

Megiddo Message

Summer 2008



The Lord is righteous
in all His ways,
Gracious in all His works.

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.

- Psalm 145:17-18

SOME THINGS ARE ALWAYS WRONG



Another report of bribery, dishonesty, fraud and corruption among high officials? The American public has come almost to expect it. The waves of disgust created by Watergate disclosures are still with us. A former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission described it as “bribery, influence-peddling and corruption on a scale...one never dreamed existed.”

But the corruption is not universal. On the positive side are thousands of businessmen and politicians who have never paid or accepted bribes, or given money illegally to political campaigns, and never would. Even if only because of the social consequences and a desire not to harm others, they maintain that some things are always wrong. Says one, “There is no earthly way to defend bribery, kickbacks, or attempts to buy votes”—no matter who the person is or what cause he represents, it is never right to lie, cheat, steal, or covet.”

Above that which benefits the common good is the law of God which takes issues of right and wrong even further, stating, “*You shall not hate*

being a matter of Divine prophecy, there is little we can do to change the situation. But what we can and must do is to conform our own lives to the Divine standard of ethics. By this action we not only benefit ourselves but can at the same time show our associates a better way. Our situation is much like that of the pilot of a boat in a rocky harbor at night. The pilot cannot remove the rocks in the harbor; he cannot even know where all of them lie; but he can look to the lighthouse and be guided by the buoys someone wiser has placed.

Daniel’s no-compromise plan

The Old Testament account of Daniel points up the same lesson. Daniel was a man of strong internal fortitude and conviction, who found himself in a bad situation in a very bad time. When we first learn of him (Daniel 1), he has already been far removed from his home environment. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had taken select young Jewish men and brought them to his court in Babylon, there to reeducate them and refine them to fill positions of leadership in his kingdom. One of the men chosen for this purpose was Daniel.

If Daniel had not been serving the God of heaven, we probably would never even know of Nebuchadnezzar’s project—it mattered only because it involved someone (Daniel) who mattered to God.

The king’s first intent was to Babylonize these young Jews. As Nebuchadnezzar planned it, they were to become genuine Babylonians reflecting a Babylonian world view, with Babylonish education and official status at the Babylonian executive level.

Nebuchadnezzar offered Daniel the best. He was to eat the king’s food, study under the king’s wisemen, and eventually become the king’s right-hand administrator—privileges he could never have expected as a slave.

From the standpoint of this world, Daniel’s opportunity was enviable. But almost immediately we hear a counter from Daniel. We read: “*Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank*” (Dan. 1:8). In other words. “I cannot...I will not...” The king’s offer violated Daniel’s convictions.

Christianity is a religion to be lived in the marketplace. Christians are to be in the world but not a part of it.

your brother in your heart.... You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him... You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor... you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:13–18).

All of us frequently find ourselves in situations where we must make an ethical, spiritual or moral choice. Often these choices involve options that conflict with the Divine order. In fact, the apostle Paul told us to expect it. In the last days, he said speaking prophetically by Divine inspiration, men would be arrogant, godless, self-willed, proud, selfish, unloving, brutal, holding a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Tim. 3:1–5).

Deteriorating morals and ethics in our day

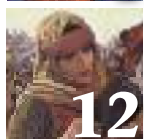
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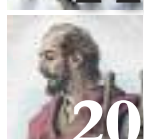


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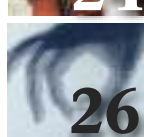
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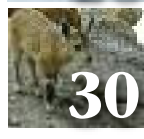
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FRONT COVER: *Old gum Trees* taken by Patricia A. Fleming

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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.

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★★★★★

CHANGE IN PUBLISHING FREQUENCY

Due to increased pressures from rising costs of postage and printing, effective in November 2007, we have changed the frequency of the **Megiddo Message** from a bimonthly to a quarterly magazine. We will now publish the **Megiddo Message** with the seasons—Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall.

Some twenty-five centuries ago, the people of God were suffering from misplaced priorities. Sound like a familiar problem?

To address the problem God sent a man named Haggai. The core question he put to the people (returned exiles) is still our challenge today: *What really matters?*



The Haggai Question: *Really* What Matters?

Among the small books of the Bible called the minor prophets is a little book with just 38 verses. The author's name is Haggai.

Though the book is short, it is filled with challenge and promise. And like all of Scripture, Haggai's message is "useful for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be upright" (2 Tim. 3:16 NJB). His message is part of the things that were "written so long ago" that we, "learning perseverance and the encouragement which the Scriptures give, should have hope" (Rom. 15:4 NJB).

Why prioritize?
Because if we don't,
something really
important will never
be done if we wait
until everything else
is done!

Appointments, schedules, activities, phone calls, e-mails, doorbells, intercoms—all compete for our attention. Pressures and tasks crowd into our lives from all sides. Everywhere we turn there is a duty, an assignment, an obligation, a need. Someone has called it the tyranny of the urgent.

Since our time and energy are limited, we have to decide: What comes first, or second, or third—or not at all?

But the underlying problem is not one of scheduling; it is a matter of values. The real question is, What is important? What really matters? Because we find time for what we value most; we have time for the things we really want to do.

Our basic resources are all the same: time, energy, money, talent. But as committed Christians pursuing the goal of eternal life, those resources are not our own to be used as we please. We have dedicated those resources to God, and need to be constantly reminded of God's claim on our life. So the questions become:

- ☐ Will God approve my response to this (obligation, duty, phone call, activity, e-mail)?
- ☐ In responding to this (obligation, duty, phone call, activity, e-mail), will I be promoting my own spiritual good and the spiritual good of others? Or will I be contributing to a selfish purpose?
- ☐ Will my response to this (obligation, duty, phone call, activity, e-mail) help me and/or others toward Christ's kingdom and the goal of eternal life?

Why prioritize? Because if we don't, something really important will never be done if we wait until everything else is done!

When we prioritize in this way, we are heeding Christ's command to seek first "*the kingdom of God and his righteousness*" (Matt. 6:33).

This was the message that God sent Haggai to deliver to the Israelites in Jerusalem: What really matters?

Who Was Haggai?

We know little about Haggai personally, except that he was God's prophet. When we first hear of him, he is with the Jews in Jerusalem who have resettled after the 70 year exile in Babylon. The year is about 520 BC.

It is likely that Haggai was born in exile, and journeyed from Babylon to Israel with a second group of returning exiles a few years after Cyrus opened the way for Israelites to return to their homeland (Ezra 5:1–2; 6:14). The very fact that Haggai was ready to leave a stable, comfortable situation in Babylon to join the Israelite resettlement effort and help to reconstruct and rebuild a desolate, war-stricken land speaks loudly of his faith in God. And the fact that God chose him as an instrument through whom to deliver His messages is evidence of Haggai's loyalty and love for God.

A contemporary of the prophet Zechariah, Haggai prophesied to the people of Jerusalem *"in the second year of king Darius"* of Persia. His God-assigned task was to motivate the Jews to resume their work of rebuilding their God's temple, the number one project for which they had returned, and which at that time had been stalled for some sixteen years.

The Book

Haggai's message is short, only 38 verses from beginning to end. But as someone has commented, "steam is no less powerful when it is compressed."

The book opens abruptly with the Prophet already on the stage of action, receiving a message from God. There is no introduction or historical background, and only the briefest identifying of the man and the times.

All the messages in his brief book were delivered within a few months during the same year (520 BC). These messages include:

- 1) *the Prophet's call to complete the rebuilding of the temple* (1:1–11);
- 2) *the response of the leaders and people* (1:12–15);
- 3) *the assurance of God's providence* (1:15–2:9);
- 4) *prophecies of the consequences of obedience and disobedience* (2:10–19);
- 5) *promises of future blessings to faithful Israel.*

Though perhaps little known, the time of Haggai was a period with far-reaching significance in Israel's history. It was a time that saw the fulfillment of Jeremiah's message. Jeremiah had prophesied: *"This whole country will be reduced to ruin and desolation, and these nations will be enslaved to the king of Babylon for seventy years"* (Jer. 25:11 NJB). The fulfillment of this prophecy proved conclusively that God was true to His Word and mightier than any who dared raise a voice against Him. Jeremiah had spoken boldly—and truly. Now anyone could see that he had been right, even though at the time everyone seemed to be against him.

Background

BEFORE HAGGAI ...

At the time of Haggai, all the Jews in Jerusalem were recently resettled in Jerusalem after the end of the Babylonian Captivity. All except the very youngest and the very oldest had been born in Babylon. Many other Jews were still in the land of their captivity.

Why the captivity? Beginning about 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had invaded Israel and had begun taking captives from among the Israelites. The first taken

Time Line (all dates are approximate)

- 722 BC Israel (Northern Kingdom) falls to Assyrians—Captives of the Ten Tribes are deported and scattered
Israel is repopulated with captives of other lands and religions
- 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invades Judah—1st Deportation: Select captives taken to Babylon
Judah's best: noble youths (Daniel) and temple vessels
- 597 BC 2nd Deportation: many captives taken to Babylon
King Jehoiachin, middle classes (Ezekiel), much plunder
- 586 BC 3rd/Final Deportation—Jeremiah given choice: go or stay
Jerusalem and Temple sacked and burned
- 539 BC Cyrus the Persian invades/conquers Babylon (Daniel 5)
Darius the Mede rules Babylon in Cyrus' absence
- 538 BC Cyrus' decrees all exiled people may return home
About 50,000 Jews return with Zerubbabel to Judah and Benjamin
- 538 BC In Jerusalem: 7th month after return
Returned exiles set up altar for worship
Make required sacrifices and keep the Jewish feasts
- 536 BC In Jerusalem: 2nd year after return
Temple foundation is laid
Jews celebrate with joy and weeping; enemies note progress
- 530 BC Enemies obtain letter to halt temple rebuilding
Jews focus on building their own homes
- 520 BC God sends Prophet Haggai to wake up the Jews
Tells Jews to rebuild temple and God will bless them
People resume work on their temple
2nd year, 6th month of Darius, Jews started to rebuild temple
God also sends Prophet Zechariah to the Jews in Jerusalem
2nd year, 8th month of Darius
Enemies again send letter to king in Persia
Ask King Darius to halt Jews' rebuilding their temple
- 519 BC Darius checks the records and allows Jews to rebuild
Even pledges financial help from neighboring provinces
- 516 BC Temple (Zerubbabel's) is completed
People celebrate
- 479 BC Esther made queen in Persia
Saves the Jews from annihilation
- 458 BC Ezra leads another group of exiles back to Jerusalem
Takes many more items for the temple
- 445 BC Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem and rebuilds wall
Enemies from within and without try to stop him
Completes building the wall around Jerusalem in 52 days



God allowed the Babylonians to utterly destroy Solomon's Temple and Jerusalem because they refused to change their evil ways.



On this clay cylinder Cyrus the Great tells of his joyful reception in Babylon and how he set about to restore ruined sanctuaries "of the west" and to return captured peoples to their homes.



Cyrus sent back many of the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple.

¹ "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up...and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:1-3).

² "King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand...all the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar [or Zerubbabel] took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:7-11).

were handpicked—young men who were sons of the kings and nobles. Among these were Daniel and his three friends (Daniel, chapters 1-3). The area in Babylon to which they were taken is part of present day Iran and Iraq, at that time a six month journey from Israel.

