

Megiddo Message



*What is
God
doing?*

Vol. 84, No. 4
April, 1997

NO APOLOGIES, PLEASE!

DID you ever hear a doctor apologize for a great cure which had been discovered? or a mechanic apologize for finding the remedy for the car that would not start? Did you ever hear of a general who apologized for designing the strategy that won the battle? or of an elected political officer who apologized for the fact that he was elected? or of a winner of a race who apologized for winning? Of course not! Then why is it that we are sometimes tempted to apologize for the high standard we uphold, or for the things we cannot do as Christians, as though we were doing something that needed apology, something we were ashamed of?

What was the attitude of Peter and John when they were asked to keep silent about the things that they had seen and heard? *"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).

Should we apologize when we must stand by our convictions and say "no" to another's request for us to do something questionable? Should the young girl apologize for refusing to lower herself to the loose morals of the present-day Sodom? Should the young man feel "sorry" when he refuses the cup that turns thousands of men and women each year into dejected, hopeless alcoholics? Should the man in business apologize for refusing to be party to a shady deal or questionable activity?

It is true that others can do things which we as committed servants of Christ cannot. Others are free to spend their time as they like. We cannot. We have duties to perform—to our brethren in the faith, to ourselves for our own spiritual enrichment, and to our God. So there are many activities and interests we must decline.

It is true that others can say

anything that comes into their minds, which they feel is in their best interest to express. We cannot. Our every word must pass those three exacting tests: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it to the glory of God? We are restricted in our conversation.

It is true that others may pursue any pleasure, diversion or entertainment that appeals to their tastes to the limit of their conscience. We cannot. They may go anywhere they wish, again limited only by conscience, while we cannot.

But have we any right to apologize for these restrictions? Should we feel any shame that we cannot do everything we might otherwise say, or go anywhere we might be invited to go? Should we ever be ashamed to say "no" to that which we are sure will not glorify God or promote the spiritual wellbeing of ourselves or others?

The words of our Master come echoing down even to us: *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels"* (Mark 8:38).

When we are in the wrong, we should feel shame. But when we are standing by our Christian convictions, when we are doing that which will enable us to live forever, should we apologize? If someone offered us poison to drink, would we apologize for turning it down? Or if someone invited us into a captivity from which we knew we could not escape, would we apologize for saying no?

Then why should we ever apologize because we are interested in something beyond this transient world, or because we are living the type of life which will make us eligible for acceptance by Christ when He comes in all His glory?

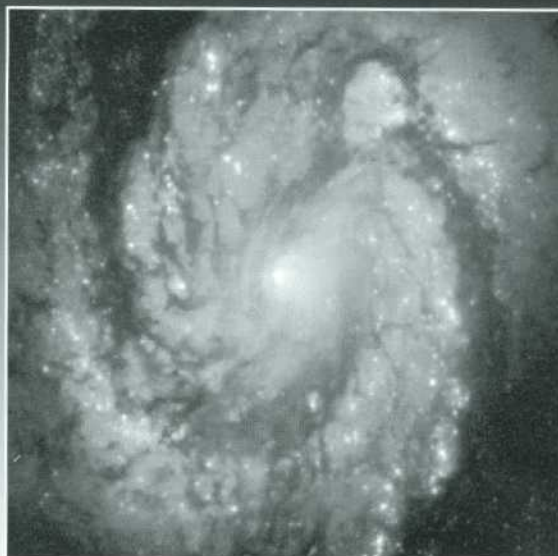
No apologies! □

We never need to apologize
for standing by our convictions
and saying "no" to wrong.

We Are Not Alone



"Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."—Jesus



Have you ever wondered if there is a God? Go outside on a starry night and look up. Ask yourself: *Where did all this come from?*

If you are looking with your unaided human eye, "all this" is a maximum of about 6000 stars that are visible in the course of a year. But now, with the advent of the Hubble Telescope, the universe has suddenly expanded beyond all imagination and human eyes are daily seeing galaxies that have never been seen before. Hubble's high-quality images have extended stellar studies one hundred times farther into the universe than before, out to the distance of a neighboring galaxy, and Hubble's cameras are penetrating to depths of seven and nine and eleven billion light-years.

Where is the end?

All this causes us to ask, **WHAT IS GOD DOING?** (see page 10, this issue).

The words of the prophet Isaiah take on new meaning: *"Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power not one of them is missing"* (Isa. 40:26, NASB).

In this issue we invite you to stargaze a few moments, to ponder the depth and breadth and beauty

of our Creator's handiwork, to get a fresh glimpse of His greatness and a new appreciation for His purpose—a purpose into which He is inviting lowly creatures like us.

Can anyone with a sane mind really think that in all that vast expanse of creation there is no intelligent life except on planet Earth? Is there in all that maze of stars no one to enjoy it? Are we alone in the universe? Our answer is definite: *we are not alone* (See "IS ANYBODY THERE?" on page 13).

Even the astronomers are realizing it. The following statement by scientist Walter Sullivan is displayed at the Strasenburgh Planetarium in Rochester, New York:

"The universe that lies about us, visible only in the privacy, the intimacy of the night, is incomprehensibly vast; yet the conclusion that life exists across this vastness seems inevitable. We cannot yet be sure whether or not it lies within our reach, but in many ways we are a part of it all; we are not alone."

Mr. Sullivan, like all of us, feels the limitations of being human. But the Author of life has given us the answer in the Bible: we are not alone. Far, far from it! One day soon God's family on earth will be united to His family in the heavens, and God's will shall be done on earth as now it is done in heaven, and countless quadrillions of

angels will become our own brothers and sisters.

No, we never were, and never shall be, alone.

About Our Cover:

Our cover photo is a Hubble Space Telescope image of a vast nebula called NGC604, which lies in the neighboring spiral galaxy M33, about 2.7 million light-years from the earth. Though such nebulae are common in galaxies, this one is particularly large, nearly 1,500 light-years across (a single light year=six trillion miles).

At the heart of the M33 galaxy to which this nebula belongs are over 200 very bright stars whose high power light illuminates the nebula's three-dimensional shape, like a lantern in a cave.

This photograph, and the other pictures of heavenly bodies in this issue, were taken during recent months by the Hubble Space Telescope (identified herein as HST), and made available by the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI), which is operated by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc. for NASA, under contract with the Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Md. We extend our appreciation to all who have had a part in making the Hubble venture a success, with special thanks to scientist Zolt Levay at the STScI for helping us obtain these photos via the Internet and the WWW. □

IN THIS ISSUE ...

New Year Issue

Editorial

FOREWARNED. READY? 2

Article

WE ARE NOT ALONE 3

Article

BORN TO BE KING 5

WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM 7

A Thought for the New Year

Special Feature

WHAT IS GOD DOING? 10

IS ANYBODY THERE? 13

THE HEAVENS ARE TELLING THE GLORY OF GOD! 14

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE STARS 16

Poem

THIS NEW YEAR I WILL 18

Article

NOW 19

Article

WHAT ABOUT CONSEQUENCES? 20

Questions and Answers

ABOUT HIGHER CRITICISM 23

Article

FOLLOW THE LEADER 24

BEGIN AGAIN 25

Back Cover Poem

THE NEW YEAR IS DAWNING 28

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Megiddo Message

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MEGIDDO MEANS ...

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

WE BELIEVE ...

- in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.
- in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- in ourselves as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

The Herald and the KING

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

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



The world into which Jesus was born needed a king, a new king, a good king, a king who would respect the interests of the people.

The Roman world of that day was under the sway of Augustus Caesar, and in spite of the peace, misery was everywhere. Much has been written of the glories of Imperial Rome, but it was not a good world in which to live, and very little good living was done. There was a semblance of peace and order, but the Pax Romana, it has been said, "made a desert and called it a peace."

There was trouble inside and outside. The vulgar fraud of Roman civilization, founded upon violence, armed conquest, pillage and human slavery, had been forcibly established in Asia Minor, North Africa, and most of Europe. But with greatness came moral decay. The sturdy virtues of the early Republic had disappeared in a putrid welter of immorality, political corruption, and universal pauperism. A symptom of the world's desperate sickness was the growing popularity of the gladiatorial shows which year by year became more elaborate, more brutal and more bloody. The provinces were bled ruthlessly for the profit of a few millionaire landlords and imperial favorites, for the adornment of a capitol which produced nothing and consumed all.

Behind the iron curtain of military might smoldered the fires of discontent and rebellion. Nowhere was the spirit of revolt more chronic than in Judea, that narrow strip of land which has made history out of all proportion to its size. Lacking even the protection of Roman law and justice, it was ruled in Oriental absolutism by Herod the Great, a

native prince who maintained his throne by collaborating with the conquerors. Under Herod there were no human rights, and human life was cheap, even worthless in the hands of a tyrant who cloaked the most monstrous cruelty with lip service to religion, who murdered, tortured and robbed at will even as he restored the Temple of Yahweh in magnificent fashion.

It is small wonder that a proud and patriotic people like the Jews constantly dreamed of deliverance. While their tradition of freedom was not impressive, nor had they ever demonstrated their ability to make use of liberty, there was in them a fierce nationalism which made slavery intolerable, and also made them a perennial problem to their masters. From the days when they demanded of Samuel a king so that they could be like the nations around them, their desire to be big in the eyes of the world led them to forget that their real superiority and advantage lay in the realms of the spirit—in their custody of the Law and the Prophets.

Through the centuries the cord which bound the Jewish people in incredible unity was the hope of the Messiah. Revealed through the ancient prophets of Israel and Judah, this hope of a Divinely sent deliverer and king had comforted them in captivity and supported them in persecution. What they

overlooked, or forgot, or did not like to believe, was that this Messiah was to enter the world the same as all men, to prove Himself and develop His character, His kingly authority being reserved for His second advent at a time far distant, when the blessings of His reign would be dispensed to all mankind.

Misunderstood and perverted, this

When Jesus
takes the throne He shall be
"King of kings and Lord of lords"
for ever, even for ever
and ever.

hope had fallen into disrepute with many who had grown impatient and become advocates of direct action. Self-styled Messiahs had arisen from time to time and taken up arms for liberation, but the inevitable result was a quick collapse of the rebellion, and then the wayside crosses with their hundreds or thousands of nailed and drooping victims.

