

Megiddo Message

Fall 2007



A Morning Prayer
Be with me as I walk the way with Thee;
Make known the secret sins I do not see;
O guide me, keep me, and my Helper be. Amen.



CHAMELEON CHRISTIAN?

I admit to having no affinity for Mr. Lizard. But I am awed by the ability that God has provided one branch of this lowly family. Through a complicated but totally automated process, the chameleon (pronounced *ka'meel-yun*) can actually change his skin colors to blend in with his environment. Put him on grass, and he can look the color of the grass. Let him move onto a tree log, and he'll take on the rough look of bark. Find him on a rock, and he resembles the rock. Yet he is the exact same creature.

This ability to change one's "color" to blend with one's environment is a trait not limited to the hundred plus species of chameleon lizards. Today many Generation X'ers are said to be adopting chameleon personalities (please whomever you are with, be whatever they want you to be) to cope with the pressures of a fiercely competitive society. It is a philosophy of auto-adapt. Adjust your resume to fit the job, even if it doesn't describe the real "you." And if you get the job and can't do it, just pretend. Bluff your way. Being believed, they feel, is more important than being truthful. The outcome? Over time, says a noted socio-psychologist, "chameleonism is self-defeating."

But chameleonism does not stop with Generation X'ers. Look at the church where success is measured in numbers, and membership is dwindling. How can the church draw more converts? Play the chameleon. Soften the colors of the church to blend with the culture. Along with Bible studies, offer activities that appeal to the younger set—games, movies, dances, fashion shows, bake sales. Advertise "buzz" events that feature well known country singers, rock bands, and sports heroes. Relax the dress code. Use contemporary music. Instead of Scripture-based doctrine, teach Christian psychology and positive thinking. Avoid mentioning issues that cause division. Encourage members to blend in with the current culture, so they do not feel conspicuous. Mold Scripture to fit the lifestyles of the people (or omit Scripture altogether), instead of requiring the people to meet the lifestyle of Scripture. What do you have? A Chameleon (not Christian) Church.

But chameleonism does not stop with the Church. The chameleon trait reaches all the way to the individual believer, who reads her Bible, and prays, and wants to be a "good Christian" but who also wants to feel accepted by her peers. When you see her participating in a Bible study, she looks like the ideal.

But meet her at the mall, or at school, or on the street, and—lo!—you hardly recognize her. She has changed her colors to blend into the environment. She looks like "one of the crowd."

So, where does the chameleon trait come from? It is in your heart and mine. The instinct to conform is born in each of us. Who does not want to be a "good Christian" AND be accepted? Who does not want to be everybody's friend AND Christ's friend (see James 4:4)?

This is why the Bible says, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*" (Rom. 12:2). Or as the Phillips Bible phrases it, "*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.*" In other words, don't be a chameleon.

Christians cannot be chameleons. When we are with friends who want us to go against what the Bible teaches, we must say No, and not do it. When there is a magazine or book we know we should not read or look at, we must say No and not read it. At other times there will be conversation we should not join in with, and words we should not use. Others may read books or look at pictures we know are not God honoring. Our loyalty to the standard of Christ must be *always* the same *all* the time, whether we are with Christian friends or strangers.


As we follow Christ, we shed the patterns and habits of the world—the character assassination, the constant dissatisfactions, the love of entertainment, the conformity to style, the sexual freedoms—and "*put on Christ*" (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 13:14). The Bible calls Christ's followers "strangers" and "aliens" (1 Pet. 2:11) for a reason—they live "in the world," but they keep their "foreign" (Christian) culture. They don't blend in; they don't belong; they don't share the views and opinions of this world.

And they don't *want* to—for very good reason: "*The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever*" (1 John 2:17)—forever!

What if we choose to be Christian chameleons (or chameleon Christians) and blend in with whomever we are with so we won't seem so different, so we won't attract negative comments, so we can avoid some of that awful embarrassment? Impossible! We can't do it. Remember Jesus' words: "*Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you*" (Luke 6:26).

We are either chameleons or Christians. We can't be both. **MM**

*He who stands for
nothing is vulnerable to
everything.*



Who stretched out
the heavens and called
each star by name?

WHO Did It?

An article in the *Smithsonian* called “Digging for Dinosaur Gold” highlights the excavation of some ancient mammoths. One apparently carnivorous creature unearthed had foot-long teeth shaped much like a serrated saw blade. How did the creature come by such an ideal tool for rending flesh? Said the author, “I marveled at the exquisite efficacy of Darwinian selection, which had lined these killer teeth with fine parallel serrations.” Who did it? Who designed these teeth for this meat-eating animal? If it were a work of art, one would credit an artist. If it were a machine, one would seek out the engineer who designed it. But an animal that lived and sustained itself for many years, that reproduced its kind and performed all the life processes—such a creature is said to be the result of blind and undirected chance (natural selection)! Such reasoning requires more faith than to believe in a supreme Deity that can create and order at will. It almost seems that every effort is made to deny and discredit the Creator. What an insult to Omnipotence!

Or take the continual discoveries of galaxies in the heavens, vast beyond fathoming. What do scientists conclude? Only that they are seeing nearer and nearer to the time of the Big Bang, that supposed tremendous explosion that resulted in billions of galaxies, each populated with hundreds of billions of suns.

Look at a cell, or the atom, or our own bodies, all incredibly complex. Who did it? Who is responsible for their existence, their complexity, their wonders? Can any thinking person really believe that such precisely

functioning, intricate structures came about without intelligent direction?

Think about the simplest blessings of life—sunshine, water, food, breath, laws of gravity, laws of growth, laws of reproduction. The list could go on and on. Without any one of them we wouldn’t be. What could we do without the Designer behind it all?

What is our response, yours and mine? Am I truly grateful to God for all that He has done? Am I ready to say with the Psalmist, “*Great things You have done*”? Am I anxious and ready to give Him all the glory He is due? And then the question that follows: What does God expect of me? How can I show Him worship and praise?

To be truly thankful is to be aware of the many forces that combine to make our lives what they are in spite of difficulties, in spite of our thoughtless ingratitude.

To be thankful is to acknowledge that we have been blessed by others and blessed by God. We need others. Above all, we need God.

To be thankful is to acknowledge that we did not do it ourselves.

WHEN WE WANT CREDIT...

Yet how easily we are tempted to take credit for ourselves. Perhaps we are a little like the woodpecker that said, “Look what I did!” What did he do? He gave a mighty peck to the great tree just as lightning struck it, and the giant oak came crashing down.

But there is danger, great danger, that when our blessings multiply and the work of our hands prospers,

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FRONT COVER PHOTO BY EDWARD SHAYLER: BOW VALLEY PROVINCIAL PARK,
AT EASTERN END OF BARRIER LAKE, ALBERTA, CANADA

MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

WE BELIEVE...

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

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

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

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

THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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

*Only fools say in their hearts,
“There is no God.”
They are corrupt, and their
actions are evil; no one does good!*
—Psalm 53:1

we will think just as proudly—and vainly—as the poor woodpecker, “Look what I did!” We so easily remember our small part and forget the great debt we owe to God for our blessings, our lives, and our very being.

At times we can see how foolish it is to commend ourselves for what we do. Like the great King Nebuchadnezzar said, “Is not this great Babylon which I have built?” For, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, God will “punish the fruit of the arrogant heart....For he has said, ‘By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent’” (Isa. 10:12–13).

Hear the reply of the Lord: “Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, Or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!” (v. 15).

A TIME TO REMEMBER GOD

Many passages of Scripture remind us of our need to remember God. Among them is a sermon by Moses, recorded in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses spoke these words when the nation of Israel was standing on the brink of the Jordan, ready to enter the Land of Promise. It was a time to remember. Too easily they would forget the lessons learned in the wilderness.

“Beware” was the key word in Moses’ message. “Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God and disobey his commands” (Deut. 8:11 NLT).

“Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God.” For well Moses knew—and God knew—they would forget. When would this happen? When they should begin to prosper, when their barns began to fill and their herds began to multiply and all was well with them.

“Lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;...then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’ And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives



*Who put awesome
power in the elements?*

you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day” (Deut. 8:12–14, 17–18). Or, as phrased in the Jerusalem Bible, “Beware of saying in your heart, ‘My own strength and the might of my own hand won this power for me.’”

Or, in simplest free paraphrase, Beware, lest you think you did it!

It is our problem, too. The Great Apostle addressed “everyone who is among you” with his warning: “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (Rom. 12:3 NIV).

Are we able to maintain a truly thankful spirit in everything we do?

Are we able to say honestly that we are more concerned that God gets all the credit due to Him than that we get the little due to us?

Are we willing to remain unrewarded for the time, if need be, if only we can qualify for that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?

God knows what to expect from human clay. He had blessed Israel, given them all they needed to sustain them for forty years in the wilderness, yet He foresaw that when they would be comfortably settled in the land of Promise they would soon begin commending themselves for what they had accomplished, instead of honoring God.

“Beware—lest you think you did it.”

Ingratitude is one of the symptoms of godlessness. Gratitude to God is one of the greatest evidences of humility. Gratitude and humility are virtues that walk



Who designed the flower—
the eye to see it and the mind to
appreciate it?



Who orchestrated the
delicate and vital
process of pollination?

hand in hand all the way into the Kingdom of God—in fact, they cannot be separated.

The apostle Paul, writing to the overconfident in the Church of Corinth—and to us—was well aware of this human shortcoming. He wrote: *“For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* (1 Cor. 4:7).

However glorious the exalted feelings we may entertain of our own worth, God knows. There is no need to commend ourselves. Perhaps we have done well. Perhaps we have rendered distinguished service in behalf of the Lord’s cause. Still the question remains: *“What do you have that you did not receive?”* What did we use to render that service but the health, the strength, and the ability God gave us—which was only our duty to use. In fact, if we had not used our God-given ability and rendered the service, we would be condemned. God is well able to find someone else to do it.

When we say “I did it” and take the credit to ourselves, we disqualify ourselves for the blessing that would have been ours, for God will find another to take our crown.

GOD WILL REWARD

Whatever our age or stage in life, whatever our responsibilities, whatever we are or are not able to do for God and His Kingdom, God knows, and we must trust Him to bless and reward accordingly. It is our part to obey; God’s to reward.

