

Megiddo Message

Fall 2008



*G*iving thanks always for all things
to God the Father in the name of
our Lord Jesus Christ. -Eph. 5:20

Too Good To Be True?

Have you noticed that telemarketers have a new tactic? Their first words used to give them away: "How are you today?" Now you pick up the phone, and after a few seconds' delay, a voice starts to speak, and you realize the caller is a computer (and I admit to being able to hang up a computer without the least feeling of guilt).

But sometimes I listen, because the psychology behind these messages interests me.

First, their words are carefully phrased to get my attention. The tone of voice is serious. "There is no need to be alarmed," the voice begins. Or, "I don't want to shock you today, but..."—but they *do* want to shock me because the next statement is something like: "You have only 24 hours to ..." or "This is the last call you will receive to..."

What have they accomplished? They have captured my attention so that I keep listening long enough to learn that I have just 24 hours to renew the warranty on my vehicle. Or this is the last call about a one-time opportunity to consolidate my credit card debt. Or I have just been

ing the sharp edge of truth. Can I believe their sales pitch? No, because they are selling unreality.

The same marketing concept has carried even into the church. Mainstream Christianity promotes a gospel of G-R-A-C-E (God's **R**ighteousness **A**t Christ's **E**xpense). Pick up a common pamphlet, and the first message is usually one of urgency: "Where will you spend Eternity?" or "Where will you go if you die tonight?" The inference is that you will go to some horrible place called Hell.

What should you do? The solution is EASY, as easy as 1-2-3. All you have to do is:

1. Realize you are a sinner.
2. Recognize Jesus loves you so much that He died on the cross to save you.
3. Repent of your sins and receive Jesus personally as your Savior and Lord.

Do the above, they say, and you are saved and have eternal life. If you die tonight, you have nothing to fear; you will go straight to heaven.

Does it sound too good to be true? Yes, because it is sadly NOT true!—its source is theology, not the teaching of the Bible.

What did Jesus say about the way to salvation? Easy as 1-2-3? On the contrary, Jesus said, "*Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able*" (Luke 13:24). His message was one of "hear and do." "*Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them...*" (Matt. 7:24). "*He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*" (Matt. 24:13). "*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near*" (Rev. 1:3). "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it*" (Luke 9:23-24).

Is Jesus' way easy? No. Effortless? No. Painless? No.

Many ways are being preached. Some say all are good, that "all roads lead to the city." But this saying is not Scripture. What if the plan one follows is not endorsed by the Creator? We cannot give ourselves eternal life. It does not matter what our name is, or background, or education, or denomination, or nationality—or how many



Jesus did not ignore the sharp edge of truth.

selected to receive an R.V., or an all-expenses-paid vacation in Hawaii.

What do I have to do? It is always incredibly easy. I simply need to call a certain number, or go to a designated website and answer three simple questions, and....

I hang up. Why? Because I have trouble believing something that sounds too good to be true. Because truth usually has an edge on it. What are the marketers accomplishing?

They know people are always looking for the diet that requires no sacrifice, or the pill that will cure all their ills, or the tonic that will restore youth, or the achievement that takes no effort. So their task is to persuade me (the consumer) to purchase their product, while ignor-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

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EDITORIAL

2 Too Good To Be True? *by Ruth E. Sisson*

FEATURE

4 Choose, Choose, Choose Is It The Right Choice?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

8 Is Jesus the "Mighty God"?

Who is the Alpha and Omega? • God is Faithful
• Self-referencing faith?

BIBLE STUDY: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

12 Paul's Defense Before King Agrippa (Part 37) *by Ruth E. Sisson*

Paul's testimonial of his conversion • The Resurrection is real • Paul recounts his conversion • A forced end to the sermon • Paul, man of courage • The after meeting

KNOW YOUR BIBLE?

21 Thieves and Robbers • When God Fought Their Battle • All Kinds of Curses

ARTICLE

22 It Is So Easy to Forget the Creator *by Edward Shayler*

YOUTH IN CHRIST

24 Golden Keys I Want It

AWESOME DESIGNS

27 The Incredibly Awesome Atom *by Patricia A. Fleming*

30 He Is Coming!

31 I Did It His Way • I'm Not Going Back! *by Melva Walton*

BACK COVER POEM My Aim

BACK COVER PHOTO: *By Patricia A. Fleming, at Sunset Point in Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah*

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.

Choose, Choose, Choose

IS IT THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Life is a series of choices. We cannot have everything. We cannot give everything. We cannot be everything. We cannot do everything. We cannot go everywhere we might like to. We cannot read everything. We cannot see everything. We must choose, choose, choose.

Our stature as men and women of Christ is determined exactly and entirely by our skill in selecting. If we major in minors, if we show a first-rate dedication to second-rate issues, if we allow impulse and convenience to dictate our choices while we drift weakly with circumstances, how can we expect to be anything but shabby, mediocre, and ineffective?

Do we ever feel that we have little opportunity to choose the course of our lives, even in little things? Is so much of our time predetermined by the demands of job, family, children, spouse, and general activities that we have little to call our own? Even so, we have choices. And those choices impact not only our own spiritual growth but often the attitudes and growth of those around us.

CHOOSING— What We THINK ABOUT

Who or what decides what you think about in the course of a day? This may seem like a strange question, but the Bible tells us that we must take captive “every thought” and make it “obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). This is no small task.

Our thoughts are one very large and very important area of our lives which is not predetermined.

What were you thinking about when you woke up this morning? The duties of the day ahead? a special concern for someone in your family? an irritating situation from the day before? a special promise from the Word of God?

There is no area of our lives where we can be more in command than in our thought life. Let events happen as they will, let situations change, let others say what they wish, we are still the captain of our own mind. Nothing takes control there except we allow it.

If we let ourselves think about every petty event that flashes by, if we let our minds be fertile ground for every idea that blows in, can we expect to produce quality merchandise in our thought-factory?

Changing the metaphor, suppose we let our garden plot become fertile ground to every seed that blew on the wind—what would we have? A corn field? a bumper crop of green beans? Just one thing is sure: we would have a vigorous, healthy weed patch!



Just as surely we will have a spiritual weed patch in our minds if we give ground to every seed-thought that passes by.

What is the answer to keeping our minds free of the excess? Choose, choose, choose!

CHOOSING—

What We Talk About

Who decides what we talk about—our friends, our children, our associates, the news media, the idle gossip that flits by, the events of the day, or...or...or...?

We are most likely to talk about what we are most concerned about, what we keep most on our minds and cherish in our hearts.

One key source of our conversation is what we read. If a large part of our reading is centered in the Word of God, we will find ourselves thinking about it in our quiet moments and talking about it when we come together.

This was the plan God Himself set up in ancient Israel. The command of the Lord through Moses was, *"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up"* (Deut. 11:18). What were they to be talking about when they sat in their houses? The law of God. What were they to be talking about when they walked by the way, when they lay down, and when they woke up? The law of God.

If we keep our conversation God honoring, others will quickly learn what is the center and goal of our lives, what we really love and stand for.

Who controls what you talk about? You do!

CHOOSING—

What We WEAR

Who decides what we wear? Is it dictated by our peers? the society? by the changing fads and fashions? Or is it determined by what is practical, modest, in good taste, and pleasing to God? Do we think first of ourselves as representing a great cause, and how we can honor it?

What we wear may seem far removed from spiritual values, but it is not. The Bible is very specific that we *"be not conformed to this world"* (Rom. 12:2); that women adorn themselves in *"modest apparel,"* not stylish, costly, and appealing to the lower nature (1 Tim. 2:9–10).

If we are looking for the compliments of those around us or want to be constantly changing our wardrobe, we have the wrong values. Keeping current with the fashions holds a double peril. It means that we will have our minds on the loves and lusts of this world, and we will be feeding a desire to spend our money in ways that do not glorify God.

As Christians, how can we justify either time or money for clothing designed to appeal to the lower nature, and which identifies us as belonging to a society we are commanded to leave? (2 Cor. 6:17–18).

We should think, too, of our influence on our children. If they see us watching the ads, window shopping, and comparing our clothing with that of others, they will very likely copy our wrong values.

What dictates our apparel—our strong convictions, or the fashions of this world? The choice is ours.

CHOOSING—

How We ACT

Who or what determines how we act—the people around us, or the law of God to which we have pledged allegiance?

Being a Christian affects every part of our lives, even to how we walk down the



Do we choose our wardrobe to be in style or to represent our Christian standards?



How we spend our money is an important choice for each of us. *"...Do all to the glory of God"* includes how we manage and view our finances.

street, how we drive our car, how we do our work.

Isn't that being petty? Not at all. How we drive our car might seem like a small issue, but have we ever judged the character of another driver? And haven't we realized, too, that others judge us? How we drive may reveal much about us as individuals. How do we react when the driver ahead of us acts irresponsibly, or the driver behind us toots his horn at our split-second delay? Are we always courteous, considerate, careful, and self-controlled? Are we always willing to defer to one who is perhaps slower in his reactions or less certain about where he is headed?

And how much liberty do we give ourselves with the rules of the road? Do we ever park—even briefly—where the sign says clearly "No Parking"? Or do we ever pass where the road is clearly marked "No Passing"? Even if we see others disobeying, can we go straight ahead without any resentment or feeling of anger?

Nothing could seem more ordinary than walking down the street, but are we always Christians in the way we walk? Perhaps the issue is not so much the walk as what we do *as* we walk. Would someone watching us sense that we were trying to be just as much like our surroundings as possible, or would they think us as *"strangers and pilgrims"*? Are we focused only on accomplishing our business and returning home, or do we want to blend in with our surroundings? Are our eyes in the ends of the earth, so to speak, or are they under control—God's control?

How well do we represent our faith when we are on the job? The workplace gives us many opportunities daily to preach the gospel—without saying a word. Are our moral principles always above criticism? The respect we show to co-workers and superiors, the dignity with which we behave, our composure in the midst of difficulties; our carefulness, our attentiveness, the interest we give our work—all are indicators of the value we place on our faith. And all are telling others whom we serve—either our Father in heaven, or ourselves.

If we keep our eyes open, we shall find countless small opportunities to show a forgiving spirit, a spirit of appreciation, a kindly spirit, a thankful spirit, a humble spirit, a brotherly spirit. If we are spiritually alert, we will see numerous times when we can benefit others by our consideration, our thoughtfulness, and—most often—our Christlike love and example.

Most especially this is true in our homes. Our children need our love and concern; they need our affection, our sympathetic understanding, our guidance. What shame on us if we hold back!

The story is told of an eight-year old who came to his father with a bad bruise on his arm.

The father, seeing that there wasn't anything he could do for the boy from a medical point of view, waved the child away brusquely. When the child dissolved in tears, the father asked him, "Son, what did you expect me to do for you?" The boy replied timidly: "You could have said, Ouch!"



Some choices—like gambling—are detrimental. Wise Christians will have no part with such.

CHOOSING—

How We Spend Our Leisure Time

When the apostle Paul wrote that *"whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (1 Cor. 10:31), he included every part of our lives: *"Whatever you do."* Even leisure time is not exempt from Christian duty.

