

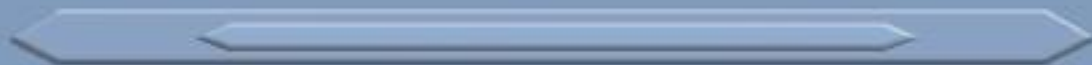
Megiddo Message

Winter 2012



*My voice You shall hear
in the morning O Lord;
in the morning I will direct
my prayer to You,
and I will look up.*

—Psalm 5:3





WHAT NEXT?

Everyone wants to know what will happen next. The newspaper prints yesterday's news, and sells a copy for a \$1 or so. A paper that could print tomorrow's news would be a bargain at \$50, and the presses would not be able to run fast enough to satisfy the demand.

But nobody has tomorrow's news.

One of these days something dramatically newsworthy will happen. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is coming to set up a worldwide Kingdom, and one of these days it *will* happen. Just as surely as He went away, He will return (Acts 1:10–11), and everyone will have to fear and worship God (Rev. 14:7). As desperately as our world today needs help, the heavenly Helper will not be welcomed. In fact, the majority will resist. They will be ready to fight (Rev. 17:14).

But the Divine plan will not be thwarted. The result will be the battle of Armageddon, its outcome predetermined. Jesus Christ will take the rulership of a worldwide domain, and all nations will surrender to Him. Then will follow a thousand years of rehabilitation, re-education, restoration, reconstruction, peace, progress and prosperity. All this is forecast in the Word of God—it is enough to overwhelm the human mind!

Incredible as it all may seem, it is the pre-planned destiny of our world. Our Creator, the God of heaven has decreed it. The ground on which we now stand will come under the jurisdiction of the new Kingdom. So will the land that is called Canada, or Germany, or Japan, or China, or Egypt. The Bible tells us that *"all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God"* (Isa. 52:10). His dominion will extend *"from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth"* (Ps. 72:8). All people everywhere shall bow before the new King, *"all dominions shall serve and obey him"* (Dan. 7:27).

Maybe you are one who scoffs. Maybe you are one who thinks that things will always continue just as they always have in an uninterrupted cycle of birth-life-death. Maybe you look upon the Bible as just another book, and its prophecies as mere fancies of human imagination. Or perhaps you are one who believes the Kingdom is here now, that the Church is the Kingdom, or that the Kingdom is in your heart.

You do not have to change your mind—not yet. But someday soon you will, for whether you believe or not, *"the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness"* (Ps. 24:1), and what God has foretold will be.

What next?

The next event will be the arrival of the announcer, Elijah the prophet. Who is he? What do we know about this Prophet, his background, his character, his achievements? In this issue we look into the Bible for the answer.

In the meantime, let us focus on preparing ourselves for that great "next" event. The great God who holds the destiny of our planet in His hands isn't waiting for us to endorse His plans. And when the time is right, He will act. ♦

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 God of heaven is not waiting for our approval of His plan. When the time is right, He will intervene. Suddenly!

Megiddo Message

The *Megiddo Message* (USPS 338-120) (ISSN 0194-7826) is published quarterly by the Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619. Telephone: 585-436-1614. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, New York.

Publication Staff:

Ruth E. Sisson, Editor; Gerald R. Payne, Executive Editor. Art and design by Margaret A. Tremblay; Subscriptions Manager, Donna R. Mathias.

Subscription Rate and Renewals:

One year (four issues) \$12.00. Send to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697. Or e-mail megiddo@megiddo.com. Or call 585-436-1614.

Note: For the protection of our subscribers, we do not sell, rent, lease, publish or distribute our mailing list.

Address Changes?

Be sure to notify promptly of any change in your address. Please include your old mailing label and your new address. Mail or e-mail to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697. Postmaster: Send all changes of address to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, NY 14619.

URL: www.megiddochurch.com

E-mail address: megiddo@megiddo.com

Manuscript Policy: Unsolicited manuscripts for publication are not accepted.

The *Megiddo Message* is the official organ of the Megiddo Church, Inc., founded in 1880 by L. T. Nichols. Publication has begun in 1914. Maud Hembree, Editor-in-Chief (1914-1935); Ella M. Skeels, Executive Editor (1935-1945); Percy J. Thatcher, Editor (1945-1958); Kenneth E. Flowerday, Editor (1958-1985); Newton H. Payne, Editor (1985-1997).

The *Megiddo Message* is available in microfilm from Bell & Howell Information and Learning, Serials Acquisitions, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

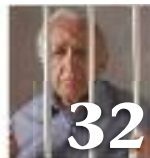
Published Frequency: The *Megiddo Message* published with the seasons—Spring (March), Summer (June), Fall (September), and Winter (December).

Bible Quotations: Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version or the New King James Version. Other versions are identified as used.

The following lexicons are abbreviated as:

BDAG—Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; **DBL**—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; **EDNT**—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; **GES**—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldean lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; **HAL**—Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; **LJS**—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; **LN**—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains; **SHG**—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. **THAYER**—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

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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).

Front cover photo:
Morning mist on Lake Catherine,
Arkansas. Photo by Patricia Fleming

Elijah

THE PROPHET

The **MAN** Who **Made** a **DIFFERENCE**



Imagine—

how King Ahab felt, this proud king of Israel basking in his own success. Life was good. The son of a king, he had everything one could ask—wealth, power, fame, a beautiful queen, lots of pleasure. The gods had been good to him.

Then suddenly one day, a rugged, leathery man burst into his stateroom uninvited and unannounced, and stood in front of the king. Before Ahab had a chance to catch his breath or ask his name, this intruder raised his left hand toward heaven and with his right hand gestured straight at Ahab. His strong voice thundered these ominous words: “*As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word*” (1 Kings 17:1 NIV). And just as quickly as this stranger had come, he was gone.

Worshippers of Baal believed Baal brought the rains and bountiful harvests. So when Elijah strode into the presence of this Baal-worshipping king and told him there would be no rain for several years, Ahab was shocked. Stunned.

Ahab had built up a strong military defense, and his abominable wife Jezebel had installed hundreds of her prophets to safeguard the nation’s needs. But they soon learned that none of them had any strength against the Lord God of Israel.

Who is Elijah? Where did he come from? We know nothing of his origin, parents, or childhood. All we are told is that he was a “*Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead*” (1 Kings 17:1), a man wearing a coarse garment girded at the waist with a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). Diligent as the Hebrew people were with genealogies, we are not even told from what tribe Elijah was descended. And James tell us that he “*was a man subject to like passions as we are*” (James 5:17).

When we first meet Elijah, he is already the avowed enemy of Baalism, a sensuous, cruel and corrupt religion built on sex and power.

Many Bible names are significant, and the name Elijah means “Jehovah is my God” or “My God is Jehovah” (LSJ). He had a mission in his name! God had sent him, and God would be with him. His task: to bring Israel back to the true and living God.

The story of Elijah has special relevance to our times. Elijah was calling the people of Israel to leave a religion of excitement and sex orgies that would destroy them and come to the wholesome, inspiring and fruitful worship of the God of creation, the God who had given them their nation, their laws, their government, their very life. Elijah was calling them back to a religion that would elevate them in this life and that, if practiced, could give everlasting life. But the

appeal of Baal was so close, so immediate, so deeply entrenched, that Elijah was truly fighting a giant.

It was a time of rampant idolatry and rebellion against God in Israel. The Bible says about Jeroboam, first king of the divided kingdom, that he *“made Israel to sin”* (1 Kings 14:16). He deliberately planted the seeds of idolatry among the people of Israel, and its corrupt fruit continued to plague Israel to her end. It is said of Ahab’s father Omri that he *“did worse than all that were before him”* (1 Kings 16:25). Then follows this testimony to the sins of Ahab: *“Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.”* To make matters even worse, Ahab, with Jezebel’s urging, made Baal worship easy: *“He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria”* (1 Kings 16:30–32 NIV). Baal worship was the worship of fertility, power and prosperity. Much of our society today is built around the worship of modern Baals: gods of self-gratification and sex; gods of materialism, pleasure, power and wealth. And just as surely as God sent Elijah to warn Ahab of his downfall, so He will send Elijah to warn our world today of the coming one, Jesus Christ, who comes to put down evil and establish His kingdom of justice and peace worldwide.

Prophet of Destiny

Picture, if you can, this singular man of God. Rare indeed is the life that combines the heavenly graces so nobly as does the life of this great man of God:

- ◆ Humble, yet he is a master of confidence.
- ◆ Bold, yet hear him petitioning God for strength.
- ◆ Undauntedly courageous, yet he is filled with awe in the presence of God.
- ◆ A leader, yet he is Jehovah’s most obedient servant.

So dynamic is the personality of this prophet that he seems to us almost like being with an angel of God. He is unknown and yet well-known; contemplative and yet vigorous; tempestuous and yet tender. His very attitude lets one know there can be no compromise with wrong. Even reading about him, one can sense that he doesn’t care a whit about the opinion of his contemporaries. His whole thought is to fulfill his Divine mission.

This grand prophet Elijah himself, who lived in the land of Israel nearly three millenniums ago, will be on earth again one of these days. Is it possible? It is more than possible—it is the sure promise of God! The Lord our God spoke through His prophet Malachi. The words are recorded in the last two verses of the Old Testament: *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse”* (Mal. 4:5–6). Jesus Himself confirmed the prophecy of Malachi: *“Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things”* (Matt. 17:11).

Elijah is coming. What will he think of our modern world? More important, what will he think of us as individuals? For Elijah was no fawning flatterer in Israel, nor will he be when he returns.



A Nature Like Ours!

The Book of James (5:17) says, *“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours”* (NKJV). *“Elijah was a man just like us”* (NIV). *“Elijah was as human as we are”* (NLT). *“Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are”* (KJV). What is this Scripture telling us?

The Greek word translated *“nature like ours”* or *“subject to like passions”* means “of like desires, pertaining to, being of the same quality or kind of desires (Acts 14:15; Jas. 5:17)”—DBL.

The Greek word translated *“passions”* in James 5:17 is also used in Acts 14:15, *“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.”*

The definitions of the word seem to leave the door open to greater meaning than can be derived from the Greek word itself. For example, *“suffering the like with another, of like feelings or affections”* (LSJ) can include anything from the context, whether one’s burning zeal or great passionate determination for right-doing, serving Christ, or any of the great characteristics of thought or action of the true Christian. So it seems the word *passions* is a good choice when used to its fullest meaning and taken in light of the zeal and determination of the early Church. The hope of eternal life puts such a deep desire in our hearts that it moves us to overpower our carnal nature regardless of the sufferings.

Can’t you just see Elijah serving God with a passion, giving all he had?

