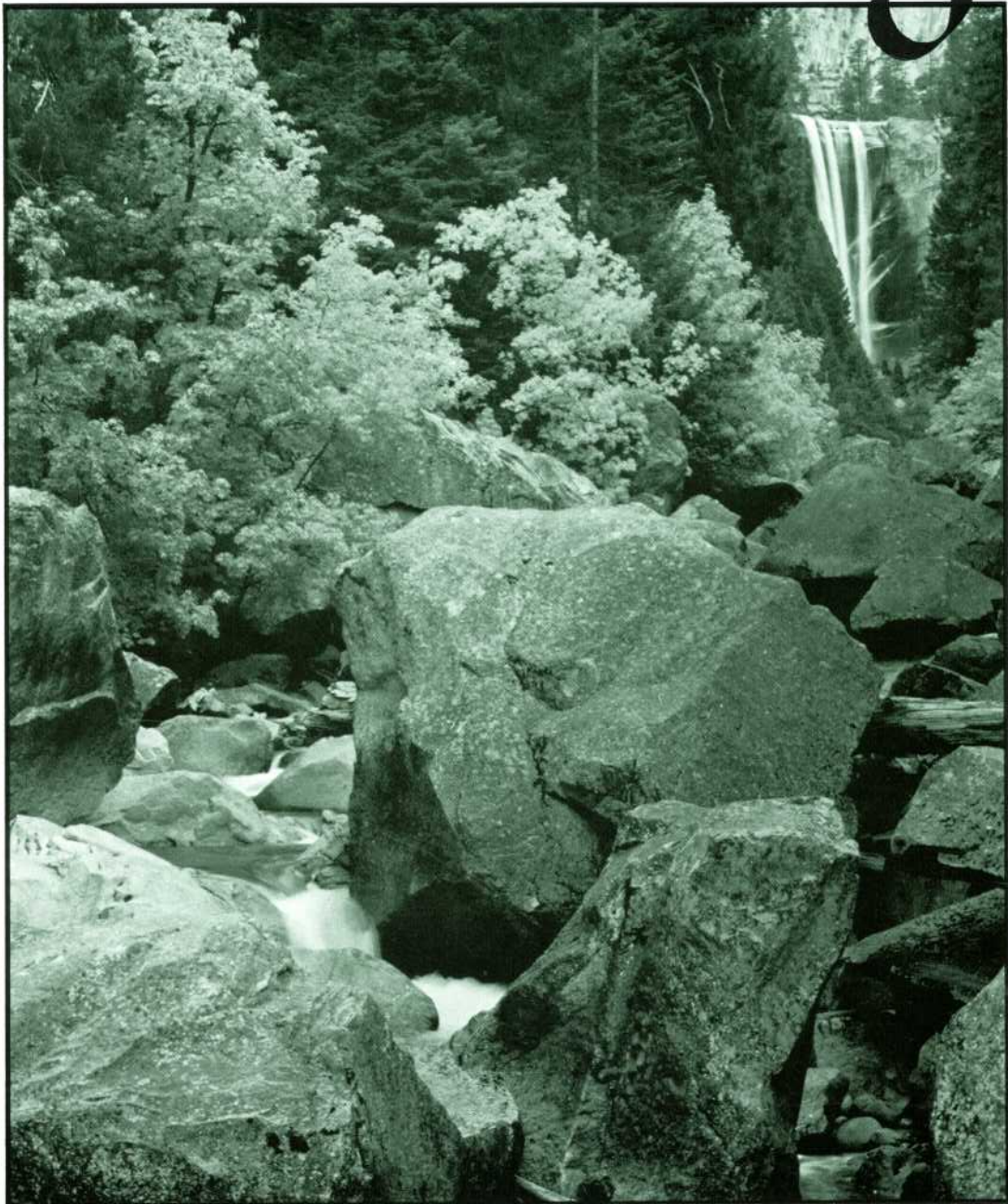


Megiddo Message



What Do You Think?

IF THE TRUTH were known, we might well discover that few of us think for ourselves. This tells a tragic tale. Is it not the aim of advertisers to make us think the thoughts that *they* want us to think?

The question, What do you think? is generally asked by us and of us only to see if we think the way others think. The tragedy is that when all is said and done, we too often fail to act on the basis of our own independent conviction and constructive thinking.

What is the goal in my life? What sovereign shall I be subject to? What shall I do? Some—and their number may be larger than we suppose—never make up their minds about anything. Their thinking is done for them about everything. As the poet has written,

*Though man a thinking being is defined,
Few use the grand prerogative of mind.
How few think justly of the thinking few!
How many never think, who think they do!*

Someone has estimated that about three percent of the people think, 12 percent of the people *think* that they think, and 85 percent of the people would rather die than think! If one has no interest beyond this temporal sphere, the tragedy of not thinking can be lived with. But if we desire the higher values, the heavenly realities, we will be called upon to think. The Scriptures pose the question directly: “What think ye . . . ?” (Matt. 22:42). No one can answer for us; each must answer for himself. The question is not general—it is pointed and specific. “What do you think? What testimony are you willing to give with your life?”

There are many places where our lack of thinking betrays us. Think of the many songs we have sung—without thinking about their meaning or message. Think of the many times we have prayed—without thinking; when our prayer was words, nothing more. Again in the words of a poem, “Do I Really Pray?”

*I often say my prayers,
But do I really pray?
And do the longings of my heart
Support the words I say?*

*I may as well kneel down
And worship gods of stone
As offer to the living God
A prayer of words alone.*

*For words without the heart
The Lord will never hear;
Nor will He to those lips attend
Whose prayer is not sincere!*

Knowing even what we know, it is easy to go right on singing and praying without thinking. Think, too, of the verses we often recite. “I thought on my ways,” said the Psalmist. And what was the result of this thinking? “I turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” There is a whole world of action bound up in the verses we recite. Do we think as we say them, or do we let the words pass in through our ears while our minds idle in neutral, not really caring to trouble ourselves with thoughts of life, death, the resurrection, and immortality?

“What do you think?” Thinking is drawing our answer from the depths of our own inner conviction, not from a time-honored phrase that has the right ring and the right rhythm. Thinking is living on the meditations of our heart drawn from the words of light and life, not living on the borrowed thoughts or testimony of another.

Like it or not, admit it or not, each of us will in the final analysis have to answer for ourselves and our own thoughts. If we lived on borrowed thoughts or failed to think for ourselves, our answer will be lacking. For no one escapes the question, and no one finally can escape his responsibility to answer.

If we are thinking beings—and we are—then it is time we did our own thinking, built our own foundation of faith. The issues are as important as life and death.

MM

Megiddo means

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

We believe

—in God the Creator of all things, all men, and all life.

We believe

—in the Bible as containing the genuine revelation of God and His purposes for men, and as being our only source of divine knowledge today.

We believe

—in Christ the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was born of a Virgin, ministered among men, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.

We believe

—in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.

We believe

—in all mankind as providing the nucleus from which a superior, God-honoring people shall be chosen to receive the blessings of immortal life.

We believe

—in ourselves as capable of fulfilling the demands and disciplines given us in the law of God, thus perfecting that high quality of character which God has promised to reward with life everlasting in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

We believe

—in the promise of God, that a new age is coming—is near—when the earth will be filled with His glory, His people, and His will be done here as it is now done in heaven.

Bible quotations

Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version. Other versions are identified as follows:

NEB—New English Bible

NIV—New International Version

NAS—New American Standard

RSV—Revised Standard Version

TLB—The Living Bible

TEV—Today's English Version

JB—The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition

Phillips—The New Testament in Modern English

Berkeley—The Modern Language New Testament

The use of selected references from various versions of the Bible does not necessarily imply publisher endorsement of the versions in their entirety.

About Our Cover...

For our cover photograph we are indebted to the kindness of D. C. Lowe, who resides in Oregon. The photograph was taken at Vernal Fall, Yosemite National Park, California.

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THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEW

The **MEGIDDO MESSAGE** is a religious magazine devoted to the cause of Christ, and published for the dissemination of Bible truth alone. Official organ of the Megiddo Church. L. T. Nichols, *Founder*; Kenneth E. Flowerday, *President and Editor*.

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MEGIDDO is a way of believing and living, grounded solidly in the Bible as the reliable Word of our Creator. A total view of life, the world and the universe, it sees all events, men and nations moving together toward one God-ordained climax: the Kingdom of God on earth. This has been the plan of God since the beginning. Christ will return visibly, bodily, as King, and the governments of this world will be joined to form a totally new worldwide government. When the task is complete, our earth shall be numbered among the heavenly, glorified worlds and filled with immortal inhabitants. This is the purpose and goal of all creation.

IRON SHOES

"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass" —Deut. 33:25.

THE MOST beautiful cluster of promises in the Old Testament is found in one of the Bible's most unread books. In the thirty-third chapter of Deuteronomy three promises nestle together: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be"; "Underneath are the everlasting arms"; and "The eternal God will be thy refuge." But God never puts promises like these in a group without a reason, and that reason is stated in the preceding verse, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." God was lifting the veil of the future a little for some of His chosen people to see. He was saying to them, "Your road ahead is going to be so rough that you will need iron shoes." Then He added the assurance of these three beautiful promises.

These words are a part of the blessing on the Tribe of Asher. But as I read them this evening I do not think that they were confined to this Tribe alone, but rather God was stating the facts about a normal Christian life, for there comes a day in the life of each of us when God hands us a pair of iron shoes and it is of vital importance that we wear them as a Christian should. We can do this only if we have the faith to appropriate these three beautiful promises.

A religious writer pictures how he had seen this admirably done not so long ago. I quote: "I had gone to a school to preach the baccalaureate sermon. As the procession began I was startled to see how slowly it moved, and I kept wondering about it until into the door at the end of the long aisle there came a wisp of a girl. She was walking with much difficulty; every step jarred her whole body. Then I realized that she was braced with iron from her head to her heels. Half way down the aisle her cap jarred down over her eyes. I saw her smilingly nudge the big two-hundred-pound boy who was marching with her. As a gesture of good will he adjusted her cap, because her arms couldn't reach it.

When the time came, the principal conferred the honors, all but one, for, at the close of the presentation

he said, "There is one other medal given by the students. It will be presented by the captain of the athletic team to a young lady who has been a great inspiration to our entire school."

The same big, two-hundred-pound boy came forward leading the frail girl in the iron braces. His speech was something like this: "This is the biggest medal I ever saw, because every one in the school wanted to have a part in buying it, but it isn't big enough to express our gratitude to this young lady. On one side of it is inscribed her name, Christine. On the other is our pet name for her, Miss Inspiration. Through these years of school life she has worn iron braces and suffered continually, but no hardship has ever been tough enough to wipe the smile off her face. Sometimes when the going has gotten rough for us out on the athletic field or elsewhere, someone invariably would mention her name and we'd just grin and buckle down."

Now God does not ask us all literally to wear iron shoes like this crippled girl wears, but few of us ever walk long on life's roadway without finding a pair of iron shoes. God never promised a Christian that there would be no suffering.

