

Megiddo Message

MAY/JUNE, 2004

The Lord "He placed springs in
the valleys, and streams that
gush from the mountains.



*....and the birds nest beside
the streams and sing among
the branches of the trees."*

—Psalm 104:10, 12 LB

WILL YOUR CONVICTIONS HOLD?

Each of us has a set of beliefs we have developed over time. Based on conclusions we have drawn from what we hear, or observe, or experience, these beliefs guide our lives. Every day we make decisions based on these beliefs.

When these beliefs are grounded firmly in evidence; when they become principles that we would not surrender no matter what others think, no matter how others may criticize, or what the consequences may be, these beliefs are our convictions.

The dictionary defines "conviction" as a belief firmly and seriously held, a belief grounded in evidence.

Christians live by convictions based on the absolute truth of the Word of the living God. The apostle Paul said, *"I am persuaded..."*, *"I know whom I have believed"* (Rom. 8:38; 2 Tim. 1:12). The apostle John said, *"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you,"* and *"We know that we are of God"* (1 John 1:3; 5:19). Addressing the people of Athens, Paul declared, *"God, who made the world and everything in it, ... is Lord of heaven and earth, ... In Him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:24, 28). These were solid convictions for which they were willing to stand, and even die, if need be. When Pilate asked Jesus about his kingship, He replied, *"For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth"* (John 18:37). To have denied that He was a king might have saved His life, but had He not been willing to die for His convictions, we today would not call Him our Lord and Savior.

Unfortunately, absolute truth is not popular today. Most people are more concerned about what satisfies them, what pleases them, what works in their lives. And for that reason, their judgments or their opinions will vary, depending on the situation. They may believe something today, but tomorrow they may not believe it, because the situation has changed. For them there is no objective absolute.

What are your convictions? Are they solidly based on the absolute truth of the Word of God?

Daniel's three Hebrew companions in Babylon were men who lived by conviction (Daniel 3).

When the king made a 90 foot high image and commanded everyone to bow down, and everyone bowed down—except these three—can we feel what they felt at that moment? When they were brought before the king, and questioned, and threatened did they change

their minds? Not one iota! They were worshippers of the true God, and they were willing to die before they would violate their convictions. Whether or not their God chose to deliver them from the wrath of the king, they still would not bow down. Their convictions would hold.

We live in a society that is absolutely intolerant of absolute truth. People want the liberty to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. They want the liberty to look upon the Bible as good literature but without authority. If they read it, they have a "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude.

But whatever anyone says or believes, the authority remains. The Bible speaks with authority, and we refuse to listen only at our own peril, because its message is the absolute truth of the living God. No matter what we think, the issue always is, "What does God say?" not, "What is true for me?" or "What do I want to think?"

Those convictions will make us unpopular. We will walk away from bad language, or dirty stories, or anything that dishonors God. We will give a full day's work for a full day's pay, because

the Bible says, *"Whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men"* (Col. 3:23).

Living by convictions affects every part of our lives. It means saying no to wrong, no to error, and no to groundless philosophies. It means saying no to all selfish, godless behavior. It means taking responsibility for our conduct, because we have made a commitment to honor God in our lives.

How firm are your convictions? When someone brings up a controversial subject, and starts criticizing God, or the Bible, or Jesus, what is your response? Are you *"ready to give an answer"* about the hope that you hold? Do you let them know that you have deep, abiding convictions that are based not on an opinion, not on a feeling, but on the absolute truth of the Word of God?

Such convictions will hold firm, even in the 21st century. ♦



*Are your
convictions
solidly based on
the absolute
truth of the
Word of God?*

Footprints to Follow

Following is an acknowledgment that another knows more about the route to take.

Imagine trying to find your way across a sandy wasteland, not knowing which way to go—when suddenly you discover footprints in the sand. Someone has already passed this way! Having no other guide, you venture to follow, even though you cannot see whom you are following.

That is how we follow Jesus. We cannot see Him ahead of us, but we know that He has gone our way because we can see His footprints. We see them in the Word of God. We see them in the lives He has influenced, both in history and in our own time.

Do our footprints follow His?

We know where His footprints lead, because He has shown us. He has given us His own testimony: *"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore"* (Rev. 1:18). There is great comfort in knowing that we put our feet in the steps of One who has gone ahead. Whatever it is, He has experienced it first. And—most important of all—He has reached the destination! He has a glorious, immortal body, and He has promised to make us like Himself when He returns (Phil. 3:20–21).

We shall be *"like Him,"* free from sickness, pain and death (1 John 3:2–6; Rev. 21:4).

All we have to do is follow. ➤

What It Means To Follow

We are all followers. The critical issue is making the right choice as to whom we will follow. Do we want to go where that following will take us?

When we travel, the first decision we must make is that of our destination. Then we must choose which routes will take us to that destination. Life is much the same. Consciously or unconsciously, we are all the time looking at the possibilities and choosing whom we will follow. We watch others and note their strengths and weaknesses.

For many, choosing a guide or a route in life is haphazard. Few, very few give serious thought to their destination.

Most are content to follow their peers and enjoy the scenery. If it is pleasant, if it satisfies their desire for challenge and achievement, if it in some way increases the happiness of themselves and perhaps others, they are content.

But occasionally comes one whose greatest concern is the destination.

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BACK COVER POEM

Light

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

WE BELIEVE...

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

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

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

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

THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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

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Such a one is careful—very careful—whom he follows, for well he knows that not every route can take him to his destination.

Such a one was Jesus Christ, the greatest man ever to live on our planet. What made Him great? The answer lies in His willingness to follow, to obey, to submit to the will of His Father.

Throughout His life He was in every sense of the word a follower. He was not on His own. He had a mission, a purpose, a duty to perform. *"I do nothing of Myself,"* He said, *"but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things"* (John 8:28). *"The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do"* (John 5:19). And again, *"I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me"* (John 5:30).

Following is not easy. **First**, it means we must make some fundamental changes in our way of thinking and doing. Following is an acknowledgment that another knows more about the route than we do, and so we are willing to let go our own opinions. From that point on we are not free to follow any road we might like to explore. Where our leader goes we must follow.



Second, we must keep our eye on the One we are following. We cannot have our eyes in the ends of the earth and be good followers of Christ. *"Let your eyes look straight ahead,"* is the command, *"and your eyelids look right before you"* (Prov. 4:25). This was the pattern left us by the One we follow, who *"for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Heb. 12:2). Christ was enduring *"for the joy"* ahead.

Third, by following another we relinquish our freedom to explore any road that might appeal to us. When we make up our minds to follow, we agree on one route and forego all others. This means that *"you do not do the things that you wish"* (Gal. 5:16–17). We are not free to try this byroad and that. Our decision to follow Christ is a decision *not* to follow any other course, not even that of our own mind.

Fourth, following means matching the stride of the One who went before us. Imagine a small child trying to follow the footprints of a giant. Just so must we grow up in Christ, become mature men and women in Him, to match His pace. And even as we grow, we must stretch our legs to the limit, and thrust them forward with all our might. It is not easy to follow One so far ahead of us, but it is the surest, fastest—only—way to our destination.

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By following Jesus,
we relinquish our
freedom to explore
any road that might
appeal to us.

How Can I Follow Jesus?

If any one message comes clearly through the Gospels, it is the call of our Lord, "Follow me." The voice is commanding. It rings with authority. But there is good reason to follow, because there is something better ahead. Life, glory, honor, and eternal happiness are ahead! (Rom. 2:7). Jesus knows, because He has gone before us.

"Follow me" was the call to each of His Apostles, and we read that they "left everything, and followed him" (Luke 5:11 NASB). Whether casting nets or tax collecting, whatever their former way of life, they left it to follow. They had caught the vision of what Jesus saw up ahead, and they wanted it!

Very near the end of his life, the Apostle Peter was still thinking about the call of his Master. He realized that Jesus' call was not to the Apostles alone but to every believer in every age. And so he wrote to his brethren: "To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Every believer in every age has been called to follow Jesus.

We can understand how the Apostles followed Jesus. Listening day after day to

His dynamic preaching, as He went from city to village "preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1), they followed Him literally. And as they followed we can be sure that they observed also His manner of life, His patience, His humility, and His careful attention to the details of His own obedience. They marveled at His kindness, His selfless consideration for others, His firm devotion to duty, and His personal life of holiness in all the events of every day.

When suddenly Jesus was taken from them, they continued to follow—by carrying out the commission He left them, by preaching His message of hope and the coming Kingdom. They were captured by Him. Christ was their rallying point, the center of their thinking, their Hero. Everywhere they went they preached Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, ascended to heaven, and coming again. They were driven

by His faith, motivated by His confidence in them, challenged by His goals. They were His servants, literally His slaves, and everything they did was done as for Him, even though He was not present.

Most of all, they followed by imitating His manner of life, His integrity, His fearless denunciation of evil, His courage, His faith, His single-minded desire to please His heavenly Father. If only they could suffer with Him, die with Him, live with Him, reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:11–12)!

But the command to follow Jesus was not for the Apostles alone. It stands on record for us, clear and unmistakable: "If any man will come after me, let him...take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

What do these words mean? Did Jesus truly mean what these words seem to say to us nearly two millennia later, we who have not seen Jesus? How can we follow Him?

Footsteps of Jesus



Then at last, when He comes and sees us,
Our journey done,
May we rest where the steps of Jesus
End at His throne.

**You must arm
yourselves with the
same attitude [Christ]
had. —1 Peter 4:1**

Footprints To Follow

What footprints can we discover from what has been written of the life of our Lord?

Jesus' life was not haphazard. Nor were the footprints He left behind. He consciously marked out a path to follow. He told His disciples, *"I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you"* (John 13:15).



1 How To Take Mistreatment

If any thought that Christ was only for admiration, not imitation, Peter dispels any such idea. Christ's life was an example for *following*. His footprints are clear, says Peter, and *"you should follow his steps."*

But the first "step" he mentions is not an easy one. Peter says of Jesus, *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth"* (1 Pet. 2:22 NIV). Here was the supreme example. Though we today are not slaves, nor are we facing active persecution as believers then, still everyone at some time encounters some type of mistreatment or undeserved blame. Are we prepared to take it without complaint?

