



# Megiddo Message

July/August, 2006



**America**  
*the Beautiful*







# You Can't Live on Cotton Candy

Religion (or "spirituality") is popular! Reference movies like "The Passion of Christ" by Mel Gibson; religious books such as "Left Behind" or "The DaVinci Code" on the top-seller lists. Observe the mega-churches (churches with more than 2000 members) that are booming. At present there are some 900 in the U.S.—ten times as many as there were in the 1970s, and floods of people are joining. A greater percentage of people belong to churches now than ever before in history, and new church buildings are being built. The latest are the "one-stop shops" which are like a religious Wal-Mart. After you pray, you can work out at the gym, eat at the food court, and browse in the bookstore, or attend a small group Bible study.

In an effort to attract people, some churches have even adopted a carnival spirit, complete with popcorn, peanuts and paper hats! To keep up with the times, many ministers are adding relevance to their messages by building them around characters drawn from the movies, because—admit it!—most churchgoers go to the movies, and they will be more sure to approve of the message if the subject matter is already familiar. And popular approval is important when success is being measured in numbers [as if God is more interested in quantity than quality—see Deut. 7:6; Matt. 7:14; Luke 13:23–24; 1 Pet. 4:18].

Tragically, the teaching of Jesus, the Prophets and Apostles is being exchanged for a good psychology gospel that is focused on the "good life" now and is non-offending, non-disturbing, non-stimulating, and non-demanding. And just about anything goes—any music, any dress, any manner of worship, any lifestyle, any scripture, any gospel, so long as everyone likes it and goes home feeling good about themselves. [Does anyone consider if God is pleased?] Look at some of the "feel good" titles among recent sermons broadcast:

*"Googling God" "When You're Kind to Others You Help Yourself" "Expect Good Things to Happen" "Being Confident in Who God Made You to Be" "Healthy Self-Image" "Taking Care of Self" "How to Enjoy Who You Are" "Positive Thoughts" "Keeping Our Hopes Up" "People Skills" "Building Self-Esteem" "Don't Feel Guilty" "Let Go of the Past"*

Who is serving "solid food" from the Word of God [see Hebrews 5:14]? What is being taught about God Almighty's power and supremacy? Who is defending His Word (the Bible) against those who call it a book of myths, or who say that miracles didn't really happen, that the disciples only *thought* they saw Jesus alive after His crucifixion? What about the issues of life and death that every one of us faces? What about God's commands [or should I call them His "appeals" or "requests" or "solutions" to be more politically correct]? Getting even more serious, who is talking to me, not about how to succeed and be happy, but about

*my personal accountability to my Creator? Who is warning about the inevitability of Divine intervention or judgment, or God's ability to overrule my opinion, my decision—even my life?*

I am reminded of my childhood experience with cotton candy. When I was about seven years old, a carnival of sorts came to our school. I don't remember anything about the event except walking under an enormous tent that had been set up in back of the school and seeing the man behind the counter spinning tall sticks of that pretty pink confection. I wasn't one to part with my pennies easily, but the cotton candy man took a few of them that day. I can still remember my delight at the taste of the amazing fluff that just disappeared in my mouth.

It was a one-time experience. My parents were wise in providing a steady diet of good, wholesome food and we never went anywhere that cotton candy was sold, so it wasn't even a temptation. But the memory of the delightful flavor stayed with me, and one day as an adult I happened upon it unexpectedly, this marvelous confection that I remembered as the best thing I had ever tasted. I tried it again, and this time it was total disappointment. I could not imagine what I had liked about the sticky, sugary fluff!

The true gospel of Jesus is as different from popular religion as prime rib is from cotton candy. True religion is not about feeling good, or having a good time. It is not about numbers, or success, or being happy "because God loves me."

On the surface, cotton candy religion may appeal, but it does not have the nutrients we need to grow spiritually strong. It may satisfy an emotional need, but it is not the gospel of Christ that will bring salvation.

Of course we like to be soothed, coddled, and comforted. But Jesus never promised that His gospel would leave men and women feeling good about themselves. He is our example, and He Himself took the hard road of discipline and self-denial and recommended the same to any would-be follower. "If any of you wants to be My follower," He said, "you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23 NLT).

The current boom in religion comes nearer to that described by the Apostle Paul, "They have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). A religion of "God loves everybody" and "Pat me on the back and tell me how much God loves me" is totally foreign to the teaching of Jesus. Repentance has become a forgotten doctrine, and "godly sorrow" something to be totally avoided—you must not question anyone's lifestyle or behavior because it might embarrass them!

Do you want to grow and mature a strong, Christ-like character that God will bless with life everlasting? Then go after the nourishing, "solid food" of the Word of God! Don't settle for cotton candy. ♦

# The Courage that Won Our Freedom

The type of people who won for us the religious freedom we enjoy were persons of rare courage and faith. One often forgotten hero among them was a man named Roger Williams.

In the early days of the Seventeenth Century, a group of Protestant Christians called Puritans were seeking religious freedom for themselves and their families. Persecuted throughout Europe, they emigrated to the New World, where they found the freedom they were seeking: freedom to serve and worship God, free from oppressive governments, free from the tyranny and trouble of the Old World.

But what they found for themselves as dissenters from established religion they were not willing to extend to others. This presented a problem to a few serious minded ones who believed firmly that God was true but who disagreed with the manner in which the Puritans were administering in the church. Accordingly, in 1636, the Puritan representative of their so-called "Christian commonwealth" threw Roger Williams out of their civilized Massachusetts Colony and into the rugged forests of New England. To make matters worse, it was the dead of winter. In exile, as Williams later wrote, he was denied "the common air to breathe in, and a civil cohabitation upon the same common earth; yea and also without mercy or human compassion, exposed to winter miseries in the howling wilderness."

For fourteen weeks Williams wandered about, not knowing, as he put it, "what bread or bed did mean." The Narragansett Indians rescued him, and he purchased land from them to found the city of Providence. By 1638, only two years later, the first Baptist Church in America was accepting members. Of Rhode Island and its tiny Baptist community Williams wrote: "I desired it might be a shelter for persons distressed for conscience. I then considering the diverse conditions of my distressed countrymen, I communicated my said purchase unto loving friends ... who then desired to take shelter here with me."

Rhode Island thus became the first colony for religious liberty in America. The new Baptist church became a church born in exile, and Rhode Island became a sanctuary for Seventeenth Century religious fanatics, Holy Rollers, and assorted theological perverts. Actually, the Massachusetts

*Without Roger Williams,  
New England might easily  
have become new ground for  
religious tyranny.*



**Roger Williams**  
*Champion of Religious Tolerance*

"moral majority" was glad to see them go. As one Puritan preacher declared, "All Familists, Antinomians, Anabaptists, and other enthusiasts, shall have free liberty to keep away from us ... the sooner the better."

## **Religion without state protection**

From the beginning of the establishment of Massachusetts, Roger Williams had been the pain of the Puritans. No sooner had he disembarked from the boat than he was disseminating what they called certain "erroneous and dangerous" opinions. For one thing, he said that the Indians, not the English King, were the rightful owners of the American soil and that they should be justly compensated. This idea was unpopular. Then, too, he declared that the authority of the state extended only to "bodies and goods," not to "souls and salvation," that the civil government had "no access to divinity." This was not a popular idea either among the civil magistrates of Massachusetts, but Williams was speaking from the depth of a sincere conscience and was not to be silenced. His belief that civil government had no

*continued on page 5*



# Megiddo Message

July/August, 2006  
Volume 93, No. 4

## EDITORIAL

- 2 **You Can't Live on Cotton Candy** by Ruth E. Sisson

## ARTICLE

- 3 **The Courage that Won Our Freedom**  
Our religious freedom heritage from Roger Williams

## CURRENT ISSUES

- 8 **What Does God Say?** (Part Six)  
Astrology Is Idolatry

## ARTICLE

- 11 **About King Saul and the Witch of Endor**  
Why did King Saul stoop to necromancy?

## FEATURE

- 14 **"Write...Send to Smyrna** (Part Two)  
Be Faithful Even to Death

## YOUTH IN CHRIST

- 19 **The "Smart" Red Hen** by Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud  
Come, Let us Worship by Calvin Reid

## KNOW YOUR BIBLE?

- 21 **Selfishness • Meet the Apostle Paul**

## AWESOME DESIGNS

- 22 **Super Leaper: The Jackrabbit** by Patricia A. Fleming

## ARTICLE

- 26 **The Kingdom's Not Like Our Town**

## BACK COVER

**Procrastination** by Liot L. Snyder

FRONT COVER: Ocean photos taken at Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park, Maine, by Casey Bartell. Chasm photos taken at Ausable Chasm, New York, by Marissa DiGrazio.

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## MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

## WE BELIEVE...

- ♦ in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- ♦ in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- ♦ in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to

heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.

- ♦ in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- ♦ in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- ♦ in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ♦ in ourselves as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

- ♦ in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

## THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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

authority over religion or churches was a radical shift in political and religious thinking—a shift which became, years later, the foundation of our American government. But in his time it was a new idea, and not acceptable. Most Puritan divines believed that without Christian magistrates imposing definite religious beliefs and practices—their own, of course—theological chaos and moral anarchy would prevail.

John Cotton was one of those Puritan magistrates who insisted on state protection for religion. He said: “If civil weapons be debarred from defending religion, upon pretense that church weapons are sufficient, and then no churches or church weapons to be found upon the face of the earth, then let all seducers to apostasy, idolaters, and heretics,... rejoice in an open door to liberty and safety.” But Williams was unperturbed and unchanged. Heretics, idolaters, and apostates abounded in the Early Church, he said, yet it grew without state protection.

The New England Puritan hierarchy justified the exiling of Roger Williams and the Baptists, as well as the executing of certain Quakers, as being “proper protection for the true gospel.” On the other side, Williams maintained that if New England churches were truly Christ churches, they would neither need nor desire political protection. Here again Williams dared to express his mind in behalf of religious freedom: the idea that religion could take care of itself and need not be defended except by the spiritual life of its people.

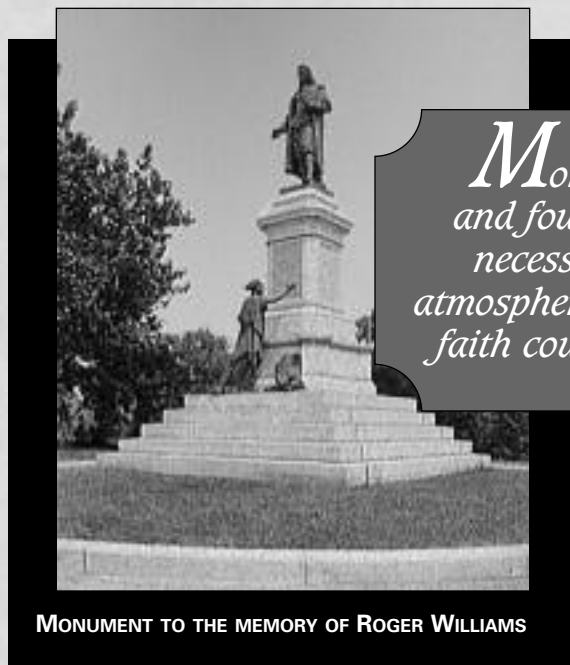
### **Uncoerced faith**

Williams’ position was counted radical in his time, so radical and so daring that others did not fully comprehend where it might take them. Nor did they wish to venture it. But God was working, and the new thinking survived and prospered.

On two very basic issues Williams took a firm stand.

