

Megiddo Message

Hope

in the midst
of **HORROR**

Megiddo Message

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A religious magazine, devoted to the cause of Christ and published for the dissemination of Bible truth alone.

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New Year Issue

Hope in the midst of Horror	3
Timely Topics	7
When the Storm Struck Nazareth	9
The Interlude	11
The Abib Calendar	12
Bible A B C's	13
"Ye Are the Light of the World..."	14
Living for Invisibles	16
"...Like A Grain of Mustard Seed"	18
Christ's Birth—Spring or Autumn?	19
Letters	23
Meditations on the Word	24
Questions and Answers	25
The Challenge of a New Year	27
Implicit Faith	Cover

Editorially Speaking...

At Year's End

THOUGHTLESS indeed is the man who does not think a little more seriously at the turning of the year. We think of the road over which we have come, the fulfillments, the disappointments, the successes, the failures. We think of our deliverances from the dangers seen and unseen, the Providential hand which has brought us safely to this time of beginning again.

In looking back, two things astonish us. First, we are amazed at the mountains that leveled off as we began to ascend them. We recall the chasms that we were sure could not be crossed—and now see ourselves on the other side. How was it possible? The words of the sweet singer of old come to mind: "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." We obeyed, step by step, and followed—"I being in the way, the Lord led me."

While these musings throw their lights and shadows across our minds, we are all too likely aware of a certain embarrassment at year's end. We could have made this year that is gone so much better for ourselves, and for all around us if—if we had tried a little harder. Too often, we can see, we failed to give our best, and now it's past and opportunity is gone. We let subtle, siren voices within deceive us. Now it's gone, and we can't call it back. What shall we do?

Then there was the opportunity to make our life count for God and good in the words we spoke to those around us. We either cast the sunshine of hope on another human life, or with a sharp, impatient, or selfish tongue we know we failed.

Oh that we might capture the spirit of those men and women who went everywhere bearing by word-of-mouth and by their everyday lives the message of the Kingdom of God. Good enthusiastic "gossip" about the Kingdom of God—we need more of it today.

At year's end there is also the memory of open, clear-cut mistakes we have made. We came to a fork in the road—and took the wrong fork. There was a decision to be made—and we reached the wrong one. We spoke too fast, or not fast enough. And now the year is done.

But our retrospection should not allow us to molder in the dust of regret; nor should we ruminate in our successes. The past is useful only for the lessons we can obtain therefrom. It is our history textbook from which we learn how to build a surer and better and richer tomorrow. A feeling of gratitude should fill us, that the Eternal God still gives us opportunity to improve upon our faulty past. He still calls us to inherit those titles which now are ours only by promise—"saints," "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ," "sons and daughters." And we should remember that such designations are not beyond us—they can be ours as surely as we make ourselves part of that royal order by improving every day of the year that is now beginning. ●●

Hope in the midst of **HORROR**

PRAYER

Dear Father, we praise Thee that Thy dear Son arose triumphantly from death.

Now we may catch the gleam of the rising sun of hope. Our hearts have said, "There must be a way out." Resurrection Morning says, "There is a way out!" We see the footprints of the living Lord coming away from the tomb. The whole history of the world has been cut in two. Help us to grasp that transforming fact.

And remind us, Father, that if this resurrection of Jesus is to be real to us, we must share in His moral adventure, always pleasing Thee.

The bright prospect generated by the resurrection of Thy Son from the dead should amount to a vital fragrance that we diffuse wherever we go.

If we would verify the truth of Christ's resurrection we must live for the values He died for, and be willing to die for the values He lived for.

Here the risen Christ is pointing us to new life and hope. Help us to recognize this ultimate truth. Here is the risen Christ directing us to trace His own steps, not only toward the tomb, but away from it. We must follow His tracks. There are bloodstains as they lead in, but when they come out there is the firm tread of victory.

So if we would arise to live with the risen Lord we too must die with Him; must die with Him from the rudiments of the world, die to every emotion of self, to live a completely new life. If we would follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes, we must follow Him to death. Bloodstained footprints will mark our path into that tomb which obliterates our worst self, but songs of complete victory as we come out and He says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

We pray for strength to keep pressing on, that a raising to life and immortality may be the happy sequence to our short journey through life.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

DISCOURSE

MEN live in the shadow of death. In the contemporary world they are continually confronting the dire problem of their ultimate fate. Almost daily we are bludgeoned with the horror of death through graphic news reports, and sometimes through personal experience. Death has been painfully close to many of us as we have wept over the loss of loved ones. All of us have shared the grief of national tragedies in the past decade. During this tumultuous period, prominent American leaders were assassinated. Fifty thousand men lost their lives in Vietnam. Over half a million citizens were killed on our highways, and an alarming number more died through criminal acts, race riots, and natural catastrophes. The brutal procession of death in our day no longer allows us to avoid thinking about it; modern men must squarely face death in all its horror.

As men in our generation are driven to confront the fact of death, Christians have an unprecedented opportunity to assert afresh the triumphant message of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Increasingly great numbers of people are no longer mesmerized by materialism. Eager to reach beyond finitude and experience life's transcendental dimensions, many are pursuing the false and irrational phantoms of Eastern mysticism, astrology, spiritism, and reincarnation myths. Others crave a solution that does not require the abandonment of reason. For such people, the Biblical message can become a live option—if Christians declare it clearly, accurately, and boldly as it is pictured in the Word of God.

The Christian gospel honestly recognizes the horror of death. In the Biblical message, death is not a beautiful anteroom that leads to the blissful realm of immortality. The grave is the inevitable consequence of man's mortal nature. Death is a fearful enemy; it crushes the deepest desires of man

to live on in a world he loves, to maintain unbroken relationships with people he loves, and to find a state of wholeness in fellowship with a God who loves those who love Him.

The Scandal of Death

Few of us can pretend to follow Epicurius's formula: "While I am, death is not; and when death is, I am not. Therefore, death is no concern to me." Death *does* concern modern man. Three principal ways have been described in which men of the nuclear age try to give meaning to the scandal of death. First, a man may make himself the master of death, within limits, by ending his biological existence whenever he wishes. He can commit suicide. He can choose to die sacrificially for a desired cause and thereby triumph over death, however incompletely. He controls not the inevitability of death, but only the time of its coming.

Second, a man may deny death's reality by believing in an immortality that assumes biological finiteness as only apparent, and life in the body as continuing in another world. Or in another view of immortality, he may believe that his soul will live forever, either separated from his body or reincarnated in another's. This belief in personal immortality defies the evidence of the finiteness of man's biological existence and is, of course, peculiar to the religious realm.

Third, a man may substitute immortality of the human race for personal immortality. He may seek to be remembered by his successors, to live on in his sons, to create long-lasting tangible monuments, or to contribute works of art that will remain as a vital part of the life of mankind. But the present possibility of the nuclear destruction of all humanity diminishes this form of hope.

Understandably, many men, facing the finality of existence with no sound intellectual basis for belief in life after death, conclude that life is absurd and seek to wrest meaning from it through strictly material pursuits. By intense involvement in the pressing demands of the moment, they hope to gain some satisfaction that will make life tolerable. But these men have no adequate foundation for life. Neither do those whose only consolation is their contribution to the ongoing human race, nor those whose hope rests in irrational abandonment to false ideas of immortality.

Theologian Oscar Cullman in his Ingersoll Lecture of 1955 shows how decidedly different is the Greek view of death and immortality, exemplified in the death of Socrates, from the Christian view of death and resurrection as shown in the experience of Jesus Christ. For Socrates, death was the great liberator; it loosed the soul from its prison

in the body and led it back to its eternal home. Thus death was a friend. Socrates was able to drink the hemlock and die peacefully. Death held no terror for him.

But for Jesus death was a fearful experience. The night before His death as He knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane, "distress and anguish came over him." He had a natural fear of death and cried out to God, for He did not want to confront it alone. He viewed death as an enemy (Paul calls it "the last enemy" in First Corinthians 15:26); He knew that to die was to cease to exist. Nevertheless, as the obedient and sinless Son of God, Jesus willingly submitted to the ultimate horror on the Cross of Calvary, and entered the realm of God's great enemy. His suffering brought real death.

Christ Conquered Death

If Christ was to conquer death, He had to die; He had to really *cease* to live—not simply live on as an immortal soul, but die completely in body and soul, lose life itself, the most precious good which God has given us. And this is exactly what happened. Jesus' death was actual and complete—not a mere separation of the soul from the body. For Him to come back to life, a divine creative act was necessary. On the third day, Jesus arose bodily from the dead. His resurrection was the supreme miracle of God in history. Death was swallowed up in victory. Through the man Christ Jesus, new life—resurrection life—became a reality.

The Christian view of death and resurrection thus is not an unrealistic acceptance of death as a thing of beauty; it does not deny the importance of man's bodily existence or teach that his soul is translated into an illusory state of immortality. Rather, it sees death realistically as a destroyer. Only the resurrection gives men prospect of life in a new kind of substantial existence to be enjoyed eternally with Christ on Earth made over new.

The Resurrection Proclaimed By the Apostles

The Christian's privilege and responsibility is to declare the Biblical message that decisively answers the problem of mortality with the truth of Christ's death and triumphant resurrection. The Gospel is no fanciful legend that asks men to believe apart from reason. The saving acts of God in Christ are solidly anchored in history. In the first century Christ's apostles and disciples turned their world upside down with a message that stressed Jesus' resurrection as an event in history that they had witnessed. On this basis they called men to repent and acknowledge Christ as Lord.

The apostle Peter, speaking to men in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed: "God has raised this very Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses to this fact . . . Turn away from your sins, each one of you, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:32, 38). The apostle Paul, addressing men of Athens, asserted that God "has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice, by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death!" (Acts 17:31). The apostle John, writing to the seven churches in Asia, referred to "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn Son who was raised from death, who is also the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5).

The literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was the central proclamation of the early Church; it must also be the true Church's central proclamation in our death-filled day. The Gospel today rests on the same evidence that the historian Luke asserted in the first century: "For forty days after his death Jesus showed himself to them many times, in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive; he was seen by them, and talked with them about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Christians must become well grounded in the historical basis of the Gospel and vigorously advance its truth so that men seeking an answer to death can recognize the necessity of examining the hope Christ offers.

Our Evidence

Our testimony to the reality of Christ's resurrection must include the following Biblical proofs:

1. *The transformed lives of the apostles can be adequately explained only by the resurrection of Christ.* Christ's followers were utterly distraught by the execution of this One who they hoped would become the religio-political ruler of Israel, and they feared for their own safety because of the violence of Christ's enemies. Yet in a matter of days these discouraged and frightened men were amazingly transformed. They openly and fearlessly proclaimed Christ alive from the dead; their belief in His resurrection motivated them to give themselves completely to the mission of making the risen Christ known to all men. So strong was their belief that they submitted to persecution and death rather than deny their Lord.

