

# Megiddo Message

May/June, 2006



Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand? —Isaiah 40:12 NIV



# ENVY-ROT

## *An Asaph Insight*

Envy is a term we sometimes use loosely. We envy a person when we admire his or her achievement, possessions or appearance. But envy is more than this. It is a resentful desire to have something someone has. Allowed to grow, envy destroys happiness and health, and even leads to disaster. *"A heart at peace gives life to the body but envy rots the bones"* (Prov. 14:30 NIV). Like rot, envy spreads until one is consumed.

There is a recent story about a man so envious he stabbed eight people. During interrogation he said he would have committed suicide but was overpowered during the attack. He admitted that he did it out of envy; he wanted others to know they lived better than he and others of like status, even if he had to die.

Envy is an old problem. Cain murdered his brother Abel because God favored Abel above him. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because he was favored over them. King Saul was consumed by envy-rot. Even though he had been appointed by God as King over Israel, he became so jealous of David's popularity that he spared no resources in his effort to destroy David.

Are you feeling consumed with envy right now?

*He who follows righteousness  
and mercy finds life,  
righteousness and honor.*

—Prov. 21:21

Psalm 73 is the personal journal of another man who struggled deeply with envy. Asaph was so envious that he almost ended in disaster. *"I came so close to the edge of the cliff!"* he said, *"my feet were slipping, and I was almost gone"* (Ps. 73:2 NLT).

Asaph was a mature man and a seasoned spiritual

leader. He authored 12 of our worship Psalms (Psalms 50, 73–83). His family elected him to be a Levitical singer in the temple. King David, a talented musician in his own right, recognized Asaph's talents and later appointed him minister of music for all worship services. Asaph was a shining jewel among his people until...until he began to lose focus.

Somehow the prosperity of the wicked started catching his attention. To quote his own words,

*"They seem to live such a painless life; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They aren't troubled like other people or plagued with problems like everyone else.... [They] have everything their hearts could ever wish for!"* (Psalm 73:3–8 NLT).

These were all the signs of envy-rot, but it came about so subtly that Asaph didn't recognize the problem until its rotting nature had almost destroyed him.

Asaph became despondent. *"Was it for nothing,"* he murmured, *"that I kept my heart pure and kept myself from doing wrong? All I get is trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain"* (Ps. 73:13–14 NLT).

Asaph's struggle went on and on until...until he went to the sanctuary of the Lord. Suddenly he realized their end. Suddenly he realized that they are every one on the road to destruction. Their dream life would end abruptly when God takes action. *"You put [the wicked] on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction"* (Ps. 73:18 NLT).

It was the same lesson a godly man named Job had learned long before. *"Evil people may have all the money in the world, and they may store away mounds of clothing. But...terror overwhelms them, and they are blown away in the storms of the night"* (Job 27:16, 20 NLT).

When you see yourself losing focus, go to the sanctuary of God in prayer. Take Asaph's lesson to heart and realize where the big money, and big palatial estates, and big-screen entertainment centers, and big spending, and big parties, and big prestigious jobs without God all end—because in the end *"The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy"* (Ps. 145:20).

Ponder the dismal end of self-indulgence, and the glorious end of doing right. ♦



# Coming On Apace

*Sometimes we say  
That the time seems long to us who watch and wait  
For that "great Day."  
As if the time loitered and the great Day came late.*

*Did you ever stay  
A moment, to think how the time is hasting on  
And we cannot hinder a moment as it flies?  
But one week dies  
And another comes straight, straight on,  
And is partly gone  
While we are pausing to think it has begun?*

*Time pauses never,  
The day of grace is shortening ever, at one unfaltering pace;  
And the Day of decision  
Is traveling onward, with steady, unswerving precision  
And suddenly,  
Or ever we are aware—that Day will be!*

*Blessed are they  
Who with good cause can say  
With every rising sun,  
"Amen, even so, Lord Jesus, come!"*

# Yet We Believe

Seeing is believing, at least most of the time. Is it possible to believe without seeing?

In everyday life, we do it all the time. We read in the newspaper about something that happened on the other side of the world. We do not go there to check out the details, yet, unless we have prior information to the contrary, we basically believe the report.

Most of us have never seen Tokyo, yet we believe that it exists. We cannot

physically see the cold germ that makes us wheeze and sneeze, but to deny its existence would not make us feel any better.

None of us personally knew George Washington, or Thomas Jefferson, or John Adams, yet we believe that they were among the founders of our country.

What does all this say? That factors other than seeing cause us to believe. In everyday matters we are willing to

trust the witness of other people, our own previous experience, the word of specialists in a field, or even generally circulated information. Other times, when something seems contrary to what we had previously thought, we demand bona fide evidence.

The effect of evidence is so great that almost never do we feel we have enough of it. In the courts of our nation, those who serve on juries quickly discover that decisions are

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FRONT COVER: SHORELINE OF GULF OF MEXICO AT PADRE ISLAND, TEXAS. PHOTO BY PATRICIA A. FLEMING

## MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

## WE BELIEVE...

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

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

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

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

## THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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



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never as simple as they seem from the outside. Invariably they wish for just one more piece of evidence to make it all clear. But if it were all that clear, the case probably would not have been brought to a jury.

Evidence demands evaluation and decision, and decisions are often difficult where clear evidence is missing. How does one deal with the missing bits and pieces, the “if only” issues where we think “if only” we had this or that additional fact, all would be clear?

This problem is even more critical in matters of religious faith. *If only* I could talk to an angel...*If only* I could hear one word from heaven...*If only* I could ask for a bolt out of the sky and see it immediately...*If only* I could ask for one broken bone to be instantly mended, or one deceased loved one to stand up and walk—anything dramatic to give me instant faith.

The fact is, God didn’t plan it that way. Long ago He planned that all open miracles would cease and only “faith, hope, and love” remain (1 Cor. 13:13).

But think about it: faith has been needed in every age. The author of the book of Hebrews recognized it. He even went so far as to say that “*without faith it is impossible to please [God]*” (Heb. 11:6). And how did he define faith? He said that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things that are seen? No, “*faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is built not on what we see but on what we do not see. He then goes through a whole roster of heroic souls who ventured everything on faith. They made decisions, took heroic stands, and lived and died for God—not because the evidence was all in but because their faith was all out! If all had been perfectly clear, their life would not have been “*by faith*” then, and ours would not be “*by faith*” now. When they put all the pieces together that they could see;

*All that  
I have seen  
teaches me to  
trust the Creator  
for all I have  
not seen.*



*“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:28–29).*

inevitably there were some missing. Yet they believed.

Here is the lesson for us. It is possible—essential—that we accept the knowledge God has revealed and believe, fully and really and wholeheartedly believe.

Are we obsessed with seeing and touching and feeling, as if only eyes and fingers and feelings could establish truth? The story of Thomas has a lesson for us; Thomas, whom Jesus reproved for his lack of faith. What was Jesus’ chiding reply? “*Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:28–29).

It is an honorary company to belong to, these “yet” believers. Why? Because Jesus promised, “*Blessed are they that have not seen, and, yet have believed.*” Whatever it includes, we want that blessing!

Why do we believe? Because we trust the Word of God, the wisdom of God, the love of God, the power of God. We believe not because of all we

have seen but because we are convinced of the reality and omnipotence of the God behind all we see. We believe, not because we can touch or feel or see all that we would like to, but because all that we do touch or feel or see is in harmony with what we expect, knowing what we do from the Word of God about the plan God is working out on planet Earth.

We believe because we see the hand of God working in our lives, in our Church, in our nation, in our world. We believe because God has spoken, and God will be true to His Word. We believe because history, science, and the Word of God all join to support the facts of our faith. All join to undergird our confidence in God, and tell us that just as God has been true in the past, just as His prophecies in the past have all been fulfilled as foretold, so the remainder will be fulfilled.

What is faith? It is being able to say, I have not seen all that I would like to see; I do not know all that I would like to know. Yet I believe! ♦



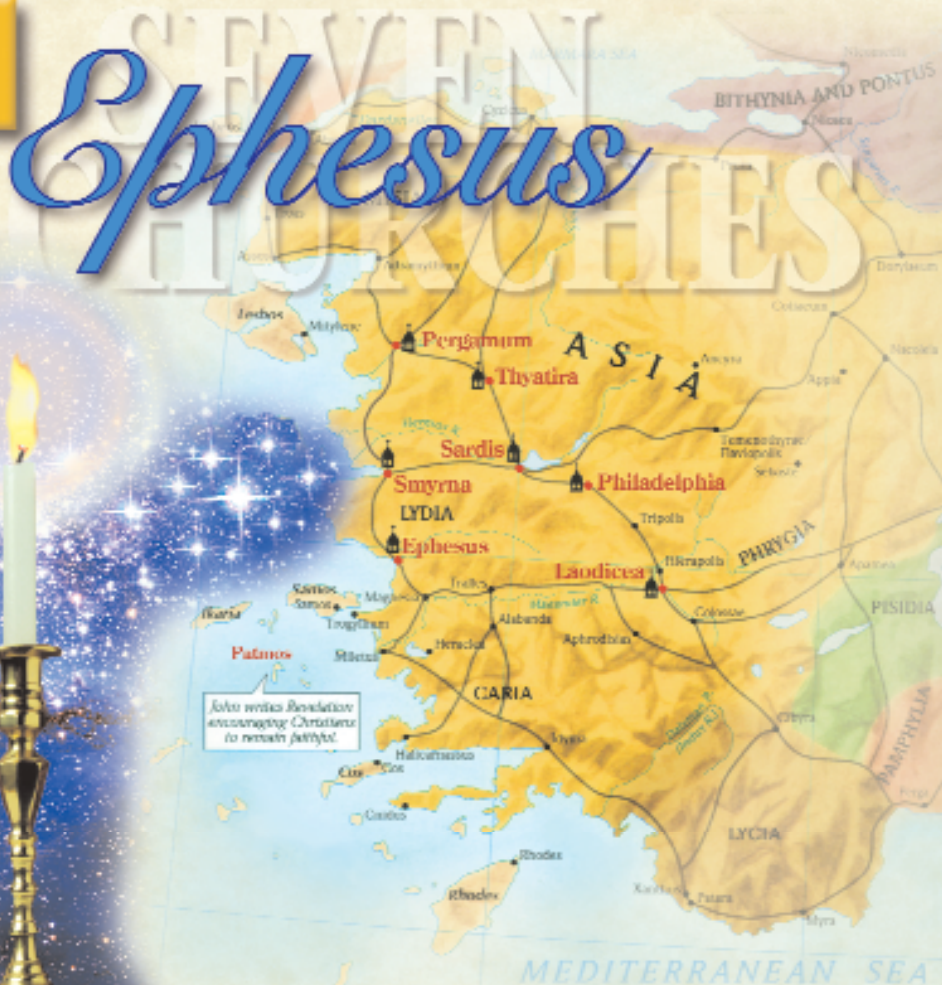
## “Write...Send” to

### PART ONE

*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, “...What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”*

*Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of [them] One like the Son of Man,...He had in His right hand seven stars...[He said to me,] “the seven stars which you saw in My right hand...are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.”*

—Rev. 1:10–11, 16, 19–20



When Jesus wanted to send one last message to His churches, he did it by sending it by His angel to His servant John, who was exiled on the island of Patmos.