Paul and Barnabas, upon a return trip to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, confirmed the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and alerting them that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21-22). Again in II Tim. 2:11-12 Paul testified that it is a faithful saying that if we would live with Christ we now must die with Him; if we would reign with Him we also must suffer with Him." This same Paul, one of the grandest men that ever lived, himself wore iron shoes from the beginning to the end of his ministry. One day when the load got what he thought was too heavy, he asked God to take them away, but instead God gave him more grace to bear the iron.

Even Christ, the only begotten Son of God, walked into the garden of Gethsemane, on down through

Pilate's court, and up the hill of Golgotha wearing iron shoes. And He made it plain that each follower of His must do the same; "He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

*There's a work for us to do each day.
There's a yoke to meekly wear,
There's a cross to overcome our way
And the Saviour's image bear.*

There is a cross, when we are reviled, not to revile again.

It is rough going if we do well and find we must suffer for it. But we must take it patiently, hence will need to be wearing our iron shoes.

It is a problem to be living in a world of evil without becoming contaminated by it.

It is a cross to completely control every thought, bringing all into fullest subjection to Christ.

It is a task to banish all pride from our hearts, and not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

It is a cross to do all that we do to God's glory, always to exalt Christ and depreciate self.

It is a cross not to cater to conformity, not to follow a multitude to do evil, to dare to be different—for righteousness sake.

It is a work to learn to govern our words, to let them be few; to use wholesome speech to which no one can take exception, so as to add luster to the doctrine of God our Saviour.

It is a cross to give up seeking the praise and approbation of men, to always seek the honor that comes from God only.

God knew if we Christians were going to wear iron shoes like real soldiers of the cross we would need these three beautiful promises to lean upon. There is no repetition here. Look closely at each one of them: the first—"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

God doesn't reveal in detail each step of the way before us, or ask us to bear the load of every tomorrow today, but He does promise, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." In the days ahead many and varied testings may be our lot, but we are assured that no temptation shall overtake us "but such as is common to man: but [that] God is faithful, who will not suffer [us] to be tempted above that [we] are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that [we] may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13).

How beautifully for every Christian this illustrates this most essential truth: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." When the dark and unknown passages of life

come, Christ also comes. No truer words were ever spoken than that "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." Maybe this was the lesson that God was trying to teach us when He sent the manna to the children of Israel in the wilderness. There was just enough for each day.

The second promise, "Underneath are the everlasting arms," no doubt had its origin in something the writer of this book had often seen in the mountainous wilderness over which he had traveled. In the preceding chapter he refers to it. He had seen an eagle teaching its young to fly. The ceremony began with the destruction of the nest. The old eagle tore up the nest and threw the pieces over the cliff. Then she took the little eaglet on her broad back and, circling, carried him high into the sun. Then she tilted her wings and slid him off into space.

Fluttering, screeching, screaming, he drifted down. The old eagle circled around him. Long before the eaglet reached the sharp crags and rocks below, she glided under him and caught him on her strong wings. Two or three times she repeated this as if to say, "See, you cannot fall for underneath are the everlasting wings." The writer changed the picture just a little and made it read that "underneath are the everlasting arms" of God. How great is our need for this message at the New Year, for we do not travel far along life's roadway until we realize our genuine need for God's help.

When David described God as the "Good Shepherd," he was using the most endearing and realistic words at his command, for the Good Shepherd would do as David had done, fight the beasts of the forest and the birds of the air for his flock. If one of the flock was wounded or sick, he found underneath him the everlasting arms, tender and strong, the arms of the Good Shepherd.

The promise is true, we shall not be tried above that which we are able to bear, and that all things will work together for good to us if we are truly exercising to godliness. The patriarch Job rested in the assurance that he would not be tried above that which he was able to bear. Speaking of his faithful God he said: "He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall go down in defeat? No! "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job. 23:10).

The fleeting things of earth, its pride and wealth and station, can never be compared with the hundredfold of happiness that comes when sin has all been laid aside, and we can feel the calm assurance that the eternal God is our refuge, and underneath us are the everlasting arms. (Continued on page 12)

Prophecy Is for US!

Scripture Reading: II Pet. 1:16-21

PROPHECY IS. There is no denying it. As surely as the God of heaven lives, He has spoken. And He has spoken in our behalf. We are not alone. We are not on our own, heading blindly down a course of self-destruction. God has a plan, a purpose, a destiny for our world and its inhabitants, and He has spoken. His Word is filled with prophecies—short-range, long-range, middle-range; some prophecies that were fulfilled ages ago, some prophecies currently being fulfilled, others that have yet to be fulfilled. As we stand on the threshold of another sacred new year, it might be profitable to review the wealth of divine knowledge that is our heritage, the things “written aforetime” for our learning, to stimulate us to more reverential living in the presence of our great Creator.

Prophecy reveals the plan of God. Every precious promise held out to us by God is a shining jewel of prophecy straight from the high courts of heaven. It is real. It is true. It is divine. God will do as He has promised. How could we know, if God did not prophesy?

Prophecy gives us a goal toward which to work, inspiring us to lives of holiness and virtue. This has always been one primary purpose of prophecy, to influence present action, to give meaning and value to the present, in the prospect of future benefit.

Prophecy is part of the Word of God which was “written for our learning”—it is clearly inspired, because no man of himself could foretell the future. And like all inspired scriptures it has value “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The Bible opens and closes with prophecy. The first chapters of Genesis present prophetically—in allegory—an outline of the entire plan of salvation for this earth, and the book of Revelation concludes the message by telling of “things shortly to come to pass.” Along with the “book of this prophecy” is the command, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear . . . and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3).

Between Genesis and Revelation, a large portion is prophetic. An estimate has revealed the following: Out of the almost 30,000 verses in the Bible, over 8,000 contain prophetic material, or 27 per cent of the whole. This means that on an average, one verse of every four is prophecy. Doesn't this tell us something of how its Author valued the promise of the future? Can we not safely conclude that God has caused His Word to be written to reveal His plans?

What is prophecy? To us it is a window through which we can peer into the future. The word comes from two Greek words, *pro* which means “for,” “in front of,” “on behalf of,” and *phanai*, which means “to speak.” The prophet had two primary responsibilities: 1) to speak out “in behalf of God,” delivering His messages 2) to speak beforehand, in advance, of coming events.

What is a suitable subject for a divine prophecy? Nothing seems either too small or too great. Whether it be the future destiny of the earth or simply an event that will happen tomorrow, either is a clear demonstration of divine power—for who of us can predict a single hour in advance? Both are beyond the scope of human knowledge.

Very often God used this fact to contrast His ability with that of men and give men faith in Himself. Even the most ordinary prediction carried certainty with it—

Note: *Prophecy Is for US!* is available as a complete church service on cassette. Price: \$3.00

down to the minutest detail. Someone has said that the best way to predict the future is to not state any time with the prediction—almost anything can happen eventually. But no such uncertainty accompanies divine prophecy. “If the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him” said the Lord through His prophet Moses (Deut. 18:22). Saul’s servant could testify about the Lord’s “seer” Samuel, “All that he saith cometh surely to pass” (I Sam. 9:6). So why should they not ask him about the lost asses? And Samuel did tell them! (9:20, 10:16).

Foreknowing—Forthtelling

When we think of prophecy, we at once think of foreknowing the future. We know God has this remarkable superhuman ability. In His divine omniscience, He knows what will happen tonight, tomorrow, one year from tonight, a thousand years from tomorrow. He knows the end from the beginning. His farseeing eye sees, and in His omniscience He knows.

But prophecy is more than foreknowing the future. His is the still greater ability to *design* the future, to make events happen according to a plan. As someone has said, prophecy is not only “foretelling”; it is “forthtelling”—declaring and *doing*.

By far the larger portion of Bible prophecy is “forthtelling” as well as “foretelling.” The prophecies of the coming Kingdom, the King, the rulers, the setting up of the Kingdom, the rewarding of the saints, and the description of what that reward will be—no “normal” or “chance” events in the course of history are these, events that would happen of themselves and which God merely had the ability to foreknow. They are events which He is bringing to pass, events which He is arranging according to His eternal purpose. They are part of the plan of God, designed by Him, and by Him destined for fulfillment. Herein lies the supreme glory of prophecy. It declares in ringing tones that God is sovereign and that it is part of His sovereign ability to decide what the future shall be and bring all events to one predetermined and climactic end.

The Prophets Themselves

We tend to think of the prophets as superbeings—super-human, almost divine. But they were very human, even as you and I, with feelings, aspirations and desires typically like our own. Their one singular and distinguishing mark was the fact that they were favored with receiving direct revelation firsthand from God.

On the positive side, the prophets were men of God,

We are not on our own. God has a plan, a purpose, a destiny for our world and its inhabitants.

sent to minister the Word of God to their contemporaries. They were ordinary men with an extraordinary mission and an extraordinary vision. On the negative side, they were a despised and rejected minority swimming against the current of the world’s thinking.

How did prophecy come to the prophet? We know “the word of the Lord came . . .,” but how did the prophet feel when receiving information from the high courts of heaven? Was it something he heard, or saw, or felt, or a combination of these? We are not told all we would like to know.

Receiving a revelation from God apparently had a profound effect, both physical and emotional, upon the prophet. They could see, could feel, could think, even as you and I, within their human framework. But the effects were deep, often stunning. The prophet Daniel wrote, after one of his visions, “And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king’s business” (Dan. 8:27).

PROPHECY—for US!

The prophecies recorded in the Bible are clearly written for us. There are three basic reasons for this which we will discuss. The prophecies recorded in the Bible were given: 1) to present evidence of the certainty of God’s promises, 2) to teach and instruct us in the plan of God and 3) to warn us to prepare for divine certainties.

Prophecy: To Give Certainty to the Word of God

Scripture makes several direct assertions concerning the theory behind predictions. They are to make known coming glories, and to prove the verity of God. We read that the prophets “prophesied of the grace that should come.” They “testified before hand the sufferings of Christ,” and also predicted “the glory that should follow” (I Pet. 1:10-11). Jesus Himself stated the underlying reason for prophecy: “Now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe” (John 14:29). Then He promised that after His own departure He would send the Holy Spirit, to teach them what is to come (John 16:13).

Isaiah the prophet also stated the purpose of prophecy: "New things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isa. 42:9).

The accurate forecasting of future events is one of the strongest evidences of the existence of God and of the authority and integrity of His Word. He who can foreknow the future with certainty and accuracy and have it prove true in time must speak by divine inspiration. And he who speaks as the interpreter or spokesman of God, whether it be a message of duty or warning, or a prediction of future events, has concrete assurance that the prophecy will come to pass.