Had these unlearned men cunningly devised a fictional message (a scheme for which they had no discoverable motive), it would be reasonable to assume that sooner or later one or more of the eleven (not to mention other followers) would

have confessed the subterfuge under the pressure of numerous threats of death. But none did. Their witness never wavered. Rather, they experienced an amazing power and stamina! The Resurrection of Christ changed the lives and message of these men. And the transformed lives and message of these men changed the course of human history. No reasonable explanation has ever been given to account for their transformed lives except their own: *they had seen Jesus alive from the dead.*

2. *The diversity of appearances by the risen Christ provides substantial historical proof for His bodily resurrection.* The four Gospels relate at least ten post-resurrection appearances of Christ. He appeared to individuals (both men and women), to small groups (two, three, seven), to larger groups (ten, eleven), and to a crowd (over five hundred). He exhibited His wounded body, spoke intimately to those who knew Him, ate in their presence, taught them, directed their activities, and gave instructions about their future witness. His first appearance was to women—hardly likely, had the story been invented by Jewish men. He appeared to His followers to assure them of His triumph over death and to prepare them for their worldwide preaching ministries. These various appearances to different people in different settings cannot reasonably be explained as hallucinatory experiences. The best explanation is that given by the reliable writers of history and theology in the New Testament: the risen Lord actually met with His followers.

3. *The empty tomb can be explained only by the supernatural power of God in raising Christ.* After the crucifixion, the obviously dead body of Jesus was anointed, wrapped in linen, and placed in a new tomb sealed with a great stone and guarded by Roman soldiers. His adversaries, knowing He had predicted He would rise from the dead, took pains to prevent any possible plot for a simulated resurrection. Yet the first day of the week after His death, the morning of the 15th of Abib, the stone was rolled away from the tomb, revealing no corpse, but only the body wrappings undisturbed and the head cloth rolled up in a separate place.

How was the body removed? Jesus' enemies would not have taken it—the last thing they wanted was the suggestion of a resurrection. Furthermore, they could not produce the corpse later to refute the apostles' claims that He had arisen. The friends of Jesus were in no position to steal the body: they were grief-stricken after His rejection by Israel and crucifixion by Rome and feared they too might be killed. And His disunited disciples certainly did not have the power neces-

sary to carry out such a plot in view of the Roman military guards who stood watch over the great stone that sealed the tomb. If Christ's enemies wouldn't have removed the body and His friends couldn't have done it, what possible answer is left? Only that the supernatural power of God was the means by which the body was removed and the tomb opened to reveal its emptiness. Attempts to explain the empty tomb by claims that Jesus never really died but swooned and then revived, or was merely drugged, fly in the face of the Biblical evidence and create far more problems than they solve.

Christians must boldly and persuasively assert the Biblical evidence for Christ's resurrection. But they must remember that argument alone cannot win their hearers. A man can be completely convinced of Jesus as the risen Lord only when saving faith works by love within his own life and the transforming power of the gospel becomes a reality for him. Personal knowledge of the living Christ involves both a rational and a moral decision.

Jesus Our Perfect Pattern

The knowledge that death can be conquered permanently is of the very highest importance to the true believer. Its importance cannot be over-emphasized. Without it the entire meaning of true religion is immediately drained away, and even the "little flock" become as walking dead men, Saducees of the latter day.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provide a complete and perfect example for all people in any possible circumstance of life, whether weak or powerful, slave or free, poor or rich, ordinary or genius, depressed or happy. The age was drawing on when the Scriptures as we have them today would be complete, and men would have to walk by faith, with their only contact with God the reading of those Scriptures. To walk by faith without angelic visitation, vision, miracle or power of the Holy Spirit needs a special faith; and that faith needs a special, complete and perfect Pattern.

True Christianity differs from all other religions in numerous ways, but one great difference is often forgotten. There is no circumstance of life which can ever prevent the true Christian from living the way God requires. He needs no priesthood, no cathedral, no measure of position, power, wealth, or worldly approbation. Once the principles of truth are inscribed on his mind, the Christian needs only time and the determination and stamina always to choose and to do the right before God.

This is not easy. Conditions arise, circumstances intervene, poverty can grind, injustice can impose, discouragement can develop. Still, there is no cir-

cumstance which life can send, no matter how dark and depressing, but we can take courage from Jesus' life. Has someone spoken evil of us? Perhaps we deserved at least some of it; but He who lived a blameless life, when reviled, reviled not again.

Many a martyr of old took courage not only from the reward ahead, but from the thought of Him who lived a perfect life, always doing good, yet who submitted without complaint—even with forgiveness—to the agonizing death of a common criminal. Have we ever been lonely? Who ever stood more bereft of human friends than Jesus, after Gethsemane, when even the impulsive Peter followed afar off, and finally denied that he knew his Master? Are we tempted? We have never been offered the wealth and power Jesus was offered by those who could use His abilities. We must confess that we have not nearly lived up to the standard of our Elder Brother. Yet God generously stretches out the evening shadows of our day of salvation, giving us more and still more time to do better. And we *must* do better, *much* better.

Living Evidence

Jesus is for all time the *living* evidence of a *living* hope. His appearances to Paul immediately lighted in the persecutor's being an inextinguishable, burning hope for this same immortality; and the theme of his message, as recorded in The Acts and the Letters, was "Jesus, whom God raised from the dead." Only such evidence and such a hope can fully account for such singleness of purpose as he displayed every day of his life, from Damascus to the day when he too could feel the warm, pulsing glow of a victorious life and could exult, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7-8).

This noble company can include you and me if we will do the same work of righteousness which will enable us to qualify for that great reward. There need be no doubt; the Eternal Himself, through Paul in I Cor. 15:20, 23, has given our hope the seal of His assurance: For "now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept . . . but every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."—*The foregoing is adapted from "Hope in the Midst of Horror," copyright 1970 by Christianity Today. Reprinted by permission.* ●●

Timely Topics

EVERY field of human endeavor has its quacks. The more important a service is to the life of mankind, the greater the temptation to deceive or defraud in that particular field.

In the cosmetic industry, for example, there are literally thousands of concoctions which purport to make your skin glowing, perk and youthful, your teeth brilliantly white, your breath clean and sweet, your hair glistening and free from dandruff, your eyelids enameled and your face painted to rival a Barnum and Bailey clown. At least 90% of these preparations serve no useful purpose other than to make the seller richer and the buyer poorer. And in some cases, the products are actually harmful.

Religious Quackery

In the important area of medicine are even more flagrant violations of public confidence. The early years of the twentieth century saw the medical messiahs with a bewildering array of nostrums which would cure everything from the common cold (for which there is yet no known cure) to gout, tuberculosis and appendicitis. Even today there are quack doctors who offer pills containing mineral oil as a cure for cancer, pills for obesity, pills to purify the blood, and preparations and fad diets supposed to alleviate any suffering that may encumber the human body.

Detrimental and wasteful as these deceptions are, they are nothing compared with the damage done by religious quacks in the world. Religious deception affects not only this life but what is far more serious—our hope of future eternal existence. There have always been fake religionists, but the number seems to have increased rapidly in the twentieth century. The prophet Jeremiah associated false prophets with the latter days. "The anger [judgment] of the Lord shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jer. 23:20-21). And again he pictures the result of religious misleading in the day when the Lord has manifested His power in the earth: "The Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the

earth and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit" (Jer. 16:19). Here is evidence indisputable that a majority of persons will have been wrongly instructed.

All governments protect their people by licensing doctors and pharmacists to help prevent fraud in health care. Unfortunately, in spite of these measures unscrupulous individuals do exist and even flourish. And the same is true in the field of religion. Centuries ago the Lord established a system of control to insure His people access to safe and reliable spiritual guidance. It proved unpopular then, and it is even more unpopular now. While truth is rejected by the masses, a majority of church-going persons accept religious beliefs without a foundation of sound Biblical evidence, and bizarre ideas attract the gullible in ever increasing numbers. In many cases religious teachers and laymen are sincere and honest in believing as they do—though they may be honestly mistaken; in other cases, innocent non-religious persons are victims of deceptive teaching which aims at extracting large amounts of money by promising a paid-up fare to heaven, or relief from some immediate suffering or fear.

Let us briefly consider a few beliefs of some of the more unusual religions of our day.

During the nineteenth century a religion was founded in Iran, which is now finding an increasing number of supporters in the Western world. The Baha'i Faith was founded by a Persian "prophet" known as Baha'ullah, whom the Baha'is believe to have been the promised Messiah with a new name, or a spirit reincarnation of Christ; he died in 1892. His coming was prophesied by the Bab (Mirza' Ali-Mohammed of Shiraz) some five years in advance, comparable to Elijah whom the Bible foretells to be the forerunner of Christ's second advent.

The Baha'is believe the Bab and Baha'ullah to have been the most recent in a series of divine manifestations which include Jesus, Mohammed, Zoroaster and the Buddha. The teachings of Baha'ullah are believed to initiate a new dispensation for our age. His writings, together with those of the Bab and those of Baha'ullah's eldest son, form the sacred literature of the Baha'i faith.

The central theme of Baha'i faith is the religious and social unity of all mankind. But contrary to the Biblical demand for oneness of mind (I Cor. 1:10), the Baha'is believe in a "diversity in unity" which allows each individual to retain his own ideas and beliefs as a part of one great universal faith.

In an effort to prove that Baha'ullah was indeed

the Messiah, William Sears in his book *Thief in the Night* quotes the well-known prophecy of Isaiah 35: "The . . . desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. . . . The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." Then he comments, "Carmel and Sharon had seen the appearance of Baha'ullah the glory of the Lord, but had the desert blossomed as the rose (Isa. 35:1)?" As proof (?) that it had, Mr. Sears presents the following: "Baha'ullah's followers brought flowers and plants from Persia, and his son, 'Abdu'l-Baha planted a lovely garden nearby. . . .

"Between the two great Baha'i gardens that go halfway up the mountainside, runs a broad highway. Through the gates leading from this highway stream pilgrims and visitors from all parts of the world. They come with hearts full of joy and gladness, and the sound of their beautiful chanting can be heard on that mountainside. This, too, was foreseen by Isaiah. 'And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness. . . . The redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads' (Isa. 35:8-10)."

Could any honest reader think that this garden was by any stretch of the imagination the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy? Just read the ten verses of Isaiah 35. Have the eyes of the blind been opened? Have the ears of the deaf been unstopped? Have the lame been healed? Do the inhabitants of this world have everlasting joy? Have sorrow and sighing fled away? The answer is a resounding No, NO! When Christ returns He will set up a Kingdom on this earth, and as the angel said to Mary, "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever. And of his kingdom there shall be NO END" (Luke 1:32). Baha'ullah died in 1892. Morally and religiously the world has been growing worse ever since. Yet there are Baha'i communities in 260 separate states and dependencies and Baha'i literature has been translated into more than 230 languages.

Another religion spreading fast is the group known as Jehovah's Witnesses. Though dedicated and sincere in believing as they do, many of their beliefs must be judged as sincerely incorrect when compared with the Word of God. Their novel belief that Christ "came" to the temple of Jehovah in 1914 and is reigning somewhere invisible to our eyes is a flagrant violation of the Bible prediction that "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty" (Isa. 33:17). Jesus Himself said, "Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert;

go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24).

The Witnesses also teach that the 144,000 saved ones mentioned in Revelation 14:1 shall rule with Christ from heaven. However, Jesus sent this message to John on the Isle of Patmos after He had spent some time with His Father in heaven. And He said, Thou "hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10). It is inconceivable that the Bride of Christ will be reigning on the earth and that the Bridegroom will be reigning in heaven.