Let us have a *“like passion”*—for God! ◆

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Elijah THE PROPHET



JEHOVAH IS THE TRUE GOD

*Elijah, the prophet of God, stood alone
Denouncing the prophets of Baal.
Outnumbered four hundred and fifty to one,
Yet never once doubting God's will would be done,
Not once did he falter, or quail.*

*He said to those prophets, "Come, stand here like men,
And prove that your worship is true.
Your god I will challenge, and prove him a liar,
For none but Jehovah will answer by fire.
This only the true God can do.*

*"So come, build your altar, your offering slay,
Prepare now the bullock and wood.
Then call on your god—if perchance he's awake—
To send down the fire, a burnt offering to make.
He'll answer, if he's in the mood."*

*The challenge accepted, the prophets prepared
The offering, then called on their god.
From morn until noon did their loud cries ascend,
In vain were their efforts the heavens to rend;
No fire coming forth from their god.*

*Elijah then mocked, and suggested they cry
Still louder. "If Baal yet lives
Perhaps he now talks, or a journey pursues,
Or, if he is sleeping, more strength you must use,
Before his attention he gives."*

*Elijah then hastened his altar to make,
And on it his offering placed,
Thrice drenching with water the bullock and wood,
Thus making the whole as fire-proof as he could,
Before his footsteps he retraced.*

*The rest you well know, how God answered the plea
Of Elijah, to quickly consume
The bullock, the water and wood all with fire,
While the prophets of Baal, seized with forebodings dire,
Awaited their impending doom.*

*We, too, many times, have our confidence placed
In gods with no power to save;
Have clung to our idols—of wealth, or of praise—
And frequently to our own ungodly ways
That lead but to death and the grave.*

*But let us now think of the false prophets' doom,
And render a service of love,
By casting away every thought of our own
To walk in the path that our Saviour has shown,
And honor the true God above.*

—Liot L. Snyder

A Man of High Character

From the bits of description given in Scripture, we can conclude that Elijah was singular. Doubtless his features and characteristics were those of the typical open country dweller. Rugged and austere in appearance, wearing a rough cloak, can't we picture him striding into the king's presence and lifting up a sinewy arm to heaven as he denounced the weak-willed king in thundering tones?

But Elijah's greatest distinctions were his strong, unswerving moral character. Three of his most conspicuous virtues were *courage*, *faith* and *zeal*. More than once the prophet risked his life to perform the service of God. See his courage as he suddenly strides into the king's audience-chamber and in the name of the Lord God of Israel denounces the king to his face. Again when Elijah knew the royal pair had put a price on his head, he obeys God's command "*Go present yourself to Ahab*" (1 Kings 18:1). On Mount Carmel this messenger of Jehovah challenges, single-handed, the whole priesthood of the State religion and all the people of the realm in a decisive test. And then, just as Elijah thinks the demonstration has been conclusive and that the whole nation should turn to God, there comes a bloodthirsty threat from the highest power in the land—Jezebel. Instead of having become convinced of the power of God, the wicked queen is filled with fury. She will avenge the blood of her priests.

Where did Elijah find his *courage*? It was courage born of implicit *faith* in the God of heaven. Think of the firm faith it required to go into King Ahab's presence and say, "*there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!*" Dew and rain may be absent by ordinary causes for a few weeks or even months. But for dew and rain to be suspended for years, as Elijah declared they would be, needed the power of Elijah's God. "*As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives*"—Elijah's God was *living*, and able.

Then see Elijah's *zeal*. He expressed this overmastering passion when at the mouth of the cave on Horeb he said, "*I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty*" (1 Kings 19:10 NIV). How much this child of the desert can teach us of zeal for the Divine honor, and burning indignation at truce-breaking compromise.

How we need him to teach us to feel more deeply for *God's* honor and *God's* name than for our own! See Elijah among the highlands of Gilead, appealing to God in prayer as he heard bits and pieces of news about the dark doings in Israel:

- ◆ Jezebel is doing her utmost to destroy the worship of Jehovah.
- ◆ Jezebel is systematically killing His prophets.
- ◆ Jezebel has placed her abominable gods from Tyre in Israel and is installing hundreds of their priests and feeding them at her table.
- ◆ Jezebel being the power behind the throne is leading Israel into shameful and wholesale apostasy!

Do we wonder why Elijah has been called the prophet of fire? Nothing cool, indifferent or complacent about this man. In his breast burns an intensity about godliness.

Would that we might be gripped with the holy passion that was his! How quickly we might be done with all pride and hate, all selfishness, strife and discord.



Elijah is one of the most remarkable figures in the history of Israel. He is living evidence that

when God has a work to be done, He finds a man to do it. He finds the right man at the right time, so that when His hour strikes, His man is ready.

Elijah was a person of dynamic suddenness. Suddenly he appears in Israel as the crisis prophet, with tempest on his brow and thunder in his voice. Just as suddenly he disappears, swept skyward in a chariot of fire. And between his appearing and his final disappearing lie a series of miraculous events. No one could guess what the Prophet would do next, or where he would be. The very style of the narrative stamps this Prophet of fire on the imagination and identifies him forever as a man of God.

The foremost task of Elijah in Israel was one of reformation. His faithfulness to this God-ordained mission is attested by these facts: 1) Elijah is mentioned by the New Testament writers more often than any other Old Testament prophet; and 2) Elijah was seen in the vision of the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9). Was it not especially appropriate that the Apostles should see in vision the very man who is destined to precede Christ at the time of His glorious Second Advent? ♦

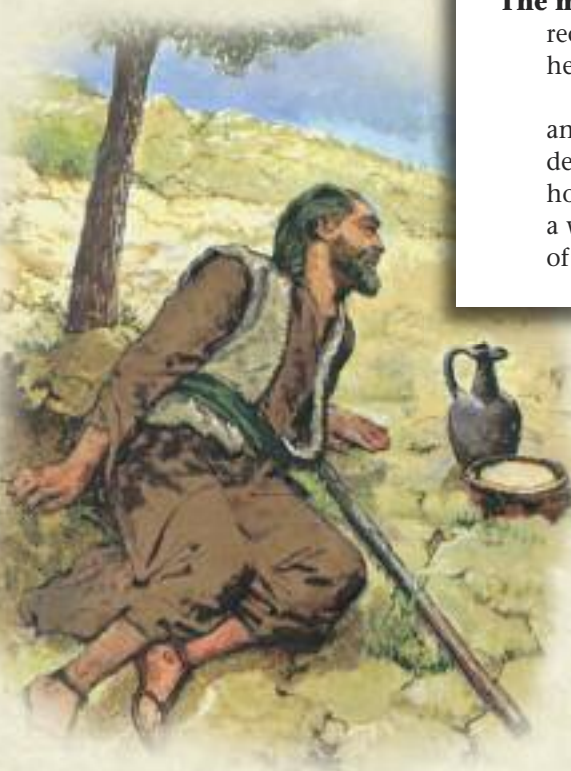


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Another miracle—

An angel brought Elijah two meals that sustained him 40 days in the wilderness.
—1 Kings 19:5–8



MINISTRY OF MIRACLES

On a number of occasions God showed His mighty power through Elijah, either to convince or to convict the unbelieving, or to carry out His own special purpose. Among these miracles are:

The miracle of the unfailing supply of meal and oil during a time of severe famine, to sustain the widow, and her son and Elijah himself until the famine ended. —1 Kings 17:14–16

The miracle of resurrection, restoring to life the young son of the widow of Zarephath. —1 Kings 17:17–24

The miracle of withholding rain in Israel for three and a half years, then causing it to rain again after the drought. —1 Kings 17:1–2; 1 Kings 18:1, 45

The dramatic encounter on Mount Carmel, where Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a contest, to see who could bring rain to drought-stricken Israel. When the prophets of Baal failed utterly, God answered Elijah's simple prayer by fire, dramatically consuming the sacrifice and 12 barrels of water that had been poured on the altar, along with the stones and dust of the altar. —1 Kings 18:1–39

Another miracle of fire from heaven —2 Kings 1:9–15. When the mortally injured king of Israel Ahaziah sent a company of 50 men to capture Elijah, the captain commanded the “*man of God*” to come down from the hill. Instead of coming down, Elijah called down fire on the 50 soldiers. Ahaziah sent another 50 soldiers, who met the same fate. The third company begged for mercy, and an angel told Elijah it was safe to follow them. At the bedside of the injured King Ahaziah, Elijah foretold that he would die because he inquired of Baalzebub and not of the true God.

The miracle of parting the Jordan River —2 Kings 2:1–8. When Elijah and Elisha reached the Jordan, Elijah took his mantle and smote the waters which parted, and he and Elisha passed over to the other side.

The miracle of translation —2 Kings 2:9–11. Instead of death ending his career, Elijah received a special blessing from God. It suited God's purpose to translate Elijah so that he did *not* die—because God had a mission for him in the future.

As Elijah walked with his successor Elisha, suddenly Elijah was taken—carried by angels to another part of God's vast creation. The Bible says as they walked along, suddenly a chariot of fire [angels, see Ps. 68:17 and 2 Kings 6:16–17] appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between them, separating them, and Elijah was whisked away by a whirlwind into heaven. When the time is right he will return to earth as the herald of the king, Jesus Christ. —Malachi 4:5–6

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Elijah's Ministries

Someone has remarked that there are two sorts of prophets: Prophets of deeds, and prophets of words. Of the latter, the greatest is doubtless Isaiah; of the former, there has not been a greater than Elijah.

Elijah was a prophet of *deeds*. So far as we know, he wrote nothing. This does not surprise us. A man from Tishbe in Gilead, he was not the companion of books and letters. But he was not called to write; he was called to *act*. He was a man of action rather than diction. He was dynamic rather than academic. This was apparently what God needed at that time, a man of prompt action, strong measures and explosive deeds. Someone else would do the writing. At that moment God needed the *action*. God needed *Elijah*.

Elijah's was a ministry of *miracles* as well. At every new chapter in the story, we learn of another miracle. These miracles tell us that God was with Elijah, that

Elijah was God's man, commissioned and empowered to do what God wanted done at that time. If ever there was a time in Israel's history when miracles were needed it was in the time of Ahab and Jezebel—even though a people bent on evil refused to change their ways.

Elijah's ministry was also a call to *reformation*. God did not send him to originate anything new but to protest the apostasy of the nation and to call the people back to the old ways, back to the good ways, back to God. But again, they refused to come.

When Elijah burst upon the scene in the time of Ahab, things could hardly have been worse. After the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, ten of the Hebrew tribes had revolted to go their own way and form the separate kingdom of Israel. Their first king Jeroboam left the distinguishing epitaph: *"Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin."* This is the Jeroboam who put a golden calf at Dan in the north and another at Bethel in the south so that the people could follow the line of least resistance and worship idols nearby instead of the true God at the temple in Jerusalem as God had commanded.

About forty years passed between the death of Jeroboam and the ascent of Ahab to the throne, forty years of continued moral and religious deterioration. No less than six kings reigned, all of them evil.

Things were dark enough when Ahab took the throne, but Ahab quickly made them at least a hundred percent worse, for the inspired chronicler wrote of him, *"He did evil above all that were before him"*—Jeroboam included: *"No one else so completely sold himself to what was evil in the Lord's sight as did Ahab, for his wife, Jezebel, influenced him. He was especially guilty because he worshiped idols just as the Amorites had done—the people whom the Lord had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites....He did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him...for his wife, Jezebel, influenced him"* (1 Kings 21:25–26; 16:33 NLT). Here was the source of the trouble, and the weak-willed Ahab did not oppose.

Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, shrewd and intriguing, led a grimly determined effort to stamp out the religion of Jehovah once and for all. The altars of the Lord were cast down, the prophets of God were murdered. In their place were erected groves and images to false gods, and hundreds of heathen priests took possession throughout the land, sustained by the revenues of the royal purse. Licentious modes of worship were introduced. A temple for Baal worship was built in Samaria (1 Kings 16:32). It was a dark, dark hour.

Was this the nation that God had founded? Were these the people He had delivered from Egypt and established in this good land of Canaan? It seemed as though the crushed worship of God could never regain its lost prestige. Those people God had chosen had lapsed into all-out heathenism.

But just at this zero hour God found His champion. The times called for an Elijah, and an Elijah was ready for the task! The greatest prophet was reserved for the worst age. Israel never had so infamous a king as Ahab nor so mighty a prophet as Elijah.