How we spend our time—particularly our uncommitted time—is more a matter of choice than we might care to admit. While our lives are busy, there is always leisure, even unplanned leisure. There are usually many activities which are optional. Or it

may be time waiting—in the grocery line, on the telephone, at the doctor's office.

How we use our uncommitted time—whether leisure, or vacation, or waiting—is another choice we make. We can carelessly waste these moments, or with a bit of planning we can make them spiritual refreshers by filling them with prayer, meditation and inspiring thoughts. The choice is ours.

Our life pattern is largely a matter of choice. If we go after the best this world can give, if we want larger homes and more property and more and more of the things money can buy, we will find ourselves with less and less time for the things of God.

The same is true of our children's time. When we include one activity, we exclude another. What will give the greatest long-term benefit: the multitude of daily activities, or the Sunday School lessons and family devotions?

We should keep in mind that one day all who have covenanted to serve God will have to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. When that Day comes, we will be very thankful if we can say that we followed the advice of the apostle Paul and made *"the very most"* of our time (Eph. 5:15–16).

CHOOSING— What We Look At

We have many options today in choosing what we look at. Every time we pick up a newspaper or magazine, or turn on the radio or the TV, we make a deliberate choice of what we let into our minds. Here are choices that can be frightening indeed, and we hold the controls. It is much easier to get thoughts and impressions *into* than *out of* our minds. What we allow to come into our minds will stay, wanted or unwanted. A good question to ask ourselves is, Would I be reading or viewing this if Jesus were beside me? Will this strengthen my firm resolve to serve God and my desire for eternal life? If not, the quicker we separate from it, the safer.

Many people use television for entertainment, but as committed Christians we need no entertainment. If our hearts are set on living in the world to come, our minds must be fixed on making that goal a reality.

Let us realize that when we choose what we will watch, or listen to, or look at, we are choosing what we will BECOME. Rather than turn on the radio or the TV and place ourselves in danger, why not turn to sources that we can be sure are safe and give ourselves a spiritual "lift"—a Christ-centered tape, or hymn, or Christian recording, or Bible study. We make the choice. We are in command.

The Choice-Of-All-Choices

Why think so much about our choices? Because by all of these mini-choices we are making one really big choice: whether or not we will be in the coming Kingdom of God. Do we want to be there? Of course we would all say, "Yes!" Of course we want to be there! But do we want it enough to make the right choices?

It is a responsibility we cannot escape. Our obligations are many, but we alone are in control of our choices: what we think about, what we look at, how we feel, how we react. And according to these decisions God will judge us either worthy or unworthy of the eternal crown.

Let's resolve here and now to choose always the very best. How can we do better than that? Then we can look forward to sharing the eternal Kingdom with Christ and all His faithful ones. **MM**



When Jesus Christ returns, would I want Him to find me watching a game? Do I choose to witness for Him or do I take part in scenes and behavior that dishonor Him?

Is Jesus the “Mighty God”?

“In Isaiah 9:6, the words ‘everlasting Father’ and ‘mighty God’ are parts of the description of Jesus. I am seeking to understand these descriptions. Can you help?”

The prophet Isaiah is looking ahead to the birth of Jesus and the roles He will fill. It reads: *“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”* (Isa. 9:6).

Notice the prophecy is written as if it had already happened—some 700 years before Christ. Much prophecy is written in present tense, as though currently happening. Or it is written as though it had already happened. Why? Because when God speaks it is just as certain as if it was history. What He has said will be!

What does the Prophet forecast? First he speaks of the birth of the Messiah: *“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a son is given.”* This part of the prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus to Mary (Luke 2:9–14).

Now the Prophet fast forwards 2000+ years, to the time when this very special Son will take over the government of the earth. *“And the government shall be upon his shoulders”* (Isa. 9:6).

A few hundred years later the angel Gabriel came to Mary to announce that she would have a son, and he also told of Christ’s future role, that He would be a King (see Luke 1:32–33). He would reign, and *“of his kingdom there shall be no end.”*

What does Isaiah say about the capacities in which Jesus will serve when the government of the earth is on His shoulders? *“His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”* (Isa. 9:6).

Does the name “Mighty God” mean that the child being prophesied was the supreme, Almighty, Omnipotent God?

Notice that the prophecy does not describe Jesus’ role as “Almighty” but “mighty.” The two words are different. There is one, almighty God. The original word for “almighty” is *shadday*, and means simply “The Almighty” (*The New Strong’s Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*). It is used 52 times in the Old Testament, and always and only of God Himself. For example, when God spoke to Abraham, He called Himself the Almighty: *“I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect”* (Gen. 17:1). The Psalmist spoke of His protec-

tor as the Almighty: *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty”* (Ps. 91:1). Job addressed God’s justice: *“Does God subvert judgment? or does the Almighty pervert justice?”* (Job. 8:3).

By contrast, the word for “mighty” as used in Isaiah’s prophecy is *gibbor*, and means “powerful; by impl. warrior, tyrant:— champion, chief, excel, giant, man, mighty (man, one), strong (man), valiant man” (*The New Strong’s Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*). Another lexicon defines *gibbor* as “1) mighty, powerful, i.e., pertaining to being strong—Pr 30:30; Ps 112:2; 2) mighty, i.e., pertaining to having political or military force—Dan. 11:3 (*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*).

“Mighty” can be used to describe God, but it is most commonly used of a mighty warrior or conqueror. The quality is one of strength and military or political might, which is the subject of the passage in question: *“the government will be on his shoulder.”* Jesus is coming to conquer the forces of

***Once given immortality,
Jesus is “alive forever more.”
His kingdom once established
will be “everlasting.”***

evil and bring all into subjection to His new and righteous authority. Other prophecies of Jesus describe Him in His role as conqueror and judge (see Isaiah 11:1–6; Jer. 23:5; 33:14–15; Isa. 2:3–4).

Why is Jesus called “mighty God”? Jesus will never be the God of heaven—He was and is the Son of God; but with respect to His kingdom He will be the highest authority. Members of God’s family bear His name, just as the angels are called “God” (see Ex. 23:20–21). Moses was called “God” to his people, not that he was in any sense the eternal God but he was God’s agent, and was assuming a role of authority to the Israelites (Ex. 4:16; 7:1). He is “Emmanuel,” which being interpreted is *“God with us”* (Matt. 1:23).

How will Jesus be “the everlasting Father”? Various of the newer versions offer some alternate translations. For example, the *New Catholic* and

Douay Versions read: “Father of the world to come,” which is certainly a role Christ will fill. The *New English Bible* calls Him “Father for all time,” adding in a footnote: “Father of a wide realm.” *The Emphasized Old Testament* by Rotherham renders it, “Father of Futurity, Prince of Prosperity.”

Is Jesus “everlasting”? Once made immortal, He will never die. Jesus is not “from everlasting to everlasting” like the heavenly Father (see Ps. 103:17-18); His life began when He was born of the virgin Mary. But once given immortality, Jesus is “alive forever more” (Rev. 1:18). He is “everlasting” going forward. His kingdom once established will be “everlasting” (Dan. 7:27). The saints ruling with Him will be everlasting also, because they also will have been made immortal, like the angels, never to die (see Luke 20:35-36).

Isaiah 9:6-7 tells more about His government. It will be righteous, it will be peaceful, it will have “no end.” It will be “from henceforth, even for ever”!

What a grand time to anticipate, when everyone on earth will enjoy peace and security, with none to make afraid (Mic. 4:2-4). Isaiah also pictured this glorious time, when as a result of Christ’s fair and just administration, “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Isa. 32:17-18).

WHO IS THE ALPHA AND OMEGA?

“Why would Jesus say He was the ‘Alpha and the Omega’, if He did not exist from the beginning with God? He says also He is the ‘Beginning and the End’ in Rev. 1:8.”

The term “the Alpha and the Omega” appears three times in the book of Revelation (see Rev. 1:8,* 21:6; 22:13). The phrase describes the beginning and the end, alpha being the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega being the last.

The phrase first appears in (Revelation 1:8, where we read, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” Who is speaking? Two details in this text suggest that the speaker is God. The better (earlier) Greek Manuscripts and most of the common translations (excluding the KJV) add the word “God” after “the Lord,” and so identify the speaker as “the Lord God” (see NRSV, NIV, NJB, NASB, NAS, TEV, NLT, etc.). The last phrase of the passage in Rev. 1:8 also points to “the Alpha and the Omega” being God by saying He is the one “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (NRSV). The original Greek

translated “Almighty” is *pantokrator*, and means “the all-ruling God, as absolute and universal sovereign; Almighty, Omnipotent” (*Strong’s Concordance*). Each use of “the Almighty” refers definitely to the Omnipotent, Almighty God (see Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22). The word “Almighty” is also used several times in the Old Testament, and each time refers to the one and only God.

Why should a statement by God Himself appear early in the Book of Revelation? God is the source of the Revelation of Jesus, as the opening verses state: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the Word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw” (Rev. 1:1-2). God gave the revelation to Jesus, who gave it to His angel, who transmitted it to His servant John, who wrote it down so that we could have it today as part of the Bible.

Revelation 22:13 again says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” Who is the speaker here? It is Jesus, because He has just said, “Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me”—this definitely describes the role of Jesus, not His Father.

Now for your question: How can Jesus be “the beginning and the end” if He was not existing from the beginning with God?

The Greek word translated “beginning” is *arche*, and means “chief” with respect to “order, time, place, or rank” (*Strong’s Dictionary* of Hebrew and Greek). It is also interesting to note that the word “end” (*telos*) refers to a completion or conclusion, as reaching a goal, not a termination.

Of what is Jesus “the Alpha and the Omega”? Of what is He “chief” with respect to “order, time, place, or rank”?

The entire book of Revelation is about “things which must shortly come to pass” (Rev. 1:1). And the greater part of the book is prophecy of events to follow Jesus’ second advent. There is prophecy of:

- ◆ Inaugural ceremonies for the King (Revelation, chapters 4, 5)
- ◆ The selecting of associate rulers and the developing of a new populous (Revelation, ch. 7, 14)
- ◆ The conquest of the nations and the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation, ch. 15-17, 19:11-21)
- ◆ The collapse and removal of the old economic and political systems (Revelation, ch. 17-18)
- ◆ The honoring of the bride, and the marriage supper of the lamb (Revelation 19)
- ◆ The coronation of the King (Revelation 19)
- ◆ The millennial reign of Christ and the saints (Rev. 20:1-4)

- ◆ The second resurrection and judgment (Rev. 20:7–15)
 - ◆ The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21)
- Of all of the above, Christ will be the “chief,” the highest in rank and importance, the “King of kings” and “Lord of lords” in His Kingdom (Zech. 14:9; Rev. 19:16, 19; 17:14). Daniel prophesied that all “peoples, nations and languages” would “serve Him” (Dan. 7:13–14). The Psalmist also prophesied of Him, that “all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him” (Ps. 72:11), and that the territory of His kingdom will extend “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” (Ps. 72:8).

Even before the Kingdom is set up, Jesus is the “chief,” the head, the “alpha.” Paul wrote to the Colossians about Jesus: “And He is before [“superior to” – Strong’s Concordance] all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Col. 1:17–18).

Christ will be the “chief,” the “King of kings” and “Lord of Lords” in His Kingdom.