The prophet Daniel is a striking contrast to the ungrateful “I did it” complex. Hear the king asking him what he was able to do in interpreting the King’s dream, and hear him reply nobly, meekly, humbly in these

God-exalting words that heaven rejoiced to hear: *“But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart”* (Dan. 2:28–30).

Daniel was too great a man to take the credit to himself. God’s honor was supremely important. He knew that if he honored God, as every mortal should, God would take care of whatever belonged to Daniel.

Still, we are not by nature like Daniel. Thanksgiving comes to remind us that we need help. No one is self-sufficient, either for this world or for the world to come. We need God. We need also to recognize God’s work in our behalf. And we need to feel and to acknowledge this—with gratitude.

WE OWE OTHERS...

We need to give credit to those who have lived before us, who made possible the blessings we enjoy. Little credit can we take for making, designing or imagining the multitude of common items we use every day. What about the automobiles we drive, the fabric in the clothes we wear, the homes we live in, with their countless conveniences and comforts; simple items like pencils, pins, paper, and plastics. How many of these would we have if we depended on our own skills, if we had to say of everything we had, “I did it”?

Our ancestors and the work they accomplished are very much a part of our lives. We owe them a very large debt of thanks.

We owe them again for the degree of health that is ours. Of course, how we care for our health is very important in whether we live a long and healthy life. There is no substitute for good health habits. However, our background is a major factor; and there are often misfortunes beyond our control.

To our ancestors we are indebted, too, for our coun-

*“What do you have
that you did not receive?”*

—1 Cor. 4:7

try. We are indeed fortunate in that regard. Our ancestors left comfortable homes to brave the Atlantic in frail crafts to settle in a wilderness, to cut the trees, till the ground and plant their crops and fashion here a new and wonderful way of life. The land they settled, the Constitution they framed, the nation they created, the battles they fought to preserve the nation—all of these, and more, they did on our behalf. We did not do it. We can only give them credit. Like the officer talking to St. Paul, our forefathers can claim: *“With a great sum obtained I this freedom.”* And so they did. We have inherited the treasure, priceless and unique. We did not do it; they did.

CHANCE OR PLAN?

A writer once asked one very successful businessman how he happened to make the decision that led to his success. His answer was simply: “I was just there. They asked me if I would do it. I recognized a good thing when I saw it, and told them I would. Launching the venture was pure chance. After that it was all hard work.” Events in this world and in the lives of those not bound to God’s purposes are pure chance; events in the lives of Christians are opportunities which, by the help of God, may be used to fashion us for eternal usefulness.

Recall the words of the Sacred Page once again: *“And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* In other words, “Beware—lest you think you did it.”

We are indebted, too, for our ideals, those marvelous lights of purpose that keep us on a definite path and out of trouble. The course we have chosen is no chance route. Principles and ideals have guided us to the point where we stand. How thankful we can be for these high ideals!

Our nation today has largely abandoned its principles and ideals. One by one they have thrown them overboard, so to speak, to lighten the ship. They have become satisfied with that which is low, and forgotten the high ideals of the founding fathers.

Now is the time to remember the ideals and principles which guided our fathers in the past, to give credit to these ideals, and to pray that we may learn to keep them.

*Who developed the sense
of smell—and the experience
of taste?*



Again comes the warning: “Beware—lest you think you did it.”

THANKS TO WHOM?

When we think about our ancestors, fathers and mothers in the faith, our ideals, our circumstances, and even our very lives, we are talking about only one source to which we can give credit: God. All is God’s activity. All these events are working out His purposes for us. This is the meaning of Paul’s words in Romans: *“In everything God works for good to them that love him”* (Rom. 8:28). In other words, we have to be in a covenant relationship with God so God can have His way with us. This is what belief in God is all about. It is letting Him take over the directing of our lives—in the words of Proverbs, *“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths”* (Prov. 3:6). God will work, but we must give God our will—our all. Otherwise we are not truly believing.

Who cannot say, “God has blessed my life?” Is there one who has not some special cause for gratitude? It was more than chance or fate that we are what we are, that we are where we are, that we have what we have. It is God rescuing us from the darkness of this world to be part of His Kingdom.

Thanksgiving is a time when we give credit where credit is due: to God. And He will give us our portion in due time. In the meanwhile let us heed this admonition from the apostle Paul: *“In everything give thanks,”* knowing indeed that *“the Lord is great and greatly to be praised.”*

Let us have the humility to relinquish our natural claim to any credit for ourselves and give all to God. Then in the ages to come He will keep on giving—more than we can ask or imagine!

Who else can do it! MM

KNOW YOUR PROVERBS

1. One who is dishonest in business is _____ ?
2. What else will a person keep who keeps his mouth and tongue?
3. A lovely woman who lacks discretion is compared to what?
4. What fatherly benefit does the Lord give to those He loves?
5. What is the destination of pride?
6. How is a child known?
7. What are seven things that God hates?
8. What will happen when you train up a child in the way he should go?
9. "The fear of the Lord is to hate" what?
10. If you trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't depend on your own ideas, what will God do for you?
11. What is compared to a "proverb in the mouth of fools"?
12. Why shouldn't you boast about what you will do tomorrow?
13. What will happen to one who causes the upright to go astray in an evil way?
14. What are we instructed to do with "mercy and truth"?
15. What will happen if we commit our works to the Lord?
16. Why are we advised to "get wisdom"?
17. By what type of searching does one find knowledge and understanding?
18. What is the end of those who acquire wealth by lying?

ANSWERS

KNOW YOUR PROVERBS

1. Abomination to the Lord (11:1)
2. They will keep their soul from trouble (21:23)
3. A ring of gold in a swine's snout (11:22)
4. He corrects them, as a father would correct his son (3:11-12)
5. Destruction (16:18)
6. By his doings (20:11)
7. A proud look; a lying tongue; hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that devises wicked plans; feet that are swift in running to mischief; a false witness that speaks lies; he that sows discord among brethren (6:16-19)
8. When he is old he will not depart from it (22:6)
9. Evil, pride, arrogance, the evil way and the perverse mouth (8:13)
10. Direct your paths (3:5-6)
11. It is like the legs of the lame that hang limp (26:7); it is like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunkard (26:9)
12. Because you do not know what a day may bring forth (27:1)
13. He himself will fall into his own pit (28:10)
14. Bind them around your neck, write them on the table of your heart and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man (3:3-4)
15. Our thoughts will be established (16:3)
16. Because wisdom is the principal thing (4:7)
17. Seek as for silver, search as for hidden treasure (2:3-6)
18. Death (21:6)



MONEY AND POSSESSIONS

1. When Jesus was asked if he paid taxes, what animal concealed a coin with which to pay the taxes?
2. What was Abram rich in?
3. Which of the Gospel writers was a tax-collector?
4. What is the root of all evil?
5. When Saul defeated the Amalekites, he disobeyed God by two actions. What were those two wrong actions?
6. In a parable told by Jesus, what did the rich man plan to do with the surplus of the crops that he grew?
7. Who thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money? What was Peter's reply to him?
8. What did God promise Abraham as an everlasting possession?
9. What possession did Naboth refuse to sell to King Ahab?
10. Ananias and Sapphira sold some property and secretly kept part of the proceeds for themselves. What happened to them?
11. What gift did Peter and John give to the beggar at the temple gate instead of the silver or gold he was asking for?

MONEY AND POSSESSIONS

1. Fish (Matt. 17:27)
2. Silver, gold and cattle (Gen. 13:2)
3. Matthew (Matt. 9:9)
4. Love of money (1 Tim. 6:10)
5. He took the best of the land and Agag the king (1 Sam. 15:1-9)
6. Build larger barns to store them (Luke 12:16-18)
7. Simon the sorcerer. Peter told him, "Your money perish with you" (Acts 8:9, 18-20)
8. The land of Canaan (Gen. 17:1, 8)
9. Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-3)
10. They died (Acts 5:1-10)
11. They healed the lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:1-8)

What Is True Integrity?

by SAMUEL NEWRAY

This question demands the right answer. What is true integrity? Many people think themselves honest, people possessing a high degree of honor and respect. But is it true integrity from God's point of view?

Let us look at integrity from two perspectives: (1) the natural perspective and (2) the Christian perspective. From the natural perspective, one may look at integrity as appearing to be honest. Christian integrity is much more. It is committing ourselves to live a life worthy of His calling, giving ourselves ultimately and entirely to live by the standard of the God of heaven, the God who can give us salvation.

Integrity is a life without compromise, a life that requires our total commitment and devotion to doing what we believe to be right, not pretending to be what we are not. If the Lord were to cross-examine us, would He say that we are honest, that we have true Christian integrity? As David said in Psalm 26:1 (NLT), *"Declare me innocent, O Lord, for I have acted with integrity, I have trusted in the Lord without wavering."* David was committed to doing those things that please God. He knew he was responsible to God and was being honest before God. He had an honest heart, a heart that could face the wrong, acknowledge it, and turn and do right.

Many people think of integrity as just possessing some kind of high esteem, high caliber or total quality or personality of oneself, but true integrity means total honesty, total trustworthiness, total submission to the will of God. When we possess that type of integrity, we will try to walk blamelessly before God and will be people of humble and pure hearts. We will let our conversation speak for who we are. People will not find fault with what we do or say. Our yes will be yes, and our no will be no. We will put away all filthiness and all corrupt practices, realizing that no liars will enter the eternal city (Rev. 21:8, 27).

As Christians, we are commanded to be obedient and honest in doing the will of the Lord. True happiness in the Lord comes when we become committed and are obedient to His word. David said in Psalm 119:1-3, *"Happy are the people of integrity who follow the laws of the Lord. Happy are those who obey His decrees and search for Him with all their hearts. They do not compromise with evil, but they walk only in His paths"* (NLT).

Do we ever compromise with evil?

There are many ways we may compromise with evil—in our day to day conversations, in our association with people,

"The godly walk with integrity."

in our work place, in our church congregation, in our classroom, in our home, in our religious beliefs, and much more. The Psalmist David resolved to be honest even at home. He said, *"I will behave myself in a perfect way. O when will thou come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart"* (Ps. 101:2). David kept himself aware of his commitment to integrity and walking with godly devotion.

It is the responsibility of all true children of God to walk with integrity, to walk without blame. Prov. 20:7 (NLT) says, *"The godly walk with integrity, blessed are their children."*

There are many today who tend to compromise their religious beliefs, and follow false teachings. Isn't this compromising with evil? Yes, indeed!