Isn't it fitting that God has chosen Elijah to be the prophet to reappear in our time? Isn't Elijah as needed in our world today, with his message of repentance



BACKGROUND

Where: from Tishbe in Gilead, sent to Israel

Occupation: Mighty Prophet of God

When: 9th century BC

Contemporaries: Ahab, Jezebel, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah, Obadiah, the widow of Zarephath; Elisha, Shalmaneser III (Assyria)

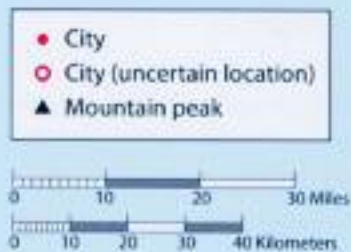
Meaning of Hebrew name "Elijah": "My God is Jehovah"

Highlights:

- ◆ Mightiest, most famous and most dramatic of the Hebrew prophets
- ◆ Predicted the beginning and end of a 3–1/2 year drought
- ◆ Represented God in a showdown on Mt. Carmel with the priests of Baal and Ashtoreth
- ◆ Thundered warnings to Ahab
- ◆ Defied Jezebel and predicted her downfall
- ◆ Was used by God to restore a dead child to his mother
- ◆ Was translated into heaven by a "whirlwind" so he would not see death
- ◆ Is prophesied to return as the forerunner of Jesus' Second Advent

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Elijah THE PROPHET



The Ministries of Elijah and Elisha



The New Moody Atlas of the Bible-2009

and his fearless denunciations of evil, as he was in ancient Israel? Hasn't God chosen well to appoint this great man for so crucial a mission?

We find ourselves today in a world doing *"evil with both hands earnestly"* (Micah 7:3). With moral values at an all-time low, with family structures deteriorated and virtue and goodness so widely maligned, with thousands and millions of men and women living without thought of God or His purposes, bent only on pursuing their selfish pleasures, isn't the time right for God once again to send the man He has been preserving and preparing for this very mission and destiny, to shock the inhabitants of the earth to their senses before He smites the earth with a curse? (Mal. 4:6).

Isn't it Time?

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it takes more than a little imagination to picture all nations bowing in humble submission to King Jesus. The transition from what the world is now to what it will be when Christ returns and takes the kingship will be by far the greatest transition in the history of the earth. Men will not easily set aside their cultures for a new way of life. Even in prospect of the most promising benefits they will not easily give up their dreams and goals. The change must be actually forced upon them.

God knows this. He knows His human creatures and all their human ways. He knows also that if any are spared, they must be pre-informed of what He is about to do. They must be given an open demonstration of evidence, followed by an open ultimatum: Turn, and live; refuse, and die.

Taken to Heaven

Elijah is one of two privileged persons who were chosen by God to be *"translated"* from this world to another, never experiencing death. The account in 2 Kings reads that *"Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"* (2 Kings 2:11). A marvelous experience to be sure! but does it seem strange that Elijah—a mortal man—could enter heaven when we read that *"No one has ever gone into heaven"* (John 3:13 NIV)?

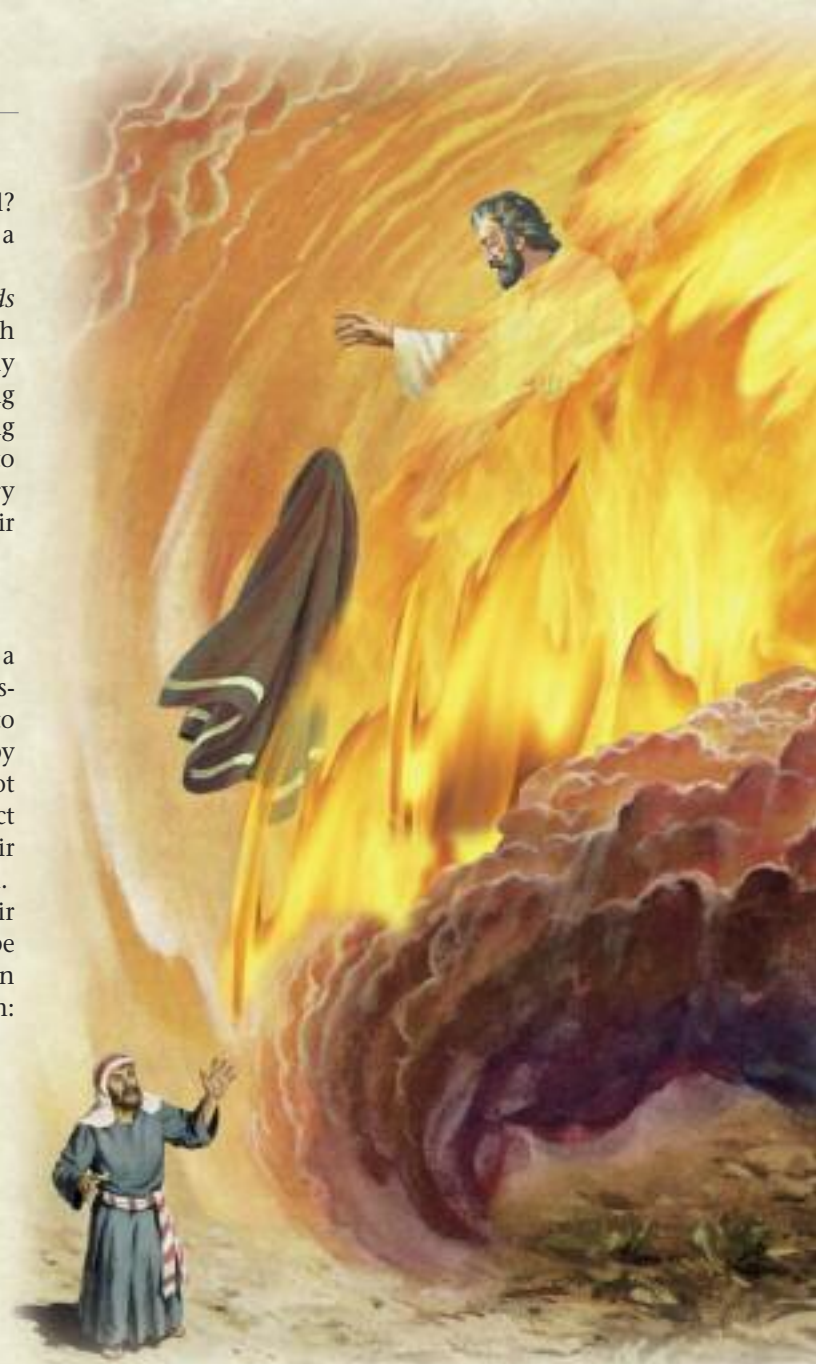
We have no reason to assume that Elijah was taken to the presence of God, or to the highest heaven. We read of Jesus that *"He...ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things"* (Eph. 4:10). Wouldn't this indicate that there are lower heavens, where one such as Elijah might go? Heaven is an immense realm. It includes, literally speaking, all of creation that is not the earth. In our own galaxy, the Milky Way, scientists estimate that there are more than one hundred billion stars. And our galaxy is only one among countless billions and trillions of galaxies. Surely in this vast ocean of space there are numerous habitable islands where God's work is not yet complete, areas still inhabited by people like ourselves—mortal, areas not yet glorified.

Of one fact we may also be sure: Elijah was not "picked up" supernaturally and deposited beyond the next hill; nor did he merely take a trip into the "atmospheric" heaven; these are some of the various interpretations extant, but they are not Biblical. The Word of God declares, *"Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven,"* and at the proper time he shall be brought back to earth.

Warnings

It has always been God's pattern to warn of approaching judgment. If Christ

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13





CHRIST Comes *“Like a Thief”...* Yet Announced?

How can Jesus be said to come “suddenly” and “as a thief in the night” if His coming is to be announced in advance to the whole world by the return of the ancient Prophet Elijah? A thief does not announce his coming; indeed, *“If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into”* (Matt. 24:43 NIV). How does the mission of Elijah fit into the picture?

The day of the Lord is prophesied to arrive suddenly, as without warning. But even with the advent of Elijah to warn, will not the great day of the Lord still be sudden to an unsuspecting world? In a sense the two events are one, for the coming of Elijah will break God’s long silence. From that point forward, God will work openly. The majority of the prophecies of the coming of Christ, in fact, do not mention or even suggest the forerunner’s coming. The whole event—the coming of Jesus and Elijah—will be sudden, a surprise to the world at large, as a thief in the night.

Christ’s coming will also remain sudden even though it is announced because most of His warning words will fall on unbelieving ears, and so the day of the Lord still comes “unawares” (Luke 21:34, Matt. 24:50). The same was true in the time of Noah, and Jesus said, *“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed”* (Luke 17:30 NIV). The comparison seems especially appropriate. The end-time was to be history repeating itself, not only in the vast extent of lawlessness and evil, but also in the general disregard of the Divine warning. At God’s bidding, Noah was a messenger with a message of warning. He preached for 120 years (2 Pet. 2:5; Gen. 6:3), warning that if they did not repent of their sins and turn to God, they would be destroyed with a great flood. But the people laughed and sneered. No doubt some believed for a time, but when years went by and nothing unusual happened, they too lost faith. But as time ran out—when the rain began to fall—then the people were ready to listen. Then they would do anything—anything—if only they could get inside that ark of safety. But it was too late. The rain came, and “the flood,” and “took them all away” (Matt. 24:39). Who was to blame because the flood came suddenly and caught them unawares? Surely not God. Why did it come suddenly? Not because they were not warned but because they had failed to listen. Even so will Christ’s coming be sudden, despite the ministry of Elijah; for the great majority still will not listen.

This is why Jesus issued His own solemn warning: *“If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping”* (Mark 13:36 NIV). Destruction often comes suddenly. One moment, all is business as usual. The next, destruction descends and things can never be the same again. So it will be with the day of the Lord.

Let us take the warning to ourselves while there is still time to choose the side of Christ and right! ♦

were to walk into our world today and begin pouring out His judgments on wickedness without any warning, how many would survive?

But God's longsuffering is unsurpassed. Before He sends judgment, He warns. Before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain, He sent His angels with warnings. He warned the people of Nineveh before judgment arrived. He warned the people of Jerusalem of the coming captivity while there was still time to escape. Again and again He warned the people of Israel and Judah, sending prophet after prophet to tell them of what would come on them if they did not turn from their evil ways.

Before the Flood, God had warned the people through Noah, His preacher of righteousness. How many listened? How many responded? How many turned? Nevertheless, God continued to warn.

And before He sends His judgments on the world for a final, all-out confrontation with sin, before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord," He will warn.

Before the "Great Day of the Lord"

For over a century now our church has been broadcasting the news of the imminent and personal return of Christ, the "Great Day of the Lord." Jesus Christ is coming back, just as surely as He went away. The evidence of Scripture in favor of this hope is overwhelming, and today, many religious groups are teaching it. But the fact that Christ's Second Advent is to have a distinguished announcer is often overlooked. Yet the forecast is definite: "I will send you Elijah the prophet...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

Shortly after the beginning of the last century, our founder, Rev. L. T. Nichols, started teaching this message, and some years later our group began distributing a free booklet, "The Coming of Jesus and Elijah." Today a number of theories on the subject are extant. A very few teach the actual return of the real Prophet himself, just as the Scriptures state. Others say "Elijah the prophet" represents a class of persons. Some expect a messenger who will be born in the western world. A few have asserted that *they* are Elijah. Most believe that it is "mission accomplished" because Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah (see discussion on page 14).

Why do we continue to teach that Elijah the Prophet is coming? Because God's prophet Malachi said it, and Jesus confirmed it. Malachi said plainly, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," and Jesus said also "Elias truly shall first come, and shall restore all things."

