



Megiddo Message

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*"Let him that is
thirsty... come" - Jesus*

Doors DO Close

More than one sad tale has been told of "too little and too late." Recall Jesus' story of the Ten Virgins who were awaiting the imminent return of the bridegroom. Five of them were wise and well prepared for his arrival, even if it should be unexpectedly delayed. And five were not wise, and not prepared. Jesus called these latter ones "foolish."

What made the difference? All had brightly burning lamps until...the time delayed, and the lamps of five of them were burning low. Getting more oil became urgent. And while these five went to find oil for their lamps—the bridegroom came. *"And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut."*

The open door closed. Opportunity was suddenly gone, and gone forever.

The same calamity overtook the people of Noah's time. After all those years of preaching and building, the day arrived when the ark was finished, and Noah and his family went in. And the Lord shut the door (Gen. 7:16).

The road marked TOMORROW usually leads to the town called NEVER.

The open door closed. Suddenly opportunity was gone, and gone forever. The door was shut, and no one else could get in.

Luke 19:20 tells of the man who carefully wrapped his talent in a napkin and put it in a safe place. This surely did not seem like any serious crime. The man was not openly defiant, or rebellious, or dishonest. His sin was only this: that he did nothing with his opportunity. The door was open, and he did not enter.

But when the lord of that servant returned, what did he say when the servant proudly unwrapped the unused talent and handed it back to him? He learned

suddenly that his door of opportunity was closed. Said his master. *"Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds"* (Luke 19:24).

The book of James tells the same truth in these stark words: *"To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17).

We quite naturally think that something we do wrong is more serious than something we simply do not do. But James tells us this is not true. He says that *not to do* what we know we should is equally as wrong as openly committed sin. In other words, sins of omission are just as culpable as sins of commission.

Neglect is serious. It is the warning of the book of Hebrews: *"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?"* (Heb. 2:3). Let us repeat, *"How shall we escape,...if we neglect...?"*

In Jesus' parable, the virtue of the "merchant man, seeking goodly pearls" was that *"when he had found one pearl of great price, [he] went and sold all that he had, and bought it"* (Matt. 13:45-46). He did not wait. There was no neglect, no delay. When he had found the pearl he was seeking, he immediately took action and *"went and sold all that he had, and bought it."*

The same was true of the man finding the treasure hid in the field. *"The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field"* (Matt. 13:44). His action was immediate, when he had found it.

Scripture calls us again and again to decide, and to act immediately upon our decision. God promises no sure tomorrow, only a sure NOW. *"Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Cor. 6:2). God calls us to act with decision. It is now or never.

The road marked TOMORROW usually leads to the town called NEVER.

The only sure moment is now, now while the door is still open. Says Jesus, *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me"* (Rev. 3:20). He will not knock forever.

Unused opportunities, like unused muscles, atrophy. The unwound clock stops. Open doors *do* close.

Simple neglect can destroy us. The only safe course is to act *now*. ♦

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.

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Until He Comes

BY GERALD R. PAYNE

Until He comes." What do these words mean to you? Well, it depends on who is coming, does it not? It may mean preparing a special dinner. Or it may mean scrubbing the house from top to bottom, mowing the grass, getting everything in order to make the best possible impression, and to be sure our guest is comfortable.

Who is coming may have a lot to do with our disposition during the intervening days, whether we are dreading to have to put up with Uncle Grumpy, or whether we are looking cheerfully ahead to spending time with a favorite friend.

"Until He comes" also implies a continuing action, something to

be sustained in the interim. So many activities we must sustain, uninterrupted, all the way...until He comes.

When Jesus went away, He promised, "I will come again." Since that memorable day every Christian has looked forward expectantly to His return. At the same time, they have busied themselves preparing. For everything must be in readiness *when* He comes—which means everything must be done *before* He comes. For those who are ready, what joy and gladness the day will bring! But woe to the ones who could have prepared—and did not.

At Christ's first coming, many were looking for a savior to deliver them from Roman bondage. Had they forgotten how their ancestors had perished in the wilderness because of their disobedience? Were they that much better than their fathers? Few understood fully the implication of Christ's coming. John the Baptist spoke sweeping words spanning two millennia...from Christ's first coming to His second. "*Someone is coming soon,*" said John, "*who is far greater than I am—so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave.*" He was speaking of Christ's first coming. But John had more words for this "brood of snakes," as he called them, and he spoke of Christ's second—

greater—advent, and all that it would bring. *“He will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire,”* he boomed (Matt. 3:11–12 NLT and ASV).

John’s words stirred a responsive chord in his hearers. *“What must we do?”* they asked?

The question echoes to us: What must we do to be ready for this greatest event of the ages? The question is important because what we do means either our eternal life or our eternal death. The choice is ours. We stand on the edge of nothingness and despair were it not for our bright hope of the coming of the Lord. But if we are doing the work Christ gave us to do, we are not standing on the edge of nothingness but on the threshold of a glorious eternity far beyond anything we can ask or imagine. For when Christ comes and we find ourselves in the presence of the King of kings, the trials, the hardships, the earthly losses we sustained will have no meaning except as the means by which our character was formed. All will be seen as constructive experiences, opportunities given us to teach us the virtues He wants us to have, to serve our Lord with a willing heart.