Both the Old and New Testaments abound with predictions of the future that were accurately fulfilled years—even centuries—later. For example, consider the prophecies relating to the birth of Christ. Hundreds of years in advance, the prophets of the Lord saw in

vision or were told by Him when, where and under what circumstance the Messiah should come into the world. Said Moses, speaking by divine inspiration, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet . . . of thy brethren, like unto me" (Deut. 18:15). The apostle Peter, addressing his countrymen after the healing of the impotent man, confirms this had happened (Acts 3:22), "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear." Then Peter continues in verse 24, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."

We today have more than the plain spoken prophecies. We have also the record of numerous accurate fulfillments or partial fulfillments, a feature we might call the divine coupling. Christ's birth, ministry, death,

Let Us Pray . . .

O God our strength and our fortress, and our refuge in the day of affliction, we come before Thee this morning thankful for all the blessings Thou in Thy mercy dost shower upon us; for life itself, for health and vigor, for pleasant homes, for warmth of friendship, for every gift of happiness and strength of Thy hand.

We thank Thee especially for Thy Word, and for the brilliant promises that reach even to us. We thank Thee that Thy farseeing eye can see, and that Thy Omnipotence can bring to pass the great things Thou hast promised. May we never cease to be filled with wonderment and awe at the remembrance of Thy prophecies, so far does Thy ability surpass our own. Not only is it within Thy power to foreknow the future, but also to bring to pass Thy purposes. May this realization cause us to live always as in Thy presence, knowing Thy plan is sure and that we ourselves can be part of it *only* if now we do on our part.

Help us to weave into the fabric of each ordinary hour the golden threads of love, joy, patience, peace, courage, dedication and a godly sobriety, so adorning our lives with virtue that they will attract Thy attention and we will be marked as future inheritors of Thy glory.

Lord, make us mindful of Thy goodness and Thy severity. Impress us anew with the seriousness of our obligation to Thee and its tremendous potential for good or ill. Thou dost not dispense Thy knowledge

indiscriminately; we shall be judged according to the terms of our covenant; we shall appear before the Judgment seat of Christ. If we are accepted, there shall be no words that can describe the joy that shall enapture us; if we are rejected, there shall be no sorrow or shame like unto ours.

Help us to realize also that the fulfilling of our covenant is not beyond our ability to perform. Thou dost not ask of us what we cannot give, nor dost Thou withhold any good. All that Thou requirest is but our reasonable service—and is only a droplet compared to the oceans of Thy blessings.

Lord, in these hurrying days when time is becoming shorter and shorter and the Day of Thy Son's appearing speeds apace, may we not waste any time in hesitancy or indecision, in strife or foolish jealousies, or in any feelings Thou canst not condone. But may we show our good sense by being quick to change our ways when shown we are in the wrong. May we be always swift to hear any word that condemns us and never justify our misconduct.

O Thou God of heaven and earth, we beseech Thee this morning to become God of our minds and Lord of our affections. Fill our hearts with kindness, our actions with uprightness, and our spirits with gladness. Give strength and support wherever Thou in Thy infinite wisdom seest need. Comfort the sorrowing, support the suffering, strengthen the weak. Be with Thy people wherever they may be, who are seeking in sincerity and truth to keep Thy law. And may we all strive with deeper dedication to live acceptably before Thee, that we may someday be among the members of Thine eternal family. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

resurrection and ascension were all vividly and exactly foretold— and fulfilled. Some of the fulfillments are recorded by secular history as well. Coupled with these fulfilled prophecies are other forecasts yet unfulfilled. There are prophecies of Jesus' future work, His Kingship, the worldwide government He will establish, and many particular details about that government. There are also prophecies revealing the times and seasons when all this will begin to happen.

This unique combination of fulfilled, fulfilling and soon-to-be-fulfilled prophecies—often within a single passage—gives us a faith, surety and conviction which can withstand the darts of the most skeptical. We may not be able to convince others with words, but let them live and they shall see. "These things shall be," because the God of heaven has spoken; and just as surely as part of a prophecy is fulfilled, so shall the remainder be fulfilled. Nothing and no one can hinder the plan of God. What He has begun, He will finish, He who knows the end from the beginning and in whose hands are the destinies of all men and nations.

God meant His prophecies to be convincing; perhaps that is why He used so large a portion of His written Word to inform us of them. He knew we would need faith-stimulators as no other people ever needed them, and this may be His way of supplying our need. Yes, prophecy is for us. He wanted the evidence so plain we could not doubt it.

Herein lies the design and goal of all prophecy—it is a combination of God's ability to foresee, to plan and to execute. There is just no question of His ability; for "as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:10-11). Again, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19).

Prophecy: to Teach and Instruct

Prophecy was also recorded to teach and instruct. Is not every precious promise to which we cling and every reward to which we aspire a prophecy? Were it not for God's ability to foreknow and forearrange, how would we have any opportunity for salvation? How could we know what is ahead for the faithful, or what He can do for us if we do our part? Prophecy is one way God uses to teach us what we need to know—

Prophecy is a window through which we can peer into the future.

about Him, about His dependability, about His promises, and His ways of working both in the past and in the future.

Most prophecy was apparently given with a dual purpose behind it. God sent the prophets for the benefit of the prophet's immediate audience, to give them a window through which to look beyond the present moment, to give them a future and a hope. But generally there was also a long-range purpose, as God prepared a wealth of recorded knowledge for those who would not share the advantages of direct revelation. We might even say that this long-range purpose was primary, for those who would have no direct revelation would need a "thorough furnisher" to instruct and inspire them. In this sense, we might say that prophecies were more for us than for any other. Why? Because we walk by faith; and for this reason, God knew we would need strong faith-stimulators. And what is more sure than that which was told in advance and as surely happened?

There is always the interesting question of how much the prophets themselves understood of the prophecies they delivered. Wonderful indeed must have been the visions, the dreams, the revelations. They heard and they saw, far beyond the horizons of their time. But there are some indications that they did not always understand all that they saw. Often the vision was deep, dim and distant, so far did it transcend the capacities of human knowledge and understanding—and even the speakers themselves! Sometimes the full meaning was revealed years later, by another prophet—a fact which makes it seem unlikely that either the prophet or his contemporaries comprehended the whole.

It may be that the prophets understood, but not to the extent that they would have liked to understand. Not having the advantage of perspective, their vision was clouded at best. For example, we read where the prophet Zechariah relates his own experience, "And he [the angel] answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (Zech. 4:12-13). Daniel's experience was similar, perhaps more traumatic: "And

The accurate forecasting of future events is one of the strongest evidences of the existence of God.

I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end (or outcome) of these things?" The vision was glorious, but a full revealing of its meaning was apparently sealed up until "the time of the end" (v. 9), when "the wise shall understand" (v. 10). Meanwhile, Daniel was given the assurance that he would sleep, but that he would be resurrected and, in the words of the angel, "stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Dan 12:8-13). Is this not a prophecy also?

Many times the prophets "searched diligently," we are told, in an effort to fathom the depths of their own predictions. The apostle Peter reveals something of the workings of the prophetic ministry in these words: "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (I Pet. 1:10-12).

Prophecy: To Warn

God's prophecies are also invaluable as a warning, to move us to alertness and preparation. There is no escaping their warning message. We must be awake, watchful, expectant, prepared.

No doubt the parable of the Ten Virgins has warned believers in many generations. It was designed to stimulate believers in any age, for no people ever had longer to prepare than the length of their lifetime. But it has even greater meaning for those who will be living in the age when the Bridegroom shall return. Jesus may have spoken it most especially for us, who in the closing hours of the Day would need special warnings as we face special perils—perils of material goals and satisfactions, perils of self-indulgence, perils of "drowsiness" when we should be exceedingly watchful and alert (I Thess. 5:6).

We today need the warning of God's prophecies as they have never been needed before. There is warning upon warning that the end is near. There is warning upon warning in the fulfillment of prophecy we see all about us. How desperate our need to grasp the deeper meaning beneath it all, to build that strong, sustaining faith and never let it go.

We need to be stung with a new awareness of our duty so that we may be fully awake as the reality unfolds before us. On the strength of what has been fulfilled, we can cling with fresh certainty to that which is still only promise.

And do we realize the intrinsic value these prophecies hold for each of us personally? We are the blessed inheritors of the blessed hope. The prophecies are God-given foundation stones on which we can build a stronger faith at this time when faith is in desperate demand.

The possessing of any type of divine knowledge is a sacred responsibility not to be taken lightly. Many are the Scriptural warnings against "handling the word of God deceitfully," or against performing of the role of the false prophet bent on deceiving. There are also admonitions such as, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Pet. 4:11). and, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (Jer. 23:28). It is not for us to interpret. It is for us to humbly listen, accept what the message says, and repeat it in its original intent and meaning. If we attempt to interpret by the light of our own reasoning instead of by what else God has caused to be written, we run the risk of adding to or taking from the words of the "book of this prophecy," and become subject to the curses spoken (Rev. 22:18-19).

The Authority of the Prophet

Small wonder that prophets of God were either loved or hated. Their words carried the authority of God Himself. As the apostle Peter wrote, "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:20-21). Prophecy was and is in its every aspect divine.

The high authority of the prophets and their words is perhaps easier for us to accept than it was for men and women who knew the prophets personally as one of their own number. Those who knew Jesus as a child, a youth, a young adult could hardly think of Him as the Messiah. Those who knew Jeremiah as a lad could scarcely believe His words came from heaven. He was just too ordinary, one of them.

Yet it was true that the prophets' words were divine and bore the authority of God. One of the later of the Old Testament prophets, Zechariah, looked back upon the words of the former prophets as "the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets" and found them equally authoritative (Zech. 7:12). Jesus Himself acknowledged the authority of the prophets when "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27, 44).

In These Prophetic Times

We live in prophetic times. But we are not the first to have this experience. In several respects, the time just before the birth of our Lord was a time very similar to our own. There were taxes, legions of soldiers, and troubles of one sort and another which occupied the minds of the multitude. And there were prophecies—prophecies pending fulfillment—on the books and parchments in the synagogues where thoughtless masses thronged each Sabbath. Week after week the prophecies were read and discussed, and people dreamed of the golden age that would arrive with the Messiah. In fact, so well known was the prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah—and so hated was the government then in power—that talk of the event was almost a national pastime. But few, very few gave serious thought to the real meaning of the prophecies, and fewer still actively anticipated the very nearness of the Messiah's birth.

But just as it was prophesied, so it happened, when God's time was right. And today, as we approach the second advent of the Messiah, the majority of mankind are still oblivious. The prophecies stand, plainly recorded on the pages of Scripture; but few listen. It is all but impossible to attract the attention of the masses to reliable information about the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God. They will follow a fad, believe a lie, or worship a phantom; but reliable, factual information they will not accept. Some scoff, others simply ignore. But every day that passes brings the great event one day nearer, the words of the scoffers notwithstanding.