Is that all we read in the Bible about the subject? Only two small verses stating the prophecy? Yes, that is all. But isn't that sufficient? How many times should God have to speak before we decide to believe?

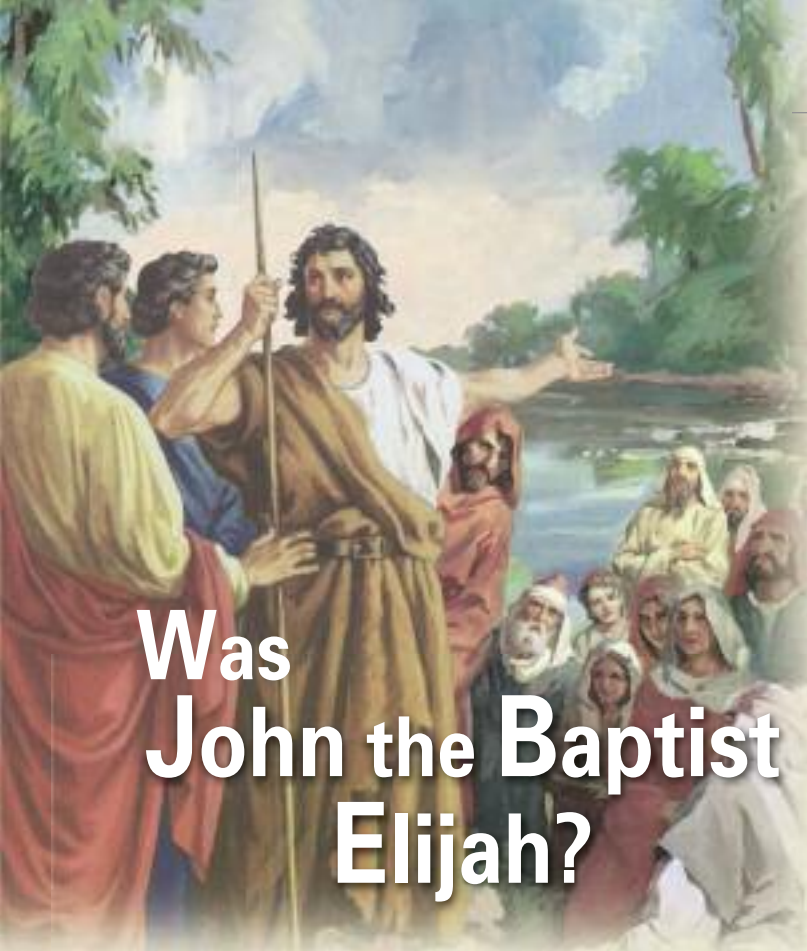
Let us take God at His Word, and His Words at face value. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet."

Though there were doubtless a few in Israel who took Elijah's words to heart, the first mission of Elijah ended with the nation lapsing into the sin and evil it had renounced and finally being swallowed up, just as God's prophets foretold. But Elijah's *second* mission is destined to be an overwhelming success. This time he comes as a man of destiny, announcing the second advent of Jesus Christ and a whole set of changes Christ will initiate: new government, new laws, new populace, new goals—a new world—until from sea to sea the kingdom is the Lord's and all nations serve and obey Him (Ps. 72:7-11).

Don't we long with all our hearts for the arrival of that Day? What a glorious culmination will follow! And it is just ahead! What a privilege belongs to Elijah, to have been appointed by God to initiate the steps that will bring about a new heaven (new rulers) and a new earth (new populace)!

Let us imitate Elijah's noble example of courage, faith and dynamic obedience, that with him we may share the everlasting blessings of the earth made new. ♦

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse. — Mal. 4:5-6



Was John the Baptist Elijah?

Many people believe that John the Baptist, by announcing the First Advent of Jesus, fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah coming as stated by Malachi (4:5-6). If this is true, are we not recognizing that Christ's *first* coming had a herald and that God had no plan for Christ's second—much greater coming—to be announced?

Even though John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, he was not Elijah. *"Are you Elijah?"* the Jews asked him directly, and he answered, *"No"* (John 1:19-21 NLT). Later Jesus said, *"Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things"* (Matt. 17:11 NRSV). These words could not possibly refer to any future "coming" of John, because when Jesus spoke them John the Baptist was already dead!

Notice also that Jesus said Elijah is to *"restore all things."* What *"all things"* did John the Baptist restore at Christ's first coming, if we should apply these words to John? He did not make any great reforming work. His whole mission was accomplished in a very short time and touched only a very small area. He did not restore the power of the Holy Spirit, for it is written that John *"did no miracle"* whatever (John 10:41). Nor did he make any sweeping moral reforms—he was beheaded for condemning a single immoral act.

No, John the Baptist does not qualify as a fulfillment of Jesus' words.

The issue may seem to be confused by Jesus' next statement: *"But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased."* Of whom did Jesus speak? Here He is speaking of John the Baptist, the "Elijah" or messenger of Christ's first advent, as the disciples understood (Matt. 17:12-13 NRSV).

There were to be two advents of Christ, and two heralds

to announce them. The two events were foretold together. But just as the first coming of Christ fulfilled only *part* of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and requires the Second Coming at the end of this age for complete fulfillment, so the coming of John the Baptist fulfilled only one part of the prophecies of the herald. The greater part await the return of the grand Prophet himself at the time of the Second Advent, before the coming *"of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."*

John the Baptist or Elijah?

"You have said that Isaiah 40 is prophecy of the mission of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus' first advent, and that Malachi predicted the mission of Elijah as forerunner of Jesus' second advent. If this is correct, why do the Gospel writers apply Malachi 3:1 to John as well as to Elijah? Couldn't John have fulfilled both prophecies?"

When discussing the prophecies relating to the coming of Jesus and His forerunner(s), the Bible makes a number of points.

1) Two advents of Jesus are predicted.

The two advents are described in totally different, even contrasting, terms. Relating to **His first coming**, we are told that:

- ♦ Jesus was to be born as an infant (Isa. 9:6), in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2), the *"city of David,"* and he was to be a descendant of the family of David (Isa. 11:1-3).

- ♦ Jesus was to come as a meek, lowly teacher (Matt. 11:28-30), teaching the message His Father gave Him to teach *"My doctrine is not Mine but His that sent Me"* (John 7:16).

- ♦ Jesus came to learn *"obedience by the things which He suffered,"* in this way becoming the source of salvation to *"all...who obey Him"* (Heb. 5:8-9). He came, learning to reject evil and choose the good, perfecting the character that would qualify Him for His future role as King of the whole earth (Isa. 7:14-15; Ps. 45:7; Heb. 1:9).

- ♦ Jesus came to show in real life the perfect example and complete pattern of one pleasing God, from birth, growth, career, death, resurrection, and rewarding with eternal life. Made like us (Acts 3:22-23), He was tempted in all points as we are, *"yet without sin"* (Heb. 4:15). In this way He showed that sin can be overcome, and set the standard for us and left us a perfect pattern to follow (1 John 3:3; Eph. 4:13).

- ♦ He would be rejected by His people. *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him"* (John 1:11), just as prophesied (Isa. 53:1). He would be like a *"lamb to the slaughter"* (Isa. 53:7).

By contrast, the prophecies relating to **His second com-**

ing describe one coming with a multitude of angels, with power and authority to execute judgment and bring the world under His domain. Some of these prophecies are:

- ♦ He is to come with a host of *"holy angels"* (Matt. 25:31), and *"with power and great glory"* (Luke 21:27).
- ♦ He is coming to bless and reward His people. Hebrews 9:28 speaks of His coming *"the second time without sin unto salvation."* See also Rev. 22:12: *"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his works shall be."*
- ♦ Christ is coming the second time as a Conqueror. He is described in Revelation as the *"Lion of the tribe of Judah... conquering and to conquer"* (Rev. 5:5; 6:2).
- ♦ Christ is coming the second time as Judge. Paul says He will *"judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom"* (2 Tim. 4:1). Christ Himself made a point not to associate judgment with His first advent when He read a prophecy about Himself in the synagogue (see Luke 4:16–21). When He was in the synagogue reading from Isaiah 61, notice that He stopped reading before the phrase about bringing in the *"day of judgment"* and added, *"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."* But at His second advent He will come as a God-appointed Judge (Acts 17:31). He will come to *"be a swift witness"* against the evil doers (Mal. 3:3–5).

♦ Christ is coming the second time as the King He was born to be (Luke 1:31–33; John 18:36). His kingdom will extend *"from sea to sea"* (Ps. 72:8). The Lord *"shall be king over all the earth"* (Zech. 14:9), and once He takes the throne, He will reign *"for ever"* (Dan. 2:44; 7:27; Rev. 11:15).

2) Both Christ's first and second advents are to be announced by a forerunner.

The fact that there are two comings or advents necessitates two forerunners. Because only one is named does not mean that there will be only one, because the one named is clearly identified with Jesus' second coming. Malachi 4:5,6 is very definite: *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."* Jesus' first advent was not a *"great and dreadful day."* Nor did Jesus at His first advent accomplish the rest of the prophecy: that the mission of the forerunner was needed lest He *"strike the earth with a curse."* There was no great turning to God, and no universal curse at Christ's first advent.

John's mission to precede Jesus' first advent is made clear by the statement of the angel to Zacharias, father-to-be of John the Baptist. Two different persons were to fill the two different roles of forerunner. This is the angel's prophetic statement about John: *"He [John the Baptist] will also go before Him [Jesus Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"* (Luke 1:17). John the Baptist was to be the forerunner

of Jesus' first advent, he being just six months Jesus' elder, and his mission is stated: John would go before Jesus *"in the spirit and power of Elias."* He would have the same God-given power to denounce sin and uphold righteousness, part of his mission to make crooked things straight and to be *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'"* as foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 40:3).

3) John the Baptist was not Elijah the prophet.

Cross questioned when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, *"Who are you?"* He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, *"I am not the Christ."* And they asked him, *"What then? Are you Elijah?"* He said, *"I am not."* *"Are you the Prophet?"* And he answered, *"No."*

*The Bible foretells
two advents of the Messiah,
and two heralds who would
announce those advents.*

When they still demanded to know who he was, John replied, *"I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said'"* (John 1:19–23).

SEEMING CONFUSION

As clearly as Malachi describes the mission of Elijah before the *"great and dreadful day of the Lord,"* Jesus in Matt. 11:10 and Luke 7:27, and Mark in Mark 1:2 applied the prophecy in Malachi 3:1 to John also. Malachi 3:1 reads, *"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight."* Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, in his jubilant exultation when his speech was restored after John's birth, prophesied of his son John, *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways"* (Luke 1:76). His wording suggests both Isaiah's and Malachi's prophecies.

The angel Gabriel related John's mission to the forecast of Malachi 4:5 (Luke 1:16–17).

What shall we conclude? It is quite understandable that if John was to go before Christ in the *"spirit and power"* of Elijah, the work planned for Elijah could rightly be related to John also, as part of his assignment.

Because John came in the *"spirit and power"* of Elijah, the prophecies regarding the work of one forerunner could also apply to the other. But this in no way changes the events

distinctly forecast to be part of each advent of Christ. Elijah is to come before the “*great and dreadful*” day of the Lord. Malachi 4:1 pictures that event as “*The day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch.*” No such period of judgment accompanied John’s mission.