Over the next 20 years, King Nebuchadnezzar's armies invaded Judah and Jerusalem numerous times, taking captives and destroying, until finally in 586 BC they plundered and burned the sacred temple and all Jerusalem. The kingdom of Judah came to a disastrous end. It was the sad reality that God's prophets had predicted would come if the people would not return to serving God. The wholesale destruction and captivity was God's requital for the gross idolatry, false prophets, corrupt leaders, rebellious spirit, and religious infidelity of first Israel, then Judah. Just as the prophets had warned, the apostate people reaped the "fruit of their doings" (Isa. 3:10; Jer. 21:14).

The lesson: God is true to His promises; we reap what we sow.

Arriving in Babylon, the captives had settled into the new way of life, and as the years passed, some became totally content with the new surroundings—so content, in fact, that when the opportunity came for them to leave, it was like leaving "home." They had no desire to go. Others lived as displaced Israelites, and they didn't forget it. They settled into life in Babylon, but they kept alive their faith in God and their hope in His promise that they would someday return to their homeland. They talked and sang of their homeland: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:1, 4). They dreamed of homes such as they had left behind, and a temple where they could worship with their own people. And some of the more dedicated even looked into the future, to the time when God would fulfill the everlasting promises to His people.

These were the eager people who responded when Cyrus announced that the captives could leave Babylon and go home.

CYRUS THE BENEVOLENT

Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king who conquered Babylon about 539 BC was not the typical king or pharaoh who was pleased to hold foreign people as slaves for his selfish ends. History recognizes him as a king with a heart. Compared to other oriental rulers, he is said to have been extraordinarily benevolent. While he did not worship the true God, he suited God's purpose and was used of God to bring about that purpose.

Cyrus' part in the drama had been prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah over 100 years before Cyrus' birth. Speaking for God, the Prophet had said of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, You shall be built, and to the temple, Your foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28). Along with this prophecy were others for the same time, from the God "Who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited,' to the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built'" (v. 26).

True to the prophecy, one of Cyrus' most significant policies was to allow captive nations, including the Jews, to return to their homelands. His words to the Jewish captives are recorded in the book of Ezra: "Go up...and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God) which is in Jerusalem" ¹ (Ezra 1:1-3). Those who were unable to go were to contribute money to help pay the expenses of those who went.

Cyrus did more than allow the captives to leave to rebuild their temple. From the book of Ezra we learn that he sent with them the gold and silver fixtures that Nebuchadnezzar had removed from the temple and carried to Babylon years earlier: ² (Ezra 1:7-11). This fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy (see Jer. 27:21-22).

How many responded? About 50,000.

To the Work!

WORSHIP COMES FIRST

About the year 536 BC, some 50,000 Jews, led by a God-fearing Jew named Zerubbabel, returned to Judah. At this time, Judah and Jerusalem still lay in ruins. The willingness of these people to venture the difficult journey and embark on life in a once-conquered homeland was a sign of their spirit of nationalism, and—hopefully—of their faith in God. Surely some of them realized why God had allowed them to be taken into exile; and that the opening of the door for them to return was God fulfilling His promise. Surely some of them realized God had allowed their enemies to take them into captivity because as a nation they had been apostate, rebellious and disobedient to the God who had given them their good land, the God they had covenanted to serve. Surely some of them knew how utterly their people had defied and forsaken Him to serve idols.

But when they arrived in the land, what did they see? Desolation, destruction and heaps of rubble. Tumble-down buildings overgrown with vines and weeds, and here and there a hut where strangers camped—can we imagine how their hearts sank! Was this the land they had dreamed about? Was this the land of their fathers, the land “*flowing with milk and honey*”? Where to begin? What to do first? Was this where they were to live and work and serve the God of their fathers?

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The returned exiles found Judah and Jerusalem still in ruins. The land was overgrown and desolate after over 50 years of no care or tending.

PUT THE BIG ROCKS IN FIRST!

A speaker took an empty jar and placed three or four large rocks in it, then asked if the jar was full. Yes, the jar looked full—it wouldn't hold any more big rocks.

Then the speaker picked up a small bucket and poured some gravel into the jar. Again he asked if the jar was full. The answer was a cautious yes, of course it was full now.

Then the speaker poured in sand. The sand filled the space between the rocks and gravel. It was obvious now that nothing more could go in, but no one would say the jar was full.

Finally the speaker picked up a pitcher and poured in water. At last the jar was full!

The lesson? The point was obvious: No matter how much you have going on in your life, you always have time for something more...right? Wrong! The moral was that if you do not get the big rocks in first, you will not get them in at all. So—

Put the big rocks in first!

This is the lesson of the book of Haggai. Put the big rocks in first, or they won't get in at all. In other words, prioritize. First things first.

Big Rock #1 – THE WORD OF GOD (the right authority)

When we are told what to do, it is natural to ask, “Who says?”

Twenty-seven times in the thirty-eight verses of Haggai,



the Prophet verifies that his message is from God. He is not speaking his own mind. His message has authority because it comes from the God of heaven!

When we read the Word of God, we must remember the authority behind it. It is not man's opinion; it is the Word of God, and we should hear it as coming from the King of the universe!

What made Jesus' words different from those of other teachers of His day? He spoke as one “*having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Matt. 7:28). This is because His authority came from His Father. Jesus could say, “*The word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me*” (John 14:24).

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³ Following "the Law of Moses the man of God...they offered burnt offerings on [their altar] to the Lord, both the morning and evening offerings. They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated...From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord" (Ezra 3:1-6).

⁴ "In the second year after their return to the house of God in Jerusalem, and in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak started work, aided by all their fellow-Israelites, the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from captivity to Jerusalem. They appointed Levites from the age of twenty years and upwards to supervise the work of the house of the Lord" (Ezra 3:8, NEB).

⁵ "The priests in their robes took their places with their trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with their cymbals, to praise the Lord in the manner prescribed by David king of Israel; and they chanted praises and thanksgiving to the Lord, singing, 'It is good to give thanks to the Lord, for his love towards Israel endures for ever.'" (Ezra 3:10-11 NEB).

FIRST AN ALTAR.

The exiles needed a few months to settle in, and find or build shelters for their families. Then in the seventh month "the people gathered together as one man in Jerusalem to build an altar to their God" (Ezra 3:1-2). An altar would provide an interim center of worship while the temple was under construction. They knew the importance of restoring corporate worship as a defense against falling into the sins their people had just suffered for. They knew also it was a vital step toward becoming a God-fearing, God-blessed nation. Even Cyrus had said, "Go up... and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3). They also knew how much they needed God's immediate protection and blessing.

In a short time, the altar was complete, and formal worship began. ³(Ezra 3:1-6). Once again they were worshiping God on their own soil, just as God had commanded years before. Only an altar, but it was a great beginning toward becoming the holy people God had planned for them to be, separated for the service of God (Lev. 20:22).

THEN THE TEMPLE.

Clearing away the debris, they prepared to lay the foundation of the temple. The Levites supervised and carried forward the work. ⁴(Ezra 3:8, NEB).

Many hands made the work light, and by the end of the second year, the foundation was ready to be dedicated. The people gathered to celebrate with cymbals, trumpets and voices to praise and give thanks to the Lord. ⁵(Ezra 3:10-12). Wouldn't we like to have heard their choir of two hundred singing men and women, all praising God!*

But the foundation was only the beginning. Now they needed the structure. They had miles to go, when...

*Strangely, not all the shouting was for joy. The occasion brought mixed emotions from those present. "While many ... shouted for joy at the top of their voice," some of "the priests and Levites and heads of families, who were old enough to have seen the former house, wept and wailed aloud when they saw the foundation of this house laid" so that "the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from that of the weeping and wailing" (Ezra 3:12-13, NEB). Those who wept were likely those who remembered the former temple, and realized the new temple could never equal the old. By comparison, the new temple was a pitiful beginning.

Big Rock #2 – THE WORSHIP OF GOD (Haggai 1:8)

Worship of God—both public and private—is not a spare time option. It is the motive underlying our priorities. If God is first in our lives, His worship must be central. He wants our heart with our hands—both the action and the devotion.

When God set up the plan for Israel, worship was central. All of life revolved around the tabernacle. Ezra set the example: he set his heart to *“seek the law of the Lord, and to do it,”* and then *“to teach in Israel statutes and judgments”* (Ezra 7:10). In their work, in their homes, in their families, wherever they went, God’s law was to be always in the center of life.

The Jews in Haggai’s time did not feel compelled to worship. Regarding the temple work, they said, *“The time has not yet come”* (Hag. 1:2). But it was only an excuse. The real problem was their lack of desire. They did not have a passion for God and His worship. Temporal interests were more important.

What was Haggai’s message? The time is **now**. *“‘Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ says the Lord; ‘and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,’ says the Lord, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ says the Lord of hosts”* (Hag. 2:4, emphasis ours).

Personal pleasure and comfort are not our goal. We are here to honor God with our lives. It is our privilege to worship Him. But our worship to be pleasing to God must be more than an outward form one day a week. It must draw our hearts away from our idols and toward Him.

When obedience to God is our priority, all of life becomes part of our worship.

Big Rock #3 – THE WORK OF GOD (Haggai 1:12–15)

If we have the big rock of God’s authority in place, and the big rock of worship, then our work (our life) will also belong to God. In fact, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, it will be to the *“glory of God”* (1 Cor. 10:31). When our work is done *“as to the Lord”* (Col. 3:23–24), our work will become God’s work, and our priorities will be right.

When the people listened to God’s prophet and resumed work on the temple, this was evidence that they had changed their priorities, and were ready to put God first. Their work became part of their offering to God.

When the people honored God by putting His worship in its rightful place, then all of their work—even growing their crops and building their houses—could be part of their healthy happy service to God, and God would be glorified by all!

MM

Halt!

The Bible tells us the sound of joy in Jerusalem *“could be heard a long way off,”* and who should hear but the Israelites’ enemies, the people of the land!

Who were these enemies? When the apostate Northern Kingdom or the Ten Tribes known as Israel fell to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V about the year 722 BC, most of the people of the land were deported and scattered (2 Kings 17:6). To repopulate the cities of Samaria, the King of Assyria brought in people from other conquered cities who brought their own gods and intermarried with the remnant of Israelites left in the land. Second Kings 17:24–41 describes the new ethnic and religious mix that resulted: *“So these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images....so they do unto this day.”* God of heaven was neither honored nor served.

When the Jews were free to return to their homeland, these neighbors, known as Samaritans, had been there so long that they viewed the returning Israelites as intruders. During the years of Judah’s captivity, they were free to occupy any portion of the land they chose. And apparently, the “province” of Judah was under their jurisdiction. If so, they were collecting tax monies from it. Is it strange, then, that when fifty thousand people showed up with obvious plans to settle in, the Samaritans should ask, “What’s up?”

To halt the Jews in their rebuilding, the Samaritans devised a plan: they would pose as helpers. *“Let us build with you,”* they said, *“for we seek your God as you do”* (Ezra 4:1–2).

Zerubbabel recognized it as only a ploy, and replied with a flat no. *“You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel,”* he said (Ezra 4:3). Did that response seem unfriendly? It was prudent. This was in the second year of the Jews’ return. They saw how their neighbors lived and worshiped.

Their adversaries would not take “no” for an answer. Determined that Jerusalem



The letter from King Artaxerxes pleased their enemies. It read: *“...Order these men to stop work immediately.... Act quickly and firmly; they’ve done enough damage to kings!”*



The returned exiles busily worked, beautifying their own homes, while the Temple of God was still in ruins.

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

should not be rebuilt, they “wrote an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 4:6).