Mormonism, also called the Church of the Latter Day Saints, now claiming more than 2½ million members scattered throughout the world, might also be classified among the unusual religions of our time. The church professes to be "a modern revelation of old principles divinely pronounced with new emphasis and completeness in our day." Fundamental in Mormon theology is the principle of modern revelation. "We believe," they say, "all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things." Much of this revelation is recorded in three books which are used to supplement the Bible—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. These, they say, "clarify many doctrines mentioned" in the Bible and "confirm the divinity of the Hebrew scripture." To Mormons, the Bible is not the "thorough furnisher" that it claims to be (II Tim. 3:17).

Among Mormon beliefs is the non-Biblical teaching that "man is an eternal being. As an individual of spiritual substance, he lived before coming to earth. . . . Life upon the earth in a mortal body is but another step in a great, eternal march. . . . And on the basis of what we believe here we shall continue to live and grow in the life beyond the grave." (Quotations are from "What of the Mormons?" by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley). Compare this teaching with the words of Job: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job 14:1-2).

Even common denominational churches are breaking away from the traditional church beliefs and practices to "seek God in experimental fashions," as the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* reports. In our own city, one of the most dignified churches used "a welter of old milk cartons, paper plates, tape, straws, tin foil, empty boxes,

(Continued on page 17)

When the Storm Struck Nazareth

YES, my friends, I shall never forget that boy. Jesus was somehow different from all the other people I have ever known. I knew Him from the time He was a small toddler. You see, I lived in Nazareth very near His family. In fact, our family's olive press was right across the road from Joseph's carpenter shop, so I had an excellent opportunity to see Jesus grow up. I still think of Him as a boy, even though He has now grown to manhood. I haven't seen Him for some time myself, but I still cherish some very vivid memories of Him.

As I was saying, Jesus was different. He was always talking about eternal values, always striving to live a better life and trying to inspire others to do the same. He was deeply concerned about living a pure and holy life; or, as He put it, He wanted always to be doing the things that pleased His Heavenly Father. I mean, Jesus got right down to the really fine points. Many little things, such as impatience or an occasional angry word, to which most of us never give a second thought, He believed were wrong and were not to be indulged—not, that is, if one wanted to live a life pleasing to Jehovah. Think of it! Why, I remember back years ago how obedient Jesus was to His parents. You know, I can't remember hearing Him speak disrespectfully to either of them—not once! He was kind and helpful in every way.

Jesus began to help Joseph in the carpenter shop when He was quite young, tidying up the shop and doing small jobs. Often when I went to the carpenter shop to have something made or repaired, Jesus and Joseph would be working together; and more often than not, they would be discussing the Scriptures when I entered. Sometimes Mary would be there, too, helping to explain the law to her young son, and I have heard both Joseph and Mary trying to impress Him with the contrast between eternal values and worldly values. They taught Him that to live an upright and godly life was worth more than anything this world can

offer. Jesus always seemed so interested in discussing such things, and His ability to grasp and remember them seemed remarkable.

On a number of occasions, I entered into religious discussions with Jesus myself. I can't really describe how I felt after these discussions. For one thing, He made a person really think. He had an exceptional knowledge of the Law and the Prophets, and He always seemed to attach a much greater meaning to these than did the rabbis and teachers. I mean, He stressed obedience to what He called the commandments of Jehovah.

Of course, it would be very difficult to live as Jesus seemed to think that Jehovah wanted His people to live. But as I watched Jesus' life and conduct I really believed that He was living according to the Scriptures as He interpreted them, and I sincerely believe He was the most earnest man in spiritual things that I have ever known. He always seemed all absorbed with living a holy life.

A few years ago, when Jesus was about thirty years of age, He left home to become a traveling preacher. "Being about His Father's business"—that's what He called it. And very shortly I began hearing strange reports from various friends and acquaintances about all the things He was supposedly doing—healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind—some claimed that He even raised the dead! Oh, no! I never really saw Him do any of these things myself, so I can't tell you for a certainty that they are true. However, some of the reports came from very reliable sources and from people whom I know personally. As I said before, I still don't really know what to think.

The last time I saw Jesus was here in Nazareth. He had been away for some time, and I had heard that He performed some miracles in Capernaum. Of course, this caused rather a sensation in Nazareth, and all of us hoped and expected that if those stories were really true, He would do the

same here when He came home again—unless we weren't good enough for Him.

Well, one Sabbath morning I went to the synagogue to worship, and Jesus was there, just as He used to be every Sabbath before He went out preaching. When the service began He stood up to read. I clearly remember what He read—it was from the scroll of Isaiah. His strong, vibrant voice stirred the hearts of every one of us as He read,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because—
He anointed Me

To tell the poor the good news.

He sent Me

To announce to prisoners, ‘You are free,’
to the blind, ‘You will see again.’

To free those who are broken down,

To announce a season when the Lord welcomes people” (Beck Translation)

Everyone in the synagogue waited and watched intently as Jesus closed the scroll, gave it to the attendant and sat down to begin speaking. “Today,” He said, “this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (NASB). As He continued His discourse, everyone marveled at the gracious words He uttered. Soon there were whispers among the congregation. “Isn't this Joseph's son?”

Then Jesus began to say something else. “You will undoubtedly quote to me the proverb, ‘Doctor, heal yourself!’ and say, ‘We've heard about everything you did in Capernaum. Do the same here in your home town! I tell you, it is true no prophet is accepted in his home town’” (Beck Translation).

Like most every other man in that congregation, by this time I was on the edge of my seat, elbow on knees, straining my ears to miss nothing of what I seemed to be hearing. What was this man saying?

“For example, remember how Elijah the prophet used a miracle to help the widow of Zarephath—a foreigner from the land of Sidon. There were many Jewish widows needing help in those days of famine, for there had been no rain for three and one-half years, and hunger stalked the land; yet Elijah was not sent to them. Or think of the prophet Elisha who healed Naaman, a Syrian, rather than the many Jewish lepers needing help” (Living New Testament).

Do you get the point He was making? Why! He was implying that the Gentiles were sometimes preferred above the Jews! Such a thing is unthinkable to any Jew! Why, it is utterly preposterous! By this time, most of the men there were on their feet, some of them were furious. They stormed out of the synagogue, an angry mob. I

shall never forget the anger on some of their faces. They were fierce! Out to the brow of the hill they drove Jesus, intent upon violence, even to throwing Him over the cliff!

I simply couldn't go along with the mob in their intentions. The words Jesus had spoken were true, although it did seem that He attached a rather radical implication to them. I knew that Jesus was really an exceptionally good man and completely harmless, and while I didn't exactly agree with the interpretation He put on these two historical events, the mob was certainly too radical and determined. I spoke to several of the people, begging them not to do such a terrible thing; but it was like trying to quiet a Euroclydon tempest. The majority ruled, and they continued to push Him toward that cliff. I went along to see what would happen to Jesus, and what did happen is simply beyond my ability to understand. Suddenly the mob stopped their rough pushing and shoving of Jesus. It seemed as though all at once everyone had changed his mind—or something—because Jesus turned and walked right through that mob and started down the road toward Capernaum. Not a single person so much as raised a finger against Him, and no one pursued Him. What happened was most mysterious!

How such an angry rabble could change so suddenly, neither I nor anyone else there could say. I spoke to a number of others about it, and they couldn't understand. Some of the ring leaders of the mob related that they just felt an overpowering helplessness come over them. They couldn't explain it. But a feeling of relief came over me, that Jesus could escape unharmed.

I wonder what has really happened to Jesus. Certain stories brought by visitors and traveling caravans tell us Jesus died by crucifixion. And, sad to say, it was reported that the Jews did it. But even more amazing is the news that Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. Again, I don't know what to think. But several tradesmen that I know have testified that it is true. Sometimes I am inclined to believe the story, because there certainly is prophecy in our scrolls that indicates these things would happen to the Messiah. But then, could Jesus possibly have been the Messiah? Could this village boy, whom I knew from childhood, be the Promised One?

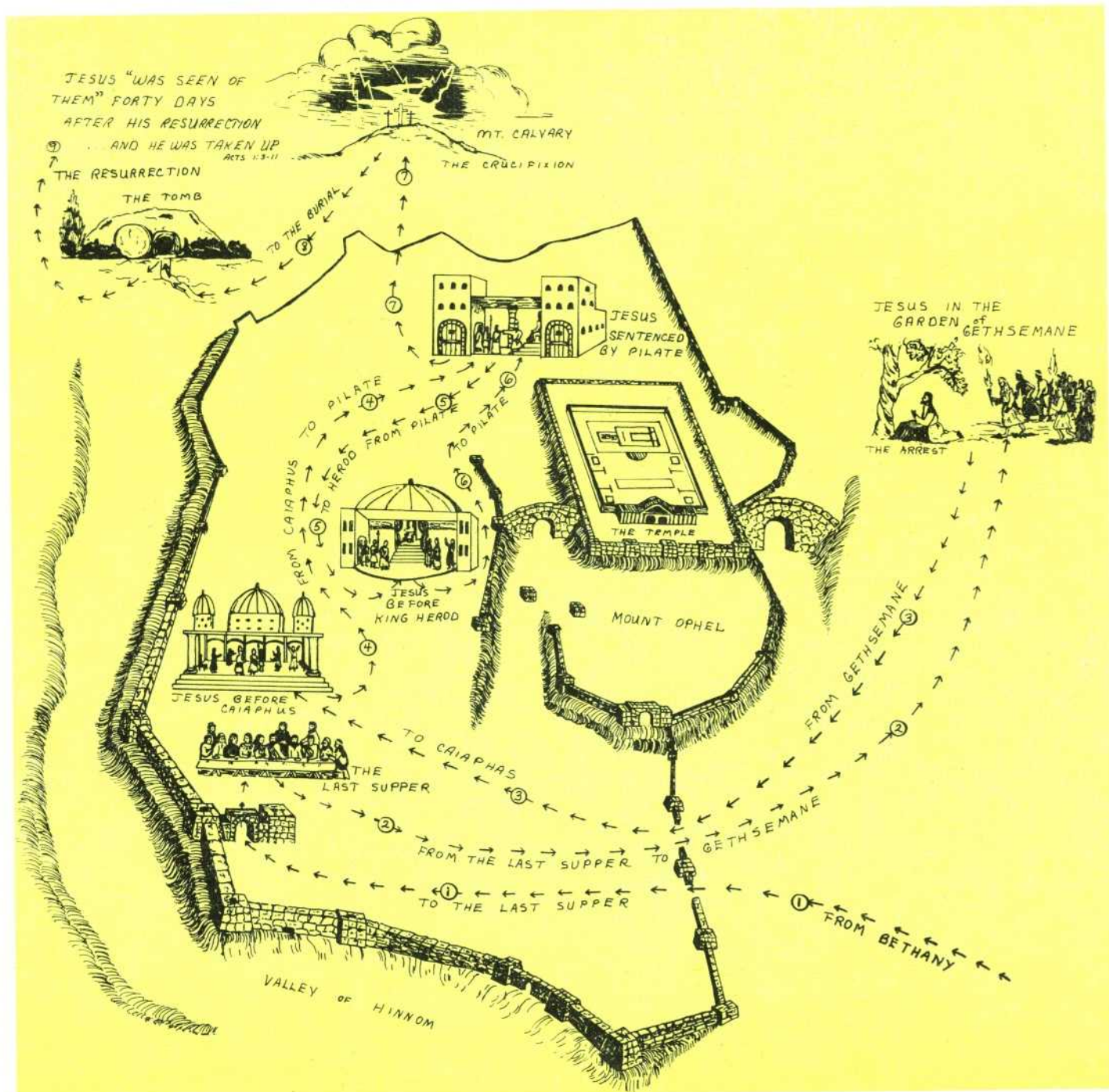
The main topic of His ministry was the Kingdom of God. I understand that He taught that the Kingdom would be set up on earth, and I have heard that Jesus would be the King. When I think of Him, I must agree that He did have a kingly bearing about Him. He was interested in people,

(Continued on page 27)

The Interlude . . .