Oh, let us grasp every chance to work now for the Lord, now before He comes. Frown not upon the disciplines and trials that come to try You. Hold them dear, cherish them. See them as the makings of eternity for you. Did not our Lord say that the world and all its lusts will pass away? Then be careful. Prepare now so you can be part of that which will endure, not part of that which will perish in the fire of God’s judgment.

The Psalmist informs us that evil-doers will be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9). Does this “waiting” imply idleness? Not at all. Our time, every moment of it, is precious. There is much to be done in a very short time...until He comes. The time is limited, and the work great. As Paul told the Ephesians, *“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity,*

because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15 NIV).

Make the most of every opportunity...until He comes. No idleness, no dreaming, no hesitating, no procrastinating here; only a firm grasping of every opportunity as it comes.

STUDY...until He comes

Study to show yourself approved to God, a workman who will not be ashamed (2 Tim. 2:15). The word “study” indicates a field of concentration, a subject to be mastered. That subject is His Word, and how it applies to our lives. Until He comes, keep studying, keep applying that Word, so that you can be a workman who will not be ashamed.

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is” (Rom. 12:2 NLT). God’s Word is the transforming power; make good use of it, says the great Apostle...until He comes.

And let there be in us a sense of urgency as we do our work...until He comes. Urgency, lest we be found unprepared when the trumpet blast announces the King’s return. Urgency, lest the day of the Lord arrive and find us sleeping.

We are working toward an unrevealed deadline...until He comes. There can be no retirement from this work, no vacation or even rest. Advancing years, declining health, changing circumstances may alter the nature of our service, but our work must continue all the way to the end. And if we must go by way of the grave, it will be but as the passing of the night while we sleep in peace until morning. For Christ is coming again, and our works will be tested, and only faithful service will receive the full reward. It matters not whether our efforts here were appreciated or even acknowledged by other mortals. Christ’s approval is all that will matter.

Oh, may our work, whatever our lot in life, be always dedicated to God, always done according to the instruc-

tions given in His Word, so that we can be accepted when He comes.

KEEP WORKING...until He comes

The Scriptures relate that the early Christians *“turned the world upside down.”* Everywhere they went, they made a difference. The Word of God changed lives from the inside out,

*Does waiting
imply idleness?
Not at all.
Every moment is
precious.*

from a death in sin to a lively hope in Christ. The difference was obvious to friends, neighbors, even people in the marketplace. Their conversation changed. Their dispositions changed. Their outlook on life changed. Now their faces were vibrant and glowing with hope, because the knowledge of the Gospel changed their way of thinking. Their God was no longer a brazen image but the true and living God, creator of heaven and earth. They were witnesses for Christ, whose ministry became known far and wide. Their work was not forced but was rather a labor of love. Wherever they went they were faithfully working and witnessing for their Lord, while awaiting His return. What an example for us!

WATCH...until He comes

Being alert is vital to protecting life at a military camp. It is also vital to the spiritual life of the Christian. Be on guard, says Jesus. *“Don’t let that day catch you unawares, as in a trap”* (Luke 21:34 NLT).

Every day we face an enemy, and Christ has commanded us to watch. That enemy is not across the sea, or in another city or town but right within our own hearts. How very watchful

we must be, lest he catch us in some unguarded moment.

To be sleeping when one should be on duty is a very serious offense. What do you suppose the commander on the front lines of the military would do if he found the sentry sleeping on duty? For sure, the outcome would not be pleasant. Jesus has commanded that we watch. Will He be any less forgiving if He finds us sleeping when He comes? If we are not watching, the enemies of

doubt, fear, apprehension and our own stubborn nature will unite to overpower us. Enemies of complacency and sin will take control, and all will be lost. No wonder Paul, repeating the words of the angel to Daniel, gave this urgent, very sound advice: "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13 NRSV).

PRAY...until He comes

Prayer has always been a vital part of every true worshiper's life. More, it is a divine command. When we pray, we place ourselves in the presence of God and a will and a wisdom infinitely greater than our own. If our prayers are according to His will, He will hear us.

How could Jesus say, "Whoever asks for anything in My name will receive it"? Because one who truly asks in His name will be asking only for those things that are according to His will, and according to His great wisdom and foreknowledge. We will realize that He knows best in every situation.

Are you being tested and tried right now? Ask not that the trials be removed but rather ask for strength so that you may be made better, stronger, purer by them. God may be using that irksome situation to mold you to His likeness. Is it not your desire to be more like Christ? Shouldn't you be thankful, then, for the means He provides? Jesus showed the proper attitude during one of the most trying moments of His life when He

prayed these words of heartfelt resignation: "Not my will but Thine be done." And isn't He our example?

When we pray, we commune with God. If we keep constantly in communion with Him, are we not in effect bolting the door against sinful habits? How can we be angry...and pray? How can we be peevish...and pray? How can we be worrying...and pray? How can we be selfish...and pray? How can we speak harshly...and pray? How can we be deceitful...and pray? How can we be proud or arrogant...and pray? How can we be retaliating...and pray?