Still there were those who clung to hope, even though it be a distorted and discolored hope. The priests and scribes, at least, must have known of the "seven weeks, threescore and two weeks," or 483 years, which, according to the prophet Daniel began with the return from Babylon and should end with the arrival of "Messiah the Prince." Surely they realized that the time was at hand. This knowledge may well have accounted for much of the foment in Palestine at that time; for to a people in hopeless, galling bondage, the time was ripe for a deliverer, a king who should forcibly break the power of Rome and restore the glory of David's throne.

True, they had prophets to the contrary. But as in every other age, the prophets of deceit were preferred by the masses. Those who had sound hope for the future were few and obscure.

Came a spring night when a few humble, honesthearted men saw and heard what has never been heard by mortal ears before or since, but which has grown in wonder with the passage of the centuries. The setting was simple, almost crude. A band of shepherds guarded their flocks on a lonely Judean hillside. It was the eve of the New Year, and naturally, they would have liked to be in the town with their kindred, keeping the feast. But sheep had to be tended.

And as they watched, or slept, or talked, or brooded in silence, suddenly there was a great light shining round about them. And while they stood wondering, trembling, a mighty angel, glowing like the sun, stood above them

and spoke to them the deathless words:

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:10-14).

Was this **the King**? Those mysterious Wise Men (of whom we should like to know more) thought so, for they came to Jerusalem inquiring, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?"

Thirty years passed, thirty years of obscurity, thirty years of intense preparation and discipline and training as the King prepared Himself for His Divine destiny. Then He appeared publicly among men, a Prophet, a Priest, the Messiah. He knew the ground whereon He stood, and He knew the truths whereof He spoke. For three crowded years He went about doing good—healing the sick, feeding the hungry, cleansing the lepers, even raising a few from death, all the while preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Avoiding politics, refusing worldly honors, He fled more than once from forcible coronation by worshipful multitudes who could not and would not realize that this was the time for repentance, not for restoration.

Yet all the while He constantly affirmed His future kingship. And when He faced the Roman Procurator, with His life hanging upon His

answer to the question, "Art thou a king?" He reaffirmed His claim with the quiet dignity of true royalty. "It is you who say it," He answered. "Yes, I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice" (John 18:37, JB).

Where now were His popular supporters—the adoring thousands who a month ago would have placed a crown upon His head, who a week ago had shouted and strewed palm branches in His path as He entered the city? Present only were those of His own nation who had consistently opposed Him, rejected Him, persecuted Him. Shortly the mob was howling for His blood. "Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar!"

So they crowned Him with thorns, and mocked Him and scourged Him. And at high noon of that day they crucified Him.

Was this **the King**? Pilate did not know, but the title He placed above Jesus' cross was a badge of glory, a testimony to an eternal truth. "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews" gave no shame or scorn to true nobility. This was the King.

Three days later the message was confirmed for all: The King was alive again—alive for evermore.

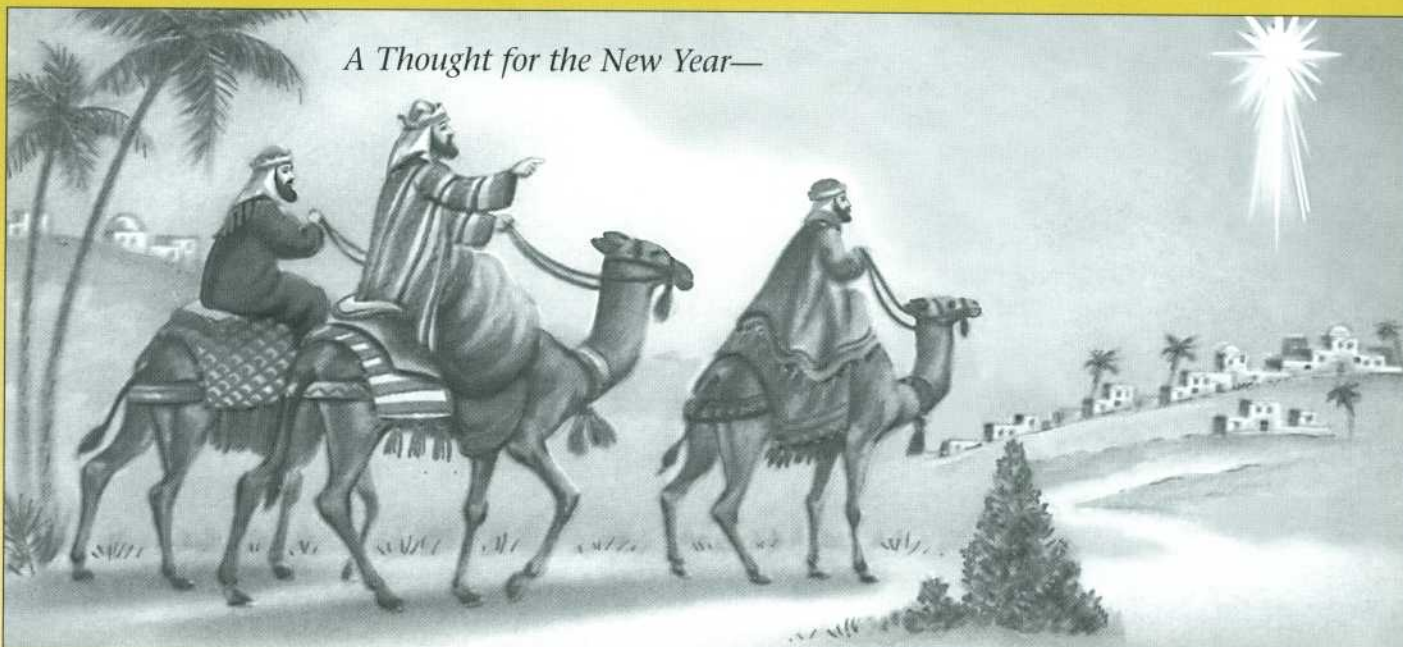
Centuries have passed, and the great King is still in the presence of His Father. He has not yet taken the throne of earth; the great Day of coronation has not yet arrived. But it is coming. The truth of that noble statement lives on: "Yes, I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth."

The Day when He shall take the throne of earth and execute judgment and justice worldwide is coming. It is near, very near. It is a prophecy on the verge of glorious fulfillment, for when He takes the throne He shall be "King of kings and Lord of lords" for ever, even for ever and ever! (Rev. 19:16).

Who will be ready to accept His authority? Who will be ready to welcome Jesus the King? □

Yes, I am a king.
I was born for this, I came into
the world for this." —Jesus

A Thought for the New Year—



Wise Men Still Seek Him

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea many centuries ago, we read that “wise men from the east” came seeking Him. However, they came not to Bethlehem but to Jerusalem, where they inquired of the most unlikely person—Herod—who was then ruler of the province. “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” they asked. “For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Matt. 2:2).

To the wise men from the east it was a simple question; for Herod it was a matter of his authority, a challenge to his own almighty position in the land, a threat to his supremacy. “When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled,” not only he but “all Jerusalem with him” (Matt. 2:3).

We know from the narrative in the book of Matthew that Herod was not pleased with the news. He proceeded immediately to gather the “chief priests and scribes of the people together,” and “demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet” (Matt. 2:4-5).

So when Herod sent the wise men on their way to Bethlehem, he added this instruction, “And

when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also” (Matt. 2:8).

It does not take much imagination to see Herod’s ulterior motive in this. No idea of worship was in his mind, but only hate and revenge. Who should dare rival him for the throne? He would have no chance, not the slightest. Herod would see to that!

The wise men from the east came seeking; they were doing on their part. God recognized this, and provided special Divine guidance; and at length their seeking was rewarded. They found. “And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

This is all we are told about these mysterious “wise men from the east” who came seeking the King. Were they nobles, merchants, traders, or just ordinary men of good and honest heart? They must have been men whom God considered wise at least in some degree, for they were given heavenly guidance which even Herod did not have—they saw “his star in the

east.” We may also observe their humble, worshipful attitude. They came bringing rich gifts. They were ready to sacrifice for the Child of Promise. In the words of the poet,

*They brought him the best, the fairest,
that earthly wealth could find.*

Nothing was too good or too costly to sacrifice for the King they adored.

Wise men from the east. They sought and they found; they brought and they gave. Does it not make us think of other wise men—wise men who even today seek Christ, and find? They are not seeking the newborn infant but the real authority of the King Himself, Christ, His wisdom, His will, His way, and—above all—His approval. Indeed, wise men still seek Him.

Thank God for these few, honest-hearted seekers today. For the Divine promise still stands, “Seek, and ye shall find.” “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Matt. 7:7; Jer. 29:13).

Who are these wise men? Do you and I qualify to be numbered among them? What are the distinguishing aspects of their noble wisdom? What makes them wise?

Whom does God call wise?



First of all, we know that they are not the wise of this world, for we read that *"The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God"* (1 Cor. 3:19). God's wisdom is so much higher, deeper, purer, and surer than the highest wisdom of men. For as *"the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isa. 55:8-9). So vast is the difference that there is just no comparison.

The book of Proverbs tells us much about the wise.

The wise prepare for the future. We are admonished to *"go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise"* (Prov. 6:6).

The wise control their words. *"He that refraineth his lips is wise"* (Prov. 10:19). *"A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards"* (Prov. 29:11).

The wise seek life. *"The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death"* (Prov. 13:14).

It is wise to be afraid of wrong. *"A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is con-*

fidant" (Prov. 14:16).

The wise make the proper use of knowledge. *"The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright"* (Prov. 15:2).

The wise hear and heed reproof. *"The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise"* (Prov. 15:31).

The wise listen to advice. *"He that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise"* (Prov. 12:15). And again, *"Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end"* (Prov. 19:20).

The wise speak "right things." *"My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things"* (Prov. 23:15-16).

Spiritual strength comes with the wisdom of God. *"A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength"* (Prov. 24:5).

Being wise means taking reproof in a spirit of humble obedience. What is more beautiful than *"a wise reproof upon an obedient ear"*? (Prov. 25:12).

Being wise means being ever ready to

hear and learn. *"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning"* (Prov. 1:5).

According to James, the wise and *"endued with knowledge"* are they who will show their wisdom out of *"good lives, with humility and wisdom in their actions"* (Jas. 3:13, JB).