At this time there is no indication there was any official action to stop the reconstruction, but many a fearful or indifferent Israelite deserted the task.

The work on the temple slowed but continued.

After about six years (about 530 BC), the enemies of the Israelites, still frustrated by the presence of the Jews, wrote a letter to Artaxerxes to enlist his support against the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:7–16).

Artaxerxes replied with a letter accommodating the wishes of the Samaritans, ordering the Jews to stop building. The king had searched the records and agreed that, according to the records, Jerusalem had been a center of insurrection and rebellion. Why should they be allowed to rebuild to the detriment of everyone? (Ezra 4:20–24).

Now with the work on the temple stopped altogether, the people busied themselves with their own lives.

THE REAL PROBLEM: PRIORITIES

The enemies had stopped the work, but the reason lay deeper. The real problem of the returned captives was one of priorities. The lack of interest in building the temple was only a symptom of the greater problem: the people did not have a heart for God. His honor and His law were not important in their lives. The mention of His name and His holiness brought no glow to their faces. How different were they from their idol-worshipping ancestors? Their actions showed that they didn’t really care about being a separate, God-centered people, living by His laws and receiving His blessings. Their concerns were temporal, not spiritual. They wanted comfortable houses, prospering families, and good crops. They didn’t feel compelled to put worship and service to God ahead of their personal interests. The general attitude was, We need to take care of ourselves. The temple can wait. “*The time has not come for the Lord’s house to be built*” (Hag. 1:2).

A second reason for the problem was very possibly a distorted view of their ancient faith. Most of these people had grown up in Persia, where the prevailing view was that all religions are equal in value. With this view, they would have seen little reason to pay careful attention to their distinctive laws and practices, or to be seriously concerned about rebuilding their ancient temple.

If these returning Jews had been serious about their service to God and putting God first, imagine how different the story could have been. God could have stopped the hostile neighbors that threatened them, and all their work could have prospered. As it was, the building stopped, the people became preoccupied with their own projects.

Years passed, and God was largely forgotten. Meanwhile, drought struck the land, their crops started to fail. Clearly God was not blessing them. What could the problem be?

Enter God’s prophets Haggai and Zechariah, with a serious wake-up call.

BACK TO WORK!

Haggai’s ministry called attention to two vital points:

The problem: God was using crop failure (drought and famine) to get their attention (Haggai 1:6–11).

The solution: If they would change their priorities and complete the rebuilding of the temple—in simplest terms, put serving God FIRST—God would restore blessings and prosper them.

God knew they needed to build houses and plant crops, but Haggai pointed to their misplaced priorities. The people had lost vision. They had gone beyond necessity in meeting their personal needs. They were preoccupied with beautifying their “ceiled” houses (houses elaborately paneled like palaces), while God’s house lay in ruins (Hag. 1:4).

What was Haggai’s action plan? “*Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,*” says the Lord” (Haggai 1:8 NASB1995). Why? Because regular religious services



At the encouragement of Haggai, the Jews resumed rebuilding the Temple in earnest.

were an absolute necessity if the people were to become God-fearing and God-honoring as a nation. How else would they learn and live by the laws of their God? What but the restoring of daily temple services would keep them from retrograding into the idolatry of their forefathers? What else would remind them daily of their duty to live true to the God of their fathers? What but their honor for God would distinguish them from other people?

The people responded, and work on the temple was quickly resumed.

Once again the Samaritans objected. "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple?" they demanded. But the workers did not stop.

Once again they appealed to headquarters in Persia. With a new king (Darius) in power, the people of the land hoped for continued support against the Jews. But when King Darius searched the archives in Babylon, he learned that his predecessor King Cyrus had indeed ordered that the temple of God in Jerusalem be rebuilt as the Jews claimed. So what was King Darius' reply to the Samaritans? *"Stay away from Jerusalem.... Don't interfere with the work on the temple of God."* More than that, the king ordered that the Persian government supply funds out of the royal treasury for the temple construction, *"so that the work will not stop."* The order even included a death sentence on anyone who might alter the decree *"or destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem"* (Ezra 6:6-12).

It was a green light for the temple rebuilding. When the people were on God's side, nothing could stop them. In a short time the temple was completed.

Although the building could not match the splendor of Solomon's temple (Haggai 2:3), yet the Prophet assured them that God would be with them as He had promised (Haggai 2:5).

LOOKING BEYOND

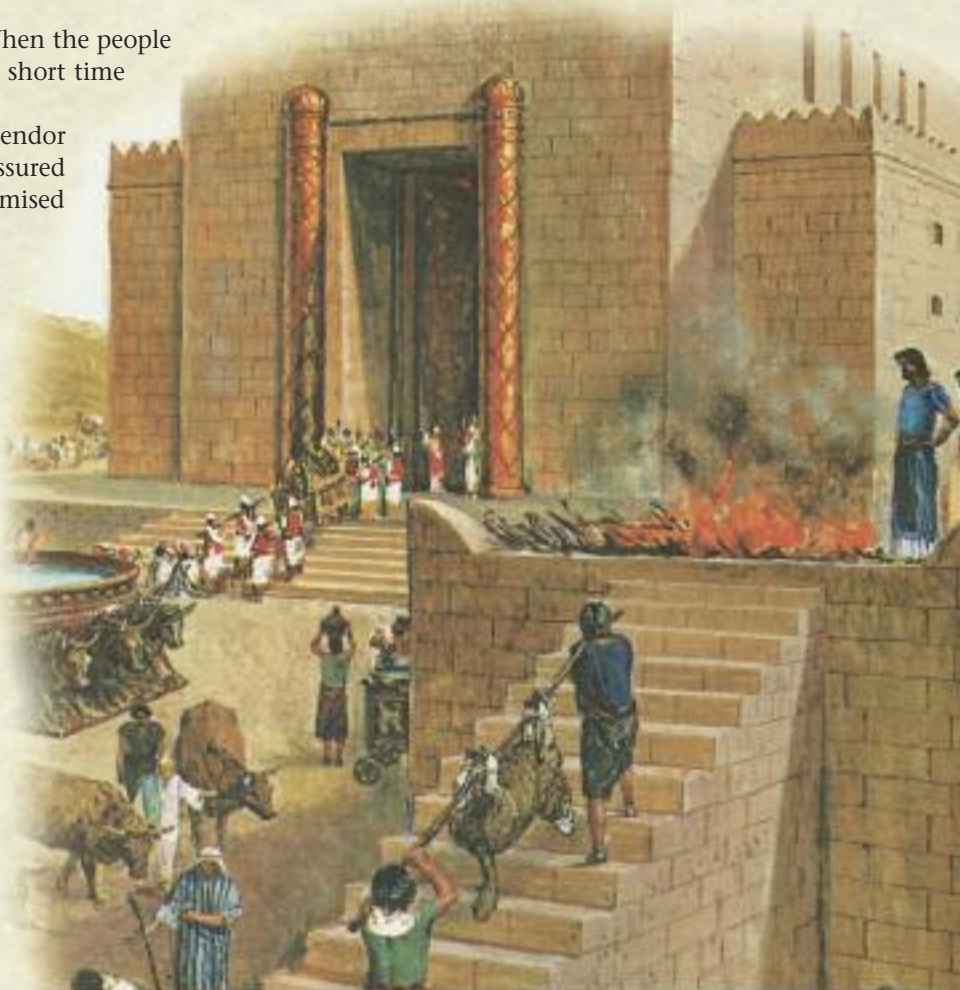
The prophet Haggai saw further than the rebuilding of the Lord's house in Jerusalem. Along with His prophecy for their time, God gave him a vision of the greater temple to come. The temple they were rebuilding, like Solomon's, was still a literal temple, and would one day be destroyed. But Haggai saw into the far future, when *"the Lord of hosts... will shake all nations, and"* there would be a greater temple, the glory of which would be *"greater than the former"*—even greater than Solomon's temple (Haggai 2:6-9). This greater temple was a symbolic picture of the saints of God (Heb. 3:6), who will be kings and priests under the Messiah when He comes the second time (Rev. 5:9-10) with *"power and great glory."* At that time, the prophecy of Micah will be fulfilled, and *"the house of the Lord"* will be established *"in the top of the mountains,"* above all earthly governments (Micah 4:1-4), and Christ the King will rule over the whole earth (Zech. 14:9) in peace and righteousness (Isa. 32:17-18).

The Revelator saw this greater spiritual temple in vision as a part of the New Jerusalem, when *"the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it"* (Rev. 21:23-24).

Haggai's mission completed, we hear nothing more of him; but his record remains in God's book of life. His mission accomplished, he awaits the coming Day when he will awake to receive, together with the faithful servants of God in all ages, the eternal blessings from the God he served (Heb. 11:39-40), along with all God's loyal servants; for God has provided a better plan, so that all can be blessed together.



King Darius' reply to the Jew's enemies was: *"....Stay out of their way. Leave the governor and leaders of the Jews alone so they can work on the Temple of God as they rebuild it...."*



"And then the Israelites celebrated—priests, Levites, every last exile exuberantly celebrated the dedication of The Temple of God."

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WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM HAGGAI?

- ✓ God did not condemn the returned captives for building houses to live in. The wrong was their priority—their actions showed that their real love was themselves, not God. They were beautifying their own houses beyond what was necessary, while the house of God lay in ruins.
- ✓ Whatever we are doing, on the job, at home, or with our families, God wants us to keep His worship, His honor and service first.
- ✓ Had the Jews put the honor of God first, God could have defeated their enemies. We are not told that they even tried to solicit God's help!
- ✓ God sent Haggai with a wake-up call: "Consider your ways," i.e., think about the consequences of your choices.

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

Why are you living in luxurious houses while My [God's] house lies in ruins? —Haggai 1:4 NLT

by GERALD R. PAYNE

When the Lord spoke through Haggai, what was the Lord's message? "*Consider your ways*" (Haggai 1:5, 7). In other words, think about what you are doing!

The message was as timeless as the problem. The people were not merely abandoning a building project. By setting aside the interests of the mighty One of Israel, they were saying that their temporal interests mattered more. Their ways needed serious change. Correct the underlying problems, Haggai said, concentrate on being God's people and honoring God in your lives, and you will see everything change.

But Haggai was more than a motivator. His message went far beyond this temporary Temple. After awakening the people to correct their present dilemma, Haggai, with prophetic vision, described another, future Temple. This Temple would be a people through whom God's glory would fill the earth. This Temple, he said, would be far superior even to Solomon's temple (see Haggai 2:1–9, 20–23; Zech. 2:6–13).

As Christians we are contractors with God. We have contracted to build a part of this Temple, this holy temple that He will approve. "*The temple of God is holy, which temple you are*" (1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19–20). No one person builds the entire Temple, but each is responsible for his part. In this spiritual building, Christ is the chief cornerstone (Matt. 21:42; 1 Pet. 2:6), and His chosen ones make up the other stones. Our job is to finish one stone, perfectly plumb and polished on every side, and aligned to the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

CONTINUING...

Most of the contractors on this job begin the project with enthusiasm, but how about the continuing? This is where we need to hear the message of Haggai: "*Consider your ways*." All of us have the same basic physical needs: food, clothing, shelter. And all of us have the same basic social needs, to love and be loved; to need and be needed. Because of these needs, the people with whom we interact can have a strong influence on our work on our stone, either to help or to hinder.

What counsel are we hearing? Are those who influence us truly friends, or are they like the neighbors of the returned captives, trying to persuade us to abandon the project and do as they do?