Worse than this, Christ was cruelly and inexcusably wronged; yet He felt no resentment against His injurers. *"When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats"* (1 Pet. 2:23 NIV). No wonder the centurion, witnessing such character, exclaimed, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"* (Matt. 27:54). Christ was the perfect example of patience in suffering.

What was Jesus saying to us? When you are distressed by the treatment you received from those who are unjust or unreasonable, this is the time to prove the reality of your convictions. Do not retaliate. Do not even allow yourself to cherish a thought of ill against another (1 Thess. 5:15). Remember the example of Christ, cultivate His spirit, and instead, trust the wrong *"to Him who judges justly"* (1 Pet. 2:23 NIV).

Even the most unwelcome, unwanted circumstances can be used to the highest results. Taken in the spirit of Christ, life's storms can only cast up rare treasure that gives spiritual advantage.



2 How To Love

Another outstanding example from Jesus was His view of love. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another"* (John 13:34).

It is a love so far removed from the level of instincts that it must be commanded: *"A new commandment I give unto you."* But like every other commandment from our Lord, He was the first to comply with it Himself. He did not ask His followers to do anything that He was not willing to do Himself. This is why He is our perfect example.

"Love one another," He said, *"as I have loved you."*

What can we learn about this mutual love that Christ commands? First, it is a special love shared by those who belong to Christ's family.

We can learn something about the nature of Christ's love by observing His love for His disciples. First, from Christ's standpoint, *it was unselfish*. And because there was no jealousy or rivalry on the part of Christ, *it was pure*. Then, too, *it was practical*. It was love that bears its ripe fruit in deeds. It walked in Jesus' feet, spoke with His tongue, worked in His hands. Everywhere He went, it was evident.

Following means
matching the stride of
the One who went
before us.

What made this a “new” commandment? Christ’s love was age-old in its principles, but it might be called “new” because of its complete expression in the life of Christ. Here was the perfect Example, the perfect life fully lived. No longer was the commandment encased in cold, lifeless words; now it was living flesh and blood, warm and animate. Then, too, Christ’s love was new in the motives it inspired. Jesus’ first love was to please His heavenly Father (John 8:29). Could His disciples share that love? They could, if they had the honesty of heart that this love required; if they had their Master’s perseverance and His deep desire to do right.

The result? *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35). The effects would be inward and outward. Others will see it. Levels of achievement in various fields have always been distinguished by different outward marks. Soldiers of different countries have long been identified by their uniforms. The Pharisees and Sadducees had their distinguishing phylacteries and ceremonies, and various kingdoms have their coats of arms. Jesus of Nazareth chose as His coat of arms these three words: *“Love one another.”* Then He added, *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* Not, if you have wealth and learning, or if you have a long face or a pious smile, but if you *“have love for one another.”*

It is said that in the early centuries after Christ, the bond between believers was so intense that the persecuting pagans exclaimed, *“See how these Christians love one another!”* Even if believers could not meet to worship as they would have liked, or sing His praise, they still could wave this flag before a hostile world. What shame on us if the love of our Master is not seen in us!



How To Forgive

Do we notice how many of Jesus’ footprints have to do with our relationships to one another? And here is one more: the ability to forgive.

Jesus was realistic. He did not picture a Pollyanna world without problems. He knew that in the daily intercourse of life, people would offend one another—innocently or intentionally. There would be differences in feeling and opinion, even among believers. How could these differences be resolved? What should be done?

Follow Christ’s footprints, and there is no question. There must be a spirit of forgiveness. We never have a right to hold a grudge against anyone. *“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you”* (Col. 3:13–14 NIV).

If Christ can forgive us, how can we possibly hold feelings against our brother?

If we would follow Christ, we must cultivate this Christ-like forgiveness. As His servants, we are bound by His example.

Christ’s example points up yet another fact: that any quarrel or disagreement requires two. If either is forgiving, the quarrel is over. Do we wonder why Paul advised, *“forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against any”*?

What if our brother is not willing to change? We are still not justified in holding any resentment against him. A Christ-like spirit will make us so humble that we cannot wish ill on the offender, even if he is hard and impenitent. Shall we make the impenitent offender set the standard for our forgiveness?

As long as we are unforgiving, we cut ourselves off from His forgiveness, for Christ has promised to forgive us only as we forgive our brother. If we refuse to forgive, let us not dare to pray.



How To Die—and Live

Another powerful example from Christ is seen in the spiritual significance of His death and His life. *“For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all [time]; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:10–11).

Paul tells us first how Christ died, then says that we must die *“likewise.”* Paul tells us how Christ lived, then says we must live *“likewise.”* But notice that death precedes life. It is *“death to sin,”* a death of our old nature. No change is so dras-

Jesus of Nazareth
chose as His
coat of arms these
three words:
“Love one another.”

tic as this death of our old self. Our “new” life does not depend on outward circumstances—the color of our skin, or the climate of our birthplace, or the nature of our occupation, our education, wealth, age or station in life. None of these make us either “dead” or “alive” to God. But as we die to sin, put to death the old nature within us, struggle by struggle, bit by bit, we become alive to God.

Christ walked this way ahead of us, and has left footprints for us to follow. And “if we be dead with Him,” we shall one day “live with Him” (2 Tim. 2:11–12).



5 How To Keep a Right Attitude

Here is a giant footprint of Christ which we must try hard to follow. This footprint is visible to us in this simple statement: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5 NIV). “You must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had” (1 Pet. 4:1 NLT).

Here we have one of the greatest challenges of all. It is easy to imitate another’s actions, even to follow their instructions or directions. How different to adopt their attitudes.

How shall we begin? How can we take on Christ’s attitude?

Christ did not live for pleasure. He did not seek status or honor in this world. He did not live for ease or comfort. He lived to please His Father, to do His Father’s bidding (John 5:30), to fulfill His Father’s will (John 4:34). He lived to preach the Gospel of the coming Kingdom (Luke 8:1), and to prepare Himself to be its glorious King (John 18:37).

If we would walk in Christ’s footprints, we must share His concerns, His thoughts, His mind. It should be the object of our hearts to know Christ, to love Christ, to be like Christ—in the outward life of obedience and in the inner life of our mind. It affects how we act toward our spouse, our children, our friends, our employer, and even strangers.



6 How To Put on Christ’s Character

Another footprint to follow is what Paul called Christ’s character. “Put on the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, and never think how to gratify the cravings of the flesh” (Rom. 13:14 Moffatt). By instinct we want what we want. Jesus did not go after the things He wanted. He said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). He “did not please Himself” (Rom. 15:3).

Putting on Christ’s character is a picture drawn from the familiar routine of putting on clothing. We put off the old, filthy garments of our natural characters so that we can put on the fresh, clean garments of right doing. The two actions are simultaneous. When we put on Christ’s character, we put off our natural habits and ways.

To wear Christ’s character is our life goal, to attain “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” to “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:13, 15).

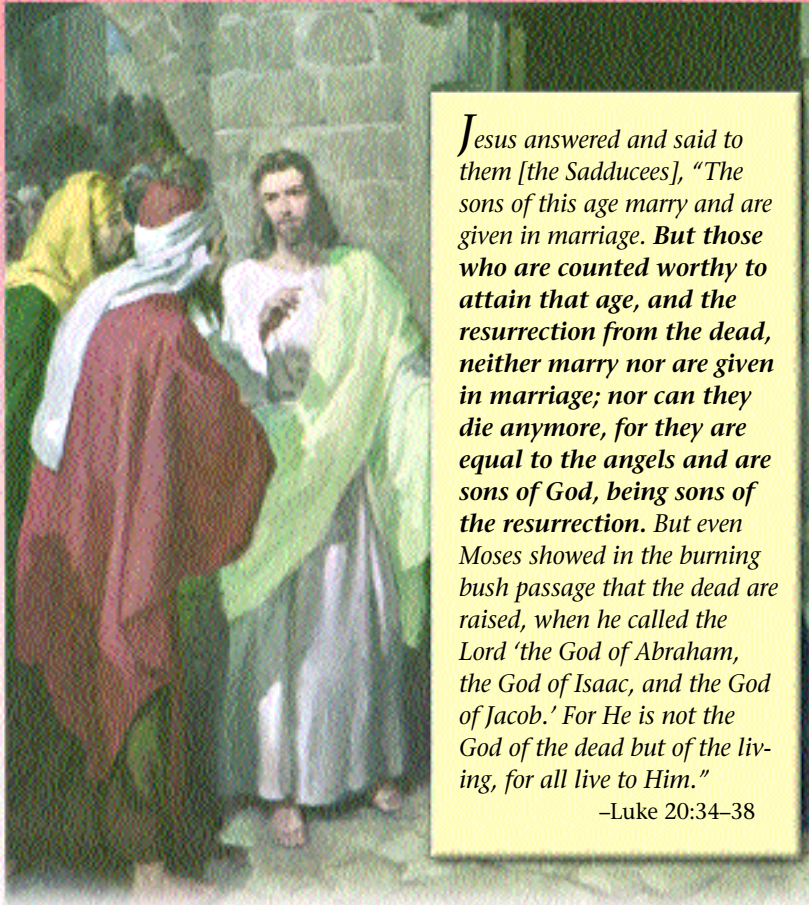
How do we prepare to meet our Lord? By becoming like Him. Jesus loves most the ones who are most like Himself (John 14:15; 15:14).

Christ is coming to be glorified in His saints—those who have grown into His likeness; and they shall in turn be glorified in Him. Our work now is to occupy each precious moment putting on the character of Christ. This is the apparel we will want to be wearing when our King arrives. For our garments of character must be all made in advance. It is written of the bride the Lamb’s wife, that she “hath made herself ready,” that she is clothed in “fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints” (Rev. 19:8).

If we would share Christ’s blessings, if we would obtain the life He has offered, we must follow. Again and again Jesus said it: “Follow me.... My sheep hear My voice ... and they follow Me” (John 10:27). And again, “If any man serve me, let him follow me” (John 12:26). And again, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

Have you heard the Master’s “Follow Me”? Then follow, all the way into the Kingdom! ♦

Christ has
promised to forgive
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Jesus answered and said to them [the Sadducees], "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."