Paul's advice to his son in the faith Timothy was that he should continue in these words of life which are *"able to make thee wise unto salvation"* (2 Tim. 3:15).

Making proper use of our time classifies us as wise. *"See then, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise"* (Eph. 5:15-16). Or as phrased by another translator, *"Be very careful about the sort of lives you lead, act like intelligent and not like senseless people"*—this is a sign of real wisdom.

The wise virgins showed exceptional foresight in doing more than would have seemed necessary. They prepared—and also took with them an additional supply of oil, more than they expected to need. Because of this extra oil, they were able to survive the extended delay when their less prepared companions could not.

According to Jesus, the *"wise man"* is he who builds his house of life on the sure foundation of evidence, digging deep, so that he may be prepared to stand the storms and stresses of life without falling. *"Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock"* (Matt. 7:24-27).

The prophet Hosea classified the wise as those who understand. *"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them?"* (Hos. 14:9).

Are we wise?

It might be well for us at the beginning of another Sacred Year to test ourselves and see whether we qualify as *"wise"* in the sight of God.

Are we numbered among the wise who still seek Christ?

Are we wise enough to see our lives and our interests in the perspective of God's long-range promises?

Have we the foresight and good sense to sacrifice present advantage in the interest of eternal gain?

The ancient lawgiver measured wisdom by one's farsightedness. *"Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"* (Deut. 32:29). Have we this wisdom?

Have we the foresight and good sense to sacrifice present advantage in the interest of eternal gain?



Have we the wisdom that will allow us to take reproof with good grace and profit by it, no matter what our own thoughts in the matter might be? Have we the humble honesty to see ourselves as we are, admit our wrong, and go to work with real earnestness to do better?

Have we the even deeper wisdom to seek and long for that which will show us what we are naturally, and train us in the good and right way?

Have we the still deeper wisdom that moves us to be constantly suspicioning ourselves, fearful lest we slip into error and jeopardize our interests in the coming Kingdom of Christ?

Have we the wisdom to apply what we know to every situation of our lives, to force ourselves to live according to the maximum we have learned, to be always alert, watchful and apprehensive, never giving ourselves any latitude to please ourselves?

Have we the wisdom not to put off even for a single hour what we know we should—and could—do right now? The mental discipline, the moral alertness, the word of encouragement, the self-denial—have we learned to do it *now*? Have we learned that opportunities must be grasped immediately as they appear, that procrastination is indeed the thief of time—and worse, the thief of life itself?

Are we wise enough to overlook petty slights, realizing that in all probability they were not intended? And can we rise above petty feelings, petty gripes, petty strifes?

Have we the wisdom that can keep ourselves firmly under control at all times, body, soul and spirit?

Have we the wisdom that can say No to ourselves and mean it?

Have we the wisdom never to appear what we are not, but yet keep reaching for what we long to be?

Yes, how wise are we? Are we wise in all the choices we make—in our choice of companions, of occupations, of friends—and even in our choice of the thoughts we entertain? Do we exercise the utmost caution in what we allow ourselves to read or look at?

Are we wise enough to avoid temptations which might overpower us, until we have mastered the strength to stand against them?

Have we the wisdom to keep ourselves from being too encumbered with the things that are

seen, to keep our eye fixed firmly on the world to come and our whole heart bent on obtaining for ourselves a place in it?

Have we the wisdom that can prefer another above ourselves and hold no feelings of hostility or ill will?

Are we so wise that we never do anything to be seen of one another, but seek to impress only our Father which is in heaven and the Christ whom we are seeking?

Have we the wisdom to choose a humble position now, to do ordinary tasks, in the prospect of extraordinary gain in the world to come?

Are we wise enough to judge situations as God judges them, to see as He sees, to weigh everything we do in the scale of its eternal value? Are we sure that everything that is important to us is important to God?

If we can acquire such wisdom as this, the next twelve months, if they be granted us, should find us many miles nearer our goal and many miles further away from the old life we left behind.

Why are we so concerned about being wise? Because God's promises to the wise are beyond imagination. The *"wise shall inherit glory"* (Prov. 3:35). And we must never forget those beautiful promises in the hand of Wisdom: *"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.... Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is everyone that retaineth her"* (Prov. 3:13–18). Is not this the height of our longing and our desire?

Oh, let us in each and every day of this new year prove ourselves wise men who seek and seek earnestly the highest and best, the good and the right way for ourselves, and the shortest route into the heavenly Kingdom of Christ.

Let us be in deed and in truth those wise men who still seek Him, and who seek with all their heart and soul and strength, knowing that all such seekers shall surely find Him and be found—and blessed—of Him. □

Why are we so concerned about being wise? Because God's promises to the wise are beyond imagining.

What is God doing?

Go outside on a moonless night, under a truly dark sky in the desert or the mountains, far from the light pollution of the cities, and look up. The spectacle is awesome. A river of stars extends from horizon to horizon. This great celestial spectacle is the galaxy that is our home: the Milky Way. Until very recently, this was "the universe."

We now know that the universe is designed on a far grander scale. The Milky Way is only one of more than one hundred billion galaxies that populate the universe, each made up of hundreds of billions of stars.

From earliest times men have marveled at the heavens and tried to figure out its wonders. But so little could they discover that in childlike innocence they concluded that their own planet was the center of the universe.

Along came Copernicus in the sixteenth century and dared to challenge this "theologically correct" dogma. The earth, he said, moves around the sun, not the sun around the earth.

It was a bold and troubling idea. The Roman Church protested, and at least one man died at the stake for holding to it. Yet it was far from the whole truth, because it still kept the sun at the center of a universe that was limited to the Milky Way galaxy.

About 1915 a scientist named Harlow Shapley began to develop a system of measuring distances to some of the stars that lie around the center spiral of our galaxy. It now became obvious that the earth was not the center of the Milky Way. And maybe there were other galaxies, though Shapley believed

that if there were, they would be less important than ours.

Then in 1924, American astronomer Edwin Hubble, peering through the biggest telescope of the time, the 100-inch reflector atop Mt. Wilson in California, recognized that the Milky Way is not alone. Announcing his discovery of the great Andromeda "nebula," he confirmed that some of the fuzzy areas on his photographic plates were not clouds of gas within the Milky Way, as some assumed, but individual galaxies, many as large or larger than our own.

With this phenomenal discovery Edwin Hubble had opened a window to a cosmos inconceivably large and filled with countless galaxies.

Today everyone knows that galaxies are the basic structural units of the universe—individual entities separated by millions of light years. And galaxies are not scattered randomly across space, as was once thought, but are found in clusters. The Milky Way

and our nearest-neighbor galaxy Andromeda (about 2

million light years away) belong to an ensemble of 20 or so galaxies (called the Local Group) that move as a unit through space. It appears that most galaxies are similarly clustered. Clusters, too, may aggregate into so-called super clusters. Filament-like in shape, some super clusters extend hundreds of millions of light years across space, making them the largest structures known.

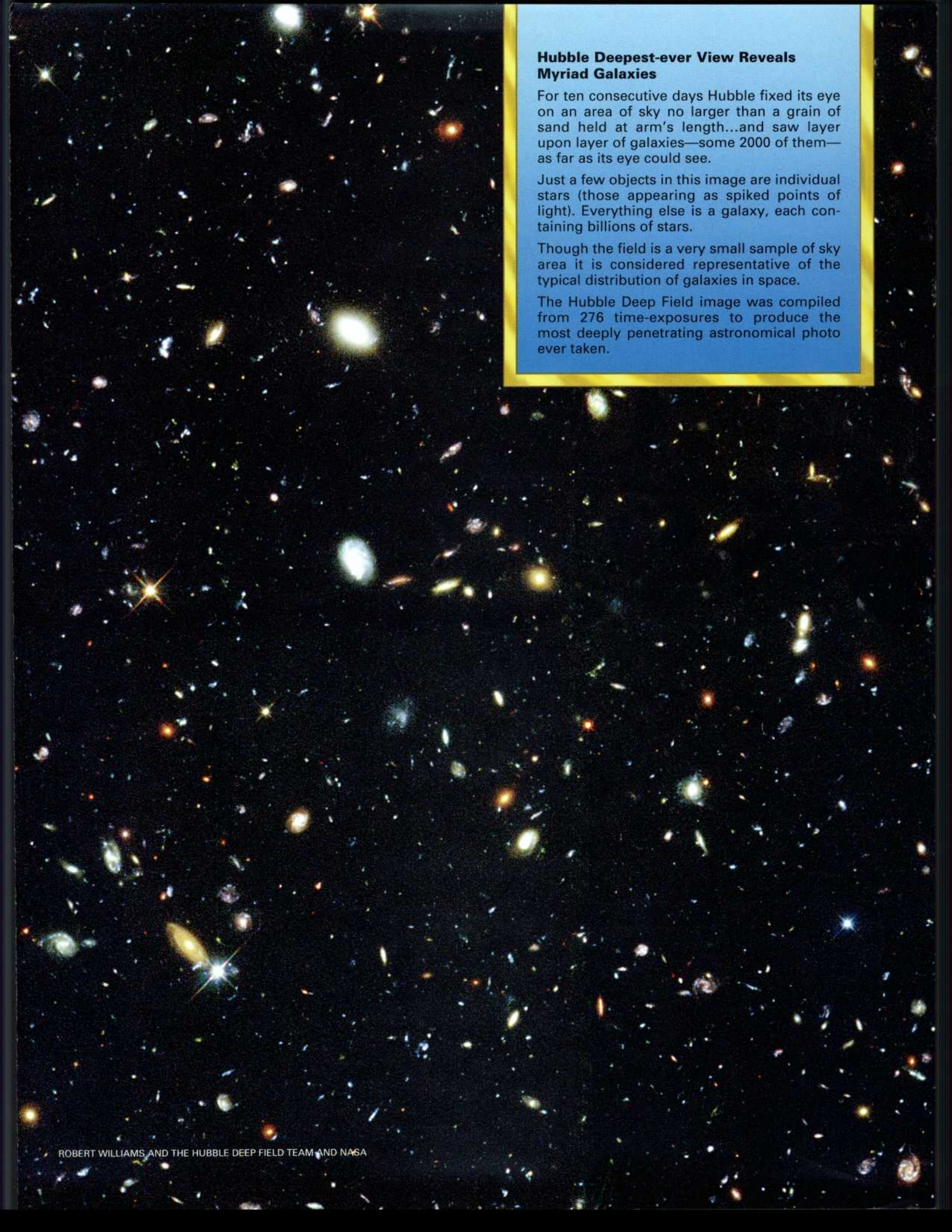
How many galaxies are there? Estimates range from 100 billion to 250 billion to a literally infinite number. And each galaxy is a vast star city containing billions of individual stars.