So it was in other prophetic times—before us. As the crowds gathered in Bethlehem of Judea under the Abib moon in ancient Israel, there were doubtless scoffers aplenty. We can almost hear a voice above the sound of hoofs and sandals on the gravel, saying, "Yes, we've heard about a Messiah coming to rule, but things are pretty much as they've always been. The Romans seem to have everything in hand." Never did they imagine

***Do we realize the intrinsic value
these prophecies hold for each of
us? We are the blessed inheritors
of the blessed hope.***

how significant the event that occurred right within the sound of their voices that night! A prophecy had been fulfilled, a prophecy that had been spoken some seven centuries before when "the word of the Lord . . . came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." So specific was the prophecy that it even pinpointed the place of the great event: "But thou, Bethlehem, Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel" (Mic. 5:2).

The coming of the Messiah was the undying hope of Israel, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite . . . and destroy. . . . Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion" (Num. 24:17, 19). Believing Israelites lived in abiding confidence that the "sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver" from his line until "Shiloh come," and "unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). It is interesting to note that many of these ancient prophecies combined forecasts of His first and second advents. The people of that time could not distinguish between the two; but the prophecy still served an important purpose even for them. Their expectation was aroused, and they looked forward eagerly.

We today, looking back upon the prophecies and seeing what has been fulfilled, can read the prophets with clearer understanding. The first part of Micah's forecast met its literal fulfillment; Jesus was born in Bethlehem Ephratah. But He was not at that time made "ruler in Israel"; the fulfillment of that part of the prophecy is yet future, when the earth shall be filled with "the glory of the Lord," a faithful Israel, a people glorifying His name (Num. 14:21; Isa. 46:13; 45:17-18). This is our lively expectation. In the words of the angel, spoken before His birth, "He shall be great, and . . . the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: . . . and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

(Continued on page 25)

Iron Shoes

(Continued from page 5)

The next promise, "The eternal God is thy refuge," states in beautiful poetry another great promise that we still have to lean upon if we wear our iron shoes like a Christian should. We need to know that we have a sanctuary into which we can go—that our strength may be renewed. There are times when life seems almost too much for us and we cannot keep our chins up. We are wounded and sick of heart. We need a refuge.

This may have been what Jesus was talking about when He said, "Go into thy closet and shut the door and stay alone with God." Certainly this was what Jesus did. He left His disciples and climbed up into the mountain and spent the night with His Father. As someone beautifully stated it, "He went into the silence with God."

The story is told of a fox hunt in Scotland. Two men on horseback had been enjoying for some time the music of a pack of fine foxhounds as they chased a wily red fox. On this particular occasion they had ridden across ahead of the dogs to the high rock cliff in which this old red fox had taken refuge several times before. They were eager for a glimpse of the red fox which their dogs couldn't catch. The men had concealed their horses in the brush and were sitting very quietly when around the edge of the high cliff on a shelf of rock the big red fox nonchalantly trotted to the mouth of the dark, deep den. He stopped a moment and lifted his head to listen. The dogs were a great distance away, so he casually sat down and began to smooth his fur and lick his paws. At intervals he would prick up his ears, listen intently, and then relax. Finally when the dogs got close, he trotted unhurriedly into the dark cavern, and presumably sat relaxed and unafraid as he listened to the furor of the hounds as they surrounded the entrance to his home. The moral of all this is, that when you have a safe refuge to which you can go, the hounds of life don't worry you much.

As Christians we have just such a rendezvous, a "strong tower" of safety into which we may run and be safe from the hounds that would plague us. There are the hounds of doubt, the hounds of despair, of discouragement. There are the hounds of self-love, of self-pity, of self-centeredness. We are hounded by a love of the world and worldliness, but none of these can deter us if the eternal God is our refuge, and our love of eternal life is all predominant.

Moreover, we have a hope built upon reality, upon

the irrevocable promises of the Eternal God, which can act as an anchor to our soul, both sure and steadfast. We have the very best of reasons to have faith in God and His promises. We can declare in the words of God's servant Joshua to Israel; "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass . . . , and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. 23:14). And He who was God in Joshua's day is just the same today.

To run into this strong tower is to surrender wholeheartedly to the demands of the God of heaven, not only to know His Word but to keep it. Merely to say "Lord, Lord," and not do the things He commands, will be of no avail.

Soon Christ will return from heaven to begin His great work of bringing peace on earth and good will to men, to establish a kingdom of justice and righteousness that will be worldwide, and eternally endure. This is the purpose for which He was born, and that purpose shall one day become a reality.

Some year will be the last year; some day will be the last day, and then our Lord will return from heaven to sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. God grant that as this day of probation draws to its close we may tread the last mile with firm and joyful step, knowing that we are leaving behind forever the iron shoes that we have worn during our day of development, and that from thence we can renew our strength, mount up with power as the eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint, enjoying heavenly bliss in Christ's glorious Kingdom here upon earth.

MM

*WISDOM ascribe, and might and praise
To God, who lengthens out our days,
Who spares us yet another year
And makes us see His goodness here:
O may we all the time redeem,
And henceforth live and die to Him.*

*Merciful God, How shall we raise,
Our hearts to yield Thee all Thy praise?
Our hearts shall beat for Thee alone:
Our lives shall make Thy goodness known;
Our souls and bodies shall be Thine,
A living sacrifice divine.*

And Still She Speaks

Extracts from sermons, discussions, talks, comments
by Rev. Maud Hembree (1853-1935).



The only way to be an overcomer is to avoid temptation, to realize the things we are most likely to yield to, and flee from that which would entice us.

If we are seeking our own honor, our own glory, trying to put ourselves ahead in any way, shape or form, we are not nearing the prize. We must put ourselves under, sink self out of sight and exalt God's Word, His truth.

The greatest warfare is with self, our old nature, the "old man" warring against the new. We must fight the old man, for he says, "Let me alone." The new man says, "Correct me, examine me and prove me, try my reins and my heart. Correct me now, do not wait until the day of judgment lest I be brought to nothing; do not leave me alone."

If we want to escape the destruction that came upon Sodom and Gomorrah, we need to make haste, not be a hypocrite, pretending to be something we are not. We need to make haste and be zealous in every good work, putting away all wrath, anger and malice. God has set a line and told us what to do.

The first thing we must do is to get our mind right, believe what God has taught and do what He has commanded. We cannot get our heart strong and have hope unless we get our mind right.

Are we obeying? are we heeding His commandments? are we loving Him with all our mind, might and strength, showing everything else is little worth compared with that? Is it more to us than houses, lands and everything else? To love God is to love His law.

Are we running after things that do not profit? Now watch, examine yourself, and do not run after this thing and that thing. Walk carefully, walk circumspectly, see that God is ruling what you want to do and where you want to go.

You have to get the thoughts of your mind cleaned up. When your mind gets clean, then you are safe. Work to bring your thoughts into subjection when you perceive they are wandering.

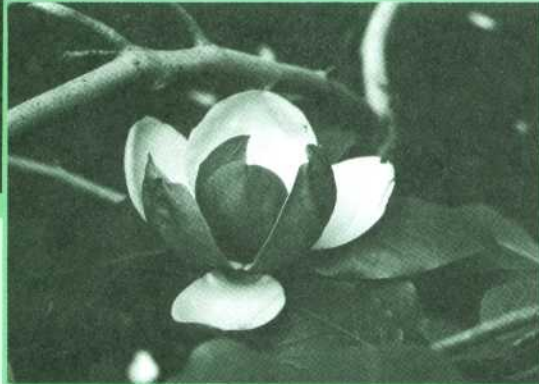
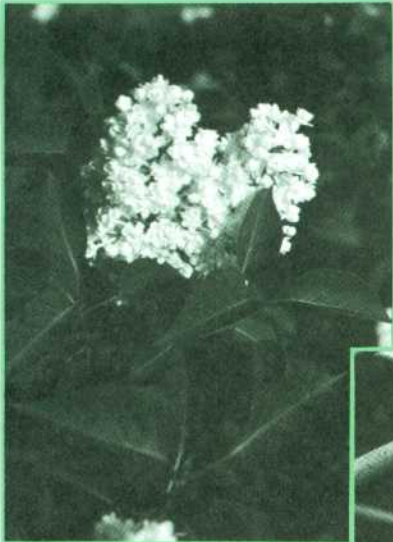
That is why it is so important to be careful what you read. What you read naturally stays in the mind. Get where the law of God rules your mind constantly, and you will be all right.

Oh, this truth should make such an impression on our hearts that we will use all our strength in the service of the Lord.

We should look back each day and see where our path has been, where we wandered in by and forbidden paths, when we were impatient, when pride ruled or governed our mind in some way. See what we have been thinking about and saying. We have to watch our feelings, see whether fleshly sympathy was governing us, where pride ruled.

Why do you not keep steadfast, firmly rooted and grounded in this truth? Why be warmed up one day and cold the next? Why warm up on Sunday perhaps, and on Monday lose your temper or do something else? Be steadfast, grow, be rooted and grounded in this wonderful truth of God.

We do not have to pay a lot of money to get clean in God's sight. We do not have to employ a lawyer. All we have to do on any given point is to wash and become clean on that point. If it is a dishonest act, make up your mind that you will never commit another dishonest act. God will give you more than one chance. MM.



Lines to Live By

Our Journey Pursue

*Come, let us anew
Our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still till the Master appear.*

*His adorable will
Let us gladly fulfill,
And our talents improve,
By the patience of hope and the labour of love.*

*Our life is a dream;
Our time as a stream
Glides swiftly away,
And the oncoming moment refuses to stay.*

*The arrow is flown
The moment is gone;
The millennial year
Rushes on to our view, and eternity's near.*

*O that each in the day
Of His coming may say
'I have fought my way through,
I have finished the work Thou didst give me to do!'*

*O that each from his Lord
May receive the glad word;
'Well and faithfully done:
Enter into My Joy, and sit down on My throne!'*

"Have You Grown?"

I STOOD the children, straight and tall,
By last year's marks upon the wall.
Another year! How soon they go,
And see how fast the children grow!
And then I thought of how God's Word
Says, "Grow in peace and in the Lord."
And as I knelt with God alone
He asked me gently, "Have you grown?"

"Can you look back and understand
How sun and rain came from My hand?
The trials which My Love decreed,
Did they not prove Me real indeed?
Or would you change a single hour
And miss the knowledge of My Power?
Do I seem nearer when you pray
Than just a year ago today?"

"And does your zeal for lost men die,
Or greater grow, as years go by?"
What deep and searching questions these!
They kept me long upon my knees;
Before His gaze my soul must own
How very little it had grown.
Dear Lord, this year may all men see
That I grow daily more like Thee.

Resolved . . .

*That no good shall keep me from the
better, no better shall keep me from the
best.*

*BREAK, new-born Year, on glad eyes break,
Melodious voices move!
On, rolling Time! thou canst not make
The Father cease to love.*

*The parted year had winged feet;
The Saviour still doth stay:
The New Year comes! but, Spirit sweet,
Thou goest not away.*

*Lord! from this year more service win,
More glory, more delight!
O make its hours less sad with sin,
Its days with Thee more bright!*

*O! golden then the hours must be;
The year must needs be sweet;
Yes, Lord, with happy melody
Thine opening grace we greet.*

FATHER of mercies! God of love!
Whose kind compassion still we prove,
Our praise accept, and bless us here,
As brought to this—another year.