And didn't the apostle Paul write, "Pray without ceasing"? How is that possible? We could say it another way: Do everything as in the very presence of God. Yes, everything, because His recording angels are watching. We cannot escape their watchful eyes. They see, they hear. See to it, then, that your conduct is above reproach...until He comes.

"EXHORT ONE ANOTHER DAILY"...until He comes

Here is another everyday duty. Long ago Cain asked the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We all know his answer: He wasn't. Cain murdered Abel. Nonetheless, he asked a very important question. We all need daily exhorting. The word "exhort" comes from a Greek word with many meanings. Among them are such words as "to beg, entreat, beseech." If a brother or sister is out of the way and there is a possibility that they will change, is it too much that we lovingly exhort them?

But this is not the only meaning of exhort. It also means to teach, to comfort, encourage, strengthen. Exhortation is a two-way street in the Greek, and it should be a two-way street for the Christian. Each of us needs the other. We need to love and help each other. We need to comfort each other. We need to strengthen each other. We need to care enough for each other so that we tell one another when we see a wrong. How else can we be truly loving?

"BE PATIENT"...until He comes

"Learn to be patient, so that you will please God and be given what He has promised" (Heb. 10:36 CEV). Patience, or endurance as it is worded in some other

How can I be angry...and pray?

How can I be peevish...and pray?

How can I be worrying...and pray?

How can I be selfish...and pray?

How can I speak harshly...and pray?

How can I be deceitful...and pray?

How can I be proud or arrogant...and pray?

How can I be retaliating...and pray?

translations, may be thought of as the crowning act of one's obedience. We might obey at a certain point in time, but this does not bring our obedience to perfection. The obedience Christ demands is not a one-time act quickly completed. It must be sustained over time, be merged into a pattern of sustained, continuing action. *"Steady patience is what you need,"* says one translator, *"so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what has been promised."* If we do not persist...continue...endure patiently in our obedience, the prize will slip through our fingers.

Paul stressed his concern about this when he compared our training in God's service to that of the athlete. *"You've all...seen the athletes race.... All good athletes train hard."* Yes, Paul says, they practice, practice, practice, and all *"for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades."* What a poor prize!

Then he puts himself on the line. *"I don't know about you,"* he says, *"but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself"* (1 Cor. 9:25-27, The Message Bible).

Paul saw the need for that continuing, patient training. What athlete would train for a few days, then skip a month? Not if he wanted the laurels!

What matters most in your life and mine? Do we live to hear good words from those around us, or are we willing to give up anything...everything...if only we can please our Master?

There is a story about a young conductor in old Vienna named Rudolph. Young Rudolph determined one day to write a symphony. He set to work and labored hard; he wrote and rewrote his composition. Then he called in some friends and went over it with them. They were loud in their praises. *"It's great, Rudolph,"* said one. *"It will make you a great name,"* said another. But Rudolph wasn't satisfied. He went over it again and again until at last he had finished it. Then he set the orchestra to work on it.

Finally the night came for the pub-

lic performance, and the great hall was packed with people. As the beautiful harmony floated out over the audience, it touched a responsive chord in their hearts, and they caught the inspiration of the composer.

When the last strain had died out, there was a moment's silence. Then the great throng went almost wild in demonstrating their enthusiasm, and hundreds flocked to the stage to congratulate the musician.

But Rudolph stood there unmoved. After the enthusiasm had died down and the crowd had moved away, there came down the aisle an old, white-haired man. Going up to the young man, the elderly man placed both his hands on Rudolph's shoulders and said, *"Well done, Rudolph, well done."* At last a smile of satisfaction stole over the face of the young musician. That man was his master.

The young man was keenly aware that the audience, though they could perhaps appreciate beautiful music, were not proper critics. Did he really do well? Only his master could affirm that.

Oh, do we not long to hear that statement of acceptance from the lips of our Master, as His piercing eyes meet ours: *"Well done, good and faithful servant"*? Just think of the satisfaction, the happiness, the thrill of joy that will ripple through our being if we can hear those words!

But for those who really long to hear those words, there is work to be done...until He comes. There are seeds to be sown, crops to be harvested, a new man or woman to be recreated in the image of Christ. Will it be easy? No. It will mean sacrifice, suffering, a laying down of life. Look again to the Master, and what do you see? A man living in luxury? without a care? Was His life without suffering, without sacrifice? Never! He was human, with human passions like ours. But what mattered most was that He was pleasing the Father. *"Not my will but Thine,"* He prayed. And by His life of sacrifice, of giving, of love, He showed us the way. *"Take up your cross,"* He said, *"and follow me."*

Let us follow His example, as we encourage one another to a closer

walk in the strait and narrow way.

Did the early Church take Him seriously? It was said that the first Christians could be easily identified by their likeness to Christ. What can be said of us, you and me? Are we day by day becoming more and more like Christ?