These letters were addressed to seven churches in Asia, churches founded by the Apostles and their co-workers during the years immediately following Christ's ministry.

The seven Churches were located on a major Roman road. A letter carrier from Patmos, where John was exiled, would arrive first at Ephesus. Then he would travel north to Smyrna, then on to Pergamum, then southeast to Thyatira, continuing on to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—the very order in which Jesus dictated the letters.

Each of Jesus' letters consisted of a short message addressed to each church, plus the whole of the book of Revelation. But Jesus meant these letters for more than the people of those churches. He saw that they were written into the Scriptures so that they could benefit all believers in the centuries ahead, because the problems of these churches are common to all of us.

In these letters, Jesus looks inside His churches—and inside us. His searching eyes see what we are inside, in our heart of hearts. He sees not



only *what* we are but *why*. He is looking for those inner qualities of love and devotion, faith and courage. He is looking for the whole-souled integrity that is more concerned with being right than being recognized; that puts obedience ahead of personal advantage, no matter how high the price; that says “no” to temptation and worldliness regardless of the consequences.

These letters remind us that God’s all-seeing eye misses nothing. “*Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes*” (Heb. 4:13 NLT). Even if we close our eyes to what we really are, God sees.

These letters hold out promises beyond our ability to fathom. Let’s look now at the first of these seven letters and see what Jesus has to say to this Church. If we have ears to hear, He is speaking to us also.

## TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS:

# *Stir Up the Fire!*

Did you ever watch a fire on the hearth, or in the fireplace, or at the campground, go out? What do you do to it? If you do nothing, it just burns lower and lower until finally it is gone.

Did you ever have a friendship change from gripping to just “so-so”?

Were you ever excited to start a project that you later found hard to keep working at? Maybe it was something you always wanted to do—like learning to play the piano, or write a book, or build a computer system. Maybe it was an exercise program to strengthen your heart, or lose weight. Or maybe you decided to build a house, or launch a new business. At first, everything about it was so exciting you could hardly stop thinking about it!

Now fast forward a month, a year, or five years. Were you still as enthusiastic, or more enthusiastic, as you were at the beginning? If not, what happened to the fire?

This is what Jesus saw in Ephesus. They still believed, and they were standing up well against opposition from the outside. But inside, they were growing cold. They were still going through the motions, but the glow was gone, the inner joy, the fire of enthusiasm, the do-or-die devotion. “*You don’t love me like you did at first.*”

Maybe one Sunday your spouse doesn’t go to church, and when you come home, he or she asks, “How was Church today?” Do you say something to the effect of “Same old thing... same-o, same-o, same-o”? or are you eager to share what has put new fire in your heart?

One thing sure, if you sit in church thinking about tomorrow’s work, or yesterday’s problem, that is all you will take home. The message fell on deaf ears.

Why do we lose our love for God? For the same reason our car runs out of gasoline on the freeway. If we don’t keep refilling it, there comes a time when the car’s engine will stall. We may coast

## VISIT FIRST CENTURY EPHESUS

Ephesus, a city of a quarter million people, was an important metropolis and commercial center of the ancient Mediterranean world. Located on the western coast of what is modern-day Turkey, it was originally a Greek settlement and later became a provincial seat of Roman government in Asia. Because it lay at the end of the Royal Road—the road that linked east/west trade across the Roman Empire—Ephesus early became a prosperous, wealthy center of trade, travel and banking.

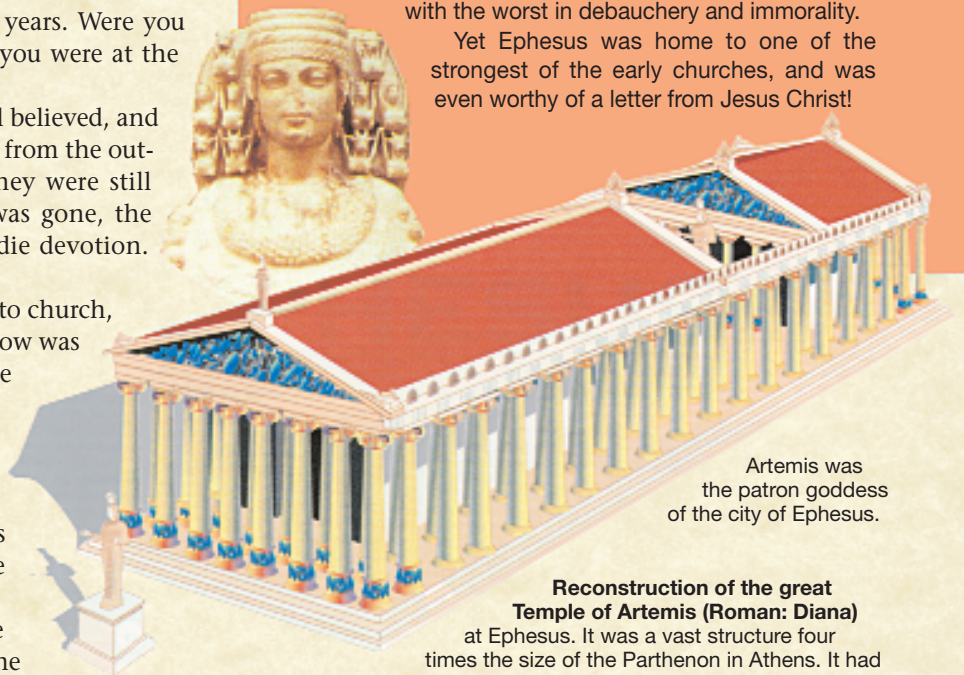
On the religious side, Ephesus was the chief place of the worship of Artemis (Roman: Diana). One of the wonders of the ancient world, its temple drew thousands of tourists and the city enjoyed a thriving souvenir business manufacturing images of the goddess (see Acts 19:21–41).

Ancient Ephesus was built to look impressive. It had high walls, broad avenues, and even some streets paved with marble. In Paul’s day, a visitor arriving at the harbor traveled the half-mile to the theater on a marble-paved boulevard 35 feet wide and flanked on either side by huge colonnades. Alongside the marketplace, the roof of the temple of Artemis was supported by 127 columns 6 feet in diameter and 60 feet high.

The people of Ephesus loved their amusements. The main theater had seating capacity for at least 25,000. Here games, gladiatorial combats and contests with wild animals were held, and here Demetrius and his fellow silver-smiths led the mob in a riot against the Apostle Paul. Excavators have also uncovered a library with capacity for up to 15,000 rolls, large public baths, gymnasia, and many fountains, wells and aqueducts; also a number of private homes, the larger ones having bedrooms, dining halls, kitchens, bathrooms, and mosaics and frescos depicting Greek mythology.

Ephesus had the best of whatever was—along with the worst in debauchery and immorality.

Yet Ephesus was home to one of the strongest of the early churches, and was even worthy of a letter from Jesus Christ!



Artemis was the patron goddess of the city of Ephesus.

### Reconstruction of the great Temple of Artemis (Roman: Diana)

at Ephesus. It was a vast structure four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. It had 127 columns, each 60 ft high, adorned by the most gifted sculptors of the day. **The Temple of Artemis** was listed as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.



## THE CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

**E**phesus and its people is mentioned more than twenty times in the New Testament.

To the believers in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul was not just a name. He was a brother in Christ whom they knew and loved personally. The Book of Acts records three missionary journeys that took him throughout the Roman Empire. On his second journey, about the year 53 AD, Paul visited believers in Ephesus. But he did not stay long (Acts 18:19–21). On his third journey, Paul spent at least three years (Acts 20:31). This gave the Ephesians and those outlying an opportunity to see the gospel lived, as well as to hear it preached (Acts 19:1–20; Phil. 4:9).

Even though the City was dedicated to the worship of Diana, during the years following Paul's visit, the Christian Church in Ephesus grew strong in knowledge and understanding. Opposition was fierce at times, but they had caught the vision of a brighter hope and a glorious future that other gods could not give.

About ten years later Paul wrote a letter to his beloved Ephesian brethren that we know as the Epistle to the Ephesians. Some seven or eight years later, Jesus sent them His letter from heaven. By then, the Apostle Paul was gone, and Jesus wanted to give these believers one last message to rekindle their love for God—and ours.

for awhile if the slope is downhill, but eventually it will come to a dead stop. It is the same with our bodies. If we do not eat, our energy declines, and we eventually come to a dead stop.

The same is true with our faith. To lose our passion for God and His Kingdom, we need do nothing at all. Just stay at home, relax, and let the fire inside die.

Faith that is not fed soon dies.

**J**esus said the Church at Ephesus had *"left their first love."* The key word here is "left." They moved away from God and toward the world.

Love that is not nurtured dies. Zeal that is not renewed dies. Faith that is not fed dies. It is only a matter of time. We may say, "Oh, I know all that, I don't need to go over these Scriptures." But if we would keep our love for God warm and glowing, we must keep feeding the fire.

What happened to Demas? Paul's last words about Demas were: *"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world"* (2 Tim. 4:10). A growing love for the world smothered the fire of his love for God.

What was it about the world that captured Demas? Was it the games, or education, or money, or the bright lights of fame and fortune? Whatever it was, we can be sure it didn't happen all at once. When Demas and Paul were walking down the street together, Paul's mind was on his message, and what he could do for the brethren they were about to visit. Demas was looking around. He looked, and then he looked again, and again, and again, until there grew such a longing in his heart for the things around him that his love for God died out.

If Demas had kept his mind focused on the promises of God and sharing the insights that captured Brother Paul, he would have scarcely noticed the bright lights of Babylon (the world). Demas was in the running with Luke, and Timothy, and others (Col. 4:14; Philem. 1:24). He could have ended his course as Paul did, with a crown of life awaiting him. But instead we read, *"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."*

**W**hat causes the fire to go out? What causes love to grow cold?

1) **The threat of the familiar.** Did you ever read a verse of Scripture—and after reading it, wonder what you had read—even though it is

so familiar, you could say it from memory?

There is a saying that "If you don't love God more today than you did yesterday, you will soon not love Him at all." Our love for God must be a growing love. If it is not growing, it is dying. Just like the flame, if it is not fed it will die.

2) **The wrong priorities.** What comes first in our lives? Is everything we do part of our service to God? Are we absorbed with fulfilling ourselves first, or are we living a life of service to God and others?

There is a story of a father who gave his little girl a silver dollar as a reward. He said to her, "You can put this in your



## KEY WORDS

- ❑ **FIRST LOVE:** Heart enthusiasm for the knowledge of God and His promises (Rev.2:4); to love God with *"all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30).
- ❑ **REPENT** (Rev. 2:5): a serious turning from self or sin and toward God in obedience to His laws.
- ❑ **TREE OF LIFE** (Rev. 2:7): a symbol of God's promise of everlasting life to those who are faithful and complete in their obedience.
- ❑ **OVERCOME** (Rev. 2:7, 11): to overpower evil with good in our individual, daily lives (Rom. 12:21); to resist the temptation to transgress God's law.



## KEY LINES

- ◆ *Our eternal salvation depends on keeping our love for God warm and the fire of faith glowing in our hearts, and to the end.*
- ◆ *Faith that isn't growing is dying.*



bank." She dashed off to put the silver dollar in her bank, but soon came back with the coin still in her hand. "What is the problem?" asked her father. "It won't go in, Daddy. My bank is too full." Her father went to investigate and found it full indeed—full of pennies!