MUCH happened in the brief seventy-two hours that interrupted the perfect melody of Jesus' life—enough to change the entire course of human history. Jesus' life was nearly complete, His purpose fulfilled, His life of complete submission nearly accomplished, when suddenly He found Himself in the cruel hands of sinful men. The scenes that followed are depicted in the accompanying illustration and are numbered in sequence.

Some men have erroneously called these few hours Jesus' last days, as though this were the terminus of His noble destiny. It was an end, the



end, as men calculated things; but who are puny men to dictate the purposes of Omnipotence? God Almighty was in control, and the purposes which He had begun could suffer no defeat. These few hours were not an end; they were but a brief interlude in the melody which should afterward grow more glorious with each succeeding century.

The following are brief descriptions of the events, as pictured above:

1. From Bethany to Jerusalem (John 12:2-8; Luke 22:3-6).

2. From the Last Supper (which took place during the evening of Abib 13, the day before the Passover Feast of the Jews which occurred on Abib 14) to the Garden of Gethsemane that same evening (Matt. 26:36; Luke 22:39-46; Mark 14:26, 32-42).

3. From Gethsemane to the Palace of the High Priest, later during the same night of Abib 13 (Matt. 26:57; Mark 14:53, 55-56; Luke 22:54, 63-65), where Jesus was examined by Annas, the ex-high priest; then by Caiaphas and the Council of the Jews.

4. From the Palace of Caiaphas to Pontius Pilate's Judgment Hall (Luke 23:1; John 18:28-38). This was during the morning of the day of Abib 13.

5. From Pilate to Herod's Palace (Luke 23:7-12).

6. From Herod's Palace back to Pilate (Mark 15:6-15; Matt. 27:15-26) where Jesus was condemned to die. This was still during the morning of Abib 13.

7. From Pilate's Judgment Hall to Golgotha (Luke 23:33; Mark 15:22-23; Matt. 27:33-34) where by the sixth hour, or noon, Jesus had been placed on the cross. By the ninth hour He had died (Mark 15:33-37; Matt. 27:45-50; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:28-30).

8. From Golgotha to the New Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where Jesus was placed sometime between 3 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the afternoon of Abib 13; the stone sealed the entrance to the tomb, and Roman guards were set to watch. The Jews were anxious to accomplish all of this before their Passover, which began at sunset that day with the arrival of the Sabbath (John 19:31-42; Luke 23:50-54). Everyone rested during the Sabbath, the day of Abib 14, and when it ended (at sundown that day, when Abib 15 began) the women (Mary

Magdalene and Mary the mother of James) bought spices and prepared to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1).

Very early in the morning of the first day of the week (probably Sunday of the Roman week) the two women went to the sepulchre and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty—Jesus was gone! (Matt. 28:1-5; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1; Mark 16:2-8). This was the morning of Abib 15.

9. The Ascension took place forty days later (Acts 1:3-11). During those forty days Jesus made several appearances to His disciples which are recorded. He taught them more of the destiny for which He was born—to be the King of the whole earth. ●●

The Abib Calendar

ABIB means "month of green ears," "spring or sprouting month." It was the first month of the Biblical sacred year as given to Moses to observe —(see Ex. 12:2; 13:4; 16:1).

Abib 1 — begins in 1973 the evening of April 3 (days were measured from evening to evening —Lev. 23:23) and continues through April 4. This is the first day of the sacred year, and the day on which we observe the anniversary of our Saviour's birth.

Abib 13 — the observance of the New Passover, begins this year with the evening of April 15. At this time we partake of the emblems (unleavened bread and grape juice) in obedience to the command, "This do in remembrance of me." We do this, recognizing the emblems as symbols of our knowledge of the law of God and our agreement to comply with its demands in their entirety. We renew our covenant and determination to go out to suffer the death of our sinful nature just as Christ suffered, surrendering completely to the will of His Father.

Abib 15 — the anniversary of our Saviour's Resurrection, begins this year with the evening of April 17 and continues through the morning and day of April 18. Early in the morning of this day we assemble to refresh our faith and living hope in Him who rose triumphant over death, remembering that because He lives, we too may live.

Bible A B C's



M is for Mary. Mary was the young woman God chose to be the mother of Jesus. God saw that Mary was a holy person and one who enjoyed keeping His commandments, so He sent the angel Gabriel to announce the birth of Jesus to her. Mary was pleased that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Christ-child and she sang a beautiful song of praise to God. Mary was not a rich, prominent person; and she praised God for His notice of her even though she was from a lowly family.

Mary's husband, Joseph, was a carpenter. They had a humble home in Nazareth, but it was a home where God was honored by the keeping of His commandments.

When Caesar ordered a census of all the people in the land, Mary traveled with Joseph to Bethlehem. It was the time of the New Moon feast, and it was springtime in Judea. The warm spring breezes were welcome after the cold, rainy winter and flowers bloomed everywhere. Shepherds were watching their flocks graze on the beautiful green hillsides.

But when Joseph and Mary

M is for
Mary

reached Bethlehem they found that the inn was already full. So they stayed in a stable. It was the best lodging they could find. It was there that Jesus was born. Mary wrapped her newborn son in soft blankets and laid him in a manger because she did not have a nice bed to put him in.

A few weeks later Mary and Joseph went to the temple to present Jesus to the Lord. Parents always brought a gift when they presented their children to the Lord, and Mary and Joseph brought two pigeons as their gift. Two pigeons was the gift brought by very poor people, so we know that Mary and Joseph were not rich and that their home in Nazareth was a very humble one.

Mary and Joseph could not

afford a big house and rich furnishings, but they did have a home that was filled with a holy influence and that influence helped to build a holy character. Both Mary and Joseph knew that Jesus was to be the King when God sets up His kingdom on this earth, so they did all they could to teach young Jesus all the godly virtues that a Christian should possess. They taught Him the law and the prophets which were their "Bible" in those days, and He memorized many portions of these. For thirty years Jesus lived at home, and during these years He gained great wisdom and understanding from both Mary and Joseph.

We do not know if Mary was a beautiful woman or not, but we do know that her character was beautiful; and that is all that really matters. God apparently approved of Mary's character, for when Gabriel announced Jesus' birth to her he said, "The Lord is with thee." Don't you wish an angel would say those words to you? Then strive to live a righteous, holy life as Mary did and some day your wish will come true. ●●

THESE words frame what is perhaps the greatest compliment ever paid to the aspiring Christian. They are the words of Jesus, addressed to His disciples on that day when He sat down upon the mountain and taught them. "You are the light of the world." It is as if He said to them, You are living examples of divine truth, that light of moral and spiritual purity by which true life is gained.

"You are the light of the world. A city which is situated on the top of a mountain cannot be hidden; nor do people light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand; and it gives light for all who are in the house.

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16, translated by William Barclay).

In these words Jesus is calling every member of His true Church to be what He Himself was. Of Himself He said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). He was the living embodiment of the light of divine knowledge; and they were to be the same.

The Christian faith is called a light, even "a light that shineth in a dark place"—an appropriate comparison; for Christianity is meant to be seen, to be lived, to be made visible to all men. Jesus did


not say, "You are the light of the *Church*," but rather, "You are the light of the world." A Christianity whose effects stop at the church door is not of much use to anyone. If we would be lights of the world, we must make our daily lives a glowing testimony to our Christianity; our devotion to God must shine through every activity, every word, every motive. Our light should be visible in the way we treat a shop assistant across the counter, in the way we treat our employees or serve our employer, in the way we drive or park a car, in the daily language we use, in the literature we read, in our every relationship with our fellowmen. Our quality of conduct should not change with our location. A genuine Christian is just as much a Christian in the factory, in the workshop, the store, the field, the classroom or the kitchen as he is in church.

Jesus says the light shines to all who are *in the house*. Here is a suggestion of another place where the light must shine. In the home is often the hardest place to let our light shine; yet it is there that we have the most opportunity to practice and develop those virtues which will make us like Christ. We can learn to be patient, considerate, kind and loving; we can illuminate our home with heavenly light and peace by the way we answer husband or wife, brother or sister, parent or child. A disciple who forgets his faith at home, who is gracious to the stranger but keeps ill-humor for his own, denies his faith and darkens his light.

Let us consider the implications of Jesus' illustration: "You are the light of the world." If we would shine as lights, we must individually serve the purposes of light. These purposes we should apply to ourselves.

First, a light is a guide. Likewise, if I would be a true Christian my life must be a guide to those around me. My daily life must shine with such a radiance that others seeing the things I do and hearing the things I say will be moved to glorify God. (Remember that many people observe our six

"Ye Are the



LIGHT

days of conduct during the week to see what we mean on the seventh.)

Second, a light is a warning. It is often a warning of danger ahead. And sometimes it will be my Christian duty to bring a warning to my fellow-man. But in fulfilling this duty I must be careful—lest by showing a wrong spirit myself I do more harm than good. A warning light never hurts or hinders another with careless or ill-considered words—it simply shines, silently, persistently, to warn the unwary of danger. And so must I—not in anger, not in irritation, not in criticism, not in condemnation, not with the desire to hurt—but in love I must show my brother the concern I feel for his spiritual welfare.

A light which can be seen, a light which guides, a light which warns—these are the lights every Christian must be. But such a light will never be if it seeks to call attention to itself. Jesus did not say, “Let your light so shine that others may see your good deeds and glorify *you*.” We must be shining lights that others, beholding us, may glorify Him whose light we are reflecting—our Father which is in heaven.

In ancient Israel the people spoke of Jerusalem as “a light to the Gentiles.” And indeed, Jerusalem was a light, a center of spiritual illumination in a world dark with paganism and idolatry; but one thing was sure—no man kindled his own light; God lit Israel’s lamp. In the same manner we must shine—not that we are the *makers* of the light, but the *reflectors* of the radiance of God’s divine knowledge.

This means that our light—if it is one hundred percent the reflection of the light of God—will be pure, unmixed with evil, unadulterated with vile or base motives, uncontaminated with any sin. It will be pure, absolutely pure.

Here we come to a most exacting self-examination. Is our light the pure, reflected light of God, or is part of it self-generated? To answer this, we must examine our motives, mannerisms and methods. For only by so doing can we determine the quality and brightness of our light, whether it is a straight, steady beam or a weak, flickering glimmer.

How are we shining? Is our service for God from selfless motives or from motives of self-display? Is the work we do in church done for Christ or for our own prestige? Is even our church-going an attempt to meet God, or are we fulfilling a habitual and conventional respectability? Is our prayer and our Bible reading the result of a sincere desire to company with God, or do we do it simply because it gives us a pleasant feeling of superiority? Is our religion a thing in which we are conscious of nothing so much as our need for God, or a thing in which we have comfortable thoughts of our own piety?