The prophets of God were continually warning the people against the influence of the nations around them. Why did God forbid them to intermarry with other peoples? Why did He call them to be separate and holy, "*a special treasure above all peoples on the face of the earth*" (Deut. 7:6–7)? Because God knew that if they intermingled with the people of other nations, they would soon be taking on their lifestyle, their behavior, their interests, their ways of worship, and their gods.

We today face the same temptations. Are we tempted by the lure of a belief system that still claims to follow Christ but is less restricting and more tolerant? Are we tempted to be all absorbed with the mundane pursuits of life—our work,

our homes, our daily tasks—to the exclusion of things spiritual? Or maybe we are tempted to associate with the “in” crowd who party and drink, hoping one day that we can influence them to better ways? This is where we need to hear Haggai’s warning: *“Consider your ways.”* In other words, consider what you are doing and where it may take you. It is only natural to want to be like our “friends,” and almost before we realize it, we will be compromising our values and will have developed habits that are repulsive to those of higher moral standards—and to God. Our stone will be marred, and out of line with the Chief cornerstone.

Most people are content to live for something at hand—something they perceive as success, power, security, comfort, pleasure. Why? Because they have never known anything better. They may work hard for what they want, and even then it may elude them. Does this sound fatalistic? It is. But to close one’s eyes to reality only makes the reality worse. Until we see the consequences of our choices seriously, there is no way out—and that is fatal!

I would like to suggest a three step application of Haggai’s message. Following these steps should help us in preparing our spiritual stone for an eternal place in the spiritual Temple that will never diminish in glory.

1. CONSIDER—WAKE UP!

The remnant who had returned to their homeland were planting large crops and hoping to prosper (Haggai 1:4–12). Why weren’t they finishing the building of the Temple? Their reply was only an excuse: *“The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord”* (Hag. 1:2 NIV). It wasn’t the time to be building the Lord’s house, yet it was time to build their own “paneled” houses and make themselves very comfortable (Hag. 1:3–4).

Haggai’s message from the Lord was loud and clear: *“Consider your ways.”* This was not a suggestion but a command. In other words, look at what you are doing, and acknowledge the wrong.

The real—unspoken—problem was not that it was the wrong time; the problem was their own lack of initiative and interest. Since the neighbors did not want them to finish the Temple, the Jews reasoned that it wasn’t the right time. They would fix up their own houses instead (Hag. 1:3–4).

2. CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

Disobedience has consequences. For the returned captives, those consequences were immediate. Yes, they would like to be happy and prosperous again. That was why they were building their paneled houses and planting large crops! Why wasn’t it working? Because they had forgotten God, so God was withholding benefits.

Listen to the words of Haggai: *“‘You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on*

whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands’” (Hag. 1:9–11).

For these Jews, the consequences were immediate because God was working openly with their nation. For us the consequences of our choices are future, because we are living in a time when *“sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily”* (Eccl. 8:11). But those consequences will come when Christ returns and the servants of God are judged and rewarded for what they have done (2 Cor. 5:10). *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works”* (Matt. 16:27).

3. CONSIDER YOUR WAYS—ACT!

Procrastination robs us of our time because we waste the time we could have used. With the returned captives, the incomplete Temple was only a symptom. The real problem was that they had lost faith in the One who could protect them and see them through the troubles. The course they had taken was leading them away from God. They had forgotten that God was working directly with their nation and had promised: *“...If you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul ... the Lord will again rejoice over you for good”* (Deut. 30:9–10).

Apart from God there can be no surety of future happiness or stability.

RESULTS OF HAGGAI’S MESSAGE

The people considered and took action, and four years later, *“in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius”* (Ezra 6:15), the project was completed.

Many laborers were needed to build the temple. Likewise, the spiritual Temple does not build itself; much dedicated work is required. Christ said, *“I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work”* (Revelation 22:12). Our opportunity to build will soon be gone. Either our stone of character will be completed to His satisfaction, or it will not. It will either be a part of the Temple, or it will be rejected.

THE BENEFITS

The people finished the Temple, and the Lord blessed them (Ezra 6:22).

For the Israelites, the benefits were immediate. God was waiting to bless their work. He is waiting also to bless our work for Him—He will give each one knowledge, guidance and sufficient time to finish the task He has assigned us, the preparing of one stone for His eternal, spiritual Temple. And if our stone is accepted when Christ returns (1 Pet. 2:5), He will bless us with life everlasting and joy beyond our wildest imagination! For *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him”* (1 Cor. 2:9).

Let us consider our ways today and every day until our stone is ready to take its place beside the Chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

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KNOWLEDGE BY INTUITION?

"I believe people can know right from wrong without any knowledge of the Bible. In fact, the Bible tells us that people do 'by nature the things contained in the law.' What do you think?"

The passage you are referring to is in the Book of Romans, chapter 2, where the apostle Paul is talking about accountability to law. After saying that the accepted ones are they who both know the law and keep it (Rom. 2:12-13), he says also that *"when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them"* (Rom. 2:14-15).

If we understand your question, it is: Why is it necessary to study and apply ourselves to acquire God's knowledge if we have the law of God naturally *"written in our hearts,"* if we know it *"by nature"*?

We have all known people who, though they have no serious interest in or knowledge of God's Word, yet they live by many of the principles in His law. For example, many people adhere to a basic moral philosophy in their homes totally apart from any convictions about the law of God, and benefit from it. They do it *"by nature"* out of love for their families, or the desire to achieve, or simply because they see it as beneficial. Following some self-set standard they *"condemn this, or approve that"* (Rom. 2:15 Knox Translation).

Is it possible for one to satisfy the requirements of the law of God without having studied it seriously as it is revealed in the Bible?

The simplest answer is no. One might make a comparison with a young person who wants to serve his community as a pharmacist, who has a general knowledge of medicine he learned on his own from observation and experience. He knows that a Tylenol helps a headache, or that massaging a bruised muscle with a liniment relieves the pain. Picture him attempting to pass the exam at the university to obtain a degree in pharmacology or a licensing from his state. Either the degree and license would be worthless, or it would be impossible for him to obtain until he acquired the necessary knowledge of medicine.

One may have a general idea of Christian psy-

chology, and be helpful and kind. But without learning the requirements of God's law, purpose and plan as revealed in the Bible, it would be impossible for him to attain to the *"measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13).

Is God being exclusive? Yes. Is He saying that one cannot know *"by nature"* all that is required to obtain future life? Yes. That is why the prophet Jeremiah, divinely inspired, said, *"I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps"* (Jer. 10:23). Again, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"* (Jer. 17:9). That is why we read in the Book of Proverbs, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"* (Prov. 16:25). And *"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord weighs the hearts"* (Prov. 21:2).

There is a vast difference between the standard that parents might require of their children to have a smoothly functioning home, or well adjusted good citizens, and the standard of obedience that God has set as a prerequisite to salvation.

Steps to Salvation

What are the steps the Bible outlines for one who would know God and attain salvation?

Step 1: Acquire a knowledge of God's plan and what He requires (2 Pet. 1:3; John 6:45).

Step 2: Enter into a covenant, or working agreement with God (1 Cor. 11:23-25), **and live according to the commands in Scripture** to develop a character acceptable to God (Rom. 2:7; Rev. 22:14; Eph. 4:15; Matt. 5).

Step 3: When Christ returns, He will judge and reward His servants (those who have agreed to serve Him), and to those who have met His standard He will give eternal life (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 5:4; Matt. 16:27).

God has made His knowledge available, but one must be serious about acquiring and applying it, just as one entering a university must study in order to acquire knowledge of the field he has chosen. The Bible tells us that one must *"cry out for discernment," "seek ... as for silver," "search...as for hidden treasures"* to be able to *"understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God"* (Prov. 2:3-5). Jesus said, *"Search the Scriptures"* (John 5:39), and the apostle Paul said, *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth"* (2 Tim. 2:15). Jesus Himself said, *"It is written in the prophets, 'And they*

shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (John 6:45). The apostle Peter confirmed when he said that "all the things that pertain to life and godliness" come "through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3).

The result of acquiring God's knowledge and agreeing to live by it is accountability. The apostle Paul explains this accountability in Romans 2: "For as many as have sinned without law [without a knowledge of the law of God] will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12). God will not hold anyone accountable to a law he did not agree to keep.

God's view of life, history, human achievement, and social standards is, generally speaking, contrary to human thinking or philosophy. This is another reason why one must study the Bible to acquire God's viewpoint, because the thoughts of God are as high above man's natural philosophy as "the heavens are higher than the earth" (Isa. 55:8-9).

As for the role of conscience in guiding one's pattern of life, conscience is wholly a product of education. Many in-depth studies of the human psyche have showed beyond question that we acquire the values of right and wrong, that they are not born in us. Whether our conscience condemns or justifies our conduct has no relation to God's view. MM

Some Things Are Always Wrong CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Why? Why did Daniel accept the training and the job, but not the food? Daniel saw a conflict between eating the king's food and the law of God which as a young Israelite he had learned to love and respect. Jews were not to eat meat offered to idols (Ex. 34:15), and they were not to eat certain kinds of meat at all. Very likely the eating of the king's food was associated with the worship of the king's gods and was intended to bring the blessing of Babylon's gods on the young men. Daniel would have no part of it.

But notice how wisely Daniel handled this delicate situation. Respectfully he stated the problem and suggested an alternative. If Nebuchadnezzar should be offended, cancel his training and send him out to the fields to labor, so be it. Obedience to God's law came first.

At the same time, Daniel did not turn down everything the king planned for him. He separated between what was a principle of the law of his God and what was not. He might not have liked the name the king chose for him, but he accepted it—what difference did it make if the king said he should be called Belteshazzar?

Then, too, Daniel did not refuse the king's training. He may not have liked the job assigned him, but he accepted it and stayed in the king's service, so far as we know, as long as the kingdom lasted, "even unto the first year of King Cyrus" (Daniel 1:21)—which would not have happened had the king been unhappy with his work.

Daniel could have adopted a plan of total non-cooperation. He could have said, I will not eat your meat; I will not accept your name; I will not do your job, and I don't want your salary. But such an attitude would not have honored God.

The difference lay in what was a command or a principle of God, and what was not. Where God had made a specific command, Daniel obeyed. But where there was no law violated, Daniel did his best to cooperate, while he obeyed God. There was no virtue in being contrary.

Likewise our obligation to God must never be an excuse for contrariness, laziness, or idleness. Daniel did what he could to avoid bringing discredit to the God of his fatherland, either by obstinacy or idleness.

Christianity is a religion to be lived in the real world 24/7. Christians are in the world but they are to be no part of it. The committed believer goes against the grain of what is acceptable to society without apology because, in his view, whatever conflicts with the higher law of God is always wrong.

We all know how the story ended with Daniel. Melzar, who was responsible for the young Jewish men, went along with Daniel's request, and at the end of the ten days Daniel and his companions "looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food" (Dan. 1:15 NIV). In other words, the way of obedience made God's people look good, made Melzar look good and—most important—God was pleased.

Let us take Daniel for our model, and never be afraid to say "I will not" when we are tempted to compromise or accommodate.