Are we choosing pennies when we could be choosing real worth? Is our love growing cold because we are spending more time with the news media than with God? Are we wasting time in idle chatting that could be better spent reading the Word? Are we spending time or money in any activity God cannot bless—entertainment, daydreaming, window shopping, or any of a thousand interests not needful or spiritually upbuilding? This is the way love grows cold.

Hear the warning in Jesus' words: "You no longer love me as you did at first."

## THE REMEDY

What is the remedy for a dying love? Jesus says it in three words: "remember ... repent ... do." Love does not have to grow cold. There is a way to turn it around, to keep our love for God warm and glowing.

1) **Remember.** Jesus said, remember where you have fallen from. Remember where you used to be.

These people were mostly believers who had come out of paganism. When they became believers, they had to study the Scriptures, the law and the prophets, to learn what God expected of them. They had done this, but now they were forgetting those early, vivid lessons of life, so Jesus says, "Remember!" Go back to the basics. Go over the promises of God, and what God required of His people of old. Go over what happened when they disobeyed, or strayed from Him. Go over the messages of those prophets God sent to rouse His people from their unbelief. Hear Isaiah shouting, "Awake! Awake!" and Micah crying, "Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God"; or Amos pleading, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (Isa. 52:1; Micah 6:8; Amos 4:12).

What made the fire of faith burn in your heart? Read it again! Re-live those lessons from Scripture, of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David and the prophets. See where they were strong, where they were weak, and where faith triumphed over fear in their lives. God was working then—and He still is now. Keep these pictures in your mind. Remember! Don't let your faith be history. Make your devotion to God the very center of your life today.

"Remember the Lord your God..." Is it important to keep going over these lessons? Moses said "Remember" fourteen times in the book of Deuteronomy, and another nine times he said, "Do not forget." He knew how easily we forget.

2) **Repent.** Just to remember is not enough. Our faith must change the way we think, the way we respond to other people, the things we do. Repent means to turn around, see where we have been wrong—where we had bitter feelings, or where we were not totally truthful, or where we were provoked and said harsh or unkind words—and correct our course.

We could remember and be resentful. We could remember and blame someone else, or circumstances—it is natural to seek out something or someone to blame for our problems. But if

## JESUS' ASSESSMENT

**Critique.** "I know your works, your labor, your patience" (Rev. 2:2).

Jesus was looking at the inside.

**Commend.** "You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;... and you have persevered,...and not become weary" (Rev. 2:2-3).

They were effectively standing up against false teachings and outside enemies.

**Condemn.** "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4).

It was a serious indictment: The teaching was correct, but the fire—the zeal, the enthusiasm—was going out. There was a feeling of "it doesn't matter," or "so what?" The warm glow of loving to obey Christ was gone.

**Counsel/Warning.** "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Rev. 2:5).

Three Steps—or else: "Remember... repent... do." Jesus wants them to see the seriousness of the danger. They must find a way to stir up the fire of Divine zeal—or lose their hope of future life!

**Crown.** "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).

## HEARING EARS

- ◆ What can I do so that Jesus will not say to me, "You don't love me like you used to"?
- ◆ What can I do to fight complacency in my own heart?
- ◆ How can I benefit from Jesus' counsel: "remember"?
- ◆ What can I do that will increase my love for God and for others?



## Seeking

LORD, YOU HAVE OFFERED US LIFE—LIFE WITHOUT SICKNESS, LIFE WITHOUT TROUBLE, LIFE WITHOUT END!—ON CONDITION THAT WE KEEP YOU FIRST IN OUR LIVES AND CENTER ALL ELSE AROUND WHAT YOU APPROVE. WE OFFER YOU ALL OUR HEART, ALL OUR SOUL, ALL OUR MIND, ALL OUR STRENGTH, BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT YOU COMMAND IN YOUR WORD.

HEAVENLY FATHER, I WANT THAT STRONG INNER AFFECTION THAT MAKES EVERY DUTY A PRIVILEGE AND EVERY OBSTACLE A STEPPINGSTONE TO HIGHER LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL ACHIEVEMENT. MAY MY LOVE FOR YOU AND YOUR GREAT PROMISES BE A GROWING, COMPELLING, TRANSFORMING LOVE THAT DRAWS ME AWAY FROM THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD THAT WILL SOON END, AND TOWARD YOU.

I ASK YOUR HELP, THAT I MAY ONE DAY BE GRANTED THE RIGHT TO EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE. AMEN.

we are honest with ourselves, more than likely we will see that the problem is ours, not someone else's.

Repentance is a change of heart.

3) **Do.** That means, put that resolution into action. Living faith must work. We must apply our faith every day, every hour, everywhere. Let it change our attitudes and actions, producing in us those beautiful fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22–23).

Remember, repent, and do. And then...

## The Crown

Why the letter from Jesus? Why the concern about the love that is dying? Because Jesus is holding out promises to the overcomers. *"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God"* (Rev. 2:7).

Serving God is not its own reward. We are not worshipping God to feel good about ourselves. We are not worshipping God because it is the accepted thing to do, or because it is expected of us. We worship and obey God because there is a condition on the life everlasting that He has offered us: *"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life"*—life in His coming Kingdom here on earth. Each one eating from *"the tree of life"* forever will have remembered, repented and done! ♦



**The Great Theater**

The Great Theater was an important part of city life in Ephesus, being on the route of the Artemis procession. After its completion by the Romans, it seated 25,000 people.



**Marble Street (right) leading to the Library of Celsus (above)**

Twelve thousand scrolls once filled the halls of this library, stored in niches in the walls.

Life for sincere Christian believers was not a lot different in first century Ephesus than it is for believers today. Christians were surrounded by icons that represented the loves of this world—*"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"* (1John 2:16).

Christians walked their streets and shopped in their markets, but Jesus warned against those evil influences and practices. He promised something far better. *"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life"* (Rev. 2:7). What did Ephesus have that could give eternal life?

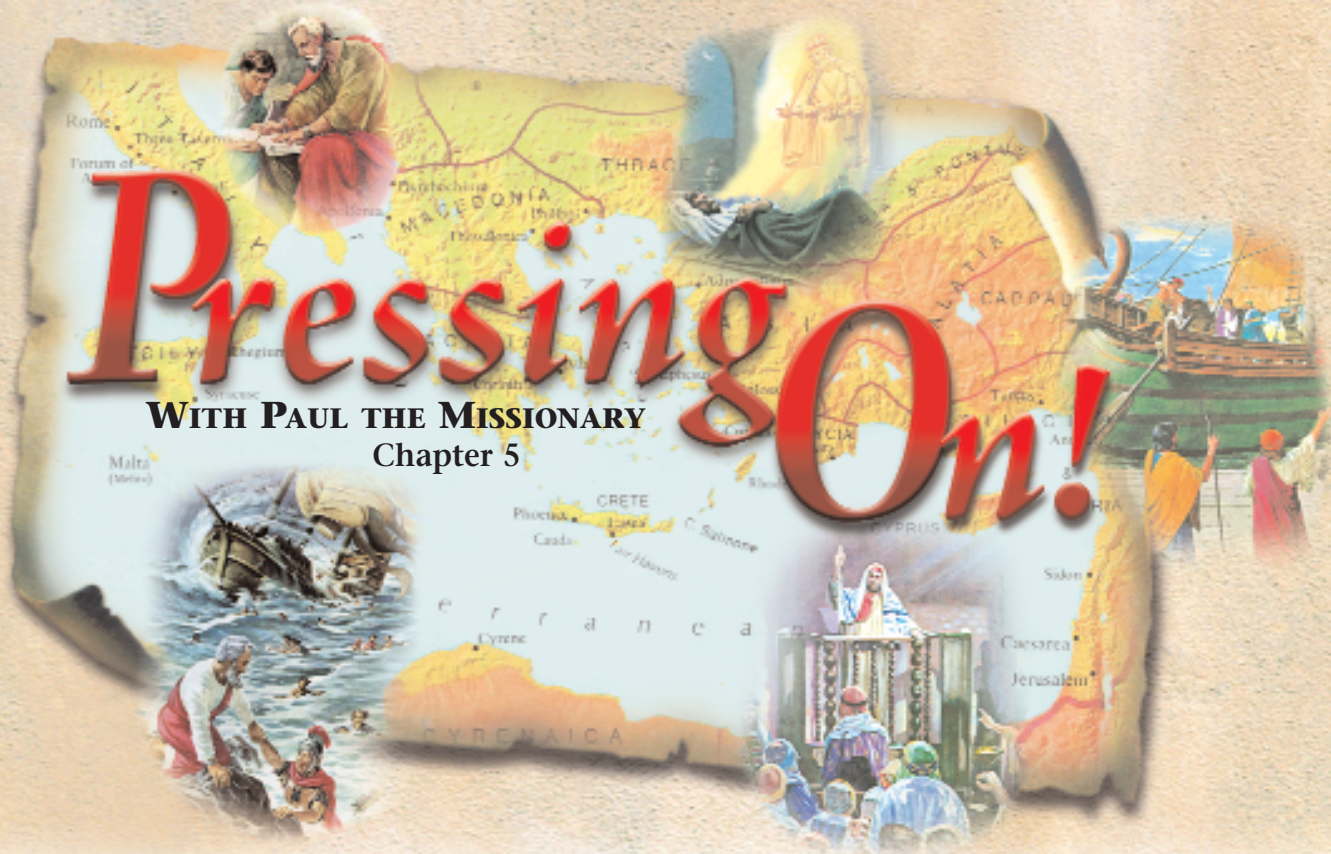


PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



**The Town Hall (above), or prytaneum,** was an important civic structure at ancient Ephesus. The sacred flame of the city, never permitted to go out, was also kept here, guarded by the goddess Hestia.





## “I Have Finished My Course”

### SYNOPSIS

*The Apostle Paul is confined in a gloomy underground cell in the infamous Mamertine Prison in Rome, awaiting final disposition of his case. As the curtain opens, he is greeting Luke, his companion, personal physician, and secretary, to whom we are so deeply indebted for our knowledge of Paul's stirring career.*

**Paul:** *(two Christian brothers embrace)* How are you, Luke? How is everyone else?

**Luke:** *(warmly inquires about Paul)* We're well, thank God. Brother, we're all concerned about you. The brethren send their love.

**Paul:** *(touched)* Thank you, my dear Luke. May God bless and keep every sincere believer! *(warmly leaves one hand on Luke's shoulder)* Luke, I'm so grateful you have come today. I don't know how I could have carried on without your support. *(matter-of-factly)* It is possible that this may be the last time. A decision is expected soon, so I'm told. Did you notice anything unusual as you came in?

**Luke:** *(sadly)* Nooo, dear brother—well—except that your jailer seemed more respectful to me.

**Paul:** Not a good sign. But let's not think about it. *(waves it off and moves toward a rough bench he used for a table)* There is work to do. I want to finish that letter to Apollos. Will you write for me?

**Luke:** Gladly. The light is rather poor,—I think I can see well enough. *(He takes the parchment Paul hands him, picks up the quill and ink, then sits down.)* I'm ready.

**Paul:** Well, let's see...*(pauses in thought)* My dear brother, for though I am a long way from you in body, in spirit I am by your side. God has thrown open a great new field for us, and I watch your success as a proud father.