INTEGRITY UNDER PRESSURE

The Christian's integrity must hold up under pressure. If we are truly children of God, hardship will not cause us to do things just to get ahead or get what we want. We may be tempted during hard times to do some things out of the way, and against our own way. But we must stand firm to resist the temptation. Let us learn from Daniel who, faced with extreme stress and difficulties in the king's palace, refused to give in. Even in the face of death, Daniel continued to pray to his God. This is true integrity—awesome indeed!

If in the face of difficulty we fall, we must be frank to acknowledge our wrongdoing, repent and turn to do right. We must not hide or cherish iniquity in our heart, or the Lord will not hear us when we pray to Him (Ps. 66:18). We must also learn to forgive those who wrong us and are willing to repent. Many of us do not like to admit or acknowledge our wrong doing, but cover our wrongs to save our face and cover our shame. The only way to do the right thing is to admit the wrong we do and resolve not to repeat it.

God knows our hearts. He knows where we are weak. He does not expect us to go a whole lifetime without any slips. But He does demand honest hearts of repentance and our unfailing love for Him.

Let us remain committed and steadfast in the work of the Lord and never waver. Let our integrity be proven by our actions and our character. Let our integrity and responsibility work together until we have formed the character God can approve and to which He can say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."* MM

“Write...Send” to

PART FIVE

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:

“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

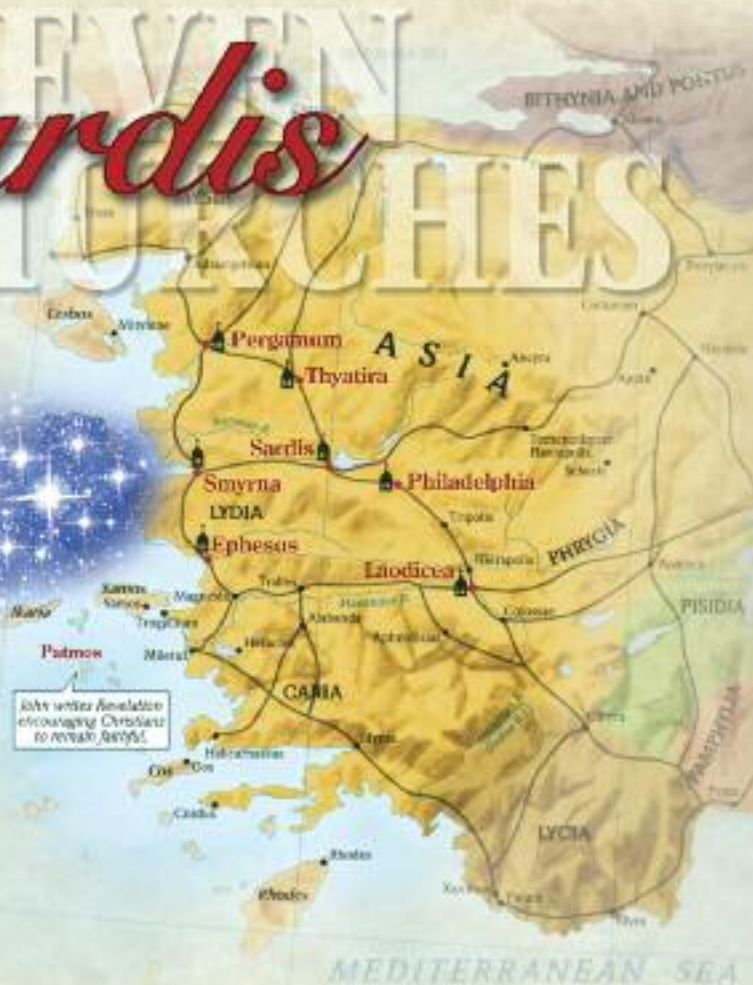
Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. –Revelation 3:1–6

Sardis



TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS:

YOU ARE Dead!

How would you feel if Jesus should step up to you right now and say, “You’re dead!”? You know you are standing on your feet, breathing, your heart beating. What would Jesus be saying?

Yet these are His shocking words to the church at Sardis. He says, “*I know your works, that you have a name, that you are alive, but...*” But what? What comes next? It is a statement directly opposite to the one just made: “*you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead*” (3:1).

A STERLING REPUTATION

“*I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive.*” The Church at Sardis had apparently acquired a tremendous reputation. It was well respected in the city. It was known among the Christian churches in the area for its vigor and vitality. If you had been coming to Sardis and asked anyone about the Church there, the reply might have been, “I’ve heard about that Church, it’s brimming with life.” The appearance was impres-

sive: lots of religious activities, good deeds to the poor, programs for the children, programs for the elderly, and workshops for those between. But the great Physician had put His hand on the pulse of this Church, and found no heartbeat. It was a church suffering from rigormortis. As He saw it, the Church was a spiritual graveyard. He did not call them weak, He did not call them sick. He called them dead.

Jesus' letter to the Church in Sardis is a spiritual wakeup call: *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die"* (3:2). In other words, this letter is a ringing alarm—and Jesus says, in effect, Don't hit the snooze button. Don't read this letter and then fall back to sleep, because your life is at stake.

Each of us is in reality three different persons: 1) the person we think we are; 2) the person that others think we are; and 3) the person Christ sees.

We are all vulnerable to falling into a trap of complacency. Is Jesus speaking to us also? Are we compromising the gospel in our everyday lives? Are we too comfortable with who we are and what we are doing, too satisfied, too engrossed with our good points and blind to our deficiencies?

Jesus was looking deeper than the surface. He was not looking at the outward attractiveness. He was looking for inner dedication, real Christian devotion, moral purity, sacrificial love, and uncompromising courage to stand for right, no matter what the circumstances.

That is also what He is looking for in us today. Have some of the world's subtleties crept into our lives? Does our thinking revolve around this world's view of success? Christ does not care about our name. He does not care about our job title, or our position, or how much money we make, or what car we drive, or what kind of house we live in. He is looking at the heart. He wants holiness of character. We may have every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed with respect to the

VISIT FIRST-CENTURY SARDIS

Sardis was built on a mountain. On three sides the mountain slope was fifteen hundred feet of nearly perpendicular rock, with Sardis standing at the top. The fourth side had a gentler slope, and was defended by a wall and gate. This made Sardis a virtually impregnable fortress.

In the thirteenth century BC, Sardis was the magnificent capital of the province of Lydia. It had a carpet industry, and a booming dye industry. And being on a trade route, it benefited from the merchandise of the other parts of the ancient world. Of one of its kings, Croesus, it was said that "everything he touched turned to gold." Gold and silver coins were first minted at Sardis.

Because of its wealth and natural defenses, the people of Sardis easily became complacent, overconfident, and none too vigilant.

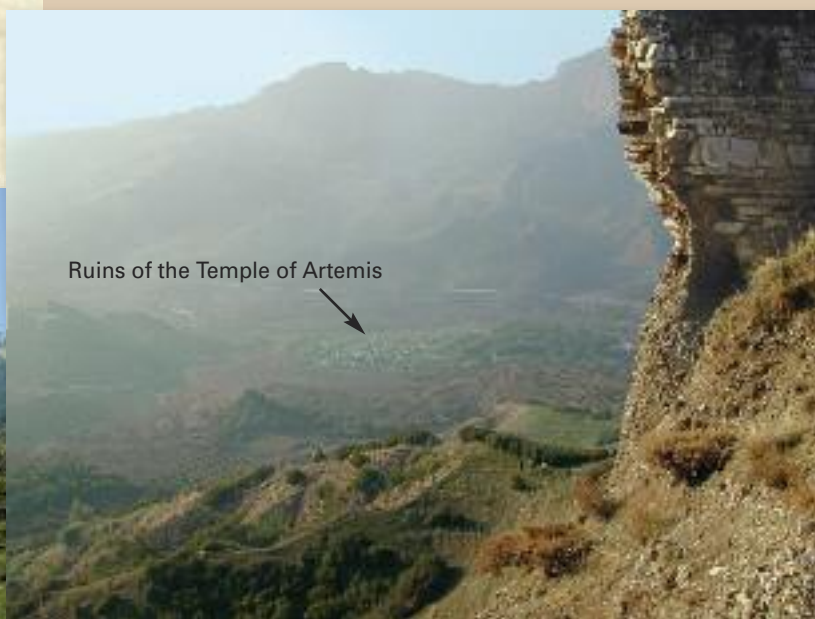
When Persia began its conquest under Cyrus, Sardis became a target of enemy attack. In 549 BC, King Cyrus of Persia failed to conquer the city in a frontal attack. But Cyrus was not one to be so easily set back. Confident Croesus returned to his city to celebrate his victory, only to find out that wily Cyrus had followed Croesus' army at a distance where they could not be seen, and that same night, just when Croesus had let down his guard, and was enjoying his victory, Persian soldiers worked their way up a crevice in one of the nearly perpendicular walls of the mountain and thus entered and conquered the city from its unguarded rear.

This bit of history was repeated several centuries later when Antiochus the Great also took Sardis by surprise, when its defenders had once again become complacent. Once again, overconfidence was their downfall.

Is it strange that Jesus calls Sardis the sleeping church—or, the dead church? What is His primary message? "Wake up."



(background) Famous acropolis on which ancient Sardis was built. (below) Ruins of a small Christian Church built on to the Temple of Artemis. Were they compromising?



Ruins of the Temple of Artemis

(above) Early Sardis was built on an acropolis that had walls almost perpendicular. The craggy rock, actually a spur of Mt. Tmolus, was inaccessible except by one steep, narrow passage. Is the structure at the right part of what remains of the wall of ancient Sardis?

SUMMING UP...

What did Jesus think about each church?

Ephesus had neglected its priorities—they still had love, but they had lost their first love.

The Church at **Smyrna** was struggling against physical poverty and persecution.

Pergamum found itself in the midst of religious compromise.

The Church at **Thyatira** could tolerate almost any standard, any lifestyle, any role model, even to Jezebel.

And **Sardis**? The problem at Sardis was all of the above, except Smyrna's poverty and persecution. There was no persecution in the Church at Sardis, because there was nothing to persecute. There was no trespassing on enemy territory because this Church was everybody's friend. There were no Jewish accusers. No domineering Nicolaitans. No false apostles. No Jezebels. No Baalamites. No zeal. No life. It was a serious indictment. The world did not threaten the Church, because the Church had opened its doors and taken in the world.

world around us. But Jesus, looking inside, may say, "You are dead."