Jesus will also be the completion (“the end”) of this special assignment, bringing it to a conclusion when the earth is filled with the glory of the Lord “as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). This conclusion is pictured in Revelation 22, where Jesus says also that He is coming suddenly to bring all of these events into being. “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Rev. 22:12–13).

The whole Bible is focused on Jesus’ coming kingdom and the selecting of those who will be part of it. Jesus spent His entire ministry teaching the glad tidings of the kingdom (see Luke 4:43–44; 8:1; Matt. 4:23; 9:35). The theme of His parables was the “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of Heaven.” The central focus of the prayer He taught His disciples was: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

Every aspect of setting up the coming kingdom, from beginning to end, is the work and obliga-

tion—and honor—of Jesus Christ. How fitting that He calls Himself “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” To be Earth’s king was the purpose of His coming and His whole career (John 18:37).

*The reference to “the Alpha and the Omega” in Rev. 1:11 is not in the earliest manuscripts. A similar phrase, “first and last,” occurs in the Old Testament. See Isa. 44:6; 48:12.

GOD IS FAITHFUL

“I don’t believe God will let anyone fall away from Him. He will bring them back and save them. Paul said it himself: ‘If we disbelieve, He will be faithful’ (2 Tim. 2:13).”

God “will be faithful”—what a great promise. What did Paul mean? We need to read the passage you cite in context. “This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:11–13).

In this passage, Paul makes four cause–effect statements regarding the “we” who have agreed to serve God. (1) We shall live with Him if we die with Him. Then (2) we shall reign with Him if we endure. The next statement (3) is a negative condition: if we deny Him He will deny us. Then follows the concluding statement (4): “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

Can we believe that Paul made three statements of conditions, that we reap what we sow, as he taught elsewhere (Gal. 6:7–8), and then reversed himself and said that He would save us whether or not we believe?

If the Scriptures are harmonious, and if Paul knew what he was talking about, there has to be something wrong with this conclusion. Read again what Paul says God will do if we deny Him—“He also will deny us.” So, “if we are faithless,” God will bless us? No. Where is the problem? Not with Paul, but with our understanding.

When Paul says “If we are faithless,” we can understand that. Faith has to be fed, built up, and maintained. That is why Paul said that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

What will God do if we are faithless and unbelieving? How will God “remain faithful”? God is true to His word. He always fulfills His promise. He has promised to bless and reward those who are faithful with everlasting life; and to destroy the workers of iniquity (Prov. 2:21–22; Mal. 3:6). He would not be true to Himself or His word if He

saved everyone regardless of what they did.

What is the end of unbelieving? Read Revelation 21:8, where unbelief is grouped with sorcery and idolatry and “all liars,” and the end result is the “second death.”

Paul addresses the point specifically: “Here we see how kind and how severe God is. He is severe toward those who have fallen, but kind to you—if you continue in His kindness. But if you do not, you too will be broken off” (Rom. 11:22 TEV).

God’s plan is the same throughout. To the Israelites He promised a blessing on those who obey His commandments, and a curse on those who disobey (Deut. 30:19). Jesus Himself said the same: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” but “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned”—the “if” makes the difference (John 15:10, 6).

Jude recorded that God saved the people out of the land of Egypt and afterward “destroyed those who did not believe” (Jude 5). Can we think that God would change His policy and save those who turn their backs on Him? We read also, “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal. 3:6). Also, “With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

What is Paul saying? *The New Jerusalem Bible* conveys Paul’s thought in 2 Tim. 2:11–13 perhaps more clearly: “Here is a saying that you can rely on: If we have died with Him, then we shall live with Him. If we persevere, then we shall reign with Him. If we disown Him, then he will disown us. If we are faithless, He is faithful still, for He cannot disown His own self.” God will be true to His promise, and He never promised to save one not faithful to the end (Matt. 10:22; Prov. 1:24–26; 2 Chron. 15:2). He will never go back on His word, even if we go back on ours.

What does He do with the faithless? He pleads with them, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, oh house of Israel?” (Ezek. 33:11).

Again He pleads, “I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, ‘says the Lord God.’ ‘Therefore turn and live!’” (Ezek. 18:32).

God is just. “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face” (Ps. 89:14). How could God be truly just if He treated everyone equally regardless of their faithfulness?

God is consistent. He will not alter what He has said (Isa. 55:10–11; Ps. 89:34). That is why the Bible is filled with pleas to turn and do what is right (see Jer. 4:14; 25:5; Joel 2:12; Zech. 1:4; 2 Kings 17:13; Prov. 1:23).

SELF-REFERENCING FAITH?

“My wife is a Christian and I am not. She is intrigued by your church and suggested that I ask a question.

“So I have read what you believe. I would like to know why you believe this. Please do not use a quote from the Bible nor reference God in your response, because this is self referencing.

“I ask this genuinely and not in a confrontational manner.”

We see no way to talk about our Church or our beliefs without referencing God or the Bible. The Bible is our only source of knowledge about our Creator available to us today, and the sole authority and foundation of everything we believe.

We hope that you will reconsider and realize that no human being has the ability to make themselves or any other form of life. Nor can we even begin to comprehend the estimated three-billion-letter software code in the DNA molecule of every one of the 100 trillion living, self-supporting, self-repairing, self-replicating cells in our bodies. We give it a simple name: life. Can anyone with a rational mind think that such complexity happened by chance?

The more we observe the various forms of life on our planet, and how perfectly they are adapted to survive in their respective environments, not to mention the laws that govern them and the interdependence between them, the more we are convinced that life on earth is no chance development. Every living creature is living evidence of the awesome ability of our Creator and of our total dependence on Him for our life and all that sustains it, both now and in the future. **MM**

Every living creature is living evidence of our total dependence on our Creator for our life both now and in the future.

FAITH *in Action*

Acts 25:24–27 NKJV

24 And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.

25 But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him.

26 I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write.

27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

Acts 26:1–9 NKJV

1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself:

2 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews,

3 especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

4 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know.

5 They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.

7 To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

8 Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

9 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

by RUTH E. SISSON

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

The apostle Paul was still a prisoner at Caesarea. To escape the vehemence of the local Jews, Paul had appealed to Caesar. But legal process was slow, then as now. Before Paul could embark for Rome, he had to be cleared by Festus. And before Festus could dispatch Paul to Rome, he had to provide the Emperor with an explanation of the charges against his prisoner and why the prisoner was exercising his right to be tried in the highest court of the Empire.

Could King Agrippa, Festus' honored guest, help the governor with the explanation of charges? In any case, the King and his sister were glad to hear Paul's defense—perhaps they saw it as an opportunity for some singular entertainment.



Read Acts 25:24 to 26:9

Picture the courtroom in Caesarea. Governor Festus enters with all the dignity of state, along with his honored guests King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice (who is also sister of Felix's wife Drusilla). Then the VIP's file in and take their seats. The members of the cabinet follow, and other men of eminence in the city, both Jews and Romans. All are dressed in their official robes. One word says it all: Pomp! Scarlet, and purple, and glittering jewels of silver and gold fill the room.

On the other side stands the insignificant looking Jew in prison garb, chained to a Roman soldier. Was Paul overawed by the pomp? Not for a moment! To one who had been blinded by the light from heaven, nothing of this world glittered. To one who had seen the resurrected Christ, the most royal pomp was only empty show.

1. How did Festus open the court session? (25:24–27) _____

As Festus sat with Agrippa in the silence of the pre-court session, he doubtless was wishing with all his might that he could turn back the clock. If only he could go back to the first time he ever saw Paul, before Paul had appealed to Caesar!

Festus had a dilemma on his hands. That Paul was innocent of any charge that a Roman court could lay against him Festus had no doubt. Paul was clearly a quiet, peace-loving citizen. No serious charge of riot or insurrection had ever been proved against him. Any charges against him had to be fundamentally religious. But what Paul could have done to evoke such fierce hatred from his own people was beyond Festus to imagine.

What should Festus have done? Let Paul go on risk of a Jewish riot? Definitely not. Hand him over to the Jews and watch a Roman citizen be literally pulled to pieces by a mob? Absolutely not. Now Paul had appealed to Caesar for justice over an issue that was no concern to Caesar. What if Caesar should view the case as frivolous, a total waste of his time, and should hand Festus a reprimand? If only Festus could set Paul free, give him a military escort out of the country, and get him to promise to stay out of the country.

But it was too late for that now.

As everyone waited in silence for the court session to open, Paul was without question the least troubled of anyone present. While Festus worried about what to say, Paul was going over the things he loved most to think about—the day he was stopped by Jesus Christ himself on the road to Damascus, the convictions of his heart, and his bright hope of future life in Christ's kingdom! At last he was to have opportunity to witness *"before gentiles and kings..."* (Acts 9:15 NJB).

As for the proceedings of this day, Paul had nothing to fear. He would only speak the truth from his heart. The consequences—even his very life—were in God's hands. He had the Lord's promise, *"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome"* (Acts 23:11).

2. Who gave Paul permission to speak in the court? (26:1)
3. How did Paul show respect to King Agrippa? _____

Paul both preached and practiced respect for governmental authority, because *"the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God"*



King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice. **Herod the Great** was their great grandfather.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BIBLE HERODS

Herod the Great: *Head of the Herodian Dynasty*

- ◆ Reigned over Judea 37–4 BC.
- ◆ Was not a Jew by birth and murdered members of the Hasmonean family whom he saw as a threat to the throne. Herod was hated by the Jews, although to curry their favor he spent large sums of money building them a temple.
- ◆ Was silver tongued—became very powerful and very wealthy, building many great monuments to his name.
- ◆ Ordered the killing of the baby boys in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16–18).
- ◆ After his death, his kingdom was divided among three of his sons: Archelaus, Antipas and Philip.

Aristobulus IV: *Son of Herod the Great and Mariamne, of Hasmonean descent (Jewish blood)*

- ◆ He and his full brother were both executed 7 BC.

Herod Agrippa I: *Grandson of Herod the Great*

- ◆ Sent to imperial court in Rome after his father's death. Was educated in Rome and made important political friends.
- ◆ Made "king" over various territories including Judea 41–44 AD.
- ◆ Aided in the banishment of his uncle Herod Antipas who had had John the Baptist beheaded (Matt. 14:3–12) and mocked Jesus at His trial (Luke 23:7–8).
- ◆ Arrested and beheaded the apostle James, the brother of John
- ◆ Also imprisoned Peter, but an angel delivered Peter (Acts 12).
- ◆ Was struck down by God in Caesarea for accepting worship after a speech.

Herod Agrippa II: *Great-grandson of Herod the Great*

- ◆ Agrippa II (about 17 years) was in Rome when his father was stricken by God and died in AD 44.
- ◆ Bernice and Drusilla (married to Felix) were his sisters. Bernice (20) after failed marriages, spent much of her life with her brother, Agrippa II.
- ◆ Was given first territory in AD 48 when 21 years old. Was king over 45 years—well beyond the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
- ◆ During the visit King Agrippa and Bernice made to welcome Porcius Festus (AD 58) to Caesarea, he asked to hear the notorious Christian, the apostle Paul who had just recently *"appealed to Caesar."*
- ◆ He heard the great Apostle's story—his conversion and commission. When asked, *"Do you believe the prophets?"* was King Agrippa's reply in jest? *"Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?"* (Acts 26:29–30).
- ◆ Agrippa II was the last prince of the Herodian dynasty.