**Paul:** *(walks to and fro as he dictates the conclusion of the letter)*

I feel the last drops of my life are being poured out for God and that I shall never see the fruits of your labors until the day of our Lord's appearing. This is His will, and I would not have it otherwise.

I trust you completely, Apollos. I remember our service together in this field, where I planted and you watered. Now in far-away Bithynia it is yours to do both planting and watering and I am confident you will do well.

Never lose your sense of urgency, for life is short and the work is great. Never let the story get started that the coming of the Lord is imminent; that day will not come until the Apostasy has come and gone. Nevertheless, we must all live expectantly; planning for eternity, yet living as if we were to die tomorrow.

Persevere in all that you do, which means meeting the sufferings involved. Persecution is inevitable for those who are determined to live above this world, so do not be disheartened by it. Remember the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ and remember me, His humble servant. Remember the final triumph is what really counts.

Be wise in your behavior toward non-Christians. Speak pleasantly to them, and let your own life be above criticism. It may well be that God will give

some of them a different outlook, and some day they will be called our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Oh Apollos, guard your Divine commission with utmost care. Do not be afraid to tell others of their duty or to reprove, in love, when necessary. However, steer clear of barren arguments over technicalities. Such arguments settle nothing and lead nowhere.

Paul: Luke, I would like to add the last words. *(The men exchange places. Paul writes—)*. And may the Lord of peace personally give you His peace at all times and in all ways. All the brethren in Rome send their love. We are praying for you. Give my personal greeting to all the brethren there.

This farewell message is written in my own writing, my mark on all my letters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, Paul. *(Paul reads what he just wrote, then rolls up parchment and hands it to Luke)*

Luke: It is a long way to Bithynia, but Brother Apollos should have it before winter. We thank God that his mission is succeeding so well. Soon there will be another church for you to look after.

Paul: Ah, no; that will be for some one else, and the work will go on as the Lord sees fit to prosper it. Others will be raised up to carry it on, just as there have always been. When I am gone, Luke, it would be well for you to join Apollos there, if it is your pleasure. You know we planned long ago to go to Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit said no. Now the door is open.

Luke: *(sadly)* When you are gone...Don't speak of it.

Paul: *(glowing)* Life for me has been wonderful and richly rewarding. Life is beautiful, Luke, if we make it so.

Luke: Yes, it is for me since I have known you and our God.

Paul: Together we have suffered much for Christ's sake, but it has been a glorious suffering—even seems light and but a moment, compared to the eternal reward. Thank God, our troubles can work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. *(very seriously)* I would gladly—eagerly—do it all over again if I could, and I would do it better. I would welcome twice the hardship if I could avoid the blunders I have made in this life; if I could atone for my great error in persecuting the Church of Christ; if I could blot out the sight of Stephen as he fell before the stones of the Jewish mob.

Luke: *(reassuringly)* That is all forgiven and forgotten, Brother Paul.

Paul: Yes, I am confident it is. *(gazing as if looking far into the future)* I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. I am ready to go, trusting in the great mercy and forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ and of our heavenly Father. *(voice trails off)*

Luke: You are weary, Brother.

Paul: A little, but it is nothing. My heart is so filled with thankfulness and rejoicing for all the Eternal has done for me that I forget the weakness of this old body.

Luke: It grows late and I had better go. I'm leaving you this medicine which will help you sleep.

Paul: You will come tomorrow, won't you?

Luke: I certainly will, if at all possible.

Paul: God be with you, my beloved Luke.

Luke: And with you, Brother Paul.

*They embrace affectionately, and Luke leaves. Paul kneels to pray beside his bed. The curtain descends, then rises with Paul in the same position. He rises and slowly paces the floor for a full minute. Then the door grates open and the jailer descends the steps. His face is grave and his voice tense.*

Jailer: I'm afraid the report is—ah—unfavorable, Sir.

Paul: I am expecting it, my son.

Jailer: I'm sorry, but you're to go immediately.

Paul: I am ready.

Jailer: *(apologetically)* I—I'm very sorry, Sir. *(at a loss)* You've been a model prisoner.

Paul: That is part of my duty to my God. I wish you could know Him as I know Him, my friend.

Jailer: *(looking earnestly at Paul)* Somehow I feel your presence has made me a better man. *(voice breaks)* I—I hoped you would be released. I am very sorry. I shall miss you.

Paul: *(a missionary to the very end)* Will you see that my physician, Luke, takes charge of my books and papers? If you care to learn about the Faith, he will be glad to help you. Friend, it's the way to everlasting life.

Jailer: Thank you, Sir.

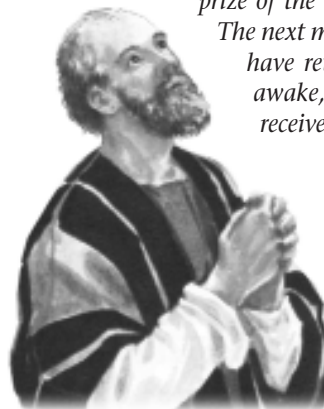
*(Paul folds his blanket neatly and hands it to jailer)*

Paul: I wish you to have my blanket. You have been most kind to me.

Jailer: *(almost overcome)* Oh, thank you, Sir! I shall always treasure it. I shall never forget you. *(composing himself)* I'm sorry—but follow me, please.

*As the jailer steps outside, Paul arranges his few possessions on the bed, then moves toward the steps, where he stands a moment with bowed head. Behind him an Angel, unseen by Paul, enters and stands. As Paul mounts the first step and pauses, the Angel extends his right hand as in blessing. As Paul mounts the second step, and the third, the Great Apostle lifts his head and looks up, his eyes shining. He is still "pressing on." His mind is fixed on the "prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

*The next moment he will know, Jesus Christ will have returned and the dead in Christ shall awake, and he will arise to be judged and receive his crown of life eternal.*



*"And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return" (2 Tim. 4:8 NLT). ♦*

THE END



# Victory Over Death!

by SPENCER KINCANNON

History has many success stories. Abraham Lincoln lost everything in business failures, had many disappointments in family life, many political failures, yet he still rose to the top in the political arena as president of the United States, winning two elections back to back. But he died from an assassin's bullet.

Einstein proved the existence of atoms. He also gave us the theory of relativity challenging everyone's perceptions of time and space, and his explanation of the photoelectric effect launched quantum mechanics and led to many developments that we use today such as lasers. He also died.

In 1895 Guglielmo Marconi received his first wireless radio signal in Italy. He was considered the "grandfather of wireless communication" that has mushroomed into multiple applications—the internet, cell phone, radio, television, remote control for many devices, etc. But Marconi is not benefiting. He died.

Alexander the Great conquered the world by military might—and died at the early age of 32.

Of course, you say! What else can one expect? Everybody dies! The Bible heroes who served God faithfully also died.

But there is a difference, a huge difference. Those who served God will be brought back to life and—if found faithful—will be given life immortal. Theirs will be an eternal victory over death. They will never, never, never die again. They did not make their little contribution to the world, only to sleep forever in oblivion—and it is oblivion, because the Bible says *"The dead know not anything"* (Eccl. 9:5). Those who die in Christ will be resurrected when He returns. At that time, those who are *"counted worthy"* will be made equal to the angels, *"neither can they die any more"* (Luke 20:35–36). Here is a real victory over death—forever.

How does one become *"counted worthy"*? What does the Bible say?

To be counted worthy one must, with God's help, win the battle against his own sinful nature, die to sin and all sinful ways. The Apostle Paul describes it as putting to death our sinful nature: *"Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires"* (Col. 3:5 NLT). In another letter he called it putting off the *"old man of the flesh,"* the old nature, and putting on the new man, the nature of Christ. *"Throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes"* (Eph. 4:22–23 NLT).

Each of us has an *"old nature"* that we have to battle daily until it is dead. To win the victory is no easy task, for the old nature does not die easily.

*"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" 1 Cor 15:55*

Colossians 3:8–10 describes the corrupt nature that has to be put off—anger, wrath, envy, hatred, lust, impure thoughts, greed, covetousness and every unholy thing that God hates.

Paul describes the change from the old to the new another way: *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Rom. 12:2).

In other words, replace ungodly, lustful, destructive thoughts with thoughts that are spiritually upbuilding.

Jesus served His heavenly Father with all His mind, might and strength, not doing His own ways, nor finding His own pleasures, nor speaking His own words—the very standard Isaiah said God would honor (Isa. 58:13). In this way He died to Himself, gave up His own ways. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:21 that He died as an example to us. He laid down His life, His ways, to save Himself and be an example to His disciples.

The Apostle Paul followed Jesus. He said, *"I die daily"* (1 Cor. 15:31). When we first hear of Paul in the book of Acts, he is Saul of Tarsus, a fanatical Pharisee and persecutor of the Church. Then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. The encounter was such a stirring event that it is told three times in the book of Acts. Paul got the shock of his life that day. He was temporarily blinded from the bright light, and had to be led by the hand. But it was more than a momentary shock. It was a 180-degree turn. He would never be the same again.

Years after his conversion Paul wrote to the Philippians, *"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things...if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead"* (Phil. 3:7–11). From that point on, he focused on the resurrection and life. He knew he would die, but he wanted to be sure of being restored to life at Jesus' return and be given that final victory over death; and he was willing to do anything Christ asked him to do, if only he could attain it.

Paul had many severe trials, yet he endured to the end, kept the faith, and was sure of the crown (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

The Bible gives us many examples of those who kept the faith and endured to the end. They endured because they believed they would receive the glorious reward of eternal life when Christ the Redeemer would return in the last day. Though they would have to sleep in death for many years, they were certain of the resurrection and the crown of life everlasting!

Remember, only the strait gate leads straight into the Kingdom (Matt. 7:13–14). Only the narrow way leads to life. Only a careful walk in the narrow way leads to victory over death! ♦



# FAITH *in Action*



Acts 21:1-7 (NLT)

1 After saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, we sailed straight to the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes and then went to Patara.

2 There we boarded a ship sailing for the Syrian province of Phoenicia.

3 We sighted the island of Cyprus, passed it on our left, and landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria, where the ship was to unload.

4 We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These disciples prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem.

5 When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including wives and children, came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed,

6 and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.

7 The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters but stayed only one day.

by RUTH E. SISSON

## TO JERUSALEM BY PENTECOST

 Read Acts 21:1-7

The Apostle Paul was a missionary on a mission. Remember, too, that he was not traveling alone—there were at least seven brethren representing the scattered Churches, each carrying their respective Church's offerings to the suffering Mother Church in Jerusalem. And they were on the open road with no armored car or body guard or arms to protect themselves.

Unlike most of Paul's journeys, this leg of the journey had a time schedule. Paul wanted if at all possible to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Even though he had not been present at the first Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection, Pentecost had great meaning for him and all the Church. One might say that Pentecost was the Church's birthday. On that day, Jesus, having been glorified at the Father's right hand, sent mighty power on His gathered, faithful disciples (Acts 2:33). This power would confirm that they were God-appointed emissaries. It was supernatural, God-given gifts to teach, or prophecy, or heal, or speak languages they had never learned (see 1 Cor. 12 for a discussion of the various gifts that were part of the Holy Spirit).

1. By this outpouring of power at Pentecost, what promise was Jesus fulfilling that He had made to His disciples before He ascended? (Acts 1:8) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What command did Jesus give His disciples when He told them He would be sending power to them? (Luke 24:49) \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus, before He was taken to heaven, had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the power, not saying how long they would have to wait. But ten days after He ascended to heaven, it happened, *"on the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection, [when] the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from*





heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting... And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability" (Acts 2:1–4 NLT).