1: **Christian belief cannot be compelled.** The sword of the state might compel a nation to be baptized, but it could not make them Christians. “Christening,” he said, “no Christians make,” and he was emphatic. Furthermore, he declared that the duty of the church was to preach the Word of God, preach it, not enforce it. And in that idea of uncoerced faith was born the doctrine of true religious liberty—that faith is personal, not political; that each individual is responsible to God and God alone for his or her faith; that it was not the duty of the state to coerce the heretic or the atheist; that God alone is sovereign judge for the conscience of believer and nonbeliever alike.

2: **Christian belief cannot be nationalized.** There are no Christian nations, he insisted, only Christian people bound to Christ, and they are bound not by citizenship but by faith.



MONUMENT TO THE MEMORY OF ROGER WILLIAMS

*More than the discovery and founding of America was necessary to create the free atmosphere in which the Apostolic faith could be reborn and grow.*

Massachusetts might be the new England but it was not the new Israel. God might have one chosen nation—Israel—as His own long ago, but that was a unique event and long past. Accordingly, Williams believed, it is not the

prerogative of any state officials to “set up a civil and temporal Israel, or to bound out new earthly lands of Canaan by exercising authority over religion in God’s name.” He said, “There is nothing special in God’s mind about England or new England or any other people or place in the world.” The entire earth is the Lord’s.

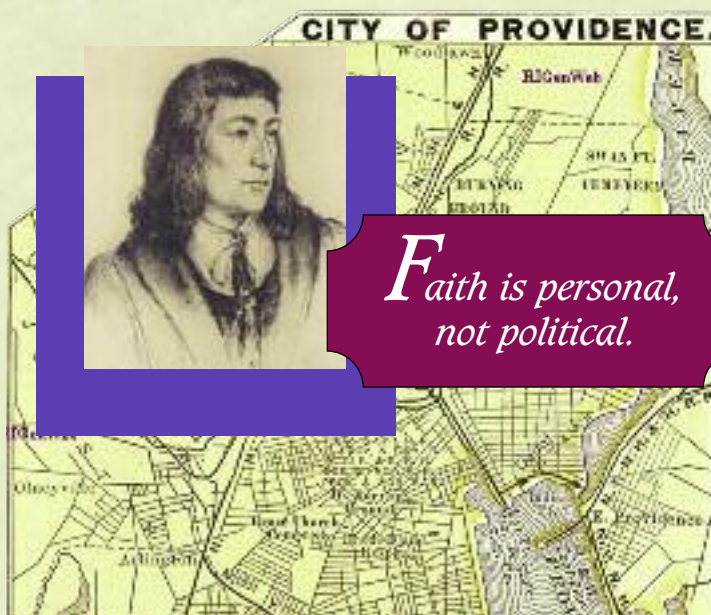
Williams further denied that individuals or nations could measure the godliness of their conduct by the beneficent results it might bring them. “The more godly, the more persecuted,” he wrote. Again, “The nearer Christ’s followers have approached to worldly wealth, and ease, and liberty, honor and pleasure, the further and further they have departed from God, from truth, from the simplicity, power and purity of Christ Jesus and true Christianity.”

Obstinate Roger Williams—challenging the devout leaders of New England’s dream, shattering the political and religious status quo, reminding all that faith at its best ever lives on the edge of exile—Williams was far from popular, but he was doing a task that God wanted done. More than the discovery and founding of America was necessary to create the free atmosphere in which true religion could yet be born and grow. The change from religious tyranny to religious freedom was not the result of one mighty upheaval. Step by step events had to take their slow and painful course, until both the time and the situation were right.

America had to be discovered, but without Roger Williams, New England might have easily become new ground for religious tyranny and persecution.

Roger Williams’ ideas stuck fast. Years passed; the Revolution came and went. The Constitution was written and accepted, and at the persistence of a determined few there was soon added a Bill of Rights securing religious freedom and liberty of conscience to all citizens. And finally, at long last—in 1833—even stubborn Massachusetts had to relinquish a state church. The new freedom had won. A state could exist apart from the authority of an established church, incomprehensible though such an idea had seemed.





### ***The religion of Jesus demands courage***

Such was the rugged road that led to our religious liberty. The same courage and faith is demanded by Jesus Himself in all who would follow Him and inherit a place in His eternal Kingdom. It is a courageous faith that is all-out, all-demanding, all-fulfilling, all-disturbing, and all-transforming. Faith that is comfortable and convenient will never result in the character God is seeking. Faith that is comfortable and convenient will never produce the character to which God will grant eternal life. The change from the old creature to the new requires a courage so powerful that the Bible uses such contrasting terms as darkness and light, old and new, heavenly and earthly.

Much religion today is valueless, not because it has been liberalized but because it has been "trivialized," says a current observer. "We have trivialized conversion from an overpowering, transforming encounter with God to a transaction that merely fulfills a salvific requirement.... Regeneration, the dying to the old self and rising again to new life, has become conversion which takes place on a Sunday morning during the singing of the last hymn or twice a year when the revival preacher comes to town. Now we, not God, control salvation through spiritual laws, Roman roads, and sinners' prayers. Such a gospel," he says, "is safe and manageable, but it will not produce Christians."

A gospel that is "safe and manageable" is not the religion of Jesus Christ. His was a courageous faith that could transform heart and life. His religion struck at the root of evil, and would not tolerate the existence of the slightest sin. Nothing easy, comfortable, or "safe" here.

### ***Our responsibility for our religious freedom***

What are we doing to show we appreciate the religious freedom we enjoy?

What is the effect of the true Gospel on us, we who hold the most valuable religious heritage in the world? How much does our religion mean to us? How much are we ready to give?

Are we—

willing to **go all-out** for it?

willing to **submit** every aspect of our lives to the transforming power of the law of God?

willing to take the **risk** of an all-out surrender of our time and talents to the cause of Christ?

as **committed** as were the early founders of our nation, who were willing to risk home and hearth for the sake of conscience?

willing to **show**, in the midst of a corrupt generation, that we will not touch or handle the things of this world that lead away from God and holiness?

ready in the midst of doubt and uncertainty to **proclaim** the absolute certainty and power of our faith by our life and our example?

ready to **call** ourselves prisoners for Christ's sake, bound body and soul to fulfilling His will, doing His work, upholding His standards of integrity in every large or small transaction every day?

willing to **go all-out for God** and holiness, to serve with all our mind, all our soul, all our might, all our strength?

willing to have our **lives turned inside out and upside down**, swept clean of every fleshly desire, every selfish motive, every thought and feeling and motive that God cannot bless—for the sake of Him who has called us to glory and virtue?

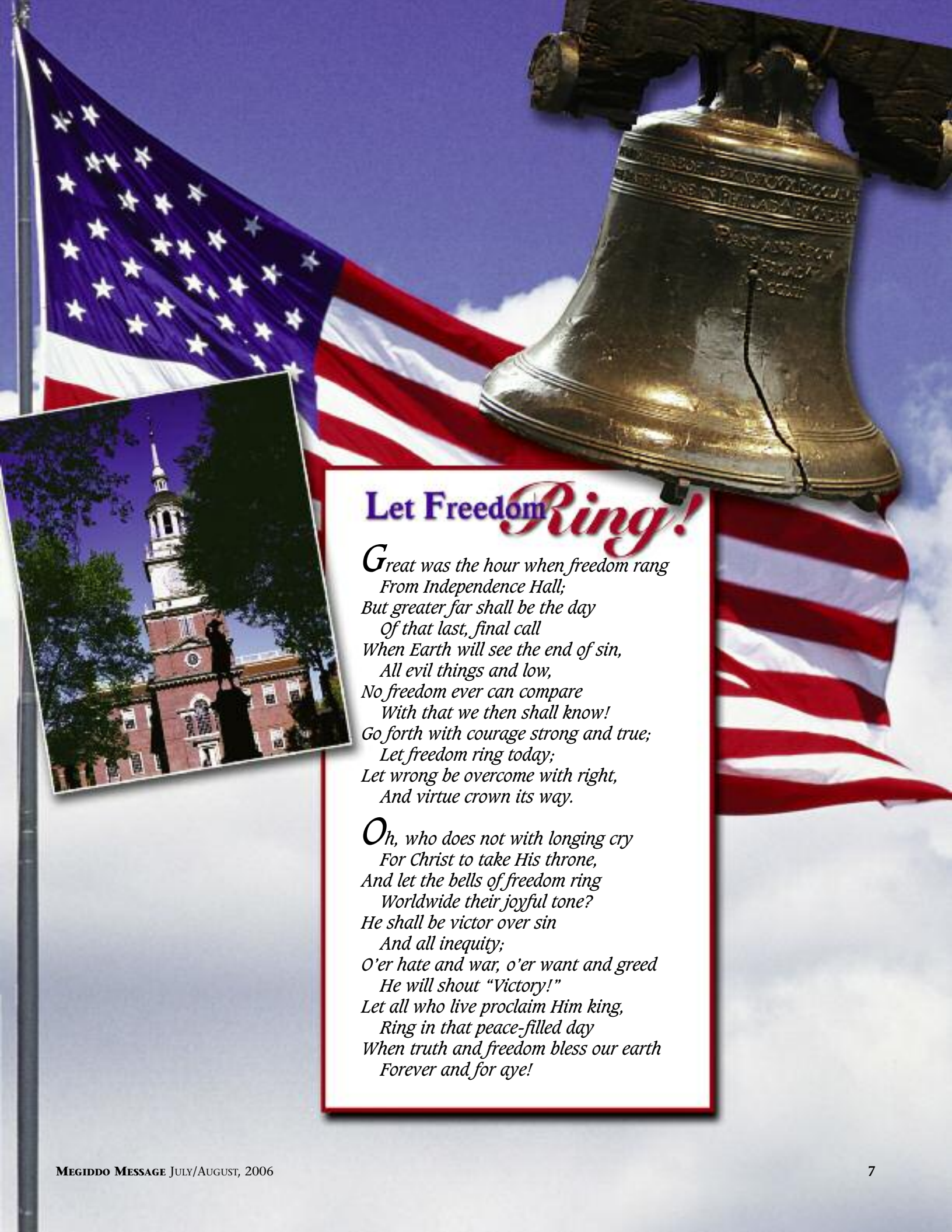
Such is the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ today. And it is not a gospel that is different for the sake of differing. It is a gospel that calls us to give up the good of this world that we might have something better—and eternal—in the coming new world. God is looking for those who are willing to take the risk, to let go of the present in the interest of securing that which is infinitely greater. He is looking for those who are willing to give up what they cannot keep in order to place a firmer hand upon that which can never be taken away from them.

Who will answer the call of Jesus? Who will step away from the good of this world to secure the best in the world to come? Remember the words of Jesus, "*He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*" (Matt. 10:39). "*All things*" must become "*new*" (2 Cor. 5:17).