Now scientists are talking about another type of galaxy, called "diffuse." Diffuse galaxies tend to be much larger, with far fewer stars per unit volume but the same approximate number of total stars as a conventional galaxy. "Our work over the past decade demonstrates that, remarkably, these galaxies may be as numerous as all other galaxies combined," says Gregory D. Bothun in *The Scientific American* of February 1997. In his opinion, "up to 50% of the general galaxy population of the universe has been missed." Diffuse galaxies went unobserved until very recently because of their extremely low surface brightness—many are as little as 2% brighter than the background sky.

As tools get better, scientists see more and more. The huge 200-inch Hale reflector on Mt. Palomar, for many years the largest optical telescope in the world, saw as many as a million galaxies inside the bowl of the Big Dipper alone. Now the most significant astronomical tool of all

(Continued on page 12)

*The Milky Way
is only one of more
than 100,000,000,000
galaxies, each
containing billions
of stars.*



Hubble Deepest-ever View Reveals Myriad Galaxies

For ten consecutive days Hubble fixed its eye on an area of sky no larger than a grain of sand held at arm's length...and saw layer upon layer of galaxies—some 2000 of them—as far as its eye could see.

Just a few objects in this image are individual stars (those appearing as spiked points of light). Everything else is a galaxy, each containing billions of stars.

Though the field is a very small sample of sky area it is considered representative of the typical distribution of galaxies in space.

The Hubble Deep Field image was compiled from 276 time-exposures to produce the most deeply penetrating astronomical photo ever taken.

(Continued from page 10)

time, the orbiting Hubble Space Telescope, is being used to count galaxies ten times as faint as the deepest ground-based telescope, and four billion times fainter than the limits of human vision.

How does one talk about the vastness of the heavens? Scientists have designed a unit called the light year, which is the distance light travels in one year at the rate of 186,282 miles a second (a light year is about six trillion miles). At this rate one could circle the earth seven times in a second. A trip to the moon would take 1.3 seconds, and one could reach the farthest limit of the Solar System in about 5 hours.

Most of the stars we see with our naked eye lie within a distance of 500 light years. Hubble's photographic eye is capturing images of galaxies that are as far as 15,000,000,000 light years away (fifteen billion times six trillion miles).

What does it all mean?

It might be better to address our question to our Creator and ask, "What are You doing?" For who can properly answer but He who is doing it? And who can imagine no Intelligent Designer behind the colossal structures that our modern telescopes are seeing?

But when we ask God what He is doing, our answer must come by the means He has supplied, His written Word. Called "*a thorough furnisher*," it does have the answer—perhaps not in the detail we would like, but its answer is tremendous.

The Creator's handiwork

First, He tells us to look up. "*Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth*" (Isa. 40:26). Look up and see—and what a sight!

The Psalmist says it another way: "*The heavens tell the glory of God, and the skies announce what his hands have made*" (Ps. 19:1, NCV).

The prophet Isaiah used a meaningful term when he described God as stretching out the heavens. He says, "*God, the LORD, created the heavens and stretched them out. He created the earth and everything in it. He gives breath and life to everyone in all the world*" (Isa 42:5, NLT). Again he says, speaking for God, "*I am the one who made the earth and created people to live on it. With my hands I stretched out the heavens. All the millions of stars are at my command*" (Isa. 45:12, NLT).

God is the undisputed Creator of the heavens. He has no rival; and can anyone truly believe that all the vast creation came about by chance? (We question whether proponents of a chance or accidental origin have looked at the order and precision, the intricacy and design that are evident in a single living cell—to say nothing of the human body, or the vast expanses of the heavens.)

One Divine, eternal purpose

We learn from the Bible that God works according to one eternal, ongoing purpose. The Bible tells us

what that purpose is with relation to our own planet, and when we apply this same purpose to the vast creation, we see beauty and glory overwhelming.

What is His purpose for our earth? The prophet Isaiah tells us "*he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited*" (Isa. 45:18).

Who will be those inhabitants? They are defined by literally hundreds of passages of Scripture. Jesus described them as those who "*do his commandments*" (Rev. 22:14). The Psalmist said that each one has "*clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation*" (Ps. 24:4-5). The Lord Himself described them as "*His glory*" in these words to Moses: "*But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*" (Num. 14:21). Jesus describes them as the "*meek,*" "*the pure in heart,*" those who "*hunger and thirst after righteousness*" in His sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:3-13). He said further, "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 7:21).

God has a great plan for selecting from among humankind those who will have a part in His eternal creation. Actually, they select themselves by their faithfulness, their obedience, their loyalty and love. Paul says that God will give "*immortality, eternal life*" to those "*who by patient continuance in well doing seek*" for it (Rom. 2:7). For this selection

(Continued on page 16)

Imagine that the thickness of this page represents the distance from the earth to the sun (93 million miles). On that scale, the distance to the nearest star is a stack of papers seventy-one feet high. And the diameter of our galaxy is a stack 310 miles high.

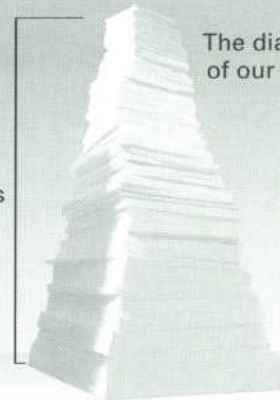
The thickness of a sheet of paper represents the distance from the earth to the sun (93 million miles)

The distance to the nearest star

71 feet

310 miles

The diameter of our galaxy





Is Anybody There? Yes!

The Bible
tells us there IS
life beyond planet Earth.

✧ **God has a family in heaven as well as on earth.**

The apostle Paul prayed to *"the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"* (Eph. 3:14-15). Paul recognized a family in heaven that could be compared to God's family on earth—real, living, conscious beings who inhabit countless other worlds in His vast creation.

✧ **God's will is now done in heaven, and will one day be done on earth in the same way it is now done in heaven.**

This fact is stated in our Lord's Prayer: *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:10). Jesus says God's will is now done in heaven—which means living beings are there who are capable of intelligent action: doing God's will.

✧ **"The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" which tells us there have been beings "from everlasting" past upon whom God has been pouring His goodness and blessings.**

Says the Psalmist, *"The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them"* (Ps. 103:17-18).

✧ **Our God is "the Lord God of hosts."**

This term occurs 100 times in the Old Testament, and suggests that myriads of animate beings (angels), inhabit His worlds through space. Hosts of angels populate His worlds; He is not sitting supreme over a vast expanse of burning gases, purposeless dust, and empty voids. There is glory, beauty, life and splendor throughout His creation.

✧ **The angels live in the heavenly realms.**

Angels visited the earth on numerous occasions as recorded in the Bible. Where are their homes? Not

on earth, because they visit the earth and depart. Other worlds in God's vast realms are their homes.

Who are the angels? The angels are real beings who, once mortal like us, now enjoy a higher level of life than we know. God's creation is built on progress: first the human level, then a physical change to the angelic; first the *"terrestrial,"* then the *"celestial."* First the *"earthy,"* then the *"heavenly";* first the *"corruptible,"* then the *"incorruptible";* first *"mortal,"* then *"immortal"* (see 1 Cor. 15:46-53).

Jesus said that those worthy to obtain the better life will be made *"equal unto the angels,...neither can they die anymore, for they are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection"* (Luke 20:35-36).

When Jesus returns, He will *"change our vile [corruptible] body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body"* (Phil. 3:20-21).

✧ **The "host of heaven" worship God.**

Inanimate stars cannot worship, but Nehemiah, extolling God's creative ability, said *"Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host,...and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee."* Myriads of living beings inhabit the heavenly bodies.

✧ **God works according to His eternal purpose, and that purpose, He has decreed, is to fill the earth with His glory.**

This is His promise: *"But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord"* (Num. 14:21). He says of His people, *"I have created him for my glory,...yea, I have made him"* (Isa. 43:7).

✧ **The Bible speaks of God stretching out the heavens "as a tent to dwell in" (Isa. 40:22). It refers often to God who "dwells in the heavens." He does not dwell alone; He has "hosts" of glorified beings upon whom He has bestowed His glory and goodness.** □

The heavens are telling

You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their host...the host of heaven worships You."
—Nehemiah 9:6, NKJV

LEFT

Hubble Zooms In On Orion

A 2.5 light-year-wide view, this photo is still a small portion of the nebula that lies at a distance of 1500 light years. Its clouds glow with light from its massive stars and star clusters.

This photo was compiled from 45 separate images.

In addition to its many stars, scientists believe Orion contains numerous solar systems similar to our own.



ABOVE

Colorful Eagle Nebula

These dark pillar-like structures are located at a distance of 7,000 light years. They are columns of gas and dust that serve as incubators for new stars. The pillar is about a light-year wide at its base to tip.

ABOVE

A small portion of a nebula called the "Cygnus Loop."

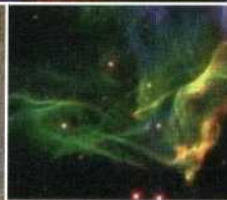
LEFT

The M100 Galaxy: A "Close" Look

For the first time Hubble was able to see structures as small as 30 light years across in a galaxy which is tens of millions of light years away.

The galaxy M100 is one of the brightest members of the Virgo Cluster of galaxies.