*I will not take that bitter thrust
Which rent my heart today
As coming from an earthly soul—
Though it was meant that way.*

*But I will look beyond the tool,
Because my life is planned;
I take the cup my Father gives—
I take it from His hand.*

*He knows, and even thus allows,
These little things that irk.
I trust His wisdom and His love,
Let patience have her work.*

*Though human means have brought the sting,
I firmly take this stand:
My loving Father holds the cup,
I take it from His hand.*

*Now those who watch may wonder why
These things do not disturb.
I look right past the instrument
And see my Lord superb.*

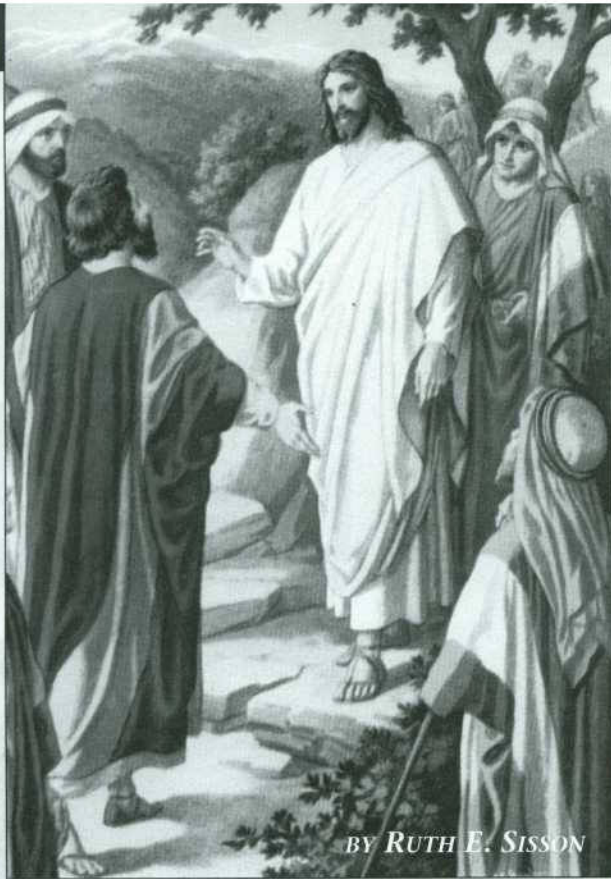
*The trials which would lay me low
Must pass through His command;
He holds the outstretched cup to me
I take it from His hand.*

—Mrs. Rae Mercer

I take it...gratefully...until He comes.

Who is this guest that is coming? He is the King of kings! Then let us get ready. With all that is in us, let us get ready. Our King is coming, and we do not want to be found unprepared. Is not each one of us a building of God? Then make haste to clean out the cobwebs, throw out the trash, scrub the floor, refinish the house from inside out! Oh, let us keep working, sowing, reaping...until He comes.

Let those words ring in our ears. *"The King is coming!"* Our heart is racing: *"I must be ready!"* ♦



BY RUTH E. Sisson

Taking Jesus Seriously

*F*or most people today, religion is a casual thing, good for a well-rounded life, perhaps, but not vital. After all, can't anyone see that faith doesn't put bread on the table, or clothes on your back, or a roof over your head? The hard realities of life take money, and more and more of it, in the view of most people today.

But Jesus' teaching about life was different, *very* different. In fact, He said *not* to make *things* one's goal. "*Don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs*" (Matt 6:31-32 NLT).

The vital issues, as Jesus saw them, were issues of life and death, *eternal* life and *eternal* death. One time when there was a question about what they would have for the next meal, Jesus took the opportunity to teach this lesson. "*You shouldn't be so concerned about perishable things like food,*" He said. "*Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that I, the Son of Man, can give you. For God the Father has sent me for that very purpose*" (John 6:27 NLT). Here was the central issue that motivated Jesus, and which He wanted to motivate His followers. "Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing"—and the money to acquire them?

Likewise, the religion Jesus taught was above the level of the mundane, above the level of life's necessities. And it was beyond—far beyond—the level of anything casual. It was all-consuming, all-possessing, all-absorbing. In fact, no one could really follow Him and remain his same old self. "*If any man will come after me, let him...*"—and what followed was radically transforming, all the way to the core of one's being. If anyone wanted only a casual belief, they would have to find another teacher.

The ministry of Jesus was so different, so out of the ordinary that He captured the public imagination. It was also so controversial at points that He caught the public outrage. One such instance is recorded in John 6.

Close your eyes, and picture the crowds thronging Jesus. They are enthusiastic, especially since He has just fed them with loaves and fishes. Anything that comes from *this* benefactor is worth going after—or so it seems. Then all at once the picture changes. Who are these people headed down the road away from Him—one here, two there, four or five, sometimes a whole group? Jesus is still teaching, but they are going home. Something Jesus has said does not suit them.

When the crowd had thinned to a mere handful, Jesus set His eyes upon the remaining remnant and put the question to them squarely: Do you also want to leave? (John 6:67). He was testing them: was their interest a mere fascination or ardent discipleship?

Jesus was thinking of faith and life on God's terms, and He called others to do the same. Taking Jesus seriously works precisely to this end. But some, like those who walked away that day, failed to meet the demands.

The religion of Jesus was above the level of the mundane. It was all-consuming and all-possessing. No one could really follow Jesus and remain the same old self.