And when we come to comparing, what is our grandest comparison beside this reality? It is something like giving up one hundred dollars in exchange for one hundred billion; or like sacrificing a moment for a millennium. But even these terms do not do justice to the difference, for "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*" (1 Cor. 2:9). ♦



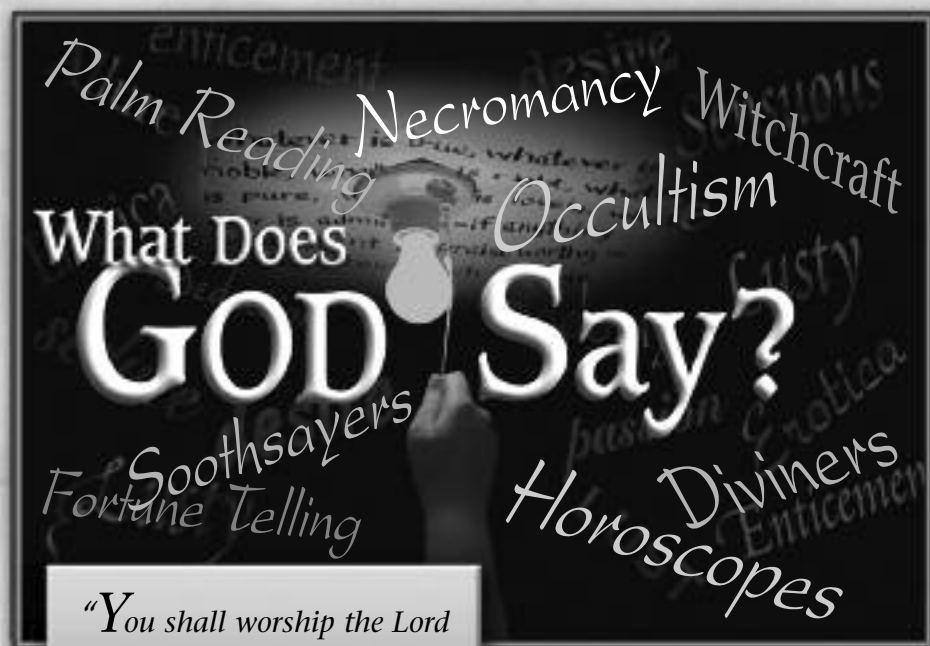




## Let Freedom *Ring!*

*Great was the hour when freedom rang  
From Independence Hall;  
But greater far shall be the day  
Of that last, final call  
When Earth will see the end of sin,  
All evil things and low,  
No freedom ever can compare  
With that we then shall know!  
Go forth with courage strong and true;  
Let freedom ring today;  
Let wrong be overcome with right,  
And virtue crown its way.*

*Oh, who does not with longing cry  
For Christ to take His throne,  
And let the bells of freedom ring  
Worldwide their joyful tone?  
He shall be victor over sin  
And all inequity;  
O'er hate and war, o'er want and greed  
He will shout "Victory!"  
Let all who live proclaim Him king,  
Ring in that peace-filled day  
When truth and freedom bless our earth  
Forever and for aye!*



*"You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." –Matthew 4:10*

## Part Six

# ASTROLOGY IS IDOLATRY

Look up into the star-studded sky on a clear night. As you look, think of the glory and magnificence of the Creator who set in motion the sun, moon, planets and stars. Then exclaim with the Psalmist, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands"* (Ps. 19:1 NIV).

Viewing the wonders of God's creation draws worship and a feeling of

awe and reverence from men and women who recognize God's greatness, omnipotence, and magnificence. Yet, time and again people have turned from worshiping the great Creator and foolishly sought comfort in worshiping some part of His creation, even to worshiping the stars! Yes, the occupants of the skies have not been exempt from such false, misguided worship.

Astrology is the system developed around the belief that the stars influence or correlate with events on the earth, both natural and human. It teaches that everything from earthquakes to elections, from personalities to preferences and inclinations to sin and wrongdoing, are linked to the positions of the heavenly spheres.

Astrology is practiced in cultures the world over and is becoming increasingly widespread in our own nation. According to a Gallup poll taken in June of 2005, 25% of Americans believe the stars affect their lives. Books on astrology abound in public libraries, web pages on astrology are numerous, and horoscopes appear daily in newspapers across the nation. Does this not point up the prophecy that says deceivers will *"wax worse and worse"*? (see 2 Tim. 3:13; Matt. 24:24).

## What Is Astrology?

Astrology is an attempt to satisfy the human desire to know the future. Add the appeal of "secret knowledge" of a "hidden connection" with the universe and the attraction of hope, however false, for those who seek relief from pain, and the popularity of astrology is not surprising.

Even less surprising is the lack of visible evidence that astrology can do what it claims. Many studies have shown that astrologers have no more success in predicting events or identifying personalities than could be expected from blind chance.

The practice of astrology is built around several ancient beliefs that have long been proven wrong. For instance, astrology assumes that the universe is geocentric (i.e., the earth is at the center of the universe), that there are seven (instead of nine) planets in this system, and that some of the planets are gods (an absolutely false assumption). Astrology also assumes that there are four elements (earth, water, fire and air, which are not elements at all) comprising all matter instead of the one hundred plus elements now known.

Offering a pseudo-power over all aspects of life and an escape from



## Don't be confused—astrology is NOT astronomy!

**astrology:** the divination of the supposed influences of the stars and planets on human affairs and terrestrial events by their positions and aspects

**astronomy:** the study of objects and matter outside the earth's atmosphere and of their physical and chemical properties



accountability, astrology amounts to nothing more than a futile attempt to bypass belief in God. Following God is a challenging and demanding path, and there will always be those who think they have a better way.

### **Why Is Astrology So Bad?**

Astrology is bad because God condemns and forbids it. Astrology is a form of idolatry. It is worshiping the creature instead of the Creator. In astrology, humankind has claimed power for the stars and has *"exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator"* (Rom. 1:25). A belief in astrology, no matter how sincere, does not make it right because it is founded on deception.

### **A few questions...**

Are there any Christian astrologers? Despite what anyone may claim, it is a contradiction of terms. Even the most basic claims of astrology go against the teachings of the Bible.

***What about the Magi? Wasn't astrology behind the positioning of the star that led them to the Christ child? (Matt. 2:2-9).***



No, the God of the Bible would not use a practice He condemned. Besides, no star in the heavens could point to a precise location on the earth.

What was the star that guided the wise men from the East? According to the Bible, immortal beings radiate light; so why couldn't that "star" have been an angel of God hovering as a light above the location of the Child and visible to the Magi? Jesus Himself said, *"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Matt. 13:43). The prophet Daniel stated this same fact when he said, *"Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever"* (Dan. 12:3).

After Jesus returns with *"all his holy angels"* (Matt. 16:27), light from immortal beings will provide physical as well as spiritual illumination. Isaiah prophesied, *"The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light"* (Isa. 60:19).

On the night Jesus was born, the announcement of His birth was delivered to shepherds; the messenger delivering it was an angel, and that angel radiated light: *"And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid"* (Luke 2:9).

The angels at Jesus' empty tomb after He was resurrected were described as *"two men ... in shining garments"* (Luke 24:4). Matthew's gospel also mentions the brightness of the angel: *"Suddenly there was a great earthquake, because an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled aside the stone and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow"* (Matt. 28:2-3 NLT).

If God summoned shining angels to attend the auspicious announcement of the birth of His Son, couldn't God send another angel to guide the Magi to the Christ Child?

*If God sent angels to announce the birth of His Son, couldn't He also send an angel to guide the Magi to the Christ Child?*

### **In Summary**

What does the Bible say about astrology? Astrologists all fall into one category: Deceivers.

There is no divinity in the sun, no "fate" in the planets, no destinies of men that can be read in the stars. Any who by whatever means profess to have knowledge of the future outside any knowledge revealed by God are deceivers, liars, falsifiers, claiming powers they do not have, and are condemned by God. In fact, the deception, the deceiver and the deceived are all condemned together. *"If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a ditch"* (Matt. 15:14).

Christian believers will have nothing to do with any such, not because they believe witchcraft or fortune telling is inspired by some superpower of evil but simply because it is vain, wrong, and condemned by God.

Proverbs 24:28 says clearly, *"Do not deceive with your lips."* Among the seven abominations to the Lord is lying (Prov.

## about human predicting and astrology?

*“You shall not make for yourself...any likeness of anything that is in heaven above...you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God”* (Exodus 20:4-5).

*“If there is found among you...a man or a woman who...has gone and served...either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven...and if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination has been committed...then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones”* (Deut. 17:2-5).

*“You shall not...practice divination”* (Lev. 19:26).

Astrology is *“an abomination to the Lord”* (Deut. 18:12).

*“You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let now the astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from what shall come upon you. Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; it shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before!”* (Isaiah 47:13-14).



6:16, 19). The Lord abhors the deceitful man (Ps. 5:6). The Lord, speaking through His prophet Jeremiah, said, “Therefore do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers” (Jer. 27:9).

Deceit is among the thirteen evils enumerated by Jesus (Mark 7:22).

The ability to know the future lies wholly and solely with God, and anyone professing to know anything about the future on his own, aside from what might be logically projected by studying the past, is openly assaulting God’s supreme right and in so doing is bringing himself under severe condemnation. All those who are “abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars” are grouped together with those who will “have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). They are among those “outside” the city, for we read that “outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Rev. 22:15).

No one can rightfully profess to honor Christ and God and at the same time condone or support a profession that practices or sells deceit and lying.

If we endorse anything which God hates, abominates, or abhors, we bring ourselves under His condemnation. And we read plainly that the “lying tongue” is among the seven abominations (Prov. 6:16-19); that “lying lips are abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 12:22); that the Lord abhors the “deceitful man” (Ps. 5:6). ♦



**Only the God of the Bible can reliably  
predict the future.**



# ABOUT KING SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR



**N**ecromancy, or spiritism, as it is more commonly called, is one of the oldest religious counterfeits known to the human race. And it survives today. A television show purports a medium who stands before an audience and pretends to be communicating with departed spirits. He claims that the spirits speak with him and that he receives messages from the dead to deliver to those still alive. The audience, if believing, is awed. Others allege themselves as psychics, who seem to have the power of a third “eye,” allowing them to foresee or foretell the future usually in very general terms. If occasionally they strike a fact, they have instantaneous believers calling in to their show. Others perform their magic on Ouija boards which can be purchased on the common market.

What does it all mean?

First, what is spiritism? The dictionary provides this definition: “The belief that the dead communicate with the living, usually through a medium.” The word actually comes from two Greek words: *nekros*, which means “dead,” and

*manteia* which means “divination.” When the two words are brought together, the meaning is usually “communing with the dead.” Spiritism claims special communication with “departed souls” by means of a medium who is supposed to be guided through the outer plains of the spirit world to be able to contact the dead. Underlying such practices is the almost universal belief that there is some type of life surviving one’s death. Countering such beliefs is the clear biblical statement, “The dead know not anything” (Eccl. 9:5). And, “There is no work, or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Eccl. 9:10).

Knowing that there is nothing that survives the body at death except the record of one’s life (Mal. 3:16–17; Rev. 20:12), all beliefs in spiritism, necromancy, soothsaying and the like must be classified as deception.

## ***Saul and the Witch of Endor***

How, then, was king Saul able to consult the witch of Endor and obtain knowledge about his fate from the Prophet Samuel who had died?

First Samuel 28 is the pathetic account of a man who, in a desperate attempt to receive a favorable word from the Lord, resorted to soothsaying or necromancy, and in so doing sealed his fate. We read in 1 Chron. 10:13 that Saul died for his disobedience and for this egregious sin.

The practice of soothsaying and necromancy in Israel was strictly forbidden. “Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:31). “The person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people” (Lev. 20:6).

Saul knew these laws. He even worked to enforce them in

Israel when he was king, purging the land of these abominable practices (1 Sam. 28:3). But at this point Saul had so lost touch with God and had come to such a pitch of panic that he actually resorted to the abominable practice himself!

### Background

Why was king Saul so desperate?

First of all, the Prophet Samuel had died, so he no longer had any spiritual advisor (1 Sam. 28:3).

Second, Saul, now an aged man, nearly at the end of his reign, was frightened by the gathering armies of the Philistines against Israel. *"When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly"* (1 Sam. 28:5). To make matters even worse, Saul knew that his archenemy David, whom he had been pursuing in jealous hate for many years, was among the Philistines (1 Sam. 27:4).

What lay ahead for king Saul? He desperately wanted some word from the Lord. So *"Saul inquired of the Lord,"* but *"the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by the Urim or by the prophets"* (1 Sam. 28: 6).

Silence.

In desperation he ordered his servants to find *"a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her"* (28:7). They complied, and Saul decided to go—disguised, and at night.

So laying aside his royal robes, he disguised himself, took two men and started for the city of Endor.