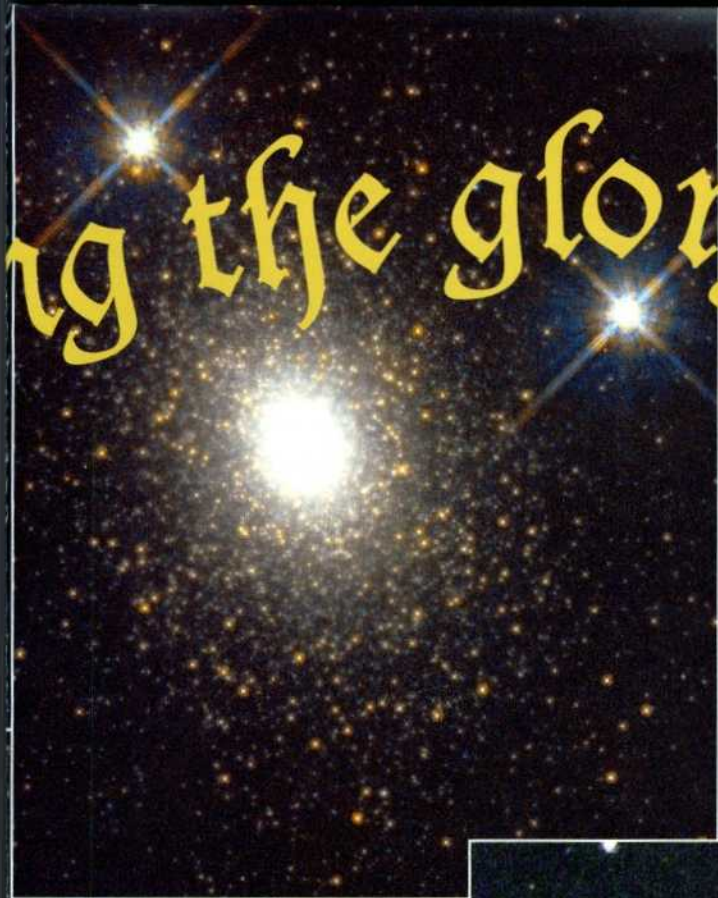
BELOW
Spiral Galaxy M100 is one of some 2500 galaxies in the huge Virgo cluster, about 56 million light years from Earth.



For the photos and the scientific data in this issue we are indebted to the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI), NASA, and all associated scientists, who are making possible the remarkable mission of the Hubble Space Telescope.

A cl
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dist

ing the glory of God!



LEFT
Bright Globular Cluster (G1)
Orbits Andromeda

The large bright ball in the center of the photo is a globular cluster consisting of at least 300,000 stars. It is the brightest cluster in our home group of galaxies.

Dozens of globular clusters freckle space in and around our Milky Way. Each cluster is like a miniature galaxy having from 100,000 to 1,000,000 stars.

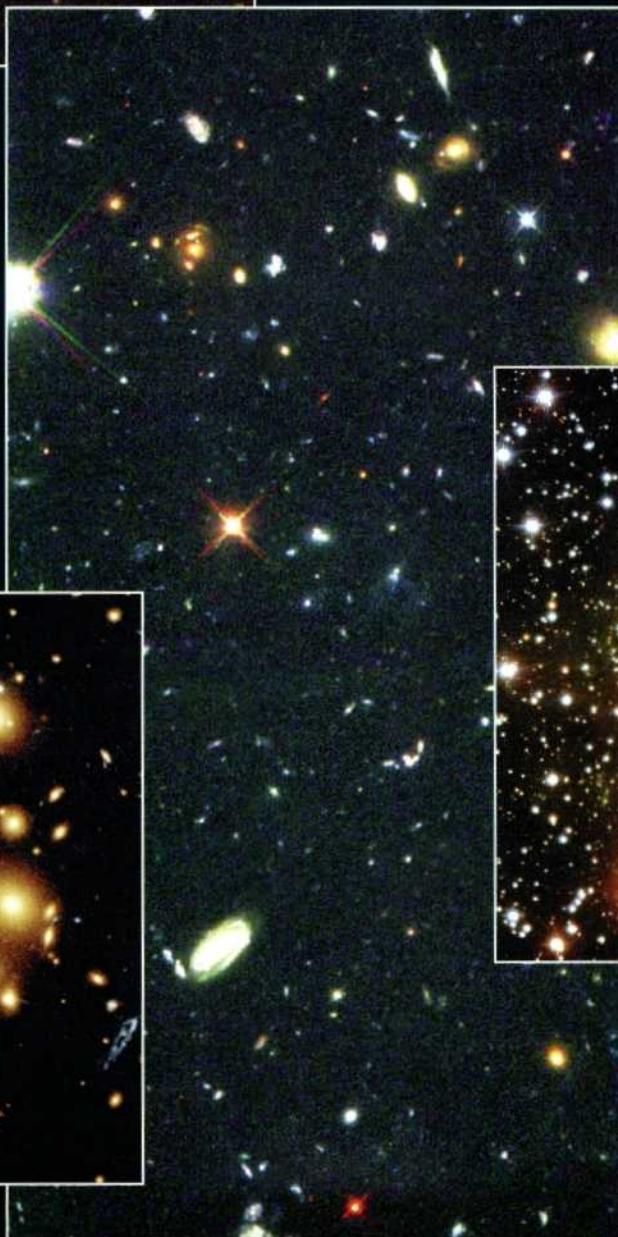
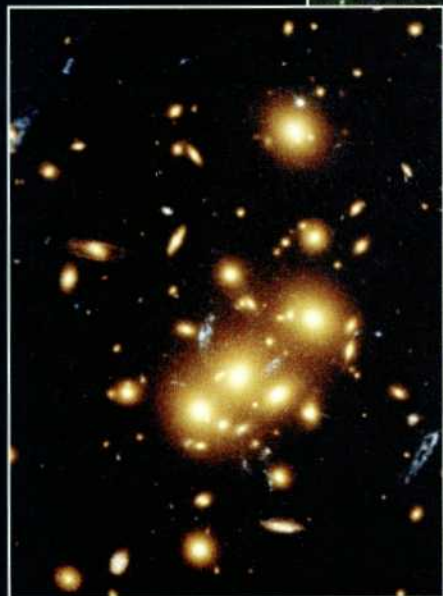
BELOW
Dense Star Cluster: NGC1850

This HST high-quality photo indicates that compact clusters contain many more massive stars than expected. In a cluster formerly thought to contain 1,000 stars, Hubble sees a concentration of nearly 10,000 stars.



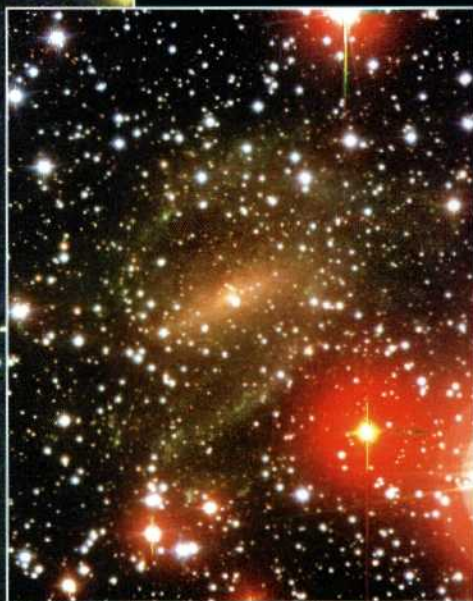
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BELOW
Dwingeloo Glory in our own cosmic back yard

In November, 1994, astronomers uncovered a galaxy they named Dwingeloo 1. Only ten million light-years away, this newly discovered city of more than 100 billion stars had gone undetected because hidden behind our Milky Way galaxy.



LEFT
Distant Galaxies

In this HST photo are 18 distant galaxies, each containing dust, gas, and billions of stars. Each is 11 billion light-years from earth.

(Continued from page 12)

process He has allotted seven thousand years, at the end of which His creative work on earth will be finished.

God set in motion certain laws of life. Those laws operate without His direct oversight, and individuals are free moral agents to choose what they will do. All are given this life free, without so much as asking for it. But this is all they will get, unless they use the knowledge He has supplied to qualify for more life, i.e., an eternal life in God's new and eternal world.

When Jesus returns, He will judge and reward those who have served Him and will, with the help of these individuals, subdue the forces of evil and set up a new government which

will be worldwide. Under this new government, millions and billions of people will find life happy and satisfying, as they comply with the laws of its laws and as they are given the opportunity to prepare to live in Christ's eternal Kingdom. This happy arrangement will continue for a thousand years, at the end of which these individuals will be judged and rewarded for what they have done. All who prove faithful will be changed to the immortal state and be granted an eternal place on the earth glorified, beautified and perfected. All evildoers will be eliminated and the whole earth be filled with His glory. Jesus Christ will be the eternal King, supreme and unchallenged, and through eternity will live with His immortal co-rulers and immortal populace. (For detailed

Biblical support of the above, see our booklet, "These Things Shall Be.")

Such, in capsule form, is God's plan for this earth as it is revealed in the Bible. And when we read that His plan for this earth is "according to his eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11), we have an idea of what God is doing all through His vast creation. If His pattern is the same throughout, His plan is to create and populate a world, develop and perfect it, and transform it into a perfect Paradise of delight, then repeat the process on another planet in some other part of His vast creation, and another, and another, *ad infinitum*. He may be working on ten billion planets like ours all at once in other parts of His universe, so limitless is the realm in which He may spread

What the Bible Says About the Stars

We've all heard that the stars are whirling balls of different types of gases, in different stages of their life-cycle, and that they have very high surface temperatures in which life as we know it could not possibly exist. If this be true, what about the angels? Where do they fit in?

"We" (in our human situation, living on one planet in our Solar System, in one corner of one modest-sized galaxy) feel very inadequate to talk about balls of light and energy that are millions or billions of light-years distant (remember that each single light-year is a distance of about 6 trillion miles). Our situation might be compared to that of a bug on the leaf of a great tree in the Brazilian forest trying to comprehend the size of the forest. We know so little about the universe that it is hardly safe to make even intelligent guesses. The only facts we can be sure of are those which we can actually observe and those which come from a source such as the Bible, where we find knowledge revealed by our Creator.

The Bible is not a scientific textbook, nor is its purpose to reveal scientific information; but neither will it make erroneous statements. Just as it is not a geography book but the places it mentions really existed, so the statements it makes about the creation are accurate and in harmony with all true science.

We turn to the Bible, and learn that:

★ GOD IS THE INTELLIGENT CREATOR/DESIGNER

The eternal God is also the God of the galaxies, the Creator of the vast expanse of the heavens with all their host of stars. The Bible makes no attempt to explain the creative process; it merely declares it to be an accomplished fact. But always God is declared to be the one supreme Creator. The Psalmist declares that "by the word of the Lord were the heavens made;...for he spake, and it was done" (Ps. 33:6, 9).