What about Malachi 3? To whom does this prophecy refer? Verse 1 speaks of a “*messenger*,” which could apply either to John or Elijah: “*Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple.*”

Malachi 3:2–3 depicts a work which the Messiah did not

Elijah being the only forerunner named in the Old Testament, is it possible that Elijah's name came to be perceived as “forerunner” or “announcer”?

accomplish at His first advent: “*But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.*” These texts indicate the program scheduled for Christ’s Second Advent, not His first. Abiding the day of Christ that followed the preaching of John the Baptist was not difficult. Christ taught; He warned; He pleaded. He was strong in His denunciation of sin. His censure of the crafty scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 was perhaps His strongest; but the work of separating the dross from the precious metal—the wicked from the righteous—awaits Christ’s second coming.

Malachi 3:5 pictures the judgments to accompany Christ’s second advent: “*And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—Because they do not fear Me, says the Lord of hosts.*”

Why the confusion? We must remember that the people of Jesus’ day were mistaken as to the application of the many prophecies regarding His coming. They confused Christ’s second coming with His first. The people under-

stood from the prophets that the Messiah would come to set up His Kingdom. But they comprehended nothing of two comings, for they saw only the coming of the Messiah to set up His glorious Kingdom, and it was their hope that He would release them from the yoke of their Gentile overlords and re-establish the kingdom of Israel. They saw neither His being rejected at His first coming nor the long lapse of time before Messiah’s Kingdom. As a result, they erroneously looked for Elijah to come before the first coming of the Messiah. But this misconception on their part in no way altered the prophecy of Malachi, that Elijah shall come before the “*great and dreadful day of the Lord.*”

IN SUMMARY

God foreknew that Israel would reject the Christ when He came the first time. It was no part of God’s plan that the Kingdom should be set up at Christ’s first coming. His first work was to perfect His own character, to prepare Himself for the kingship. Not until His second coming should His kingdom be established. Hence, God sent John the Baptist as Christ’s first forerunner. John therefore was the “*Elijah*” of the first coming, but Elijah himself is to be the forerunner of His second coming.

The Israelite nation rejected the King, as we read in John 1:11, “*He came to his own, [Israel], and His own did not receive Him.*” And with the King rejected, instead of the Kingdom came the crucifixion, the resurrection, the setting aside of Israel, and the calling out of the Gentiles. Not until Christ’s Second Advent will the Kingdom come.

Consistent with His orderly way of working, God appointed two forerunners each with a different mission for a different coming. John was to be the voice in the wilderness; Elijah was to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers and the hearts of the fathers to the children; and John was to come in the “*spirit and power*” of Elijah, but not as Elijah himself.

Gabriel’s words in Luke 1:17 show that he understood the plan of God: “*He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah.*” Thus he applied Malachi 4:5 to show the type of work which John the Baptist should do—the same that is prophesied to be fulfilled by Elijah in greater measure at Christ’s second advent. Both the angel Gabriel and Jesus saw in John the Baptist a partial fulfillment of Malachi’s words, and at the same time looked ahead to the Day when these words would meet their complete and greater fulfillment in the return of the prophet Elijah himself “*before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*” ♦

*Jesus may come any time,
so we should be ready all the time.*

Though It Tarry, **WAIT!**

A lesson from Habakkuk 2:2

And God answered: *"Write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run."* –The Message Bible

The prophet Habakkuk lived in a time when the children of Israel were at the point of despair. For years God's prophets had warned against the evils of idolatry. Now flagrant disobedience to the laws of God had brought the nation to the brink of Divine judgment. Time was running out. So Habakkuk opens his prophecy by exclaiming, *"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? even cry out to You, 'Violence!' and You will not save"* (1:2).

In response to his plea, the Lord gives Habakkuk this very strange message: *"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it."* What does that mean? He says, Write the vision clearly enough, plainly enough, so that whoever gets it may read it on the run, in haste—speed-read it. There is no time to stop and read casually. This is not a message to be tucked away in your library to be picked up in leisure hours. There is urgency here. You must read the vision in haste—now!—on the run!

What makes this especially strange is the next verse in which the Lord says: *"For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"* (Hab. 2:3).

What can be so urgent about a message that you have to read running—speed-read it, when all it says is *"Though it tarry, wait for it"*? And what is the vision?

The vision is in chapter 3, and it is a vision of God's judgments upon a disobedient people. The prophet pictures it in symbolic language:

"O Lord, I have heard your speech and was afraid,... the mountains saw You and trembled. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation. You marched through the land in indignation; You trampled the nations in anger. You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Anointed."

It is a vision of destruction and judgment. God is going to use a worse nation—Babylon—to bring punishment on his own sinful, rebellious people. They have been warned, and warned, and warned. Now the end is imminent. This is the message of Habakkuk.

Jesus came preaching the same message of Divine intervention. *"Repent,"* he said, *"for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matt. 4:17). He referred to Himself over and over again as *"the Son of Man"* who would be coming *"in a cloud, with power and great glory"* (Luke 21:27), *"with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God"* (1 Thess. 4:16–18).

Jesus told often of His second greater coming. He said there would be signs in the sun and moon and stars, the political powers of earth. He said it would be at a time when there was great distress among nations, with perplexity (Luke 21:25–26). And He said, just before He bade them farewell, *"If I go...I will come again"* (John 14:3), sealing the promise of His return.

The authors of the New Testament saturated their writings with the promise of Christ's return. When they would meet in the marketplace or along the street, they would whisper to one another, *"Maranatha,"* meaning, *"The Lord is coming."*

The author of Hebrews quoted Habakkuk's prophecy about the vision and its urgent message, applying it to the second advent of Jesus. *"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, 'In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay'"* (Heb. 10:36–37 NIV).

Let us not forget even for a moment the reality of this promise. It should be with us continually. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we should keep it in mind: *Jesus is coming, and I must get ready.*

As we partake of the Lord's Supper each year, we *"proclaim the Lord's death till He comes"* (1 Cor. 11:26).

In our day this emphasis on Christ's coming has been widely lost among a people so preoccupied with living for today that they have little if any concern about preparing for tomorrow. However, the force of Jesus' words remains unchanged: *"I will come again"* (John 14:3). The *"day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night"* (2 Pet. 3:10). We should remember it constantly. It should be the bright light of promise shining hope on every dark hour; the radiant prospect of a new world where the horrors and sorrows and sufferings of this age will be forgotten.

Like Habakkuk, we have many questions. There is much we would like to know about the end-time that we are not told. Just how will Christ come? How will the new order displace the present? and so on and on. Most of all we would like to know just when He is coming. There is so much in the realm of the unknowables. But God has not intended that we should know.

What the second coming does most for us right now is to wake us up to our duty here and now. It calls into question all the false gods to which we are tempted to give allegiance, the false securities with which we prop up our lives—of money, status, and any imagined power and influence. When Jesus comes, all these things will lose their value.

What is your response? What is mine? God is not compelling yet. I can go my own way, I can ignore the God who made me. But one night when my barns are filled with wheat, and I am sleeping soundly on my soft pillows, God may say, "You fool, you fool," and my opportunity will have ended.

This is why Habakkuk's message has meaning for us. It comes with the certainty of Divine authority, telling us that things will not always continue as they are.

"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets," says God to Habakkuk. *"The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it."*

Life in the Waiting Zone

Here, at the point of waiting, is where most of us have our greatest difficulty being faithful. Yet we are forced to spend much of our lives waiting for one thing or another. We wait for a certain letter which we hope will come in the morning's mail. We wait for examination grades to be posted. We wait for the doctor's report to be released. We wait for the weekend, or the weekday.

So much of life is lived in the waiting zone. How then are we to wait while Jesus seems to tarry?

In reality, there is no real delay. God's plan is exactly on schedule, and on time. And it is timed to give us extended opportunity. We are not waiting with nothing to do but wonder what next. No, there is urgency in this waiting. Something to do. Something to be. Something to become. *"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets,"* said God to Habakkuk, so that whoever gets the message may read it as one who runs, may speed-read it.

This kind of waiting has been called revolutionary patience. It is the kind of waiting that feels the stress between having and not having, between knowing and not knowing. It is the kind of waiting that is active, busy. Why? Because we know that when the vision becomes reality and Jesus Christ appears, everything as we know it will change.

Do you hear the message? *"Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."* There is no real delay. In God's good time our patient waiting will be rewarded. Jesus Christ will come *"in the glory of His Father, with His angels"* (Matt. 16:27) and bring the fulfillment of all that God has promised.

So, *"do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, 'In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay'"* (Heb. 10:35–37 NIV). ♦

WHAT DID JESUS SAY?

1. About what goes into the mouth and what comes out of it?
2. About blind leaders?
3. In pity of the hungry five thousand?
4. About losing and saving life?
5. About the grain of mustard seed?
6. About how many times we should forgive?
7. About a promise regarding prayer?
8. To Thomas, after the resurrection?
9. In the parable of the talents to the faithful servant?
10. When Peter cut off the soldier's ear, in the Garden of Gethsemane?
11. To the crippled man let down through the roof?
12. When His critics objected to His associating with publicans and sinners?
13. About obedience merely in words?
14. About cross-bearing?
15. To those who were ashamed of Him?
16. When He was tempted each time in the wilderness?



ABOUT NEHEMIAH

1. Who visited Nehemiah and told him the news about Jerusalem? (1:2)
2. What was Nehemiah's position at the time? (1:11)
3. How did Nehemiah respond to the news that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the gates burned? (1:4)
4. Who was the king whom Nehemiah served? (2:1)
5. After asking for a leave of absence to travel to Jerusalem, Nehemiah asked the king for letters to the governors of the province beyond the river. He asked for another letter to whom? For what? (2:8)
6. Once Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he did something secretly at night, what was it? (2:12-15)
7. At the start what did Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem accuse Nehemiah of? (2:19)
8. What was the name of the high priest who set to work with his fellow priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate? (3:1)
9. How did Nehemiah and the Jews respond to their enemies in each of these situations during the rebuilding of the wall?
 - a. When Sanballat and Tobiah mocked and scoffed.
 - b. When the wall was repaired about half way and their enemies were furious and planned an attack.
 - c. They tried to discourage the workers living outside Jerusalem from returning to work.
 - d. Nehemiah's enemies sent a request four times that he meet with them in the Plain of Ono.
 - e. They sent an open letter with lies about Nehemiah.
 - f. They tried to frighten Nehemiah into fleeing into the temple.
10. The wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt in how many days? (6:15)
11. On what occasion did Ezra lead half the joyous choir and group one direction while the other half (including Nehemiah) going in the opposite direction met at the Temple? Where did this procession take place? (12:31-40)
12. How was Nehemiah as governor a good example? What were some of the reforms that he made?
13. How many years was Nehemiah governor of Jerusalem before he returned to Persia for a while? (5:14)
14. Eliashib, the high priest converted a temple storage room into living quarters for this enemy who had opposed the rebuilding of the wall. (13:4-9)

ANSWERS ON PAGE 27



Cleanse Me

In this nineteenth Psalm, the royal singer has been meditating on the wonders of the glory of God revealed in the creation around him. *"The heavens declare the glory of God,"* he writes, *"and the firmament shows His handiwork."* Whether men take notice or not, the beauty is there and it is of God. *"Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge."*

His mind then rises to contemplate the next higher revealing of the glory of God—His law. Here is a region that directly concerns him as the servant of God. It is the region of thought, duty and spiritual life. *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes*

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression. —Psalm 19:12-13

of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:7-9).

Then he opens the windows of his own soul and lets the light of this glorious, perfect law of commandments shine in, for *"in keeping them there is great reward"* (19:11). Yes, great—even everlasting—reward.