—Luke 20:34–38

The Sadducees' question. The Sadducees were always trying to trap Jesus with a question He could not answer. Jesus taught the resurrection, and they did not believe in a resurrection. They believed that the only hope of life after death was through the survival of one's family, and so they practiced levirate marriage (the practice of marrying the widow of one's brother) to ensure descendants to carry on the family name.

To make Jesus' teaching about the resurrection seem ridiculous, they presented Him with a scenario where one woman outlived seven husbands who were brothers, then died. Then came their stinging question: *"In the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife"* (Luke 20:33).

The Sadducees placed all their faith in the here and now. Their god was only the god of this life. Their view was little different from that of the man who wrote, "Setting suns shall rise in glory but when little life is over, there's the end of all the story. We shall sleep and wake no more."

Jesus' answer. Jesus dealt with the Sadducees' question seriously because the issue was serious. Someone has said that death is nature's way of saying that high interest rates aren't our biggest problem. The fear of death has forever plagued humankind. Humans have

THE GOD OF THE LIVING

by RUSSELL HAMBY

invented all kinds of means to attempt to evade its finality, with no success.

But Jesus had the answer. His response to the Sadducees says that one does not need an heir to thwart death. One needs to be *"counted worthy"* by God. Each of those *"worthy"* ones will experience a resurrection—God will bring them back to life, and more—they will never die! Said Jesus, *"Those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection"* (Luke 20:35–37). By the power of God these worthy individuals will be restored to life and will be given life unending—they will be made *"equal to the angels"*!

God is the God of the living. To further refute the Sadducees' misconception, Jesus recalled the words of Moses at the burning bush. Moses had addressed God as *"the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,"* and by quoting it, Jesus affirmed Moses' confidence that even though sleeping the faithful are not erased from God's memory. The covenant relationship of God with these godly ones was not a temporary bond "till death do us part." We may lose our friends in death, but not God. Even though they sleep for a time, God will awaken them at the resurrection and give them their inheritance, a place in His Kingdom. As Jesus said about these very special, righteous ones, *"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Matt. 13:43).

Death is for us the *"last enemy,"* and it will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). God will not allow this enemy to separate any of His children from His love (Rom. 8:38). He will give to those who seek Him a place in His everlasting Kingdom (Dan. 7:27).

God is not the God of decomposed bones and faded memories. Those who live for God will be given *"glory, honor, and immortality...eternal life"* (Rom. 2:7). They shall be granted the right to eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7), to eat and live for ever! ♦



A Greater Pentecost Is Coming!

In ancient Israel, Pentecost was a happy festival. When the barley harvest began in the springtime, during the first month of the year, loyal Israelites were under obligation not to eat or use any of the new crop until they had used it to bake two loaves and had taken them to the temple to be offered to the Lord. This ceremony was called waving the first sheaf before the Lord (Lev. 23:10–11), and the Israelites observed it as a day of praise. This waving event took place on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year (Abib, or Nisan). Fifty days later was Pentecost, another celebration, marking the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. The time of the event gave Pentecost (literally in Greek, *Pentekoste*, meaning “fiftieth”) the name of “Feast of Weeks” (Ex. 23:16; 34:22), because it was celebrated a week of weeks, or 50 days after the waving of the first sheaf (Lev. 23:15). In the later years, Pentecost was also kept as a remembrance of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.

Since Pentecost marked the end of one harvest and the beginning of another, wasn't it a fitting time for the outpouring of the power of the Holy Spirit in the days of the Apostles? We read, “when the day of Pentecost was fully come,” when the disciples were “all with one accord in one place, there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1–4). What an indescribable experience it must have been!

What a day! What a Pentecost, greater than any of the preceding fifteen hundred years!

On this Pentecost, the ancient feast took on new meaning. From this time forward, Christians would remember Pentecost not as a day marking the summer harvests but as the day when Jesus sent special power to His people, to launch a new missionary campaign that would reach to all parts of the then-known world and fulfill the commission Jesus had given to His Apostles, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations,... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20).

What was the power that came on Pentecost? It was not power that was theirs to use as they pleased. It was not theirs merely to make them look impressive in the eyes of their peers. It was not even given to keep them physically strong and relieve their personal pain and suffering. The power of the Holy Spirit was power with a purpose. It was power meant to make them living witnesses of all that they had seen and heard and been taught during the preceding three years that they had spent with Christ (Acts 1:8–9). It was power that was theirs to confirm the words which they would speak and the witness which they would give; it was the “Promise of My [Christ's] Father” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4) given so that those who heard and saw could not possibly doubt the God who was behind them (Mark 16:20; Rom. 15:19). It was power that was meant to bring in a great harvest for God.

The greater, coming Pentecost will be when the Lord pours out His power “on all flesh” and “all the ends of the earth

shall see the salvation of our God” (Isa. 52:10)! The time for this great outpouring is not revealed, but when God begins His great, open work on earth, once again His people will be given power to confirm their words with marvelous “signs following.” Jesus told of this time when He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12).

This is the promise of our God. It is no fanciful dream; it is all true. Elijah the prophet will come (Matt. 17:11) to restore the power of the Holy Spirit and to begin the greatest period of reformation this earth has ever seen.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.

For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,

And streams in the desert.”

(Isaiah 35:5–6)

Then the dead in Christ will be resurrected (1 Thess. 4:16–17), and together with the living believers will rise to “meet the Lord in the air” as He returns. All this—and much more—will come with the great new outpouring of power.

That greater Pentecost, that second outpouring, that “latter rain” forecast by the prophet Joel is coming, and with it will come the solution to all the problems our world faces today, along with the fruition of all our hopes and highest expectations.

What a Day that will be! ♦

The Cost In Pentecost

Was there *cost* in the ancient Israelite feast called Pentecost?

The celebration of Pentecost was one of three festivals mandated for all the males of the families of Israel to observe each year, and the command was, “*They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed*” (Deut. 16:16). Always the first and the best belonged to God. Each had to bring the first of his crop to offer to the Lord. Then he was free to use it for himself and his family.

Was this the conviction of those early disciples of Jesus who shared in the memorable Pentecost when the Holy Spirit power was given? Did those disciples feel their account with God was “*Paid in Full*,” that there was no cost for them to meet?

Those disciples had a double task. They knew they faced persecution and suffering. In addition, they had their own task of character-building to complete, to become pure and holy like their Master, to complete what they had begun. This is part of God’s way of working. Where much is given, much is required; and on that day of Pentecost, much *was* given. To have in one’s own being the living power of God—what a tremendous privilege! Was it not reasonable that they owed, in return, some special obligation, duty or responsibility?

The Cost of Commitment

Being a recipient of the Holy Spirit power brought with it, first of all, a *commitment to a lifelong loyalty*. If they fell away from the faith at any time, they could not repent and be re-instated. Doesn’t God give everyone the opportunity to return when they have apostatized? Not those who had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. For them, the sin of apostasy was without pardon. The warning was plain: “*It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the*

Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:4–6). “*It is impossible...if they shall fall away, to renew them again.*” A harsh and stark fact, perhaps; but God meant what He said. High privilege brought with it high responsibility; there was *cost* in Pentecost.

The Cost in Suffering

There was also another cost: the cost of suffering. Inevitably they would be persecuted as they went out to give their message to a hostile world. “*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution,*” wrote the Apostle Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:12). *All* will experience some type of suffering; but there was possibility—great possibility—that these first-century believers would have to suffer physically for His sake. Even to identify oneself with the cause of Christ in that day might mean placing oneself in mortal danger. It was part of the price of belonging at that time. It was a cost that went with the Pentecost blessings, the great privilege of experiencing the power of God firsthand.

Even so, the Apostles viewed their persecutions as an opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ. As the Apostle Peter wrote, “*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.*” What was to be their attitude? “*But rejoice*”—why? “*to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings.*” They were to view it as an opportunity to share in Christ’s sufferings, “*that when His Glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy*” (1 Pet. 4:12–13).

The Apostle Paul also warned that there could be serious persecution in his

*A faith worth
living for is
also a faith worth
dying for.*

letter to the Thessalonians, where he said “we must expect to have persecutions” (1 Thess. 3:4 JB). Or to Timothy, “If we suffer [with Christ], we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12).

There are two words used in the New Testament for suffering and persecution. One is *pascho*, which is literally “suffering” such as Christ suffered physical crucifixion. The other is *thlipsis*, which refers to “trials, troubles, tribulation, pressures.” We today experience only the latter—the pressures of circumstances, the tribulation that accompanies sacrifice, or the trials that result from pursuing our own stubborn way; but *both* types of suffering were part of the cost the early Christians had to pay. The way to life was indeed strait, narrow and difficult, just as Jesus had said (Matt. 7:13–14).

But the Apostle Paul was ready and willing to meet the cost. Hear him reciting a page from his own book of experience: “Overworked,...scourged more severely, more often imprisoned, many a time face to face with death. Five times the Jews have given me the thirty-nine strokes; three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I have been shipwrecked, and for twenty-four hours I was adrift on the open sea. I have been constantly on the road; I have met dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my fellow-countrymen, dangers from foreigners; dangers in towns, dangers in the country, dangers at sea, dangers from false friends. I have toiled and drudged, I have often gone without sleep; hungry and thirsty, I have often gone fasting; and I have suffered from cold and exposure” (2 Cor. 11:23–27 NEB). This great Apostle

enjoyed the highest of privileges—a miraculous meeting with Christ to send him on his way, only a few days later a blessing with Holy Spirit power; numerous other visions and contact with angels. Stupendous privileges!—but was there not a cost? Jesus told at the very first: “I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).

Only “Light Afflictions”

What was Paul’s spirit through it all? “For our light affliction,” he wrote, “which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). “Light affliction”...and “but for a moment,” “troubles which are soon over” (JB), which “though they weigh little, train us for the carrying of a weight of eternal glory.” In his view, it was worth every penny of the cost!