When we give generously to some good cause, are we tempted to bask in the sunshine of our own self-approval, eagerly anticipating the praise, the thanks and credit which we expect to receive? If we do some fine thing, which demands some sacrifice from us, are we altogether free from the feeling that men will see something heroic in us and that we may regard ourselves as a martyr of some degree?

Unless wide awake and extremely careful, we may find that much of the light that is in us is the light of our own generating, and therefore, darkness.

The lamp is not important; the light is everything. When the candle, rather than the light, becomes the object of attention, beware—something is wrong. The light is too feeble. We must remember that the light, coming from God, belongs to God, and should reflect His glory—and not be in the least shadowed by the bearer. Remember Jesus’ words, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works”—not yourselves —“and glorify”—not you, but—“your Father which is in heaven.” If our light shines only for men, it is pride-filled exhibitionism.

As by God’s grace we keep our hearts clean, or as by human lust we soil them, we are either fitting or unfitting ourselves to shine as lights in the world. To be genuine lights we must be striving earnestly and sincerely for absolute purity of heart, that purity which is blameless in the sight of the world, sincere in itself, and fit to stand the scrutiny of God.

We profess that God’s Word is our all in all. How brilliant are our lights—yours and mine? ••

of the World ...”

--Jesus

Living for Invisibles

ONE by one the months are flying past into eternity. One by one the years are fleeing, and now this year too has joined the countless aeons of time that composed eternity past before we arrived upon the scene of life.

Time is our greatest gift in this temporal life. It is the only commodity that makes endless salvation in the future a possibility to us. Lifetime is the only small division of eternity that has been allotted to us, and whether we shall receive anything more depends upon how we use this brief span. For this reason the apostle Paul commanded, "Make the very most of your time, . . . act like sensible men, not like thoughtless, . . . for these are evil days" (Eph. 5:15-16, Moffatt).

This very important shifting of interests from the fleeting present with its seeming assurances, to a seemingly uncertain future, a new world which can be seen only through the eye of faith, may be styled the love of the invisible. It is the reaching out of our souls toward that which lies beyond the apprehension of our physical senses, the dedication of our lives to what we cannot actually know, but in which we may strongly trust. It is akin to faith, so nobly described in the book of Hebrews as the "substance of things . . . not seen."

In our temporal lives we find that we encounter the invisible first of all in the realm of space. Here we are, living from day to day on one little spot on the vast surface of the globe. All around us swings the circle of the horizon, beyond which it is impossible for us to see; yet we are convinced there is something beyond. Within this circle are the things which are visible; far away, beyond that encompassing rim of mountains or of ocean, there lie those things which are invisible, and hence unknown.

The great majority of men are quite content to spend all their lives in the realm of the visible. They have no desire to explore strange lands or meet peculiar people. Men sailed the shores of Europe for hundreds of years without feeling any desire to steer the prows of their ships toward that strange blue line on the western verge of the horizon, which marked the limit of the Atlantic which they knew. Many people are quite content to

stay at home among familiar objects. Only in these latest days of human history have any number of men developed an interest in the invisible and dared to challenge the horizon which rims their lives.

Explorers and scientists of ancient and modern times have lived for the invisible; they have given to it their faculties, pledged to it their lives.

As Christians, let us be courageous explorers!

Every now and then appears a man whose human interests cannot be confined within the borders of his particular family or tribe. He loves men and desires to help them. Barriers of sea and land, distinctions of race or creed or nationality do not touch in the remotest degree the affections of his heart. Men who are invisible are as real and precious as those who are visible.

This brings us to a second and deeper consideration—namely, the invisible as it reveals itself in time. All time is divided into three parts: the past, the present, the future. The past and present can be classified together as that portion of time which is visible; it has been seen, or is being seen, and is therefore a part of the definite experience of mankind. The future, however, is that portion of time which is invisible. We know that it is coming. But until it comes, it remains invisible in the sense that we do not know what it may bring to us of happiness or ill.

Now in the realm of time, as in the realm of space, most men prefer to live in the midst of things visible, and not invisible. We are inclined to feel most contented when dwelling in the past, with its ancient traditions, its venerable institutions, its familiar ways and customs. To accept of what our fathers have taught us, to follow the example which they have tried and set, is like sailing a sea which has been charted in every square mile of its area. In this kind of life there is nothing undiscovered and unexpected; we know everything that there is to be known.

There are some men, of course, who feel the monotony and even deadness of such a life; and these men move up heroically from the past to the present. They live in the new experiences of their progenitors; but they still cling to things

visible. Only now and again do we find a man who puts both past and present deliberately behind him, and launches boldly out into the invisible reaches of the future.

And these men are all characterized by a single remarkable fact: Because they believe in the God of the Bible, they see a vision of a better world than has yet been established upon earth. They behold a future age when all men will be happy; when suffering, starvation, and disease will be no more, when justice will be executed to all and peace established, when love will shine in every face, and there will be no more sin, no pain, no loss, no death. They see a society so new and so wonderful that it can be described in no terms that are associated with the society that now exists. They see, as Isaiah saw, the coming of a time when men "shall build the old waste places, and they shall raise up the former desolations, . . . and everlasting joy shall be unto them. . . . For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isa. 61:4-11).

These are the men who live in the future, as the great masses of other men live in the present and the past. They burst the barriers of time. They seek the invisible, in deliberate rejection and defiance of the visible. And they do this because to them there is no choice. Not the inheritances of the past or the realities of the present, but the promises of the future constitute the real world.

The invisible ahead, and not the visible behind and around, alone truly exists. In this future therefore they must live; for it, if necessary, they must die. They will "endure" all things—persecution, suffering, the loss of worldly friendships, if only they can hasten its coming upon the earth. Here is the very essence of heroism and devotion. To labor for no gains that are now tangible, to sacrifice for rewards that can be seen only with the eye of faith, this is their ideal. And they have done this because they have believed "with all their heart, mind, and soul and strength" in this future which is invisible.

These heroes, young and old, are simply those who walk in the footsteps of Abraham, of whom it was said that he "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." To live for the future and its promises, to seek for the kingdom soon to exist upon earth, this is the one way to show our love of the invisible.

Paul spoke much in few words when he said: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above,

not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2). We should remind ourselves often that the things which are seen are temporal; only the invisibles are eternal. And this thought will develop in us such a strong desire for the invisible that nothing we can behold with our eyes will deter us from our quest. ●●

Timely Topics

(Continued from page 8)

and plastic liquid containers"—combined with non-church music and non-church apparel in a church service. The pattern seems to be anything, so long as it is different and unconventional.

It would be impossible to mention all the counterfeit religions extant. They would include the Negro Father Divine, the many faith healers who bilk countless thousands each year claiming to have Holy Spirit power, when the Scriptures distinctly state that that power was to be withdrawn. They would include a popular Hollywood entertainer who one week entertains the gambling crowds at Las Vegas and the next week addresses the Jesus Freaks at San Francisco. Lester Kinsolving in his column "Inside Religion" describes the whole spurious melange under the title "Bogus Holy Men at New Heights." Such is one of India's major (if unofficial) exports, which has recently "reached a new pinnacle in blatant, pseudo-ecclesiastical flimflammy." He says "there have been 'Divine Light Missions' established in 45 states—where salvation is being presently peddled via a 14-year-old guru entitled Maharaj Ji, 'The Perfect Master,' 'Saviour of the World,' 'Lord of the Universe.' . . . When the plump young Saviour of the World does deign to favor the flock with assorted divine emanations from his august lips, they usually follow a familiar fakir technique: nonsense, when spoken slowly to the gullible, can sell better even than surrealistic art. And nonsense is selling well in the current and widely ruffled U. S. religious milieu."

The boy god is said to have returned to India accompanied by seven Jumbo jets full of his followers and \$80,000 in his briefcase.

The words of the apostle John are especially apropos: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). And such is conclusive evidence that we are in the last days, for, said Jesus, "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch, that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24). ●●

"...Like A Grain

of Mustard Seed"

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" — Matt. 13:31-32.



IN these two short verses Jesus immortalized one of His parables of the Kingdom.

It was the common folk who gathered in great numbers to hear the Teacher from Nazareth. Away from the synagogues and the prying eyes of the fault-finding Scribes and Pharisees, who weighed His every word, Jesus was free to speak to this more willing audience in the simplest of settings—the outdoors.

He drew many ideas from this inspirational setting, for it is possible that He used for comparison those things which were actually near at hand. As He spoke, His language was simple and direct, for He used words and illustrations comparable to the homely objects and experiences of the people's daily lives. With such familiar things their minds could be most easily impressed, for those were the things they understood best.

Such was the case with the parable of the mustard seed. There was likely a mustard tree in the immediate locality when Jesus spoke of the tiny seed which, when sown, flourishes and becomes greatest among herbs. In the east, the smallness of the seed was "used proverbially to denote anything very minute." It is not literally accurate to call it the "least of all seeds," since there are seeds that are smaller (although it is said to be the smallest of all *garden* seeds). However, a note in the *Emphatic Diaglott* says that it is the least "of all those seeds with which the people of Judea were then acquainted. Our Lord's words are to be interpreted by popular use." The listeners understood that Christ was using a popular term of

comparison to picture something that was very small.

The mustard spoken of in the Bible is generally thought to be the black mustard, which is an annual herb with yellow flowers and pods of roundish seeds. It grows wild along the Plain of Gennesaret, a place where Jesus taught the multitudes, and reaches a treelike height of twelve to fifteen feet. It is often surrounded by a flock of small birds, which settle upon it to eat the little black seeds, which they love.

Jesus knew the effectiveness of the short story in generating interest, and of its use He was a master. His stories took the form of the parable, which has been simply defined as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

"The parable, as Jesus used it, was *spoken*; it was not read. Its impact had to be immediate, not the result of long study with commentaries and dictionaries. It made truth flash upon a man as the lightning suddenly illumines a pitch-dark night.

"Generally speaking, a parable *will have only one point*. A parable is not an allegory; an allegory is a story in which every possible detail has an inner meaning; but an allegory had to be *read and studied*; a parable is *heard*. We must be very careful...to remember that they were designed to make one stabbing truth flash out at a man the moment he heard it" (Wm. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 2, pages 62, 63).

So we would ask, What is the truth that flashes from this parable of the mustard seed? Jesus'

(Continued on page 26)

Christ's Birth--Spring or Autumn?

AMONG the many theories concerning the birth of Christ, none is more startling or apparently convincing than that advanced by several religious groups, among them the publishers of the *Plain Truth*—that Christ was born in the Autumn. (We refer to an article by Ernest Martin, "When Was Jesus Born?" published in the September-October, 1972 issue of *Plain Truth*.)

When was Christ born? in what season? According to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's publication, the subject is no matter of mere conjecture or surmise—it is provable fact, "as striking as it is obvious!" In the above-mentioned article, the "proof" is seemingly ample—even abundant. And accompanying its logical presentation are numerous statements that note the clarity and obvious certainty of these "facts" as they are presented. Indeed, this is the "only conceivable" argument. It is "evidence which clearly reveals . . ."; it is proof positive and certain. So says Mr. Armstrong, but—

Before we accept the validity of the Armstrong evidence in total, let us test it by the one medium of comparison the Lord has provided—the Word of God. Let us study it with an unbiased mind, determined to learn the real truth of the matter as God intended us to understand it.