Those defectors failed because what Jesus had said did not suit them. We all know how Mr. or Mrs. Average Speaker keeps a finger on the pulse of the audience. So did Jesus, but in a different way. He didn't preach to please. He planned His words to be hard hitting, yet thoroughly instructive. Never did He bend or compromise the truth to accommodate their thinking.

In an incident recorded in John 6, His hearers understood well enough. In fact they understood so well that they reacted unfavorably to what they had heard. Jesus had considered His audience, but His audience did not rightly consider Him. It was easier to reject the message than to take Jesus seriously.

In the same chapter Jesus had been discussing His ministry. He attempted to explain His purpose, how He was Himself, metaphorically speaking, the "bread of life" (verse 48). He even added another disturbing simile, saying that this spiritual, life-giving bread was His flesh and blood (verse 51). No one understood that it was His literal flesh. Yet His word-conscious critics bristled. The language shocked them. Jesus only went on to say more—that this spiritual blood would be their means of life if they would but drink it (verse 53). His words only deepened the critics' wrangle against Him.

When Jesus spoke about blood, He spoke about that which sustains life. Spiritual blood sustains spiritual life just as natural blood is vital for natural life. The giving up of one's blood meant giving up one's life, a total surrender. The language was uncomfortable. It sounded too much like sacrifice, surrender, suffering, and they didn't like it. And so they turned and headed down the road. The Gospel records that many in the crowd "drew back and no longer went with Him."

So many—then and now—would follow Jesus if it were not for this, or that, or the other...and there they stop. They stop for many different reasons, but any one is as effective as

another. They stop because they do not like to be told what they can and cannot do. They stop because they think a lot of what He says is good but He is taking things too far, that all this concern for one's words and actions and attitudes is unnecessary. They stop because they would rather make their own judgments of what is right and what is wrong. His doctrine is all right, but they do not like what He says about responsibility, and final judgment, and cross bearing, and the high standard of character He requires. They stop because they prefer themselves just as they are.

But their stopping doesn't change Jesus, not one iota, because Jesus is speaking with authority. He is speaking what He has received of His Father. Just think of it: when we listen to Jesus, we are listening to the God of Heaven. What higher authority could we seek?

Do we wonder why we should take it seriously?

What did Jesus teach? He taught that life is moving toward a consummation, and that each one of us is accountable to God for what we do, what we say, and the path we leave as we move through life. He taught that each one's life is being written in a heavenly book, and will at the end be taken apart and judged by God. He taught that there is a life to come that is determined by the way one lives here and now. Will we believe it? Will we follow? Will we take Him seriously?

Some would follow eagerly if it were not for this, or that, or the other. If it were not for His disciplines; if there were more evidence for His teachings; if they were more popular; if they were easier. They have a problem with His standards. Prodded by a strong desire for self-fulfillment, they fall hard over His word, "Deny thyself."

Recall the setting and the saying: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever would save his life will lose it; and whosoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's shall

*Jesus taught
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that is determined by
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here and now.*

save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? or what can a man give in return for his life?" (Mark 8:34-37 ASV). This is plainly a call to self-discipline, to submit to the law of Christ. Jesus knew the forces which dominate us—the pull of habit, the pull of popular opinion, the pull of constraining friendships, the pull of the path of least resistance, the pull of selfish whims, the pull of pleasure. He knew all this. Still He insists, "Deny thyself."

Will we do it, or will we refuse? Will we take Him seriously, or will we count Him just another voice from the past, and go our own way? The answer lies in whether we are concerned for the future, or only for the present. If we want anything future, His demand is inflexible. His is the *only* way, and each of us can take or leave it at will. But if we want life, if we want security and protection when the storm of God's judgments descends on this earth, we must take Him seriously—now. ♦



Nothing is easier than fault-finding. It takes no talent, no self-respect, no brains, no character, to set up in the Grumbling Business.

And that is probably why so many people are engaged in it. Most anyone can find something to grumble about without half trying. The weather is too hot or too cold, too rainy or too dry. "Do we have to eat leftovers again? It seems that's all we have is leftovers!" Or maybe it's a wardrobe problem. "I need a *new* coat but all I get is hand-me-downs."

Maybe you've heard the story about the man who complained about the poor yield from his apple trees—until they produced a crop so abundant that he complained because the trees had taken so much out of the soil. How silly! we say. But isn't most of our grumbling and complaining just that silly? Usually the subject is things that are of no real significance, or issues over which we have no control.

All through the ages there have been grumblers, complainers, faultfinders. The children of Israel were typical. They grumbled when they were pursued by Pharaoh's host. They complained because they had no water. They found fault with the manna. They grumbled because they had no meat to eat. Time and again they grumbled against Moses their leader.

Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians spoke of these grumblers and exhorted us "*And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel*" (NIV). God is not pleased with such actions, and if we grumble and complain as they did, we, too, shall be destroyed.

Who likes to be around a grumbler? I don't. Certainly no chronic complainer is ever really happy. Have you ever seen one that was?

There is no good reason for grumbling. It is nothing but a bad habit we need to break.

The grumbling business is all nonprofit. It always has

been, and it always will be. It's not only nonprofit but the person engaged in it loses. He loses his peace, his happiness and contentment, and often his friends.