We sing Thy goodness all divine,
Whose radiant beams around us shine,
'Tis through Thy goodness we appear
Preserved to this—another year.

Our souls, our all we here resign;
Make us, and keep us ever Thine;
And grant that in Thy love and fear
We may begin—another year.

Be this our sweet experience still,
To know and do Thy holy will;
Then shall our souls, with joy sincere,
Bless Thee for this—another year.

Points for the Month:

- Week 1:** Magnanimity is forgiving and forgetting.
- Week 2:** God is with those who patiently persevere.
- Week 3:** Resolved: That nothing inferior shall take command of me.
- Week 4:** Loyalty in every walk of life is a major factor in success.
- Week 5:** Making excuses is not our business; our business is to make good.

The Kingdom of Christ

in the PARABLES

JESUS did most of His teaching through parables. In fact, "with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mark 4:33-34). No doubt to many an uninstructed ear, these parables had little to offer in meaning. But they were such that every hearer could gain knowledge of profound spiritual truth in proportion to his own faith and perception.

Many of Jesus' parables give us insight into God's plans for the Kingdom that is to be established upon earth. What are the various aspects of the Kingdom they illustrate?

■ Sovereignty

By what authority is this Kingdom ordained and established? Just as every government action today must be permitted under law, so this greater government shall be duly authorized. A kingdom that shall extend from "sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" must have supreme authority vested in competent hands.

Who shall be supreme ruler? In parable Jesus pictures Himself in that vital role. In the **Parable of the Pounds** (Luke 19:12-27), He compares Himself to a nobleman going into a far country to receive a kingdom, and to return—a procedure familiar to His listeners, since any prospective ruler at that time had to present his credentials to the emperor in Rome, receive an appointment, and return to take over the government he had received. (Jesus always used true-to-life occurrences to impress His hearers.)

In this Parable of the Pounds, Jesus makes two other important points concerning His sovereignty:

1) *His sovereignty shall be challenged.* Jesus pictures those who hate His goodness, and despise His unrelenting justice. Rejecting His righteous authority they proclaim brazenly, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

2) *His sovereignty shall triumph.* Rebellious men cannot defeat the plan of God. Jesus pictures Himself as the victorious ruler, with His enemies, representative of those not submissive to His rule and hence not fit to live in His kingdom, slain before Him (Luke 19:27).

Jesus also pictures Himself as sovereign in the **Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen** (Matt. 21:33-42). Here He is represented by the son. The owner of the vineyard (God) first sends His servants (the prophets), and they are rejected. He then sends his own son (Jesus), who is likewise rejected.

In this parable, Jesus foretells His own death at the hands of wicked men: "And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (v. 39). But as in the Parable of the Pounds, wicked men cannot overthrow the plan of God. He whose right it is to reign shall take the throne as sovereign ruler and destroy those wicked men (v. 41).

■ The Kingdom—When?

Through parables Jesus many times emphasized the suddenness of His coming. "If the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up" (Matt. 24:43).

Again, "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch" (Mark 13:34).

Christ's coming will begin a series of events that will

result in the establishing of the Kingdom. He will come suddenly and at a time when men do not look for Him. How important, then, the lesson: "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44).

In the **Parable of the Pounds**, Jesus tried to clarify for His disciples a misconception with regard to the time of the establishing of His kingdom. In Luke 19:11, note that Jesus spoke this parable because "they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." He then pictured Himself as a man traveling into a "far country," indicating a great distance and a correspondingly long time.

In Matthew 25, in the parallel **Parable of the Talents**, Jesus says: "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them." His return would be a long time after He went away. He was informing His disciples that He was not yet ready to establish His kingdom.

■ The Value of the Hope of the Kingdom

In two short parables Jesus pictures the inestimable value of the Kingdom. First He compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a "treasure hid in a field," again to a choice pearl of great value, the "pearl of great price" (Matt. 13:45-46). Of such intrinsic value is the Kingdom that in each parable a man given the opportunity to obtain it is willing to sell all that he has to buy it. Eternal life is a prize of incomparable worth! abundant recompense for our selling out all to the Lord and serving Him with interest undivided.

■ Growth of the Kingdom

At its inception, the Kingdom will be small, like the little stone that strikes the image on the feet (Dan. 2:34); but its growth will be so rapid as to be phenomenal. Jesus described this growth in the **Parable of the Mustard Seed** (Matt. 13:31-32). A very small seed when planted, the mustard of Palestine grows rapidly into a large plant. (According to the Bible Dictionary, mustard, as used in this parable, was a plant common in Palestine which grows rapidly to a height of about 10-15 feet; the birds feed on its seeds.) "As a seed, mustard is smaller than any other; but when it has grown, it is bigger than any garden-plant" (Matt. 13:32, NEB).

The growth of the Kingdom is also compared to leaven in the **Parable of the Leaven** (Matt. 13:33). Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and mixed with half a hundredweight of flour till it was all leavened" (NEB). We are all familiar with the power of a comparatively small amount of yeast in dough. From the smallest beginning, the king-

dom will grow and expand until it fills the whole earth as the waters cover the sea.

Mark records yet another parable of Jesus, the **Parable of the Seed**, in which He describes the growth of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is likened to seed cast into the ground that grew while the man slept. The seed grew and matured and produced fruit, and "he knoweth not how" (Mark 4:26-29). This process is going on in our day. While the world sleeps, not knowing of the workings of God, the plan moves steadily forward. The seed or Word is being sown in a few good hearts. Fruit is being produced for the Kingdom that will be harvested at Christ's coming.

■ Inhabitants for the Kingdom

In many parables Jesus discussed the supreme qualities which every prospective inhabitant must possess. He also discussed the means by which they are planted, prepared, and selected.

■ Planting

God's plan is logical and reasonable. He does not send His kingdom down from heaven ready-made. Nor does He find the people for His kingdom automatically prepared. In His wisdom He allots time sufficient to accomplish each step of the plan.

One primary step is discussed by Jesus in the **Parable of the Sower**. No seed can grow until it is sown; and even then, its growth depends on the soil in which it takes root. The seed, or the Word of God (Luke 8:11), falls on four distinct types of ground: the roadside, among thorns, on stony ground, and in good soil. As Jesus explains the parable, the good seed of the Kingdom falls into various types of human hearts. Some (the stony ground) lack the element of depth. Some hearts have multiple interests, hence the word of God sown in such hearts is said to be choked by thorns, by the cares, pleasures and riches of this life. Other hearts are unstable, hence the fowls of doubt, or indecision, or adverse human persuasion easily pluck up the seed, giving it no chance to take root and grow. The good ground "are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (v. 15). God expects much seed to be wasted; nevertheless, some will produce a harvest for the Kingdom.

■ Selecting Inhabitants

In the **Parable of the Labourers** (Matt. 20:1-16), Jesus describes God's call to men to come into His vineyard and work. The first call was "early in the morning," representing God's first call to men on this

(Continued on page 21)

John

"I Was His Closest Friend"

MY name is John, known in the fourth Gospel as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." A common inference from this title is that I was by nature a lovable character. That, I must confess, was anything but true at the first. Just as people have often been too severe with Judas, judging him to have been a fiend from the beginning, so they have often been too kind to me, judging me to have been always a saint.

I was anything but a saint on the day that Jesus turned to me and my brother James and rebuked us saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56).

You remember the story. We were passing through Samaria on our way to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. We needed lodging for the night. Jesus had sent two of His

disciples ahead into a village in front of us to make arrangements. As you are aware, Jews and Samaritans held sharp differences of opinion on certain religious and racial matters and, in general, had no dealings with one another.

But our Master was different. He lived above prejudice and bigotry and taught us to do the same. Once before, in passing through Samaria, He had stopped beside a well to talk to a woman about the water of life. Not only she but many of the people from her village believed on Him and welcomed Him. So grateful were they for the message of salvation Jesus had brought them that they urged us to abide with them and we did for two days.

You will recall, also, that Jesus in telling a parable to illustrate what it means to be a genuine neighbor made the hero of His story a Samaritan. Also, once when He healed ten lepers, one of them—the only one who came back to thank Him—was a Samaritan.

The point is—the Samaritans had every reason to treat Jesus and us, His disciples, with courtesy and to

extend to us the overnight hospitality which we had asked. Imagine our astonishment, then, when the two disciples returned from the village with the report that the Samaritans would not receive us! In the case of my brother and me, it was more than astonishment. We were insulted. And stirred. "Lord," we said, "wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

Little wonder Jesus nicknamed us "Bōanērgēs," which means "Sons of Thunder." It was one of His ways of reminding me that before I could become a saint, the apostle of love, I had to bring under control my unruly temper!

Until I came to know Jesus, I was not unduly concerned about my temper. Like so many people in your age, I regarded it as a rather minor fault, regrettable, but sometimes an asset (!) and not a thing to be taken into serious account in evaluating character.

There is a story concerning a woman of your generation to the effect that she once said to her minister: "I must confess that I explode

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now and then, but I get over it quickly." To which he replied: "So does a machine-gun, but it blows everything to pieces." Oh, the incalculable harm that temper may do—even though it passes over quickly.

There is another story about one of your contemporaries, a young man, who was on a crowded streetcar one morning when he was accidentally shoved by an older man

come vexed when He saw wealthy men closing mortgages upon widow's houses and narrow men standing between Him and the healing of an afflicted man on the Sabbath, and pretentious hypocrites by their pride and pious platitudes keeping other people from hearing the gospel. Jesus' feelings, you see, were always social, not personal or selfish. He was never stirred by anger because of a wrong done to Him as

cover just what you are primarily interested in?

You live in a land of fabulous material abundance—automobiles, airplanes, exquisite clothes, luxurious homes, all kinds of sports and pleasures. These are the prizes that glitter before you, and are you saying, "They shall be mine; I shall pursue them"? Are the things of this world your goal and ambition?

You talk and pray about the Kingdom of God, but do the things of this world take too prominent a place in your desires? Are you seeking what this world can offer?

I speak with great feeling, because it was worldly ambition—not drunkenness, not impurity, but greed which brought about the downfall of Judas and which would have ruined me also, John the son of Zebedee, had I not been willing to lay my ambition at the feet of Him whom I had come to call Lord and Master.

Looking back upon that day, my brother and I asked for those two thrones and realizing how selfish and worldly our request was, I marvel at the patience of Jesus with us. Neither of us ever forgot the searching words with which He closed the interview: "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:43-45).

His meaning came home to me with even greater force a few days later. We were gathered in the Upper Room for the Passover Supper, when to our astonishment we saw Him coming in with a basin of water and a towel, as though He were a slave, to wash our feet.

He had every human reason to be irritated with us. We had often argued about who was or would be

I wonder if you have learned the secret of conquering your temper . . . ?

who stumbled. The youth flung an angry word at the man and moved on toward the back of the car.