Paul was not alone in the suffering-cost. The book of Hebrews speaks of those who suffered “by being yourselves publicly exposed to insults and violence” (Heb. 10:33 JB; see also Heb. 11:37–38). Yes, there was cost. But, was not a faith worth living for, also a faith worth dying for? This was the attitude of those early stalwarts, and they were more than willing to pay the price—not only to compensate for the privileges they were enjoying then but in prospect of the “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”!

The Prize Is Worth It!

Shall we be any less willing to pay the cost, we who have been invited to share in the greater outpouring of Divine power that is just ahead? The Pentecost day when Jesus sent power

from on high was shared by only a few, and the cost likewise was assumed by only a few. But a greater outpouring of power is coming that will be celebrated worldwide, and will benefit all who live. It will be worth all it costs!

Jesus said it this way: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

The Apostle John said it this way: “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). ♦

OBITUARY

Gerald J. Vosburgh

On March 1, 2004, a long-time acquaintance and friend Gerald J. Vosburgh passed away. He was the last member of the Vosburgh family of seven, who had been members and friends of the Megiddo Church since 1921.

Gerald was born at Palatine, New York on November 1, 1916. He worked the family farm until 1980, when his brother Ralph died suddenly. At that time he gratefully accepted an invitation from the Megiddo Church to come to Rochester, where he quickly became the overseer of the large community garden and lent a generous and good spirited right hand to his friends and neighbors.

Never afraid of hard work, Gerald helped wherever he could—gardening, painting, shoveling snow, he always did his best. He was honest to the penny and expected the same of others.

Funeral services were conducted by Associate Pastor Gerald Payne on March 4, 2004. Interment was in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Rochester, New York.

ANSWERS TO BIBLE QUESTIONS ON PAGE 19

PLANTS OF THE BIBLE

1. Moses (Ex. 3:2–4)
2. Lebanon (Ps. 104:16)
3. Gopher (Gen. 6:13–14)
4. A gourd (Jonah 4:6)
5. Fig (Matt. 21:19–21)
6. Zacchaeus (Luke 19:4–5)
7. Grapes (Num. 13:21–25)
8. Deborah (Judges 4:4–5)
9. Almonds (Num. 17:8)
10. Olive (Gen. 8:11)
11. Oak (2 Sam. 18:9)
12. Fig tree (1 Kings 4:25)
13. Bramble (Judges 9:7–15)

14. Juniper (Broom) (1 Kings 19:2–4)
15. Naboth (1 Kings 21:1)
16. A mustard seed (Matt. 17:20)

FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

1. Seven (Gen. 29:17–18)
2. Luz (Gen. 28:18–19)
3. Land of Moriah (Gen. 22:1–2)
4. Bilhah (Gen. 30:4–8)
5. Keturah (Gen. 25:1)
6. Brother (Gen. 24:29)
7. Isaac (Gen. 26:17–33)
8. Benjamin (Gen. 35:16–19)
9. Eliezer (Gen. 25:1–2; 15:2)

HILLS AND MOUNTAINS

1. Like rams (Ps. 114:4)
2. Mountains of Ararat (Gen. 8:4)
3. Mount Moriah (2 Chron. 3:1)
4. Sisera (Judges 4:12–16)
5. Ten commandments received (Ex. 19 & 20)
6. Nebo (Deut. 32:48–52)
7. Altar (Josh. 8:30)
8. Aaron (Num. 20:27–28)
9. Fall on us (Luke 23:30)
10. Held up his hands (Ex. 17:8–12)
11. Brought low (Luke 3:2–5)
12. Esau (Deut. 2:5)

FAITH in Action

Bible Text: Acts 15:36–41 NLT

36 After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return to each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are getting along."

37 Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark.

38 But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not shared in their work.

39 Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus.

40 Paul chose Silas, and the believers sent them off, entrusting them to the Lord's grace.

41 So they traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches there.



Insight

When Christian Brothers Disagree

How do we feel toward Brother Paul and Brother Barnabas when they are at odds? Don't we see them as reflections of ourselves?

The challenge is to resolve disagreements constructively—in a Christ-like spirit—without anger, without unkind words, without feelings of hate, or rivalry, or contention.

We do not have enough information to be able to judge whether Paul and Barnabas were right in how they resolved their disagreement. But knowing what we do, can't we see ourselves in them? And doesn't this little example from Scripture encourage us? It lets us know that these people in the Bible were real people, with real human failings. But we have every reason to believe they resolved it and went on as Christian brothers—just as we can. They had to learn to forgive, and to be longsuffering, just as we must.

by RUTH E. SISSON

"LET'S GO AGAIN"



READ ACTS 15:36–41

Paul's enthusiasm was at its peak. The Church at Jerusalem had decided that Gentiles could come into the Church without first adhering to Jewish customs and rites. He felt all the time that it was the only right way—what difference could it make whether a new believer gave up worshipping idols, or gave up an empty form and custom? Now Paul could go straight ahead! His heart was still pounding with the words of Jesus from his Damascus Road experience, when Jesus had said concerning him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

That day, life for this dedicated Jew-by-birth had taken a 180-degree turn,



and now his heart burned for his Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ. Ever since returning from his first missionary journey, Paul thought about them, dreamed about them, worried about them, prayed for them, yearned over them, until there was only one solution—he had to go and see them.

And so he addressed his comrade Barnabas: *“Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord and see how they are doing”* (Acts 15:36).

Wasn't it dangerous to go back to cities where the persecution had been so hot? back to where he had been assaulted, beaten, even stoned? Paul did not give it a second thought. He was ready to go.

And so was Barnabas.

But there was one problem. Barnabas was determined to take John Mark with them. Paul was just as determined that Mark should *not* go. No doubt Paul was thinking, “He let us down once. I don't want to risk it.” And doubtless Barnabas was thinking, “Mark needs another chance. We've all made mistakes.”

What was the solution?

There was no way they could agree. And so they separated.

1. Who was Barnabas' companion of choice? Where did they go? (Acts 15:39) _____
2. Who was Paul's companion of choice? (Acts 15:40) _____
3. Which direction did Paul go? (Acts 15:41) _____

Will serious, dedicated Christian brothers always agree? No. What is the right thing to do?

Handling our differences in a Christ-like manner is a challenge. We naturally have different views and different opinions, whether in the first century or the twenty-first. These views and opinions become matters of right or wrong, depending on how we respond to one another.

Even though there was a rift at the time, we know from the Scriptures that

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TODD BOLEN IN ISRAEL



LYSTRA



(above) Unexcavated remains of Lystra Tel

Lystra, home of Timothy, was a Roman colony set up by Augustus Caesar to protect routes into the Taurus Mountains. (seen behind the Lystra tel) Augustus also ordered the building of the Imperial Road between Lystra and Pisidian Antioch, likely the road used by the Apostle Paul.

Among the remains is evidence of a temple to Zeus near the gates of the city, which explains the excitement of the people to hail Barnabas as Zeus (Acts 14:11-13).



Did you know...

Goodbye, Brother Barnabas

When Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus (Acts 15:39), this is about the last we hear of him. From this point forward, Paul is center stage.

But we can believe Brother Barnabas went quietly on serving the Lord, even though the mainstream of events passed him by.

We would like to know how he and Mark made out on their trip to Cyprus, who they talked with, and what events followed.

As for Mark, we learn from the Bible that Paul later endorsed him as one who was “profitable” for him in the ministry. Mark also wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Peter called Mark his son (1 Pet. 5:13), and sent his greetings to the brethren along with his first epistle.



Insight

How Can Conflict Be Resolved?

1 By open, honest discussion.

Sometimes we disagree because both parties do not know all the facts.

What were the issues underlying their disagreement? Barnabas could have said to Paul, “*What is causing us to disagree? Let's sit down and talk about it.*” When they had shared all the facts about each other's of view, they might have been nearer a solution.

2 By prayer.

When we pray about our differences, when we seek God's will, we look at our problem from God's point of view and ask, What is best for the spiritual good of all concerned? What does God want us to do?

Prayer can break down walls of hostility by replacing the “my way” or “your way” with God's way.

3 By a third person.

Sometimes discussion is more fruitful if a trusted third person can be present during the discussion, one who can see the situation more objectively.

4 By compromise.

Is there an alternate plan acceptable to both?

In this situation, perhaps Barnabas took Mark on the shorter, less demanding missionary venture to Crete to see how he would fare. This may have been a point of compromise; we are not told.

When Christians talk peaceably and in a Christ-like spirit, there is always a solution.



A closer look

If truth is eternal...

If truth is eternal, why did the Apostles have to figure out a “new” policy in Jerusalem after Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey? When Gentile believers started coming into the Church, wouldn’t they all have known what was the right policy, without having to meet and discuss the issues?

The point to recognize is that they were talking about a local application, not about God’s eternal plan or purpose. Nothing they said or did changed God’s plan. They were only trying to apply God’s principles to their situation.

Principles are eternal, rules are temporary. At the time of the Apostle Paul, the Jews were bent on adhering to many details (rules) that had no meaning. They had lost sight of the reason behind those rules.

During the years when God was working chiefly with the Israelite nation, there was no serious issue about non-Jews.

God had given His law to Moses for the governing of the nation, and it became the civil law for those living under it. The Israelites and the strangers among them had to obey the same law. Those seeking eternal salvation had to adhere to the law of the land as well as the higher law of God, God’s law of faith and obedience.

When the Israelites were still in the wilderness, God gave them many laws to civilize them and teach them obedience. By the time of Paul, Israel had ceased to be a nation, and these laws were no longer binding, yet some zealous Jews insisted on imposing the laws on newcomers into the faith. If they as Jews had to obey these laws, why shouldn’t non-Jews have to also?

Such thinking easily comes from motives that are tinged with pride or jealousy. If I have to do it, it isn’t fair unless you have to do it also. But truth is not about fairness; it is about what is right in the sight of God.