Every year Jewish people from many different nations came to Jerusalem for Pentecost, "devout men from every nation under heaven." At this particular Pentecost, as a result of the Holy Spirit power given to the disciples assembled, each person heard the Apostles speaking "in his own language" (Acts 2:6). It was a miracle of understanding never imagined before. It was the beginning of a ministry that would send the Apostles out with courage and conviction, ready to testify in the name of the resurrected Christ, ready to suffer—and die, if need be—for their faith.

No wonder Paul and his brothers in Christ wanted to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost! It was not likely that any of the missionaries in Paul's company had been present that first Pentecost, but they had all heard the story told and retold many times. More, they had all seen the results of that Pentecost—in miracles done by Paul and others of the brethren, and in the spread and growth of the Church. Everyone knew that the power of the Holy Spirit was real.

### **Missionary Visits En Route**

But even though the missionaries were anxious to reach Jerusalem, they also wanted to benefit believers along the way.

The record tells us that they followed along the coast, passing by the city of Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and the next day to Patara.

If Luke had been the standard reporter, Rhodes would have been



### **Insight**

#### **How Strong Are Your Convictions?**

The Apostle Paul could easily have been diverted from his course when he learned that serious persecution and suffering lay ahead of him. If he was trying to rationalize, he could have concluded that the Lord was using these prophesying brothers to tell him to stop and not go through with his plan to reach Jerusalem.

But Paul was not daunted. He had already experienced at least one stoning and several beatings. And he was well acquainted with more than one prison in the Roman Empire. When challenged for his faith, he did not flinch. When asked to make a sacrifice, he did not hesitate. Was he a follower of Jesus? Absolutely! Did his loyalty to Jesus come ahead of his loyalty to Caesar? Absolutely! Did he believe Jesus had been resurrected? Absolutely! Was he willing to suffer—even die, if need be—before he would deny his faith? Absolutely! Why should he start now to avoid the storm? His first thought was, let it come! "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). I can give no more than Christ gave!

How strong are your convictions and mine? Are we ready to die, if need be, for the cause we believe in?

PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



(above) A street in ancient Tyre. Perhaps the Christian brothers took this street in search of the Christians in Tyre.

(right) Ruins of the famed ancient Tyre on the Mediterranean Sea. At this time the causeway built by Alexander the Great to conquer the city of Tyre linked the Island of Tyre to the mainland.

Tyre was an important seaport of Phoenicia.







A closer look

### Determined but Not Stubborn

In Acts 21:4, the Ephesian elders had warned Paul *“that he should not go up to Jerusalem.”*

Was Paul being stubborn and difficult to insist on going to Jerusalem in spite of the warnings?

We do not have a record of any time when Paul disobeyed or resisted what God told him to do. By going to Jerusalem, he was only doing what he believed to be his God-assigned duty—to suffer for Christ’s sake. This is what Jesus had told him when He met him on the Damascus road *“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake”* (Acts 9:16). Paul had a definite mission in Jerusalem, and he was determined to see it through.

It is even possible that the Holy Spirit had told him to go to Jerusalem at this time. Various translations of Acts 20:22 are as follows: *“And now you see me on my way to Jerusalem in captivity to the Spirit; I have no idea what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit, in town after town, has made it clear to me that imprisonment and persecution await me”* (NJB). *“And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me”* (NLT). *“But now I must obey the Holy Spirit and go to Jerusalem. I don’t know what will happen to me there”* (NCV).

One other fact is clear: the Holy Spirit did not give a counter direction.

noted as a highlight of the trip. At Rhodes was the toppled Colossus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But to Luke the historian and the other Christian brethren, Rhodes was only another point on the map, insignificant because there were no believers there.

At the city of Patara, a port of Lycia, the missionaries boarded a vessel sailing for Phoenicia, their destination Tyre. Likely an ocean-going vessel, it would make better time than the ship on which they had begun their journey. And it would be stopping at Tyre, where there were believers to meet and encourage!

Traveling by ship was monotonous, there being nothing to see for days but water, water everywhere. Then someone sighted land—the island of Cyprus!

3. What Christian brother came from Cyprus? (Acts 4:36) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Who accompanied Paul on his first missionary visit to Cyprus? (Acts 13:2, 5) \_\_\_\_\_
5. What open demonstration of Divine power did Paul use to reinforce his message on that first visit to Cyprus? What was the effect on his hearers? (Acts 13:6–12) \_\_\_\_\_

Paul had vivid personal memories of Cyprus. He knew there were believers there, whom he longed to see. Barnabas and John Mark had done much good work on Cyprus. But the ship did not stop there. It was making its way to Tyre, where the captain had business to transact. At Tyre the passengers would be able to spend a few days on land.

### Believers in Tyre

Tyre was a pagan city, a historic center of idol worship. Phoenician and Egyptian gods—Adonis, Melqart, Anath, Astarte, Baal, Baal-Hammon—all thrived in ancient Tyre, and monuments of art and religion were often set up over urns containing the ashes of human sacrifices. Could any good be found in Tyre? Yes! There were believers in the city.

Once the missionaries disembarked at Tyre, their first task was to *find* the Christians in the city. Who were they? Where did they live? Luke tells us that the travelers had to *“find”* the disciples—suggesting a difficult search.

This shows two facts: that the Christians were very few, and that the visit was not planned, so no one was expecting the travelers.

But when the Christians were found, and brothers met brothers (and sisters), what joy! Can’t we picture the Tyre believers quickly rearranging their schedules wherever possible to have time with Brother Paul and company?

The missionaries received a warm welcome; and Luke writes, *“we stayed there seven days.”*

6. What in Luke’s account shows the believers had feeling for Brother Paul? (21:4) \_\_\_\_\_
7. How did they know Paul would suffer at Jerusalem? (21:11) \_\_\_\_\_

These believers felt a common bond with their brothers in Christ. They were in the race for eternal life. And though they may never have seen each other before, they shared their joys and sorrows, their trials and blessings (1 Cor. 12:25–26). And naturally, when through the Holy Spirit they learned that trouble awaited Paul in Jerusalem, they warned him tenderly.

This warning did not surprise Paul. He already knew, even before leaving Ephesus, that *“the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.”* What was the response of this indomitable, totally committed soldier of Christ? *“None of these things move me”* (Acts 20:23–24).



PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



(above) Paved Street in Caesarea

(left) Roman mile stone

Mile stones were an important part of the Roman road system. The traveling brothers would be very familiar with these markers.



One week of delightful fellowship was quickly spent, and Paul and company had to say goodbye to the brethren in Tyre. The emotion in that parting even comes through multiple translations and nearly two thousand years. When the brothers had to leave, Luke writes that *"they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed"* (21:5). It was the perfect end of a perfect week of loving spiritual refreshment.

Oh, the links of Christian love that bind believers to one another! There is nothing in all the world to compare with it. Ties of Christian love can be far stronger than flesh and blood ties.

As the keepers of the ship were loading the last of the cargo, these believers standing on the shore, commending their loved ones to the care of God, looked forward to the day when there would be no more partings.

### Believers in Ptolemais

8. Leaving Tyre, where did the ship stop next? (21:7) \_\_\_\_\_
9. How long did they stay in this city? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What did the missionaries do when they had only a "one day" stopover? (21:7) \_\_\_\_\_

Once again, it looks like Paul and company could leave the ship briefly to meet with believers in the city. Ptolemais was a Roman colony dating back to the days of Ptolemy II.

Even though Paul did not have much time to spend with the believers here, he used his opportunity to share their experiences and learn of their trials and triumphs. In a single day, how much he could give them of hope, encouragement, and vision! How vividly he, by the power of the Holy Spirit, could picture the Day when Christ will return and the whole world will be under His domain, and people everywhere will be brothers and sisters in Christ! Everywhere Paul went, he was spreading this special fragrance of hope (2 Cor. 2:14).

### Believers in Caesarea



Read Acts 21:8-14

11. Leaving Ptolemais, where did the ship stop next? (21:8) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Who lived in this city? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What was his earlier relationship to the Church? (Acts 6:5) \_\_\_\_\_
14. What do we know about his family? (21:8-9) \_\_\_\_\_

Caesarea was the home of Philip the evangelist. The last time we heard of Philip was years earlier, even before Paul's conversion, when an angel sent Philip on a special mission to enlighten the Ethiopian eunuch on the Gaza Road (Acts 8:26-40). The fact that Paul and company could go directly to Philip's house shows that the believers kept in touch. They loved and needed each other, and the bonds of fellowship such visits strengthened.

Paul and company enjoyed a full week with this dedicated, committed brother—and, very likely, his four grown daughters who had committed themselves to the work of the Church. It was true spiritual refreshment as they journeyed toward Jerusalem.

The Christians cared about one another.

15. What shows that these believers cared about Brother Paul? \_\_\_\_\_

### Acts 21:8-14 (NLT)

8 Then we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food.

9 He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

10 During our stay of several days, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea.

11 When he visited us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans.'"

12 When we heard this, we who were traveling with him, as well as the local believers, begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

13 But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus."

14 When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The will of the Lord be done."



From the Word

### Get acquainted with Philip...

Philip was one of the original seven deacons of the Jerusalem Church. He must have relocated to Caesarea sometime during the earlier years.

Paul and Philip had a lot in common. Though Philip had been a believer before Paul, both had now had many years to grow in Christ. Both had seen the earliest difficult years of the infant Church. Both had seen periods of persecution come and go, and felt the pain. Both knew the price of serving Christ, and shared the great hope of being part of His family forever.

Philip at this time was also, like Paul, middle aged, and had four adult, unmarried daughters who were giving themselves to the work of the ministry. What a testimony to a God-centered home! What a delightful, happy family, serving Christ together!

Philip's daughters *"prophesied."* This may mean that they had special gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit. Or it may mean that they were teachers in the Church, instructing others in the inspired Word of God. In either case, they were actively participating in Christ's ministry.





## Insight

### "The Will of the Lord Be Done"

"*Thy will be done*" was the acceptance statement of Jesus Himself. Facing a trial that was almost too much to contemplate, Jesus placed Himself in His Father's care. To submit was all that was asked.

How else could Paul go through those difficult years under a despot like Nero? But Paul could look up to Nero and think, You can do nothing except God allows it. This is the way Jesus viewed His crucifixion: "*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above*" (John 19:11), and the Apostle Peter said Jesus suffered "*leaving us an example that we should follow his steps*" (1 Pet. 2:21).

When we come to a great trial, we, too, must place it in God's hands. As long as we fight God's will, we cannot grow spiritually. But when we accept what the Lord allows as for our long-term good, we benefit—eternally.