Often God is called the "Lord God that made the heavens," "God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out" (Isa. 42:5) "the LORD that created the heavens" (Isa. 45:18); "he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion" (Jer. 10:12). Nehemiah gave full credit to God for the vast heavens and all that is in them: "Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host" (Neh. 9:6).

★ GOD "KNOWS" ALL HIS CREATION

However vast the creation, each of the stars is known individually to God. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the creation"—a statement that would include the stars as well as His other works of creation. We are also told by the prophet Isaiah that "he calleth them all by name by the greatness of his might" (Isa. 40:26). And by the Psalmist: "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names" (Ps. 147:4).

★ GOD'S CREATION HAS PURPOSE

Each of the stars serves a purpose in God's design. All may not serve the same purpose, but God's

His mercy! And it may well be the future work of the inhabitants of our finished, glorified planet, to initiate and follow through the same process on another planet, and another, and another—just as the angels have overseen the work on earth (Heb. 2:5; 1:14).

The plan of God has been in operation from eternity past, and will continue to eternity future. We learn this from Psalm 103, where we read that *"the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them"* (vs. 17-18). For God's mercy to extend from everlasting past to everlasting future, He must have had living beings upon whom to

bestow mercy in a glorious, finished creation.

First Human, Then Angel

There is constant progress throughout God's creation, from mortal to immortal, from human to angel. Worthy earthborns will one day be physically changed to be made like the angels of heaven, a fact which indicates God's plan of progression: first the human level of life (subject to death), then the higher, angelic level (not subject to death). Jesus said that those worthy to obtain the better life will be made *"equal unto the angels, ...neither can they die anymore, for they are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection"* (Luke 20:35-36).

First Corinthians 15 reveals this sequence: first the *"earthly,"* then the

"heavenly." Our present level of life is not the ultimate; it is only an introduction to life. And *"as we have*

The God
who created us has
countless billions of
worlds filled with
glorified, immortal
beings.

borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.... Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption....We shall all be
(Continued on page 20)

work is not haphazard. God is the supreme Creator, and all parts of His vast creation serve some purpose in His eternal scheme. As is said of the earth, *"He created it not in vain"* (Isa. 45:18), so different worlds may serve differing purposes, not all known to us.

What would be the purpose of billions and billions of balls of hot gas scattered through eons of space? Is it not more realistic to believe that many of them are real worlds—as real as our earth—inhabited by real beings who have been changed to the immortal state?

★ HOMES OF THE ANGELS—

REAL WORLDS INHABITED BY REAL BEINGS

Many (probably most) of the stars are worlds inhabited by companies of angels. The Bible suggests repeatedly that the number of angels is countless. The book of Hebrews speaks of *"an innumerable company of angels"* which will be present at the return of Christ (Heb. 12:22). The prophet Daniel pictures the judgment seat as attended by *"thousand thousands"* of ministering angels (Dan. 7:10). When the law was given on Sinai, myriads of angels were present (Deut. 33:2). These angels are not spirits but real, tangible beings, and they have real homes, on countless worlds in the celestial realm. The angel Gabriel, who flew swiftly to earth from *"the presence of God"* and touched Daniel on the shoulder was a real being (Daniel 9:21). Several hundred years later this same angel appeared to Mary to announce the birth of the Messiah (Luke 1:30-31).

★ THE HEAVENS REPRESENT GOD'S FINISHED HANDIWORK WHERE HIS WILL IS NOW DONE

Jesus in the prayer He taught His disciples prayed,

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The apostle Paul prayed to the Father, *"of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"* (Eph. 3:14-15), indicating an already existing family of God in heaven, to which the earthly family bears likeness. The promise to earthborns is that they can become God's eternal *"sons and daughters"* (2 Cor. 6:17-18), i.e., additions to an already existing family.

★ ANGELS SHINE, STARS SHINE

The stars shine because God created them to shine, by whatever means He designed. We are not told the process. We do not know how light is made. We know properties of it, how it behaves, and something about how it is transmitted, but we still do not know what it is. Job says that God *"by his spirit...garnished the heavens"* (Job 26:13). And visible light is said to be one outstanding feature of immortal glory. When the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle in ancient Israel, there was visible light. When the angels appeared to the shepherds, *"the glory of the Lord shone round about them"* (Luke 2:9). Jesus says that the righteous shall *"shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Matt. 13:43). Daniel says that *"they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever"* (Dan. 12:3).

Does it not seem realistic, then, to believe that glorified worlds (stars) radiate light because they are inhabited by glorified beings, and the earth, when glorified, will shine like the stars? □

This New Year I Will...

Mend a quarrel

*Forget a slight
Dismiss a suspicion and
replace it with trust
Write an encouraging letter
Share with a friend
Give a soft answer*

Show my loyalty to God by word and deed

*Encourage a youth
Keep my promise
pray earnestly
Forego a grudge
Forgive an injury
Dig up bitterness*

Apologize if I am wrong

*Try to understand
Flout envy
Examine my demands on others
Think first of someone else*

Appreciate a kindness

*Be kind
Be gentle
Be unselfish
Smile
Deserve the confidence of others
Take up arms against malice
Decry complacency
Express my gratitude*

Worship God

*Think nobly
Take pleasure in the beauty and
wonder of His creation;
Demonstrate my love for Him
Do it again
Do it once again.*



The little word “now” occurs 1321 times in the King James Version of the Bible. It is also a very important word in our everyday language, though one which we many times prefer to ignore. If an unpleasant duty should be done right now, we are inclined to acknowledge it but postpone the necessary action for one reason or another—or for no reason at all except, perhaps, our natural tendency to procrastinate.

Secular history is filled with examples of those who ignored a warning that could have saved their lives, as well as the lives of others. The recent bombing of the apartment building in Saudi Arabia is an example of disaster following the ignoring of warnings of possible terrorist attacks.

There is a story from the past of the steamship *Central America* on a voyage from New York to San Francisco, which sprang a leak in mid-ocean. A vessel, seeing her signal of distress, bore down toward her. Perceiving her danger to be imminent, the captain of the rescue ship spoke to the *Central America*, asking, “What is amiss?”

“We are in bad repair, and going down. Lie by till morning.”

“Let me take your passengers on board now,” said the would-be rescuer. It was night and the captain of the *Central America* did not like to think of transferring his passengers then, lest some might be lost in the confusion. Thinking they would surely keep afloat some hours longer he replied

only, “Lie by till morning.”

Once again the captain of the rescue ship called, “You had better let me take them now.”

“Lie by till morning” was the reply sounded back through the night. About an hour and a half later, her lights were missing. The *Central America* had gone down, and all on board were lost because the captain thought they could be saved later.

Bible history has many examples of opportunities and lives lost because warnings went unheeded. When Paul was being taken to Rome as a prisoner, he warned the captain of the ship that if he was determined to set sail, the voyage would end in disaster. The advice was ignored, and both the cargo and the ship were lost. Since God was protecting Paul, there was no loss of life.

In the days of Ahab king of Israel there is a striking example of warnings disregarded. The Lord’s prophet Micaiah gave warning, but the foolish king preferred to listen to the false prophet, who told the king what he wanted to hear. With great personal courage Micaiah told the king exactly what his fate would be if he persisted in his plan to go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead. But the proud king was unwilling to listen to the advice which would have saved his life. The final result: the dogs licked up the blood of Ahab at the pool of Samaria.

What says the apostle Paul

about the need to take action now? These are his words: “*You know the time has come: you must wake up now: our salvation is even nearer than it was when we were converted. The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon—let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light. Let us live decently as people do in the daytime....Let your armor be the Lord Jesus Christ; forget about satisfying your bodies with their cravings*” (Rom. 13:11–14, JB). Again he said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*”

There is a feeling of urgency in the word *now*. It tells us that something should not be put off until a more convenient time. We have all experienced times in our lives when we saw the need to take immediate action, which would have proven very beneficial had we done it at that just-right time. But the opportunity passed, and never came again. In temporal affairs, this is not too serious, as other opportunities may reappear. But in our spiritual lives it is very serious because our time is fleeting, and our opportunities are limited. Now is our time to be a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer, for only the doers will receive the crown of life eternal.

Now is the time to come out from the world. Now is the time to control our tongue. Now is the time to read, and hear, and keep the sayings of this Book.

It is now or never. □

(Continued from page 17)

changed...for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:46, 49-53). When Jesus returns, He will "change our vile [corruptible] body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21).

God's work is not limited to one tiny planet in one small solar system in one corner of one galaxy. The God who created us has countless billions of worlds filled with glorified, immortal beings. He has countless others on which He (or His agents) are still at work, and countless others in the beginning stages of creation. It is all one glorious, on-going plan for the benefit of His living creation.

"Shine as the Stars"

We know by observing the visible universe that stars shine. We also know from what is recorded in the Bible that immortal beings radiate light.

We cannot say that all light in the heavens comes from immortal beings, but God is the ultimate source of light, and where there are angels, there is light. Our earth is now a dark planet, dependent on the sun for its light. But when God's work here is complete, the earth will no longer need the light of the sun (Isa. 60:19). In fact, the people inhabiting the earth will be beings filled with light, which will result in the end of night: "There shall be no night there" (Rev. 22:5).

Does it not seem possible that such is the pattern through the heavens, that the presence of immortal beings is one possible cause for the stars to radiate light? By the definitions to which we are accustomed, light is a release of energy as a result of a change from one state to another. But can we say that all light comes from such a process? Are we competent to say that such is the *only* source of light?

The angels who appeared in Bible times were luminous beings, whose natural brightness was

(Continued on page 26)

What About CONSEQUENCES?

Our economy is based on the relation between product and value, so much goods or services or benefit for so much cost. One cannot be had without the other. The same relation exists between action and consequence. God has made us free moral agents, free to choose our own course of action. But we are not free to choose consequences. Every action has a predetermined consequence.

We live in a society that wants to be free from consequences. But such is not reality. Witness the spread of AIDS, the sharp rise in illegitimate births, the broken homes, the frightful rate of crime among youth who have grown up on a diet of TV viewing, the violence related to the drug trade, the more than four hundred thousand deaths each year from lung cancer—all testify to the inescapable reality of consequences.

Consequences were the rule of life in ancient Israel. No book addresses this fact more clearly than the book of Deuteronomy. The words for consequences here are "blessing" and "curse." The context is the governing of the Israelite nation, and how the people's cooperation would affect their temporal and immediate well-being.