It was said of Herod the Great by his enemies that *"He stole to the throne like a fox, ruled like a tiger, and died like a dog"* (Klausner, J., *Jesus of Nazareth*, 145).

**Paul “lived a Pharisee”**

The Pharisees, a powerful religious leadership group within Judaism, were both scholarly and politically minded. Originating during the Maccabean period some two centuries before Christ, they were socially powerful leaders. The Pharisee’s chief concerns being with ritual purity, tithes, food laws, and Sabbath and festival observances as set forth in Moses’ Law and subsequent interpreters (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:291).

During the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were the religious leaders of the Jews. A strict religious group, they made a lifetime profession of keeping all the minute regulations in the law, especially those of the oral traditions. Paul was able to say, I lived a Pharisee...

- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind whom Jesus said paid tithes of “*mint and rue and all manner of herbs*,” and passed by justice and the love of God (Luke 11:42).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind who loved “*the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’*” (Matt. 23:7).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind who liked the feel of sitting in “*Moses’ seat*” (Matt. 23:2).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind who bound “*heavy burdens, hard to bear, and [laid] them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves [would] not move them with one of their fingers.*” Why? Because they did “*all their works...to be seen by men*” (Matt. 23:3–5).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind whom Jesus called “*blind guides*” (Matt. 23:16).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind whom Jesus called hypocrites, “*for you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside...are full of extortion and self-indulgence*” (Matt. 23:25).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind to whom Jesus said, “*You are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*” (Matt. 23:27–28).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind of whom Jesus said, “*You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets’*” (Matt. 23:29–30).
- ◆ A Pharisee, the kind of whom Jesus said, “*You are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets...serpents, brood of vipers!*” (Matt. 23:31, 33).

(Rom. 13:1–2). He also taught, “*Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor*” (Rom. 13:7). By respecting the person holding a position, he was not endorsing their way of life or their character but was only acknowledging their office as part of “*the powers that be.*”

4. Why was Paul especially pleased to present his defense to King Agrippa? (26:3) _____

Of all the officials in the court, no one knew the details of Jewish customs as well as Agrippa. Paul even called Agrippa an expert in these matters. Apparently Agrippa had some acquaintance with the prophecies, traditions, and ideals of the Israelite people. The message Paul was preaching was solidly grounded in the Old Testament Scriptures, which the Jews professed to respect. Surely he should be able to understand Paul’s position. Surely he could see that Jesus was the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic hope.

Festus would likely miss the point, but Agrippa should understand.

Paul’s testimonial of his conversion

Paul had come from an influential Jewish family. He had graduated from the most prestigious Jewish school of his day. A high achiever, he had excelled in natural talent and intellectual ability.

5. What did Paul say about his early life? (26:4) _____

Paul added weight to his argument by saying in effect, you all know where I came from. It was an appropriate statement, because in his audience were Jews of mature years who knew him “*from the beginning*”—as a youth in Jerusalem—and could speak in his defense, if they were willing. But of course they were not.

6. What could those older Jews have testified about him? (26:5) _____

Paul, up to the time of his conversion, was a loyal, dedicated, aspiring young Pharisee.

**From the Word****“Most Straightest”**

How did Paul live as “*the most straightest sect of [the Jews’] religion*” (Acts 26:5)? The word translated “*most straightest*” is the superlative form of a word which means, “*pertaining to strict conformity to a norm or standard, involving both detail and completeness; accurate, strict.*” Taking accuracy and strictness to the superlative level, his aim was “*the most precise and rigorous interpretation of Moses’ Law, even observing the more minute precepts of the law and traditions*” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*).

But Paul left it behind for the higher calling of Christ, a call that led him to renounce all his former attainments, to count them as rubbish, in exchange for “*the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 3:13–14).

7. What did he say elsewhere about his credentials? (Phil. 3:4–6). _____

Paul's audience might not like him as a person, but they had to admit that he knew what he was talking about—very likely his credentials were superior to many. As a youth he had been in the very center of their world, reaching for the best they could offer. *"Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless"* (Phil. 3:4–6).

A committed Jew, yet he had been ignorant of the real meaning of faithful service to God. Like the rest of the Pharisees, he had been content with outward compliance and rejected the Christ who had come as the fulfillment of the prophecies made to the Israelite fathers.

8. What did Paul's commitment to Judaism mean in relation to his being judged by this court of law? (26:6) _____

In other words, Paul was saying that his accusers had no cause to make any accusation. Was not their hope preserved in the Scriptures? Their hope was of the coming Messiah, a deliverer who would fulfill the prophecies to the fathers and bring in a kingdom of righteousness and peace.

Their hope was the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). It was the hope to which Abraham clung when God asked him to sacrifice his son, his only son of promise; and Abraham obeyed, and *"against hope believed in hope, accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead"* (Rom. 4:18; Heb. 11:19).

The Resurrection is real

At this point Paul appealed to King Agrippa by name (Acts 26:7). Agrippa knew what Paul meant. Agrippa knew the hope of Israel and the promises of the Messiah. Agrippa knew that the whole accusation against Paul was unjust.

Paul's special emphasis, though, was on one word: RESURRECTION. Belief in a physical, bodily resurrection distinguished the Pharisees from the Sadducees. Paul was specific. He was testifying that he had seen Jesus Christ alive, that Jesus had been resurrected, and that resurrection certified the hope of resurrection to all His followers. Even though the Sadducees denied the belief totally and the Pharisees would not acknowledge Jesus' resurrection, Paul certified that it was all true. Jesus is alive!

9. What question did Paul put to the court? (26:8) _____

Why should belief in the resurrection be hard to accept, Paul reasoned? Cannot the God who created life in the first place, who gives life to each of us, can He not re-create us?

Before his conversion, Paul was drawing his own conclusions. Based on his training in the Jewish religion and his zeal for the faith of his fathers, he had been wreaking havoc on the believers in Christ.

"I myself thought I must do..." and he told how he had persecuted the Christians. A man of conviction, he was following a planned course of action. No one could have doubted his sincerity. But he had been sincere in the wrong cause; it was all *"contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"* (26:9).

"I myself thought I must do..." is the problem with every belief that is not according to Christ's mind. That is why Paul later wrote, *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 2:5).



Take heed

"Hear Me Patiently..."

As he began to speak, the Great Apostle pleaded for an attentive audience. He did not promise a sermonette. Deep spiritual issues require deep thought, careful reasoning, and serious concentration.

Paul pleaded for the king's whole attention, because he seriously believed his cause warranted it.

Paul wanted King Agrippa's whole attention for the same reason Jesus said so many times, *"Verily I say unto you..."* or, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"* (Matt. 11:15; 13:9; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29).



Insight

"If Christ Is Not Risen..."

When Paul said, *"I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, it is for this hope...that I am accused by the Jews"* (Acts 26:5, 7), Paul was talking about the hope of the resurrection.

Why were the Jews arguing with Paul about his belief in the resurrection when their own prophets had taught it? There was only one reason, and that was the well documented case of Jesus Christ.

Why should they resist belief in the resurrection? Was it because the God they believed in, the God who gave all of them life, was not able to raise the dead? (Acts 26:8).

Then Paul told his own experience. Paul was not talking about something that somebody had told somebody about, who had heard it from somebody else. Paul had firsthand information about his subject. He had seen the risen Christ. To Paul, the whole Christian faith rested on the verity of the Resurrection. His audience could scoff, but that did not change the facts.

The certainty of Christ's resurrection and the personal hope it gave him was at the core of Paul's faith and the key to future life. *"If there is no resurrection of the dead,"* he wrote later, *"then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise....If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable"* (1 Cor. 15:13–15, 19).



From the Word

Our Ancestral Hope

Did the Jews as a people believe in the resurrection? It was the teaching of their prophets, though over time, the Jews divided into different sects, some of whom adhered to the beliefs of Scripture and some adhered more to their current rabbis.

Isaiah spoke definitely of the resurrection: *"Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead"* (Isa. 26:19).

The resurrection was the hope of the Psalmist: *"But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me"* (Ps. 49:15).

Job said positively, *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"* (Job 19:25–27).

Did the Jewish heritage include the hope of the resurrection? Absolutely!

Paul had been formerly as much an unbeliever in Christ as he was now a believer.

10. What did Paul say he had done against the believers in Jerusalem?

(26:10) _____

The Jewish leaders knew Paul well enough. If they wanted to admit it, they knew that Paul's open attack on Christianity before his conversion had been highly approved by the Jewish authorities.

11. In what event against the Christians had Paul directly participated as a young Pharisee? (Acts 7:55–60) _____

12. What did Jewish law state as the role of the witnesses when the offender was worthy of death? (Deut. 17:7) _____

Paul's record was clear. He had had a role in the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7). He was instructed in the Jewish law which said that the *"hands of the witnesses shall be the first upon him to put him to death"* (Deut. 17:7).

13. Was Paul's zeal against the Christians limited to Jerusalem? Where else did he persecute them? (26:11) _____

Paul's outrage against the Christians reached even to foreign cities. If the believers fled, he was hot in pursuit after them.

Paul did not have to guess how his accusers felt toward him. He had been one with them, walking in their very shoes. He had felt the fury they were feeling, and their desire to cut off every shoot of the Christianity they saw as deadly heresy.

Paul recounts his conversion



Read Acts 26:10–23

As Paul set out for Damascus, nothing could have been further from his mind than that he would ever be a follower of the cause he hated. To persecute the Christians, he had dotted every "I" and crossed every "T". He even had official documentation from the High Priest to support his mission.

14. Suddenly, what happened? (26:12–14). _____

15. Who saw the light? Who heard the voice? Who understood? (26:14). _____

There could be no mistake in Paul's mind from this moment forward: Jesus Christ was alive.

Every time Paul recalled the experience, it captured him anew. Could Agrippa and Festus possibly miss the point? He had been on the side of the Jews, until that day on the Damascus Road. From that point forward, the whole direction of his life was changed. Could they wonder why? Couldn't they see? Why wouldn't they join his cause!

16. What was Paul's response when he heard the voice saying, *"Saul, Saul, why do*



Paul: King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.

Agrippa: You almost persuade me to become a Christian.

Paul: I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.

you persecute me?" (26:14). _____

Paul had to verify that it was indeed Jesus speaking to him. Suddenly he realized he had attended the wrong school. He had been taught the wrong knowledge. He had believed tradition instead of truth. Far from doing God's service, he had actually been tearing down God's cause.

Paul was stopped in his tracks. Suddenly his passion against the believers in Christ horrified him. For the first time in his life he was flat on his face, stricken and humbled.

17. In what two capacities was Jesus calling Paul to serve? (26:16) _____

18. What words show that Paul could expect opposition when fulfilling his new commission? (26:17) _____

Jesus said in essence, I have a job for you to do, Paul. I have people scattered throughout the region, both Jews and Gentiles, whom you must find and teach. But everyone will not like you. At times you will need deliverance from the very people I am sending you to help.