In the following article we will quote major portions from the *Plain Truth* for the purpose of investigating its logic and discovering its foundations, using the Bible as our sole basis for belief and acceptance.

The article in *Plain Truth* begins with a discussion of the origin of the modern Christmas and the practices and rites related to it. The December 25 date was derived from the Mithraic celebration of the "Sun Goddess," the Oriental deity known as the "Queen of Heaven." At the time of the winter solstice, worshipers held a festival which they called "the Nativity"—the Nativity of the Sun. And all this was centuries before the birth of Christ. In this he is correct. History affirms that the December 25 date was adopted during the fifth or sixth century after Christ was born, and scholars consistently agree that Christ was not born on that date.

He then makes a point on the insignificance of the date, as the Bible makes no definite statement concerning it, and suggests that anyone wishing to celebrate a date in memory of Christ is following a pagan custom of remembering birthdays—a custom which the Lord condemns.

We can certainly agree that the popular manner of celebrating Christ's birth, or December 25, or Xmas, is thoroughly paganized and commercialized and secularized. To the majority of people it bears little or no remembrance of Christ; and to the few who do remember Him on that day, it is too often a remembrance of His birth and babyhood, with little or no thought of His lifework and eternal destiny.

But let us return to the point of remembering a worthy person on a particular day—does God condemn this?

The law of Moses commanded the observance of numerous feast and festival days, several of them as memorials commemorating special events. The Israelites were to remember the day of their departure from the land of Egypt at the Passover, and were commanded to observe this as a memorial throughout their generations (Ex. 12:4). They were to observe each year the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which commenced with the waving of the first sheaf of the barley harvest before the Lord (Lev. 23:6-10). They were to observe the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall, as a recognition of their abundant harvest "when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land" (Lev. 23:34-39).

The birth of Christ was a special event, even more significant than the above-mentioned events which God instructed Israel to commemorate. His birth and purpose had been foretold millenniums before. Israel had long waited and hoped for the fulfillment of this prophecy. At the birth of Christ, Simeon blessed God for the "consolation of Israel" and the salvation of God. Anna likewise "gave thanks unto the Lord and spoke of him to all that looked for redemption in Israel."

And we can never transgress while doing what our heavenly Father does. On one occasion when Jesus was criticized for His actions, He defended

Himself by saying, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.... He that honoureth not the son honoureth not the Father which sent him" (John 5: 20, 23). God deemed it appropriate to send a multitude of the heavenly host to announce and to celebrate the birth of Jesus with songs and praise. Why should we not mark the event in a humble, God-honoring manner?

Mr. Armstrong also makes the statement that there is no evidence to prove that the birth of Christ had any special significance to the early Church. It is true that there is no record that the early Christians celebrated the birth of Christ—and there may have been a reason.

The early Christians were living in the heat of the day of salvation, during a time of active and open persecution. They were persecuted not only by the Jews but also by native and foreign overlords. Often their lives were in danger. The birth of the royal Heir was magnificently announced by the angel choir, but to whom was the announcement directed? Not to Caesar and his court, not to the rulers of the land of Judah, not even to the pompous hierarchy of the Jews, but to humble shepherds. God's way was best. Had the angels made it known to the Sanhedrin and the high priests, the career of Christ might have been much shorter than it was. He would have been marked from His birth as a revolutionary, a symbol of rebellion, a rival to Herod, and a menace to Caesar. As such He would have died young; in fact, that is what almost happened. His first contact with earthly greatness was a brush with death. Obscurity was best for Jesus. The early Christians might have endangered their lives by celebrating the birth of the crucified and condemned Christ.

In a booklet circulated by the Strasenburgh Planetarium of Rochester, New York, we read, "As late as 300 A. D., the Emperor Diocletian had ordered fire to be set to a building in Nicodemia, where a great many Christians had gathered to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The worshipers were all slain either by the fire or by the soldiers as they ran from the burning building." This suggests the persecution which these early Christians faced.

In What Season Was Christ Born?

We quote again from the aforementioned article in *Plain Truth*: "Even though there are no records which show the date of Christ's birth, there is sufficient evidence within the Bible itself which clearly reveals that His birth was nowhere near, of all days, December 25." This statement is true, as many religious persons recognize.

To show that Christ was born in the early autumn, the author attempts to show that Jesus' ministry was three and one-half years; which, if we assume that He was crucified at the time of the Passover in the spring of A. D. 31, means that He must have begun His ministry in the early autumn of A. D. 28. Of this time the Bible states that Jesus "began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23). This fact might seem to support his belief that Jesus was born at that same season of the year thirty years earlier.

But how shall we prove that Jesus' ministry was three and one-half years? Mr. Armstrong starts with Daniel 9:27. The details of this verse are not applicable in this discussion, but we do need to know whether or not Mr. Armstrong's reference here is justifiable.

The text speaks of a week, or seven years, if we count prophetic time; it speaks also of "the midst of the week," which would be three and one-half years. "He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease...." The question is, who is the "he"? The thought is a continuation of that of verse 26, where "he" is "the prince" and his "people" which shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The *Interpreter's Bible* says of the word "prince," as it is used here, that it "can be a secular leader and the natural meaning is that it refers to some hostile prince whose coming will be disastrous to city and sanctuary." This prince is distinct and separate from the Messiah, the prince whose birth and crucifixion are foretold in verses 25 and 26a. The desolation which this hostile power is to bring about does not in any way fit the ministry of Jesus. Thus Mr. Armstrong has no point here to prove that Jesus' ministry was three and one-half years in length, and this undermines his argument that Jesus was born in the fall.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the Gospels to indicate that Jesus' ministry began in the fall of the year. On the contrary, John 2:13-14 shows that His ministry began in the spring of the year; it was at Passover time that Jesus drove the money changers from the temple.

It seems difficult to prove exactly the length of Jesus' ministry, and perhaps it does not matter. But many scholars agree that it was three years in length, and this does not conflict with any passage of Scripture. A ministry extending from the Passover season in A. D. 28 through the Passover in A. D. 31 seems reasonable and consistent with what we are told, though we do not know the dates.

Mr. Armstrong concludes further that it was impossible for Christ's birth to have been before

the autumn of 4 B. C. He arrives at this date by counting time backward from the ministry's conclusion in the spring of A. D. 31, to subtract the time of the ministry which he is sure was three and one-half years (which is not definitely taught in the Scriptures); then subtracting thirty years (Jesus "began to be about 30 years of age" when he went out to preach), Mr. Armstrong sets Christ's birth in the autumn of 4 B. C.

He then continues with "proof": "There are many proofs which point to an early autumn birth of Christ. For example, if Christ had been born in any of the seasons preceding autumn 4 B. C. (that is, spring or summer of 4 B. C.), He would have been past 30 at the commencement of His ministry. But the scripture says He was about or approaching 30." However, this statement proves very little—for what empirical authority established the date of the conclusion of Christ's ministry from which Mr. Armstrong is subtracting thirty-three and one-half years? and what positive proof has Mr. Armstrong that the ministry of Christ was three and one-half years?—none which we are able to verify.

In establishing the exact year of the birth of Christ, Mr. Armstrong is making a statement far more definite than is made by many prominent and well-known scholars and historians of today. Will Durant, eminent scholar and historian, in his *Story of Civilization*, Volume III, gives various points of history which would support a date between B. C. 6 and A. D. 6, with no definite conclusion as to what is the exact year.* A. T. Robertson, scholar, teacher and compiler of *A Harmony of the Gospels*, discusses the subject of the date of the birth of Christ with this introduction: "Everyone now understands that the accepted date of our Lord's birth is wrong by several years. The estimates of the true date vary all the way from one to seven years B. C. There are various data that fix the year with more or less certainty, but none of them with absolute precision. They do, however, agree in marking pretty clearly a narrow limit for this notable occurrence, B. C. 6 or 5." And in his concluding remarks we find, concerning the date of Christ's birth, "If one might hazard an opinion, it would be that the birth of Jesus occurred in . . . B. C. 6 or 5."** Other scholars now project a date of B. C. 4, but none with absolute certainty.

Flocks in the Fields

Another point which Mr. Armstrong suggests

* Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. III, pp. 557 ff., Simon and Schuster, New York, c. 1944.

** A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, pp. 264-267, Harper and Rowe, c. 1950.

to buttress his theory is that the flocks were in the fields and tended by shepherds when Christ was born—a fact which rules out a December date, as the flocks were kept inside protected places from mid-October to mid-March (see *Clarke's Commentary* on Luke 2:8). "The late autumn and winter seasons of Palestine were too severe for the flocks to remain in the open and unprotected from rain, wind and frost. Notice Matthew 24:20 for a reference to Palestinian winters." In stating this, Mr. Armstrong is correct. But does this fact support his theory of a fall date?

It seems possible that the shepherds were not likely to be out watching their flocks at night in the early autumn either. From a booklet published by the Morehead Planetarium, *Star of Bethlehem*, by Roy K. Marshall, we quote the following: "We can be sure that December 25 does not coincide with the date of the birth of Jesus. We have only one clue, in St. Luke's Gospel (2:8) 'And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night.'

"Since earliest days, it is only in the spring, when the new lambs are being born, that the shepherds of Judea have ever watched their flocks at night. In December, in Judea, the rains fall, and shepherds are not likely to be out; the sheep are then in corrals. . . . It was probably in the spring of the year that Jesus was born."

Also the *Irwin's Bible Commentary* states that "as the flocks were not kept out at night in the open fields between the autumnal rains and Passover, and as, on the other hand, the pasture is burned up in the summer, it is inferred that our Lord's birth must have occurred in the spring."

The Bible Time Almanac states this: "In the letter column of the Los Angeles Examiner, Carl F. Mayer of San Diego writes: 'Christ was born in the spring time, during the lambing season which is in the spring only. He was also the traditional Passover Lamb of promise. The shepherds were "watching their flocks at night," which is done only at lambing time, as I well know, for I lived among European shepherds and know that a ewe will die quietly without aid during the nights. At other times shepherds sleep at night, while dogs watch.' "

Evidence from the "Temple Ritual"

The next point in defense of the autumn birth of Christ as presented by the aforementioned article in the *Plain Truth* is probably the most complicated; as presented by Mr. Martin, the argument sounds convincing, but it is seriously deficient in substantial fact.

Without quoting extensively from the *Plain*

Truth, we will try to state accurately what Mr. Armstrong teaches. He begins with prophecy which came to the father of John the Baptist, the senior of Christ by six months. Luke 1:5 states that Zacharias was serving in the temple at that time according to his order of service, he being of the course of Abia. Because the course of Abia (Abijah in Hebrew) was eighth in the original listing of the order of the courses for temple service as given in I Chronicles 24 (the system was set up during the time of David), Mr. Armstrong concludes that Zacharias would have been serving during the ninth week of that particular year. The extra week is added because during festival weeks, all the priests served, and such a week would have occurred during the first month of the year (the week of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread). We quote now from the *Plain Truth*, "On what days did Zacharias serve?"

"The year in which all of this occurred was 5 B. C. [This is a statement which, as we have observed, authorities, scholars and historians avoid.] The first day of Nisan in this year was a Sabbath"—as the law was given to Moses, the first day of the year could never have been a Sabbath; the *seventh* day was the Sabbath.

We continue our quotation: "On our Roman calendar, this day was April 6." This may be true for some particular year, but the Jewish calendar had a different number of days than has our year—how can we compare the dates exactly?

