William B. Erdman’s Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, copyright 1979; also from *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 1, pages 391-396; also *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, edited by Samuel McCauley, 1907.

A Future Full of Hope

*Come back, Jeremiah, to our troubled world.
Say it again: In God there is hope!*

We like to think about the progress of the human race, the steady advance of recent centuries which has made possible the many comforts and advantages we enjoy. We like to think it will continue. At the same time, we witness a moral deterioration that threatens the very life of anything we dare to call civilization. If only a concerted effort by the human family could attack the foes of sensuality, lust, and lawlessness of every sort; if only the human race could unite in the abolition of war, and poverty, and disease!

But the Bible tells us that this will never be. Unaided man will never save himself from the program of ruin he has designed.

At the same time, the Bible tells of hope. There is hope—glorious hope—in the plans of God!

A bit of history from the Fourth Century B.C. points up this fact. It was during the exile of the Jews in Babylon. Their national life had been shattered. How could it be? Were they not the people of God? Yet their beloved city Jerusalem lay in ruins, their temple destroyed and their leadership deported to a foreign land. How could it have happened?

About this time an elderly prophet named Jeremiah was living among the ruins in Jerusalem. But he had not been ruined. His hope was in God, and he wrote a remarkable letter to his fellow countrymen exiled in Babylon. By God's provi-

dence this letter has been preserved, and is now part of the book of Jeremiah (chapter 29).

The spirit of the letter is buoyant, confident, expectant. It is the Word of the Lord. *"I know the plans I have in mind for you—it is Yahweh who speaks—plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you"* (Jer. 29:11, JB). *A future full of hope!* Why? Because God has plans for you, plans for your welfare, plans full of hope.

Come back, Jeremiah, to our troubled world. Say it again: In God there is hope!

But Jeremiah has more to say. A future full of hope is not a natural sequence of events that will come about of itself. Jeremiah's depth of insight into God's ways of working sees an open obligation on the human side. It is as if God said, You do this, then I'll do that. *"You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord."* Here is the real basis of hope: a people seeking God.

Jeremiah's expectant hope was not the result of daydreaming or wishful thinking. Don't look for easy answers to hard problems, he says. False prophets may tell you that within a few years you will be back in your beloved Zion. Don't believe it. The Lord is punishing you for your transgressions, and there is no escape until He sees fit to provide it.

Second, Jeremiah was telling them

to use their exile as an opportunity. Were they captives in a heathen land? Make the most of it. Don't waste your years regretting, or wishing you could be elsewhere. Live for God right where you are.

This is a lesson for all of us. Delayed action does not improve circumstances. Waiting for a more propitious time to do what needs to be done is always futile. The time for action is now.

And above all, remember to seek God. *"You will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart"* (v. 13). That message comes close to us. How much do we really want to resolve our problems? How diligently are we seeking God? Do we seek Him with all our heart?

For us too, the future is full of hope! Soon *"the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe"* (II Thess. 1:7-10).

That day is coming. In the meantime, there is no need to look for easy answers. Don't suspend present responsibility while you wait for better times. Do the work that God has laid out for you right here and now. This is the only way to be sure of a share in that "future full of hope" which God has laid up for all who diligently seek Him.

MM

Wealthy — or merely Rich?

Some people get all the breaks!" Karl tossed his hat onto the hat rack with more than usual vigor and strode into the den. "Here I've been working myself skinny trying to—"

Brenda attempted to hide a smile as she surveyed her brother's husky frame. "Trying to get a promotion," she finished for him.

"Right! And who gets it? Roger Page!"

Neal laid down his pen and adjusted his glasses. "Perhaps Roger had the qualifications the boss was looking for."

"You mean I *don't* have the qualifications the boss was looking for. That's what it amounts to." There was a tone of bitterness in Karl's words.

Neal's face grew serious. "Son, with so many out of work, you should be thankful to *have* a job."

"I am, Dad, really I am. But I'm still doing the same old thing for the same old wages. There are jobs I'd like better."

"Pretty good wages you're getting, I'd say. And the job *could* be a lot *less* desirable. But Son, money isn't our goal. The Bible says, 'Having food and raiment let us there-with be content.'"

Kathy paused in her crocheting. "There are many things in life, Son, that are worth far more than money. You can't buy good health in any market. Or happiness. And even millionaires don't have the faith we have." She checked her stitches again.

"I know," said Karl, flatly.

"Oh," Brenda exclaimed, "that must be what our neighbors meant. They were talking about the richest man in town who is loaded with money but is never satisfied

with anything. The old grouch! They called him a poor man with money. Then one lady said to the other, 'Now the Kandor family aren't merely *rich*, they're *wealthy*!'"

"What were those women talking about... us wealthy?" Karl shook his head in disgust. "Wealthy!... when we can't even afford a decent looking car."