But, David wonders. Is that great reward for him, he a man of war? How many lives had he snuffed out prematurely?

David looks into the depths of his own heart as he writes, *"Who can understand his errors?"* He is suspicioning himself—there are "errors" perhaps hidden deep, but they are no less errors that will stand between him and the great reward. There is still sin lurking within; he has not yet perfected his obedience to that perfect law of God. Hence, his humble prayer: *"Cleanse me."*

Should not we follow David's example and look to ourselves? And should not our petition be the same as David's, *"Cleanse me"?*

David mentions two basic types of sin, either of which may defile our record. Listen, because if anyone is qualified to talk about sin, David is.

"Cleanse me from secret faults."

Two types of sin may be called *"secret."* The first are those sins into which we fall unawares, and which are in that sense secret even from ourselves. We did not realize it was sin, or we would not have done it. And as soon as we learn, we are ready to turn. The second type is those sins known only to God and ourselves, which we practice secretly, and carefully keep secret. Both kinds are no less sinful, but this second kind is by far the more vicious because we keep it intentionally secret. It is difficult enough to overcome sins evident to all and for which we can have help. But when we keep our sin secret because we want it that way, and secretly coddle it, cherish it, love it, that is the most serious kind. What power have we to combat a sin that we are secretly propagating? How wise was the Psalmist to seek God's help. *"Cleanse me from secret faults."*

How will He answer our prayer?

He may begin by revealing to us the hideousness of the sin we cherish and the eternal consequences we will meet if we do not overcome that sin. Then if we are serious, we will follow with an open, honest confession,

and repentance, perhaps with the help of a trusted brother or sister in the faith.

It has been truly said that secret sins are seldom forsaken so long as they remain secret. And saddest of all is the plight of one who has lived in honor among fellow Christians, who is suddenly found to have been secretly leading a dishonest or impure life. It is like a tree, hollow at the heart, suddenly crashing down. Such examples give dreadful emphasis to the question of the Psalmist: *"Who can understand his errors?"* Who can unravel the deceitfulness of sin that is finally disclosed?

Oh, let us pray with the Psalmist: *"Cleanse me,"* that I may be spared that shameful revealing. *"Cleanse"* the thoughts, desires, and affections from which such sins spring. Perhaps it is a secret opinion, or a harsh or hasty judgment we hold in our mental storehouse. Or perhaps it is an attitude of hostility, felt but unexpressed. It may be only a bit of pride, but oh, how deadly. In anticipation of the searching light of the great Day of Revealing, we ought to blame ourselves bitterly now for every secret sin we can discern, for He whom we worship sets *"our secret sins in the light of [His] countenance"* (Ps. 90:8). What need to diligently search out every secret sin! What need to pray, *"Cleanse me from secret faults."*

Then there is another class of sins for which the Psalmist seeks help. But this time his prayer is different. This time he prays not to be pardoned or to be helped in cleansing from sin but to be *"kept back,"* withheld, restrained. He has a healthy fear of sin and wishes to avoid it. Prevention is always more desirable than cure. But with a profound humility and a deep knowledge of his own heart, he feels the need of God's help. Of himself he cannot be sure of avoiding the sin he fears. And he wishes at all costs to avoid the consequences. Is not avoiding the sin always the best plan? Thus he prays, *"Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me."*

What is *"presumptuous sin"*? It is willful sin, literally, "sin with a high hand." It is plotted, planned, perverse disobedience to God. It is sin that despises His law, defies His justice,

denies His supremacy and does despite to the spirit of grace. It is sin which is an open contradiction to professing to serve God. David dreads the overmastering power of such, perhaps from the depths of his own bitter experience. Hence his prayer, *"Let them not have dominion over me."*

The more willfully we sin, the more we forge fetters that will bind us to death. Knowing that *"sin when it is finished brings forth death"* (James 1:14), shouldn't we pray with the Psalmist to be kept from all such? We can avoid the consequences by avoiding the sin. And shouldn't we realize with him that our heart also is deceitful and desperately wicked and in need of Divine help if we would walk straight? Jeremiah the prophet knew our own deep need when he penned those words (10:23): *"I know the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps."* We need God to help us cleanse from sin; we need God to help us keep from sin.

Then the Psalmist sees a ray of hope. If God will help him, there is hope: *"Then shall I be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression"* (v. 13). Is not any sin, whatever its definition or dimension, a *"great transgression"* when we realize that any sin makes us a transgressor and will keep us from receiving God's approval and a place in His Kingdom? That is why David longed for self-knowledge that he might see, turn and be forgiven.

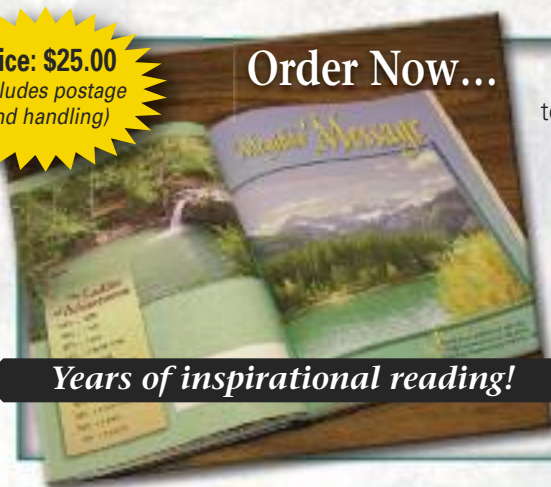
David's whole desire is to be *"blameless... innocent."* And for this he seeks God's help. Blameless means literally "perfect." It is completeness, wholehearted sincerity, complete integrity. It is all good, all pure, with nothing lacking.

What, then, is David's prayer? *"Cleanse me from secret faults,"* from those sins which are so difficult to bring to view. *"Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins,"* from those sins which I shall forever regret if I commit them. Let not them or any other conceivable form of sin *"have dominion over me. Then shall I be blameless"*—perfect, pure, acceptable in Your sight. Then I shall be *"innocent,"* and will someday receive that *"great reward."*

Then God will truly be our Strength and our Redeemer (Ps. 19:14). ♦

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WILL IT HURT MUCH?

My youngest came limping into the house with tears streaming down his cheeks and a ragged hole in the knee of one pant leg. The palm of one grubby hand and the now exposed knee were both scraped raw, obviously the result of some unfor-

fortunate meeting of flesh and pavement. The sobbing subsided somewhat as I soothed and comforted the hurt, but howls of protest went up anew when I suggested cleaning the wounds and administering some medication. "No, Mom! No, no—wait. Will it hurt much?"

This was by no means the first experience of this nature, and each time I am both amazed and amused at the reaction. The hurt is already there, the pain is evident, yet there seems to be a fear that the treatment will not be worth the added hurt. I always try to explain that the medication may sting just a little, and though the washing may be unpleasant for a moment, it will be so much better afterward. It will help keep away infection, which could cause a lot more pain, and the wound will heal more quickly. However, I have discovered that only time and experience will convince the fearful child that the cure is worth the hurt.

Then I look at my own life and wonder if I have ever really learned that the cure is worth the hurt. When there is an area in my life that has been scraped raw by some unfortunate meeting with the realities of life, am I ever afraid of the means by which healing could come? Have I ever pulled back from that word or deed which could cleanse and medicate my wounds because deep inside I was crying, "Will it hurt much?"

Perhaps this was part of the problem of the rich young man who came to Jesus seeking the means to eternal life (Matt. 19:17–22). We know from the account that he was basically a "good" man; but there was a longing in his life

for something more, something beyond. Jesus gave Him the exact answer, one that was exactly suited to his needs, but the young man was afraid it would hurt too much. He went away sad, filled with the pain of giving up what was too precious to him—his wealth.

I recall with shame the number of times I have pulled away from God, fearing how much it was going to hurt. What more was I going to have to give up? How much was it going to hurt to be a "growing Christian"? Then I would take a long look at others and see the festering, ugly sores that sin causes. The wound, to heal, must be cleansed, and the proper medication applied. But oh, there is that dreadful fear that the cleansing and cure will be worse than the disease. How shortsighted we are! How many times we cause ourselves even worse injury by pulling away from the one who would help us, breaking open the wound even more when we struggle against God's cure.

Open wounds fall into four categories: abrasions, incisions, lacerations, and punctures. There are parallels with each in our Christian lives, and God treats each kind differently.

An **abrasion** occurs when the surface is scraped off and the area is left raw and bleeding. Most of us receive abrasions in our lives almost daily from contact with the circumstances of life. These raw areas of life include anything from the small scrape of a sour note in my solo that special Sunday morning to the large scrapes of severe financial problems. I must be ready to accept these abrasions as part of the life God allots me, as part of my training for the larger life to come. For "*we know that all things work together for good to them that love God*" (Rom. 8:28). Through all I must show that I love God, must keep His goals in mind, and do everything in line with those goals. I must remember that only the strait and narrow way leads to eternal life (Matt. 7:14)

An **incision** is a cut. The incisions of my life come from personal, one-to-one contacts with

The cure
(of forgiveness)
is worth the hurt
(of repentance).

people. It may be a cutting word, and if I do not immediately apply medication of forgiveness, the wound becomes sore and inflamed. Those who cause the incision may not even be aware of the injury, but it is so easy for me to disregard that as I nurse my hurt feelings and injured pride that cause even deeper sores to develop. I will never forget what our pastor told us one day, that “you will never suffer from hurt pride if you have no pride to hurt.” Oh! to grow to that point where I have no pride to hurt! Then I will not have to ask God if His cure is going to hurt!

Sometimes even the tiniest wound can be painful—a little paper cut. The same is true in my associations with others. I have sometimes allowed the most insignificant cuts to become much more sore, even infected—all because I kept rubbing them, instead of allowing the Word of God to dictate how I should deal with those feelings. When cut by someone, I must forgive and let it go, not keep nursing it until it is a matter of real consequence.

Lacerations are similar to incisions, but a laceration is a tear rather than a clean cut. Lacerations are more painful than incisions because they are brought about intentionally; because the edges of a tear are more ragged, healing takes place more slowly.

Malicious gossip is probably the most common source of spiritual laceration, and I must confess that I have at times been guilty of doing this to others. I know it is wrong, very wrong, and I have resolved never to do it again.

Puncture wounds are too often self-inflicted. It is difficult for me to admit that I am too often the cause of my own

injury, but such things as stubbornness, moodiness, egoism, and self-pity cause puncture wounds which go deep and are difficult to heal, if I am not continually watching.

One of the dangers of puncture wounds is that they do not bleed freely as other types of wounds do, so there is no cleansing action by the body itself. This is true also of the puncture wounds in my life. I must be willing to turn the treatment over to others and grit my teeth against the pain. Does it hurt much? Yes! But the hurt is insignificant compared to the good that will result.

The deepest hurt sometimes comes when God sends one of His human instruments to help me see the cause of my wound, so that I can avoid it in the future. Yes, I am learning to be thankful for this, too. It is all part of learning to avoid the hurt. Like David, I must learn to pray, “*Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don’t let me refuse it*” (Ps. 141:5 NLT).

And so my resolve is set. The next time I suffer any kind of wound—abrasion, incision, laceration, or puncture—I am going to face the cleansing and medicating process with determination, because I know only good can result if I take it in the right spirit. I am determined to benefit from each experience so that when all is said and done and the last hurt has been healed, I can have a place in that new world where “*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away*” (Rev. 21:4). ♦

Abib 2013 – Calendar

The NEW YEAR is coming, the sacred NEW YEAR as God commanded Moses to measure time.