I am reminded of a comment someone made about a church that had some Sardis-like characteristics. Asked how that church was doing, this person said, "I would say that the blower is going strong, but the furnace is out."

A dead person does not love. A dead person does not have emotions. A dead person does not feel. A dead person does not have convictions. A dead person does not do anything. That is why the Bible says, *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going"* (Eccl. 9:10).

Was He saying that there was no activity, no feeling, no heart? There was no activity, feeling or heart toward Him and His cause. There was plenty of activity, but it was not spiritually motivated. It was not fed by an inner spiritual life. It had been formerly, but now they were living on their reputation. The blower was still going, but the fire—the enthusiasm—for God and His cause had gone out.

Jesus was capable of powerful similes. He termed the scheming Pharisees a *"brood of vipers"* (Matt. 23:33). Another time He called them *"blind guides"* (Matt. 23:24). Again He said, *"You pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone"* (Matt. 23:23).

Again He said, *"You cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence"* (Matt. 23:25). The solution? *"First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also"* (23:26).

Sardis had a sterling reputation. But reputation is not character. Someone has well said that reputation is what people think we are; character is what God knows we are. God, who looks beneath the surface that is brimming with life and activity, sees the real love, the real devotion, the real concern, the real spiritual faith—or lack of it. In Sardis, He saw the *lack*.

God hates pretense; He hates hypocrisy. He wants His people genuine through and through, the same outside and inside. He wants those who profess and possess. He wants people who say what they mean and mean what they say. That is why He condemned the Pharisees, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness"* (Matt. 23:27).

The church looked good on the outside. They had doctors, and lawyers, and politicians and professionals who were highly intellectual. But Jesus was not looking for intellect. They had lots of money and activity. But Jesus was not looking for these. As Jesus saw them, Sardis was living a lie.

THE REMEDY

The problem was serious, but not hopeless. Wherever Jesus had a criticism, He also had a remedy. You don't have to stay dead, He says. There is hope!

Approximately 20% of the letter is condemnation. The rest is recommending a solution: *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to*



KEY QUESTIONS

- ◆ *Why might Jesus have said to the church in Sardis, "WATCH"?*
- ◆ *What was the most serious problem in the church in Sardis?*
- ◆ *Why did Jesus promise to walk with some of the people "in white"?*
- ◆ *What is the value of a good name if one is spiritually dead?*
- ◆ *What kills a church?*
- ◆ *What brings a church (or people) back to spiritual life?*
- ◆ *What did Jesus promise the "undefiled"? (3:4)*
- ◆ *What does Jesus promise the overcomers?*
- ◆ *What kind of obedience delivers one from spiritual death? (Rom. 6:17)*

die...remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent" (Rev. 3:2-3).

Jesus has five recommendations: 1) be watchful; 2) strengthen what remains; 3) remember where you have come from; 4) hold fast; 5) repent.

Let's look at each more closely.

1) **Be watchful.** In other words, wake up! Face your situation for what it is. Face the failure, acknowledge it, and set about to change. Start walking the talk. If you say you are a Christian, you need to start *living* like a Christian.

We cannot correct a fault until we confront it. That is why Jesus says, "*Be watchful.*" Face reality. Yes, we are not as bad as someone we know about, and we are better than we used to be, but that does not make us what we ought to be.

The apostle Paul gave the same warning to his Ephesian brethren: "*Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light*" (Eph. 5:14). In other words, Wake up to what is happening around you! Wake up and see what you are professing. Wake up to the important opportunities you are missing!

2) **Strengthen the things that remain.** Jesus sees the remains of what used to be alive and thriving, and says, Revive it! Any good habit, good thought, good intention, good action, or tradition, or background, revitalize it! Make it grow. Perhaps you had some familiarity with words of Scripture? Review it! Is there a Christian friendship almost forgotten? Seek it out and renew it! Whatever remains that bears likeness to Christ, strengthen it! Why? Because you have not yet arrived. "*I have not found your works perfect before God.*"

3) **Remember how you received and heard.**

Memory is a great reinforcement. We do not want to live in the past, or go back to the past. But we can use those memories to make us stronger today. What helped us build our faith before can build our faith again. What made us stronger before can make us stronger again. He says, remember where you have come from. Remember the lessons you learned, and the people whose examples of faith and courage inspired you. Go over them in your mind. Make them part of your life today.

Paul said the same to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15. "*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that*

JESUS' ASSESSMENT

Critique/Condemn. "*I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.... I have not found your works perfect before God*" (3:1-2). Sardis had suffered spiritual death. Growing more and more tolerant of sin, they had been contaminated by the world, and were finding their "life" in the world instead of in following Christ. Even though still going through the motions of worship, they were without spiritual life. Sardis was "the world" under the title of "Church."

Critique/Commend. "*I have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy*" (3:4). "Few" means slight or small. "Garment" refers to one's character. There were a few people even in Sardis who were keeping their garments of character unspotted—uncontaminated—from the world (Jas. 1:27), who were living pure, upright, wholesome lives. To them Jesus gave a great promise: "*They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.*"

Counsel. "*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die... Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent*" (3:2-3). There was a command for every level in the church. To the dead or sleeping: "**Wake up... watch.**" To the weak: "**Strengthen**" whatever is still alive. To the partially alive: "**Remember**" the good instruction you had in the past. To the faithful: "**Hold fast.**" Don't get distracted. To the carnal-minded: "**Repent.**" Turn around.

Ultimatum and Judgment. "*If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you*" (3:3).

Crowning Promise. "*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels*" (3:5). Always there are promises to the overcomers, those who refuse to compromise. Think about those promises—the white robes, symbolizing purity, victory and glory. Then think about having your name in the Book of Life, *never, never* to be blotted out.

What a beautiful picture of immortality! Then add the honor of receiving the special recognition of the Heavenly Father and His angels! What measureless blessings (1 Cor. 2:9) and all because they refused to compromise with evil!

Ruins of the magnificent Temple of Artemis built in the 6th century BC by the wealthy King Croes of Lydia. Sometime after Christ, a small brick (Christian) church was attached to the Temple of Artemis.

To enter this Church, worshippers actually had to walk between the enormous pillars of the temple! One wonders why here? What were the motives and circumstances? Jesus knows—He is judge.



AN EXAMPLE FROM THE ERMINE

There is a story of a little animal called the Ermine. This little creature is known for its very special, white fur. It is said that when you put its fur against snow, you can hardly see the fur against the snow, it is so white.

Apparently the little animal knows what it has to do to keep that fur white. How do hunters capture the Ermine? Someone has said that they find the Ermine's hole while the animal is out hunting during the day, and put mud around the hole. The little Ermine is so proud of his white coat that he will not go through the dirt to get back into his hole. So when he comes home, they can catch him easily. He would rather face death than get his coat dirty.

Isn't this the lesson Jesus is teaching? White garments have to be kept white. And how do we keep them white? By keeping away from anything that contaminates. If we are going to have white garments of character, we have to be keeping them white every day. We put spots on our garments whenever we are unkind or impatient. We put spots on our garments when we pick up a sarcastic or cynical attitude from people around us. We put spots on our garments when we do not show a Christ-like spirit to our family, or friends, or associates at work. We put spots on our garments when we insist on our own way, and are not easily entreated.

What did the Wise Man say? *"Let your garments be always white"* (Eccl. 9:8).



ERMINE



word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1–2). The words they had heard were the key to salvation if—"if you hold fast," if you seize them, if you keep them in mind.

If we allow our minds to dwell on anything and everything that happens by, our minds will be cluttered with rubbish. But if we keep focused on the evidence God has given us, the solid fundamentals that support our faith, and the goals and promises He has set before us, when we have time for leisure we can enjoy thoughts that are inspiring, uplifting, and invigorating. That is why Jesus says, "Remember." Remember the good examples you have seen. Think back to what inspired you. Put these facts in your mind, and go over and over them. Keep reviewing the facts that pertain to your eternal salvation.

We are what we think about. And what we think about is our choice. Thoughts will come into our minds, but we do not have to fondle them. We can choose what we think about, and memory can be our servant.

4) **Hold fast!** In other words, take it to heart! Follow and observe the things you have been taught. Pay attention to the pure teaching of the Word of God.

We are in constant danger of being distracted. From morning until night, distractions threaten to pull our minds away from the important issues of life. That is why Proverbs says, *"Keep your heart with all diligence"* (4:23). That is why Jesus says, *"Hold fast."* Grab that good thought, that powerful illustration, and keep it fresh in your mind.

5) **Repent or perish.** What does that mean? Turn around, and go the opposite direction while you still have time.

Repent is a three-step process. The first step is to become aware of the problem, to realize what we should have done and did not do. The next step is to feel sorry about our wrong course of action. The third step is to turn it around. Being aware is not enough. Acknowledging the wrong is not enough. To repent, one must turn from the problem to the solution.

Why is repenting so important? Listen to Jesus' warning: *"If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you"* (Rev. 3:3). If you are not watching, He says, I will catch you unawares. Don't let me find you sleeping. Don't let me find you dead!

"THEY SHALL WALK WITH ME"

As a church, Sardis was dead. But they were not ALL dead. There were a few, a precious few, who won Jesus' special commendation. There were a few whose hearts were beating in unison with His own. This worldly Church that had all the pretense and all the show, all the life outside and dead inside, had also a few genuine, wholesouled believers. There

were a few who, even in Sardis, who had not defiled their garments of character. Even while most of the members did not care about spiritual issues and were all taken up with the activities and programs, a few were worthy of Jesus' highest commendation. *"I have a few names even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy"* (Rev. 3:4). Even in Sardis, these are not spotted. Even in Sardis, their garments of character are unsoiled. Like the three young men in Babylon who refused to bow to the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up (Daniel 3), these few are sincere, gripped by their living hope in Christ.

White garments suggest clean, upright character. The bride of Christ is said to be dressed in *"fine linen, clean and white,"* which is the *"righteousness of saints"* (Rev. 19:8). They are making their spiritual garments of character clean by doing only the things that please Christ—because they want to walk with Jesus.

These few are *"worthy."* What does that mean? They have not been accommodating the low standards around them. They have not been compromising. Instead of doing what pleased the people of Sardis, they have been doing what pleased Jesus. They have kept separate and apart, and for this reason they are *"worthy."* They are worthy of Jesus' commendation and will be given the eternal benefits Christ has reserved for faithful children. Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they are *"counted worthy"* (Luke 20:35–36).