Jesus had warned Paul to expect opposition. He would be hated, persecuted, maligned. But Paul did not have to fear. The Lord would be with him, and "deliver" him. He did not have to fear Festus, or Agrippa, or even Nero. He had a mission to do for Jesus Himself, and he was invincible until his work was done. If imprisonment was Christ's will for him, and the way he should serve, Paul was quite willing.

19. What was Jesus commissioning Paul to do for both Jew and Gentile? (26:18) _____

In God's view, Jew and Gentile were both spiritually blind, in darkness, and needed to be mentally enlightened.

In God's view they were both captives of Satan [sin personified, i.e., their naturally godless desires—Mark 7:21–23], living contrary to the will of the true God, and needed to be released.

20. What did Jesus say was the power to release one from sin and darkness? (John 8:32) _____

21. What could they expect once they turned to God? (Acts 26:18) _____

If they should change and follow God's way, they could look forward to being forgiven of their sins and receiving an inheritance "*among them which are sanctified*" (26:18).

What did all this mean to Festus, King Agrippa, Bernice, and the rest of his pagan audience? Probably very little. Most likely they were wondering when the sermon would end.

Paul was in essence telling these people they were some of those to whom Christ had sent him. They—not he—were the prisoners. And they could be freed from their bondage, be forgiven, and even receive an inheritance among the saints—if they would listen.

Even though the message seemed to be falling on deaf ears, Paul continued his story.

22. How did Paul say he responded to the heavenly vision? (26:19) _____

By saying that he was "*not disobedient*," Paul used a very powerful figure of speech that showed the intensity of his obedience. Saying he was "*not disobe-*

Acts 26:10–23 NKJV

10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.

14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

15 So I said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,

18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

21 For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—

23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."



Jewish coins minted by King Agrippa II





Insight

One Message: Repent!

If we compare this statement of Paul's with the preaching of John the Baptist or the early preaching of Jesus, or Jesus' commission to His Apostles, we see that the message is the same in each. They should:

- 1) Repent, i.e., turn from their ungodly ways of thinking and living
- 2) Turn toward God, i.e., accept His commandments as a guide for their lives
- 3) "Do works befitting repentance," i.e., conform their lives to Christ's higher law—"the royal law" (Jas. 2:8).

When John the Baptist started to preach, his message was to "*repent*," and "*bear fruits worthy of repentance*" (Matt. 3:2, 8). Luke reports that John started out preaching "*the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*" (Luke 3:3).

When Jesus started to preach, His message was the same: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 4:17). And even when He was about to ascend to heaven, His final word to His disciples was that "*repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations*" (Luke 24:47).

Peter on the day of Pentecost was preaching the same message: "*Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38); and, "*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*" (Acts 3:19).

dient" meant that he had done the extreme opposite: he had flung himself wholeheartedly into the new cause, giving himself with a passion unequaled by his peers.

Paul answered Christ with a burning zeal that pushed him to labor "*more abundantly than they all*" (1 Cor. 15:10). As he wrote later to the Philippians about his personal sacrifices, whatever had been "*gain*" to him he counted "*loss*" for Christ and the hope which Christ had set before him (Phil. 3:8-14).

23. What did Paul write to the Galatians about his response to the "*revelation of Jesus Christ*"? (Gal. 1:12-16) _____
24. What did Paul mean by saying that he did not "*immediately confer with flesh and blood*"? (Gal. 1:16) _____

Paul did not consult his family, his peers, the Rabbis, or any of the prominent Jews. He acted immediately on the conviction of his heart. He knew Christ had spoken to him, and he acted immediately on his own deep conviction.

25. What was the message that Paul started preaching among both Jews and Gentiles? (Acts 26:20) _____
26. What do you think was Paul's purpose in telling about his conversion? (Acts 26:21) _____

Telling about his conversion was Paul's way of saying positively that Jesus was alive. It was also the reason behind the statements he had made that raised the ire of the Jews—Jesus Himself had come from heaven to stop him in his tracks. Paul's was a divine commission to teach and preach, and He could only do this because Jesus was alive! And because of the depth of his conviction, he had gone immediately from persecutor to persecuted. Actually, Paul was proud to identify himself with the followers of Jesus. He was even happy to suffer with them, and share in the shame and disgrace that others might inflict on them, for the sake of Christ.

27. What was the reason Paul gave for his being arrested in the temple? (26:20) _____

Paul stated plainly the reason for the riot in the temple, and why he was arrested. It was because he was a zealous follower of Christ. He was not guilty of any crime, nor had he caused the riotous conduct. And now Festus had inherited the problem of what to do with an innocent man, hated by the Jews, guilty of nothing that Rome could prosecute.

It is likely that King Agrippa understood the issue even more keenly, being more acquainted with the fierceness of Jewish jealousies and prejudices. Did Paul's depth of conviction upset them? Of course! Was Paul willing to dampen his enthusiasm and compromise his cause for their sake? Absolutely not! In fact, Paul was ready to tell the whole world about his new hope in Christ—which was precisely what Christ had called him to do.

What made the situation even more tense was Paul's background in the Jewish faith. While it made him able to understand the feelings of his persecutors, it also infuriated them.

No doubt, King Agrippa understood the issues. But helpful to Festus? He may have been secretly glad that the letter Paul would take to the Emperor would be signed by Festus, and not by himself.

28. What conclusion did Paul put on his continuing mission? (26:22) _____
29. What did he say was the source of his message? _____

Paul was not manufacturing a new gospel. He was not even saying that

Jesus had a new gospel. His message was the same as had been taught all through the Old Testament. The prophets had predicted the coming of the Messiah, and Jesus fulfilled it. Every statement Paul had made was backed up by Scripture. Festus might know something about the Jews, but he could not appreciate the fundamentals as Paul could. And even though Agrippa had some basic knowledge of the Jews, he knew little of the scope of the fulfillment of those prophecies, and how the coming of Jesus fulfilled even the writings of Moses.

30. Where did Paul find his greatest source of help? (26:22) _____

Paul knew that God was backing his ministry and helping him. Nothing could stop him, because God was with him.

31. What did Paul say the Scriptures had foretold about Christ? (Acts 26:23) _____

He had nothing to fear—because he was preaching the facts, the facts revealed in the whole Old Testament, from Moses, to the Psalms, to the Prophets.

A forced end to the sermon

 Read Acts 26:24–32

Festus did not share Paul's rapturous enthusiasm. Quite frankly, he had had enough of it.

32. What did Festus do to interrupt Paul's discourse? (26:24) _____

How pathetic! The only way Festus could think to stop Paul was to shout at him—in the presence of the whole court—and call him insane!

Probably what bothered Festus most was Paul's emphasis on the resurrection of Christ. Festus was a man without hope. To him, a dead man was dead, and there was nothing further to talk about. All this insistence on Jesus being alive, ascended, and coming back was, in Festus' view, so much nonsense.

33. What was Paul's reply to Festus' outcry? (26:25) _____

Notice Paul's dignified, respectful reply. Festus shouted at Paul, but Paul did not shout back. He even addressed Festus as "most noble," and explained that the words he spoke were words of *"truth and soberness."* Even though Festus was prejudiced against Paul, even when Festus had accused Paul of being out of his mind, Paul replied with Christian dignity and courtesy. He refused to lower himself to the level of Festus.

There is never a situation that justifies rudeness.

34. What appeal did Paul give to the King Agrippa when replying to Festus? (26:25–26) _____

It was an adroit way of excusing Festus' ignorance. King Agrippa could not deny the Christian movement. Likely he had been around when Jesus was preaching, when He was crucified, when He was resurrected. Agrippa knew the truth of Paul's words: *"This thing was not done in a corner"* (26:26). Did anyone refuse to believe the facts? Perhaps. Could they honestly deny them? No. The facts were public knowledge.

Festus might think Paul was out of his mind, but the King knew that Paul was speaking *"the words of truth and reason"* (26:25).

Paul, man of courage

Can we picture Paul confronting these heads-of-state with the gospel of Christ?

35. What question did Paul suddenly put to the King? (26:27) _____



A closer look

Transported

Can't we imagine Paul's enthusiasm mounting as his mind was captured by one prophecy after another, as he thought of dozens of passages from the Old Testament, all pertaining to Christ and all at least partly fulfilled in Christ's first advent?

As Paul talks, he is transported, as it were, into another world where his mind revels in the triumph of the One he loved to serve. Is it any wonder that Festus has to speak with a loud voice to be heard above Paul's enthusiasm? *"Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"* (Acts 26:24).

Acts 26:24–32 NKJV

24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

25 But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.

26 For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

29 And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

30 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them;

31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."

32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."



Insight

Almost,...

Paul's thrust came too close home for King Agrippa's comfort. He had come to the court to accommodate Festus, not to listen to a sermon. But neither could he totally resist the force of this sermon. Agrippa might be able to talk about the Jewish religion in general, but there was a gap—a wide gap—between knowledge and conviction. *"Almost"* was a comfortable way out.

Agrippa had a little idea of the cost that would come with the gospel—that he would have to give up his sins, his lifestyle, his entertainments, the approval of his peers, his lucrative position, and, and, and—. Could he risk the disapproval of the Jews, or the snobbery of the Romans, or the scorn of the Greeks? Could he risk Festus telling him that he, too, was mad? Not for a moment!

The price was too high, and King Agrippa declined with a courteous *"almost."*

Do we realize what is happening? Suddenly, Paul has taken the offensive, and Agrippa must defend himself. Paul has Agrippa on trial.

Transported by the power of the gospel as he rehearsed it to the king, Paul cannot wait for him to reply; he answers for Agrippa: *"King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you believe"* (26:27). Paul was bringing Agrippa face to face with the facts, and saying, Where do you stand?

36. What was Agrippa's response to Paul? (26:28) _____

Adroitly, Agrippa sidestepped the issue with one little word: *"almost."*

37. How did Paul answer Agrippa's *"almost"*? (26:29) _____

In his reply, Paul drew attention to the fact that he was a prisoner. He would wish all of his opportunities and his conviction on anyone present—everything, except his chains. The statement shows the suffering that Paul was enduring. It was secondary, but still very real.

38. What happened after Paul's strong appeal? (26:30) _____

The court session was adjourned. As Paul watched the attendees file out one by one, he was likely praying that some heart had been touched by his testimony. Perhaps someone in that audience would think about what he had said and cast his lot for Christ. Paul could only hope.

The after meeting

The court session had showed one fact for sure: Paul was innocent of any crime against Rome. Agrippa could only look at Festus and agree, *"This man is not guilty of any crime."*

39. What was Agrippa's concluding reply to Festus? (26:32) _____

"This man might have been set at liberty"—but by appealing to Caesar, he was freed from the local hatred of the murderous Jews.

How did Festus solve his problem of explaining Paul's case to the Emperor? Luke does not tell us. Apparently it did not matter how Festus patched it together. At best or worst, it would be a fabrication.

But Paul had appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar he would soon be going, all expenses paid. That Caesar was named Nero. The name meant little, because this was about the year AD 59, before Nero had showed his hatred of the Christians.

Why was Paul going to Rome? Because the Lord wanted him to go. Paul's whole life was in the hands of God Almighty, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which Paul regarded as only his *"reasonable service"* (Rom. 12:1).

TO BE CONTINUED

PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



(above) Remains of the **aqueduct at Caesarea** attesting to the skill of the Roman builders.