According to Biblical records, the ancient Hebrews began their sacred year with the new moon of ABIB, or Nisan (see Ex. 12:2; 13:4). ABIB is the first new moon following the spring equinox. The equinox this year occurring on March 21, and the first new moon following on April 10, the Megiddo Church will observe the beginning of the month ABIB on **Wednesday evening, April 10**, continuing through **Thursday, April 11**, Bible time being counted from evening to evening (Lev. 23:35). The day will be observed in recognition of its double significance—as the beginning of the sacred New Year and also as the anniversary of the birth of Christ.

Thirteen days later (Abib 13, this year on **Monday evening, April 22**), we will commemorate the anniversary of our **Lord’s Supper**, and Thursday morning, **April 25** (Abib 15) will be observed as the anniversary of Christ’s **Resurrection**.

Fifty days later on **June 13** will be the anniversary of the day of **Pentecost**, when the power of the Holy Spirit descended upon the assembled disciples.



Alleluia!

WHO IS WORTHY TO OPEN THE SEVEN SEALS?

Revelation 5 (NKJV)

1. And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.
2. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"
3. And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.
4. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.
5. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."
6. And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.
7. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.
8. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.
9. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
10. And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."
11. Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,
12. saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!"
13. And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"
14. Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

"I am a Christadelphian who is currently studying 'the atonement.' I have read through a couple of times the atonement debate between Ruth Sisson and Duncan Heaster. I know that this subject is crucially important, so I want to be sure that I understand this doctrine properly. I would like to know your view regarding Revelation 5:1-10. This passage seems to depict Christ as far more 'worthy' than the rest of us. Only he could open the scroll and seven seals. Is He, in your view, more worthy because of His total sinlessness? If Abraham died having arrived at a perfection of character, wouldn't he be then entitled to also open the scroll and seals? Why was only Christ able to open the scroll and seals? I would appreciate your thoughts on the subject very much."

You are correct that all must reach the same standard of a morally perfect character. Why, then, is Christ the only one counted "worthy" to open the seven seals?

The Greek word from which "worthy" is translated means "counterbalancing, hence weighing as much, of like value, deserving, fit" (LSJ). To be "counted worthy" one must meet the standard of the one who is judging, in this case God the Father. And while the standard is not defined in Revelation 5, the context warrants the conclusion you suggest, that this very honorary task was reserved for the only one who held the record of sinlessness.

What is the difference between Christ's accomplishment and that of others who reach the same standard? All others have transgressed many times and have had to repent and go to God for mercy and forgiveness. Abraham gave a life of exemplary obedience by faith, even heeding the command to "walk before Me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1); but his attainment was far from that of Christ, who never transgressed a law that He had learned. Only of Christ could it be said that He was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Only Christ could be described as "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). Only Christ "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). Only of Christ could it be said, as the Apostle John wrote, "in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Jesus had to learn obedience, just like the rest of us (Heb. 5:8; Isa. 7:14-15), but unlike the rest of us, once He learned a law, He never disobeyed it.

Think what this means. It means He never gave in to a "me first" spirit. He was never vindictive, never resentful, never jealous, never proud of His superior intellect, talents, or accomplishments, never lustful, never foolish, never impatient, never out of control. He never told a lie, never deceived, never retaliated. He never coveted what did not belong to Him, never pressed for His own way against what He knew to be God's. "When He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten" (1 Pet. 2:23). When we think about the magnitude of this attainment, and the iron will He needed to hold Himself to an absolute

obedience to His Father, to “always” do the will of His Father, ever ready with “it is written” when He might be tempted to yield, we can understand why He is “worthy” far beyond anyone else. He gives us the same standard to reach, even the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), but God allows us time to go through many tests and re-tests while we are growing our inner strength of character, because He knows that time and again we will err and will have to repent and go to the throne of grace seeking forgiveness.

We know of a number of persons in Scripture who attained the standard through growth. As mentioned above, Abraham was faithful and obedient, but his obedience was not flawless; it was not without transgressing. We know of at least one time when Moses sinned, when he lost his temper with the rebellious and stubborn people and struck the rock when God had commanded him only to speak to it (Numbers 20:10–13). Because of this transgression, by which he dishonored God, Moses was not allowed to enter Canaan. However, Moses reached the standard in the end; we know because we are told that “Moses was faithful in all his house” (Heb. 3:5), and those who are saved will “sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Rev. 15:3). But Moses’ attainment was not like that of Christ.

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus set the standard at the highest point when He said, “...you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48). In saying this He knew He was demanding the ultimate in effort, but He would not require a standard that humans could not attain. That is why He also said, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate” (Luke 13:24), and that only “few” would enter (Matt. 7:13–14).

The apostle Paul, after many years in the Christian way, said that he himself had not yet attained, nor was he “already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Phil. 3:12). Then he stated his earnest resolve: “One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14).

The heavenly Father, knowing that the rest of Jesus’ followers would need help to reach the goal, assigned Jesus the role of mediator so that He could assist us. Hebrews says of Him, that because “He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18).

With these thoughts in mind let us look at Revelation 5. By dramatizing the scene in which no one could be found who was worthy to “open the scroll and to loose its seals,” the Revelator is pointing up the singular attainment of Jesus Christ. He is without equal. No one could be found “in heaven or on the earth or under the earth” who was able to open the book (Rev. 5:3). Why the description “in heaven or on the earth or under the earth”? The Bible uses these terms (heaven, earth) to specify political figures (heaven), as compared to the general populous (earth), or “under the earth” (those without social status, i.e., slaves). Moses used this

same terminology when he said (Deut. 32:1), “Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth” when addressing the Israelite rulers (heavens) and people (earth). The Psalmist used it when he said, “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad,” again referring to the nation’s rulers and those ruled over (Ps. 96:11).

In the prophetic language of Revelation 5, the sacred scroll written inside and outside and sealed with seven seals, symbolizes the promises of God for this earth, which up to this time are “sealed,” hence the words of the “strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals?’” (Rev. 5:2). The Divine forecasts are “sealed” until one is found who is able to make them happen. This is the work reserved for Christ when He returns as “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14).

Appointed

Bringing about the fulfillment of all the prophecies associated with the coming kingdom is a supreme honor and a prodigious task reserved for the one whom God has appointed. The apostle Paul affirmed this fact when he said that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts. 17:31).

Others, by virtue of attaining a perfect character through growth, are qualified to be the associate rulers of Christ, to sit with Him on His throne of power (Rev. 3:21), to be His associate kings and priests (Rev. 5:9–10), and reign with Him (Rev. 20:4), but only Christ will be the “King of kings” (Rev. 19:16; 17:14).

Prepared

Christ’s qualifications go beyond His perfect obedience. For the past two millennia, He has been at the right hand of the Father, serving as our mediator while we are given time to develop a character worthy of His approval. Even in this capacity He is doubtless learning many of the things He will need to know to administer the new government when He returns to earth.

But more than this, Christ has been preparing for His role as King of the earth. In the parable of the Pounds, He compared Himself to a nobleman going into a far country to receive a gubernatorial assignment (such as the administration of a kingdom), and to return. Such a one would be instructed in the laws of that nation, to administer state affairs according to the laws of that nation. He would also be given the authority He would need. Likewise Christ, while in heaven, is receiving the authority He will need to rule, not over a nation but over the entire earth. And His associate rulers must rule in harmony with His laws, which means they also must have training. As far as we know Christ did not receive training to be a King while on earth; He came as a servant to preach the Kingdom, and will return to take His place as King of the whole earth.

When He returns He will be both “worthy” and fully equipped to bring about all that those seven seals represent. ♦

An Awesomely Thorny Design!

In one of the hottest, driest deserts of the world lives the Thorny Devil Lizard. Found only in the deserts of Western and Central Australia, these 8-inch lizards have some singular features that make them perfectly adapted to the harsh desert conditions. God, their Creator, knew just what a creature would need to survive in a desert where it rarely rains and where temperatures may reach 118°F during the summer months.

On Hot Sand...

Because the sands over which this lizard moves may be very hot, it walks with its body raised up and its tail in the air. No slinking around for this little fellow!

A "False Head"

A unique feature—a "false head" on the back of its neck. This "head" has some large spines

sticking out of it. When the thorny devil feels threatened it may tuck its real head between its front legs thus presenting the "false head" to the enemy—and save its life!

A Thorny Meal

Is a predator serious? It may only try once. While the thorny devil lizard is not a fast runner, neither is it a delicious, succulent meal. This lizard's upper parts are all covered with hard horns—cone-shaped spikes—not exactly what a soft-mouthed animal like a dingo, feral cat or African fox wants to swallow!

Water Collection System

The thorny devil lizard has a unique water collection system which is essential for its survival in the desert. Those conical spikes are not just for protection. They increase the surface area on which dew can condense. Then this small amount of water travels through narrow channels between the spikes down to the corners of this creature's mouth. Awesome!

Menu of Choice

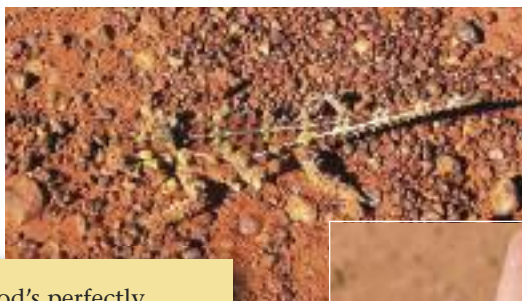
The thorny devil lizard's menu of choice is black ants. How fast? With its sticky tongue it can pick up ants at a rate of 40-45 ants per minute. One study calculated that a thorny devil had 2500 ants in both of its largely filled stomachs.

If there is a puddle of water, the lizard can stand in it and "drink" the water through its feet. How? The water travels by capillary action up its legs and across its body to the mouth. Opening and closing its mouth acts as a pump that keeps the water coming. Amazing?! It took scientists a long time to figure out how the water could flow up to the creature's mouth when it stood in a puddle, but the Almighty designed the thorny devil lizard to be able to survive in a desert.



An Effective Camouflage

The thorny devil lizard is able to change its coloring to match the sandy soils where it lives. This provides effective camouflage. Another ruse it uses to confuse predators is a slow rocking gait which may resemble a dry leaf blown by the wind.



Again we are awed by another of God's perfectly designed creatures. Everywhere we look this awe translates into even greater awe for the Divine Architect. Earth and the heavens are filled with His wonders. So when this earth becomes part of heaven, those worthy to live will continue discovering new wonders through eternity. *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"* (1 Cor. 2:9).

That is a time worth giving our all now to attain. ♦

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ANSWERS FOR PAGE 19

WHAT DID JESUS SAY?

1. Matt. 15:11, "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."
2. Matt. 15:14, "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."
3. Matt. 15:32, "Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.'"
4. Matt. 16:25, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."
5. Matt. 17:20, "So Jesus said to them, 'Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.'"
6. Matt. 18:21-22, "Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"
7. Matt. 21:22, "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."
8. John 20:29, "Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"
9. Matt. 25:23, "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"

10. Matt. 26:52, "But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.'"
11. Luke 5:20, "When He saw their faith, He said to him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'"
12. Luke 5:31, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.'"
13. Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"
14. Luke 9:23, "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"
15. Luke 9:26, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."
16. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10 "It is written."