Brenda ignored Karl's remarks and went on. "They said something about some of the world's poorest men having bushels of money and some of the wealthiest don't have any. I didn't get all they said, but they just envied Dad and Mom for their serene and happy faces. They said they'd never seen Mr. or Mrs. Kandor with brows all puckered in worry. They thought we must have wonderful peace."

"But how much is *peace* worth? You can't buy a new car with *peace*." Karl was indignant.

Neal had a ready answer. "Tell me this, Karl. Suppose we lived up on the hill, where the Robinson's have built their new home. Suppose we had their house to live in—I think someone said they have twenty-four rooms—"

"Great!" exclaimed Karl. "Then

people could talk about the wealthy Kandors!"

"Just a minute now. Suppose we had that big house, and three new cars in the garage."

"One for you and Mom, one for Brenda, and one for me. We'd be all set!" Karl's face beamed with the thought of such grandeur.

"But now," continued Neal, "let's go a step further. Suppose you drive your fine new car to work, then come home at night, and you go into the house and you find Mom and me quarreling, I mean really going at each other and trying to hurt each other just as much as we could. Suppose this happens day after day. How would *you* feel?" Neal looked squarely at his son.

Karl's head dropped. "I'd be sick."

Brenda also looked distressed. "I think I'd try finding somewhere else to live—maybe back down here!"

Neal went on. "Suppose we quarreled so much that we decided we'd have to separate and live apart."

"You wouldn't be Christians, then."

"You're right, Brenda." Kathy spoke with dead-seriousness.

"And," added Neal, "we wouldn't be very wealthy either. Right, Karl?"

"Right, Dad. But I still don't like to think of us being quite so—so *ordinary*."

"We aren't poor just because we can't have everything we want. Money isn't everything. Money can't buy happiness. Money can't buy peace. Money can't buy life. But we know the way to get these things — and have them forever! Don't you think we're *rich*?"

"Not merely rich, Dad"—Brenda's eyes sparkled—"we're *wealthy*!" MM

***Money can't buy
happiness.
Money can't buy peace.
Money can't buy life.***

Why Study?

The simple religion of Jesus, the Prophets and the Apostles teaches that we must repent and endure to the end (Prov. 28:13; Matt. 24:13). This means that we must turn from things abominable to God and be obedient to His laws until death, or until Christ returns, whichever comes first. This is important for us to realize because from the conditions of both the political realm and the state of humankind today, we are most certainly in the "last days." It is impossible to know whether death or Christ's return will be first for any of us.

One cannot truly repent without first having a knowledge of the law of God. Some may ask, Doesn't the decision to make the commitment count? Yes, but no. Confusing? Not really, because one must have knowledge before one can make the commitment. It takes knowledge to know *why* you believe *what* you believe. And where does that knowl-

edge come from? I may tell you my beliefs. Others may tell you their beliefs. But that would be only secondhand knowledge. Sadly, that is how most people develop their beliefs. Is not firsthand knowledge better? Firsthand knowledge comes only from the Word of God.

Why is firsthand knowledge so important? Just consider this partial list:

God instructs us to study His Word so that we will know His plan (II Tim. 2:15), and so that we can obey His Word (Rev. 1:3).

We must study so that we can follow exactly His teachings wherever we are and whatever we do.

The Bible warns us not to add to or take from His Word (Rev. 22:18-19; see also Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:6). Simply put, we must reject the false teachings of today's nominal religions and hold fast only to that which is "good," that which is supported by the Word of God. If we accept any teaching which is not supported by the Word of God, Jesus will reject us when He returns (Matt. 15:9; 7:21-23). We must study our beliefs until no questions remain,

and this is possible only by acquiring a thorough knowledge of God's Word.

True religion is actually simple and makes sense—it is not clouded with such things as a three-personality Godhead; nor any such thing as Christ dying to atone for our sins. Nor is it clouded by a literal devil which, if true, would be even more powerful than God. Nor is God so cruel that He has a place called Hell where He puts sinners to be tortured day and night forever. Nor is there a soul that goes on living after natural death; etc., etc. We must study the Scriptures always seeking harmony with the general teaching of the Bible. Then the Bible will become self-explanatory providing one Divine answer and not result in hundreds of beliefs going off in different directions (see I Cor. 1:10; 14:33).

Only the knowledge of God can confirm *why* we believe *what* we believe. It is this knowledge that informs us of God's plan for mankind and is that which reveals the great reward of eternal life which will be given to all who are obedient to His laws. Only by acquiring His knowledge can we repent, for when all is said and done, it is our one desire to obtain that great reward that keeps us obedient and helps us endure to the end (Rom. 2:4).