16. What prophecy did a brother named Agabus make concerning Paul? (21:10) \_\_\_\_\_
17. How did he dramatize his prophecy? (21:11) \_\_\_\_\_
18. What was the effect of his prophecy on the believers who heard it? (21:12) \_\_\_\_\_
19. What was the Apostle Paul's reply? (21:13) \_\_\_\_\_

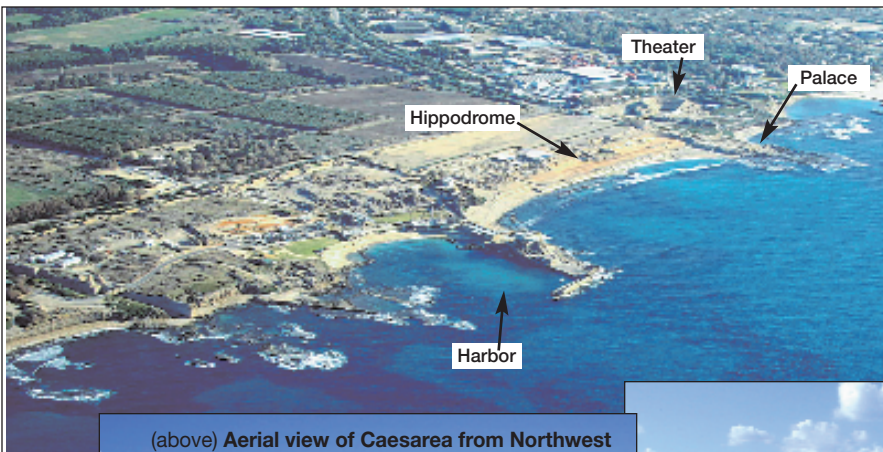
Paul was ready for anything. Totally committed to Christ, he was prepared for whatever suffering might lay in his path. He was not recklessly pursuing suffering but willingly accepting it as he fulfilled his Christ-assigned duty, confident that he could do anything Christ asked in the strength Christ would provide (Phil. 4:13). He said, "*I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (21:13). His one goal was as he wrote to the Philippians: "*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*" Paul wanted life, and he understood the requirement was his all. Hadn't Jesus taught, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*" (Mark 12:30)?

Paul was not saying he was anxious to die but that his commitment had no limits. Whatever might be asked of him, with Christ's help he would do it. Nothing could make him compromise his allegiance to Christ. It was the same message he had written to the Romans shortly before this: "*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 8:38-39).

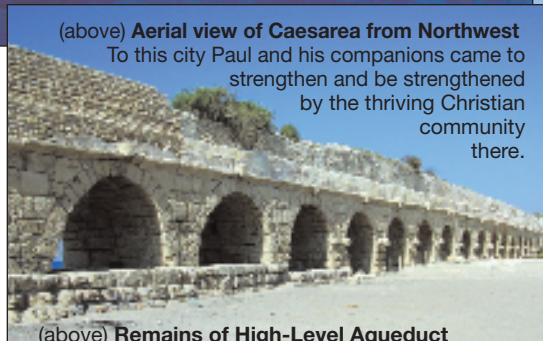
20. What was the reaction of the believers to Paul's stand? (21:14) \_\_\_\_\_

Accepting God's will is part of our Christian duty. We have to place what we cannot change in the care of the same God and the same Christ Jesus that supported Apostles Paul, and Peter, and John, and all who followed faithfully.

*to be continued*



(above) **Aerial view of Caesarea from Northwest**  
To this city Paul and his companions came to strengthen and be strengthened by the thriving Christian community there.



(above) **Remains of High-Level Aqueduct**

Herod built this aqueduct to bring fresh water into Caesarea from springs at the foot of Mt. Carmel. The arched portion of the aqueduct is 5 miles long. It also passes through a kurkar (sandstone) ridge by means of a hewn tunnel 1312 ft. long.



**Caesarea's (Modern) Harbor**

Herod needed to build this harbor to service his grand city. Besides, for economic trade and moving building materials and supplies, he needed it to welcome important traveling Roman officials. Pomp and display were evident everywhere in Caesarea. It is said the harbor could accommodate 300 ships.



**Site of Herod's Promontory Palace**

Herod spared no expense in the building of Caesarea. Between his "most magnificent palace" and the ocean he built a huge freshwater pool, lined on three sides with colonnades—anything to look impressive. However, Luke does not even mention the grandeur of Caesarea. Paul and company headed straight for the believers.





"Look," said Mr. Robin, "Let's build our house under that!"

## Too Modern

Mr. and Mrs. Robin were among the "400" top-flight birds of Wington. They came from a wealthy family—the kind that can afford to go to Florida every winter! Their feathers were stunning but always in good taste. They were members of the Tree Top Birderian Club which was quite exclusive, and they attended church occasionally—on special occasions. They were very up-to-date about everything and tried hard to be modern. In fact that was the cause of all their trouble.

Here's how it happened. In the early spring when all the birds in Wington were thinking and singing of building new nests, Mrs. Robin said to her husband, "It seems everybody is planning to do the same old thing in the same old way. All the birds are going to build their nests in the forks of trees, in ivy vines and under the eaves of houses. I wish for once we could be different and build a nest that everyone would notice and talk about."

"That's a great idea," answered Mr. Robin as he looked down proudly at his stunning red vest, "and I think I know just the place. Come, let me show you." So away they flew.

"Look!" said he five minutes later, as he made a two-point landing on a limb, "a little red house on wheels! Let's build our nest under that."

"Why, I never saw such a cute thing in all my life," exclaimed Mrs. Robin as she flew around and over and under it. "No doubt we are the first birds that ever thought of building a nest under a house on wheels," she said, as she brought the first piece of straw and put it in place. "Won't the other birds be jealous of us? I am so thrilled that I am all aflutter!"

And thus it came to pass that just under the floor of that little red house on wheels up in a corner on top of the axle, Mr. and Mrs. Robin built their nest. When it was finished, birds flew in from all over Wington to see it. Some chirped one thing and some another. Most of them were very complimentary in their chirps and some were just a little envious of the Robins. But Mr. Owl, who was very wise and terribly old-fashioned, blinking his eyes, said to his wife, "It looks very nice, but what if those wheels should begin to roll?" And do you know, that is exactly what happened!

It was several weeks later when there were "three little birds in the little brown nest" that a railroad engine backed up to the little red house and pulled it away. For, you see, it was not a little red house after all, but a freight caboose that had been left on the siding for several weeks when the railroad company did not need it. But later an order came for the caboose to be hooked up behind a new freight train and it was pulled many, many miles away.

And thus it was that while Mr. and Mrs. Robin were searching for worms to feed their hungry family, their nest and the three little Robins were taken away. And to this day they have not seen them nor do

they know what happened to them. They were modern you see, so modern that they lost their children! Yes, so often being modern does cost more than it could ever be worth! ♦



(American) Robin

## A Safe Nest

*They spotted the perfect place under the church roof.*

I would not call it queer, but it was a bit unusual—I mean the place Mrs. Sparrow and Mrs. Swallow built their nest. You see, they heard about the tragic mistake of Mr. and Mrs. Robin, as I told you in a previous story. You remember how Mr. and Mrs. Robin, trying so hard to be modern and up-to-date, built their nest under the little caboose. So, when the caboose was pulled away, they lost their home and their children.

Well, Mrs. Sparrow and Mrs. Swallow fell to talking about that one day, as they hunted worms in the same back yard.

Mrs. Swallow said: "Our little birds are exposed to so many dangers nowadays—dogs and cats and snakes and wolves—I just wonder where is the best place to build a nest. I do not mind being poor and having to scratch for worms if I can

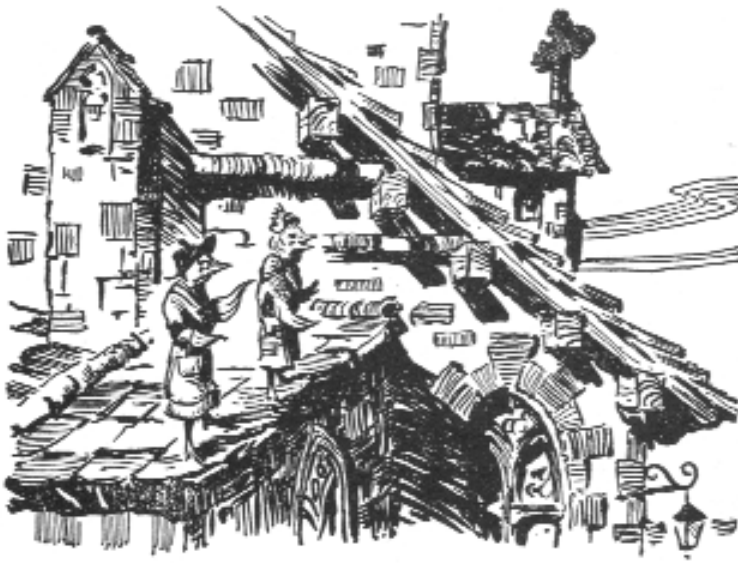
only be sure that my children will grow up safe and sound and love the Lord."

"I feel exactly the same way," said Mrs. Sparrow. "It certainly is a problem. Last year we had our nest down near the park. It was not so bad on week days, but there was so much noise on Sundays that it just didn't seem right at all. Mr. Sparrow and I have decided that we must get our children into a different neighborhood."

"We want to change too," said Mrs. Swallow. "Last year we built near a barn. Of course the market was handy, but we didn't like the atmosphere at all, and the rats were terrible!"

I am not sure how long this discussion continued, but as they were flying home side by side, they happened to pass





over the church. That is, they were about to pass over, when Mrs. Sparrow said, "The church! Maybe we could find a place to build here."

So they made a two point landing on the tower to look over the situation. It did not take them long to spot two corners, just under the roof, well protected from the wind and rain.

"A wonderful idea," said Mrs. Swallow. "This is the safest place I know to rear our children."

And she was right, wasn't she? All the parents who bring their children to Sunday School and then have them with them in church know she was right. The safest place in all the world to bring up children—within the protecting walls and under the sheltering roof of the church.

So that's where Mrs. Swallow and Mrs. Sparrow did build their nest, side by side on a ledge under the roof of God's house. The decision of theirs pleased God so much that He preserved an account of it in His own Holy Book. If you want proof that I am telling you the truth, turn in your Bible to the eighty-fourth Psalm, the third verse. There you will read: "Yea, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God."

I only wish that all human fathers and mothers were as wise as Mrs. Sparrow and Mrs. Swallow. That would please God, I am sure. ♦

#### MEMORY VERSE:

*"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. – Psalm 23:6 NKJV*

#### FOR DISCUSSION:

1. We cannot live in the church, but what four things must we do to have God's blessing on us? Read Psalm 24:3–4
2. How can we keep from being influenced by those who go after the sinful pleasures of godless people? Read Proverbs 4:14–15

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## Letters

### Neglected or Cultivated?

As Christians, our minds may be likened to a garden, which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild; but whether cultivated or neglected, it will produce a crop.

Just as a gardener cultivates his plot, keeping it free from weeds and growing the flowers and fruits which he requires, so may we tend the garden of our mind, weeding out all the wrong, useless, and impure thoughts, and cultivating those perfect flowers and fruits of right, useful, and pure thoughts.

By pursuing this process, we will sooner or later discover that we are the master gardener of our soul, the director of our life.

Beloved brothers and sisters, let us be generous in our attitude towards others. Criticizing those around us will not serve our best interests or theirs, but will become a seed sown in our own lives that will produce more of the same. We should examine our heart to see where this negativity springs from and how it gains a

stronghold because the Lord looks at our heart not our outward appearance. First Samuel 16:7 makes that point clear for us.