In traveling the route from Mt. Gilboa, where his army was camped, to Endor, Saul and his men traveled right by the camp of the Philistines in the valley of Jezreel. If he had been struck with fear listening to his intelligence sources, he was even more fearful seeing the camp.

### The Woman Recognizes Saul

Picture Saul arriving at the witch's door with two men in the dead of night. It seems that she was immediately suspicious of her client—after all, Saul was hard to disguise. His height alone would give him away, for he was *"head and shoulders taller"* than anyone else! But Saul still tried to be disguised, and can't we almost hear him pitching his deep voice as high as possible so as not to be recognized: *"I have to talk to a man who has died,"* he said to the woman, *"Will you call up his spirit for me?"* (1 Sam. 28:8 NLT).

The woman, being one of the few survivors of Saul's campaign against her trade, could only think that this was some trick. *"Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?"* (28:9 NIV). Saul quickly guaranteed impunity, and the woman asked whose spirit she should bring up for him. Saul replied, *"Bring up Samuel"* (28:11).

The request for Samuel clinched her suspicions absolutely. There was no question that this was Saul! Who could live in

Israel all these years and not know of the connection between Saul and Samuel! She herself had likely seen Samuel on more than one occasion. She was a deceiver, but she wanted Saul to know he had not deceived her. *"Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!"* (28:12).

Seeing her opportunity to get Saul's attention, the woman shrieked—it was the beginning of the seance.

It worked—she had Saul's attention. *"What did you see?"* he asked. This was just the question the woman wanted, and she began her vague, mysterious description of what she had seen. *"I saw a god ascending out of the earth."*

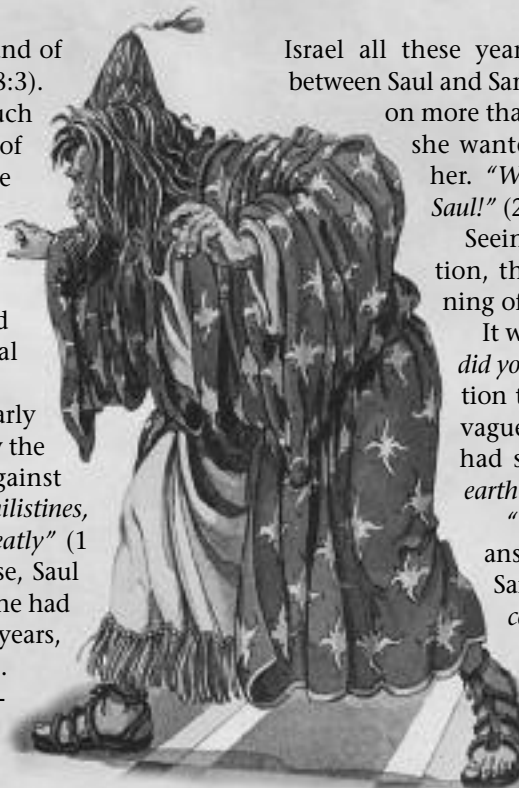
*"What is his form?"* The witch could answer easily from her own knowledge of Samuel: *"An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle."* Her deception was working. Saul *"perceived that it was Samuel"*—the woman was experienced in involving her client in her deception. Saul *"stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down,"* ready to hear whatever might be forthcoming from the Prophet.

The woman, in all likelihood an experienced ventriloquist, threw her voice in such a way that the sound seemed to be coming from "Samuel" in the ground: *"Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"* Again, she knew the right question to ask to get the information Saul wanted. Saul's response accommodated her perfectly: *"I am deeply distressed.... Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."*

It was everything the woman needed to be able to make a suitable response. Again, as a ventriloquist, she knew how to make Saul think the voice was coming from the earth, as though some spirit of Samuel was speaking: *"So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? And the Lord has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David."* This was a fact everyone in Israel had known for many years. Saul had been unfaithful to God; it was a published fact (1 Sam. 15:22–24).

The woman went on with her deceptive art: *"Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God nor execute his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day."* Here was more information that the woman had by firsthand knowledge of the events in Israel.

*"Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hands of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines"* (28:17–19). It was a prophecy of doom, which did not need a magician to spell out. Saul himself had revealed his fateful position. The Lord had departed from him, the Lord had put a limit on his reign years earlier (1 Sam. 15:23–24), and now the Philistines were camped against him, powerful and strong. His sons, fighting with him, would be the first targets of the powerful Philistines.\* Why would



**For centuries, sorcerers have preyed on people's desire to know the future.**



the Lord deliver Israel, when Saul was not on God's side, and not even communicating with God?

Immediately Saul was overwhelmed by the woman's words, purporting to come from Samuel, and he was dreadfully afraid (28:20).

What was the source of the woman's message? It was Saul's own testimony to her (verse 15).

Where did the woman get her information? She gives herself the credit. *"Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me"* (28:21). She was not receiving a message from God.

We must keep in mind that the woman's trade was in deception. She knew how to let her clients talk and give her the information she needed. She also knew how to make a description of what she saw vague enough for her client to draw his own conclusions, so that Saul could *"perceive that it was Samuel"* (verse 14). She did not say it was Samuel; Saul did.

What makes us believe that Samuel or the spirit of Samuel was really not present, that her prediction was only part of her practiced deception?

1) The woman's trade was deception. God abominates all deception and deceptive practices, including witchcraft, necromancy, and soothsaying, and He would not use (promote) a practice He hates.

2) God condemned Saul for consulting a medium (1 Chron. 10:13)—how could He condemn the practice and then support it?

3) The woman could not utilize any demonic powers, because the Bible does not uphold the existence of a personal devil or spirit of evil. The devil or Satan is only a term for the man or woman who opposes God (John 6:70; Matt. 16:23).

4) Samuel had died, and the Bible tells us there is no consciousness in death (Eccl. 5:9–10).

5) The woman had no power to speak to one who had died because she had no power to resurrect Samuel; only God or those to whom He gives such power, can resurrect or restore life.

6) Samuel, if present, would not have spoken any word

except from the Lord, and Samuel knew that God had forsaken Saul—if he had spoken in the seance, he would have been going against the God he served.

Where did the woman get her knowledge to "prophecy" Saul's fate, if not from God?

The woman learned from Saul's own mouth that the Lord had forsaken him, and combining this with what she knew of Saul's earlier disobedience, the medium could easily make the appropriate reply.

It was common knowledge that David had been chosen

## Would God condemn a practice—and then speak through it?



to succeed king Saul. David

was anointed before a group of people

(1 Sam. 16:4, 13). Abigail, living in the wilderness, knew what the Lord had done for David, in appointing him to be *"ruler over Israel"* (1 Sam. 25:30). Elders of Israel also knew. They confessed knowing that years before *"the Lord had told you, 'You will be the shepherd of my people Israel. You shall be their leader'"* (2 Sam. 5:2). The medium was not guessing.

Would Saul and his family be defeated? It was a safe guess because Saul had told the medium that God had abandoned him, that he was scared, that the armies of Israel were weak and the Philistines were strong. What more did she need to know to guess their defeat and predict the outcome!

And so we read in 1 Chronicles 10:13 that *"Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also **because he consulted a medium for guidance.**"* ♦

\*The phrase, *"Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me"* is phrased in the Septuagint Bible, *"Tomorrow you and your sons shall fall"*—a simple statement that Israel would be defeated.



God's Word condemns all types of necromancy, spiritism and astrology.

## **“Write...Send” to**

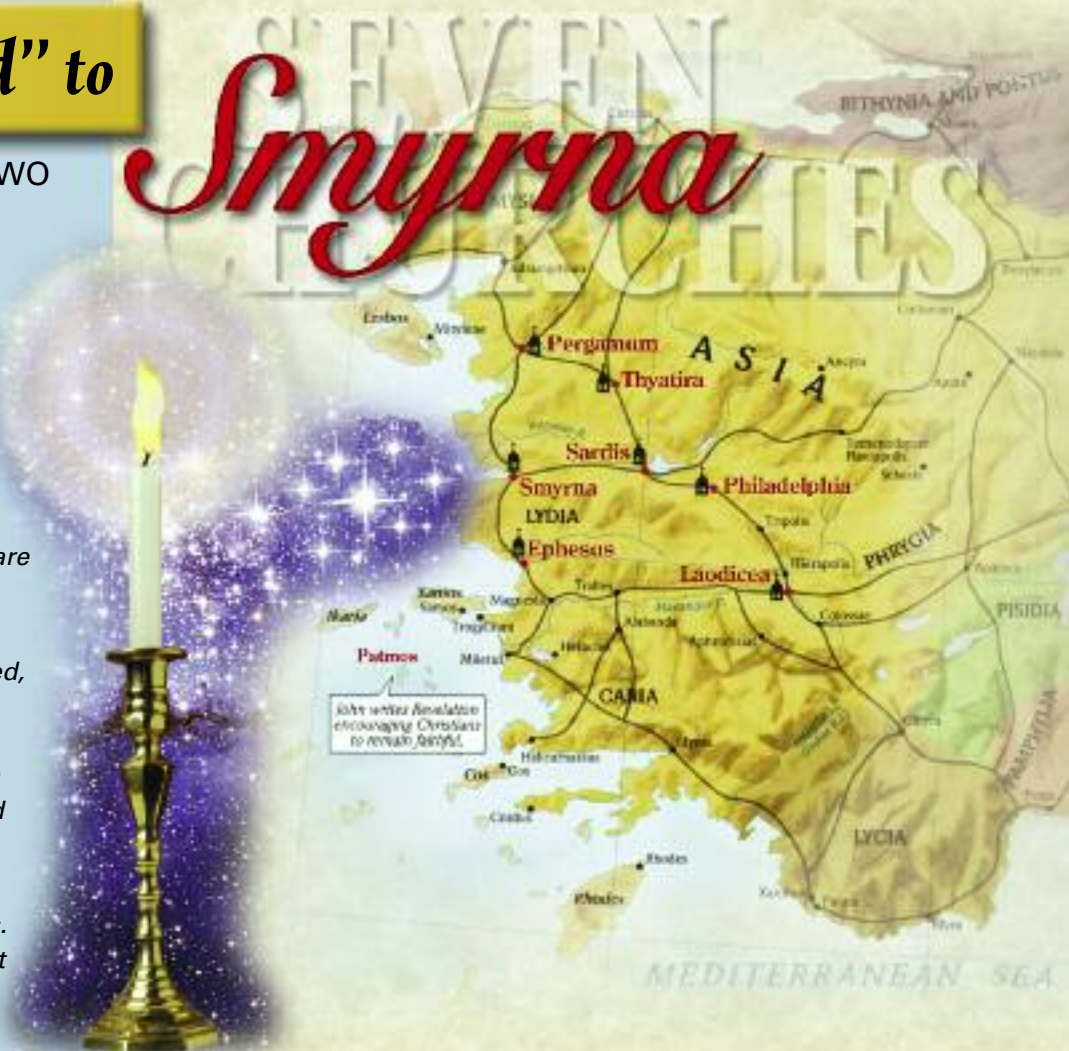
### **PART TWO**

**A**nd to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

*I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

*Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” Rev. 2:8-11*



TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA:

## ***Be Faithful Even to Death***

**I**magine it is the first century AD, and you are approaching Smyrna from the east. Once the skyline of the city becomes visible, you can't but admire its beauty. Ahead of you is a wide highway running right through town, lined with trees and tall buildings. You can see immediately that this city is wealthy. On this one highway east to west were five temples, elaborately constructed, to the gods of the city. There was a temple to the god Zeus. There was a temple to the patron goddess of the city Cybele. And—most elaborate of all—there was a temple to the honor of the Roman Emperor Tiberius.

There were many other public buildings: universities, and a marketplace, a large library, gymnasiums, baths, and large official buildings.