Let's get out of this extremely non-profitable business *now*, once and for all, and instead let us become all absorbed in the business of being a real true Christian, living as Christ lived. This is the most profitable business one can ever engage in.

Do you really want to make your life profitable? Go into partnership with the Eternal God. He is willing, and will help just as much as you let Him.

God has devised a Master Plan that has been proven over the ages. Tried and true, it has never yet failed, neither can it be improved. However, God is very particular and will go into partnership only with those who promise to follow His instructions in every detail.

Think of it! If we allow Him, God will show us how to make an *eternal* profit. Not only will we make a *profit* but we will collect huge dividends as well.

Very few have entered into partnership with God and then followed His directions to the letter. You know, it's very easy for human nature to feel that they know a thing or two about becoming successful. These "would-be-good business people" begin to make changes in the policies and procedures that the Almighty has supplied. They make a slight change here, or a little deviation there, and feel that their business will still produce rich rewards, but they will be sadly disappointed.

Let us get one fact firmly fixed in our mind: that God's business plan cannot be improved upon. So let us study His plan diligently, and go to work and follow it minutely. We have ample evidence that it really works, but first we must give up our own thoughts, our own ideas, our own ways and follow the advice of our Senior Partner. This is the most profitable business we can engage in, and it will pay and pay and pay through the endless ages of eternity. ♦



What I Need

I need a strength to keep me true
And straight in everything I do;

I need a power to keep me strong
When I am tempted to do wrong;

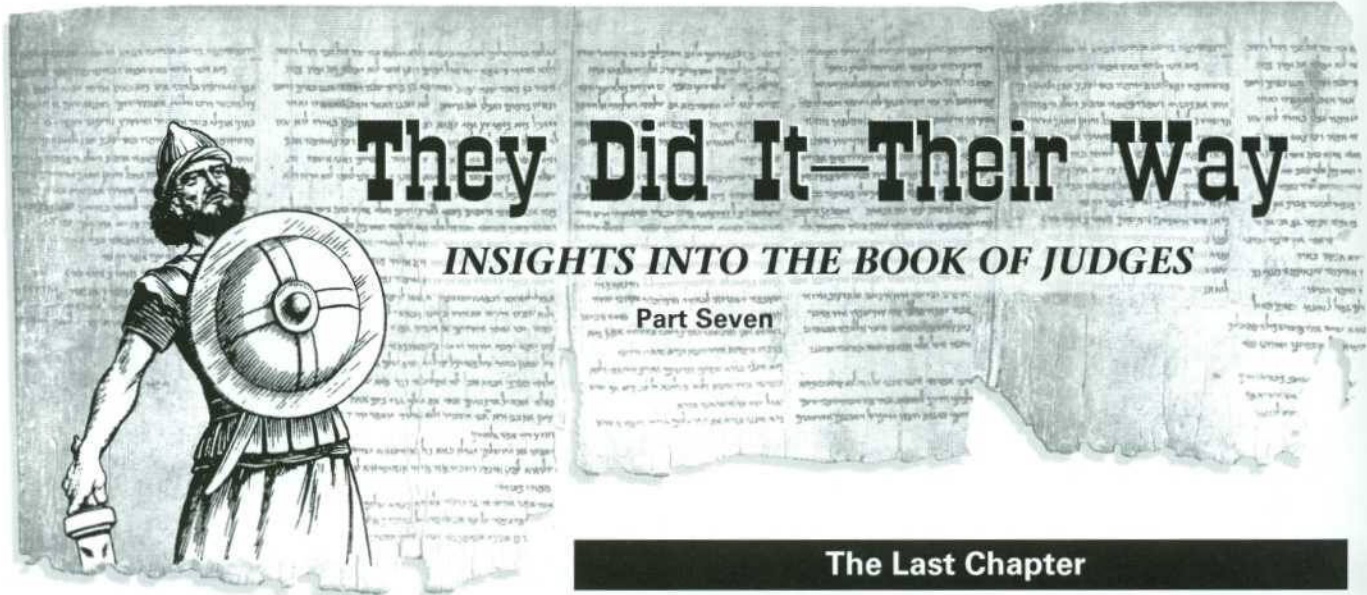
I need a grace to keep me pure
When passion wafts its deadly lure;

I need a love to keep me sweet
When hardness and mistrust I meet;

I need an arm to be my stay
When dark with trouble grows my day;

Oh, what on earth can these afford?
I find them in God's Living Word.

— Selected



The story of Gideon does not end with his tremendous victory over the Midianites. There is one more chapter that tells us something more about Gideon and his character.

First, quite unexpectedly, the people asked if they could make Gideon king. *"Rule over us, both you, and your son, and your grandson also,"* they said, *"for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian"* (Judges 8:22 NKJV). What a temptation—to become the king of Israel and start his own dynasty!

Here is the first expression of Israel's desire for a monarchy form of government. Somehow the people believed that a king could provide the best insurance against foreign domination.

What was Gideon's reaction? Hear his humble reply: *"I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you"* (verse 23). Here was a man in Israel who was not doing what was right in his own eyes, who had more interest in the rulership of God than in his own. Gideon recognized that the request was from the people, not from God. God was to be Israel's sole ruler, and Gideon would not presume to take that place.