(right) The site of Herod the Great's grand palace in **Caesarea**—looking north toward the harbor.



THIEVES AND ROBBERS

1. Who stole idols from her father?
2. What robber was released from prison in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover?
3. What were the people of Judah not doing that caused the prophet Malachi to tell them they were stealing from God?
4. Who was killed as a punishment for stealing booty during the battle for Jericho?
5. What disciple carried the bag and was called a thief?
6. Who said, *"My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves"*?
7. Paul's advice to the Ephesians was *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him _____."*
8. Who was God speaking against when He through Jeremiah said they *"steal my words every one from his neighbor."*
9. Who requested that a guard be placed at Jesus' tomb lest His disciples steal Him away?
10. Which parable is built around the setting of a man being robbed and left half dead?

WHEN GOD FOUGHT THEIR BATTLE

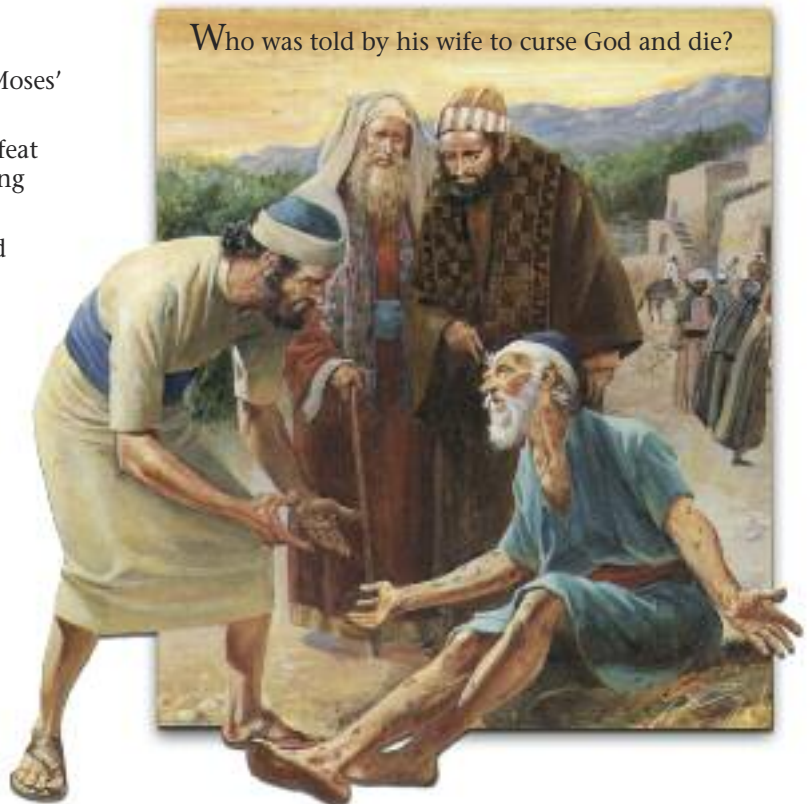
1. What prophet's prayer was answered that the Syrian soldiers be struck blind?
2. What nation's army was destroyed in the Red Sea?
3. What king and his army was Israel fighting when Moses' arms, held aloft, caused Israel to win?
4. What weather phenomenon did the Lord use to defeat the Amorites when Joshua and his men were fighting them?
5. What army was defeated when an angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 soldiers?
6. When Samuel was offering a sacrifice, what did the Lord do to confuse the Philistines?
7. What occurred as and after Jonathan and his armor-bearer attacked the Philistine garrison?
8. What made the Syrians flee, thinking the Israelites had joined forces with the Egyptians and Hittites?
9. Who was Judah fighting when God helped the army of Judah slaughter a half million soldiers?
10. How did God help Jehoshaphat win the battle against the armies of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 26

ALL KINDS OF CURSES

1. Who was sent for by the king of Moab to put a curse on Israel?
2. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?
3. Why did God put a curse on Cain and make him a wanderer?
4. What son of Josiah was cursed by God and would not have a decent burial? Why?
5. On what mountain were curses pronounced on Israel if they disobeyed?
6. Who received a promise from God that all persons who cursed him would be cursed themselves?
7. Who said that people who taught a false gospel would be cursed?
8. Who cursed whom by his gods and said *"I'll give your flesh to the birds..."*?
9. What Prophet ended his book with God's threat to come and strike the land with a curse?
10. What Epistle says that blessing and cursing should not come out of the same mouth?
11. Who had enemies that bound themselves under a curse because they were so determined to kill him?
12. Who told God that Job would curse Him to His face?
13. Joshua pronounced a curse on the man who would rebuild what city?
14. Who unknowingly brought a curse on himself when he ate some honey?

Who was told by his wife to curse God and die?



It Is So EASY TO FORGET THE CREATOR!

by EDWARD SHAYLER

*Oh, worship the King all glorious above,
And gratefully sing His wonderful love;
Our Shield and Defender, The Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.*

I wakened this morning to a beautiful day, and was greeted by having had a wonderful rest in what I believe to be the most comfortable bed in the country. The sheets were clean and newly changed, the window was open and a lovely breeze was blowing, and I began to credit myself with the wonderful home that I had. I washed my dentures, shaved with nice hot water and a new razor blade, then a warm shower with plenty of water. I put on some nice clean, comfortable clothes, and hearing aids in my ears! (Are they comfortable?) Oh, yes, "what a wonderful invention," I say to myself.

Now for breakfast. I usually have cereal, homemade fruit juice, a banana, milk, and coffee. What! No milk? Well, the store is not that far, and besides it is such a beautiful day! I will go and get some.

The day is beginning to get warm, so I turn on the air-conditioner as I pass the switch in the hall on the way to the garage. The car is nice and cool. I press a button, the automatic doors open. I start the car, and soon I am at the store. I purchase the milk and return, re-open the automatic doors, drive the car into the garage, and close the door.

Now for breakfast. But first, GRACE!

Then I ask myself, "Didn't I forget something?" Yes I did! I forgot to give thanks for the blessings of a beautiful new day and a wonderful night of comfortable sleep, and all of the conveniences God has provided. How can a person apologize for forgetting such wonderful blessings?

Then I began to think further. First, my breakfast: the milk came from Quebec; the cereal came from the United States, the banana from Central America, the fruit juice from Ontario and British Columbia, and the coffee from Columbia in South America.

*The earth with its stores of wonders untold,
Almighty Thy pow'r hath founded of old;
Hath 'stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.*

Then I went back to my childhood days of the 1920s, and thought about the morning of a beautiful, warm spring day. I wakened to a same beautiful morning in a nice comfortable bed with a straw mattress, one that had sheets made from flour sacks. And then it was earlier in the morning, around 4:30 AM. I put on my only pair of pants (bib overalls), and that was all. My blouse and shoes had to be kept for best and for school. My brothers and I

went to the well pump, rinsed our mouths, sloshed water on our heads and were off to the barn. As I enjoyed the pungent smell of wolf willow, the sun was just rising and there was a lovely breeze.

Then to the work! All our farm animals had to be fed, watered, milked,

Be thankful for
what you have
received and also
for what you
have escaped.



turned out to pasture, the barn cleaned, and eggs gathered. We hurried so that we could jump in the slough* (no soap) before breakfast. Next was a breakfast of porridge, homemade bread, butter and milk. The porridge was made from oats we grew on the farm, the bread was made from wheat we grew on the farm, the milk and the butter were from our cow. The yeast for the bread was from a bowl kept in the pantry (the yeast would live if kept warm and was fed regularly).

After breakfast came the household chores: emptying the slop bucket into the pigs trough, bringing in a supply of wood, separating the cream from the milk and lowering it in the well to keep it cool, getting both drinking and wash water for the day, (the wash water came from the slough, and from snow in winter).

School was next, and was two and a half miles away. Our classes began at 8.30 am and ended at 4.00 pm. The walk to school was the highlight of my day, for this is when I discovered all the wonders of nature. Sometimes I could just hide and lay in the grass thinking about all these marvelous things, or just listen to the frogs, birds and all of the sounds, and smell the summer fragrance.

While reminiscing about these days, my mind turned to the pet animals. There usually was a new calf, a lamb, or a duck or goose, also the dog, and even a horse. We were always told not to make pets of them; but for me they were part of my life, as we didn't have any other type of entertainment. This was also a time when some wild animals were prevalent.

*Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite!
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.*

Then my thoughts went to the time when Jesus was growing up and beginning His new day. Immediately I felt my young life was also blessed, and I had many comforts that even He did not have. I thought about the tools of iron, steel and wood that we had to make life more pleasant; items like a well pump, a cream separator, a stove, door hinges, drawer handles, screws, glue, wagons, plows, threshing machines, windows, fanning mills, grain crushers, chairs, beds, lamps. The list is endless. Even in my young days there were many items that were manufactured and sold, such as buggies, harnesses, glass, buckles, hooks, cloth, wool, leather, etc. When Jesus lived on earth there were many of the same chores to do without all the

help we had learned to expect. If Jesus wanted to make the labor easier, the items to which I was accustomed had to be hand-made, which required much effort and time.

Consider also His breakfast. The staples may have been similar, but the method was much more difficult. Think about the shelter for the milk-producing animal. How was it constructed? There was no lumber unless it was hand-made. The stool to sit on had to be fashioned (from wood), also the container to hold the milk (likely clay pottery). Where would the water for the animals come from? At best it had to be lifted to the surface from a well. That bucket also had to be made, the well had to be dug and somehow secured so that it did not cave in.

And then the bread. Baking bread requires an oven, and making flour means grinding grain. Yeast is fragile. Butter means separating milk and churning. Grain needs crushing to make porridge. Even dishes were made by hand. Grain had to be threshed without a steel fork; the wooden one must have been very heavy.

Yes, the making of clothing, bedding, furniture, even utensils took much labor and time. Also the material was not always the better type. Long distances were laborious and took much time. Where did He get the time to study? Lamps were an inferior type, and fuel for them limited.

Yet, this man was brilliant. He had a command of words that people even today must study to understand. His words were well spoken and with authority and wisdom. And He changed the world like no other man who ever lived. Another awesome thought is that He was only thirty-three years old when His life on earth ended.

Suddenly I was startled from my reverie. The telephone began to ring. It was someone who wanted to know if I would be interested in having my groceries delivered, which would save me the effort of going to get them. My mind went to the reality of my world and I began to think about how mankind has become a prisoner of his own devices by making himself dependant on these conveniences. Mass production has become the engine to supply methods that are affordable. The system chews up large quantities of materials in the process. Cost cutting is a paramount pastime and increases profits. This process is not all bad, but when it is applied to unnecessary items such as entertainment and art, the reverence for the Creator is lost and huge waste takes place with an attitude of "Oh! Well, I'll get another one tomorrow." Instead of men being grateful for the resources of earth and using them to the glory of the Creator, they are using them for themselves and their own selfish ends.

Let us not be one of them. Let us show a genuine gratefulness for everything, large or small, that God has allowed us to enjoy. And let us be good stewards of everything on this earth, like Caleb, so that when Jesus returns and the promised rewards are given, we may be granted a share on this earth made over new!