Imagine that you stop at a small shop in the agora (the marketplace) and inquire for the Christian section of the city. You are taken back by the response of the shopkeeper: “Did you say Christian? How much value do





you put on your life?" The shopkeeper turns away from you to take care of the next customer.

You walk on.

Perhaps the next person you approach has a small produce market. This time you are more cautious. "Could you direct me to the section of the city where I might find some Christians?" The produce marketer gives you directions. "Keep going straight ahead until you are outside the city. Then keep going down, down toward the bay. When the road disappears, keep going. You will be able to see a path through the marshes. Eventually you will come to some fields that are poorly drained, and you will see some lean-to's standing along the bay. We call it Shantytown. That's where the Christians are." Then he whispered, "But let me give you a little advice. Keep your eyes open. You just might suddenly find yourself in trouble. You know, this is Caesar's town, and the Christians refuse to worship Caesar."

### EMPEROR WORSHIP

The Christians in Smyrna faced serious persecution because they refused to go along with worship of the emperor.

What was emperor worship?

The ancient conquerors, when they defeated a nation, had a new challenge: to assimilate those people into their kingdom. How did they do it? The very fact that a nation lost a battle was proof that their gods were inferior to the gods of the winning nation. So the gods of the losing people were put down and the winning gods were imposed on the losing people. The strategy for the winning nation became: 1) Conquer your enemy, 2) humiliate them by putting down their gods, and 3) replace their gods with your own. In this way the defeated nations were assimilated into the culture of the victorious nation.

When the Romans conquered the Greeks, they had a different situation because the Romans did not have all the gods that the Greeks had. What could the Romans do to impose their gods? The emperor had the solution. He said, "I'm the god! Worship me. When I conquer your kingdom, I become your god." Thus emperor worship lay at the very heart of the Roman Empire. "Caesar is lord" was the slogan that saluted Roman victory, and that the winning emperor demanded.

The city of Smyrna being a center of Roman authority and having palaces and temples built to the honor of the emperors in Rome, the people were openly obliged and compelled to pay homage to Caesar. It is said that every year the people of the city had to file through the temple of Caesar one by one, dropping a pinch of incense on the pagan altar, and declare their loyalty by saying out loud, "Caesar is lord." This was something loyal Christians could not do. They could not worship the true God and say, "Caesar is lord."

Their refusal set the political authorities of Smyrna against the Christians. It was first of all an economic problem. By refusing to be part of the political structure, they could not get good jobs. They could not own property. They could not operate a business. They could not make their living in the structure of the city. If they set up a market, no one would be allowed to buy from them—even under threat of open persecution. What were they to do?

### VISIT FIRST-CENTURY SMYRNA

Some two thousand years ago, on the west coast of Asia Minor was a city named Smyrna. About 40 miles north of Ephesus, Smyrna was one of the largest and most prosperous cultural and commercial centers of that period, and one of the first seats of Christianity.

The city survives today as Izmar, the second largest city in Turkey.

One of the oldest cities of the Mediterranean world, Smyrna has been of almost continuous historical importance during the last 5000 years. The original city was established in the third millennium BC, but about the end of the seventh century BC it was captured and destroyed by the Libyans. For the next few hundred years it was virtually non-existent until Antigonius (316–301 BC), a successor of Alexander the Great, restored the city, and Lysimachus (301–281 BC) enlarged and fortified it. Because of its advantageous location and its well-protected harbor, it quickly grew to be one of the most prosperous cities on the Aegean shore.

But Smyrna's greatest claim to fame lay in its early policy of being a faithful ally of Rome, and long before Rome became a dominant power.

Observing the rising power of Rome in the first century BC, the political leaders of Smyrna acted shrewdly to assure their friendship with Rome. In AD 26 they conceived the idea of building a temple to the honor of Tiberius, then Emperor at Rome, and appealed to Rome for permission. In their appeal, according to Roman historian Tacitus, the Smyrnans recounted numerous occasions in their history when they had offered friendly services to the Roman people or aided Rome with their defenses, "not only in their wars abroad, but also in those they had fought in Italy." They also claimed to have been the first to rear a temple in honor of Rome, even while the powerful city of Carthage still stood to rival.

Permission was granted, and Smyrna became the site for the second Asian temple to the Emperor as deity of Rome—and also the seat of the sinister Caesar-cult which was to cause so much suffering for the Christian Church at Smyrna.

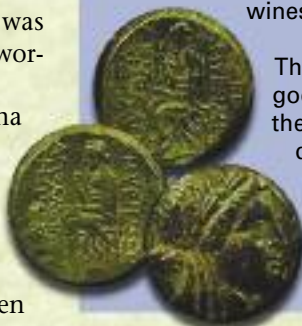
Smyrna competed with Ephesus and Pergamum for the honor of being the foremost city of Asia. The streets were broad, well paved, and laid out at right angles. Many were named after temples. The main street, called the Golden, ran across the city from west to east.

The city's buildings extended from the bay up the sides of the surrounding hill. Fountains flowed with water from the city's aqueducts. A theater on one of the highest slopes overlooked the lower city. Smyrna had a library, gymnasiums, baths, and a large stadium (seating capacity for 15,000) where games and civic events were regularly held. Industry flourished. Ancient Smyrna was known for its fine

wines, garments, perfumes, and goldsmithing.

What was at the heart of Smyrna? Idolatry. The city had at least five temples to pagan gods and goddesses. On the eastern side of the city was a temple to Smyrna's patron deity, the great mother goddess Cybele.

Often pictured on Smyrna's coins, Cybele was given the credit for the city's well being.



Coins from City of Smyrna of the 2nd and 1st century BC

## THE CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

**T**he Bible does not tell us when or how or by whom the Church at Smyrna was founded. Some have speculated that Paul, while in Ephesus, may have traveled to Smyrna and founded the Church there. Because we read in Acts 19:10 (NLT) that during the two years he was in Ephesus, *"people throughout the province of Asia—both Jews and Greeks—heard the Lord's message."*

Smyrna was another city in Asia. If the Church at Smyrna was indeed founded by Paul, the people there were likely familiar with both Paul and his companions, who might have included Priscilla and Aquila, Tychicus, Luke, Aristarchus, and Timothy. But the record is silent.

The Church at Smyrna was caught in this very difficult situation. It created an economic crisis.

Then they were stigmatized. Socially they were outcasts. They were maligned. They were slandered. They were falsely accused. They were threatened. If anything went wrong in Smyrna, the Christians were to blame simply because they refused to honor Caesar.

Consequently, the Christians in the Church at Smyrna were very, very poor.

It is even likely that the state confiscated their bank accounts, their property, and their possessions, leaving them with nothing. The book of Hebrews describes this plight and how the Christians took it: *"You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail. When all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew you had better things waiting for you in eternity"* (Heb. 10:34 NLT).

Smyrna was probably about the most difficult place in the world to live as a Christian at that time. To be a Christian in Smyrna, your faith had to be worth more to you than being comfortable. Your faith had to be worth more than having the things you wanted; more than having enough to eat; more than life itself. Do we wonder why Jesus wrote to these brave souls, *"Be faithful to death, and I will give you a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10)?

## KEY WORDS

- ❑ **POVERTY** (Rev. 2:9): Lacking the resources and rewards acclaimed by the present system; lacking in abundance of this world's goods;
- ❑ **RICH** (Rev. 2:9): Having an abundance of the resources of faith, hope, and godly character, which will ultimately purchase Christ's eternal favor.
- ❑ **FAITHFUL** (Rev. 2:10): Endurance through and beyond the period of one's testing; loyalty to the end; unflinching, unswerving commitment to Christ.
- ❑ **DEVIL** (Rev. 2:10): One opposed to the cause of Christ and having the authority to persecute true believers.
- ❑ **TEN DAYS** (Rev. 2:10): A limited period of undefined length.
- ❑ **SECOND DEATH** (Rev. 2:11): Death that is a punishment for sin and final; death from which there is no resurrection (see Rev. 21:8; Jer. 51:57).

## POOR RICH CHURCH!

Jesus looks at this little, suffering Church and says, *"I know...."* He says, I know, I understand, I'm standing by you.

Jesus says, *"I know your works, your tribulation, your poverty...."* Then He throws in a most surprising phrase: *"but you are rich."* How contradictory! But think of it. This little Shantytown people who didn't have anything are really rich! Why? They have the real riches, the riches of genuine faith, the riches of a sure hope, the riches of a secure—eternal—future if they proved faithful to God.

Someone has said that there is a poverty of riches and a richness of poverty. These people had the riches of poverty, the true riches, the riches that count for eternal life. The people up on Golden Avenue might look down on them. They might call them nobodies, and subject them to absolute poverty. But Jesus looked at

them and said, *"You are rich!"*—rich because they had the things that really count, the things that money cannot buy.

The people on Golden Avenue might have the money, the pleasure, the beautiful estates and the servants, the fine mansions, the chandeliers and the sparkling glassware, the wines and the dinners and the fine food, everything money could buy. But they lacked the true riches. They did not realize it, but they were the destitute ones.

Jesus is complimenting them. It is as if He says, *"You have something so valuable that nothing on Golden Avenue approaches it! Those people are not happy. They are killing one another. They are jealous of each other. They change governors so often one can hardly know who is in power. Their fame can evaporate overnight. You have the secure riches—of heavenly faith, of divine truth, of a sure and unshakable hope. You have peace and an inner joy that nothing in this world can take away. You*

## KEY LINES

- ◆ **B**etter to be God's poor than this world's rich.
- ◆ **E**ternal life is God's promised recompense for faithfulness to the end.



are happy because you are not living for mere “things.” You are not crying for what you lack because you have something better, the glorious, eternal future!”

Then Jesus says more: “I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan” (2:9). Slander is saying something against another with the intent to hurt. Slander is malicious, especially when it comes from inside the family. Jesus says, I know those who are maliciously against you, who pose as true Jews and are not. They may have Jewish blood but they are not of the family of Abraham. Why? They do not have Abraham’s faith and they do not have Abraham’s character and righteous life. They might be able to make money; they might look good in the town, and be capable administrators in the government. But they were not true Jews, because they were not Jews in heart. They had rejected Jesus and the true riches He could have given them, riches of faith, love and mercy.

So Jesus says, I know the blasphemy, the slander you have to take from those who say they are Jews and are not but belong to the synagogue of Satan. (“Satan” is a symbolic term for men and women who oppose Christ and His people.)

Think about the trouble the opposition caused the Apostle Paul. These opposers, this Satan, were the ones who crucified Jesus. They were the ones who put the Christians in prison and hurt them and made them suffer. They were the ones who beat Paul, and stoned him, because they were opposed to his teaching about Jesus.

### COUNSEL

What was Jesus’ advice? He said, “Don’t fear.” In other words, don’t worry. I know you are suffering, and you have enemies all around you. I know you are barely making it from one day to the next. I know your children are growing up with no place to go, and nothing to do, and no goals in this world. I know what you are going through. But do not fear any of these things you are about to suffer. It is going to get worse. More persecution is coming. But do not fear.

“The devil is about to throw some of you into prison.” Who was this devil? Someone who could throw these people into prison—not a spirit of evil, not a monster, not a being that had been cast out of heaven, but an agent of the opposition, someone with authority to execute Roman law and persecute the Christians.

Jesus says, You are going to be tested. It is going to be very difficult. Some of you will be sitting in prison. “And you will have tribulation ten days.” Here is another symbol. What is Jesus saying? Perhaps Jesus is saying that the tribulation will not last; it has a time limit. “Ten days” is a limited duration of time. You will be able to take it, He says, because it will have an end. It is under control; it will not go too far.

So Jesus counsels, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you a crown of life” (2:10).