"Ye did run well"

Sadly, though, this is not the end of the story. There is one more incident, which casts a shadow over all of Gideon's good work. After all the triumph of battle, the victorious three hundred, the triumphant pursuit, and the final defeat of the enemy, Gideon disappoints us. After breaking down the altar of Baal and turning the people back to the worship of the true God, he takes a step backward himself. He asks the people to bring him the earrings they had taken as spoil from the defeated Midianites.

What does Gideon do with the gold? He does not use it for personal profit. But he uses it to make an ephod.

The ephod was a Divinely prescribed garment worn by

the high priest. It was really an elaborate apron, which the high priest wore when worshiping the Lord in the holy place of the tabernacle (Judges 8:27; Ex. 28:4, 6).

Gideon was no priest. He came from the tribe of Manasseh, yet he made this valuable and holy garment. Then he put it in his city for all to see. So now, instead of an image for Baal which his father had set up, he placed this holy relic as a sign of his faith in Jehovah. But he was not following God's directions. He was doing what was right in his own eyes.

This ephod became a memorial to the great victory they had won. Gideon intended it to be for the glory of the Lord, but it turned out differently. *"And Gideon made it into an ephod...and it became a snare unto Gideon and to his house"* (verse 27).

Back in Judges 2:3, we read of the Lord's warning, that *"Their gods shall be a snare unto you."* This came true in a terrifying way as the ephod became a snare to the family of Gideon.

What a lesson, that that which was set up to be a memorial to the glory of God so quickly developed into a *"holy ephod"* and became the city's idol.

Is it not a lesson to us, that the misuse of holy things can be detrimental, even deteriorating into a purpose that works against God? By this action Gideon took their allegiance and their true effort away from the living God to a lifeless object. What is the principle? *Never do evil that good may come.* Gideon made his ephod, placed it in Ophrah, *"where he lived,"* and soon all the Israelites were worshiping it, and *"it became a trap for Gideon and his family"* (Judges 8:27 NLT).

Gideon was wise enough to refuse the honor of king. He had enough spiritual discernment to perceive that a judge was only an instrument in the hand of the true King, God. But in making the ephod and setting it up to be wor-

shipped, he undid all the good that he might have done.

At this time God had set Shiloh as the gathering place of the people. But Shiloh was forgotten in this time of apostasy. Following the work of Gideon, patriotism was strong, but the people were spiritually weak. Notice their fickleness: *"And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel"* (Judges 8:33–35).

What a sad chronicle: the people were unfaithful to Gideon, and unfaithful to God.

Good and Evil

Gideon's good act in rejecting the kingship provides an excellent example to follow. The offer must have been tempting, especially when he had just returned from the exhausting victory. A triumph of this kind always tends to make a person feel important, and to believe he deserves honor. But Gideon recognizes this is not an office open to him or anyone else. God had reserved it for Himself, and Gideon had the sense to refuse the honor.

But the good act of Gideon in refusing the kingship was offset by the wrong one in having the ephod made. By doing this, he was really invading the area of service reserved for the high priest. Yes, he who had personally received revelation through the angel of the Lord, an honor no one else had had since the time of Joshua; he who had been God's instrument in delivering the people from Midianite oppression, presumed to take on the duties of a substitute high priest, which God had not appointed.

Though Gideon did not serve as king, it is quite possible that he served as judge in a kingly style. The fact that the people offered him full kingship could have influenced him in this direction. Another indication is the fact that he had seventy sons born to him, and these from several wives. One of these sons, born in Shechem, was named *"Abimelech,"* which means *"my father is king."* Though Gideon was not king, still the fact that he gave his son such a name suggests that the thought of position was near his mind.

Still a third indication is the fact that this son Abimelech had his own desire to serve as king, possibly following the example of his father. A final suggestion comes from the fact that Abimelech later implied to the leaders of Shechem that Gideon's other sons had ideas of ruling as well (Judges 9:2), perhaps because they had been accustomed to living as royal princes.

We need not criticize Gideon for this. It may well have been that he gave strong leadership at a time when it was needed, and kept the people from returning to Baal worship as long as he lived. Israel needed this type of leader-

ship and influence. The fact that the Israelites reverted to Baal worship as soon as Gideon died emphasizes the degree of attraction it had for the people. Couldn't they see what the worship of Baal had not done for them? Couldn't they see what the true God did in delivering them from the Midianite oppression? One would think that the people would have learned a lesson they would never forget, that they would never return to Baal. But they did return—a fact that shows the weakness of our own human hearts. For as they were, so are we. Now, as ever, we are tempted to take the easy course, to follow the pattern of those around us, to fall again and again into sin.

Had the Israelites been wisely led, they would have gone to Shiloh, to worship the God of Israel who had delivered them. Sin was the cause of the evil that Gideon and his bravery had all his life been battling. But now, instead of going himself to God, Gideon set up a sham house of God of his own choice and a sham service of God of his own, with the result that Israel went away from God. Think of Gideon, of all men in Israel, leading the people away from God! The pleasure-loving people came up to Gideon's pleasure-giving ephod, when both he and they should have gone to God's true ephod in Shiloh. They forgot all about the Midianites as they came up to Ophrah to eat and drink and dance.