*Oh, measureless might, ineffable love!
While angels delight to hymn Thee above,
The humbler creation, though feeble their lays,
With true adoration shall lisp to Thy praise!* MM

Ed Shayler and his wife Lorna live in Calgary Alberta, Canada. They both love the out-of-doors. This setting is in beautiful Kananaskis Country near their home.



GOLDEN KEYS



A bunch of golden keys is mine,
Thru them each day my light will shine.

“Good morning” is the golden key
That opens ev’ry day for me;
When ev’ning comes, *“Good night”* I’ll say
And close the door of that glad day.

Hearts like doors open with ease
When I use these golden keys.
So very important are two of these,
The little words *“Thank you”* and *“Please.”*

When at the table, *“May I please”*
I take from off my bunch of keys;
When friends give anything to me,
I use my little *“Thank you”* key.

“Excuse me,” and *“I’m sorry”* too
When by mistake some harm I do.
And if a pain or hurt I’ve given,
With *“Forgive me”* I’ll be forgiven.

I’ll often use each golden key
And then a child polite I’ll be!

***Thank you God for everything.
Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Amen.***

I WANT IT

Let's look in the department store first, suggested Mother as she and Emily entered the shopping mall. They were looking for a birthday present for Emily's cousin, Hannah.

Emily followed her mother into the store. "Oh, Mom, look at that blue sweater with those cute buttons! I want it!" she exclaimed.

Mother smiled and said, "We're looking for something for Hannah, remember? Not for you, Emily."

"Oh, but it's ..." Emily's voice trailed off as she passed the jewelry counter. "Oh! I want a watch like that one!"

"Come on, Emily. We don't have much time." Mother glanced over a rack of clothes. "I don't see anything here. We have just enough time to go to Walmart."

There were a lot of interesting things at Walmart. They first went to the electronics section, where Emily immediately spotted a CD player that she wanted. But she forgot about it as she followed her mother to the games section. "Mom, there's that new game I want." Emily pointed to a game on the shelf.

Mother sighed. "Well, here's the game that Hannah's mother told me Hannah would like. This will help her in geography class. Let's buy it and get out of here before your 'I want it' develops into a serious disease."

"What do you mean?" asked Emily.

"Emily Jane, you've seen all kinds of things this morning that you want," Mother answered. "The Bible tells us to be content with what we have, and my desire for you is that you would be a contented, unselfish Christian — a girl who is thankful for what the Lord has given her instead of always wanting more."

Emily frowned for a moment. Then she suddenly laughed. "You know what? I can't even remember most of the things I told you I wanted. But I better keep my eyes straight ahead on the way out."

"Good plan," said Mother. "I'll do that, too. Let's both ask the Lord to help us not to be focused on things around us and things for 'me.'"

"And watch out for that contagious 'I Want It' disease," Emily added with a grin.



Learn to be content and think of others.

Now godliness combined with contentment brings great profit.

For we have brought nothing into this world and so we cannot take a single thing out either.

But if we have food and shelter, we will be satisfied with that. 1 Timothy 6:6-7

HOW ABOUT YOU?

When you go shopping, do you want everything you see? Sure, it's a blessing to have nice clothes and many useful and enjoyable things, but it is wrong to selfishly desire more and more. Instead, thank the Lord for the many things you do have. Learn to be content and appreciative. And avoid the habit of constantly wanting and asking for more.

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

Too Good To Be True?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

sincerely believe they have eternal life. If God is not the author of the plan, it is of no value. And God says plainly in His Word, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord"* (Isa. 55:8).

The problem of deceptively easy is not new. In ancient Israel, when God sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people of the judgments that would come on them if they did not turn from their wicked ways, there were plenty of false prophets handing out lies, telling the people, "Everything is going to be all right." And while Jeremiah was being persecuted for telling the true word of God, these false prophets were flaunting their popularity.

The false message was consoling for the moment. It soothed the spirit and calmed the nerves. But there was no change of heart. God had decreed that the nation would be taken into captivity unless the people repented of their sins and turned to Him. When they stubbornly refused, it was only a matter of time before the predicted calamity arrived. The message of the false prophets was—literally—too good to be true. Truth (Jeremiah's message from God) had an edge on it.

How can one distinguish truth from error? If the message is effortless, easy, and comforting, you can pretty much depend on it that it is not true. Advertisers may play up the EASY product they are marketing, but no one masters music in six easy lessons. No one gets a bona fide degree in law, or medicine, or physics, without years of intense study and work.

The same is true about the prize God is offering. He has bountiful reserves from which to give, but His products are not free for the taking. They are "free" in that they cannot be truly "earned"—who could ever do enough to deserve eternal life!—but they are only for those who meet the requirements (see Rom. 2:6–9).

God's truth has an edge on it, and that edge will always be disliked by those who want instant benefit.

The ultimate issue is not what feels good, or what stirs up the right emotions, but only, *What is the way God has marked out in His Word?*

There is no painless way to right the world's wrongs. There is no effortless way to turn from seeking the honors of this

world to seeking God's honor only (John 5:44). There is no easy, pain-free way to turn from loving the world, and the things of this world, to doing the will of God (1 John 2:15–17). There is no easy, pain-free way to give up living for *"what shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear"* to laying up heavenly treasures of faith, patience, meekness and Christian love (Matt. 6:19–21, 25). There is no easy, pain-free way to stop doing evil and start doing right except to obey the command, *"cease to do evil, learn to do well"* (Isa. 1:16–17).

Truth has an edge on it.

Just type into Google "God loves you" and you get over a million hits in a fraction of a second. Naturally we want to be affirmed—to believe God loves me no matter how I live or act. But is that the teaching of the prophets, Jesus and the Apostles? Do we want to buy into a gospel that is without foundation? Was Jesus' message popular when He was here

The ultimate issue is not what feels good, but what does God say is true?

the first time? Will He be popular when He returns?

Truth costs, because it has an edge on it.

Jesus came teaching the truth. He said, *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine. And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (John 8:31–32 NASB).

His truth brings freedom as we take it into our minds and apply it in our lives. And the benefits will be beyond anything we can ask or imagine. He is able to do *"exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think"* (Eph. 3:20). For *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"* (1 Cor. 2:9).

This message is not too good to be true, because it is the promise of God Himself! **MM**

ANSWERS FROM PAGE 21

THIEVES AND ROBBERS

1. Rachel (Gen. 31:19)
2. Barabbas (John 18:39–40)
3. The tithes they owed (Mal. 3:8)
4. Achan (Joshua 7)
5. Judas Iscariot (John 12:4–6; 13:29)
6. Jesus (Matt. 21:12–13)
7. *"Labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* (Eph. 4:28)
8. False prophets (Jer. 23:30)
9. The high priests and Pharisees (Matt. 27:62–64)
10. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30)

Picture: Job (2:9)

WHEN GOD FOUGHT THEIR BATTLE

1. Elisha (2 Kings 6:18–23)
2. Egypt (Ex. 14:13–27)
3. Amalek (Ex. 17:11–13)
4. Large hailstones (Josh. 10:6–11)
5. Assyria (2 Kings 19:35)
6. Thunder from heaven (1 Sam. 7:10)
7. God caused an earthquake, confusion and Philistines attacked each other (1 Sam. 14:11–16, 20)
8. The Lord made a sound like a thundering army (2 Kings 7:5–7)
9. Israel (2 Chron. 13:14–18)
10. They attacked each other (2 Chron. 20:22–23)

CURSES

1. Balaam (Num. 22:1–6)
2. It bore no fruit (Mark 11:13–14, 21)
3. Cain had killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:9–12)
4. Jehoiakim refused to repent and obey God (Jer. 22:18–19, 21; 36:30)
5. Mt. Ebal (Deut. 27:13–15; 28:15)
6. Abraham (Gen. 12:13)
7. Paul (Gal. 1:8)
8. Goliath cursed David (1 Sam. 17:43–44)
9. Malachi (4:6)
10. James (3:10)
11. Paul (Acts 23:12)
12. Satan (Job 1:11; 2:5)
13. Jericho (Josh. 6:26)
14. Jonathan (1 Sam. 14:24, 27–28)

The *Incredibly Awesome* ATOM

Look at the world around you. Marvel at the intricacy, beauty and functionality of everything you see. Marvel, and glorify the Creator!

But go further. Look deeper into the part of God's creation not visible to the naked eye—or even to man's finest, most powerful microscopes. I'm thinking about atoms, the fundamental building blocks of all matter—an awesome part of God's creative design.

Atoms make up everything around us, from the ground we stand on to the air we breathe. In fact, they make up everything on this earth, whether solid, liquid or gas.

Yet the atom is very, very small—it is hard to imagine *how* small. When we talk about the size of an atom and its components, we are talking about *millionths of billionths of an inch!* It would take 100 million atoms set edge to edge to equal the thickness of a sheet of paper. If we were to compare the size of a single atom in an apple to the size of the apple, it would be like comparing that apple to the size of the earth! Just think of that!

When the Greeks named the atom about 400 B.C., they thought they were naming the very smallest, indivisible part of anything. Now the atom has been split into protons, neutrons, electrons, and other particles. In fact, some scientists are speculating that the atom, far from being a single indivisible particle, may be a miniature universe!

Pattern and balance in the atom—by design

See how consistent and dependable are the properties of the atom. Protons and neutrons are bound tightly together in the nucleus of the atom. In the nucleus is a fixed number of neutrons and a usually equal number of protons. Each element also has a matching number of electrons orbiting its nucleus. (Did this equality just happen by chance?)

All atoms of the same element are essentially the same. Each element gets its identity (its atomic number) from the number of protons in its nucleus. The electrons travel in orbitals at some distance from the nucleus. The rest of the inside of the atom—the most of it—is empty space. This means that the soil that grows our vegetables—and the vegetables themselves; the wood floor we stand on, and the steel in the car we drive are all mostly empty space. What holds the particles together and makes

UNDERSTAND THE BASICS:

The **atom** is the smallest unit of an element (e.g., gold, silver, oxygen, carbon, calcium) that retains the chemical properties of that element.

Atoms are made up of **protons, neutrons, electrons**, and still smaller particles called subatomic particles.



The mass of an electron is about 1/2000th of the mass of a proton or a neutron. If an **electron** weighed the same as a dime, a **proton** would weigh the same as a gallon of milk.

Order is the hallmark of Almighty God's creation.



The atom's **nucleus**—the part that contains the weight of the element—is the smallest part of the atom. If an atom were the size of a football stadium, the nucleus would be the size of a bee in the center of the playing field.

It is hard to believe that objects that seem so solid are really mostly empty space. Everything is made up of atoms, and most of the space in the atom is the paths of the orbitals that whirl through the open space around the nucleus. The incredible speed of the orbiting electrons creates an illusion of solid substance.





AMAZING DESIGN...

About 98% of living organisms are composed of only six elements: **oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium and phosphorus.**

DOES PRECISION COME FROM CHAOS (BIG BANG)?

Periodic Table of the Elements (Table below)

All matter, living or nonliving, is made up of elements which cannot be broken down into simpler substances by any chemical means.

All known matter is made up of 92 naturally occurring elements, and about 26 additional elements (as of January 2008) that have been synthesized from naturally existing elements.

Two familiar examples of elements: A non-metal—**carbon** in the form of a diamond and a metal—**gold**.