Rules provide temporary guidelines to help us while we are learning to live by principle. When those rules become a hindrance, or are no longer meaningful, they should be removed. For example, the Israelite law stated that no one could harvest his crop of wheat until the first sheaf had been dedicated to the Lord. When the people were largely rural, this was meaningful. But when the people were no longer agricultural, the rule had no meaning. However, the principle remained: Always the first and best belongs to God. That is why it is important for us to offer prayer to God before we eat, to thank Him for providing for our needs. After all, we don’t make the rain. We don’t provide sunshine; we don’t make soil; and we can’t give life to a seed. All the credit goes to God, as we recognize our total dependence on Him. After we have offered Him thanks, then we can take what He has provided—with gratitude.



Insight

The Silent partner, Silas

The Bible tells us that *“Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went...”* (Acts 15:38-41).

“And he [Paul] went...” Paul and Silas went together, but clearly the spotlight is on Paul, not Silas. Paul is the born leader, and Silas is the silent partner, the patient follower, Paul’s right hand at every step, doing everything he could to make Paul’s work a success.

Leader and follower—the Church needs both. The work of the Lord needs both.

Are you called to follow? Are you in that nameless position of Silas, quietly doing your work for the Lord, unknown and unnoticed? Has all the praise and acclaim and encouragement passed you by? Don’t despair. The Bible says, *“God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister”* (Heb. 6:10). Every willing worker will be rewarded according to his works, whether that work is done in the spotlight, or in the dark. All work done for the Lord will be recompensed—abundantly.

the disagreement was finally resolved, because Paul later wanted Mark to come to him in Rome (2 Tim. 4:11), saying that he was one who was *“profitable”* to him for the ministry.

Forward!



READ ACTS 16:1-5

4. Where was Paul and Silas’ first stop? Where was their second stop? (16:1) _____
5. What had happened in these two cities on Paul’s first missionary journey? (Acts 14:8-20) _____

As the two brothers headed north through Syria, it is very likely that they passed right through Paul’s hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia. Paul saw the river and the hills, and the roads he knew so well. What would he have been thinking as he walked down the streets of his boyhood town? Wouldn’t he have been longing to stop and talk, to look up some old friends and old landmarks? Not Brother Paul! His eyes were fixed forward! Tarsus was no longer “home.” His mind was set on answering the call of Christ, to go wherever Christ sent him. His heart



THE CILICIAN GATES

This pass through the Taurus Mountains, located about 30 miles north of Tarsus, allows travel between Syria and central Asia Minor.

was on the other side of those mountains, in Derbe and Lystra, where new believers were anxiously waiting for encouragement, the hope, the love, the instruction that Paul and Silas were bringing.

And there was that important letter to deliver from the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem, so that the new converts would know that it did not make any difference whether one was born Jew or born Gentile (Rom. 1:16-17; Matt. 24:13).

Paul wasn't looking back. He was pressing forward!

A new travel companion

6. What very special person did Paul find in Lystra? _____
7. How did the people of the local Church feel toward this person? (16:1-2)

8. What was Paul's wish for this young man? (16:3) _____
9. What made Timothy such an "ideal" choice as Paul's helper? (16:3; 2 Tim. 1:4-5) _____



Young Timothy listens to his grandmother Lois read Jewish Scripture while his mother Eunice sews.

From what we are told, Timothy grew up in a home where the parents were divided on their religious beliefs. Nothing is said of Timothy's father, except that he was "a Greek." But he must have allowed his wife Eunice and mother-in-law Lois to teach his young son the Scriptures, because Paul wrote of Timothy that "from a child" he had known the "holy Scriptures," which are able to make us "wise for salvation" (2 Tim 3:15).

When Paul finds Timothy, likely a lad in his teens, Timothy has already made a good start. He has a solid foundation of genuine faith (2 Tim. 1:5) and a deep inner commitment. He isn't a believer just because his mother and grandmother were. He has already made the faith his own.

The Bible says that Paul circumcised Timothy "because of the Jews who were in that region" (Acts 16:3). Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? Wasn't this sending the message that Paul really didn't

believe what he was preaching, that the law of Moses had to be adhered to?

No one realized more clearly than Paul that God regarded all—Jew or Gentile—equally. Adhering to the rites of Judaism gave one absolutely no advantage to salvation. In Christ "there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision" (Col. 3:11).

At the same time, it seems that Paul was thinking about his mission and what would make it successful, and wanted to remove any obstacles from those who would be hearing him. Timothy would be with him, and non-Jews would reject him because his mother was a Jewess. Jews would reject him because his father was a Greek and he was not circumcised according to their law.

To remedy this possible obstacle to the Gospel, Paul circumcised Timothy. In doing this, Paul was not compromising any principle. He merely wanted a successful mission. He did not want to give people any excuse to reject his message.

When Titus joined him, Paul did not take this step because Titus was a Greek (Gal. 2:3).

Bible Text: Acts 16:1-5 NLT

1 Paul and Silas went first to Derbe and then on to Lystra. There they met Timothy, a young disciple whose mother was a Jewish believer, but whose father was a Greek.

2 Timothy was well thought of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium,

3 so Paul wanted him to join them on their journey. In deference to the Jews of the area, he arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left, for everyone knew that his father was a Greek.

4 Then they went from town to town, explaining the decision regarding the commandments that were to be obeyed, as decided by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

5 So the churches were strengthened in their faith and grew daily in numbers.



Take heed

No Second-generation believers

Timothy was not a believer because his mother and grandmother believed. He was standing solidly on his own convictions. His faith was his own.

There are no second-generation believers. Even if our parents were believers, each of us has to study the evidence, be convinced, and make our own decision. Each of us has to say, "This I believe, here I stand, and this I will do, God helping me." We cannot expect God to accept us on the merits of our parents, any more than he will condemn us if they were lacking in faith.

Each generation has to internalize their beliefs and make them their own. Each generation has to test and discover anew what it means to be like Christ. We cannot coast on the glory and faith of the past. We cannot claim any merits from what others have done. Our faith, our convictions, our Christianity, our spirituality, have to be meaningful to us and transform our hearts, or they are worthless.

Always remember, God will judge and reward each of us according to what we—not our fathers, or sisters, or grandparents—have done (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12).

Bible Text: Acts 16:6-10 NLT

6 Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had told them not to go into the province of Asia at that time.

7 Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not let them go.

8 So instead, they went on through Mysia to the city of Troas.

9 That night Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia in northern Greece, pleading with him, "Come over here and help us."

10 So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, for we could only conclude that God was calling us to preach the Good News there.



A closer look

A Brother named Silas...

The name of Silas first appears in the Book of Acts near the end of the Church Council at Jerusalem. One of the "leaders among the brothers" in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22 NRSV), Silas was chosen by the Church to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to deliver the letter stating the new Church policies for Gentile converts.

Silas is also called a prophet (Acts 15:32). This could have meant he was a capable teacher, perhaps one who had special ability by Holy Spirit power. We read that in Antioch he "spoke extensively to the Christians, encouraging and strengthening their faith" (Acts 15:32 NLT). And when the rest of the brethren returned to Jerusalem, Silas stayed in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, likely to help them teach and preach the Word of the Lord (Acts 15:34-35).

When Paul was looking for a brother to accompany him on his second missionary journey, he quickly chose Silas (Acts 15:40).

Paul and Silas were the first to travel into Macedonia at the command of the Lord (Acts 16:9). At Philippi, Silas was Paul's partner in prison and suffering. Paul and Silas sang praises to God at midnight in the Philippian jail, after being severely beaten. And together they were released from the prison by a Divinely-sent earthquake, that miraculously broke all the chains in the prison.

Paul and Silas were together at Lydia's house.

Later, Paul and Silas narrowly missed another beating in Thessalonica. They traveled together, and suffered together. And everywhere they went, they left a small group of believers behind them.

10. What did Paul leave behind as he visited the Churches he had founded? (16:4) _____
11. What was the effect of Paul's visit on the Churches in that area? (16:5) _____

God made the plans



READ ACTS 16:6-10

Paul and his companions were not traveling on their own. They were missionaries for God, and were guided by Holy Spirit power. They made their own plans, but at times, God overruled them.

12. Where did the missionaries want to go after leaving Galatia, and the Holy Spirit said no? (16:6) _____



Timothy waves goodbye to his mother and grandmother.

13. Why didn't they go into Bithynia? (16:7) _____

Paul was planning to visit other Churches in Asia—perhaps Ephesus, Laodicea, Thyatira, Pergamum. But God said no. "*The spirit did not permit*" (16:7).

So they redrew their plans, and went on to Troas.

14. What happened to Paul at Troas? (16:9) _____
15. How did Paul interpret this vision? (16:10) _____
16. When did Paul respond to this vision? (16:10) _____
17. Who joined Paul and Silas and Timothy at Troas?—notice the reporter suddenly says "we..." (16:8-10) _____



Paul receives the Macedonian call in vision at Troas (Acts 16:9-10).

Paul and Silas now had doubled their number—they had added both Timothy, and Luke. No doubt the traveling was safer with more of them traveling together, and think of the fellowship! Think of the hours they had to share their convictions, their faith, and their bright hope! Even though they had none of the conveniences to which we are accustomed, we do not hear of any complaints, or any desire to go back. They just kept pressing on! ♦

to be continued



Fig

Figs are slowgrowing trees, bearing fruit for about 10 months of the year. The large leaves make useful wrappings. Cakes of dried figs were excellent food and easy to carry.

PLANTS OF THE BIBLE

1. A burning bush caught this man's attention.
2. Cedars are renowned in the Bible as coming from this place.
3. Noah's ark was made out of this type of wood.
4. This plant provided Jonah with shade (for a while).
5. Jesus condemned this tree because it had no fruit.
6. This man climbed a tree in order to see Jesus.
7. The spies brought back a sample of this fruit, so heavy that two men had to carry it.
8. This judge of Israel is said to have dwelt under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel.
9. Aaron's rod that budded brought forth this type of fruit.
10. Noah sent out a dove from the ark which brought back a leaf plucked from this plant.
11. Absalom was fleeing battle when he got his head caught in this type of plant.
12. When Solomon reigned, it is said that every man dwelt in safety, under a vine and this tree.
13. Jotham spoke a parable about trees. In the parable, what agreed to be king?
14. When Elijah fled from Jezebel and asked God that he might die, he did so under this tree.
15. This man had a vineyard next to the king's palace.
16. According to Jesus, in order to move a mountain, we need an amount of faith comparable to this.

FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS

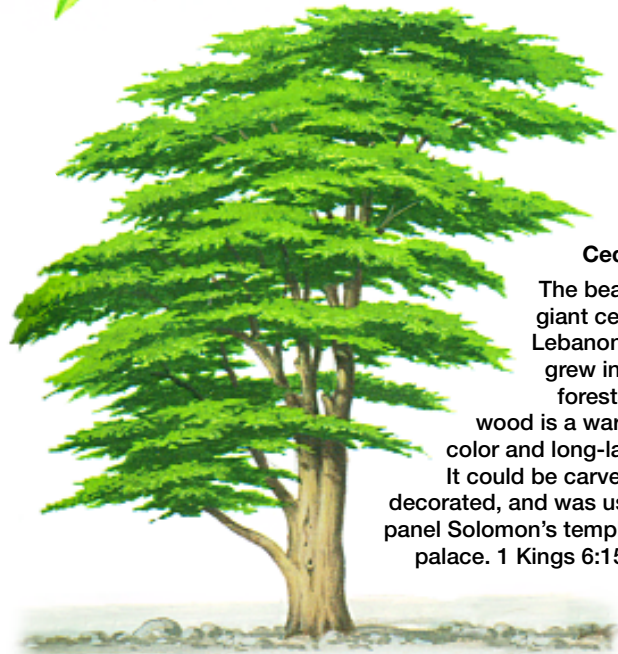
1. Before being deceived, how many years had Jacob planned to serve in order to marry Rachel?
2. What was the name of "Bethel" before it was changed by Jacob?
3. To where was Abraham instructed to take his son Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice?
4. Name the mother of Dan and Naphtali.
5. Who did Abraham take to wife after Sarah died?
6. What relationship was Laban to Rebekah?
7. Who named his wells Esek, Sitnah, Shebah, and Rehoboth?
8. Rachel died while giving birth to what son?
9. Which of the following was not one of Abraham's sons: Medan, Midian, Eliezer?



*Know
Your
Bible?*

Almond

The almond was the first fruit tree to blossom in Israel, sometimes as early as January. As well as being a favorite food, the nut also produced oil.



Cedar

The beautiful, giant cedar of Lebanon once grew in great forests. The wood is a warm red color and long-lasting. It could be carved and decorated, and was used to panel Solomon's temple and palace. 1 Kings 6:15-7:12

HILLS AND MOUNTAINS

1. According to Psalms, how do mountains skip?
2. Where did the ark come to rest?
3. Where did Solomon build the house of the Lord?
4. Whose army was defeated at Mount Tabor?
5. What notable event happened at Mount Sinai?
6. Moses saw the promised land from this mountain.
7. What did Joshua build on Mount Ebal?
8. Who died on Mount Hor?
9. As Jesus walked to the cross, what did He prophesy the "Daughters of Jerusalem" would say to the mountains?
10. What did Aaron and Hur do for Moses on the hill top during a battle with the Amalekites?
11. Luke quotes a prophecy concerning John the Baptist in which every mountain will be.
12. Who lived in Mount Seir?

answers on page 13



One Road to Conviction

by EDWARD SHAYLER

The author relates his own spiritual journey.

Every Sunday morning for many years in our home we have been listening to a sermon that we received from the Megiddo Church. In fact, this worship service has become a necessary part of our life, and everyone who knows us respects the time we dedicate to it. I have been sitting here wondering when it all began. It has been one of the most continuous endeavors of this household.

The *Messages* from the Megiddo Church began arriving, indirectly, over eighty years ago, and the predominant factor has always been "TRUTH." Sometimes it is difficult to understand how Bible truths find their way into each person's mind; there seems to be a different process for every mind. In our case, the dominance of the European aristocracy was being left behind because of the severity of their moral principles—which applied to everyone but themselves. It had become a situation of "It's my way or no way." It was not a question of moral values but dominance. "Keep up good appearances" became the buzzword of the times. This caused the general population to follow the demands of their ancestors, especially in matters of spiritual beliefs. The religious beliefs of families had been made an institution more than a belief. It was looked upon as part of the inheritance, and because "they were, you

were," or out you went.

This story begins around 1920 in a little village of Trehearne in Manitoba, where a family who had migrated from England became part of the reason this country has so much freedom of thought. The father followed the Anglican Church doctrines. The mother was a member of the United Church; she was also the organist and treasurer. When they began raising a family of six children, the mother wanted for her family the "Bible Truth," and began searching for a way to teach that to her children. Through an advertisement in a local regional paper, she began corresponding with the Megiddo Church. She was doubtful in the beginning that a small Church could know Bible truths more thoroughly than some of the theologians who had spent decades studying. This lady was also out of place with her new circumstance. She was an expert pianist. She had studied music in the London Conservatory of Music and was a qualified music teacher. She was determined to find a way to teach her family the true meaning of the Scriptures.

The Megiddo Church began to send her Children's Bible Lessons, and so the teaching began. She also found herself highly dedicated to her own studies of the Scriptures using the same format: writing and receiving replies. The family grew up having these Bible studies every Sunday, but they were indifferent; and their father, a good man was more interested in the social aspirations of the community. As the children grew up it was difficult for them to find a means of financial support, as there was no other industry but farming. The only answer seemed to be in relocating to

larger populated areas; which in their case was the city of Winnipeg. The oldest girl found a job at a Jewish Orphanage and was able to help her two sisters get employment there also. I lived in Winnipeg at that time, and I first met this family in 1937.

I, on the other hand had very limited family influences spiritually. My young life had been spent living with my grandparents who had come from Scotland. They claimed to be Scotch Presbyterian, and I assume that it was the religion of their parents before them. I have learned since that some of what they believed came from Celtic folklore. They believed in the "wee folk" (Leprechauns). My grandfather told us that they were in trees, in the barn, in the house, and followed us all over; and if we didn't please them they would "get" us, and also God will rain down fire and destruction. I had watched life begin and end on the farm where we lived and I just did not believe what he told us. At other times I talked to the other children at school, and each seemed to have a very different version of God. When I was beginning school I learned that there was no Santa Claus and proceeded to convince a neighbor family who were my school friends. They told my Grandfather, and I was in serious trouble.

When eleven years old I was sent to Winnipeg to meet my mother and stepfather, and their family worship was not much of anything, but my mother had a Bible and she spent time reading it, and did impress me with the thought that she was searching to find how to understand the Bible. She insisted on saying grace before meals and practiced good morals. However, our relationship was never intimate as her new family monopolized her time. But this princi-

ple of searching for the proper answers never left me.

The district we lived in (Winnipeg) was also home to the poorest of the poor. But even within this group were people of sound moral principles, and some of them became my friends. This was the time of the great depression, and I had to find a way of being responsible for myself. Steady work for young boys was almost impossible to find. These were the days of the "Soup Kitchens." I found several ways to earn "my keep," and most days it required all my effort; but it was better than living off the street. Some of the jobs were delivering telegrams or bread on a bicycle, shining shoes in a shoe shine parlor, working in market gardens, and helping on farms. Then I went to forest camps, and from there, to the Army soon after I married Lorna, who had been born in Trehearne. Lorna and I discussed religion, and I promised never to interfere with her spiritual beliefs. She had demonstrated to me that she wanted to follow what her mother had been teaching. Lorna had all of the qualities of one who wanted to be a good Christian.

I spent six and a half years in the military, four of which were in combat. I was taken prisoner of war by the Japanese in Hong Kong. One of my possessions as a prisoner of war was a Bible. I began to read the Bible for the first time in my life, but like most people, I did not accomplish understanding it.

After liberation and during the next several years, I acquired an attitude in the belief that because of the many sins I had committed, forgiveness would be impossible for me so I might just as well follow the crowd. Lorna gave up trying to persuade me otherwise and concentrated on our two children. We talked about our preferences of spiritual teaching. This is where she became the dominant mother, and I knew I had better not interfere. Every Sunday she conducted Sunday school in our house with material received from the Megiddo Church. I was excused.

Through my own selfishness and stubbornness I was received less and less into their personal routines. I felt rejected and alone; fortunately I had a conscience loaded with guilt. I had been using alcohol more and more and came

to view every ambition not worthy of the effort. Several times I tried to stop living in the way that had become a daily process, but without success. I closed my mind to all outside advice, determined to see myself through without help from anybody. My life had become a shambles without hope; I could not find work to provide the necessities, and every employer I worked for asked me to leave. I blamed my predicament on everyone but me.

One day I was desperate. Having no one else to turn to, I did something that I hadn't done for years: I kneeled down and asked God for help. But then, I reasoned, God would not be interested in helping a derelict like me. Maybe if I showed Him some genuine effort; if I sought help, then asked Him, He might have compassion.

I joined a self-help group who presented me with a program to follow. The program consisted of twelve steps. The third step read as follows: "Turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand Him." Immediately I felt as though a great weight had been lifted right off my back. I realized that this was a spiritual program and that it could only take me so far. My old aspi-

rations came back to haunt me. I had better learn "God's Will" for me. I stuck with my resolve and started reading from my old friend, The Bible. This time I resolved to search out meanings that I could not understand. Immediately I received help from Lorna and my family, but I was still in denial and felt they could think as they liked but *I had to search out the "truth"* by myself. I cheated and began reading the material sent by the Megiddo Church. I read it when the family was not watching.

Everything I read, I checked and double-checked to prove it wrong. The more I read and the more I checked, the more it proved to be true. I began to live the way I was told in the gospels. And was I amazed at the improvement in our lives!

We became a family again, and I found peace. It is the most incredible journey I ever experienced—the wonderful and beautiful friendships, full sound nights of rest, blessings beyond any of my dreams. Parts of the Scriptures that used to confound me I now understood. Every day we learn more and more.