Thirty minutes later, when the same young man entered a business office where he had made application for a position, he found himself in front of the desk of the man to whom he had spoken so rudely on the streetcar a short while before.

"Your qualifications are not bad," said the man behind the desk, "but in view of your lack of self-control on the streetcar this morning, they do not mean a thing to me." And the interview was over!

An unruly temper is not an insignificant fault. And in combination with jealousy, anger, pride, vindictiveness, cruelty, self-righteousness, touchiness, or sullenness, it is one of the worst of sins.

I am not forgetting that there is such a thing as justifiable indignation. Jesus could and did grow zealous against a public evil such as the legalized system of graft organized and operated by the priests and money changers in the court of the temple. He could and did be-

come vexed when He saw wealthy men closing mortgages upon widow's houses and narrow men standing between Him and the healing of an afflicted man on the Sabbath, and pretentious hypocrites by their pride and pious platitudes keeping other people from hearing the gospel. Jesus' feelings, you see, were always social, not personal or selfish. He was never stirred by anger because of a wrong done to Him as

an individual. In all such cases, and they were many, He practiced what He preached—going the second mile, turning the other cheek, doing to others as He would be done by. "When he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, [he] threatened not" (1 Pet. 2:23).

I wonder if you have learned the secret of conquering that temptation? I, who was at the beginning of my relationship with Jesus a "Son of Thunder," had to learn it, or I would never have been known as the disciple Jesus loved.

There is another story in the New Testament which reveals how far from saintliness I was at the beginning. It is the one which tells about the day my brother and I came to Jesus with the request, "grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory" (Mark 10:37). At that time I was selfish, greedy, worldly. I was like Judas—interested in Jesus primarily because of the personal glory I might have when He set up His kingdom.

Before you condemn me, will you not search your own heart to dis-

the greatest among us. None of us was interested in doing the work of a slave. And here was Jesus about to wash our feet! No group of men were ever more completely ashamed or rebuked than we. After Peter's feeble objection, we sat in silence, the silence of humiliation, as He knelt in front of each of us in turn, bathing our feet, then wiping them with the towel.

As He finished He said: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. . . . The servant is not greater than his Lord. . . . If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:15-17). In those unforgettable words was the sting of rebuke, but also the healing power of His patience and love.

Another thing that helped to change me was what He said to me at the time of His crucifixion. I was there, as you remember, when He was on the cross. A few others of His devoted disciples were there also, among them His mother—and He committed her to my care. "Woman," He said, addressing her and looking upon me, "behold thy son!" While to me He said, "Behold thy mother." It touched my heart to think He entrusted her to my care, and from that day forward I provided for her as if she had been my own mother.

My ambition He did not take away, but He transformed it. He transfused it, redirected it—away from self toward service, away from my desires and toward His purpose. As you know, the eagle was my symbol. I wanted to fly high. The Master did not turn me into a barnyard fowl; He did not even clip my wings; He only showed me in what direction to fly!

So, as you open the pages of the Book of the Acts, you find that instead of calling down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, as I

once wanted to do, I am preaching to them, laying my hands upon them, and praying that they too may receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15).

Instead of running away from danger or grasping after my own glory, I, with Simon Peter, am standing face to face with the same Council which had condemned Christ to death, and replying to their command not to speak at all

cannot wish yourself good—you must *make* yourself good. The plan I recommend is the same urged by another first century Christian who wrote: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:1-2).

That was my secret, the secret I was trying to make clear as I penned the words of Jesus' last sermon, in the 15th chapter of my Gospel, that sermon in which He

You cannot wish yourself good—you must MAKE yourself good.

or teach in the name of Jesus, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

I had the opportunity of being close to Christ. I was one of three with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, also one of the same three who waited close by while He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was I who leaned upon His bosom at the Last Supper. To my shame, I fled when He was arrested, but I quickly recovered and found my way into the high priest's house where I stood by Him at His trial. I was at the cross when He died. Over against my faults and sins, this was my redeeming trait and also the secret of my growth in grace and transformation in character—I lived in intimate fellowship with Him. Day after day and hour after hour, I stayed close beside and copied His example.

That is still the secret of transformation into His likeness. You

reminds you that the Christian life at its best is as if Christ were the vine and you the branches; that if you abide in Him and allow Him to abide in you as the branch abides in the vine, then you will naturally, inevitably, bear much fruit. So shall you be truly His disciples. MM

Meditation

*Let me be a little kinder,
Let me be a little blinder
To the faults of those about me;
Let me praise a little more;
Let me be, when I am weary,
Just a little bit more cheery;
Let me serve a little better
Those that I am striving for.
Let me be a little braver
When temptation bids me waver;
Let me strive a little harder
To be all that I should be;
Let me be a little meeker
With the brother that is weaker;
Let me think more of my neighbor
And a little less of me.*

—Selected

The Kingdom of Christ in the Parables

(Continued from page 17)

planet. The call is repeated at the third, sixth and ninth hours, representing His entreaties to men at various times during the six-thousand-year day of man's rule upon earth. The call for workers in the eleventh hour represents God's call to those living in our own age, the eleventh hour being very near the end of the Day of salvation. To all who would work in His vineyard He promised, "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." In the end, all received a "penny," representative of the reward of eternal life.

■ Separation

In several parables Jesus pictures the separating of faithful from unfaithful servants for His kingdom. The **Parable of the Wheat and the Tares** teaches us that both righteous and wicked shall grow together in the field of the Lord until the time of the harvest, when the Judgment of God will separate them (Matt. 13:24-30, 38-40). Jesus explains it so plainly that there can be no misunderstanding of the lesson: both faithful and unfaithful are to inhabit the earth until the time of separation.

The separation of the righteous from the wicked is also taught in the **Parable of the Drag-net**. The Kingdom of Heaven is likened "unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." In similar manner shall the righteous be separated from the wicked.

Jesus pictures this same separation in Matt. 25:31-32, as the dividing of sheep from goats. The sheep (faithful servants) He places on His right hand, the goats (unfaithful servants) on the left. Those on the right hand are invited, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you" (vs. 33-34).

■ The Necessity of Preparedness

Knowing that the lesson of being ready to meet the King at the time of His arrival could not be overemphasized, Jesus gave several parables on this vital subject. In the **Parable of the Ten Virgins** (Matt. 25:1-13), five are represented as wise and five as foolish. Christ is the bridegroom. The five wise virgins who took oil in their lamps represent the faithful who are prepared to last through the long time of waiting with an ample supply of faith. The five foolish virgins, not prepared to keep their lamps burning until the arrival of the Bridegroom, go to buy oil and upon returning find themselves forever shut out of the Kingdom.

In the **Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son** (Matt. 22:1-14), Jesus taught a similar lesson. Here the wedding guests "both bad and good" (v. 10) are representative of the two classes of God's servants, faithful and unfaithful, who will be present when the king (Christ) arrives. The man without a wedding garment (the robe of righteousness—see Isa. 61:10; Rev. 19:8) represents the unfaithful who are to be cast out (v. 13)—rejected because they were not prepared. Note that the man without the wedding garment was "speechless"—he had no excuse to offer for not being ready, only his own negligence, which he was not ready to admit. His end is destruction, or, as in the parable, to be "cast into outer darkness."

ABIB MEANS . . .

"month of green ears," "spring or sprouting month." God commanded Moses to "observe the month Abib" (Deut 16:1; Ex. 12:2; 13:4) in remembrance of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt.

Abib 1 begins this year on Sunday evening, April 1, and continues through Monday, April 2, Bible time being measured from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). It was the pattern of the Hebrew people to begin the new year with the first occurrence of the new moon after the Spring Equinox. Accordingly, Abib First is the first day of the sacred New Year, and the day on which we observe the anniversary of our Saviour's birth.

Abib 13 the anniversary of the night when Jesus partook of the Last Supper with His disciples before He suffered. It falls this year on the evening of April 13. At this time we partake of the emblems (unleavened bread and grape juice) in obedience to the command, "This do in remembrance of me." It is a sacred rite, symbolic of the renewal our covenant relationship with God, the bread representing the knowledge of the law of God, and the juice the wholehearted application of that knowledge to our daily lives, the offering of ourselves in total dedication to do the will of God.

Abib 15 is the anniversary of the Resurrection of Christ, occurring this year on the morning of April 16. In ancient Israel, this was the day of the waving of the first sheaf of the harvest before the Lord. On this morning, Christ the firstfruits from death rose triumphant over the grave. On this morning, after the crucifixion, even "very early in the morning," certain women found their way to the tomb. Finding it empty, they heard those immortal words that still stimulate us today: "He is not here, for he is risen! Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Pentecost, which came fifty days after the waving of the first sheaf offering, falls this year on June 4.

Christ's Birth—Spring or Fall?

WHEN was Christ born? Spring, fall or winter? If we were to judge by the opinion of the majority, we would say December 25. But when the facts are considered fairly, December 25 is the most unlikely time for His birth. Bible and history scholars agree that Christ could not have been born at that time; there is too much evidence to the contrary. And even among the majority who celebrate Christ's birth on December 25 are those who acknowledge that the date is wrong.

If not December 25, when?

We are confident from the evidence of both the Bible and history that Jesus was born in the spring. But some religious groups favor a fall date. In fact some go so far as to state positively that He was born in the fall.

Why celebrate Christ's birth date at all? There is no evidence to indicate that the apostles or the early church celebrated the date in any manner. But could it in any way be wrong to honor one who is to be our Saviour and the eternal King of the whole earth? God never commanded it, you say. No, but neither did He ever condemn it. The law of Moses commanded the observance of numerous feasts and festivals commemorating certain seasons and some special events.

From the time the Israelites left Egypt they were commanded to remember the day of their departure. This was the Passover Feast, and it was to be a memorial

throughout all their generations. They were also commanded to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began with the end of barley harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles, a fall festival of thanksgiving for an abundant harvest (Lev. 23:6-10; 34-39).

Christ's birth was an event fully as significant as any of the feasts God commanded Israel to celebrate each year. His birth and His purpose had been foretold for centuries. Faithful Israelites had lived and died waiting for the fulfillment of the prophecy. A faithful Simeon, holding fast to faith, blessed God for the event when it came, and Anna the prophetess likewise gave thanks unto the Lord for His birth, giving assurance "to all that looked for redemption in Israel."

It is also a Bible command to render "honour to whom honour is due." A statement by Christ Himself also supports this position. Answering the Jews who had criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus said He did only those things which He received of His Father, and "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him" (John 5:19-23). By honoring Christ we are also honoring His Father.

Why not honor His birth as nearly all Christendom does on December 25? We readily admit that the date of Christ's birth is not a matter of

record, but of all possible dates this is the most unlikely. The date is admittedly of pagan origin, and present day celebrations incorporate a considerable amount of paganism. Can we imagine that Christ would feel honored to have His birth celebrated on a pagan feast day?