As followers of the Lord, our faith gives us five elements:

1. trust
2. confidence
3. courage
4. assurance
5. action

A lack of these five elements of faith results in insecurity. And insecurity comes from unlawful comparing of ourselves with others. Make every effort to uproot and eradicate this evil from among us, as says the Lord to us in 2 Corinthians 10:12: "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." We need this advice as we use our circumstances to shape our character and destiny as Christians. ♦

– JOHN S. DAVIES

#### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 21

##### DISOBEY AND DIE

1. (b) they offered strange fire to God (Lev. 10:1–2)
2. (d) Dathan and Abiram (Num. 16:23–33)
3. (d) death of the firstborn (Ex. 12:28–33)
4. (b) Haman (Esther 7:10)
5. (b) Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6–7)
6. (b) Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24–25)
7. (c) *I saw all Israel... as sheep that have no shepherd* (1 Kings 22:17)
8. (d) b. He listened to a lying prophet and (c) He ate and drank where he was told not to (1 Kings 13:1–24)
9. (a) Achan (Josh. 6:18–19; 7:20–25)
10. (a) Ten spies (Num. 14:36–37)

##### REWARDS

1. (c) Honor above all other nations
2. (d) His reward
3. (b) To each according to what he has done
4. (b) Obedience
5. (d) All three
6. (c) Confess him before His Father
7. (a) They will eat the fruit of their doings
8. (a) They will eat the fruit of their actions
9. (a) The crown of life



# DISOBEY AND DIE

- Why did Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, die in front of the altar?
  - They cursed God*
  - They offered strange fire to God*
  - They favored the rich people*
  - All of the above*
- During a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, which two men and their families were swallowed up by an earth quake?
  - Eliazar and Ithawar*
  - Ten spies*
  - Hur and his sons*
  - Dathan and Abiram*
- What was the last plague sent upon the Egyptians?
  - Darkness*
  - Locusts*
  - Boils on man and beasts*
  - Death of the firstborn*
- Who was hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for his enemy?
  - King Ahasuerus*
  - Haman*
  - Mordecai*
  - Judas Iscariot*
- Who died because he did not show respect according to the law of God?
  - Lot*
  - Uzzah*
  - Ananias*
  - Zachariah*
- What two cities were destroyed by fire and brimstone?
  - Ninevah and Babylon*
  - Sodom and Gomorrah*
  - Jericho and Babel*
  - Bethlehem and Nazareth*
- When Micaiah predicted King Ahab's death, what did he say?
  - You will be eaten by dogs*
  - One of your soldiers will shoot you down*
  - I saw all Israel...as sheep that have no shepherd*
  - All three*
- Why was a man of God killed by a lion and then buried in that land?
  - He spoke the word of the Lord*
  - He listened to a lying prophet*
  - He ate and drank where he was told not to*
  - b & c*



# Know Your Bible

- Who and his family were stoned for taking what was accursed?
  - Achan*
  - Samson*
  - Ahijah*
  - Jotham*
- Among those that died in a plague because they complained against God and Moses were:
  - Ten spies*
  - The five daughters of Zelophehad*
  - Korah and his sons*
  - Miriam and Aaron*

## REWARDS

- In Deuteronomy 28:1, what does the Lord promise as the reward for diligent obedience to His laws and commands?
  - Peace with the neighbors*
  - They could eat their fill*
  - Honor above all other nations*
  - All of the above*
- According to Isaiah 40:10, what is the Lord bringing with Him when He comes?
  - Judgment*
  - Angels*
  - Fury*
  - His reward*
- Revelation 22:12 tells how God will compensate His workers. He will give:
  - A fixed amount to each*
  - To each according to what he has done*
  - Special favor to the talented*
  - A golden crown*
- What does Samuel say is better than offering sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22)?
  - Love*
  - Obedience*
  - Good will*
  - Tolerance*
- According to Romans 2:7, what does God promise to every one who patiently continues doing well?
  - Glory*
  - Honor*
  - Eternal life*
  - All three*
- In Matthew 10:32, what does Jesus promise to do for everyone who confesses Him before men?
  - Bless him*
  - Give him a seat at the head table*
  - Confess him before His Father*
  - Reveal Himself in His glory*
- According to Isaiah 3:10, what is the reward of the righteous?
  - They will eat the fruit of their doings*
  - They will see God*
  - Righteousness is its own reward*
  - They will walk without fear*
- According to Isaiah 3:11, what is the reward of the wicked?
  - They will eat the fruit of their actions*
  - They will burn in hell*
  - The Lord will forget about them*
  - They will live in fear*
- According to Revelation 2:10, those "faithful until death" will receive:
  - The crown of life*
  - A full pardon*
  - The stone of triumph*
  - The light of heaven*

answers on page 20





In flight, no other bird comes close to a hummingbird. It hovers, dives and darts, flies forward and backward (as above), sideways and even upside down!

## Meet the *Jeweled Hummers!*

by PATRICIA A. FLEMING

**Y**ou hear a soft hum. You look up, to see a tiny bird seemingly suspended in mid-air in front of a flower, its wings beating so fast that they are only a blur. If it is a ruby-throated hummingbird, its wing speed is about 70 beats per second. This little bird has been clocked in flight speeds exceeding 30 miles per hour. Just think of it—30 miles an hour! That is 44 feet in a second, 88 feet in two seconds, a whole mile in two minutes. How can they do it?

The hummingbird is one more of our great Creator's marvelous designs. With some 340 known species in the western hemisphere, only 17 or 18 are found in the United States, and only one—the ruby throated—nests east of the Mississippi.

Hummingbirds are the smallest of all birds. Tiniest of all is the bee hummingbird, a native of Cuba, about 2 1/4 inches long. The mid-sized ruby-throated is about 3 1/2 inches long.

### **All direction fliers**

God designed these tiny birds with amazing flight capabilities that no other bird has. It can fly in any direction it chooses: forwards, backwards, sideways, down, and even straight up like a helicopter—only the hummers were doing this millennia before the helicopter was invented! And hummers can change their direction in a fraction of a second.

The bird's flight muscles comprise about 30 percent of their body weight—proportionally greater than that of any other bird. The end of the hummingbird's wing is hinged very much like our wrist, so that it

can turn easily in any direction. This feature is the very best for nectar gathering. It can dart from flower to flower, hovering beneath a blossom, back away, and move on to the next, then downward, or upward with amazing ease. Did the hummingbird design and refine these complex-flying techniques by chance? No, God fashioned this tiny bird to be the very best nectar gatherer right from the beginning because He knew it would need all of its amazing capabilities to survive.

### **High energy requirement**

The energy requirements of the hummingbirds are astoundingly high. Just consider this one fact: the tiny heart of the hummingbird beats at some 1260 beats per minute. That is 21 beats per second—nearly 20 times faster than the human heart beats! Think of the amount of fuel required to sustain that level of energy use. How does the hummingbird meet that energy requirement?

For a quick burst of energy first thing in the morning, the hummingbird visits nectar-rich flowers. Small insects through the day add protein and other nutrients that they need to keep their muscles in good working order. God has also equipped these tiny creatures with high-efficiency digestion. The hummingbird can actually convert a crop full of nectar to useful energy in about 20 min-



No, I'm not sick or dying!

To conserve energy during cold nights, hummingbirds will fluff their feathers and many drop their normal 107°F body temperature to about 64°F and enter a state of torpor. At the same time, their breathing rate and heart rate are significantly reduced along with other physiological processes.



utes! All day long they are busy hunting for food to support that high-energy need.

At the end of the day, the food hunt becomes even more urgent, because the tiny birds must prepare for the night hours when they cannot see to find food. If they do not get enough to eat before nightfall to keep their hearts beating through the night, they could starve before morning.

When conditions are ideal—when the temperature is warm and there is an abundance of food available—hummingbirds are able to meet their needs. But what do they do if conditions are not ideal and food is not abundant? Their great Designer thought of this in advance, and made a way. He designed them so that they can become torpid. Torpidity is similar to hibernation. When food is short, the hummingbirds actually slow their racing 1260-beat-per-minute heart rate down to between 80 and 100 beats per minute. Their body temperature drops also, and they go into a trance-like state. In this way, they conserve their remaining energy and survive. It takes between 10 and 20 minutes for them to wake up from torpidity. Can you imagine a better way for the Creator to provide for this tiny bird's survival?

It is also interesting that the hummers serve the plant community that supplies their food. As they dart from blossom to blossom, they carry grains of pollen on their beaks, faces, and heads from flower to flower. In this way they help to pollinate flowers that might otherwise not be able to become fertile and make seeds. Here again is the hand of the Designer at work. The various parts of His creation benefit each other.

### Migration

Because the hummers are so dependent on flowers to meet their energy needs, as their food supply decreases in autumn and winter, they must migrate southward. But strangely—wonderfully—the urge to go south is not stimulated by the lack of flowers. The Designer built in a surer signal. He gave these tiny creatures hormones to tell them just when to start building up the fat they will need to make their migratory flights possible. Were they aggressively hungry before? Now their hunger becomes all-consuming. In late summer and fall, hummingbirds step up their nectar gathering to such a level that they nearly double their weight before starting on their long flight south.

Many hummingbirds migrate over land, where some food is available. But the ruby-throated hummingbird does something else

that is even more remarkable. It flies across the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of more than 500 miles, non-stop. Think about this 3.5 inch bird flying 500 miles over water. How can it do it? Scientists do not have the answer. With its high-energy



(above) The male Bee Hummingbird is the smallest bird in the world.



Female Broad-tailed Hummingbirds perform all nesting activities: nest-building, egg laying, incubation and the feeding and brooding of nestlings (usually two).



demands, it is theoretically impossible. Yet these tiny birds do it again and again, year after year.

### Iridescent plumage

Hummingbirds have beautiful, iridescent plumage. Their shimmering, changeable hues are the result of the presence of the common pigment melanin. (Did the hummingbird mix its own pigment?!). And that isn't all. In the plumage of hummingbirds, this pigment appears in the form of flattened particles called platelets. Each platelet is enclosed in tiny air bubbles that act like tiny prisms. These prisms bend the light rays as they pass through the air around the platelet, giving

*continued on page 25*



Hummingbird feathers are covered with thousands of tiny bubbles. Because the bubbles have various shapes and thicknesses, light bounces off them at different angles. And when light bounces at different angles, it appears as different colors.





## PROOF OF PRE-EXISTENCE?

***“How can Jesus be both the root and the offspring of David? I have heard that He is the ‘root’ because He preexisted in heaven before He was born of the virgin Mary. This way He was David’s father, as well as being David’s son, or offspring.”***

The passage you are questioning is Revelation 22:16, where Jesus says, *“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.”*

The definitions of “root” from the Greek are as follows:

1. Root, the fundamental part of the plant or tree from the very surface, down into the ground (Mt 3:10; Mk 4:6; 11:20; Lk 8:13; Rom 11:16–18);
2. descendant, formally, the Root (of Jesse, David), (Rom 15:12; Rev 5:5; 22:16+);
3. basic cause, primary reason for something (1Tim 6:10; Heb 12:15+)— *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament).*

Jesus is the root (descendant) of David, a few generations removed. There is no indication that Jesus existed before His ancestors.

The marginal references associated are also helpful in understanding its meaning. They are: 2 Samuel 7:12; Isaiah 9:7; Jeremiah 23:5, and Revelation 5:5. Looking at these may help to understand the meaning of the phrase in question.

First, 2 Samuel 7:12 reads: *“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”* This verse seems explicit. The King who was to come would be directly descended from David. If He was to come from David’s body, then He could not have existed before that from which He came.