If we continue to study God's Word (really study), we will obtain the knowledge necessary for repentance. Then if we are obedient, when Christ comes He will bring us our reward (Rev. 22:12; Matt. 16:27)—if we but remain faithful. And if we are sleeping when He comes, we shall be resurrected and given the reward.

So that is the plan: first the knowledge, then the obedience. All this (and more) is revealed in God's Word, the Bible. Worth it? Yes, and much more. That is why I tell people, "Try it, you might like it. I certainly do! And I believe you will too."

—Contributed by R. Hamby

Abib Greetings!

The New Year is coming, the sacred New Year as God commanded Moses to measure time.

According to Biblical records, the ancient Hebrews began their sacred year with the new moon of Abib, or Nisan (see Ex. 12:2, 13:4). Abib is the first new moon following the spring equinox. This year the equinox occurs on March 17, and the next new moon falls on March 31. For this reason, we are observing the beginning of the month Abib on Friday evening, March 31, continuing through Saturday, April 1, Bible time being counted from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32).

The Megiddo Church observes the day with double significance—as the beginning of the sacred New Year and also as the anniversary of the birth of Christ. Members and friends set aside the day to reconsecrate themselves to God for the New Year, and also to honor Christ, our coming King and Ruler. The heavenly Father chose to honor Christ at the time of His birth by sending angels to the shepherds—shouldn't we do our part?

Thirteen days later (Abib 13, this year on Wednesday evening, April 12) we will commemorate the anniversary of the Lord's Supper, and the morning of April 15 (Abib 15) will be the anniversary of Christ's triumphant resurrection. Pentecost occurs on June 3.

MM

*Genuine repentance is
being sorry for the deed, not
for being caught.*

The Measure of a Man
is the height of his ideals, the depth of his convictions, and the breadth of his interests.

Tomorrow will be a better day if you begin this morning to improve it.

If the world copied you—copied you to the letter—would it be nobler? Tell me, if it followed you, would it be better?

To learn what is true in order to do what is right, is the whole duty of man.

He who lives well is the best preacher.

When God shuts a door, He opens a window.

"Nevertheless"...

(Continued from page 2)

from the lips of Simon Peter the fisherman; and this one adds yet another dimension of meaning. On the shores of the lake early one morning Jesus finds Himself surrounded by a large group of people. The crowd is so large that He is forced into Simon Peter's nearby fishing boat, which He uses as a pulpit. Then Jesus dismisses the crowd, and turns to the fishermen and hears how they had fished all night without any success. He instructs them to row out into the deeper water and let down their nets again. Dismayed, Peter replies: "Master, we toiled all night, and took nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the nets."

It was as if Peter said, Master, if it were anyone but You, I wouldn't even consider it. We know our business, we know what we are doing. All night catching nothing—how much reason does one need to quit!...Nevertheless, because it is You, because it is Your Word, I will let down the nets.

Could we have done as well as Peter did?

There will be times when the demands of our Lord seem unreasonable. Our own judgment is always superior—in our own eyes. After all, we have learned a few things about life. But when the command comes to do that which does not seem reasonable or logical to our self-biased judgment, what shall we do? Shall we say, "It's no use, I know better—"? Or shall we respond with the humble faith and obedience that motivated Peter, and say, My thoughts are not Yours, "...nevertheless, at Your word I will...."



The word "nevertheless" seems to achieve its full height the third time we meet it in Jesus' experience, and this time it is a meeting between Him and His Father. Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, facing the most difficult hour of His life. Three times He prays for deliverance, then, realizing that such is not His Father's will, He submits in absolute trust into the hands of His Father, saying, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." Could the virtue of faith and obedience rise higher than this?

Let us take "nevertheless" as our word of commitment. It says that we have looked at the problem from our point of view and drawn our conclusion, *and* we are going to give up our judgment in deference to a will and a knowledge which we recognize as superior.

"Nevertheless" is another way of saying that we are giving ourselves to something bigger than ourselves, bigger than our troubles, bigger than the dangers that threaten us. And in spite of everything that may come—the threat of adversity, or the disappointment of empty nets, or the hurt of lost hopes and wrecked plans—in spite of anything and everything, we will submit to the will of our heavenly Father.

We will not give up! □

It's Coming!

***This is no time for fear, for doubts, for grief,
For broodings on the tragedies of fate.
This is a time for songs of hope and gladness,
For hymns of joy for better days to come!
Though echoes of old wars depress the heart,
And scars of greed and hate do linger yet,
Though foul suspicions still are felt afar,
This is the time for confidence and praise!
Arise! Awake! The Prophet true has spoken.
Our dreams, our hopes, our prayers are not in vain.
The night is past! The morning light is breaking!
Together let us shout new hope of life!
Our Babels crash. Let selfish flags be furled.
Together let us shout, The Kingdom comes!***