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 says definitely that the consequence of obedience is blessing, and consequence of disobedience is the curse. In chapters 27 and 28 these words are translated into everyday terms. What would be the benefits of obedience? "Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy

cattle....Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out....The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto: and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee....The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself,...if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways....The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand" (Deut. 28:3-12).

Any young Israelite hearing—and believing—these words, would feel impelled to obey. There was no other sensible option, with so much to be gained.

But what about the other side? What if one was determined to disobey?

"It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of the body, and the fruit of thy land,...The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me" (Deut. 28:15-20).

These blessings and curses were part of God's special covenant relation with Israel. Always people were free to choose; yet choosing a

certain course of action meant choosing also its consequences. Immediate obedience was rewarded with immediate blessing; and disobedience with a curse. This was a temporary arrangement for Israel, but the principle is far-reaching. God works according to plan.

Longer range consequences are also part of God's plan. The principle is timeless: obey and live, disobey and die. This does not mean that one sins and immediately drops dead. Nor does it mean that one does right and is immediately guaranteed endless life. But God is carefully keeping a record of every life that is pledged to obey His laws, and when the right time comes He will examine it and determine its eternal consequences, for good or ill; for blessing or curse.

All through Scripture God warned that the eternal consequences of our choices are fixed: a life of obedience to His law will ultimately be rewarded with eternal life; and a life of rebellion and willfulness will receive eternal death. Our eternal destiny is not in the hands of fate, nor is it predetermined by forces beyond our control. *"The wages of sin is death"* said the apostle Paul (Rom. 6:23), and we are the ones who choose to—or not to—sin. Jesus compared our choices in life to selecting a route of travel: when we choose the beginning of a road, we choose also its end. The broad way leads to destruction; only the narrow road leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). Here are fixed and final consequences.

We should also realize the certainty of consequences. When God delivered His law to Israel and said, *"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse,"* He made the statement definite. He did not say that obedience *may* bring a blessing and disobedience *may* bring a curse. Nor did He indicate that it was a haphazard matter. Rather, it is a fact upon which we may depend. One who wants the blessing *must* obey; one who disobeys will get the curse. Paul said the same using the illustration of sowing and reaping. *"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful*

nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7-8, NIV).

Right or Wrong?

There is a further lesson in God's words to Israel: that two opposite endings (a blessing and a curse) follow two opposite types of conduct (obedience and disobedience), and there is nothing in between. Every action is either right or wrong, and is recorded to witness for or against us.

Now isn't this being really narrow-minded? Many people today would say that it is. They feel we must be tolerant of all, that there are no clear-cut definitions, that right and wrong must be determined on an individual basis. What is "right" for me may be "wrong" for you, and vice versa. Yet some issues have obvious absolutes. For instance, is it necessary to breathe to live? Is it all right to drink kerosene? Is it all right to walk into the path of a fast-moving vehicle? Is it all right to disregard traffic signs? On such points there is no dispute. Why, then, should the laws of God be disregarded?

tieth century, but it is not God's way. His law is clear: *"Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing if ye will obey...and a curse if ye will not obey."*

To have the privilege of determining one's own "right" and "wrong" may please erring men and women, but it does not satisfy a God whose thoughts and ways are as high above ours as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. 55:8-9).

God leaves no undefined gray area. Truth is consistent; right is right, and wrong is never right.

The Day is coming when every servant of Christ shall be called to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to receive for the things he has done. In that Day God will give *"to every man according as his work shall be"* (Rev. 22:12). But the eternal rewards will be only two: either eternal life, or eternal death. There will be no in-between state of half blessed, half cursed.

Is God fair in setting the standard so precisely? Is He right in requiring absolute obedience and ruling out all who continue in any kind of disobedience?

We are free to choose our course of action, but we are not free to choose its consequences.

Perhaps those who are accustomed to the tolerant, easy-going ethics of the twentieth century, who dislike rules and structures, who champion the rights of the common person—would like to edit the law of God, so that it might read something like this: *Behold I set before you this day a blessing on the one hand and a curse on the other; but I do not mean to be telling you what to do. Each can decide for himself what is best, and that will be his obedience.* Is this what God said? Is He ready to accept anything and call it obedience? Never! Such is not His way. Such a plan may look right to the broad-minded children of the twen-

The counter question follows: How can God be fair and do otherwise? How can He reward total righteousness without punishing or removing every form of evil? How can He honor anything that opposes His way of righteousness: How can He love righteousness without hating iniquity? How can He eternally bless the righteous without removing the rebellious, the wicked, the stony-hearted and the obdurate?

God does not want lukewarm believers, or half and half servants. He wants those who are out and out, all or nothing. As Jesus said to the Church at Laodicea, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold*

What About Consequences?

nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!" (Rev. 3:15, NIV).

The Israelites, too, would doubtless have preferred to write their own rules. They would have been pleased with variable laws and variable consequences. But it was not their part—nor is it ours—to design the plan.

Jesus reaffirmed the same principle in His parables. In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, every animal appearing in His presence was placed either on the right or on the left. If it was not qualified to go to the right, it went to the left. And at the end of the parable, Jesus made this summary statement: *"These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal"* (Matt. 25:46).

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares teaches the same lesson. The wheat is placed in His garner, there to abide forever. The chaff is burned up (destroyed).

The lesson appears again in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Jesus is saying solemnly:

consider the consequences, look at the end of the matter. Be the rich man, live as you please now, but what will the afterward be? The rich man is punished while Lazarus is blessed. One course of action results in eternal bliss (life), the other in eternal punishment (death).

Consequences are an inescapable part of this present life; but the more serious are those that have to do with our eternal welfare, because they affect us eternally for good or ill. Hear Moses pleading with his people, and with us: *"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!...O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"* (Deut. 5:29; 32:29).

Hear the wise man, who proved to be not wise enough to direct his own course in life, advising generations to come: *"Young man, it's wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want*

to do; take it all in. But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do" (Eccl. 11:9, NLT).

Consequences can be bad, or they can be supremely good. *"The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace....Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed"* (Ps. 37:11, 3). *"Let the people turn from their wicked deeds. Let them banish from their minds the very thought of doing wrong! Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"* (Isa. 55:7-8, NLT). Abundant peace, endless life, prosperity, mercy and abundant pardon—here are consequences we do not want to miss.

As we live from day to day, we are constantly making choices. Let us choose carefully, remember that we also are choosing consequences—eternal consequences.

May we be among the wise ones who will remember the Lord's appeal: *"Wherefore choose life!"* □



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 (or Nisan) 1, the first day of the Sacred New Year, begins this year on Monday evening, April 7, and continues through Tuesday, April 8, Bible time being measured from

evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). It was the pattern of the Hebrew people to begin the new year from 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, falls this year on Saturday evening, April 19. 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 of 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, the anniversary of the Resurrection of Christ, occurs this year on the morning of April 22. 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, fifty days after the waving of the first sheaf offering, falls this year on June 10. □

ABOUT HIGHER CRITICISM

"Would you please tell me something about what is meant by the term 'higher criticism'? Thank you."

The first term to clarify is the meaning of Biblical criticism in general. The word criticism is derived from the Greek word *kari-no*, meaning, "to cut," hence, to judge. With regard to literature, the word is used in a constructive sense, the purpose being to analyze and evaluate. *The Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines such criticism as "the art of evaluating or analyzing works, art or literature." In literature, criticism is a positive vehicle for serious study, by which literary works are opened for deeper study and understanding. When the subject of study is the Scriptures, criticism may be negative or positive. But one fact should always be remembered: Any unfounded claims of the critics do not change the facts of Scripture one iota.

God never asks us to accept blindly what He has said. He encourages, even commands us to apply our minds and study. *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim. 2:15). Jesus Himself said, *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me"* (John 5:39).

Biblical criticism divides into two basic groups: lower and higher. Lower criticism, usually called textual criticism, is the study of the original documents behind Scripture in order to determine as closely and as carefully as possible the intended meaning of the original text, so that a passage may be better understood and appreciated. Lower criticism tries to understand the original words used by the Biblical authors in the context in which they were used. When we

look up the relevant meanings of the original Hebrew and Greek words that underlie our familiar translations, we are doing the work of a textual critic.

Now we come to the term higher criticism, which you question. Higher criticism is not concerned with the words themselves or their meanings but rather with investigating the source of the original text. Think of "lower" or textual criticism as a study of the text, and "higher" criticism as the study of external factors affecting the text (the identity, purpose and style of the author; the author's purpose in writing, the date of the writing, the language, the location, circumstances, etc.).

Higher criticism is often negative because the higher critic, rather than seeking to understand the Biblical writer and his situation, may inject irrelevant information from his own resources, which may or may not be accurate, and so influence the understanding of the Scripture text.

What makes higher criticism good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable? The criticism in and of itself is neither good nor bad. It is simply the science of inquiry. It becomes good or bad according to the accuracy, integrity and understanding of the critic and the information he relates to the subject.

The problem with much Biblical criticism is that:

1) *Critics often disregard the Divine authorship and authority of Scripture*, judging the Bible from the viewpoint of human knowledge and human experience, on a par with any other literary work. In doing this they deny the superior right of God to act apart from or different than a human being would act. From this vantage point they try to judge the validity of His work. What they cannot duplicate themselves, or prove to their own

satisfaction, they deny.

2) *Critics often reason from erroneous assumptions*. Again, they are drawing from their own experience, and not allowing God the right to be superior in knowledge or understanding. They are limiting God's information to the limits of their own human understanding.

3) *Critics often miss the message of the Bible and overemphasize the insignificant*. Not looking for the message of the Bible and not being acquainted with its Author, they focus on meaningless details while ignoring the knowledge that could lead them to genuine faith and understanding.

If the Bible were a normal human product, as any other work of literature, it could be judged and evaluated from a normal human viewpoint. But it is not.

Higher criticism goes wrong when the critic's conclusions contradict clear Scripture statements. For example, suppose the critic takes the position that the book of Revelation was composed by the apostle John, when the book says clearly that it is *"the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him,"* and which Jesus *"sent and signified...by his angel unto his servant John"* (Rev. 1:1). Can we expect the critic's subsequent statements to be correct?