Mr. Armstrong says further: "Thus, by simple arithmetic, Zacharias, . . . was serving Iyar 27 to Sivan 5 (June 1 to June 8). This was the time he was told that his wife was going to conceive and bear a son."

In connection with this narrative, the Bible mentions two points of time: six months later the birth of Jesus is foretold, and three months after this, John is born. Thus Mr. Armstrong counts forward six months from the approximate date of the birth of John (which he claims occurred nine months after June 15) and arrives at a mid-September date for the birth of Christ, or about Tishri 1 on the Jewish calendar.

On the surface, the argument sounds plausible; but Mr. Armstrong is assuming much to arrive at his conclusion.

The Order of the Courses

First, Mr. Armstrong is assuming that the 24 courses (or divisions) of the priesthood at the time of Christ were serving exactly according to the temple arrangements made by King David a thousand years earlier. For details of this arrangement, the *Plain Truth* refers to the Talmud and the

Jewish historian Josephus. While these sources describe this priestly arrangement, they do not state that it was being strictly followed in the same routine during the first century before Christ. While it is likely that the descendants of these 24 priestly divisions existed at the time of Christ, it is very questionable whether they were performing in order their priestly turns of duty.

There seems to be sufficient evidence to show that the order of the priestly services *did* change. From the *Junior Jewish Encyclopedia* we read, "As foreign empires came and went they interfered with the life of the people, with the temple worship . . . Corrupt Greek and Roman governors ignored the required qualifications for priests and set up puppet high priests who bought their high places with gold." Among the opening paragraphs of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* is mentioned a number of changes in the priestly courses. For example, "In the Babylonian Exile, Ezekiel arose and demanded that basic changes in the organization and order of the priesthood be introduced. . . . A decisive change in the priesthood took place with Ezra."

A footnote in the *Berkeley Bible* also indicates change: "The 24 priestly classes continued as the basis for rotating the priestly duties into New Testament times. Although some of these classes died out or had to be consolidated with others, new ones were formed to take their places. In the return from exile, 538 B. C., four registered classes were represented, David's 2nd, 3rd, and 16th, and a new class, Pashur [Ezra 2:36-39]; and by 520 B. C. 22 were again in operation." (See I Chronicles 24:4, footnote.)

We note further that there are three listings of the priestly class in the book of Nehemiah (see 10:2-8; 12:1-7, 12-21). Each list has a different number of priestly representatives; most of the clans are different from the original list in I Chronicles 24; and the clans of Hilkiah, Shemaiah, Iddo, Seruah, and others are new. Note also that Jedaiah is mentioned *second* in the original arrangement (in I Chron. 24:7), and he is *last* on the list of Neh. 12:12-21; Abijah (the course to which Zacharias belonged) is mentioned *eighth* in the list of David's time, and he is *twelfth* in Neh. 12:21 and *eighteenth* in Nehemiah 10.

It seems evident that we cannot take any certain position as to the exact time when Zacharias was on duty in the temple. And according to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, rabbis say that the 24 priestly divisions were subdivided into households, each of which had a fixed day of the week for service. How can anyone say that Zacharias worked the eighth week of the year, and that his period of

priestly duty was two weeks, one week or a day!

Mr. Armstrong advances another point in favor of his argument, saying that Rome at this time was not exacting direct taxes from the people, but received tribute from Herod. He feels the occasion which brought Joseph to Bethlehem was not a Roman tax but was a Jewish tax on agricultural products at the close of the year, namely, tithes which the Jewish law required, and that Mary went to be present at Jerusalem for the holy days of the seventh month.

But his conclusions have little or no supporting evidence. The Biblical narrative points to the holy days of the *first* month, not of the *seventh*, which brought Mary to Jerusalem with Joseph. And there is no mention of the harvest season or a Jewish tax. Our King James Version reads "taxed" (Luke 2:1-5), but other translations refer to a registration for a census. And scholars say that what Luke tells about Cyrenius the governor is credible. The Roman government respected the feelings of subject peoples, hence allowed the Jews the privilege of enrolling in their place of origin, according to their family and tribe.

To further support his autumn position, Mr. Armstrong brings up two points which actually support a spring event more than an autumn.

He explains that the reason there was no room in the inn was because of the holy days of the seventh month. He quotes Josephus as saying that "it was customary for two million Jews to go to Jerusalem for the Passover"—and Passover was in the spring—always!

Mr. Armstrong says it is no wonder we find Mary along with Joseph, for it was customary for them to go to Jerusalem for the Holy Festivals, and he quotes Luke 2:41, which states that Joseph and Mary went up every year at the feast of the Passover—and Passover was a spring festival. Again Mr. Armstrong has no support here!

The Bible does not state positively just when Christ was born, but the evidence certainly points to a spring event, and not to autumn. ●●

*Reprints of this article
available upon request.*

A man should never be ashamed to own he has been in the wrong; that is but another way of saying he is wiser today than he was yesterday.

April, 1973

LETTERS

From Darkness to Light

In the days of my youth I was in darkness, and of the night. But I was not satisfied and longed for something better. And to this day, I pray and thank God for the saving truth which was revealed to me through the founder of the Megiddo Church.

Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada

J. G.

God Is Fair

The world is in such a restless state and so troubled. Few people live a serene and happy life.

We can be happy that the God who is over us does not expect the impossible from us, and we know that God is fair in all He asks us to do. We should be happy to be working for God, whose ways are just and righteous. Whatever He asks us to do is a small price to pay for the great blessings He has promised.

Selma, Iowa

V. T.

God Sustains

If we eat the spiritual flesh and drink this blood and by great effort do all His commandments and trust God to help us, His great love will sustain us. For with God all things are possible.

We must be convinced of His love, and know that all He has promised will be fulfilled to those who love Him, according to His will. Praise the Lord!

Brunswick, Maine

M. L.

See God in Everything

As we go from day to day, let us see God in everything we do. When we have trials and disappointments, we must recognize them as opportunities to enrich and strengthen our spiritual progress.

The natural man is inclined to evil, but the Christian is concerned how he can throw off these evils and gain victory over one person—self.

We will have temptations, discouragements, sensual thoughts, thoughts of self-importance, and any number of corrupting influences to combat, but if we always resist them, fortify mightily against them, never forgetting to pray, we shall have victory.

Winterset, Iowa

F. B.

Very Convincing

I have read the book of the Lord and Elijah, and the Kingdom of God. I must admit it is very convincing. I am deeply grateful to you, and may the good Lord richly bless all of you.

Lawrence, Mass.

J. H.



Meditations

On the Word

WHEN the round full moon climbs slowly over the evening's eastern horizon, it is easy to wonder how many countless ages this same moon has cast its light over the earth. Silently it has seen vast continents rise from the seas and others swallowed in their salty depths. It has watched the tireless clouds perform their duties in watering the thirsty lands: all with no man to look on or take any credit to himself. Laws without number and beyond our imagination operate continuously about us, and even within us, for us and against us, all strangers to our comprehension. Indeed, were we informed of their existence and purpose we might be little if any wiser than we are.

Oh, how little man knows! A short search reveals our limitation, for Paul tells us in I Cor. 2: 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." This places man pretty far down the scale of all knowledge, when we realize that there are things in existence today that we know not, and even beyond that, things that we cannot begin to imagine because they are so far above our level of intelligence. This includes everyone from the dullard to the scientific genius, for the Almighty says the wisdom of man is foolishness with Him. While man's limitations are thus demonstrated to us, in no field are they so pitifully apparent as in self-understanding, self-development and self-control.

The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, is speaking. What a contrast! Man has never accomplished anything worth mentioning in his little span of threescore years and ten, but the Eternal has created all, including

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding" —Isaiah 40:28.

man himself. Man cannot satisfactorily explain the most common phenomenon in nature, the forming of food in green plants by the combination of earth, air, water and sunlight. God is eternal in character, man but a passing

vapor (James 4:14). God is the ruling Sovereign of all nature, while man can rule himself only by effort so great that only few will ever attempt it. God created the ends of the earth, things too great and distant for us to see and understand, and at the other extreme things too small and delicate for man to comprehend.

The Lord inquires of Job, "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?" (38:22). It is known to science that snow brings valuable ammonia to the soil; and who can say if this is more than a small part of its work? Again the Lord inquires, "Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart [mind]?" In reply Job says, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth" (40:4). Can we come closer than Job to the secrets of the Almighty? This is He who announces Himself to mankind, and gives poor frail creatures of the dust an opportunity to listen to wisdom.

"The Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary." The prophet Isaiah says, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings [power] as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" (40:31). Although man has the promise of enjoying power without weariness for his physical use if he does that which is pleasing in the Lord's sight now, even moral

exertion tires him today. "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not," says the apostle Paul. We need look no further for proof than our own experience in trying to do well. If it did not weary man to do well, God would never have given the command to put away evil, wash and be clean. The great God never wearies of doing well; and if we follow His example and learn to do well in a manner acceptable to Him, there will come a time when to our expanded minds neither physical nor moral effort will be wearisome, and the only tendency of our lives will ever be onward and upward to greater joys and opportunities. But before that time lies the remaining portion of our probation when we must prove that we are one who really desires that reward, by putting away all evil now, when conditions are not so helpful and encouraging for righteous living.

"There is no searching of His understanding." The Apostle exclaims in Romans 11:33, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" These words of humble admiration came from the heart, for he had been instructed by Jesus, who had been through the death state, received instruction of the Father, and been made immortal. Not once but repeatedly Jesus had appeared to instruct Paul. The first time He said, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and those things in which I will appear unto thee" (Acts 26:16). Is it any wonder Paul could proclaim the wonderful knowledge and understanding of God? We cannot search out God's understanding, but we can share with Paul some of the wonderful depths of God's understanding that Jesus gave to him. Then we shall know more what we can do to please our God, drawing nearer to Him in knowledge and practice, now and in the future. Paul said, "Copy me as I copy Christ" (I Cor. 11:1, Moffatt Bible).

"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ," he tells us in Philippians 1:27, "that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." Paul always spoke to edification and upbuilding, else he could not have testified at the sundown of life that he had fought a good fight and finished his course. Can our record afford to be less? Again he tells us in II Cor. 6:17, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." Separation from the world and worldliness is not merely ad-

vice but a God-given command which must be obeyed if our thoughts and actions are ever to be purified. And even this is not enough, for Paul admonishes us in Rom. 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." To make our lives a living sacrifice is a high calling, but only a step toward a higher knowledge of God's wonderful knowledge and wisdom.

There is a great work to do with self before we can qualify for such a wonderful reward and be privileged to share in the wonders of the knowledge of God's creation. First we must be one with God mentally, then one with Him morally, and then He will gladly make us one with Him physically. But even then we never shall be able to search out His understanding. ●●

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"I heard a minister over the radio claim concerning prayer, faith healing and the high priest's throne of grace, 'I know whereof I speak because I've put what I am now telling you to the test, not once but literally hundreds and thousands of times and God has never failed to keep His promise once. I've seen the answers come so often and so frequently that I expect the answer when I ask. God promises to supply every need. . . .' He has claimed he prayed for a certain amount of money and has received that exact amount in one lump sum and that he would have had an accident if an angel had not steered him around—he felt the tug at the wheel! Many preachers tell of happenings like this and since such is not, I am confident, always God's doing; do you have any thought?"