Because even if wrong seems to win for the moment, God's side will triumph in the end, and those who obey, no matter what, will reap eternal benefits. MM



*The greatest Book I ever read,
It fills my every need;
The Bible is my Daily Bread,
My Counsel and my Creed.
It is the Rock on which I stand,
My sword to conquer fear;
My shield against temptation
And a Shepherd always near.*

*It is my comfort in distress,
It makes my burden less;
'Tis healing wisdom from above,
And joy and heav'nly love.
The light to guide my feet beyond
The turmoil of today,
The greatest Book, it gives me hope,
The Bible shows the way!*

IS IT WORTH THE RISK?



1. A prize! But hmmm ...
how do I get it?

Is it worth the risk? For the fox, yes. The fox must survive. But what about us, when there is something we really want?

The things we covet are often not a matter of survival, or even necessity. Jesus says we can want things that look as good to us as that carrion looks to the fox—and cut ourselves off from the vastly better things God has for us. Is it worth the risk?

Jesus asked this question: “What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37). In other words, what is the real cost? What will it be worth long term? How much will I be ahead—or behind—for this choice?

Perhaps Jesus’ analogy is extreme. No one expects to gain “the whole world,” not even Alexander the Great, who lamented that there was “no other world to conquer.” How long did Alexander benefit from his conquests? Only a moment.

What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

—Mark 8:36–37



2. One swift move, and it will be mine!

If we manage to grasp our earthly dream, it is only a matter of time until force, or fraud, or casualty, or disease or death will wrench it from us. The question of Jesus remains, “What shall it profit?” What is the value of the “whole world” or any part of it (that is, any goal or satisfaction of the present), if one loses his or her soul (that is, his opportunity for eternal life) in the getting?

Don't risk the greatest value for anything lesser.

Life offers millions of choices. What determines our choices? Our values? Our goals? Are we making wise choices? By nature we think short term. Jesus is trying to change that mindset and teach us to look for long term benefit. Why put our eternal future at risk for a carcass?

3. Oh! What's happening?!



Is any temporal prize worth the risk? Before you grab it—think. It may cost me my (eternal) life.

4. Oooooo ... I didn't bargain for this!

What is the value of any earthly carcass—whether it be in the form of money, position, a grudge or just the satisfaction of having our own way—compared with what God is holding for His faithful ones? Nothing at all! MM



5. It's NOT worth it!

CREDIT FOR PHOTOS:

Credit for these unusual photos belongs to an anonymous adventurer who is at home in northern Alberta, Canada. The photos came to us through Ed Shayler, a member who lives with his wife Lorna in Calgary, Alberta. Mr. Shayler is personally acquainted with a senior member of the Ecological office of the government of

Canada, Bruce Leeson. In an e-mail, Mr. Leeson described this series of pics as displaying "a daily drama in the wild country," and commented, "The whole drama reminds me of some people —going at it tooth and claw when there is virtually nothing left to scrap about."

by Kenneth E. Flowerday
Pastor, 1958–1985

Another View of Politics

This article, written in 1976, is still timely today.

As another political campaign nears its climax, it seems appropriate that we review our relationship to our country and our politics.

We are citizens of a good land; we are inheritors of a great nation. We are grateful. God has blessed us far above what we have deserved, providing abundantly for our physical and spiritual needs. Our country rates first in many areas, ranging from the number of automobiles produced each year to the number of Bibles printed.

But unfortunately, our country is not all that it might be. It is not even all that it was. What can be done?

Many people feel in all seriousness that every one should support some political front. Let your voice be heard. Isn't this the principle upon which our nation was founded? Isn't this what democracy is all about, the voice of the people speaking out for what they feel is right? Join with others who

*The politician must
please the people who
elect him; the Christian
must please God.*

also want to see a return to higher principles in government and speak out. After all, they say, isn't it the silent, non-committal, acquiescent majority who are responsible for the present situation?

This may well be the answer on a national scale. But our

first concern as Christians must be individual, not national. What is the serious Christian to do?

To be sure, there is no verse of Scripture which says, "Thou shalt not engage in politics." But let us look for an example.

The Example of Jesus

There can be no better example than Jesus. There is nothing in any of the Gospels that suggests that Jesus was involved in any political maneuver, or that He supported any political personage, or debated any political issues of His time.

We can be certain that His non-involvement was not the result of a lack of incentive. The people of His time clamored for a man who could relieve them of the iron yoke of Rome. Jesus understood their feeling, and He knew the circumstances that had caused their oppression. He even had the capability to do something about it. But He refused to play their game. He refused to have any part in it. He did nothing that could be interpreted as politically motivated.

Jesus stated His relationship to the government when He answered His questioners: "*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's*" (Matt. 22:21). Pay your legal obligations, live as good citizens under law, respect authority and that is enough. Let the "children of this world" mind the affairs of this world. Your calling is to a higher allegiance.

This is what Jesus taught and practiced. His first and whole interest was to please His heavenly Father. "*I do always those things that please him,*" He could honestly say. And He told His disciples that as the Father had sent Him, "*so send I you.*"

The mission of the early Christians was non-political. Neither Paul nor any of the other Apostles had anything to do with politics. Simon the Zealot *had* been politically minded—the Zealots were a radical group in Palestine who were working to overthrow the Roman power. But Jesus would have none of this. When He did not even approve of the Apostles' striving among themselves "*which should be greatest*" in the kingdom of God, how could He have tolerated *any* seeking

for greatness in the kingdoms of men? He even said at the last Passover supper, *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves"* (Luke 22:25–26).

Paul could easily have been political material. Among the Jews he was highly qualified—*"circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless"* (Phil. 3: 5–6). He had the makings of whatever the world might need—statesman, lawyer, judge or president—he could have qualified above many. But he said, *"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Phil. 3:7–8). He had caught a vision of something so much greater, that everything of the present seemed to shrivel into worthlessness.

Paul recognized another problem inherent in politics: the need to please men. The successful politician must seek popular approval and conform to popular opinion. Paul said of himself, *"Do I ... seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ"* (Gal. 1:10). The Christian could never succeed in the popular view if obeying the injunction: *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 2:5).

Followers of Christ have never enjoyed popular support. Even in the first century the Christian community was accounted as a way *"which they call heresy"* (Acts 24:14), and a *"sect... spoken against everywhere"* (Acts 28:22). Any group described as such could hardly expect to be accepted in political circles.

Paul gave another clear guideline for the Christian's attitude toward the present cosmos. *"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please*

him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). As the soldier cannot get involved in civilian affairs, so the Christian cannot entangle himself in the politics and social affairs of his time. His God-given task must take top priority. Paul said of himself, *"This one thing I do"* (Phil. 3:13)—and that one thing had nothing to do with politics.

What is the Christian's duty to his country? To obey the laws (Rom. 13:1–5), and do right just as far as we know, and trust God for the rest. If some good cause is hindered by our lack of support, the results—whatever they may be—are in the hand of God. Nothing can happen against His will. It is He, the *"Most High"* who *"rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will"* (Dan. 4:17). All authority finds its ultimate source in God; He will triumph in the end.

There is yet another danger: If one

supports a cause that is blameworthy, he shares in the guilt (Ps. 50:18). Suppose the cause seems innocent. How can one be sure that there is not some carefully concealed intrigue, deceit or double dealing? How many good faith supporters of Richard Nixon were disappointed? No wonder the Psalmist said long ago: *"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help"* (Ps. 146:3).

Think about the following:

Can I, as a professing Christian, obey the command to *"keep...unspotted from the world"* (James 1:27) and voluntarily work among those whose principles and values are those of the world?

Can I *"walk honestly"* and support those who uphold a lesser standard of integrity? Read Psalm 15, and look for a politician who takes his integrity to that level.

The Apostle set the standard for all time when he wrote: *"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands,...so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders"* (1 Thess. 4:11–12 NIV).

All present government—however good or bad—is only temporary. Here we are aliens and strangers (1 Pet. 2:11). We have committed ourselves to a cause and a government which, once established, will be worldwide and eternal, with justice and equity for all. Our whole interest is there—in the *"world to come, whereof we speak"* (Heb. 2:5).

That new world is coming. Meanwhile, we want to be Jesus' disciples, *"in" the world but not "of" it* (John 17:14–16). For this reason we say with Paul:

"Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:20–21).

When King Jesus is on the ballot, I want to be ready to give Him my full support. Won't you do the same?

MM



The slander and abuse which accompany political campaigns are a disgrace to the name of the nation.

FAITH *in Action*

Acts 25:1–27 NKJV

1 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

2 Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him,

3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea [the seat of political jurisprudence], and that he himself was going there shortly.

5 "Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him."

6 And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.

7 When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove,

8 while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all."

9 But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"

10 So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know.

11 For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

by RUTH E. SISSON

"I APPEAL TO CAESAR"



Read Acts 25:1–12

The change in leadership from Felix to Festus might have benefited Paul except that the new governor, like his predecessor, still carried the favor of the Jews.

Festus wasted no time in going to Jerusalem to acquaint himself with the situation in his province. He also wanted to see for himself what was the root of the problem with the Jews, those people who had a reputation for being emotional, fanatical and riotous.

Quite naturally Festus went to the Jewish leadership to rally their support for his regime. He met what he did not expect.

1. What special petition did the Jewish leaders make of Festus? (25:2–3)

2. What was Festus' reply? (25:4–5)

Likely Festus wanted to get firsthand information so he could make his own judgments. And, from the other side, it was only natural that the Jewish leadership would see in Festus a new opportunity to get rid of Paul.

The scheming Jews were ready to take advantage of Festus. All Festus had to do was to have the prisoner Paul brought to the city of Jerusalem, and they would have men positioned along the route who would kill him. Easy.

But the hand of God was guarding Paul, and Festus did not fall for it. Would he, Festus, a new incumbent to the position, want to risk his political future by such a maneuver?

Also, Festus may have already heard something about Paul, including that he was a Roman citizen, and Caesarea was the proper place for a Roman citizen to be tried. Perhaps he knew the real reason Paul was in Caesarea. In any case, he let the Jews know he would not be manipulated by giving them a counter proposition.

3. What request did Festus make of the High Priest and the Jewish officials? (25:5) _____

In essence, Festus said, “*See you in Caesarea!*” Festus did not need help with his plans. The Roman court was handling the case, and the trial would be taking place in Caesarea. The governing power was Rome, not Jerusalem. At the same time, Festus was learning about Jewish nationalism and Jewish pride. Doubtless he was thinking how he could best compromise—and make peace with—the Jewish nationals. But he wanted peace on his terms, not theirs.

Festus spent over a week in Jerusalem, then returned to Caesarea, where, the next day, the court convened, Festus presiding.

Slandered and Falsely Accused

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12).

After two frustrating years of appearing frequently before Felix, and knowing that all Felix really wanted was a bribe and Paul could have been freed, now the trial procedure had to start all over again.

As Paul looked into the group of Jews who had assembled to accuse him, he saw many familiar faces. Did they have the same complaints that they had voiced to Felix two years earlier?

All of the same, and more—none of which they could prove. They accused him of heresy, sacrilege, and sedition.

4. When Paul had opportunity to answer for himself, what did he say? (25:8) _____

Paul knew that he was innocent. He also knew that the Jews didn’t have anything against him justly except his conviction regarding Jesus Christ, and the resurrection. He could honestly say that he had done nothing against *“the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar”* (25:8).



Paul: “If I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.”



A closer look

Falsely Accused

Can you picture the noble apostle Paul sitting through the court session, while his angry opponents hurled slanderous accusations at him? This was not the beginning. It had been happening for years. They had no new arguments, only the old ones rehearsed and unembellished.

Likely the question in Paul’s mind was how much those in authority would believe the lies. He knew their accusations were false, but how could he refute them?