IN THE BOOK OF LIFE

Jesus has blessings for those who keep their garments white. He says, among other things, *"I will not blot his name from the Book of Life."* It was customary at that time to blot out of the book the name of the person who had died. When He addressed the Church at Sardis, He said they were dead. If they did not come alive spiritually, He would take their name out of the book. Now He is saying of those whose garments are white, *"I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life"* (Rev. 3:5). What does that mean? If one's name is not blotted out, that means it will stay, and stay, and stay. This suggests the reward of life eternal.

Think of the honor of having our name in His Book of

WALK THE TALK

I was waiting at a stop light this morning. The lady in front of me was going through papers on the seat of her car, and when the light changed to green she did not "go." To me, a green light is a command, not a suggestion.

When the light quickly turned red again and she had still not moved, I began screaming and beating on my steering wheel.

My expressions of distress were interrupted by a policeman tapping on my window. Against my protest, he ordered me into the back seat of his car.

After about two hours of waiting and questions, the officer advised me I was free to go. I said, "I knew you couldn't arrest me for what I was yelling in my own car."

The officer replied, "I was directly behind you at the light. I saw you screaming and beating your steering wheel. Then I noticed the 'Jesus Is Coming Soon' bumper sticker, and I thought you must have stolen the car."

— Author unknown.

Was it the same in the Church at Sardis? Were they professing Christianity, but acting like the unbelievers around them? Did their life-style belie their Faith? What about yours and mine?



(above) The name Domitian, once engraved on this stone, has been blotted out—because he fell from Roman favor. In contrast, Jesus promised that the names of those true to Him would never be removed from His Book of Life, suggesting their honor would be eternal.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



(left) Ruins of a massive **Roman gymnasium-bath house** built in the 2nd or 3rd century AD.

(above) At one end of the gymnasium-bath complex and sharing an entrance with the gymnasium was a **Jewish synagogue**, the largest known synagogue in the ancient world. Its rich decoration, size and inscriptions tell of the status and wealth of the Jews of Sardis.

Did these Jews have any problem with their proximity to the gymnasium-bath house, a center for immoral behavior?





Ruins of a Jewish Synagogue in Sardis

(above) In front of the apse (seats for important members) is a table or altar, likely for offerings. The table ends are decorated with an eagle on each. And notice the two double-lions at either end of the table. Were these emblems borrowed from their pagan associates?

(left) View across the large and once beautiful mosaic floor of the **synagogue** in Sardis.

Life! And then, He says, "I will confess His name before My Father, and before His angels." Think of the honor of being given special recognition by the Father in Heaven. Think what that means: "I will confess His name before My Father, and before His angels" (3:5).

When Jesus was talking to his disciples before He was crucified, He said, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt 10:32-33).

The prophet Malachi wrote another promise about those who would be recognized by the great God, those who feared the Lord

WHO IS "WORTHY"?

Does "worthy" as used in Scripture mean "equivalent in worth"? If so, mortals—whom God has created—lose out by Divine design, because they can never be more than God made them to be. This would be unreasonable, and God calls us to "come, let us reason" (Isa. 1:18).

No, "worthy" means "to think meet, fit, right; to judge worthy, deem deserving" (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance). When God offers His human family members eternal happiness, eternal joy, eternal love, eternal life, why does He choose one, and reject another? What determines His choice? Is He whimsical? Never! "God is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3). God wants those who meet the standard by which He judges "worth." When one meets His standard of character, He calls them "worthy" (Isa. 66:2).

The idea of merit or "worth" is currently out of vogue in most Christian circles. Most believers even teach that taking any credit for work well done is shameful, that God prefers helpless, languid sinners to diligent hard working servants.

The teaching of Scripture stands out in sharp contrast. All through the Scriptures, God is looking for quality. Always He demands the best, whether in the value of the sacrifice under the ancient Israelite law, or the work done by the Christian slave in New Testament times. The sacrifices under Moses' law typified His high standard. Each animal brought for sacrifice had to be without blemish or defect. Whether it was for a peace offering, or a burnt offering, or an offering for sin, it was to be "without blemish" (Lev. 1:3; 4:3; 5:15; 14:10). Only the best was good enough to present to God. Why? Because the sacrifice represented the offerer's worship. The offerer was judged by the quality of the sacrifice he chose to represent him at the altar.

Definitions of "**worthy**" as used in the New Testament

axioo [515] 1) to think meet, fit, right.
2) to judge worthy, deem deserving (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible).
Examples: see Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10;
1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:11;
1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 3:3.

kataxio [2661] regard as worthy;
(passive) be counted or considered worthy (Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)).
Examples: see Luke 20:35; 21:36;
Acts 5:41; 2 Thess. 1:5.

and spoke often to one another: *"The Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. 'They shall be mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him'"* (Mal. 3:16-17).

Talk about honor! People think it an honor to have an audience with the President, or the Queen of England, or some celebrity. They will work hard to excel in their field, to be recognized for their attainment. But what can compare with the honor of having our name confessed before the Father, the Great God of Heaven, and before His angels!

Here is real hope. But it is not for those who are dead; it is for the living. Christ does not want us to have even one little toe dead. Even a little gangrene is serious. Jesus wants to see every part of our being full of vibrant spiritual life. He does not want any deadness.

What if we discover some deadness? Hear His remedy: *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...remember therefore how...you have received and heard; and hold fast and repent"* (Rev. 3:2-3).

Then we can be among those who will be "worthy" to walk with Jesus in white and share His eternal crown. MM



Eagles on the two ends of the marble table in the Jewish synagogue.



What might these eagles have stood for?

God is not whimsical. He is realistic. He knows what His human children have, what they can do, and what they can attain (Ps. 103:14). Accordingly, He sets expectations, but only within what they are able to do. He does not ask that they be mighty, or wealthy, or intellectual, or beautiful, but only that they be "worthy." What does this mean? It means that they must meet the standard He has set, a standard He knows they are well able to reach. Then He counts them "worthy" of what He has promised.

That is why John the Baptist came preaching the need for spiritual fruit-bearing and a quality of character: *"Bear fruits worthy of repentance"* (Matt. 3:8). Jesus said the very highest commendation is reserved for those who shall be *"counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead"* (Luke 20:35). These shall be made *"equal to the angels ... neither can they die anymore"* (Luke 20:36). Never is worthiness depreciated or downgraded. It is the standard for acceptance. *"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man"* (Luke 21:36).

The apostle Paul picked up the same thought when, writing to the Ephesians, he pleaded with them to *"walk worthy of the calling with which you were called"* (Eph. 4:1). This high calling in Christ was a challenge to live as worthy representatives of Christ's cause, to be all that they professed to be. Again to the Church at Colosse he wrote, *"That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Col. 1:10).

To the Philippians Paul wrote, *"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ"* (Phil. 1:27). He appealed to the

Thessalonian believers to *"walk worthy of God who calls you into His kingdom and glory"* (1 Thess. 2:12). Again he prayed that they *"be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer...we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power"* (2 Thess. 1:5, 11). Just imagine being *"counted worthy of this calling"* by the God of Heaven!

Is it strange, then, that Jesus commended the faithful few in Sardis with a high privilege to which they could look forward: *"they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy"* (Rev. 3:4)?

What does worthy mean? It is not that you or I naturally have intrinsic or incomparable "worth." Worthiness is a standard of conduct to be met. If one does not meet the standard, that one is not "worthy."

Being worthy establishes a level of suitable conduct. Either an action, a thought, or an attitude is worthy of Christ's approval, or it is not.

God has offered more than *"eye has seen"* or *"ear has heard"* or the heart of man has imagined (1 Cor. 2:9). Are we worthy of it? Not in terms of equivalent value. But if we meet His standard of character, at that point He counts us worthy, because we have done what He asks. If we live by His precepts, He says we are "worthy." In other words, we have done what He asks in return for the privilege of having His name, and sharing His inheritance.

Do we still feel unworthy? It is a judgment we must leave to God. In the meantime, let's give our best, and let Him decide who is "worthy." MM

FAITH *in Action*

Acts 23:10–22 NLT and NKJV

10. Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.

11. But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

12. The next morning a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

13. There were more than forty of them.

14. They went to the leading priests and other leaders and told them what they had done. "We have bound ourselves under oath to neither eat nor drink until we have killed Paul.

15. You and the high council should tell the commander to bring Paul back to the council again," they requested. "Pretend you want to examine his case more fully. We will kill him on the way."

16. But Paul's (sister's son) nephew heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul.

17. Paul called one of the officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him."

18. So the officer did, explaining, "Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

19. The commander took him by the arm, led him aside, and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

20. Paul's nephew told him, "Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the Jewish high council tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information.

21. But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to jump him and kill him. They have vowed not to eat or drink until they kill him. They are ready, expecting you to agree to their request."

22. "Don't let a soul know you told me this," the commander warned the young man as he sent him away.

by RUTH E. SISSON

THE PLOT THAT FAILED



Read Acts 23:10–24

Likely Paul didn't sleep much that night in the barracks. Perhaps he was uncertain as to the future. Events of the last few days only emphasized the fact that the Jews wanted him dead. Just that morning as he stood before the Jewish council he may have remembered the times he too vowed to stamp out the Faith of Christ. How well he knew, even before he came to Jerusalem, that the Jews were a jealous and determined people, and that imprisonment lay ahead for him. He had been warned. Now that prophecy was being fulfilled. Was he safe in the hands of the Romans? What could he do in prison? *"But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome'"* (23:11). Jesus still had work for him to do.

But the reassurance from heaven was not a release from problems. The next day, a new problem surfaced, this one a plot on Paul's life. A dead serious plot.

Perhaps as the Jews saw the Romans determined to protect Paul and give him a fair trial, they began to despair of ever removing him by any legal means. They needed a new scheme: treachery.

1. What was the plot of the conspirators? (23:12) _____

The Jewish conspirators took a vow that they would neither eat or drink until they had killed Paul—not that they were willing to die, but they felt confident they had a sure, no-fail plan. And there were not just two or three of them but more than forty! To these overly zealous Jews, adhering to their traditions was the only "right." They thought they had the perfect plan. But as always, God was in control.

2. What was the conspirators' first step toward making their plan succeed? (23:14) _____

These plotters were not depending on God. They were devious and had the

support of the high priest and his company, along with the Sadducee members of the Sanhedrin.