Isaiah 9:7 further identifies the King: *“Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”* This king will sit on the throne of David—another sense in which He could be said to be from the line of David.

The next reference is Jeremiah 23:5, *“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “That I will raise unto David a Branch of righteousness. A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.”* Again, Christ was to be descended from a branch of David. No suggestion that He could precede David.

The last reference is to Revelation 5:5, *“But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’”* This “Root of David” is again identified as coming from the tribe of Judah, the tribe to which David

belonged. Again, there is no hint that Christ preceded the “root of David,” any more than He preceded the “tribe of Judah” from which the root of David came.

Looking more closely at this last passage (Rev. 5:5), we see an allusion to Isaiah 11, where we are told that Jesus was to be descended from Jesse, who was David’s father. The passage even suggests that the Messiah would come after the Davidic line had seemed cut off—because the root was still intact. The new dynasty was to come from the same root. *“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots”* (Isa. 11:1). Here is a clear statement that Jesus was to grow out of the root of the family of Jesse. How, then, could He have existed before the root from which He came?

Passages such as Romans 15:12 and Revelation 22:16 simply refer to the root from which Christ came, the family from which He was descended, whether it is mentioned as Jesse or David. All are from the same root, Jesse. If the root dies, there could be no sprouts. But the root did not die.

Romans 15:12 carries this very thought: *“And again, Isaiah says: ‘There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.’”* Here we have Christ as a root (singular) of Jesse and the action is future: *“shall rise.”* Christ was yet to come from that root. In Isaiah’s words, the root was existing, and Christ would *“rise to reign over the Gentiles.”*

The root of Jesse was there, even though there was no visible sign of the Davidic line at that time. Stock will often grow from a root, or stump. When a tree is cut down, another will sprout from its roots. It seems this is the simile the prophets were using to describe the lineage of Jesus.

Moses spoke prophetically of Jesus as One whom *“the Lord your God will raise up for you, a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren”* (Deut. 18:15). If He was already existing, Moses should have said that He would be brought down, not raised up *“from your midst, from your brethren.”* Jesus was to be of one of their tribes, a man like them.

### ❖ Jesus’ death destroyed the devil?

***Please help me to understand Heb. 2:14. How did Jesus destroy the devil by dying?***

Your question raises a viable point. If Jesus’ death destroyed the devil (or adversary), why all the evil in the world since Jesus died?

Hebrews 2:14 reads: *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”*

In this passage, the author is making the point that Jesus was made *“like his brethren,”* just as Moses predicted He would be (Deut. 18:15, 18). He was flesh and blood like us. Being flesh and blood, He was mortal, and He died physically, as all



mortals do. How did His death destroy the devil?

First we need to understand the term “devil” as it is used in Scripture. Does the Bible teach that evil comes from a spirit or superpower of evil that is all around us?

No, studying the Bible we find that the term devil is not a spirit or a created being of any kind but a symbol (sometimes a personification, i.e., given human traits) of the evil in the human heart. Devil (*diabolos*) means “an adversary, an opposer”—anything that opposes God or His laws.

**Satan, adversary**, i.e. one who opposes another, either as a verbal antagonist and so a slanderer or accuser, or one giving physical opposition (Nu 22:22, 32; 1Sa 29:4; 2Sa 19:22; 1Ki 5:4; 11:14, 23, 25; Ps 109:6+) (—Gesenius’ *Hebrew Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*).

Jesus states just one source of this opposition: the human heart. “*For from within, out of the heart of men [not any outside force or power of evil], proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,*” and every evil that defiles (Mark 7:21–23). James says also that no one is

tempted except from within. “*Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed*” (Jas. 1:14).

Did Jesus by dying physically destroy the devil? If so, why all the evil in the world today?

The Bible uses the term “death” with more than one meaning. It speaks of death as:

1. **Natural death** Example: “*Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old*” (Gen. 50:26).
2. **Death in sin** (the condition of being oblivious to sin, uninformed about God’s laws of life). Example: “*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1).

3. **Death to sin** (the condition of being dead, or unresponsive, to the temptations of evil or one’s lower nature). Example: “*For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all [time]... Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts*” (Rom. 6:10–12).

4. **Penal death**, i.e., death that is a punishment for sin and therefore without release or hope of resurrection. Example: “*when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death*” (Jas. 1:15). “*For the wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 6:23). This penal death is also called the “*second death*,” as in Rev. 2:11, “*He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death*” (see also Rev. 21:8). It is not immediate death when one sins but a final verdict from God when one is judged and found unrepentant.

Then how did Jesus destroy the devil by dying?

His physical death did nothing to change the evil in the world—this is evident by all the history that has transpired since Jesus was crucified.

Jesus was not “dead in sin,” so that definition cannot apply here.

Jesus died to sin (see Rom. 6:6–11), i.e., when He was tempted, there was no response to the temptation from within Him. He gave up His own will; He resisted every temptation to sin (Heb. 4:15). He did always the things pleasing to the Father (John 8:29), even submitting to physical death on the cross (Luke 22:42). In this death to sin He defeated the devil, the adversary, but only with reference to Himself, not everyone. The adversary is still very much alive and active in those who have not overcome the evil in their lives and hearts.

Jesus’ death benefits us only as we follow His right example in taking unjustly imposed suffering (1 Pet. 2:21–23) and dying to sin as completely as He died to sin. ♦

*continued from page 23*

the hummingbird its iridescent, jewel-like look. Can you imagine something like this happening by chance? Not a chance! The hummingbird had a Designer. The great Creator knew just what this tiny feathered creature needed to get attention.

Hummingbirds use their iridescent colors to advantage. Highly territorial, they place themselves in just the right light to attract other hummingbirds. Both male and female spend a great deal of time and energy defending their territories from other hummers—they are fiercely jealous of their food supplies. When it is time to mate, the female chooses her territory and starts to build her nest using spider webs, lichen, and other bits of forest debris. After mating, she finishes the nest and raises her two or three chicks—all without any help from the male bird, who has gone on to mate with other females, because there are many more females than males. It is all

part of an instinct for survival.

Who gets the credit for these beautiful busy hummers? Only their great Creator. Each of these tiny birds is perfectly designed to survive in its environment—to raise their young who will do the same things their parents do generation after generation without being taught!

Don’t we feel to bow our head to thank the God of Heaven for these awesome jewel-like creatures that display His creative skill—the Creator and Designer of our earth and everything in it (Neh. 9:6)? ♦

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Hummingbirds love to fight. They can be downright mean, and sometimes engage in heated aerial battles—charging each other like flying missiles or tumbling through the air.



*Stop doing  
wrong, learn to do right!*

*—Isaiah 1:17 NIV*



THOMAS KINKADE

## *The Balance of Power*

*I* clearly remember my grandfather's well,  
Just back of the farmhouse, and close to the dell,  
Where often I paused, with the sun at its height,  
To draw a cool cup, and then rest me a mite.  
The old oaken bucket was there, to be sure,  
And crystal-clear water, refreshingly pure.  
No wonder the traveler, dusty and hot,  
And weary from journeying, welcomed the spot.

*I*'m often reminded of those boyhood hours  
When some weighty problem in front of me tow'rs;  
And as from my worries a respite I seek,  
I turn to the Volume once penned by the meek.  
There, as I found rest at the well in my youth,  
I now am refreshed at the Fountain of Truth,  
Whose pure, sparkling stream through the ages has flowed,  
To strengthen the pilgrim on life's rugged road.

*T*he bucket, the rope, and the weight I can see  
As clearly as though they were still serving me;  
And often I'm caused to remember them when  
I think of the good and the evil in men.  
In fact, human nature resembles a well—  
The heart is so deep, none its secrets can tell;  
And he who would taste of the good from within  
Must first drop the weight, and get rid of the sin.

*W*hen I, as a youngster, the bucket would drop,  
The weight, at the bottom, would rise to the top;  
But when on the end with the weight I would pull,  
The bucket would come to the top, brimming full.  
Just so, when our virtues are held to the light—  
The evil, forgotten, is hidden from sight;  
But when sin is manifest, righteousness flees,  
And fades, as a scent on a swift Autumn breeze.

*L*et us, from this moment, be careful to see  
The weights are submerged, and the bucket left free;  
Then, when there is need to put evil to rout,  
The waters, uncovered, will quickly gush out.  
'Tis not a hard task, as a person might think—  
Assist one to rise, and the other must sink,  
The question is not of the day or the hour,  
But which is receiving the balance of power.

*—LIOT L. SNYDER*



In a garden next to Gloucester Cathedral there is a sundial which bears this inscription:

*Give God thy **heart**, thy **service** and thy **gold**;  
The day wears on and time is waxing old.*

*Our life is dyed the color of its leisure thoughts.*

"Will you please tell me," said a Christian woman to a minister, "what consecration is?" Holding out a blank sheet of paper, the pastor replied, "It is to sign your name at the bottom of this blank sheet, and let God fill it in as He wills."

*There are no lasting disappointments to those whose wills are buried in the will of God.*

When anger rises, think of the consequences.

*The best thing to do with the Bible is to **know** it in the head, **stow** it in the heart, **sow** it in the world, and **show** it in the life.*

Over the triple doorway of the Cathedral of Milan are three inscriptions.

Over one is carved a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath is the legend: "*All that pleases is but for a moment.*"

Over the other is sculptured a cross, and these are the words beneath: "*All that troubles is but for a moment.*"

But underneath the great central entrance in the main isle is the inscription: "*That only is important which is eternal.*"

*You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer,  
And even once say "I",  
You cannot pray the Lord's Prayer,  
And even once say "my".  
Nor can you pray the Lord's Prayer  
And not pray for another;  
For when you ask for daily bread,  
You must include your brother.  
For others are included in each and every plea:  
From the beginning to the end of it,  
It does not once say "me".*

*A whole bushel of  
wheat is made up of  
single grains.*



*Going into business  
with God is like a beggar  
going into business with a  
millionaire.*



# Mastering Your ABC's

Spiritual growth is a narrow road that leads to eternal contentment and happiness. It means:

**ADMITTING** a wrong even if you wouldn't be found out;  
Being **BUOYANT** in a flood of trouble;  
Being **CONTENT** with what we have;  
Having **DETERMINATION** through trying times;  
**ENERGY** at the moment you feel burned out;  
Being **FAITHFUL** during moments of doubt;  
**GIVING** to others before thinking of receiving;  
Having **HUMILITY** while others heap praise on you;  
Being **INTELLIGENT** to say no to sin;  
Having **JOY** at the very moment when your prospects seem the darkest;  
Being **KIND** to an opponent;  
**LEARNING** from others because you realize there's so little you know;  
**MOURNING** when you fall into sin;  
Being **NICE** to others when they do you wrong, realizing you also have been wrong;  
Keeping **OBEDIENT** to God in face of trial;  
**PERSEVERING** when you think you're too tired to go on;  
Being **QUICK** to pay a vow and  
**RELIABLE** when you could slack off;  
**SACRIFICING** your all to a caring God;  
Being **TRUTHFUL** when a lie would be easier (and more comfortable);  
Having **UNQUENCHABLE** love for God;  
Being **VALIANT** to stand for right;  
**WAITING** on the Lord patiently;  
Making your life a **XEROGRAPHY** of Christ;  
**YEARNING** for the Kingdom;  
Being **ZEALOUS** in honesty.