But the assurance that God Almighty was with him put hope in his soul. He had heard the words of the Lord: “*Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome*” (Acts 23:11).

Paul was not the first to face false accusations. During those difficult years he thought often of Jesus, the One to whom he belonged and whose followers he himself had persecuted. Whoever suffered any severer test than Jesus Himself? Now Paul counted it a privilege to share Christ’s sufferings, “*if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*” (Rom. 8:17).

Taking false accusations in a Christ-like spirit without any desire to retaliate is one of the severest tests of character. How well do we take it when someone speaks falsely about us? At such times we can say, remember Paul!



Insight

Festus had a problem...

Festus had a problem with Paul. If he had let Paul go, he risked a riot because of the Jews’ hatred of him. If he handed Paul over to the Jews to be tried, again he had a problem, because Paul was a Roman citizen and any mistreatment of Paul would reflect back on him. Both of these issues became immense, now that Paul had appealed to Caesar.

And the fact remained: that Paul had committed nothing worthy of death or any other type of punishment. Festus himself had to acknowledge this fact.

Festus’ one hope was that King Agrippa might offer him a viable reason to send with Paul to Rome.



Insight

"I Appeal To Caesar"

Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? Was he being moved by the Holy Spirit to make the appeal? Or was he acting according to what he knew to be God's will for him?

Paul's reason for the appeal to Caesar was both of these. He was himself a living illustration of the truth he had already written to the Romans, that *"all things work together for good to them that love God"* (Rom. 8:28).

Paul likely knew only too well that there was no justice to be had from Festus. If Felix could not give Paul a fair trial—and Felix had knowledge of Jewish practices and beliefs—what could he expect of Festus?

Politics is politics in every age, and for the politician, the bottom line was to win as many friends as possible. The prisoner's welfare was not the main consideration.

Acts 25:13–22 NKJV

13 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.

14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix,

15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.

16 To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.'

17 Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in.

18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,

19 but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

20 And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.

21 But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar."

22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

5. What was Festus' state of mind?

(25:9) _____

Typical politician, Festus wanted most of all to curry the Jews' favor. And knowing that the Jews had wanted Paul to be tried in Jerusalem, he decided to comply and ask Paul if he would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem.

6. What was Paul's earth-shaking reply to Festus?

(25:10–11) _____

Remember, the Holy Spirit was guiding Paul's answer (Luke 12:11–12).

Paul was too much aware of Jewish schemes to trust them. He felt safer in the higher court of Caesar. As a Roman citizen, he had this right. If a citizen did not believe he could get justice in a provincial court, he could appeal to the Emperor. Only if one was a murderer, a pirate or a bandit could the appeal be denied.

7. What was Festus' reply when Paul appealed to Caesar? (25:12)

Whether Festus was angry, or resentful, or relieved, he had no choice but to confirm Paul's request. *"You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"* (25:12).

Paul's appeal actually put Festus in a very awkward situation. Here he was, trying to use Paul to establish his own credibility with the Jews, and now the prisoner exercised his right and took himself out of Festus' control. How would Festus explain this action to his superiors? What would he tell them had occasioned this extreme reaction from his prisoner? What could he say, especially when he knew that Paul was innocent of the charges leveled against him?

Another Opportunity for Paul to Witness



Read Acts 25:13–22

Since Festus was newly in office, King Agrippa came with his sister (and cohort) Bernice to pay a courtesy visit. What did Festus do but seize the opportunity to show off his special prisoner, the apostle Paul.



Festus: "Tomorrow, you shall hear him."



Festus: "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

Who was Agrippa? He was a puppet prince of Rome. King of a small part of Palestine that included Galilee and Perea, he was a subordinate of Festus. Still, Festus wanted to look good to him. So Festus did his stately best to impress Agrippa and Bernice.

Knowing that Agrippa was well versed in Jewish matters, Festus took the opportunity to get some official help with his Jewish dilemma. Perhaps Agrippa could give Festus some much needed guidance in presenting Paul's case suitably to the Emperor. The timing was perfect.

8. What did Festus tell Agrippa and Bernice about the prisoner

Paul and how he (Festus) had treated him? (25:14-16) _____

Notice that Festus told Agrippa that he had invited Paul's accusers to come to Caesarea. He could as easily have asked for witnesses who could testify to Paul's character.

If the truth be told, Festus might not have cared for the facts. It was convenient to be impressed by Paul's accusers and not even to think of asking for witnesses who could testify in his defense.

9. What did Festus say about the nature of the accusations Paul's enemies had brought against him? (25:19) _____

Did Festus in his heart thank his gods that his people were not like the wrangling Jews? He had doubtless heard about the Jewish traditions, but had not seen them at such close range.

10. What detail did Festus include that would have extended beyond the religion of the Jews? (25:19) _____

Festus did not know Jesus, and had no interest in knowing Him, or anything about His life, His death, and resurrection. All he knew was that it was one big controversy whether Jesus was *"dead or alive."* Festus used this discussion of Jesus to justify his request that Paul go to Jerusalem to be tried and judged by the Jewish people there, because the whole issue, as he saw it, was about Jewish *"superstitions."*

11. What did Festus say about Paul's response? (25:21) _____

Reading the account, we cannot miss the fact that Festus was trying to put himself in the most favorable light possible. He, too, was playing the political game, just as it is still played today. And because Festus was both executive and judicial, justice was compromised by his political objectives.

But Festus' plan to look good in the eyes of the Jews had boomeranged. Suddenly it was hard to keep his motives from showing through.

12. What was Agrippa's response to Festus' explanation about Paul? (25:22) _____

13. How long would Festus keep Agrippa waiting for his wish? (25:22) _____

Festus was more than willing to accommodate Agrippa, because he saw in Agrippa a possible way out of his predicament with this prisoner. Festus had to justify sending Paul's case to Caesar. What if Caesar should view Paul's case as a petty one, a time waster that Festus should have taken care of himself?

TO BE CONTINUED



A closer look

A Busy Prisoner

Luke doesn't fill us in as to what Paul did during those two plus years in the Caesarean prison. Felix had given instructions that Paul could have visitors, and no doubt, Festus continued the same policy.

What did Paul do with the time? There was an active Church in Caesarea and very likely brethren were in and out, looking after his physical needs while he cared for their spiritual needs. How convenient to have the great apostle Paul right in their city! Also, Luke and other companions of Paul likely stayed nearby to watch over their special friend.

Perhaps Paul wrote letters as he would later do in the Roman prison. The welfare of his churches was always on his mind. If he could not be among them, he could write to encourage and instruct them to be strong in the faith.

Of one thing we can be sure: Paul was a model prisoner. He copied his Master and so could say, *"Copy me as I copy Christ"* (1 Cor. 11:1 Moffatt).



Paul was a living testimony to his own conviction:

***"Whether we
live or die, we
are the Lord's."***

—Paul (Rom. 14:8)



Little Marcia waited with her mother in the department store while a clerk went to check on an item her mother wanted. Suddenly Marcia's eye caught something in the opposite aisle. It was a toy violin and bow, just her size, and all packaged nicely in a bright green box with a cellophane top. "Oh please, mommy. Please! Please! May I have it? Please, mommy, please?"

Mother picked up the package and turned it over, looking for the price tag "Nineteen ninety five," she said. "That's almost twenty dollars. If you really want it, Marcia, you'll have to work for it."

Marcia's face fell. What could she do? "Think of some extra chores you can do at home during the next few weeks, and we'll see if you can't save enough to buy it. Your birthday's coming, you know, and maybe Grandma will remember you with another crisp five dollar bill. That will help."

All the way home Marcia was thinking about things she could do to earn that little toy violin. As soon as they were home, she emptied her bank and carefully piled its contents. She had ten quarters, nine dimes and four dollar bills besides many pennies. She wasn't just sure how much there was, but she knew it lacked a lot of being twenty dollars.

After dinner, Marcia did more than her share of the chores. She even offered to sweep the kitchen floor. Then,

noticing that their neighbor was pulling weeds in her garden, asked if she could go and help for awhile. The neighbor agreed, and Marcia came home after awhile with a dollar bill. "Mrs. Mony said I worked real well," Marcia reported proudly.

And so it went day after day, Marcia continually looking for something extra she could do. She just had to have that little violin!

On her birthday, as usual, Grandma gave her a crisp five dollar bill, and at last she had enough money to buy the toy violin.

Marcia loved her little violin. It even made a little music. Carefully, she would put it up to her chin, just like her aunt Carol, and draw the bow across the strings. Playing it made her feel so grown up.

Marcia took very good care of her little treasure. Each night she carefully tucked it away in its special box and tucked it under her bed, so that it would be there for her in the morning when she woke up.

Marcia's father was very kind and loving, and every night when she went to bed he would stop whatever he was doing and read her a story.

One night when he had finished the story, he asked Marcia, "Do you love me?"

"Oh yes, Daddy, you know that I love you."

"Will you give me your little violin?" he said.

"Oh, Daddy, oh! Not my violin. But you can have my pretty yellow blanket," and she picked it up and handed it up to her father.

"No, that's all right, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after story time, Marcia's father again asked her, "Do you love me?"

"Daddy, you know I love you."

"Then give me your little violin."

"Oh, Daddy, not my violin. But you can have my treasure chest, and everything in it. The brand new one I got for my birthday. It is so beautiful."

"That's all right. Sleep well. Daddy loves you." And as usual he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her father came in, Marcia was sitting on her bed. As he came closer he noticed her chin was trembling, and a silent tear rolled down her cheek. "What is it, Marcia? What is the matter?"

Marcia jumped up, and quickly pulled the precious little violin from underneath her bed, picked it up with both hands and lifted it up to her father. She swallowed, and with a little quiver she finally said, "Here, Daddy, it's for you," and big tears welled up in her eyes.

"Thank you, my little Marcia," he said as he planted a big kiss on her cheek, then turned to leave.

"But Daddy, Daddy, are you going to take it away?" Now the tears tumbled out—streaming down both cheeks as she watched her father disappear without another word. In a moment, however, he returned with another package.

"Here, Marcia, darling. Would you like to open this?" he

said, as he handed the box to his little daughter. "It's for you." Blinking back the tears Marcia took the box, set it on her bed, and carefully removed the cover. Then she carefully lifted out a strange shaped case.

"Open it," her father gently urged. Carefully, her baby fingers unfastened the little latches and Marcia peered inside. Delighted she cried out, "Oh, Daddy, it's another little violin, but it is so much prettier than the old one."

"Marcia dear, this is a *real* violin—one that can make *real* music.

"A real violin—just my size! O thank you, Daddy!" Throwing her arms around her father and looking brightly up at him Marcia asked, "Will it play music like Aunt Carol's?"

"Yes, indeed it may someday" chuckled Father.

Carefully Marcia plucked a string, to hear it ring. "It's real, Daddy, it's real! It's real!" she exclaimed, jumping up and down. Then carefully she took her new treasure out of its case and hugged it.

"It's your very own, Marcia. I was just waiting for you to give up your toy violin, so I could give you a real one."

"Oh thank you, Daddy, thank you, thank you!"

"Marcia," said Daddy very softly, "I have made arrangements for you to take lessons,— someday you may play it beautifully."



*Are you ready
to exchange
(your) lesser for
(God's) greater?*

Isn't Marcia's father like our Heavenly Father? He is just waiting for us to give up our cheap department store toys so He can give us something of real—eternal—value!

What are you holding on to?