3. What did they ask these Jewish leaders to get the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council) to do? (23:15) _____

They wanted the Chief Captain, or tribune, to bring the captive Paul into the presence of the Sanhedrin, on the pretext that they needed to clarify the accusations against him.

4. What did the conspirators not know regarding Paul? (23:11) _____

Unknown to the conspirators, their plan was doomed from the start—Jesus had promised Paul he would be bearing witness for Him in Rome just as Paul had in Jerusalem. In other words, Paul's life was secure. Their plot could harm only themselves. The Apostle could say with the Psalmist, *"God is [my] refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"* (Psalm 46:1).

The conspirators' only hope of success would have been to divert Paul from his high calling and determined course, and this they were powerless to do, because Paul was a committed disciple of Christ. As he wrote later, *"this one thing I do...I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13–14). Men were powerless against Paul's advocate—Jesus Christ.

HELP!

But what could be done to save Paul's life? At this point, the conspiracy was all in place, the plans were solid, and Paul knew nothing about them. Nothing, that is, until...

A new player enters this little drama, a very youthful player. He may have been a child as young as seven or eight; we are not told. But by some unseen, Divine arranging, a certain young boy was in the right place at the right time, and had his ears open. What did he hear? He heard some of the insiders whispering details about the plot on Paul's life. It was a plot on Uncle Paul's life—and this child was Paul's sister's son.

Suddenly, this ordinary, young lad found himself possessing earth-shaking information. What should he do about it?

Even if he wasn't very old, he was old enough to know that something had to be done, and done quickly; and he was the one to do it. He would go straight to his uncle Paul in the prison, for he needed to be warned.

Was there some risk on his life as he attempted to visit his uncle? The child apparently did not think about it, or if he did, it didn't stop him. Bravely he went up to one guard after another seeking permission to enter the prison, and visit his Uncle Paul. (It seems that Rome allowed family and friends to visit and bring food and other amenities to prisoners.)

Even though Paul's nephew may not have realized it, he was an agent in the hands of God.

5. What did Paul do when his nephew told him about the plot? (23:17) _____

Notice Paul's response to the lad. In Paul-like fashion, he acted. Not in hysterics, but quickly and wisely. The Chief Captain had to be informed. Calling



A closer look

Do we know Paul's sister?

"But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul." Acts 23:16 NIV

We know nothing about the boy who was the instrument in saving Paul's life. But one conclusion we may safely draw: someone in his family was sympathetic with Paul's cause; which may mean someone in the family was a believer and a follower of Christ. No one professed loyalty in that age without a serious commitment, because sooner or later one might have to die for their beliefs.

Did Paul's sister cherish a love for her brother's God? Did she share some of the character traits of her brother—perhaps his strong will, his ardent determination, his unwavering commitment? Was he a spiritual influence on her life? Whether younger or older, did his change of heart affect her? Or was she already a believer before he turned? Was she perhaps one source of the "pricks" he had felt even before Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus Road? (Acts 9:5).

Greeting the Christians at Rome in the closing words of his letter, Paul mentions *"Then there are Andronicus and Junia, my relatives, who were in prison with me. They are respected among the apostles and became Christians before I did. Please give them my greetings"* (Rom 16:7 NLT). We have no way of knowing if these distinguished brethren were part of Paul's natural family, or his family in Christ. Or perhaps they belonged to both, which would have made a double bond. We shall know at the resurrection.



Paul's sister's son overhears men plotting to kill his Uncle Paul.



How God Works His Will

Does it seem only happenstance that Paul's nephew was in the right place at the right time to be the instrument in saving Paul's life? It is another example of how God uses ordinary people in ordinary situations to work His will.

In how many ways is God working behind the scenes today? It may be a delay caused by a traffic jam that saves His chosen one from an accident. It may be a chance meeting that acquaints His disciple-to-be with a new way of life. A sudden danger may be averted by a change of plans, an illness, or even adverse weather. *"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them."* (Ps. 34:7). Whatever the means He uses, God accomplishes His purpose. Supernatural and natural means are all the same to Him, though to us they look so different.

Because we do not see the Divine hand directing, we may conclude it is not present. But Omnipotence has agents everywhere, even when things look hopeless. In the words of the poet, James Russell Lowell,

*Though the cause of evil prospers,
yet the truth alone is strong.
Though her portion be the scaffold,
and upon the throne be wrong,
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadows,
keeping watch above His own.*



The Roman escort leaves Jerusalem with Paul.

one of the centurions to him Paul asked the centurion to take the "young man" to the Chief Captain because *"he has important information to give him."*

6. How did the Chief Captain receive the boy? (23:19) _____

The way the Chief Captain received the "young man" suggests that he was a young child because he *"took him by the hand"* and went aside to speak with him privately. It was not a normal place for a child to go alone, and even a man as hardened as a Roman Chief Captain showed a bit of tenderness in his conduct toward the boy.

At this moment the Chief Captain may already have had background information on his prisoner Paul, which may help explain the Chief Captain's conduct. He may have felt kindly toward Paul, having observed his consistently respectful behavior, in contrast to the often hot-headed, riotous Jews whom it was his job to keep in check. The goal of the Romans was peace and civilization, which overly zealous Jews too often violated.



Warning Uncle Paul of the plot.

7. What did the boy tell the Chief Captain? (23:20–21) _____

Notice that Paul's nephew first tells the Chief Captain what the Jews are going to ask him to do. They are going to *"ask you to bring Paul to the courtroom tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information"* (NLT).

Then, even before the boy tells what is going on, he gives bold advice to the Chief Captain: *"Don't do it!"* he says, and explains why: because *"there are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to ambush him. They have vowed not to eat or drink anything until they have killed him. They are ready now, just waiting for your consent"* (23:21).

The fact that the child told the Chief Captain what to do even before he told him the seriousness of the problem shows that he was likely very young. His first thought was for his uncle's life. He wasn't thinking of proprieties, or what the Chief Captain might think of him, or of the proper way to present the case. He had but one mission: to save Uncle Paul's life.

8. What was the Chief Captain's reply to the young man? (23:22) _____

The last thing the Chief Captain needed was for a high visibility prisoner in his charge—and a Roman citizen besides—to be murdered by scheming Jews! Such a disaster would cost him his reputation, probably his job, and possibly even his life! The whole thing was unthinkable!

Quickly he devised a plan and gave orders, brief and sharp, like the crack of a whip.

9. What was the plan? (23:23) _____

By nine o'clock that night Paul would be safely on his way to the city of Caesarea, guarded by a 400 foot soldier escort and seventy cavalry, Caesarea, the Roman capital of Palestine, lay about fifty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

The next day the 400 foot soldiers returned to their barracks in Jerusalem. The rest of the company—seventy cavalry—continued on with the apostle Paul, to protect him from any possible attack. The four-hundred returning foot

soldiers were also likely instructed to make sure none of the forty conspirators were trying to follow Paul.

When the seventy horsemen arrived in Caesarea with Paul, it must have been an unusual sight to see such a company dismounting at the Governor's palace. Imagine what the town gossips could make of this one—some hero being brought to town? or a notable person? Maybe the Emperor coming to visit! What a disappointment when the flat facts were told: a prisoner had arrived.

10. Into whose hands did the Chief Captain commit his prisoner once the party reached Caesarea? (23:24) _____

11. Beside providing an escort for Paul, what did the Chief Captain send along in Paul's behalf? (23:25) _____

Marcus Antonius Felix was governor of Judea from AD 52 to 59. A former slave and a fiercely violent man, he could nevertheless do better for Paul than the forty Jews who were plotting against him. At least Felix was a quick solution to a desperate situation.

12. What happened to the forty conspirators back in Jerusalem? _____

We are not told whether the conspirators died of hunger, but more likely they broke their vow and returned to normal life. If they did break their vow, and if they were loyal Jews, the temple at Jerusalem was a busy place the next day, because failure to keep a vow required a special sacrifice at the temple.

Whether they complied with their own law we do not know. But one fact we do know: their plot failed. It failed because Paul was in the Lord's care. It failed because God is stronger than His fiercest foes, and none of His plans ever were or ever will be thwarted.



Insight

Did Paul see the letter?

Some speculate that since the Bible records the text of the letter that the Chief Captain wrote to Governor Felix, Paul must have seen it and copied it. This seems most unlikely, given the stress of the moment, the time factor, and the secrecy of the whole escape. The Chief Captain told the child not to tell anybody. There were only hours to prepare for the journey, and the circumstances would not seem to allow time for the luxury of hand copying the contents of a letter, even though it is only a few paragraphs. And how would Paul have had quick access to parchment and pen—in prison?

Luke tells us the Chief Captain wrote *"after this manner"* (23:25), and quotes the letter.

Why not recognize that this text, like many other passages in the New Testament, was revealed to the writer, in this case Luke, by the Holy Spirit?

If God wanted the text of an undisclosed document to be made public, He had it within His power to reveal it to the person who was acting as His pen. It is this very fact which makes the New Testament, and the rest of the Scriptures, reliable. The information was not depending on someone's faulty memory, or oral tradition, or data that may have been gathered from dubious sources. Before Jesus left His disciples, He promised that He would send the *"comforter,"* the paraclete, the Holy Spirit, which would *"bring all things to their remembrance"* (John 14:26), as well as revealing *"things to come"* (John 16:13). The apostle Peter affirmed in his Second



Insight

The Ultimate Escort—for a Prisoner

Imagine Paul riding on a horse in the midst of two hundred foot soldiers, along with seventy cavalry and two hundred spearmen, all trudging up the road in the darkness. There were an infinite number of ways God could have used to get Paul to Caesarea, but He chose to use the Roman army to deliver him from his enemies.

By morning, the company had travelled as far as Antipatris, about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem. This city was located on a fertile plain near the foothills between Judea and Samaria. Here Herod the Great had built a city and named it after his father, Antipater. Since the Romans had a colony here, it was a convenient, safe haven for the Roman soldiers to stop and get some rest. The cavalry continued on to Caesarea while the 400 foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem.

Why so much invested in one lone prisoner? Because this prisoner was no ordinary man. Even though the Chief Captain was oblivious, he was protecting Christ's *"chosen vessel...to bear [Christ's] name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel"* (Acts 9:15). The Apostle's work for God was not yet finished. He had yet to witness in Rome (Acts 23:11).



Paul and his Roman escort may have ridden down this very street in Antipatris.

Epistle that *"prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21).