Can you imagine how the people would feel who received this letter, these people who were living in destitute poverty, who hardly knew where the next meal was coming from, or when an agent of Caesar might be standing outside ready to capture them? Jesus is encouraging. “Hold on, I will be with you through it, it won’t last forever.” The evil will only dominate so long. It is under control. Be faithful, “and I will give you a crown of life.”

In other words, it is going to be worth it—more than worth it. You are going to get the crown of endless life for your faithfulness during a few short days. Death is not the end. Even if you have to face death, hold on because beyond it is eternal life.

## JESUS’ ASSESSMENT

**Critique.** “I know your works, tribulation and poverty but you are rich” (Rev. 2:9).

Jesus was looking at the inside.

**Commend.** “You are rich...and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9).

The believers at Smyrna were standing strong against Jews who had rejected Jesus yet claimed to still be Jews.

**Condemn.** Nothing in Jesus’ letter condemns the Church at Smyrna.

**Counsel/Warning.** “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days” (Rev. 2:10).

Jesus is saying, Don’t be afraid. You will be tried. It will be hard, but it will not last.

**Crown.** “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).



Gold foil crown  
from Smyrna

## HEARING EARS

- ◆ What am I doing today to increase my stash of “true riches”?
- ◆ Is my faith worth more to me than my comforts, my bank account, my job, my family—my life?
- ◆ Would I say, “I’m choosing Christ first, I am going to be loyal”—if I knew that by that decision I was risking my life?
- ◆ Do I want the world to say about me, “He/she is rich!” or do I want to hear those words from God?
- ◆ If I had to choose between Christ and my life, or between Christ and my friends or my family, what would I do?
- ◆ How much am I willing to pay for the “crown of life”?

**W**HAT IS YOUR GOAL IN LIFE—

MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN THE BANK, OR A  
LIFE RICH IN FAITH, OBEDIENCE, PATIENCE,  
INNER PEACE, JOY, GENTLENESS, KINDNESS,  
LOVE, MERCY, GRATITUDE, AND ALL THE  
RICH VIRTUES OF CHRIST?



Smyrna agora: first level arches

PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



Roman athlete  
with wreath

Fragment of gold crown, 4th century BC

Here is the real victory, the real triumph, and the real riches. Here is hope that nobody on Golden Avenue could imagine. Jesus says, You have the most precious thing in the whole world—because you have hope, hope of life eternal in my coming Kingdom.

### **"BE FAITHFUL"**

What did Jesus mean by saying to the people in Smyrna, *"Be faithful"*? Perhaps He was saying to them that even though they didn't have money, they didn't have riches, they didn't have possessions, they still could be faithful. They could be faithful in suffering just like someone else could be faithful in the proper handling of their goods. Even though they didn't have economic benefits, they were stewards of their lives, and their life belonged to God.

God is looking at character. Whether we have Abraham's wealth or Smyrna's poverty, it all belongs to God. This is the lesson Jesus was teaching the rich young ruler who came to Him (Matthew 19). The young ruler had a great plenty. He came to Jesus to see what he might do to get eternal life—a very high aspiration. His question was, How do I get it? Jesus told him the bottom line was simple: *"If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me"* (Matt. 19:21). Was Jesus actually asking the ruler to give up everything he had so he would be a beggar on the street? No, He was telling him that his riches were his idol, and he had to part with that idol. He had the wrong first goal.

Unlike the rich young ruler, the people in Smyrna had the pain of lacking even the necessities of life. But on the other side, Jesus could say to them, *"You are rich"*—because they had the true riches. They had the treasures that moth and rust cannot destroy, and thieves cannot steal (Matt. 6:19–21); treasures that could not be taken from them. They had faith. They had the hope of future life, the crown of glory that lay ahead if they just held true. They were poor in this world but rich in faith, and potentially they were heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to those that love Him (James 2:5).

If the people in the Church in Smyrna had been willing to give up their commitment to Christ, if they had been willing to say even once a year that *"Caesar is lord,"* they could have lived comfortably, probably even prospered in this world. They could have had jobs and good positions, and plenty of money, and education for their children. They were not destitute because they lacked initiative or because they wanted to be backward. They were destitute because they were putting their faith first and holding to it—no matter what. Yes, they had to live in rags, with very, very little. They had to work hard for everything they had. But Jesus said to them, *"You are rich!"*—if they would just hold faithful to the end!

### **CHOOSING LOYALTIES**

We all have choices to make. We choose our loyalties. It is a serious choice because when we choose faithfulness to Christ we are choosing unfaithfulness to the world, and that choice may mean rejection and disfavor from former associates. When we say, *"I am not going to compromise my loyalty to Christ's principles for any personal favor or gain,"* that loyalty will be tested. Sometimes we may lose; but the loss will be momentary; the gain will be eternal. Remember Jesus' words, *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10).

In other words, be faithful whatever the cost, because it will pay in the end. It will pay eternally. ♦





## THE "SMART" RED HEN

Paul stared. He was sure there was something moving inside the overturned box. It was the box on which Mark, his older brother, would stand when he reached for eggs in the highest row of nests. One board on the side of the box was broken off, and Paul could see that something had gotten inside that darkened box.

He watched for quite a while, not quite daring to get close and look right inside. Then suddenly a hen poked her head out, and looked at Paul as if to ask him what he was doing there in the poultry house.

The way she cluck-clucked to herself, Paul knew she wanted to set on eggs, but at Happy Acres Farm, hens were not allowed to hatch eggs because all the chicks were bought at the hatchery.

Paul watched the red hen go cluck-clucking as she went over to the water fountain for a drink. Paul decided that he would peep inside the box to see if she might have a nest hidden there.

But just as Paul got down on his knees to look inside the box, the hen came flying straight at him, her wings fluffed out. Cluck-clucking angrily, she pecked him with her sharp bill.

"Ouch!" cried Paul, and he ran out of the poultry house and straight to Mom. Soon he was back with Mom to show her the broody hen.

By this time, the cluck-clucking hen was gone.

"She's very likely out in the yard, getting something to eat," said Mom. "We'll see if she has a nest under that box."

So Mom tipped the box up and there was a nest of eggs—eleven of them, closely-packed together. Mom felt of them and said, "Feel the eggs, Paul."

"Oh, they're warm—warm like toast!"

"Yes. The hen must have been setting on them for some time. So we won't be able to use the eggs for cooking or to sell. Guess we might as well let her hatch the eggs." Mom turned to Paul, "I think we'll let this hen and her chicks be Paul's chickens!"

Paul's eyes sparkled. "Oh, that will be fun!"

Mom turned the box back over the nest as the red hen returned to the poultry house. Spying Mom and Paul, the hen came running, her wings fluffed out. She cluck-clucked angrily as Mom and Paul walked away from her nest.

"She's not a nice hen, though," decided Paul. "She could have better manners. She thinks she's smart—just like those big roosters."

Mom chuckled. "She is afraid we may be harming her

eggs—she just wants to frighten us away from them."

Every day after that, Paul would run many times to the hen house to see his broody hen. Dad pulled another board off the box so Paul could see more easily inside without troubling the cluck-clucking hen.

One day as the hen came back to her nest after she had been out feeding, Paul was surprised to see her carefully turning over every egg with her bill. When she had finally settled herself down over the eggs, Paul ran to Mom to report what he had seen.

"Oh, yes," said Mom, "the hen must turn the eggs every day. Otherwise, the little baby chick that is growing inside the shell may stick to the side of the shell, and it wouldn't grow to be strong and healthy."

"That hen of mine must be extra bright," concluded Paul.

"I am quite sure it's just like every other hen, Paul, because all setting hens will do that to their eggs."

A few mornings later, Paul saw his hen out in the dewy grass. He watched her as she returned, with wet feet, to her nest. Alarmed, he ran to the house, "Mommie," he cried.

"My hen has wet feet—and she's going right to her nest with those wet feet. She'll get the warm eggs wet!"

"Oh, that's all right, Paul. She's just doing what's best for her eggs. When eggs are hatching they need to get a little wet. In fact, at the hatcheries the hatch-



### MEMORY VERSE:

*O Lord, how manifold are Your works!  
In wisdom You have made them all.  
The earth is full of Your possessions.*

—Psalm 104:24

ery people not only turn the eggs every day like the setting hens do, but they sprinkle the eggs with a little water, too."

"Did the hatchery people learn from the hens?"

"Yes, I'm sure that's where they learned."

"How did the hens learn?"

"Well, I'm afraid the hens never learned at all. I'm sure your red hen doesn't know why she turns the eggs, and she doesn't go out and get her feet wet on purpose. She just does those things by instinct."

"What's instinct, Mom?"

"Birds and animals and fish can't think or figure things out for themselves the way people can. When God first created us, He made us so that we can think, and we can choose what we want to do. But birds and animals and fish can't think for themselves like people. God gave them instincts

instead. Your hen has the instinct to hatch eggs—she does things that are right for her eggs even though she doesn't know why she does them.

"Someday the baby chicks will break through the egg shells and come out—and they'll do many things that are best for them without knowing why. Little ducklings will go right into the water, but little chicks won't. You'll see your little chicks eating tiny pieces of grit and gravel, and they'll swallow that into their gizzards—they won't know why they eat grit, but they must have grit to grind up their food because they don't have any teeth."

"They do *all that* by—by instinct, Mom?"

"That's right. By the instinct God gave them to know what to do without being taught."

"I guess nobody—even if he lived to be a million years old—could ever know as much as God," decided Paul. ♦

#### DISCUSSION:

In your Bible, find verses to show how right Paul was when he said that nobody can ever know as much as God. (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; 1 Sam. 2:3; Isa. 40:28; Matt. 6:8; Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 3:20)

The above story was reprinted from *Happy Acres* by Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud. Published by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.



## COME, LET US WORSHIP

**M**r. Mockingbird is one of the most dedicated members of the First Birderian Church of Wington. For one thing, he is the most gifted singer in the choir. Quite remarkable is

the fact that he can carry one part as well as another. He can jump from low bass to high soprano and back again with no effort at all. He is just as willing as able, too, and always on hand. So, if some other member of the choir is absent because of a cold in the bill, or ruffled feathers, or late sleeping, Mr. Mockingbird without a complaint hops right in and does his best. I do not know how the First Birderian Church would get along without him. And he sings with his whole heart to his Creator, of course.

He is a good worker in other ways, too. Would you believe it? He makes it his habit to spend one night each week flying from tree to tree helping as he can. And he even goes out of his way to encourage bird drop-outs to come back to church and worship so they can grow spiritually.

Last week he chirped first at Mr. Crow's door. Mr. Crow was not in a very good humor because—well, just because Mr. Crow never is. He didn't invite his visitor to hop in and roost a while. But Mr. Mockingbird appeared not to notice the cold reception, and pleasantly invited Mr. Crow to come to church anyway. Then Mr. Crow said, trying hard to look very important, "Thank you, Mr. Mockingbird, but I really cannot afford right now to be away from my work on Sundays. I have gone into the funeral business, you see, and one never knows when the phone may ring. Besides," he added, trying to look quite pious this time, "I have always felt that one could pray just as well at home or, for that matter, out in the country on the end of a dead limb."

Mr. Mockingbird was thinking, but of course he didn't say it, "Well, if he prayed as much as he wants me to think he does, he would not have such a glum look on his face."

Then Mr. Crow asked one of those sharp questions such as birds sometimes ask when their conscience is beginning to hurt them, "Mr. Mockingbird, you don't think one has to go

to church to worship or pray, do you?"

He supposed that would silence Mr. Mockingbird for good, but Mr. Mockingbird had an answer ready. "For myself," he said, "I'm going to the Church where I learn how to enter the Kingdom of God."

With that he moved on down the street to the home of Mr. Duck, and again gave his friendly invitation. And what do you suppose Mr. Duck said? "Quack, quack, quack!" which in our language means, "Hypocrites in the church!"