Higher criticism errs again when the critic reasons from the standpoint that the Bible is false until proven true. Higher criticism also errs when the critics make themselves the ultimate judge of what can or cannot be done, of what is right and what is wrong.

Criticism can be good, but often it comes down to a mortal man telling God what He should say and do.

Whatever critics say, the words of Paul still hold: *"Let God be true, but every man a liar"* (Rom. 3:4). □



Follow the Leader

Like Paul,

I will forget those things which are behind and press
relentlessly toward my new goals in Christ Jesus.

Like David,

I will lift up mine eyes unto God, from whom comes my help.

Like Abraham,

I will trust implicitly in my God, in fullest faith that He will
yet lead me to that city whose builder and maker is God.

Like Enoch,

I will walk in daily fellowship with my heavenly Father.

Like Jehoshaphat,

I will prepare my heart to seek God.

Like Moses,

I will choose rather to suffer affliction with God's people than
to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a very short season.

Like Daniel,

I will commune frequently with God, knowing that an attitude
of prayer is the best defense against unwanted thoughts.

Like Caleb and Joshua,

I will refuse to be discouraged because of the apparently
superior numbers or greater strength of the enemy, knowing
that if I am on God's side, I am well able to overcome.

Like Gideon,

I will advance in the strength of the Lord, even though
my friends be few.

Like Aaron and Hur,

I will uphold the hands of those who are on God's side
and need my support.

Like Stephen,

I will be forgiving in spirit and loyal even to my
latest breath.

Like Jesus,

I will endure any cross that may come in
full hope of the joy set before me.

This is my NEW YEAR prayer.



Begin Again

The old year, with its broken vows and thwarted efforts, is bidding us farewell. Only scattered memories linger to tell of halfhearted efforts, sad mistakes and vain misgivings. And victories? Oh, yes. We had our triumphs, those glowing moments of success. Thank God for each and all of them. But oh, to get to the point where there will be no more blunders, no more failures, no more stumbling in the same old hole!

Through the mercy of God, we are still given time. How much, we do not know, but each new day is a new opportunity to begin again. Each day is a fresh assurance from God that we can improve, that we can succeed, that we can learn to walk without stumbling. Each new day is a fresh opportunity to redeem that selfish act, to displace the wayward thought, to make amends for the bitter word, to straighten out the crooked tracks.

Why not resolve here and now to make this New Year the best year of our lives? Why not re-discover here and now our devotion to God and radiate new hope to all we meet? Why not re-live our joy in the thought that God has planted us here for a special purpose of His own design?

Let us, like all nature around us, bestir ourselves to new life, and awaken the secret wealth of our better self. Let us bring those green shoots of new spiritual life to the surface, unlock the latent goodness of the inner life, and all rejoice together in this time of beginning again.

Springtime is growing time. Enough of bleak winter days! Enough of lives that are dark and squalid, blitzed and scarred by bitterness and hate! Can there be a soul so wretched and so full of gloom that the thought of goodness does not penetrate?

How about your inner climate? Is there winter in your soul because someone somewhere, sometime inflicted a wound with a bitter word? Unlock your frozen heart and begin to thaw by forgiving and forgetting.

Are there hurt feelings, envies, jealousies carried over from year to year? Are the drifts of ill feeling so high that no summer sun has been able to disperse them?

Do buds of beauty lie dormant because you are too proud to admit that you were wrong? When you get the courage to ask forgiveness, watch and see how quickly your soul can bud and bloom.

Are there hoarded up animosities against a neighbor? It may have started with the most trivial slight, so trivial that you have long forgotten what it really was. Your neighbor, too, may have forgotten, and

longs to make amends. Why not be the first to make the move toward friendliness—with a cheery greeting and a warm handshake?

Is there someone in your circle of contacts whom you dislike and avoid because of a certain peculiarity? Try to tolerate in others what you would allow in yourself. They may need your friendship and support more than you realize.

How about the love that warms your heart? Has your first love—that first tide of affection that you felt for God and holiness when you learned that He was offering to lowly earthborns a prize so magnificent as *eternal life*—has that first love grown chilly and cool? Are you no longer stirred—as you would like to be—as you once were—by the sound of the Gospel? Is your heart a little less touched by your Master's pleas for holiness, purity, and virtue? Now is the time to stimulate that love, to renew it afresh. Now is the time to break down the barriers that have built up in your mind—barriers of doubt, and fear, and negative feelings; barriers of indifference and uncertainty. Now is the time to feed the fires of faith, and stir up your soul to white heat intensity. Do you not know that your unbelief will not hold back the Day of the Lord a single hour? Do you not know that your lack of enthusiasm, your timidity, your slowness to believe and obey will not alter the Lord's plans one iota?

And do you realize that God will not chase after you, if you forsake Him? He does not need you—you *need Him!* And in that Day that is so near, you will need Him more than anything else in the whole world—more than anything else you can imagine. You will need His favor, His love, His protection. Why not be making sure of it now, every day, every hour? Why not be doing everything in your power to strengthen the bond that binds you to Him, and Him to you?

Do you let your friend's heart ache for a word of sympathy or appreciation? Of course you mean to encourage him—some day. Why not do it now?

If only we could remember that God is giving us every day an opportunity to begin again, to live again, to triumph again—how much we could accomplish!

If only we could know, and see, and feel all of a sudden that "*the time is short*," how it would break the spell! How we could go instantly and do the thing which we might never have another chance to do.

Enough of bleak and bitter days! Enough of cold winds and fallow ground! Enough of waning love and icy indifference. Let the warm fire of faith kindle in your heart, and let the snows thaw out into compassion and beauty and goodness to all. Let this New Year open the way to love and gratitude, to holiness and virtue that will make us true lovers of God and truly loved of God—so that He will open to us the delights of His eternal springtime in the world made over new!

May this be our heartfelt prayer. □

*Each day is our
God-given opportunity
to begin again.*

(Continued from page 20)

greater than human eyes could look upon. They also had the ability to diminish that brightness, so that they could be seen as "men" (Gen. 17:1; 18:1-2).

Jesus Himself said that *"the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Matt. 13:43). The prophet Daniel said that the *"wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever"* (Dan. 12:3).

The prophet Isaiah said that the

Life is
not limited to
one tiny planet in one
small solar system in
one corner of
one galaxy.

glorious new world will have no need of the light of the sun or of the moon, *"but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory"* (Isa. 60:19).

In the book of Revelation we read of the eternal city (a figurative representation of the glorified saints—see Rev. 21:1-10), that *"the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof....And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light"* (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

When our earth is filled with glorified, immortal beings, each one a light in himself, this dark planet will be no longer dark but will shine as the other worlds in God's finished creation. How many other dark planets throughout the galaxies are in this same stage of development?

Who Are We?

Who are we, mere earthlings, and where do we fit into this vast creation? Are we vanishing into nothingness in a universe that is immense beyond our power to imagine?

No, positively no! The stars speak of God, His greatness, His magnificence and His eternity. And through His Word we can become acquainted with that God, that Creator, as we see—at a distance—what He has been doing and is doing—and what He will shortly complete right here on earth!

As we look into the wonders of the heavens, we ask: Why are we, mere mortals, being permitted to peer so far into the heavens? Why is God permitting us such a deep-field view into His creation?—or is it still only the surface that we are permitted to see? Perhaps the portion we are seeing is so small that it is insignificant in the Divine scheme.

What is God doing? Perhaps God is counteracting the drugging effects of our faithless and indifferent generation. Perhaps God is providing a means for us to look above the mire and materialism of our world, above its sensuality and vice and its multitude of problems, and see the destiny He has planned for our world.

Perhaps He is trying to boost our faith, our confidence, our zeal for His cause, by giving us a tiny, breathtaking glimpse of His handiwork. Perhaps He is saying, "See what I can do—and believe. Get ready, for I will soon complete my work on earth."

Perhaps He is giving us one last stimulus to prepare for what He has promised, before He breaks into human history and changes the course of life for everyone on earth.

When we think about His Divine purpose and the stupendous opportunity He has set before us, how can we forget it for a moment?

Our faith in God and His Word is strengthened and magnified by the discoveries of science, the Hubble Telescope, and those who are working hard to discover what has not been seen before. All that they

find only emphasizes the fact that a God of order and design controls the mighty universe. We do not pretend to understand all. Even those who study it intensely are limited by their observations (what they can actually see, which at light years of distance, is limited at best), must constantly revise their conclusions and theories.

But the more they are able to see, the more we realize our extreme smallness, and the more we marvel at the fact that God recognizes us at all! Small wonder that the Psalmist exclaimed, *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* (Ps. 8:3-4).

Yet this Infinite Creator is inviting us mortals to become part of His eternal creation. Who will turn down such an offer for the small gratifications of this world? Who can think of willfully cutting himself off from such glory, such immensity, such beauty and light?

Jesus is coming to make earth a part of heaven. To those whom He accepts, the door will be open to explore the vast reaches of creation. Interstellar space travel is common to angels. Eternity will be none too long to survey the length and breadth of it. And as we look at the universe visible to the Hubble Telescope, does not that most precious of all promises become even more meaningful: *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him"* (1 Cor. 2:9, NLT)? Our power to imagine grows ever greater—perhaps we can even have a hand in forming and filling other planets with happy, blessed inhabitants.

For when life and opportunity and expansion are everlasting, where is the limit of usefulness to which one may aspire?

We can only say with the great apostle, *"Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods!"* (Rom. 11:33, NLT). □

*Another year is dawning:
Dear Master, let it be,
In working or in waiting
Another year for Thee;*

*Another year of mercies,
Of faithfulness and grace,
Another year of gladness
In the shining of Thy face;*

*Another year of progress,
Another year of praise,
Another year of proving
Thy presence all the days;*

*Another year of service,
Thy faithfulness to see;
Another year of training
In holier work for Thee.*

*Another year is dawning:
Dear Master, let it be,
In working and in watching,
Another year for Thee!*

—Selected



*When verdure was springing and flow'rs were in bloom,
And nature was smiling and fair;
When winter had merged into springtime again,
Then Abib proclaimed a new year.*

*A new year of joy will soon dawn upon men,
Unknown to this planet before,
When Jesus our Saviour shall come back again,
His Kingdom on earth to restore.*

*The angelic message will then be fulfilled,
And peace o'er the earth shall extend;
No error or sin e'er its comfort can mar,
For right shall the victory win.*