MM

THE RIGHT SOUNDS

Listen To God

As Nate turned the dial of his new transistor radio, he counted the stations it could pick up. "Dad, how can there be so many stations inside my radio?" Nate asked. "I counted thirty."

"I'm sure you know the stations aren't actually inside your radio," said Dad with a smile, "but sound waves from all those stations are right here in this room. Your radio is simply a 'receiver.' It picks out the various sound waves and then makes it possible for you to hear them."

"The man who invented the radio must have been pretty smart," Nate said thoughtfully.

"Yes," agreed Dad, "but God, the One Who made your ear to hear the sounds, is even smarter. Just think about the ear and how wonderfully it works. It receives sound waves, too. And since you have two ears, you can even tell what direction a sound is coming from and also about how far away it is!"

"So the ear is something like a radio," said Nate.

Dad nodded. "Your radio can be tuned to receive all kinds of sounds from different stations, and your ears can receive all sorts of different sounds, too." He paused, then added with a stern look, "I don't think your ears have always been treated to the right kind of sounds lately. I've spoken to you about this before." Nate blushed. He remembered some programs and jokes he had listened to with his friends. "Nate," continued Dad, "be careful that you don't allow the sounds of the world to drown out God's voice. Let Him speak to you through His Word. What He has to say is very important."

MM



*My son, give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.*

*Let your heart retain my words;
Keep my commands, and live.*

—Prov. 4:20, 4

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Are you using your ears to listen to the right kinds of things? Does the music you choose honor God? Do the jokes, stories, and programs you listen to please Him? Thank God right now for your hearing, and promise Him you'll use your ears to listen to good things!

The above story is adapted from *KEYS FOR KIDS* 1997.

AMAZING STRUCTURE

Did you know that

- ✓ Each of our hands has at least 123 named ligaments.
- ✓ We operate our fingers by remote control. There are no muscles inside our fingers. The muscles that bend fingers are located in our palm and up in our mid forearm. These muscles are connected to the finger bones by tendons, which pull and move our fingers like the strings of a marionette.
- ✓ We have 34 muscles (17 in the palm and 18 in the forearm) that move our fingers and thumb.
- ✓ The wrinkles on the back of our finger knuckles mark the areas where the skin is attached to the tendon beneath the skin.

Every day our hands perform thousands of simple tasks for us—because of their awesome design!



THAT AMAZING THUMB

Did you know that

- ✓ We have an amazing thumb. Our thumb can be easily rotated 90° on a level perpendicular to the palm. The other fingers can only be rotated approximately 45°.
- ✓ Our thumb moves in such a complex fashion that there are 6 separate terms just for describing the directions our thumb can move!
- ✓ Chimpanzees and monkeys can oppose the thumb **only** to the index digit. By contrast **each** of our fingers can rotate across the palm to meet the thumb. This gives our hands unparalleled grip, grasp, and torque.



The human hand is more complex and delicate than any comparable organ in any other animal. This extra articulation makes us able to operate a wide variety of tools and devices.

OUR HAND

Have you ever thought how amazingly designed your two hands are? The hands you use every day to hold a spoon or a fork to feed yourself, or to fasten the buttons on your clothing, or to carry heavy loads, or to hold a precise writing or drawing instrument are unique among the instruments God has created. From the time we are born, our hands shape how we interact with our world.

At the risk of being too technical, I want to describe just a little about the design of our hands, so that you can appreciate a small part of the wonder of our great Creator's handiwork.

Awesome flexibility

Our two hands together contain more than a quarter of the bones in our body. Each hand contains 27 bones. There are 8 squarish, marble-sized bones in the wrist, 5 bones in the palm of the hand, and 14 finger and thumb bones. The bones in our wrist are stacked together in 2 rows of 4 bones each, held tightly together by ligaments. Even though there is little movement between each bone, together they allow the wrist to be very flexible.

The thumb bone is the shortest and most mobile of the palm bones. A dou-

In a precision grip, a flexed finger and opposing thumb can grasp an object and hold it firmly.

Of the thousand or so different functions we perform daily with our hands, few would be possible without our opposing thumb.



"The thumb alone would convince me of God's existence," said Sir Isaac Newton.



BY EVOLUTION?

In his book *The Hand*, neurologist Dr. Frank Wilson outlines current thinking about our hand's evolution. About 60 million years ago early primates took to living in trees and made "appropriate physical alterations." For one thing, their paws changed: the thumb—although not yet opposable—became more mobile, nails replaced claws, and palms developed sensitive skin ridges.

Our hands and brains actually evolved together. By about 10 million years ago, our tree-living ancestors had "learned" to use their brains for hand-eye coordination. Increased skill "demanded a bigger brain with very

specialized control characteristics." Touch also needed enhancement, and this "demanded more brain rewiring...." Plus the "fact" that modifications passed on to offspring had to be survival-enhancing changes (to be able to play a violin?).

It is easy to describe the alterations necessary to go from a paw to a hand, but in reality how could those primates have figured it out? How could they rewire their brains, enhance their sense of touch, and alter the bones in their wrists? They could not!

Our awesome hand testifies to our Great Designer!



How did a paw evolve into an appendage so sensitive as to perform a Mozart concerto?



ble saddle joint in the thumb allows our thumb to flex enough to touch the tips of each of our fingers. This gives our hand the ability to grasp even very small objects—an ability that other primates do not have. The special thumb joint allows it to rotate 90 degrees, making it possible for us to have a much more precise grip between our thumb and fingers and to clench our hands tightly into a fist. The joint at the bases of the third and fourth fingers allows them to rotate 45 degrees, again adding to the precision of our grip. Can we believe that such intricate design came about by blind chance? Should we not give thanks to our awesome Creator?

Each of our fingers has 3 bones, while the thumb has only 2. In addition, scattered in each hand are small pebble-like bones embedded in the tendons to provide extra leverage and to reduce pressure on the tissues below. Can you imagine how chance could bring about bones to meet needs so specialized?

Awesome remote control

The movement in our hands is unique in another way. Our fingers are moved by remote control. We have no muscles in our fingers. The muscles that cause them to move are actually located in our palms and forearms. These muscles are connected to the finger bones by long tendons which pull on the fingers like strings on a marionette. The muscles powering the fingers are strong, strong enough to allow some people to climb vertical surfaces and hang their weight on just a few fingers at a time. The laws of biomechanics require that the force generated by the muscles which bend the fingertips must be at least 4 times the pressure produced at the fingertips. Think about this: it means that if a 150 pound person is hanging onto a rock ledge by 3 fingertips in mid-air, the force exerted on the muscles that operate those fingers would be at least 600 pounds. The muscles and tendons which operate the hand are also very strong, yet at the same time capable of very fine precise movement. How awesome!

Awesome skin design

Even the skin on our hands is unique—and specialized. On the palm side of our hands, the skin is tough and hairless, and fastened very securely to the tissue beneath so that it acts like a slip-proof rubber glove when we use our hands to twist and grip.

Why is fingerprinting a means of sure identity? Because the print of every finger on any person who ever lived is different from any other. Think about this! Could an infinite number of skin patterns be always different if no master mind had designed our fingers?

At the same time, the skin on our fingers is tough yet very sensitive. The fingertips, along with our lips, contain the highest concentration of

DESIGNED TO USE

Did you know that

- ✓ Your hand was designed to grip and grab. Your finger bones are straight on the back side, but curved on the palm side. This design allows us to form our hand tightly around the object we want to grab!
- ✓ You can grip and twist because the skin on the palm side of your hand is anchored to the bones of your hand to keep the skin from sliding around.

The muscles which bend our fingertips to perform intricate functions can also support our entire body weight.



INCREDIBLE TOUCH

Did you know that

- ✓ Our fingertips contain some of the densest areas of nerve endings on our body.
- ✓ Research has found that the human finger can distinguish textures as small as 75 nanometers—a nanometer is a thousandth of a micron, and a human hair is between 50 and 100 microns.



Each of our fingertips has about 2,000 receptors just for touch, not to mention receptors that detect heat, motion, or other sensations such as mechanical pain, or thermal pain, or chemical pain.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

LIES, LIES, LIES

1. Who is referred to as the father of lies?
2. What king of Israel falsely claimed to worship Baal in order to gather Baal-worshippers in one place then slaughtered them?
3. Whose wife claimed her Hebrew servant tried to seduce her, when in actuality the reverse was true?
4. Who contracted leprosy as a punishment for lying to the prophet Elisha?
5. How was Jacob a victim of his future father-in-law's deception?
6. What two people died after lying to Peter about the value of the land they had sold?
7. Who is remembered for his 3 lies (denials)?

Character Shows

Meek, Humble; Impetuous; Wise; Faithful; Forgiving; Brave; Patient; Wise; Submissive; Self-disciplined; Treacherous; Deceptive; Jealous; Penitent;

What character quality do you associate with each name?
Choose from the above.

1. _____ Abraham (when he left his homeland at the command of God – Heb. 11:8–10)
2. _____ Joseph (his attitude toward his brothers – Gen. 50:15–21)
3. _____ Daniel (when he prayed to his God after the edict that everyone could pray to the king only – Dan. 6:1–10)
4. _____ Job (his attitude toward his suffering – Jas. 5:10–11)
5. _____ King David (after he had sinned – Ps. 51)
6. _____ King Saul (when he was pursuing David – 1 Sam. 18:5–9)
7. _____ Moses (when his brother and sister challenged his God-given authority – Num. 12:3)
8. _____ King Solomon (when he was writing the proverbs – 1 Kings 3:7–12)
9. _____ Paul (when he compared himself to a runner in a race – 1 Cor. 9:26–27)
10. _____ Judas (when he planned to betray Jesus to his enemies – Matt. 26:14–16; 47–49)
11. _____ Peter (when he spoke first and thought second – Matt. 16:21–23)
12. _____ Jesus (when praying in Gethsemane – Matt. 26:39, 42, 44)

Think about it:

What **character quality** would be attached to **my name**?

Food and Drink

1. Of whom was it said that his food was “locusts and wild honey”?
2. Which land was spoken of as “flowing with milk and honey”?
3. Who fed the prophet Elijah with “only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a cruse”?
4. During a time of famine, Jacob sent his sons into Egypt to purchase what commodity?
5. Why did Paul encourage Timothy to use a little wine?
6. What did the children of Israel eat in the wilderness that tasted like wafers made with honey?
7. What king ordered that a prophet be fed “on scant fare of bread and water”? Who was the prophet, and what was the reason for the king's order?
8. In exchange for what food product did Esau sell his birthright?
9. What two kinds of meat (food) did Jesus contrast? Which kind did He recommend? Why?
10. What food items did the king-priest Melchizedek present to Abraham when he returned from his battle with the 5 kings?
11. Who refused to eat the king's rich food, and requested vegetables instead?
12. Jeremiah saw in vision two baskets, one containing fresh ripe fruit and the other rotten fruit. What was the fruit?
13. Who asked for a drink of water and was given milk instead?
14. Who looked back nostalgically, remembering “the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic”?
15. What food did Jesus multiply to feed five thousand people?
16. What did Jesus say is not sufficient to live by? What better (spiritual) food did He recommend?



ANSWERS ON NEXT PAGE 29

Our Awesome Hands

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

sensory nerve endings anywhere in our body. The human hand is equipped with about 17 thousand touch nerve endings, to say nothing of the thousands more that sense pain and temperature.

Why does the Bible use the hand as a symbol of power (see Ex. 15:6; Hab. 3:4; Prov. 3:27)? Does it not tell us that our hands are unique?