All this has given me a determination to put what I learn into practice. The result is a conviction so strong that I doubt any influence in the world could shake it. ♦

*Oh, for a faith that will not shrink,
Though pressed with many a foe;
That will not tremble on the brink
Of poverty or woe;*

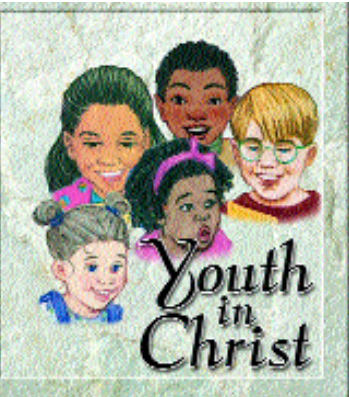
*That will not murmur nor complain
Beneath the chastening rod;
But in the hour of grief and pain
Can lean upon its God.*

*A faith that shines more bright and clear
When tempests rage without;
That when in danger knows no fear,
In darkness feels no doubt;*

*A faith that keeps the narrow way,
By truth restrained and led,
And with a pure and heavenly ray
Lights up a dying bed.*

*Lord, may I have a faith like this
And then whate'er may come,
I'll taste e'en here the hallow'd bliss
Of an eternal home!*





Follow the Rules



Why do we need rules? Couldn't we get along without them?

Watch Eric, Amber, and Emily playing their game. Now imagine what would happen if they didn't follow the rules. Amber might decide to move her button ten blocks forward instead of five blocks as she was supposed to. Or Eric might not go back and start over when the rules said he should. Or Emily might take her turn whenever she wanted to. In no time at all there would be no game, for they would be all mixed up and upset with each other.

No one can enjoy the game unless everyone plays fairly and follows the rules. Rules for games are made so everyone can play together. Eric, Amber, and Emily have fun because they obey the rules of their game. And Mother and Father enjoy watching them play.

For what else besides games do we have rules? We have rules in our homes and at school. We have the laws of our states and country. All these help us to live together.

A long time ago God gave Moses ten rules for His people. They were written on two tablets of stone and were called "The Ten Commandments." Those Ten Commandments helped the people of Israel to live better and be a stronger nation.

When Jesus lived on the earth, He also gave some rules.

"Love your neighbor as yourself"¹ was one of them. He gave rules for those who believe in Him and belong to God's family. Here are a few more of them (paraphrased):

Love your enemies.²

Put God first in your life.³

Do not worry because God knows what you need.⁴

Treat others like you want them to treat you.⁵

Forgive others as God forgives you.⁶

Jesus said, "If any one **hears** these words and **does** them he is like a wise man."⁷ ♦

¹Matt 19:19; ²Matt. 5:44; ³Matt. 6:33; ⁴Matt. 6:31-32; ⁵Matt. 7:12;

⁶Matt. 6:14-15; ⁷Matt. 7:24

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for the rules and laws in our homes, schools, and country. Help us to obey them. And we thank You for the perfect rules You have given us in Your Word. Help us to follow them that we might please You and live happily in Your family now and through eternity. Amen.

What Small Things Tell

Mr. Barber liked the the young man he had just hired to stock shelves in his factory. There was something about the boy that made him stand out.

A week later He saw him pick up an empty soda can that someone had dropped and toss it into the trash bin.

"How do you like the new stock boy?" he asked the manager.

"I like him. Daryl listens well to instructions. Can't say that about most of them fellas."

"That's good. Give him a list of the things you want him to do. Make sure he understands what you want and then back off—let him be. Then let me know how well he does."

The following week the manager reported, "Daryl keeps right at his work. He does his work well and is careful about details."

Of course, Mr. Barber was pleased to hear this, but decided to test Daryl him-

self. Just before he came to work the next day, Mr. Barber knocked over several boxes of fittings which rolled every where.

Then he stepped into the manager's office to watch. When Daryl came in, he looked surprised but immediately went to picking up the fittings and carefully sorting them, putting each size into its own box.

When Mr. Barber saw that Daryl was careful and faithful in little things, he said to him, "How would you like a job in our office? If you will keep on doing your work well, you may even be a manager someday."

This businessman could guess that the young man would be a good worker. He could tell by watching how

well he did his work while he was young.

We can guess how good a father a boy will be by what he does now; or how good a mother a girl will be by what she does now. The little things we do, even when we are small, tell the story of how well we will probably do big things when we are bigger.

That's part of what Jesus meant when He said, "He who is faithful in small things is faithful also in big things; and he who cheats in little things also cheats in big things." ♦

"Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right." —Proverbs 20:11

OUR PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please help us do our work and even little things in such a way that we will grow up to be good parents and good workers for our Lord Jesus. In His name we ask this. Amen.

Flying Marathoners:

The Red Knots

Awesome
Designs



Did you ever run in a marathon? Did you win? If you did, you thought yourself pretty distinguished, didn't you? But whether you won or not, the greatest victory was completing it—right? You became a marathoner.

Well, we red knots are flying marathoners. How long is the marathon you run? Something like 26 miles? Well, if we flew only 26 miles, we wouldn't think we had gone anywhere. Every year—are you with me? Every year we red knots fly some 20,000 miles. Often we fly as many as 2500 miles non-stop. And we average speeds between 30 and 40 miles per hour. Now how do you feel about your marathon achievement? I'm afraid we passed you long ago!

But I can't take any credit for this. I have to tell you about my wonderful Creator, who designed my robust, muscular wings, and my fine, streamlined body that is able to carry its own food supply—fuel supply, I mean. Yes, I've been engineered to keep flying.

Why do we fly so much? We red knots, it seems, have an obsession for daylight. The more daylight, the better. 24/7 is perfect. Impossible? We come close! We just plan our time so that we're in the Arctic during the summer months (May, June, and July), when the sun there scarcely dips below the horizon, and we are in Antarctica during the winter months (December and January), when the days are longest there! Yes, we follow the sun!

What is our motivation? More daylight means more time to forage for food. Because we spend so much time in the air burning up energy, we have to pack all we can into that time on the ground—or we won't keep flying. At the same time, we have to know when to stop eating. If we ate too much back at the bay (where we fuel up) and got too heavy, we'd still be there. Grounded!

Life for us begins in the Arctic summertime. This is where we raise our families. By late summer, when the days begin to be noticeably shorter, we are on our way south. The first stopover for many of us is Delaware Bay, where the horseshoe crabs have just laid their eggs. Someone has estimated that 100,000 of us devour 248 tons of horseshoe crab eggs during the time we are there. This rich food is excellent for refueling and rebuilding our muscular wings.

Then we're off to Brazil or Argentina non-stop. That means going several weeks without eating. (Do you see why we need all those horseshoe crab eggs?) By late November we are in the Antarctic, just when the daylight there is getting close to 24/7. Well timed, isn't it?

Then in the spring (your spring) we head back north, stopping to refill our energy tanks in Brazil or Argentina, and again in Delaware Bay.

Scientists have found that when we refuel we actually triple the size of our liver and double the size of our flight muscles, which eventually serve as a source of protein for us. This is all very important to our survival. If any of us run out of fuel on the way—that's the end of the story for us. There are no refueling stations in the air!

And think about this. When we head for the Arctic, we have to have a little more than enough energy to arrive, because there may not be food immediately available in that region, and we need to build nests and raise our young while the days are longest. That is why,

when we're on the ground, we eat so ravenously.

Besides knowing just how much to eat, we also have to know just how fast to flap our wings, as every wing movement uses valuable energy from the very limited supply. How do we know these things? I can only thank our marvelous Creator. (If I tried to figure it out for myself, I would get nervous—and burn up more energy!)

So you agree that 20,000 miles a year is a major undertaking for a nine or ten inch bird? Those miles add up. By the time we are 13 years old, we have flown a distance equal to the moon and back!

What about adverse weather? What if strong winds or storms blow us off course? In general, weather conditions are not a big problem. If we get blown off course, our Designer has provided us with an inside navigation system to get us back on course. I can't explain how it works, but I thank our great Creator that we are very seldom lost.

You call it "instinct," this marvelous programming in our brains that we didn't put there? When you think about it, isn't it fantastic? Yes, our little ones hatch actually knowing how to fly, and which direction to go. How do we judge distances so accurately? How do we navigate? How do we find the same stopovers every year (at the right time of year) when flying two or three thousand feet above the earth? There's no logical explanation—except that we are awesomely designed!

Some of our kind leave the Antarctic and head for the Arctic by way of a

continued on page 25





MIRACLES TODAY?

Is it true that all the power Jesus gave His disciples was meant for them alone and not for Christians today? For example, He said they would be able to tread upon serpents and not get hurt, they could drink poison and not die, etc.

You are correct that the power Jesus gave His disciples was for them alone, and not for Christians today. No one on earth today can perform miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit as the Apostles did. As you have observed, there is a vast difference between the type of miracles Jesus was suggesting in Mark 16 and those which are claimed to be performed today. No one attempting to demonstrate any Divine power today would go to a cemetery and raise the dead.

What types of gifts did the Apostles have? In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul listed a number of the powers or gifts that had been given to the people of the early Church at that time. One person had one gift, another had another. Chapter 13 compares the value of these gifts with the greater and enduring quality of "charity," or love, a term covering the entire duty of the Christian. Then in 1 Corinthians 13:8 the Apostle Paul compares the duration of the different gifts. "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, [by Divine power] they will fail; whether there are tongues, [by Divine power] they will cease; whether there is knowledge, [by Divine power] it will vanish away." Then verse 13 pictures what will remain after the other gifts are withdrawn: "Now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

No one today possesses the power of the Holy Spirit. It was not God's plan that people in every age would have special gifts by Divine power. The Prophet Joel predicted two outpourings of the Holy Spirit, symbolized as two rains, one "former" and one "latter," to be dispensed at two different times. Two rains indicate a time between when there would be no rain. Joel said, "Be

glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain and the latter rain in the first month" (Joel 2:23). Then he describes in more detail the "latter" rain, indicating that it will be the more widespread: "It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28–29).

Just before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, "And now I am sending upon you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high" (Luke 24:49 NJB). The apostles waited in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them, and ten days after He ascended to heaven, on the day of Pentecost, the power came on them suddenly like "a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1–3). The people observing could not understand what was happening, and the Apostle Peter explained: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). The outpouring of power was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of a "former rain."