But the real reason Mr. Duck had stopped coming to church lately was that he preferred going swimming on Sunday. And do you know, as he waddled down to the edge and pushed off into the lake, I believe he knew, deep in his heart, that he was the biggest quack of all!

But Mr. and Mrs. Sparrow did appreciate Mr. Mockingbird's visit. They said that they had just moved but they realized they were neglecting the most important part of their lives and they would surely be in church next Sunday and would bring their children, too.

And they did come! When Mr. Mockingbird looked out from the choir next Sunday, there they were, the whole Sparrow family! Can you understand why Mr. Mockingbird's solo that morning was the best he had ever sung? Perhaps the words of his song had something to do with it. There was a line, "*The sparrow has found a house where she may lay her young, even your altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God*" (Ps. 84:3). But I think still more, he was inspired to sing unusually well because the Sparrows were present.

After the service Mr. Sparrow shook hands with Mr. Mockingbird and thanked him for inviting them. Mr. Sparrow said, "I was glad when you said unto me, '*Let us go into the house of the Lord.*'" ♦

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 122:1).*

The above stories are reprinted with permission from *Bird Life in Wington* by J. Calvin Reid. Published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI.



## SELFISHNESS

1. Galatians 6:2: "\_\_\_\_\_, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

- a. Love one another
- b. Bear one another's burdens
- c. Shepherd the lost
- d. Resist unto death

2. What is our obligation if we are to follow Christ's example according to 1 John 3:16?

- a. Give to anyone who asks
- b. Keep a close watch on our brother
- c. Do not give to impress others
- d. Be willing to sacrifice for our brethren in Christ

3. In Matthew 19, a wealthy young man asked Jesus how he could get eternal life. He said he kept all the commandments, but Jesus told him he was still lacking. What did Jesus say he needed yet to do to "be complete"?

- a. Sell all his possessions
- b. Give to the poor
- c. Store up treasure in heaven
- d. Come follow Him
- e. All of the above
- f. Only a and b

4. According to 1 Corinthians 10:24, each of us should be looking out for

- a. ourselves
- b. each other
- c. our country
- d. our family

5. In Philippians 2:3, we are told to

- a. Give more honor to others than to God
- b. Give more honor to God than to others
- c. Look out for ourselves first
- d. Give honor to others ahead of ourselves

6. In Romans 15:1-2, Paul tells us to

- a. Let others have their way
- b. Consider the needs and feelings of a weaker brother above pleasing oneself
- c. Give temporal help to a weaker brother

7. In Micah 3:11, judgment is pronounced on Israel because:

- a. Her leaders did their duty for a bribe
- b. Her priests instructed for a price
- c. Her prophets divined for money
- d. All of the above; everyone had their price; mammon was god

8. In James 2:5, we are advised to:

- a. Give prior consideration to the rich
- b. Give prior consideration to the poor
- c. Treat all equally
- d. Remember that God chooses the poor of this world—rich in faith to be heirs of the kingdom

9. According to Eph. 4:31-32, each of the following should be put away except:

- a. Anger
- b. Forgiveness
- c. Bitterness
- d. Wrath

10. In Haggai 1, the people were more concerned with their personal gain than with completing the rebuilding of God's temple. How were they faring?

- a. "You have sown much, but harvest little."
- b. "You eat, but there is not enough to satisfy."
- c. "You put on clothing, but no one is warm enough."
- d. "Those who earn wages put them into a purse with holes."
- e. All of the above

## Know Your Bible



## MEET THE APOSTLE PAUL

1. Paul's Jewish name was \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Paul was from the tribe of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Paul was born in the city of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Paul was a \_\_\_\_\_ citizen.
5. Paul was educated in \_\_\_\_\_ under the well known teacher \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Paul was present when \_\_\_\_\_ was stoned to death.
7. Paul's first role in early Christianity was that of \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Paul requested permission from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem to go to \_\_\_\_\_ and arrest any followers of the Way he found there.
9. On the road at noon \_\_\_\_\_ appeared to Paul.
10. As a result of this meeting Paul was \_\_\_\_\_ for a time.
11. How long did Paul spend at Judas' house without eating or drinking? \_\_\_\_\_
12. The Lord sent \_\_\_\_\_ to restore sight to Paul.
13. Once converted, Paul went immediately to the \_\_\_\_\_ to preach that Christ was the Son of God.
14. Paul escaped from Damascus over the \_\_\_\_\_ in a \_\_\_\_\_.
15. After his escape, Paul spent some time in \_\_\_\_\_.
16. Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion was to visit the Apostle \_\_\_\_\_.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ was Paul's companion on his first missionary trip.

answers on page 25

## **Super Leaper:** *The Jackrabbit*

by PATRICIA A. FLEMING

**O**ne evening as my husband and I were walking in the dry grasslands of West Texas, a slight movement caught my attention. On the side of the trail sat a creature with the biggest ears I had ever seen on so small an animal! Standing on its hind feet, its black-tipped ears held straight up like a huge antennae, its whole body was alert and ready to spring at the first sight or sound of danger. It was a black-tailed jackrabbit.

Did “Big Ears” just happen? No! The jackrabbit is another example of our Great Creator’s ability to design creatures for survival.

### **Defenses**

There are many kinds of jackrabbits, and each is equipped with very special defenses. When crouched under a small bush or in a clump of dry grass, the black-tailed jackrabbit is almost undetectable as its coat of sandy brown mixed with darker browns and black blends into the shrubbery. During the winter the white-tailed jackrabbit changes its color to a lighter hue of brown, to blend with the snow covered ground. The snowshoe rabbit, also called the varying hare, faces deep snow superbly equipped. Only his black eyes and black-tipped ears spoil his camouflage. Did such precise color changes just happen, as evolutionists suggest? Or did the jackrabbit determine which colors would be advantageous? No! Not a chance! Its coat camouflage is the handiwork of its Great Designer!

The jackrabbit will sit—crouched and motionless—its heart rate slowed and breathing minimal, in hopes that an approaching predator will pass it by. However, if it needs to flee, its heart accelerates to pump oxygen through its body at three times the normal rate, and the jack hops straight up in the air and speeds away. As it races across the landscape in leaps as long as 20 feet, it flashes its white underside, perhaps to alert other jackrabbits of the danger. Zig zagging from side to side to outmaneuver its foe, the antelope jackrabbit can reach speeds of more than 40 mph for short distances.

Even when it is not being pursued, the jackrabbit will hop or leap as it moves around. With long and powerful hind legs and feet especially designed for jumping, at a moderate rate it distances 5 to 10

feet a hop; and every third or fourth leap will be higher than the others so the jackrabbit can properly look for danger. (This small creature has been known to jump an incredible 15 feet high!—the record for the Olympic high jump is below 8 feet.)

### **Habitat & Habits**

Where do jackrabbits live? Jackrabbits are found in many parts of the world, particularly in arid climates. The black-tailed jackrabbit lives mostly in the western part of the United States and in northern Mexico, where they like the level grassy plains. Due to the hot climate of the desert and prairies, they are most active in very early morning and late evening. They may feed and move about most of the night when the moon is bright. Although you might think that an open plain would be dangerous, they take advantage of the high visibility to spot predators before predators spot them, and where they have the room to outrun them.

### **Warning System**

Being near the bottom of the food chain, jackrabbits are lunch for many animals, so must be especially alert. Their huge ears, as well as being regulators of their body heat, catch and carry the slightest sounds, alerting them to the smallest sign of danger. They can swivel independent of each other, scanning for sounds from many directions. Their large feet are also very sensitive to any vibration of the ground under them. Not only can they detect approaching predators, they can also detect the vibration caused by another hare thumping one of their long back legs on the ground to warn others of a threat. Their large, protruding eyes are set high on the sides of their head, enabling them to have an almost complete circle of vision. Only an all-knowing Creator could design His creatures with these unique abilities for survival.

### **Hares, Not Rabbits**

Actually, jackrabbits are not rabbits at all; they are hares. Hares differ from rabbits in that hares have long black-tipped ears, very long hind legs, and large, prominent eyes. One of its main distinguishing features is that the hare’s young (leverets) are born fully furred and open-eyed. Within moments of





birth some baby jacks are able to hop and run. Have all these special features of the hare come by chance or did the hare design them for themselves? Impossible! Almighty God has built into His creatures these unique features to survive.

Unlike actual rabbits, jackrabbits usually live above ground, and only on rare occasions do the young seek shelter in an empty burrow. A jackrabbit's home is typically a shallow depression called a "form" under a bush or in tall grass. A mother jackrabbit will line her forms with fur pulled from her breast. For safety, she will often separate her litter of 2 or 3 babies into different forms, only coming to nurse her babies during the night. Who but its Designer could have given the hare that instinct for caution, so that if one of the forms is discovered by a predator all her young will not be lost?

The jackrabbit's young are very precocious. They are able to run from danger when only a few days old, and within a month can fend for themselves. Depending on weather and food supply, a mother jackrabbit may have one to four litters of young each year.

### Food

Jackrabbits are vegetarian, and enjoy clover, grass, and tender growth shoots, among other plants. During the winter or a drought, the bark of trees or even cactus pads will make a meal. Jackrabbits get most of their water out of the plants they eat and very seldom have to drink. Although they are not picky eaters, they are known to prefer nice, tender alfalfa, lettuce or cabbage when available. This culinary preference has made them the enemy of farmers who did not intend their crops for jackrabbits and will employ any means possible to destroy them.

### Super Vigilant

With threats from heat, predators and people, the jackrabbit must be super vigilant to survive. Likewise, the Christian must be super vigilant to survive spiritually in a largely secular environment. All around are enemies—enemies of doubt, complacency and disbelief; enemies of secular thinking and an attitude of "if it feels good, it is good." All around are temptations and dangers that lead away from God and life. We stay alive spiritually by keeping our ears sensitive to warnings and encouraging words from caring friends and God's Word. We avoid going to "dangerous" places where God's enemies are. And we flee spiritual dangers, flashing warnings to our fellow believers as we escape—for to stay around is certain death.

Take these spiritual lessons from the jackrabbit, and stay alert! It is your life! ♦



The pads of the jackrabbit's feet are covered in fur, which helps cushion their feet on hard ground and provides extra traction for jumping as well as providing protection against the heat of the desert sand.

(above) **Black-tailed Jackrabbit**  
**Habitat: Mostly grassy slopes and deserts**  
**Body length: 19"–25"**

The jackrabbit's long ears play an important role in regulating body temperature. In hot weather, the hare's blood vessels dilate and increased blood flow fills the tiny capillaries of their ears. Standing upright, the blood flows through the ears, radiates off heat and cooler blood circulates back into the body, thus cooling the jack. In cold weather, the ears lie back close to the body, helping to maintain body warmth. In the hottest part of the day they avoid direct sun and rest in the shade of shrubs or grasses.

(right) The antelope jack's extraordinary ears measure up to 9" from skull to tip. Marvelous organs, delicately veined, they pick up the slightest vibration.



(right) **Antelope Jackrabbit**  
**Habitat: Deserts S. Arizona and N. W. Mexico**  
**Body length: 20"–24"**



(right) **White-tailed Jackrabbit**  
**Habitat: Prairie S. Canada to New Mexico**  
**Body length: 22"–26"**

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*Keep your priorities in  
"Kingdom-first" order*

## WHAT IS 1<sup>st</sup> FOR YOU?

Look at the three times Jesus used the word "first" in the Sermon on the Mount.

*"If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." –Matt. 5:23–24*

*"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." –Matthew 6:33*

*"Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." –Matthew 7:5*

Jesus said, "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." He realized the value of worship and sacrifice but said reconciliation to our associates must come before worship. If we are not at peace with others in our own mind, our worship cannot be meaningful.