The Bible we have today has deficiencies due to errors in translation, or in copying, but these errors are insignificant in the extreme, because the original text was 100% accurate in the languages in which God arranged that it be written. Even many of the copyists and translators viewed their task as a sacred assignment requiring carefulness and precision.

Thanks to the work of many scholars, students and archivists, we today have literally thousands of manuscripts and numerous translations. This makes it possible to resolve minor inconsistencies by comparing translations with the earlier manuscripts.

Acts 23:23–35 NLT

23. Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, "Get two hundred soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight. Also take two hundred spearmen and seventy horsemen.

24. Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix."

25. Then he wrote this letter to the governor:

26. "From Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency, Governor Felix. Greetings!

27. This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety.

28. Then I took him to their high council to try to find out what he had done.

29. I soon discovered it was something regarding their religious law—certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death.

30. But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you."

31. So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris.

32. They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the horsemen took him on to Caesarea.

33. When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix.

34. He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. "Cilicia," Paul answered.

35. "I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive," the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod's headquarters.



A closer look

Where Was the Church?

Have you wondered about the elders in the church in Jerusalem? Where were they when the Chief Captain rescued Paul from his persecutors and put him in prison? Where were they when he was being whisked off to Caesarea? Did they disappear into hiding when they heard of the plot on Paul's life, or did some follow him to Caesarea, anxious to see how he made out? (Apparently Luke and Aristarchus did exactly this. The next time we hear of them, they are both with Paul in Caesarea.)

It is hard enough to judge the weight of the cross a fellow brother or sister is carrying even at close range—how much less at a distance of nearly 2000 years!

If the church elders failed Paul when they could have helped, we are not told. God is the judge. Let us be kind!



Read the letter (Acts 23:25–30)

13. Who do you think is the most important person referred to in this letter? _____

The form of the letter shows that 1st and 21st century politics have much in common. What was the purpose of the letter? Most importantly it was to put its author, Chief Captain Claudius Lysias, in the best light possible as he presented his prisoner to Felix. Written in the first person, the letter makes frequent use of the first personal pronoun. Lysias clearly intended to give Felix the impression that Paul had been unjustly seized and attacked by the Jews, and that he (Claudius Lysias) was the hero in "rescuing" Paul from his enemies, and putting him in the noble hands of a just Governor like Felix.

The letter also has one noticeable omission: the Chief Captain says not a word about his error in commanding Paul, a Roman citizen, to be scourged. Nor did he include details of how he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. Accuracy of detail was not important to the Chief Captain.

14. If Felix had listened to the Chief Captain, what would he have done with Paul? (23:29) _____

The letter declared Paul innocent of any crime worthy of imprisonment or death. It not only put Paul in a good light but gave him advantage should the Jews bring further accusations against him in the future. Obviously, the Chief Captain wanted to make sure Paul would get justice.



Read Acts 23:31–35

15. What was Felix's reply after he read the letter? (23:34–35) _____

The fact that Paul was a Roman citizen from a well-known province meant that Felix could not ignore his case. Neither could he ignore the complaints of the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem. As Governor, he had to hear both sides of the issue, hence his decision to wait for Paul's accusers to come from Jerusalem.

Paul was a native of Cilicia, an important district or province in southeast Asia minor, located between the Taurus mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. Separated from Syria on the east by Mt. Amanus, and mounted on the west by Pamphilia, the province was largely a fertile alluvial plain, with Tarsus, the city of Paul's birthplace, its chief city. The city came under the jurisdiction of Rome with Pompey's conquest about 66 BC.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BIBLEPLACES.COM"



Remains of the Olympic size pool that was the centerpiece of Herod's magnificent promontory palace in Caesarea. Was it near here that Paul was kept a prisoner?

16. Where did he command that Paul be kept in the meantime? (23:35) _____

The prison at Herod's headquarters (palace) where Paul was kept no doubt lacked much in human comforts, but it may have been a better prison than some, because Caesarea was still a young and thriving city in Paul's day.

to be continued

Seeds to Go and Grow!

All summer long, plants everywhere have been fulfilling one of their most important functions, that of making seeds. Some plants produce only a few seeds and others produce thousands. I am sure you have marveled at the wide variety of seeds to be found. Some seeds are encased within fruit, some have pods, some have wings and others have burrs or long sticky hairs on them. Some orchid seeds are as fine as dust with about one million seeds per gram. A single *Coco de mer*, the largest seed known, may weigh as much as 50 pounds. The variety is astounding. When God created each unique plant He created them to make their own unique type of seed as well. Every plant's seeds are best suited to be distributed and to grow in the areas that are best for that plant. Seeds are essential to the continuation of most plant species. They are also an essential food source for many animals, including humans.

When we look closer, we see that every seed contains within itself the potential of another plant like or similar to its parent plant. What an awesome design in every seed!

A seed is a small embryonic plant with a food source enclosed in a seed coat. Once the plant's flowers have been pollinated, the fertilized ovule within the flower begins to grow. Most of the seed's bulk is actually the food supply for the newly germinated plant while it is establishing its first roots. The seed coat, which protects the embryo from injury and from drying out, may also have on its surface the means for the seed's distribution.

Can we even imagine the wonderful provisions of the Great Creator for the survival of an infinite num-



JOHN MCCOUGAN, ALASKA FIRE SERVICE

It is awesome how the **knobcone pine seeds** are saved even while the parent tree is burning up. The knobcone's ripe seeds are sealed inside very tough cones that are released after a fire. As the tree burns to ashes, the cones are freed and explode like popcorn, scattering their seeds to soon germinate in the fertile ashes.



DAVID BLUMENFELD

Imagine life in a seed surviving 2000 years! (above) A **Judean date palm** sprouted from a seed found in an excavation at Masada in 1973. The **date seeds** were left untouched in a drawer until November 2005 when one was planted and—amazingly—germinated.



The wind aids in scattering the wonderfully designed **dandelion seed** hanging from its parachute.

ber of plants? God designed each seed to protect the tiny life within it so that when conditions are right the young seedling could grow and flourish in its environment.

Seeds are distributed in many different ways. How the seed cases are formed often determines how the seed is distributed. Seeds like the maple and the ash have wings. The dandelion, milkweed and cottonwood have delicate “parachutes” that make it possible for the seeds to be carried from the parent plant by the wind. When fruits are eaten by animals, the whole seeds that pass through the animal are deposited far from the parent plant. Nuts and acorns are buried by squirrels, chipmunks and other animals and later germinate far from their source. Other seeds are transported by moving water. Cockle burrs, stick tights and many grass seeds are



When the **witch hazel seeds** are mature, the seed case contracts, propelling them outward with great force.



These seeds have tiny barbs and are dispersed by catching a “ride” on clothing or on animal fur.

equipped with little hooks or barbs that cling to the fur or clothing of those brushing against them. Some seeds are distributed by mechanical means designed into the seed cases. The mature seed pods of the Touch-Me-Not will burst open at the slightest touch and fling its seeds far and wide. The fruit of the squirting cucumber releases its seeds in a powerful jet of liquid. Such unique designs don’t just happen or evolve. Behind each of these designs is the Almighty Creator.

Another amazing wonder of seeds is germination. Why do some seeds germinate readily and others lie dormant for

THE SMALLEST SEED



One of nature’s wonders is a certain **orchid’s** dustlike **seeds**—so tiny that a single pod may contain millions. (One seed weighs about 1/35,000,000 of an ounce.) Light enough to blow for hundreds of miles on the wind, they don’t have the stored food customary in other seeds. To germinate they must have the aid of special fungi that provide necessary nutrients.

What a marvelously delicate partnership—one only the Master Mind could make work!

THE LARGEST SEED



Enormous! The **seed of the coco-de-mer palm** takes the prize for being the biggest seed. It can measure 12 inches long and weigh more than 40 pounds!

years? A few years ago, while excavating Herod the Great’s palace in Masada, a Judean date palm seed was found and recovered. This seed was carbon-14-dated to verify that it came from that time period. In 2005, after nearly two thousand years, this seed sprouted and is now growing! There are other reports of ancient seeds, such as a Chinese lotus seed and wheat from a pharaoh’s tomb, that have sprouted. Seeds may live for centuries in a dormant state until conditions are right, then sprout. Just imagine the vitality in such seeds to remain alive for all those years! Life—another wonder of our Almighty Creator.



The **American lotus’s** remarkable **seeds** are able to germinate after a century or more.

However, the longevity record belongs to an **Arctic lupine**. According to reports, seeds frozen in a northern lemming burrow some 10,000 years ago were washed out recently in a mining operation. Most amazingly, some of them sprouted and actually grew into healthy plants.

Germination

What does it usually take for a seed to germinate and start to grow?

1) Moisture. All seeds require water to penetrate the seed coat and swell the tissues. The swelling cracks the seed coat, activates hydrolytic enzymes that break down the stored food resources, and allows the seedling to germinate and grow until it reaches the light.

2) Oxygen is needed for the seedling’s metabolism until it can start photosynthesis of its own.

3) Proper temperature. Temperature also affects seed germination. Most seeds germinate at the temperature of their environment, but there are some that must freeze before dormancy can be broken. And—can you believe this—some seeds must be exposed to the heat of a forest fire before they will germinate!

4) Light. Some seeds need light to germinate; others require darkness.

5) Abrasion. The seed coats on some seeds are so hard that water cannot penetrate unless the coat is first scarified, or scratched. This may happen when the seeds are tumbled along a sandy streambed during a rainstorm. It may also happen by the acid in an animal’s stomach as they pass through.

Seeds are indeed marvelous and fascinating. What they are and what they require is just too complex to have happened by the chance of evolution. Actually, wouldn’t it be a far greater wonder if the intricacies in each seed evolved wholly by chance, rather than by the design of an Almighty, All-wise God? How can we begin to comprehend the wonder and awesomeness of over 550,000 kinds or species of living organisms!

Only the Almighty Creator, the God of the Bible, could package the miracle of life in each seed—the potential for a plant like the parent. MM

Sources:

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

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CHURCH BIRDIQUETTE

Both of them should have known better, and I believe they did. I do not think they were ignorant, but just plain thoughtless. I refer, of course, to the church manners of Mrs. Crow and Mrs. Jay.

For one thing, Mrs. Jay was usually late. And, it wasn't because she had several children to get ready, because hers were already grown. Nor was it because she had so far to fly, because she lived quite close to the church. It was just habit! At least that is what Mr. Cardinal said. He was head usher and according to him, for the most part it is the same birds that are late each Sunday morning.