The passage in Mark 16 tells the purpose for which this special power was given, and also says that that purpose was accomplished. We read in verse 20, "And they [the apostles] went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs." This was another purpose of the special power that they were given, to "confirm the word," the message they were preaching. Those hearing them could know of a certainty that they were sent of God.

The Apostle Paul also recorded the fulfillment of this commission to the

Apostles, under which they were given special power. We read in Romans 10:18, "Have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'" He wrote the same in his letter to the Church at Colosse, that they should not be "moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23). This power was given to add force and conviction to the message of the Apostles, to demonstrate the authority behind them.

The first outpouring of power on the day of Pentecost was with them until the end of that age. This was the same Comforter or "helper" which Jesus promised His disciples, would "teach" them all things, and "bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). They would need this power to be able to write the books that we have as part of our New Testament, so that we could depend on the accuracy of the information they contain. He did not leave them to rely on their own memories unaided. When the Bible was completed, about AD 70, and the Apostles no longer needed this power, it was withdrawn. It will be restored when the prophet Elijah comes as Christ's forerunner, fulfilling Jesus' promise to "restore all things" (Matt. 17:11).

In the interim, between the former rain (at Pentecost) and the time when Elijah comes to "restore all things" and bring the glorious latter rain that will accompany Christ's return, no one has power to do miraculous works as Jesus and His Apostles did. We cannot heal the sick, raise the dead, open blind eyes, or understand languages we have never learned. We cannot drink deadly poison and not be affected by it. We cannot be bitten by a snake and shake it off, feeling no effects, as Paul did. Why? Because this special power was withdrawn, as prophesied. Until the power is restored, all we have to guide us is the written Word of God, the Bible.

❑ Did Christ Pre-exist?

I would like you to explain to me John 6:61-62, about the pre-existence of Jesus. I need to understand this in order to be able to teach others.

John 6:61–62 reads, “When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?’”

Surface reading of this passage sounds as though Jesus was saying He came down from heaven. But if we look closely at Jesus’ words in the sixth chapter of John, from verse 50 forward, we find that He is not speaking of Himself personally but in a representative way. He was using Himself, “I,” as representing the knowledge of God, the truths which He taught, His teachings and principles.

The man Christ was, in a sense, the Word of God personified, i.e., His teachings put into real life, because He lived what He taught so completely. This is the “Christ” that can be in us, as Paul said, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). The personal Christ could not be in us, but His teachings, the principles He stood for, the message from His Father that He proclaimed, all this can be in us. When Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), He did not mean He was literally a road, or that one must literally follow Him from village to village. Only a very few people would be able to do this. But all of us can follow the “I” that is His teachings, His way of life, His resolve to please His heavenly Father.

This same “Christ” is “the bread of life” (John 6:48), the “bread which comes down from heaven” (verse 50), even “the living bread which...if anyone eats...he will live forever” (verse 51). Speaking of this same knowledge of God which He was personifying, He said, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (6:53–54). He was not asking them to eat Him literally, but the “Son of man” was a real-life image, a personification of the teachings of Christ, the words of the heavenly Father. Jesus explained this in verse 57, “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.” In other words, just as He lived by eating the

Father, so we live by eating of Him.

Jesus referred to this same “Son of man,” this same spiritual Christ, the knowledge of God He personified, when He said, “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?” The man Christ had never been in heaven, He was born of the virgin Mary, raised up from among His brethren (Deut. 18:15, 18). Even after His resurrection He made the statement that He had “not yet ascended” to His Father (John 20:17).

Jesus made use of this same literary device of personification in John 3:13 when He said, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” Jesus Himself could not possibly be one who “came down from heaven” and was then on the earth, and was at the same time “the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

In John 6, Jesus was referring to Himself as the “the living bread” which did indeed come from His heavenly Father. No one could have spiritual life without eating spiritually of “his flesh” and drinking “his blood”—all have to be symbolic terms. If the shedding of His literal blood on Calvary was part of the equation, this would contradict the symbolism. The shedding of physical blood cannot produce spiritual life.

In verse 63 Jesus gave His listeners the key to what He had been saying, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are

spirit, and they are life.” In verse 51 He said that “If anyone eats of this bread [the living bread that came down from heaven, which He said He personified—verse 48], ‘he will live forever.’” He had also said that if anyone does not eat “the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood” they are not alive. Then He says in verse 63, “The Spirit...gives life...the words that I speak to you are spirit, and...life.” If we look at these passages together, we see that “the Son of man” is a personification of “the living bread” which Jesus said is “My flesh” (verse 51), which He also called the “spirit who gives life,” or “the words that I speak to you” (verse 63).

When Jesus spoke of the “Son of man” ascending up “where He was before,” He is referring to the knowledge of God, the words He was speaking, the knowledge from His Father, which He called bread from heaven, “This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.” This is the bread He symbolized by His life, when He said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” In other words, I have come to do the will of My Father, so that You can follow me.

Was Jesus saying, what if He Himself should go to heaven where He personally was before? Was He saying He Himself had come from heaven? No, Jesus was saying, What a cataclysm if Divine knowledge that comes from God should be taken away from the earth, and leave you without any hope of future life! ♦

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stopover in northwest Australia. The bay waters there are distressingly hot and humid. We find these conditions extremely difficult (it’s a shocking contrast with the temperatures in the Antarctic). But again, praise to our Creator, our body temperature fluctuates, and our normally low temperature can rise to well over 100 degrees F. We don’t like it—we pant, and wade in the warm shallow waters, and raise the feathers on our backs to dissipate some heat—but we survive! And soon it is time to fly on.

Sources for information in this article:

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Every flap of my wings is another “Thank You!” to my wonderful Creator. If He is able to keep little me flying all those miles, what can He do for you! ♦



Forget It!

Rid yourselves, then, of all spite, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and carping criticism. Like new-born babies all your longing should be for milk—the unadulterated spiritual milk—which will help you to grow up to salvation.

—1Peter 2:1–2 NJB

*If you see a tall fellow ahead of a crowd
A leader of men, marching fearless and proud
And you know of a tale whose mere telling aloud
Would cause his proud head in anguish be bowed
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.*

*If you know of a skeleton hidden away
In a closet, and guarded and kept from the day
In the dark, and whose showing, whose sudden display
Would cause grief and sorrow and pain and dismay
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.*

*If you know of a tale that will darken the joy
Of a man or a woman, a girl or a boy;
That will wipe out a smile, or the least bit annoy
A fellow, or cause him to hurt or destroy,
It's a pretty good plan to forget it.*

—Selected

My great concern should be not whether
God is on my side but whether I am on God's side.

*Patience strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper,
stifles anger, subdues pride, and bridles the tongue.
What an indispensable virtue!*

There is no time lost in waiting if you are waiting
on the Lord.

To be in step with God demands sensitivity.

The great dividing line between success and failure
can be expressed in five words: I did not *take* time.

*When you have been wronged,
a poor memory is your best response.*

THE MINUTES COUNT

A conductor on a trolley line had seven minutes to spare
between trips. The half-acre loop where his run ended was
covered with a dense underbrush and thicket. He decided to
put his seven minutes to work. At the end of each trip he
cleaned out some brush and weeds. Eventually he turned the
loop that had been an eyesore into a garden.

Do we fill our "spare" minutes with something worth-
while?

To forgive heals the wound, to forget heals the scar.

May each sun find something accomplished
by way of moral growth.

Happiness is an inside job.

We make our future by the best use of the present.

*When you have been wronged, a poor memory
is your best response.*

You will never "find" time for everything. If you want
time for anything, you must make it.

To forgive heals the wound, to forget heals the scar.

May each sun find something
accomplished by way of moral growth.

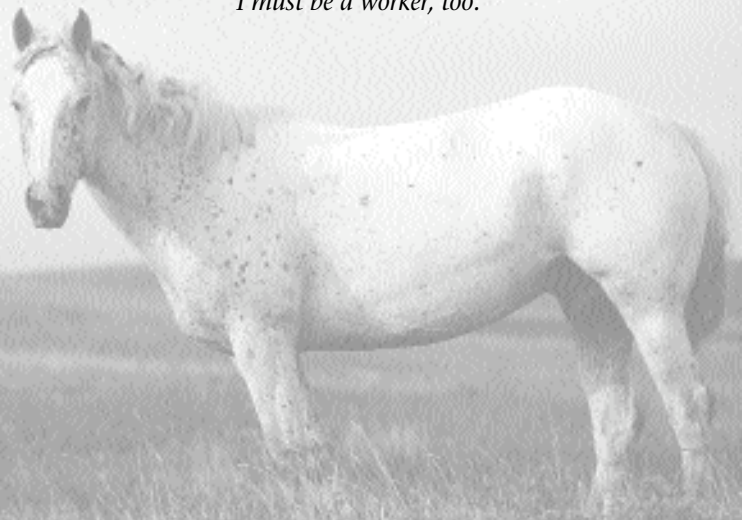
*We may not be able to leave others a heritage
of wealth or fame, but we can leave a shining example
of godly character.*

You won't have a better tomorrow if you are thinking
all the time about yesterday.

Please God in all you do, and be pleased with all God does.

We may not be able to leave others a heritage
of wealth or fame, but we can leave a shining example
of godly character.

*My master was a worker,
with daily work to do,
And if I would be like Him
I must be a worker, too.*



Light

O grant us light that we may know
The wisdom You alone can give;
That truth may guide where'er we go,
And virtue bless where'er we live.

O grant us light, that we may see
Where error lurks in human lore,
And turn our doubting minds away from "me",
And love Your Holy Word the more.

O grant us light, that we may learn
How dead is life from You apart;
How sure is joy for all who turn
To You an undivided heart.

O grant us light, in grief and pain,
To lift our burdened hearts above,
And count the very cross a gain,
And bless our Father's hidden love.

O grant us light, for soon or late
The things of earth will pass away
For Christ will come and bring to earth,
A glorious, bright and endless Day.

—Selected