There is ample evidence that winter was not the season of Christ's birth. Luke relates how that flocks of sheep were in the pastures at the time, and flocks of sheep were never in the open fields in December. We read that "there were . . . shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" when the angel of the Lord appeared to them to announce the birth of Jesus. This fact alone rules out the date of December 25. Besides, history shows beyond doubt that December 25 was the date of a pagan festival, when Rome celebrated the birthday of Mithras, the sun god, centuries before Jesus was born.

The date was also midway in the celebration of the winter solstice, the Saturnalia. It is claimed that Christ's birth was set on this date originally so that the Christians could celebrate without fear of persecution from the pagans who were busy with their own celebration, but this is questionable, since the Christians refused to take part in any pagan festival, and it is to be questioned if they would have used the same date. Christ's birth was not

celebrated until some two hundred years after the event, and the celebration was supposedly "Christianized" when the date was chosen for the festival of Christ's birth.

How do you "Christianize" a pagan festival? You don't. The first settlers in America refused to have anything to do with such a holiday. When the date was first celebrated in America, it was kept as a holy day, but with the passing of years it has degenerated until it has become largely a commercialized shopping spree that is used to gauge the health of the American economy. Some children grow up knowing only the Santa Claus aspect of Christmas, having received no religious instruction about the Christ who is supposedly being honored. But where is the honor? The wise men brought their gifts to the Christ Child; in our day the gifts are for everyone else, Christ is almost forgotten.

If Christ was not born December 25, was He born earlier in the fall? Evidence to support a fall date is flimsy at best. Much of it rests on the courses of the priest who served on a regular basis in the temple. Luke informs us that "in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia" was serving in the temple at that time according to his order of service. It was at this time that the angel appeared to him to inform him that his wife, Elisabeth would have a son in her old age. It is a well-known fact that John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus, hence if we could establish the date of his birth we could date the birth of Jesus from it.

Those who attempt to do this conclude that Jesus was born in the fall by establishing the "course of Abia" at the first week of June. Calculating the exact time for the various courses of the priests at

Jerusalem nearly two thousand years later is difficult at best, and any date arrived at is only arbitrary and cannot possibly be claimed as accurate.

Those who opt for the fall date of Jesus' birth are assuming that the order of the courses of the priests were kept exactly according to the arrangements made by King David a thousand years earlier. But there is no proof whatever that this is true. In fact, there is considerable evidence to show that the priestly services did change before Christ. By this time the priesthood had degenerated into an office that could be purchased from corrupt Roman governors who ignored the required qualifications for priests. Priests who obtained their office by such means disrupted the cycle, hence there is no proof that Zacharias, a righteous priest, was serving at the exact time of the course as it had been set up by David a thousand years earlier.

A footnote in the Berkeley Bible bears out this conclusion, indicating that changes were made: "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 Chron. 24:4, footnote.) No, there is no way that we can say that Zacharias worked one particular week in the month of June!

The Biblical narrative points to the holy days of the *first* month of the Jewish calendar, not the seventh, that brought Mary to Jerusalem with Joseph. And Mary and Joseph were at Bethlehem—not *Jerusalem*—when Jesus was born. Why?

Mary did not have to accompany her husband for an "enrollment" as ordered by Caesar Augustus. Joseph alone could have taken care of it. There was a deeper reason for Mary's presence.

Each month of the year according to the Hebrew calendar began with a new moon and continued until the next new moon. Abib, the first month of the Jewish sacred year, would have been an ideal time for the governor to call for an enrollment, and a tax. Such an enrollment or taxation is highly unlikely in the fall and winter months because of the heavy rains at that season. The month Abib, or Nisan is defined in the Hebrew Lexicon as "the month of green ears, beginning with the new moon of April or . . . March"; the first month of the Hebrew year. Loyal Jews were duty bound to "observe the month Abib" (Deut. 16:1), to keep the New Moon feast. According to custom, Bethlehem was the town where the family of David assembled to carry out this command. The reason that there was no room at the inn, and the reason Mary was there was because of the many who came to Bethlehem, not for the taxation, but for the New Moon Feast.

The Psalmist makes mention of this important feast: "Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob" (81:3-4). Nowhere in the Scriptures can be found any other Jewish custom or sacred law which would draw the household of David to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was Jesus' birthplace, and we believe He was born during the New Moon feast.

Some years after the birth of Jesus, the Bible states in Luke 2:41, that Joseph and Mary went up to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. This shows that His

parents had been accustomed to attending the yearly feasts.

The fact that the tabernacle was set up on the first day of Abib is further evidence to support the thought that Jesus was born on that date. Jesus being the reality of which the tabernacle was a type, how fitting that God arranged His

birth to be on that important date!

To establish the date of the beginning of Abib (or Nisan) and the beginning of the Bible New Year, we need but to ascertain the date of the first new moon after the vernal equinox. This year April 1, at evening, is the beginning of the New Year. On that day we, the members

of the Megiddo Church, pay homage to Christ and mark the New Year with appropriate special services of song and words in remembrance of Christ and the special place He fills in God's plan. We praise God for His birth, His life and His words, and rejoice in the hope of His coming. MM

■ QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ■

• THE SUN DIAL OF AHAZ: Was It Literal?

Bible students and even scientists who study the earth and the moon often maintain that in the days of King Hezekiah the literal sun went backward at the command of the Lord. They base their conclusion on the words of Isaiah 38:8.

It is our conviction that the events recorded in the 38th chapter of Isaiah have no reference to the literal sun. In literature, the "sun" is commonly used in a figurative sense. Could this not be the case in the book of Isaiah? As the Kaiser of Germany once said, "The powerful German Army guarantees the peace of Europe; we sail under the star of commerce, we demand our place in the sun." He had no reference to a literal star or to the physical sun.

In Amos 8:8-10, speaking of the judgments of God, we read: "Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood. . . . And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: . . . and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day."

The literal sun never set at noon; but the "sun" of man's rule shall set in that coming day of the judgments of God when Christ, the "Sun of righteousness" of Mal. 4:2, arises as King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9). Many nations may sail under the "star of commerce" now, but the day cometh when "no man buyeth her merchandise any more."

In the 15th chapter of Jeremiah, the judgments of the Lord are spoken of in a similar, figurative sense (v. 9):

"She that hath borne seven languisheth . . . her sun is gone down while it was yet day." When nations fall, their sun is said to have gone down. When we read in Gen. 37:9 of Joseph's dream that "the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to him" we do not for a moment imagine that the literal sun, moon and stars bowed to him. His father, Jacob, understood for he said: "Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee?"

In First Kings 11, we learn that because Solomon had become a wicked king the Lord purposed to take from him the ten tribes. In verses 35-36 the Prophet said to Jeroboam, "I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem."

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a very wicked king in Israel; and at his death Hezekiah succeeded to the throne. Hezekiah now became the light, the sun, in the kingly line of Ahaz. We read later that "Hezekiah was sick unto death." And Isaiah came unto him and said: "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live." At this word the king wept and prayed to the Lord that his life might be spared. God had mercy on him and sent Isaiah to him with these comforting words: "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years."

What, then, of the shadow on the sundial or "steps" of Ahaz, which the Lord caused to go backward?

The addition of days to Hezekiah's life was a literal

event; and a literal event would need not a literal "sign." The sign of the sun moving backward is wholly figurative, a symbolic expression of the event in which Hezekiah is the "sun" which would have set in the natural course of events, just as the sun of his father Ahaz had set before him.

A "shadow" is proper representation of the brevity of man's days. Is not the life of every man, in the eyes of the Lord, a "shadow," a "vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14)? The lexicon says of the meaning of "shadow": "All my members are like a shadow; scarce a shadow of my body remains. Also used of anything fleeting and transient, as in Job 8:9, 'Our days upon earth are a shadow'; Ps. 144:4, 'His days are as a shadow that passeth away.'"

The "sign" of the return of the declining sun (of Hezekiah's reign) has an obvious appropriateness to the addition of years to the declining life of a man; and the "ten degrees" or "ten steps" added are a figure of the added time (fifteen years). By extending his life, God "turned back" the "shadow" and lengthened Hezekiah's brief mortal span.

God promised to heal him of his deadly malady and deliver him from the Assyrians, and this should be a sign unto him from the Lord. The definition of the word "sign" in the Hebrew is: "The sign of anything which cannot of itself be seen; hence a miracle, as a sign of divine power." The addition of fifteen years to Hezekiah's life was a miracle, a visible demonstration of divine power. As we read in II Chronicles 32:24, "In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord . . . and he gave him a sign," or, as it reads in the margin, "wrought a miracle for him." Hezekiah was healed and delivered; and this was evidence that the Lord would add the fifteen years to his life.

When Isaiah told Hezekiah, "Thou shalt die," in his mind his life ended. He knew that God meant what He said, as he reveals in Isaiah 38:10, "I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years." He knew that God had the power to determine the end of his life, if God chose to do so. And any time beyond that cutting off point—such as the fifteen years God allotted—was for him an extension.

The Prophet was not speaking of the literal sun nor of a literal dial, nor of literal shadows. Hezekiah's life, compared to a shadow, was to have fifteen additional years, and then the sun in his kingly line would set.

There is no need to think that the literal sun moved backward for the event. MM

Prophecy Is for US!

(Continued from page 11)

Some Abib will mark the beginning of the most important year in history, the year which will bring the end of all things past and the opening to all things future. Some New Year we will welcome the beginning of the year in which Jesus will return. We may be welcoming that year right now. Never before has there been so much evidence pointing to the end of the age. Never before has there been more to support our confidence that we are nearing the end. As one believer has said, "Christians never had more reasons to believe that the coming of Christ could occur any day than they have in the present prophetic crisis."

One of these days the dramatic event will occur. The forecasts for the end time all fulfilled, the prophet Elijah will arrive as the herald of the great event and then—suddenly—the heavens will open and out of the azure blue will descend the King with all His retinue of shining angels. Then will follow the Judgment, the Coronation, the Battle of Armageddon, the Millennium, and, after all, Eternity! Yes, Eternity, with everlasting expansion, everlasting happiness, everlasting joy, everlasting life. All this—and more—is the promise of our God. It is enough to overwhelm the human mind!

Incredible as it all may seem during these ordinary days, it shall come to pass—and *right here in our world!* The ground on which we now stand will be under the jurisdiction of the new Kingdom; so will the land that is now under the dominion of China, Egypt, Germany, Spain and every other principality and power in the world. "All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." All people everywhere shall bow before the new King, "all nations shall serve him."

Are we not the most privileged of any people who ever lived? The prophets saw it long ago. But we who live so near, do we not see it clearer, clearer now? In the words of the song: "They could see it dimly, just a far-off distant view; dimly, yet distinctly." We today, with the advantages of the centuries between, and the whole of the Scriptures in our possession, can truly see it "clearer, clearer now."

Do we appreciate the high and holy privilege that is ours? And what is our own personal relationship to the prophecies? What should be their impact on your life and mine? We see with other eyes. We hear with other ears. We have heard whisperings from eternity, and life can never be the same again.

Our Lord may not come in this year that is now dawning. On the other hand—*He may!* MM

What A Gathering!