But, even when late, Mrs. Jay wanted to pick her own roost and always acted surprised to the point of appearing slightly offended that the best limbs were already occupied.

On the Sunday I have in mind, Mr. Cardinal greeted her quietly at the door, then started down the aisle to usher her to a seat. She followed him a few steps, then flopped down into one she spied herself. So, when Mr. Cardinal, walking on down the aisle, turned to indicate the seat he had selected, there was no Mrs. Jay there! Mr. Cardinal was dreadfully embarrassed, and blushed all the way down to his toes. But, of course there was nothing he could do about it, except march back to the rear of the church and hope that the next bird might not be so rude.

The seat Mrs. Jay had found appealed to her not only because it was not so far toward the front, but because it was next to Mrs. Crow. She liked to sit beside Mrs. Crow in order that they might chat with each other. Mrs. Crow was sitting next to the aisle. Of course she did not move over. That would have been good manners, but Mrs. Crow was not concerned about that—about good manners, I mean. But she was very much concerned about keeping her corner seat. So, Mrs. Jay had to crawl over, and, as you may have guessed, she knocked Mrs. Crow's umbrella to the floor in the process.

There was quite a little commotion, but finally they were settled—that is, as settled as could be expected considering who they were. The choir was just beginning the anthem, which provided them with a wonderful opportunity to start chatting at once—almost as wonderful as the opportunity during the prelude, which they always used for chit-chat whenever they arrived that early.

"What an outrageous hat!" thought Mrs. Jay, as she glanced out of the corner of her eye at Mrs. Crow. "Reminds me of a scarecrow." But this is what she said, "I like your new hat. That corn tassel on it instead of a feather is most unusual."

"Made it myself," replied Mrs. Crow, "which reminds me. We had the best corn fritters for breakfast. Farmer Hayseed's

corn is better than ever this year, but my, that man is stingy. By the way, can you tell me who that bird is, two pews in front of us next to the aisle? When she came in she did the strangest thing—she bowed her head for a moment, just after she took her seat."

"Don't know," replied Mrs. Jay. "I can't understand why my mouth is so dry," she continued, as she opened her purse. "Will you divide this piece of chewing gum with me?"

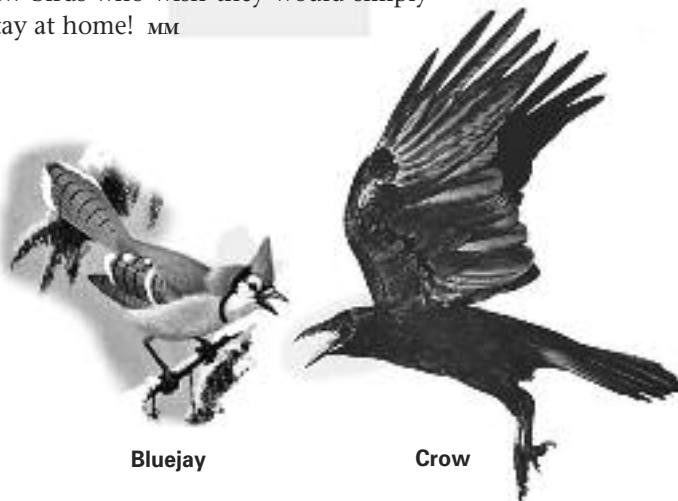
"No, thank you," answered Mrs. Crow. "I got tired of mine before you came in and stuck it under the pew."

"Good idea," said Mrs. Jay. "I'll leave mine there too, later. We might as well give the janitor something to do around the church!"

"My goodness," said Mrs. Crow. "I wish that Mr. Meadowlark wouldn't sing so loud. I can hardly hear a word you say!"

And, for once, Mrs. Crow had her wish. For just at that instant there was a sudden pause in the anthem, with the result that almost half the birds in the church heard Mrs. Crow's remark, "I can hardly hear a word you say." Heads turned their way. Mrs. Crow looked for a hole in the floor to crawl into, but couldn't find one small enough. And Mrs. Jay's chewing gum went down with one gulp!

There was just one more line in the anthem, and I do not think either Mrs. Jay or Mrs. Crow will ever forget it. For guess what it was—"Be still, and know that I am God." I certainly hope that they have learned their lesson, and so do all the members of the First Birderian Church who believe in reverence and worshipfulness. If they haven't, there are quite a few birds who wish they would simply stay at home! MM



Bluejay

Crow

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For Everything Give Thanks

*For all that God in mercy sends;
For health and children, home and friends,
For comfort in the time of need,
For every kindly word and deed,
For happy thoughts and holy talk,
For guidance in our daily walk,
For everything give thanks!*

*For beauty in this world of ours,
For verdant grass and lovely flowers,
For song of birds, for hum of bees,
For refreshing summer breeze,
For hill and plain, for streams and wood,
For the great ocean's mighty flood,
For everything give thanks!*

*For sweet sleep which comes with night,
For the returning morning's light,
For the bright sun that shines on high,
For the stars glittering in the sky,
For these and everything we see,
O Lord, our hearts we lift to thee.
FOR EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS!*

by H. I. Tupper

***Blessed are
those that can give
without remembering
and receive without
forgetting.***

Go ON!

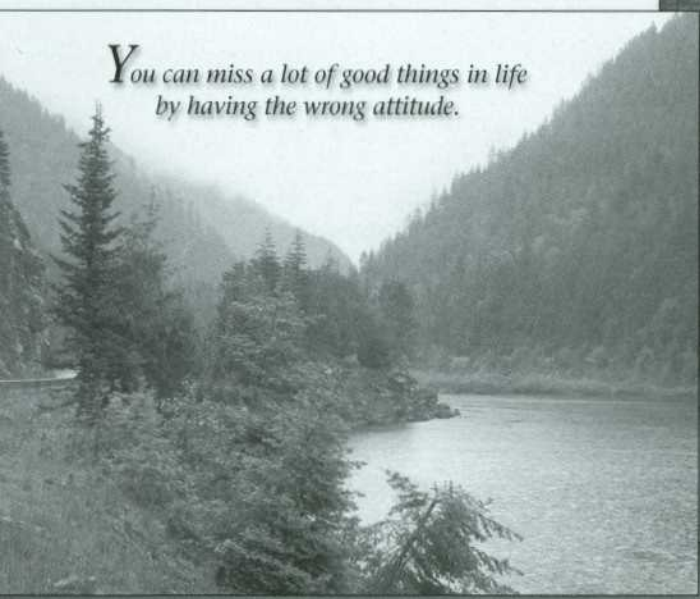
*God seeks for those, the persevering souls,
The ones who do,
Who battle on when all looks dark around,
Though they be few.*

*The ones who try and fail and try again
To conquer sin
Are those God seeks; who labor on
Until they win!*

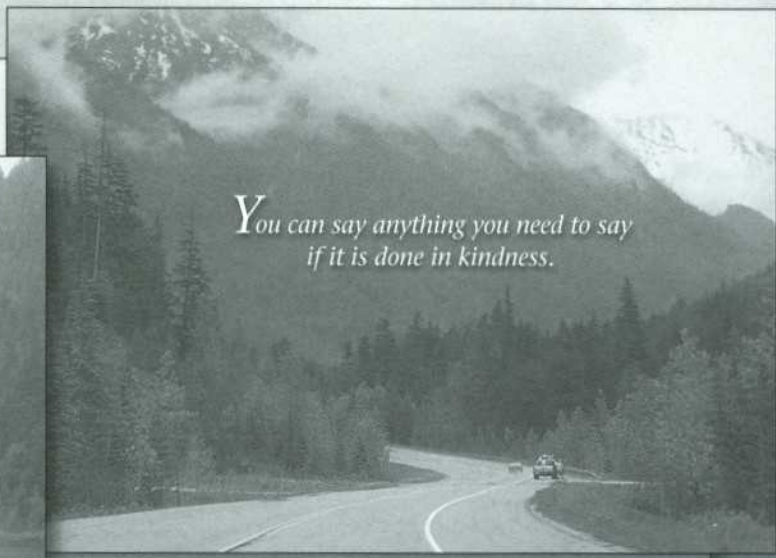
*The ones God seeks, their thirst for righteousness
Must be so great
That though they fall, they bravely rise and run
Before too late.*

*So when you're down, get up! The Lord
Has work for you!
Remember He has kept the Great Reward
For those who do.*

by Barbara Crum



*You can miss a lot of good things in life
by having the wrong attitude.*



*You can say anything you need to say
if it is done in kindness.*

*When my response to rudeness is kindness,
I feel better.*

*I've learned that saying "Forgive me"
is not the hardest words for some people to say.
Saying, "You are forgiven" seems to
be more difficult.*

*The desire to have a positive impact on the life
of each person I meet has had an even bigger impact
on my life.*

*Words are the most powerful weapon
in the world and should be used with great care.*

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Construction activity is going on as God is building His Church. Some churches have given out buttons to their youth groups with the letters "PBP GINTW MY". The letters stand for "Please Be Patient, God is Not Through With Me Yet." As Christians we are under construction.

*If the person you are with doesn't help make you a better and
stronger person, you are with the wrong person.*

The only person you can be sure of improving is yourself.

*Things that last only a short time
are not worth making lifetime sacrifices for.*

*I've learned that every day we are offered far more
opportunities than misfortunes—it's our use
of them that make the difference.*

*I've learned the greatest value of the three F's:
forgive, forget, and forge ahead.*

We are judged by what we finish, not by what we start.

*No one out there is in charge of making me happy.
That's my job.*

A little boy came running to his mother one day, "Mommy, guess what! I'm eight foot tall!" His Mother chuckled and exclaimed, "My, how my little man has grown! How did you know?" Holding up a six inch ruler he said confidently, "'Cause I used this foot—like Daddy."

This is what we do when we measure ourselves by one another or by an imperfect prototype, rather than by the standard of the Word of God.

*Change is a challenge for the courageous, an opportunity
for the alert, and a threat to the insecure.*

*Imagining the recording angel standing beside me
stops me from doing things I know are wrong.*

Not, how did he die,
But, how did he live?
Not, what did he gain,
But, what did he give?
These are the merits
That measure the worth
Of a man as a man
Regardless of birth.

Not, what was his station,
But how was his heart?
And how did he play
His God-given part?

—Selected