Jesus used the word "first" again in Matt. 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Christ was not forbidding us to think about the necessities of life. But He explained that our primary interest must be God's Kingdom and righteousness. In other words, keep your priorities in "Kingdom first" order.

Jesus made another interesting use of the word "first" in Matt. 7:5. "First take the saw log out of your own eye." He realized, as human beings, we tend to see others' faults bigger than our own.

When something is wrong, Jesus says, don't look at your brother. First look at yourself. He knew our need to deal with our own shortcomings first. That is the place we have the most control and the greatest responsibility. ♦

## Letters

### My Personal Ebenezer

For my personal study this morning, I had from our Church Message magazine November/December 2005 edition, the article entitled "Here I Raise My Ebenezer." I was so spiritually touched and moved with a deep feeling of great joy and happiness as I studied the article, realizing how great and helpful the Lord has been to us. This article reflects my own personal life experience, when I look around me and see how helpful God has been to us in our life in exile, blessing us, supplying our daily needs, giving us our heart's desire, even helping us to escape the calamities of the brutal civil war in our country Liberia, when thousands have been slain in cold blood by our side and were left unburied.

Then I ask myself, "Do I have some moments of victory that I want to remember with special sense of gratitude to God?"

I know truly that there is an Ebenezer in my life, and in the life of my family. God has been our Ebenezer, our "STONE OF HELP," just as He was to the Israelites during their fight against the Philistine giants.

My family and I want to raise our Ebenezer, our Stone of Thanksgiving, to the God who has been our source of help. What special cause of thanksgiving do we have in our lives today? What is there that we want to mark in profound gratitude and appreciation for God's goodness and mercies to us? I have great reason to thank the God who has blessed me with life. I can say right now, "Here I Raise My Ebenezer." The Lord has been my help, and in Him do I trust.

– S. Newray, Africa

### Spiritual Blessings Are Worth More

Consumers get quite a bit of help from private and public agencies that report to the public on the quality of merchandise, the comparative value of products offered. This information helps consumers get the most for their money.

Since God is ultimately the giver of all gifts, we are not so much consumers of humanity's goods as we are of God's, for He richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. In Deuteronomy, Moses writes about the blessings of the field, the fruits of the ground and the increase of cattle, the full basket and the well supplied kneading trough, saying that all are God's gifts.

In the city of Lystra, when Paul healed a crippled man and was about to be revered as a god, the Apostle turned the thought of the people to "the living God who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in the seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:15, 17). In other words, Paul says, Look to the Source!

We are consumers also of spiritual blessings, of which Paul speaks eloquently in the opening verses of his letter to the Ephesians: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

These spiritual blessings are worth more than anything else—because they will give us eternal life if we follow the commands God has put in the Bible for our learning.

–B. Crum, Iowa





## RUTH L. FLEMING

On June 6, 2006, we met to pay our last respects to a friend and sister, Ruth Lane Fleming. The eldest of three daughters, she was born in Rochester, New York to Percy Lane and Harriett Cinnamon in 1924.

Compared with other members of her family, she was blessed with a long life—her mother died of a heart attack at age 45, and her other sister died in her early 20's. Sister Ruth was also blessed with exceptionally good health until about 10 years ago, when in a relatively short time she developed multiple, serious problems—so many, in fact, that her primary care physician told her she had never seen a person living with so many major illnesses. Yet she was consistently optimistic, loving life, thanking God for every day, and determined to keep going as best she could. How did she do it? "I keep thinking about God," she always said. "God helps me."

Sister Ruth's acquaintance with the Church came through her husband, Brother Reginald Fleming, to whom she was married at age 21, and with whom she shared nearly 50 years of happy, loving companionship, until his death in 1994.

A deeply caring person and a devoted wife, she was also a generous contributor to the Church through her excellent typing skills. Taking early retirement from her secretarial job at DuPont, she volunteered her time at home, and using a Dictaphone and a computer she transcribed literally thousands of tapes for the Church publishing staff. For some 25 years she was one of those steady, "behind-the-scenes" support persons so vital to any good work. Even when her fingers became seriously bent by arthritis, she was determined to keep on typing as much as she could. She said the typing gave her a lift and kept good, spiritual thoughts in her mind.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 21

### SELFISHNESS

1. (b) Bear one another's burdens
2. (d) Be willing to sacrifice for our brethren in Christ
3. (e) All of the above (Matt 19:21)
4. (b) Each other
5. (d) Give honor to others ahead of ourselves
6. (b) Consider the needs and feelings of a weaker brother above pleasing oneself
7. (d) All of the above; everyone had their price; mammon was god
8. (d) Remember that God chooses the poor of this world—rich in faith to be heirs of the kingdom
9. (b) Forgiveness
10. (f) All of the above

"My mind is like a sieve," she would say, "but I just keep pouring it in."

She is survived by one sister, Mildred DeHond, who lives in Florida, and a number of nieces and nephews.

*"God would not be so unjust as to forget all you have done, the love that you have for his name or the services you have done."*

—Heb. 6:10 NJB

## LOUISE RATHBUN

On June 15, 2006, Sister Louise Rathbun died suddenly after a long-time association with the Megiddo Church. Born in 1918 in Kansas to Gideon Albert Rathbun and Minnie Cunningham, she was the youngest of four children, all of whom are now deceased.

The family's first acquaintance with the Megiddo Church came when her mother responded to a small advertisement for the Elijah book about 1920. They were living at that time in Sedan, Kansas. The family made their first visit to Rochester for the Abib (Christmas) celebration in 1927, and some years later relocated to the environs of Rochester.

Sister Louise was exceptionally kind, generous, and good-hearted. She spent part of her life in Kansas and part working on the family's farm near Rochester.


After the farm was sold in 1968, she worked as a live-in caregiver for a number of elderly people, and visited the Church as she had opportunity. In 2002, following the death of one of her last patients, she decided to spend her remaining days with our Rochester Congregation, and relocated to our Church Home.

She is survived by nieces and nephews, and many friends who will long remember her kindness.

*No one is so empty as  
when he is filled with thoughts  
of himself.*

### MEET THE APOSTLE PAUL

- |                                    |                              |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Saul (Acts 13:9)                | 9. Jesus (Acts 9:3–6)        |
| 2. Benjamin (Rom. 11:1)            | 10. Blinded (Acts 9:8)       |
| 3. Tarsus (Acts 22:3)              | 11. Three days (Acts 9:9–11) |
| 4. Rome (Acts 22:25)               | 12. Ananias (Acts 9:10–18)   |
| 5. Jerusalem, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) | 13. Synagogue (Acts 9:20)    |
| 6. Stephen (Acts 7:58–59)          | 14. Wall, Basket (Acts 9:25) |
| 7. Persecutor (Acts 22:1–4)        | 15. Arabia (Gal. 1:17)       |
| 8. Damascus (Acts 9:1–2)           | 16. Peter (Gal. 1:18)        |
|                                    | 17. Barnabas (Acts 13:2–4)   |



*"Behold, I make all things new.... Write, for these words are true and faithful."*

—Revelation 21:5

## The Kingdom's Not Like Our Town

I saw an article called "Heaven's Not Much Like Our Town." It was written by Allan Webster. I'd like to quote some of it. I'll substitute "Kingdom of God" for Heaven.

"Our Town has a cemetery, but there will be no cemeteries in the Kingdom, for no one ever dies there! John wrote *'there shall be no more death'* (Rev. 21:4).

"Our Town has a hospital but there will be no hospitals in the Kingdom of God. Sickness is one of the *'former things which have passed away'* (Rev. 21:4).

"Our Town has a jail, but there will be no jails in the Kingdom. Every day we hear about so much crime and violence that we often fear for our safety. But in the kingdom there will be no crime. There will be no need for door and window locks and burglar alarms. *Nothing evil will be allowed to enter—no one who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.* (Rev. 21:27 NLT). There will be no criminals there.

"Our Town has a nursing home, but there will be no nursing homes in the Kingdom. We see the aging process in our loved ones and ourselves. Our skin wrinkles, our vision dims, our strength fails, our hearing goes, our energy wanes. But in that land everyone will have immortal, incorruptible bodies (1 Cor. 15:53–54; Phil. 3:20–21).

"Our Town has a drug store, but there won't be any drug store in the Kingdom. John wrote there *'shall be no more pain'* (Rev. 21:4).

"Our Town has adult video stores, nightclubs and places to gamble, but such will never be found in God's Kingdom on earth. There no one will *'hurt or destroy'* (Isa. 11:9)."

Today there are many places of temptation in our communities. The forces of evil are busy (1 Peter 5:8), and their influence can be seen all around. The only way to be safe is to put on the whole armor of God and keep it on (Eph. 6:13–17).

The Kingdom is coming, and there will be not even a trace of evil left. We can spend eternity there if we now follow in the footsteps of Jesus and do only the things which please the Father.

—S. Kincannon, Tennessee







### CONTROLS

**Y**ou cannot control the length of your life,  
*but you can control its width and depth.*

You cannot control the contour of your countenance,  
*but you can control its expression.*

You cannot control the other fellow's opportunities,  
*but you can grasp your own.*

You cannot control the weather,  
*but you can control the moral atmosphere  
 that surrounds you.*

You cannot control the distance that your head shall  
 be above the ground,  
*but you can control the height of the contents  
 of your head.*

You cannot control the other fellow's faults,  
*but you can see to it that you yourself do  
 not develop or harbor provoking propensities.*

Why worry about things you cannot control?  
*Instead, get busy controlling the things that depend on you.*

**W**e choose freedom when we choose discipline.

**A**nger is a feeling that makes  
*your mouth work faster than your mind.*

**A**river is powerful because many drops of water  
 are bound together toward a common destination.

**F**reedom not to listen is just as precious  
*as freedom of speech.*

**T**he Bible will never be a dry book to those for whom  
 it is a source of *"living water."*

**A** U-turn is good, if you are turning toward God.

**C**hrist will never lead anyone astray.

*Life is the workshop where  
 God's jewels are polished for His palace.*

**P**eople who get something for nothing often complain  
 about the quality.

**A** "me"-centered person is apt to write his benefits  
*in dust and his injuries in marble.*

**T**he one thing Christianity in our lives cannot be  
 is *moderately* important.

### YOU HAVEN'T TRIED YET!

**I** was busy in my workshop when four-year-old Mike came  
 and stood at my elbow. "Daddy, will you please fix my  
 bike?" he asked.

Guiltily, I looked down at his wrecked training bike,  
 which I had backed over earlier that day. I couldn't possibly  
 fix it; it was too badly damaged. Irritated, I said, "Mike, I told  
 you before that I can't fix your bike, I'm sorry."

A troubled expression came over  
 Mike's face. "But Daddy, you haven't  
 tried yet!"

How could a father resist such an  
 appeal? I set to work and, to my sur-  
 prise, I discovered that I could fix  
 the bike. Together Mike and I took  
 the bike to see how it would ride.

As I watched my son ride away, I  
 pondered what he had just declared.  
 "Daddy, I told Frankie you could fix it  
 'cause you can fix anything."

How often do we excuse ourselves  
 from attempting a difficult assign-  
 ment or taking a new step in faith  
 by saying, "I can't," when we  
 haven't tried.





## Procrastination

*P*ostpone not till tomorrow  
The good deeds still undone;  
For how can you be certain  
You'll see another sun?  
Remember that the Savior  
Tonight may claim His own,  
And none will be rewarded  
With life but those full grown.

*S*o end procrastination,  
Resolve to do today  
The things of you demanded—  
Your obligations pay.  
'Tis better to be ready,  
And be compelled to wait,  
Than to be told by Jesus,  
“Depart! you are too late.”

—Liot L. Snyder