ABOUT NEHEMIAH

1. One of his brothers and some men from Judah. (Neh. 1:2)
2. He was cupbearer to the king. (Neh. 1:11)
3. He mourned, fasted and prayed. (Neh. 1:4)
4. Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1)
5. Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest for lumber. (Neh. 2:8)
6. He rode around the city wall to assess its condition. (Neh. 2:12-15)
7. Rebelling against the king. (Neh. 2:19)
8. Eliashib. (Neh. 3:1)
9. a. Nehemiah simply prayed. (Neh. 4:1-5)
 b. The Jews prayed and guarded the city day and night—half worked while half stood guard—working and slept with their weapons

near them and fully dressed. (Neh. 4:7-9; 16-23)

c. Nehemiah encouraged all not to be afraid and then he had those living outside move into the city. (Neh. 4:14, 22)

d. He replied, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (Neh. 6:3)

e. Nehemiah replied "You know you are lying. There isn't one bit of truth to the whole story. You're just trying to scare us into stopping our work." (Neh. 6:4-9 LB)

f. Nehemiah replied, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" (Neh. 6:10-12)

10. 52 days (Neh. 6:15)

11. The dedication of the wall. The procession was on top of the newly completed wall and over the gates. (Neh. 12:31-40)

12. He and his men accepted no salary from the people. (Neh. 5:14) 150 Jews, plus some non-Jews, ate at his table at his expense. (Neh. 5:17) He responded to the oppressed poor and made the rich oppressors return what they had taken. (Neh. 5:1-13) He gave liberally toward the work. (Neh. 7:70) The Temple worship was set up again and provisions for the priests, Levites and singers were made. (Neh. 7) The Law was read and interpreted to the people and the nation entered into covenant with God. (Neh. 8, 9 & 13) Keeping the Sabbath holy (Neh. 10:31; 13:15-21)

13. 12 years (Neh. 5:14)

14. Tobiah the Ammonite (Neh. 13:4-9)

Read: Romans 13:11–14

Memorize:

“Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” –Romans 13:14 NIV

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Have you promised to give up some sin in your life? Are you finding it hard to live up to that promise?

Maybe you need to make some permanent changes in order to get rid of your sin. Even if it means giving up something you prize, or one of your friends, decide right now that you will live for Christ, no matter what. Get serious about dealing with sin.

DUSTPAN NEEDED

Mindy, who was staying at her grandma’s house, was helping by sweeping the kitchen. She sighed as she leaned on her broom. “Grandma, why is it so hard to be a Christian?” she asked. “I mean...well, Mom and Dad talk about the bad influence of rock music, and I promised God that I’d stop listening to it. For a while I did good. Then I started looking through my tapes one day, and I just couldn’t keep from playing one of my old favorites. Afterwards that tune kept going around and around in my head. I know it’s wrong and I’ve prayed about it.”

“Well, that’s a start,” encouraged Grandma.

“I don’t know.” Mindy sighed again as she swept all the dirt into a big pile. “Some of my friends listen to rock music, so when I’m with them, I’m listening to the same kind of garbage as before. It’s just no use!”

Before Grandma could comment, the door bell rang, and Mindy went to answer it. Grandma took a load of laundry to the basement.

Some time later, Grandma returned to the kitchen. “Mindy! Come here!” she called sternly.

When Mindy came in, she saw that the big pile of dirt she had carefully swept up was scattered all over the floor. “Oh, no!” she groaned. “I forgot to pick up the dirt. Looks like the dog has gotten into it.”

Grandma nodded. “This reminds me of your problem with rock music,” she said. Mindy looked at the dirty floor and back at Grandma. “The dirt got spread around again because you

didn’t do anything to get rid of it permanently,” explained Grandma, “just as you didn’t do anything to get rid of rock music permanently.”

“Like what?” Mindy asked.

“Like destroying your tapes, for one thing,” said Grandma. “And not spending time with people who are a stumbling-block to you.”

Mindy looked shocked, but then she nodded slowly. “You’re right, Grandma,” she admitted. “It’s time I started getting serious about obeying God. I don’t want dirt in my life!”

GET SERIOUS ABOUT DEALING WITH SIN.



Read: Philippians 2:13–16

Memorize:

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.” –Colossians 3:23

THE ACTIVITY BOX

As Mother put bread in the toaster, she sighed. “We have a lot to do today,” she said.

“We always do on Saturday,” Jessica complained. “Yeah,” murmured Justin. “I hate Saturdays!”

Dad poured a cup of coffee. “I don’t like them, either, because they’re days of whining and grumbling,” he said. “I’m sure the Lord is not pleased with that. Let’s do something about it.”

Justin scowled. “Stop the work and I’ll stop

grumbling.” Dad ignored him. “Please find me a shoe box, Justin,” he said, “and Jessica, you can bring me some paper and a pencil.” The surprised children hurried to get what he asked for. When they returned, Dad said, “Let’s write everything we have to do today on slips of paper and put them in this box.”

“Change the sheets; vacuum the carpet; clean the bathrooms.” Mother quickly named several tasks.

“Sweep the garage; shovel the patio; clean the car,” added Dad.

"I've got to dump the garbage and shovel the..." Justin groaned. "There won't be any end to the list," he complained.

"Wash dishes; water the plants," said Jessica. They each thought of a couple more jobs.

"Now," Dad said, "we'll take turns drawing out a slip and doing whatever is written on it."

"When the box is empty, we could pack a lunch and go sledding at the park," suggested Mother.

"All right!" Jessica and Jason cheered. This was sounding better. "I want to draw first." Jessica reached for the box.

Dad held up his hand. "We forgot something," he said. "We want to give the Lord some time, too."

"Read a chapter in our Bible." Jessica wrote it on a slip of paper. "Stop and give thanks for our family," wrote Justin.

"Memorize tomorrow's Bible verse," added Mother.

"Call Grandpa and remind him we'll be picking him up for church," Dad said as he wrote it down.

Then Dad held the box out to Jessica. "This is going to be the best Saturday we've had in a long time," she said as she drew out a slip and looked at it. Then she groaned. "Even if I do have to clean the bathrooms!"

WORK CHEERFULLY.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

If your tasks have become boring, make an activity box. If it won't work for your family, perhaps it will work for you. List everything you have to do today, and don't forget to include the Lord's work. Then do what *"your hands find to do"* — cheerfully!

Read: 2 Cor. 6:16–18

Memorize:

"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent." —Prov. 1:10

YOUR PRECISION-BUILT "MACHINE"

I wish I was a few years older so I could drive," said Joel. He and his father were looking over their shiny new car as it stood glistening in the sunshine. "It's a great machine, huh, Dad?"

"Yes, Joel, it sure is," agreed Dad. "Want to help me wax it?"

"Sure!" exclaimed Joel, and they were soon busy at it. When they finished, Dad turned and walked into the garage. He came back with a large hammer, which he held out to his son. "Here. Would you like to slam this into the windshield?" he asked. "Just for the fun of it?"

"Dad, why no!" Joel gasped in astonishment. "You can't be serious!" he exclaimed.

Dad smiled. "I'm glad you have better sense than to do that," he said. "Let's talk a minute." He set the hammer down and put his hand on his son's shoulder. "When you were born, God gave you a beautiful, precision-built 'machine' — your body," said Dad. "He asks that you treat it well. That's not expecting too much, is it?" Joel shook his head, smiling at the comparison, and Dad continued. "Son, you've heard about young men and women who have drug problems, haven't you? Those that talk about sharing needles and about ways to protect themselves against some awful diseases?" Dad's voice was quiet, but Joel could hear the urgency in the questions.

Joel nodded. "Yes, Dad, I know about them," he said.

"Well, Joel," continued Dad, "please remem-



ber that there may come a time when some friend of yours will suggest that you 'try it' just once. 'Just for kicks,' he may say, or maybe to prove you're not 'chicken.' You want to be ready to say No! There are an awful lot of bad things that have consequences you don't want. Just like it would be crazy for you to slam that hammer into our beautiful new car," Dad nodded toward the automobile. "It would be even crazier to deliberately do something destructive to the wonderful 'machine' of your body."

Joel nodded. "You can trust me to keep my 'machine' in good shape," he said. Then he added, "And thanks for talking about this. I'll remember."

KEEP YOUR "MACHINE" IN GOOD SHAPE.

The above stories are adapted from *KEYS FOR KIDS* 1999

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Have you been asked by friends to do something you know is wrong? It may happen, and if it does, say "No." The Bible says you are *"fearfully and wonderfully made"* (Psalm 139). God wants you to use it right.



WHEN TOMORROW COMES

Proverbs 27:1

*Boast not thyself of tomorrow;
Who can tell what it will bring?
We poor mortals can not borrow
Of the future anything.
For us but today is certain—
Let us ev'ry moment use,
So that, should Death drop its curtain,
God will not our work refuse.*

*Say not, "I shall go tomorrow,
To a certain place and trade;
And, relieved of ev'ry sorrow,
Glory in the gain I've made."
Rather say, "If God is willing,
I shall journey here or there;
Meanwhile, all my vows fulfilling,
That I may His mercies share."*

*Be not anxious for tomorrow,
Planning what you then shall do;
Leave till then such joy or sorrow
As the day unfolds to you.
Yours today is; as a worker
In the vineyard of the Lord,
Use it! do not be a shirker,
Waiting for tomorrow's word.*

*Life at best is, oh, so fleeting—
They do well who strive today,
That they may, when Jesus meeting,
Be prepared with Him to stay.
Give today your best endeavor,
Serving God with purpose true;
Thus prepare to meet Tomorrow
When Tomorrow comes to you.*

—Liot L. Snyder

*The important thing about your lot in life
is whether you use it for parking or building.*

Don't count the days—make the days count.

*The best preparation for tomorrow
is the proper use of today.*

The greater the difficulty, the more honor and
satisfaction in surmounting it.

ARE YOU FOR SALE?

- **Ahab** sold himself for a vineyard;
- **Judas**, for a bag of silver;
- **Achan**, for a wedge of gold and a garment;
- **Gehazi**, for some silver and garments;
- **Esau**, for a pot of soup
- **Balaam**, for a reward
- **Rich young ruler**, for his possessions
- **Ananias and Sapphira**, for the proceeds
from the sale of their property.

Character is not made in a crisis—
it is only displayed.

What a world this would be if we could forget our
troubles as easily as we forget our blessings.

If I cannot do great things,
I can do small things in a great way.

*In the orchard of opportunity,
it is better to pick the fruit than to wait for it to fall.*



BEST SELLER

*It is worn where fond hands have caressed it
And dog-eared where hearts found release.
Oh no, it is not just the book-of-the-month,
It's the Book of the Centuries.*

*There are tears where a soul shared its sorrow
And smiles where it lightened a load.
There are names of the true and stouthearted
Who cherished it so on life's road.*

*I turn to it when I am happy
And it doubles the joy of the day,
I go to it when I am troubled
And its leaves blow my cares far away.*

*It tells of a glorious tomorrow,
Every page gives the story Divine;
In this quiet, eternal Best Seller,
Is the plan of salvation, you'll find.*

I pray You, O God, that I may be beautiful within.

A godly life is characterized by doing with heart and
mind the things God says are right.

The unexamined life is the wasted life.

Avoid looking at temptation. The more you see of it,
the better it may look.



A PRISONER OF YOUR MIND?

*Have you become a prisoner of your mind?
Has it built bars of steel, with you behind?
Have anger, fear and worry forged the bars
That keep you from the glory of the stars?
You've bound yourself—old hurts and vain regrets,
Old failures that the stronger man forgets;
Oh, show your strength! Cast off the ball and chain!*

*Forget the past! The future lies ahead!
Before you like a dream life's vistas spread.
You can be free. It all depends on you!
With thoughts you mold your life, the things you do.*

*Material circumstances, ill or well,
Are just an outgrowth of the thoughts that dwell
Within your mind. Heal now those ancient scars
And keep before you the glory of the stars!*

—Author Unknown.