Divide a particle of gold to its smallest unit, and you would have an atom of gold.

them “feel” solid? The solid feel comes from our interaction with the force of the electrons whirling so rapidly in their orbitals around the nuclei that they cannot be crushed.

Elements known—by design

Now think about the awesome design in this “atomic” world that we can’t even see, but which we are very much a part of. Who designed the atom? Who determined the orbits of those electrons—which men have only recently discovered? Think about it, and marvel at the God of the atom!

The God of heaven is a God of law and order. Everything that He creates fits that criterion. The elements which comprise all matter fit into a very precise design when arranged by their chemical properties. The Periodic Table, an essential tool of chemistry today, reflects this orderly composition. The fact that such a chart could be made at all is evidence of the perfect order that the Designer put into His creation.

Amazingly, the Periodic Table was first put together in 1869 by a Russian chemistry professor, Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev. At the time there were only 65 known elements, now there are a total of 117 elements, 92 usually considered to be naturally occurring. The rest have been made synthetically from existing elements.

Mendeleev took the elements known at the time and arranged them in rows, from the one with the smallest atomic weight, hydrogen, to the heaviest. He arranged the rows so that the elements in each vertical column had similar properties. When doing this he observed that there were gaps in the chart where there was no known element that would fit. He predicted that elements would be found that had the properties needed to fill those spaces. Within 16 years those missing elements had been discovered.

Even though the atom had not been actually seen at the time Mendeleev set up his Periodic Table, he was able to put

ATOMIC NUMBER	11	2
SYMBOL	Na	8
NAME	Sodium	1
ATOMIC WEIGHT	22.989769...	

Note: Instead of writing out the name of each element, chemists use a system of abbreviations to indicate the name of each, usually the first one or two letters of the English or Latin name of the element. O stands for oxygen, C for Carbon, Na for sodium (its Latin name is natrium).

		Group																													
		1	2											13	14	15	16	17	18												
Period	1	1 H												5 B	6 C	7 N	8 O	9 F	10 Ne												
	2	3 Li	4 Be											13 Al	14 Si	15 P	16 S	17 Cl	18 Ar												
	3	11 Na	12 Mg	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	19 K	20 Ca	21 Sc	22 Ti	23 V	24 Cr	25 Mn	26 Fe	27 Co	28 Ni	29 Cu	30 Zn	31 Ga	32 Ge	33 As	34 Se	35 Br	36 Kr
	4	19 K	20 Ca	21 Sc	22 Ti	23 V	24 Cr	25 Mn	26 Fe	27 Co	28 Ni	29 Cu	30 Zn	31 Ga	32 Ge	33 As	34 Se	35 Br	36 Kr												
	5	37 Rb	38 Sr	39 Y	40 Zr	41 Nb	42 Mo	43 Tc	44 Ru	45 Rh	46 Pd	47 Ag	48 Cd	49 In	50 Sn	51 Sb	52 Te	53 I	54 Xe												
	6	55 Cs	56 Ba	57 La	58 Ce	59 Pr	60 Nd	61 Pm	62 Sm	63 Eu	64 Gd	65 Tb	66 Dy	67 Ho	68 Er	69 Tm	70 Yb	71 Lu													
	7	87 Fr	88 Ra	89 Ac	90 Th	91 Pa	92 U	93 Np	94 Pu	95 Am	96 Cm	97 Bk	98 Cf	99 Es	100 Fm	101 Md	102 No	103 Lr													

together a table that is still useful today—because the atom was wonderfully designed. Creation did not happen haphazardly with a Big Bang. All creation is the finely tuned handiwork of Almighty God.

Predictable results—by design

When a scientist performs an experiment, if he follows the same formula exactly each time, he can expect the same results. The same reliably predictable laws and rules make it possible to send astronauts into space and bring them back safely.

Actually, chemical reactions occur within and around us all the time. When we take a breath of air, the oxygen atoms pass through the walls of our blood vessels and attach to iron molecules in the hemoglobin in our red blood cells. That is a life giving chemical reaction!

When we eat, a chemical reaction takes place as our food is broken down into the proteins and other substances our body uses to build and repair our body tissues.

Chemical reactions are happening everywhere and all the time, both in living organisms and in non-living organisms. Sometimes the reactions are large and spectacular, but most often they are so tiny we don't notice them. It is those chemical reactions that keep us alive and our environment renewing itself.

Every inch of planet Earth attests to the Creator's hand. The order of these chemical reactions is far too exact, purposeful and superbly interacting to be wild chance. Some choose to give Mother Nature the credit. We are compelled to declare with the apostle Paul, *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"* (Rom. 11:33) **MM**

Sources of scientific data:

Chemistry, The Study of Matter, published by Prentice Hall;
Curt Supplee, *Everyday Science Explained*, published by National Geographic Society; <http://www.chemicool.com>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Periodic_table
<http://www.aboutnuclear.org>; <http://www.periodic-table.uk/>



No chance here!

Our **indispensable water** is the result of the chemical combining of hydrogen and oxygen in a fixed ratio—two atoms of hydrogen combine with one atom of oxygen to produce one molecule of water. The process is precise and orderly, and always in the same ratio.

JUST CONSIDER THAT

- ✓ every known element is made up of atoms that are unique to that substance, and each substance always has the same atomic structure.
- ✓ every element has a fixed (and sequential) number of protons in the nucleus (the first having 1, the next having 2, and so on) along with a usually equal number of neutrons, and a matching number of electrons orbiting the nucleus.



Atoms are almost unimaginably small, much smaller than the tiniest particle visible under a light microscope. Using special scanning electron microscopy, with magnification as many as **5 million times**, researchers have been able to photograph some of the larger atoms, such as uranium.

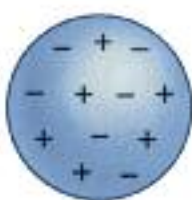


In this photograph of a **silicon crystal**, individual atoms, enlarged about a **billion times**, look like small hills. It would take about 500,000 of these atoms to form a row 1 centimeter long.

Our ideas about the structure of the atom gradually have changed since Dalton proposed their existence.



1803



1897



1909



1913



present

- 1803 **Dalton**—indivisible particles
- 1897 **Thomson**—plum-pudding model
- 1909 **Rutherford**—positively charged nucleus surrounded by mostly empty space
- 1913 **Bohr**—electrons in energy levels
- 1950 **Many researchers**—charge-cloud model (present model at 1992)



Sailors in the northern oceans have frequently observed icebergs traveling in one direction in spite of strong winds blowing in the opposite direction. The icebergs were moving against the winds, but how? The explanation is that the icebergs, with eight-ninths of their bulk under the water's surface, were caught in the grip of strong currents that moved them in a certain direction, no matter which way the winds raged.

Similarly, the Christian may be in the world but because he/she is gripped by a different and stronger force going in the opposite direction, the sincere Christian will go counter culture, counter world.

He Is Coming!

He is coming, Christ, Messiah,
Coming to this world again,
Coming as Earth's future Sovereign
Over all the world to reign!

Can't you hear Him getting ready,
Counting down the hours till then?
He has promised soon to be here,
On His word you can depend!

As we see the evil rampant,
Hate and greed and pride and lust,
Oh, it grieves our hearts so deeply,
Fills our souls with deep disgust.

Though things look so fearsome,
Stormclouds hov'ring dark and drear,
Lift your heads, redemption cometh!
Soon the Saviour will be here!

—Contributed

I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. (Ephesians 1:16)

It isn't what you have in your pocket that makes you thankful, but what you have in your heart.

Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses.

Even though we can't have all we want, we ought to be thankful we don't get what we deserve.

Blessed are those who can give without remembering and receive without forgetting.

Nothing is more honorable than a grateful heart.

When you take responsibility on your shoulders there is not much room left for chips.

Life is the training place for all eternity.
Use the time wisely!

*Self-control is the ability to stay cool
when someone else would make you hot.*

Wise people speak when they have something to say;
foolish people speak because they have to say something.

*It is easy to be thankful for the good things.
A life of rich fulfillment comes to those who are
also thankful for the setbacks.*

GRATITUDE can turn a negative into a positive.
Find a way to be thankful for your troubles
and they can become your blessings.

I Did It His Way

*“Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth. Unite
my heart to fear Your name.” –Psalm 86:11*

A popular song some years ago proclaimed, “I did it my way.” Our song should be, “I did it His way.”

Everyone knows that repetition aids learning. With that in mind, read Exodus, chapters 38:21 through chapter 40. You will see the phrase, “As the Lord commanded” again and again (20 times). Five times in these two chapters, Moses records that the Israelites did “according to all that the Lord commanded Moses.”

When the skilled workmen were constructing the sacred tabernacle, they paid attention to the details. They followed the Divine “blueprints” exactly. “Then Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moses blessed them” (Ex. 39:43).

God also was pleased. “And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:35). That must have been an awesome sight!

As one reads the history of the people of Israel, it is readily apparent that they did not always do as the Lord commanded. In fact, too often it was “my way.” The Bible records both the successes and the failures of its characters so that we can learn from their lives. We can learn good lessons even from bad examples. But thank God for some very good examples.

My way gets in the way so easily. God, help me to do it Your way. **MM**

I’m Not Going Back!

*Before me lies the Promised Land
Where I shall never feel
The ravages of this old age
And never say, “I’m ill.”*

*Where tears will cease and joys begin
All promised by our God
And wonders that I’ve never seen
As on this way I’ve trod.*

*To fellowship with saints of old
I’ve never met before
Oh, think of all the pure delight
Awaiting on that shore!*

*To travel with the powers of flight
That only angels share,
And feast my eyes on worlds afar
I never knew were there.*

*Go back, you say? Go back to what?
To a world of pain and sorrow
Where sin and evil sit enthroned
With no promise of tomorrow?*

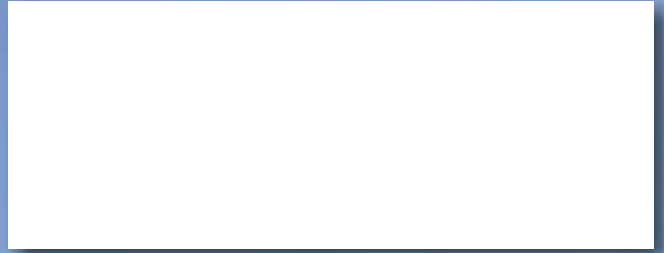
*Go back to foolish, fleshly things
So shallow and mundane
When I can dwell in a better world,
A world that’s free of pain?*

*I’m pressing on, not looking back,
The prize is just in view
When Christ shall come to claim His own
And crown His faithful few!*

— Melva Walton



My Aim



To believe in GOD.

To believe His Word.

To trust His promises.

To live peaceably among ourselves.

To have "no confidence in the flesh."

To deal fairly and honorably with all.

To make the world better for my being here.

To render strict obedience to the laws of the nation.

To live each day better than the day before.

To make no compromise with wrong.

To render honor to Christ in all I do and say.

To untiringly proclaim the Word by my example.

To realize that my life is the most powerful sermon I can deliver.

To wait patiently for the coming of the Lord to right all wrongs.

To realize the time is short, and I must redeem the hours left to me.

To be kind.

To forgive.

To daily count my blessings.

TO BE THANKFUL.