Remember the Scripture, *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going"* (Eccl. 9:10).

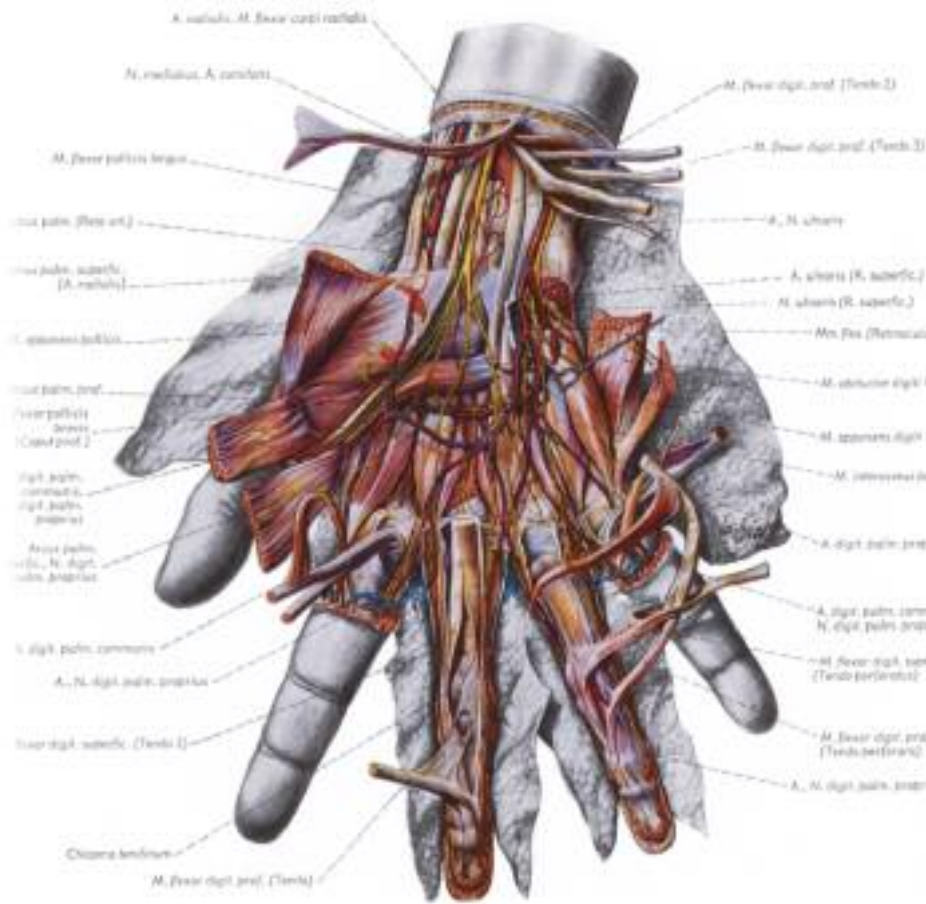
Let us approach God in reverent worship. Let us *"lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens"* (Lam. 3:41). **MM**



Photo of human hand only 16 weeks after conception, showing fingers (even with finger nails) and developing bones. (from *"The Incredible Machine"*)

Sources of information and photos for this article:

Smithsonian, *"Charting the Terrain of Touch,"* by Richard Wolkowicz;
National Geographic Society, *"The Incredible Machine"*
<http://www.eatonhand.com/hw/facts.htm>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand>



(above) One of seven different x-ray photograph/pictures of the hand in an anatomy textbook for surgical students. We marvel at the complexity and incredible amount of knowledge required to operate on a human hand. And yet our students are taught all this just evolved! How can any person think such complexity happened without a Designer? (Picture from Perhkopf, *"Topographical and Applied Human Anatomy"*)

ANSWERS FROM PAGE 28

LIES, LIES, LIES

1. The Devil (John 8:44)
2. Jehu (2 Kings 9:5–6; 10:18–28)
3. Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:1–20)
4. Gehazi (2 Kings 5:23–27)
5. Laban gave his daughter Leah instead of Rachel to be Jacob's wife (Gen. 29:21–25)
6. Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11)
7. Peter (Mark 14:66–72)

CHARACTER SHOWS

1. Faithful (Heb. 11:8–10)
2. Forgiving (Gen. 50:15–21)
3. Faithful, Brave (Dan. 6:1–10)
4. Patient (Jas. 5:10–11)
5. Penitent (Ps. 51)
6. Jealous (1 Sam. 18:5–9)
7. Meek, Humble (Num. 12:3)
8. Wise (1 Kings 3:7–12)

9. Self-disciplined (1 Cor. 9:26)
10. Treacherous, Deceptive (Matt. 26:47–49)
11. Impetuous (Matt. 16:21–23; John 18:10–11)
12. Submissive (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44)

FOOD AND DRINK

1. John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1–4)
2. Canaan, the land of promise (Ex. 3:7–8)
3. The widow of Zarephath, with whom Elijah lodged during the three years of famine in Israel (1 Kings 17:12–16)
4. Grain (Gen. 42:1–2)
5. *"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments"* (1 Tim. 5:23)
6. Manna (Ex. 16:31–35)
7. The king was Ahab, and the prophet Micaiah. The king was displeased because the prophet Micaiah had predicted the defeat of King Ahab in battle (1 Kings 22:26–28)

8. Red lentil stew (Gen. 25:29–34)
9. Meat that perishes, and meat that endures; because the meat that endures gives everlasting life (John 6:27).
10. Bread and wine (Gen. 14:18).
11. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, who were re-named Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego by the Babylonians (Dan. 1:8–16)
12. Figs (Jer. 24:1–2)
13. Sisera, the army commander for Jabin, King of Canaan (Judges 4:17–19)
14. The complainers among the children of Israel in the wilderness (Num. 11:4–6)
15. Five barley loaves, and two small fish (John 6:1–13)
16. *"Bread alone"* is not enough to *"live by."* To live one must eat *"every word of God"* (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4)

Have You Been to

En Gedi?

I lie surrounded by lions, greedy for human prey, their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongue a sharp sword. ...They laid a snare in my path... they dug a pit ahead of me, but fell in it themselves. ...I will praise you among the peoples, Lord, I will make music for you among nations...
— Ps. 57:4, 6, 9 NJB

Have you been to En Gedi? Sounds like a strange place doesn't it? An expedition somewhere in the Yukon, or maybe Antarctica? No, En Gedi is actually the oasis in the barren, windswept Judean desert where David wrote Psalm 57 as he was hiding in a cave. King Saul had been pursuing him for years, intent on killing him (1 Sam. 23:25-29). Exhausted, David found refreshment and rest at En Gedi.

Catch this phrase in verse 2, *"I cry out to God most high; to God who accomplishes great things for me"* (NASB). When David wrote these words, everything seemed against him. No one would have given him the slightest chance of escaping. Even though David had been anointed king, Saul was still king and commanded the army of Israel. What was David to do?

In this prayer David put all into God's hands. He didn't know how God was going to work it all out, but he trusted God had a plan and at the right time would bring it to completion.

What is the timeless truth here? That for the child of God, even when things look hopeless, God is still working. All things are working together to an expected end (Rom. 8:18). It isn't chance, or happenstance. God knowing the end from the beginning sends His angels to arrange circumstances for His own.

Bottom line: God will fulfill His purposes—regardless. Our part—to submit to His will. **MM**

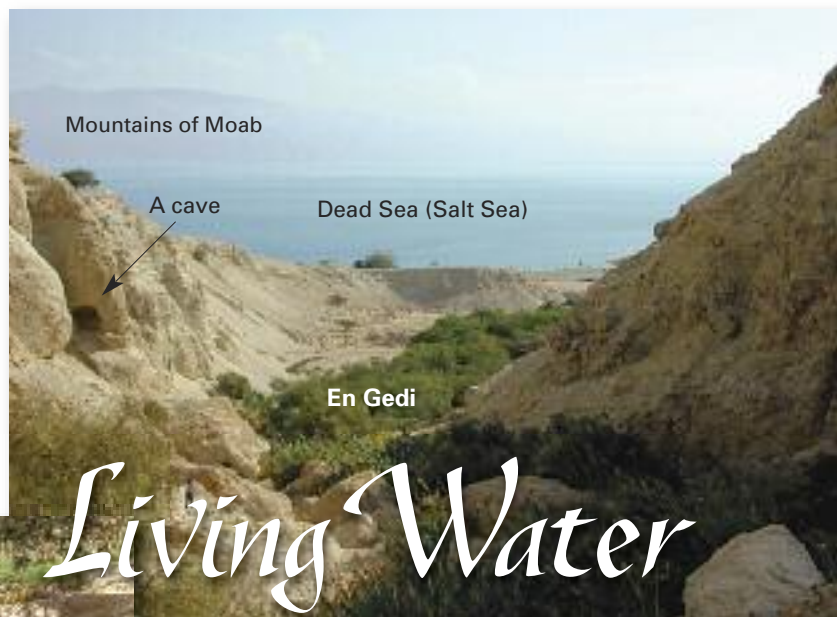
The life giving Word in our hearts will turn dry and barren lives into refreshing and productive lives.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"

- ❑ En Gedi is about 35 miles southeast from Jerusalem.
- ❑ Israel's only naturally-occurring waterfall is at En Gedi.
- ❑ En Gedi is also referred to as Hazazon-tamar.
- ❑ There is farming about 15 miles to the west.



Living Water

En Gedi provides ideal shelter for people and animals in its numerous caves and grand rock formations. But especially, it provides cool life giving water in a dry and barren wilderness.

"The strongholds at En Gedi" served as refuge places for David as he fled from King Saul's jealous pursuit (1 Sam. 23:29). One time when David and his men were hiding in one of its many caves, King Saul entered the cave to take rest. Unexpectedly, David had a perfect opportunity to kill his enemy. But instead, David showed his outstanding character and faith in God by sparing the king's life—only cutting off a corner of his robe as proof of his innocence (1 Samuel 24).

(above) One of four springs that feeds the oasis of En Gedi, making it the largest oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea. Irrigation provided by these perennial springs encourages a lush and fruitful ecosystem as the "living water" tumbles approximately 650 feet toward the Dead Sea.

(far left and left) Two of En Gedi's three waterfalls.



As water from a spring provides an oasis that sustains life, similarly Jesus offers "living water" that can become in us "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" – John 4:10, 14 NIV



En Gedi means "the spring of the kid (goat)." Evidence exists that young ibex (wild goats) have always lived near the springs of En Gedi.



An ibex family

En Gedi's refreshing water contrasted by the barren wilderness just a few feet away made a deep impression on David. He uses the imagery in his psalms.

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" – Ps. 42:1-2

All photos on pages 30 and 31 were taken by Todd Bolen; courtesy of "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



Someday...!

*Someday a bright new wave will break upon the shore,
And there will be no sickness, no more crying, no more war,
The saints will be immortal, none will suffer any more,
And there'll be a bright new morning over there,
There'll be a bright new world for them to share.*

*Someday there'll be an end to unkind words and cruel,
The man who said, "There is no God" will know he was a fool;
And peace will be a way of life when Christ the earth shall rule,
And there'll be a bright new morning over there,
There'll be a bright new world for some to share.*

*Someday, we know not when, when toiling days are done,
And saints of all the ages shall be gathered in as one,
Their voices shall be ringing out the victory they have won,
And there'll be a bright new morning over there—
Shall we be there, that bright new world to share?*