In many cases it is happenstance. People believing that God answers prayers can connect circumstances with action by Him. But the times when there are no such circumstances, no seeming answer, they say nothing about.

We do have the promise, however, that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7). God is overseeing all circumstances, arranging and working them out for the benefit of all who are doing and will do His will.

"Numerous times the literature that I have read states that Noah preached to the people about God and the flood, etc. But never is a verse given and I cannot find it stated that he preached for a number of months. Could you help me out?"

II Peter 2:5 speaks of God as not saving the old world, "but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." Surely such preaching would include preaching about God, and a warning of the oncoming flood.

Hebrews 11:7 speaks of Noah as acting on faith, "being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Modern news media, such as the printed page, radio and television, were non-existent at the time, hence the only way Noah could have condemned the world would have been by means of example and the spoken word. Surely he must have preached.

The length of time in which the ark was being built, and presumably the length of the time of Noah's preaching, is determined by the statement in Gen. 6:3. The verses before speak of mankind multiplying on the earth, while sin and sinfulness also became progressively more dominant. Then verse 3 reveals the sequel: the Lord said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." Our founder accepted this as meaning there were yet 120 years until the flood, hence the length of the time of Noah's preaching would have been 120 years. Other Bible students concur.

"What are Gog and Magog, as in Revelation 20:8?"

Some theologians have attempted to connect the terms "Gog" and "Magog" with specific countries of our present world. These terms appear to have been borrowed from Ezekiel, where Gog and the land of Magog launch an attack upon Israel and are to be destroyed.

In Revelation 20:8, the period under consideration is the time at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ and the saints. The kingdoms of this world will have long since been abolished, having become the "kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). It seems more reasonable that the terms "Gog" and "Magog" stand symbolically for everything which is against God and His new order of world government. In this conflict they meet their final and complete destruction. Christ and the saints are triumphant. ●●

"... Like A Grain of Mustard Seed"

(Continued from page 18)

listeners were probably at once familiar with the illustration used, though perhaps an immediate realization of its meaning did not dawn upon them, and possibly they never really did understand it. Let us read back over His words with the advantage of an enlightened understanding.

"The kingdom of heaven," said Jesus, "is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

After the long centuries these words are even more relevant to us than they were to those whose ears they fell upon. The impact of the parable is not lost on the true believer. Jesus' lesson is personal. He speaks to you and me a heavenly, simple—yes, and hopeful!—truth. The Kingdom, He says, will come from the smallest beginnings; indeed, each of us may be a beginning! This seeming incredibility becomes meaningful only as we take it to heart. To be believable it must be acted upon. What an opportunity! It leaves no room for doubt, despair, or discouragement. There is too much to be done. We can be an effective witness for Christ and the truth He taught; we can follow wholeheartedly His example of that truth lived out; we can "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," but "set our affections on things above"; we can "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." In such a way the seed of God's Word can work effectually within each of us; and we, each as a small beginning, can grow so that some day we may be privileged to view the Kingdom of heaven in its fullest splendor; indeed, to become a very part of it. For then the Kingdom in its glorious completion will be composed of such as you and me.

God's people have always been in the minority, even to the present time. But it will not always be so. The seed will develop and grow until it branches out into that future eternal Kingdom of God itself, filling all the earth with the glory of the Lord. In our age, those working out their salvation are passed by unnoticed by an indifferent world. But soon, Christ will return to earth and the entire world will be brought into subjection to the law of God. Christ's new empire will be worldwide, a flourishing tree, and all nations and peoples of the earth will find rest, food, and shelter among its branches, until the time when the kingdoms of men become the everlasting Kingdom of God. ●●

MEGIDDO MESSAGE

The Challenge of a NEW YEAR

AS I stand in awe and gaze into the vast unknown of the New Year being offered me, the challenge is indeed tremendous. I approach it cautiously, as a yawning cave yet unexplored and unnamed, beset by anxieties and fears.

Will I be able to fill the great vacuum before me with worthwhile and lasting accomplishments and friendships? When the year is gone and all the space is filled, will it be an acceptable package to hand back to God who gave it to me? Or will it be a limp bundle of collapsed efforts and half-hearted attempts that I will be ashamed to own?

Will I have grown spiritually at this year's end? Will I have good works to my credit? Or will I have held back, letting others bear the burdens and do the work I had intended to do?

As I face these questions, I am very keenly aware that considerable time and thought and prayer should be devoted to deciding how my time will be spent in the coming year, if I am permitted to add this year to my life.

Although a year, by some standards, seems a very long time, I am determined that there will be definitely NO time allowance for:

Quarreling with my neighbor.

Listening to and spreading gossip.

Exposing loved ones and friends to my chronic frustrations, worries and disappointments.

Snooping and prying into the affairs of another.

Procrastination.

Exhibiting pride and haughtiness.

Worry and pessimism.

Self-pity.

Envy and jealousy.

Idleness.

Unwholesome or questionable recreation and entertainment.

Thinking and living negatively.

Indifference to God's purposes and plans.

I am thankful that the New Year will provide ample time for:

Pursuit of my highest ideals.

Influencing others for good.

Stooping to lighten my brother's load.

Optimism and faith in the future.

Growing in wisdom and understanding.

Building a better life for myself and all others.

Giving encouragement and sincere praise to my fellowman.

Daily meditation and prayer, without which I cannot hope to become an acceptable worker in God's vineyard.

Co-operation and kindness.

Sharing my blessings, both spiritual and material, with others.

Seizing every opportunity to improve myself.

Giving thanks to God each day for my manifold blessings. ●●

When the Storm Struck Nazareth

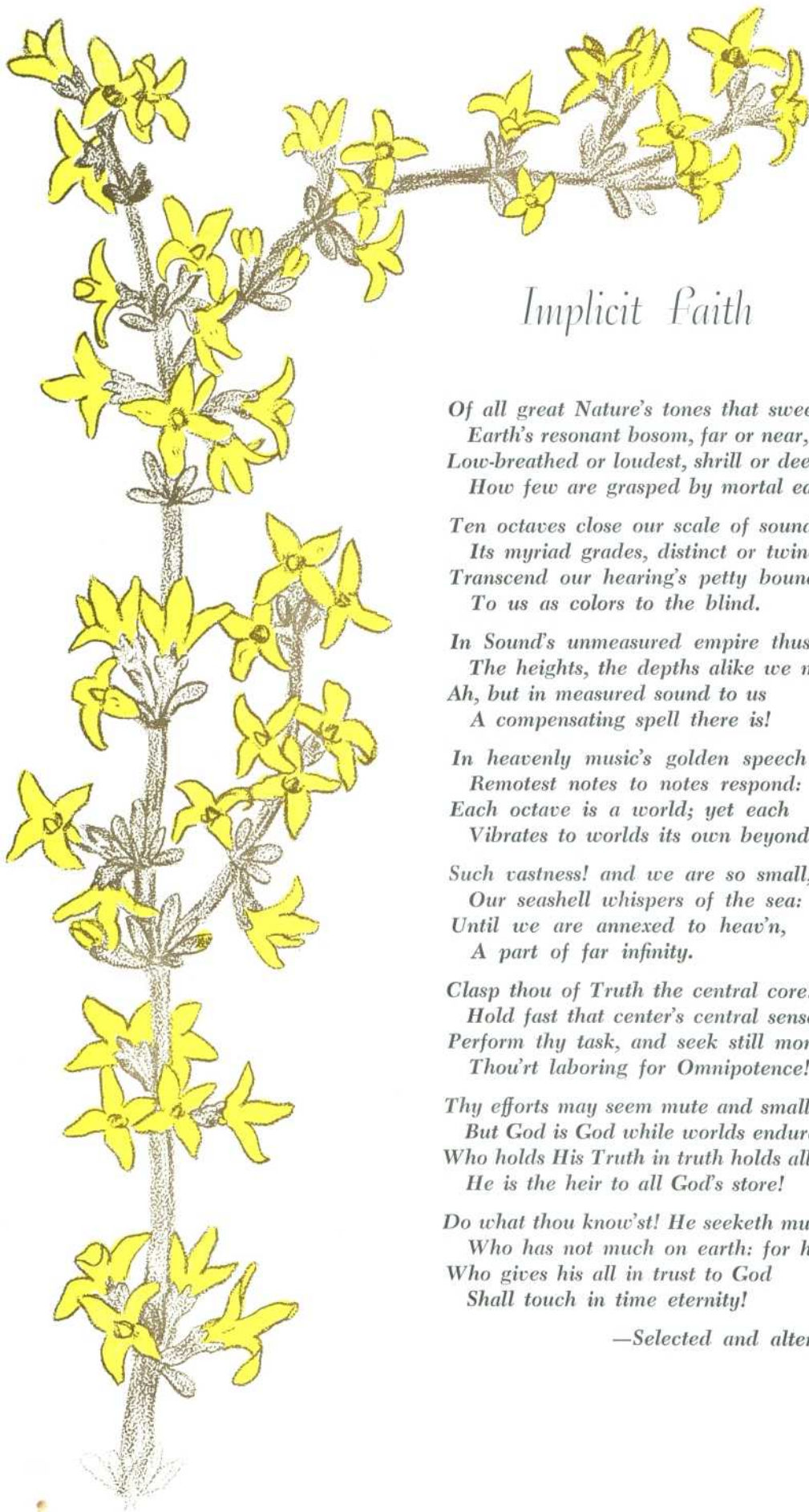
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and He ministered to people from all walks of life. He always tried to get them to live righteous lives and to be kind, to be patient, to be truthful, to live above the level of people who are interested only in what this life can give.

Jesus tried to get people to look forward to future eternal things. He told of glories to come, of blessings beyond measure, of life without end; but always He tried to impress that these things

would be given only to a few, a little flock. It would be given those who were willing to give up all worldly honor and work for an eternal kingdom of joy and happiness that would be set up here on earth—sometime—in the distant future.

Well, that is my story, friends. I feel that Jesus was an extraordinary young man, but I never took Him as seriously as some people did. Perhaps it is because I knew Him too well and couldn't really believe that much good could come out of Nazareth. Perhaps it *was* like He said, "No prophet is accepted in his home town." ●●



Implicit Faith

*Of all great Nature's tones that sweep
Earth's resonant bosom, far or near,
Low-breathed or loudest, shrill or deep,
How few are grasped by mortal ear.*

*Ten octaves close our scale of sound
Its myriad grades, distinct or twined,
Transcend our hearing's petty bound,
To us as colors to the blind.*

*In Sound's unmeasured empire thus
The heights, the depths alike we miss;
Ah, but in measured sound to us
A compensating spell there is!*

*In heavenly music's golden speech
Remotest notes to notes respond:
Each octave is a world; yet each
Vibrates to worlds its own beyond.*

*Such vastness! and we are so small,
Our seashell whispers of the sea:
Until we are annexed to heav'n,
A part of far infinity.*

*Clasp thou of Truth the central core!
Hold fast that center's central sense!
Perform thy task, and seek still more—
Thou'rt laboring for Omnipotence!*

*Thy efforts may seem mute and small,
But God is God while worlds endure!
Who holds His Truth in truth holds all—
He is the heir to all God's store!*

*Do what thou know'st! He seeketh much
Who has not much on earth: for he
Who gives his all in trust to God
Shall touch in time eternity!*

—Selected and altered.