I like to read some portion of my Bible daily. I was thinking of Brother Nichols being given a Bible at 13 years of age. And how he treasured it. We are guided by it daily, if we allow it to be thus. Many call it old-fashioned, outdated, even "old-boot." But we owe our future life to it, if it is allowed to govern our actions, thoughts and motives.

We can thank God for the beauty and light shed on us by His Word, and for the friendship given by those of like precious faith, for Brother Flowerday, fatherlike, anxious for each one to make the grade—a real stimulus in these trying days. I am enjoying the life history and photographs of Brother Nichols in the *Message*. What an example to follow, firmly founded on a Rock, no stormy wind can shake. We can gain security if anchored firmly to the Rock, keeping in the channel.

The many cassette sermons give scope for upbuilding faith and helping us to rejoice always.

We need have no fear of the slough of despondency if we keep the Captain's orders. Straight on. What a gathering it will be. I am working hard to be there, keeping my voice in tune now by singing His praises every day. I visualize it often, knowing that Day will come. Albeit, I have much to do yet in order to be ready. I am watching, working and praying to be up and ready, for it will not delay.

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult: Of our life's wild restless sea: Day by day, His sweet voice soundeth: Saying, Christian, Follow Me. As of Old, Apostles heard it: By the Galilean Lake: Turned from home and toil and kindred: Leaving all for His dear sake.

*Now as we part, Dear Saviour,
Do Thou surround each one
With halo of Thy glory
As fits the setting sun:
Give us new hearts, right spirits,
That all the world may see
That we have been with Jesus,
That we have learned of Thee.*

*The pretty flowers are nodding
Their heads before the breeze,
The happy birds are singing
Glad anthems in the trees:
And we too must be voicing
Our heartfelt love and praise
And join the great rejoicing:
In pleasant springtime days.*

England

N. T.

Looking Ahead

Our life is an open book. I pray that I can so live that when the Book of Life is opened, I can hear God say, "Enter into the joys of thy Lord."

We know not what the year may bring, but we know we can trust all to our Heavenly Father's care. For He knoweth our every need, and He so abundantly giveth us of every good thing.

King David was beset with so many troubles, yet he had faith in the Lord and His goodness. He knew what it was to miserably fail to do what was right, but he confessed his sin and received God's forgiveness, and his voice was raised in praise. We can take courage from the experiences of the saints who have gone before.

How sad that King Solomon chose the downward way. He started out so well. It behooves us to take heed that the things of this world do not hold more than their rightful share of our interests. We must have the principle of Truth always springing up in us.

Arizona

D. F.

Gleaning

We must forgive to be forgiven. And we should truly thank God for His dear Son, who always did the Father's will. We should do likewise, but we stumble and have to get up and strive to do better.

We all have our trials, sorrows, and temptations, but we have learned that it is how we face up to all these that counts the most. We must deny self, take up our cross daily and follow in Jesus' footsteps.

I enjoy the cassette tapes and I try to glean the many lessons and points in them. We can't have all, just a choice. And may we make it the best choice—to strive to conquer old self and walk in the strait and narrow way.

South Carolina

E. C.

Another Year

Through the mercy and longsuffering of God, we are granted another year. The door to the past year closes behind us. Regrets, bitterness, folly and errors we must leave behind and start afresh.

We hold in our hand the key to a treasure chamber in God's Holy Word. We may enter that treasure chamber and draw from it true words to guide and direct our footsteps and beautiful thoughts with which to furnish our minds.

We have had every opportunity for richest growth and advancement. All our deeds, all our thoughts, and the imaginations of our heart are the solid materials with which our characters are built. Let us from the rich material of time and opportunity furnish our room of character with good habits and good deeds and be ready when Jesus comes.

Georgia

S. J.

Start Afresh

Now is an appropriate time to start afresh, casting off all the deeds of the lower nature and begin new and clean. We are thankful for the Providential Hand which has brought us safely to this time of beginning again.

*May we then welcome another year,
Redeem what He gives in godly fear;
Be a true Christian each day as it goes,
It's the one happy life; we reap as we sow.*

Now as we stand at the portals of another year, may we resolve with a firm determination to become more zealous in every good work and more willing to give up those things that are unholy and unChristlike.

It is a new opportunity to renew our efforts towards self-improvement; a deeper examination of self that we may uncover and bring to light those failings we yet have not faced up to.

May we rededicate ourselves to the task of living the higher life; living in that hope that will triumph; in which we may rejoice "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

*It matters not for us to know
What this New Year may yet bestow,
'Tis ours to do, and live, and trust
What God and duty ask of us.*

May the coming days of the year bring the "peace that passeth understanding" which comes only to those who love His Law.

Missouri

H. W.

Before Too Late

I hope that we can live this coming year better one day at a time. We never know; we might not have many days left. Let us strive to do the righteous things in God's sight before it is too late.

Texas

B. N.

Keeping Our Vow

As we renew our vows to crucify the flesh and bring every thought into subjection, let us render ourselves wholly unto God which is our reasonable sacrifice. We have come out of the tomb of darkness to partake of newness of life by obeying Him.

If we have not kept our vows and

readied ourselves for Elijah's coming, we will not welcome the dawning of that Great Day. We must not be like Lot's wife and linger along the way, when we have been warned so often to "hasten, hasten, the night cometh when no man can work."

Let us take it to heart and run in earnest this race that is set before us.

Ohio

M. W.

■ FINALLY, BRETHREN

The Challenge of the New

LITTLE Johnnie begs for a new toy, promising "Then I'll be a good boy." The teenager blames his poor performance on a "poor" teacher. "Give me a new teacher, and then I'll do better." The man whose business is not doing well blames circumstances. "Give us a new year, and we'll show what we can do." There is some mysterious magic in newness, as if the new would automatically take care of the old problems.

There is something of the same aura about the new year, as though we feel it is almost impossible *not* to do better with this new beginning.

What about *this* new year? And our expectations for it? Yes, we have resolved that we will do better. Better than ever before. But do we realize that a new year does not make the new man? It is the new man that makes the new year. There is a new leaf in the calendar—that is easy! But the new leaf is not in our character until we place it there.

Making new resolutions is entirely different from carrying them out. The basis of the problem is simple. Changing human character for the better is not a matter of making new things out of nothing; it means making new things *out of the old*. God gives us each morning a new day, and we have the opportunity to make it *all new*, to leave behind our old sinful ways and enjoy a totally new day. The problem is that we have to make that new day not out of anything new but out of what we already have—which means that very, very easily we can come up with the same old product! Old habits are not easily broken. Old ways are not easily changed. Old thoughts are not easily disposed of.

Yet this is our assignment, to make ourselves new using the raw material of what we already are. We must deal with ourselves beginning where we are and as we are, and work toward newness.

Here is a challenge. Here is what the new year is all about. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." New, through and through.

It is not automatic, but it is possible.

May God grant us the strength and the endurance to see it through to a successful conclusion.

MM

result in the establishing of the Kingdom. He will come suddenly and at a time when men do not look for Him. How important, then, the lesson: "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44).

In the **Parable of the Pounds**, Jesus tried to clarify for His disciples a misconception with regard to the time of the establishing of His kingdom. In Luke 19:11, note that Jesus spoke this parable because "they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." He then pictured Himself as a man traveling into a "far country," indicating a great distance and a correspondingly long time.

In Matthew 25, in the parallel **Parable of the Talents**, Jesus says: "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them." His return would be a long time after He went away. He was informing His disciples that He was not yet ready to establish His kingdom.

■ The Value of the Hope of the Kingdom

In two short parables Jesus pictures the inestimable value of the Kingdom. First He compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a "treasure hid in a field," again to a choice pearl of great value, the "pearl of great price" (Matt. 13:45-46). Of such intrinsic value is the Kingdom that in each parable a man given the opportunity to obtain it is willing to sell all that he has to buy it. Eternal life is a prize of incomparable worth! abundant recompense for our selling out all to the Lord and serving Him with interest undivided.

■ Growth of the Kingdom

At its inception, the Kingdom will be small, like the little stone that strikes the image on the feet (Dan. 2:34); but its growth will be so rapid as to be phenomenal. Jesus described this growth in the **Parable of the Mustard Seed** (Matt. 13:31-32). A very small seed when planted, the mustard of Palestine grows rapidly into a large plant. (According to the Bible Dictionary, mustard, as used in this parable, was a plant common in Palestine which grows rapidly to a height of about 10-15 feet; the birds feed on its seeds.) "As a seed, mustard is smaller than any other; but when it has grown, it is bigger than any garden-plant" (Matt. 13:32, NEB).

The growth of the Kingdom is also compared to leaven in the **Parable of the Leaven** (Matt. 13:33). Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and mixed with half a hundredweight of flour till it was all leavened" (NEB). We are all familiar with the power of a comparatively small amount of yeast in dough. From the smallest beginning, the king-

dom will grow and expand until it fills the whole earth as the waters cover the sea.

Mark records yet another parable of Jesus, the **Parable of the Seed**, in which He describes the growth of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is likened to seed cast into the ground that grew while the man slept. The seed grew and matured and produced fruit, and "he knoweth not how" (Mark 4:26-29). This process is going on in our day. While the world sleeps, not knowing of the workings of God, the plan moves steadily forward. The seed or Word is being sown in a few good hearts. Fruit is being produced for the Kingdom that will be harvested at Christ's coming.

■ Inhabitants for the Kingdom

In many parables Jesus discussed the supreme qualities which every prospective inhabitant must possess. He also discussed the means by which they are planted, prepared, and selected.

■ Planting

God's plan is logical and reasonable. He does not send His kingdom down from heaven ready-made. Nor does He find the people for His kingdom automatically prepared. In His wisdom He allots time sufficient to accomplish each step of the plan.

One primary step is discussed by Jesus in the **Parable of the Sower**. No seed can grow until it is sown; and even then, its growth depends on the soil in which it takes root. The seed, or the Word of God (Luke 8:11), falls on four distinct types of ground: the roadside, among thorns, on stony ground, and in good soil. As Jesus explains the parable, the good seed of the Kingdom falls into various types of human hearts. Some (the stony ground) lack the element of depth. Some hearts have multiple interests, hence the word of God sown in such hearts is said to be choked by thorns, by the cares, pleasures and riches of this life. Other hearts are unstable, hence the fowls of doubt, or indecision, or adverse human persuasion easily pluck up the seed, giving it no chance to take root and grow. The good ground "are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (v. 15). God expects much seed to be wasted; nevertheless, some will produce a harvest for the Kingdom.

■ Selecting Inhabitants

In the **Parable of the Labourers** (Matt. 20:1-16), Jesus describes God's call to men to come into His vineyard and work. The first call was "early in the morning," representing God's first call to men on this
(Continued on page 21)

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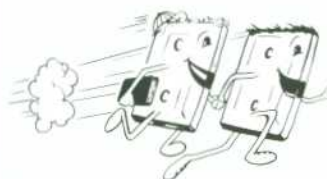
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