Gideon proved one thing: That it takes much more than putting on a costly ephod to make a loyal, godly priest.

Do we ever think that we can change God's ways, that our ways are better? Let us beware of repeating Gideon's fatal mistake. In the words of the poet,

*The gray haired saint may fail at last,
The surest guide a wanderer prove;
The bark, that all the way across the sea
Ran straight and speedy, may perish at the last,
Even in the haven's mouth.*

Gideon was that gray haired saint, that sure guide, that straight and speedy bark.

Let us be sure we do *not* follow his example. ♦

(To be continued)

*G*ideon, tempted by the
easy course of those around
him, fell into sin.

QUOTABLE QUOTES...

*Lord, may I live that all may see
The love of Christ revealed in me;
And help me flee all sin and shame,
Lest others scoff at Your dear name.*



You don't need to know where you're going if you know God is leading.

Criticizing Others

Have you ever met someone and formed a negative first impression—which you had to change later?

What did those living during the time of the Civil War say about Abraham Lincoln? Many were ridiculing, caricaturing, and vilifying him. He was called a clown, an ignorant backwoods lawyer, a despot, a butcher, a gorilla, a fool, a scoundrel and a villain. Nor was all this from the South, as one might suppose. Far from it.

What was the end result of such careless remarks? Incited by such cruel criticism, an insane man assassinated him. Our misguided remarks, however true, however justified we think they may be, could do great harm to another, even to taking their life.

Today, public opinion has reversed. Abraham Lincoln is revered almost as a god, in the North and South alike. No, we are never justified for such criticism. Are we guilty of criticizing another, even when we do not know all the facts? If we are, then one or more of the following sins may lie at our door:

Peter "listed five sins of attitude and speech, which if harbored will drive wedges between us as believers. **Malice** (*kakian*) is wicked ill-will; **deceit** (*dolon*) is deliberate dishonesty; **hypocrisy** (*hypokriseis*), pretended piety and love; **envy** (*phthonous*), resentful discontent; and **slander** (*katalalias*), backbiting lies. None of these should have any place in the heart of true believers. Rather, in obedience to the Word, they are

to make decisive breaks with the past (1 Pet. 2:1)" — *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

No matter how pious we are, we need to be careful. The Jews were pious during Jesus' day to keep the law. But they wanted to be sure that others did, too. Ironically, they added so many details that the law became a grievous burden. When Jesus began to teach the Words of God and to show by conduct what God's will was, they saw Him as a threat. They had their own ideas of how to serve God, ways which were not altogether in accordance with what they heard and saw the Man from Galilee teach and do. The more they heard and saw, the more they complained and slandered Him. Like the insane man who killed Lincoln, they crucified the Lord, our coming King.

Think about your conduct, about what you say about others. Would you be among those who crucified the Lord? Let us be careful to think before we answer. Do we have our own preconceived ideas about right and wrong? Do we believe and practice every Word the Master taught? What did James say about offending? "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*" (James 2:10).

Following Christ's example is no small task. There is always a battle over sin to be won—a wayward thought to direct, a proud heart to humble, an unruly tongue to tame. But think of the glory that will belong to the winners, even "*glory and honour and immortality, eternal life*" (Rom. 2:7).

A photograph of a brick wall with climbing vines and red roses. The vines are green with small leaves, and the roses are dark red. The wall is made of reddish-brown bricks.

Those Little Sponges...

You shall teach them to your children...when you lie down, and when you rise up. —Deuteronomy 11:19

Most people today use sponges that are synthetic, but few know that real sponges were at one time living sea animals. When a live sponge is removed from the sea and its living matter is cleaned out, it becomes useful for household purposes. The skeleton that remains, with its open-celled structure, can soak up and absorb liquid.

Children are like sponges. They are constantly soaking up attitudes and ideas from their surroundings.

What are your children absorbing in your home? Are they absorbing the level of speech and behavior that is promoted by the television? What are they getting from magazines they see in your home? As they listen to your conversations, what kind of words and attitudes are they taking in? Are you setting an example of love for God and concern for others? Is there a warm radiance of hope in your heart, and a strong spiritual direction in your life? Are you the living Word of God acted out in real life for them?

Someday soon our children will be giving out what they have taken in during their formative, impressionable years. Let's make sure that those little "sponges" are soaking up all that is pure, true, wholesome, and uplifting.

Control Yourself

There is something lacking in one who can control his dog better than himself. It makes one wonder which is living the dog's life.

Evidently it takes more power to control self than to control others or even animals. But why should it be so? In giving an order to others, the order may be misunderstood. In giving an order to self, you know what you mean.

He who rules himself is the most masterly master. Being free, he is unshackled to handle today and unchained to face tomorrow. He is Mr. Freedom, Mr. Victory, Mr. Boss. He directs himself, and that's where success or failure begins.

The world is yours, provided YOU are in control of yourself.

"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control" (Prov. 25:28 NIV).

—Selected

Be Like the Airplane!

Between an airplane and every other form of locomotion and transportation there is one great contrast. The horse and wagon, the automobile, the bicycle, the locomotive, the speedboat, and the great battleship—all can come to a standstill without danger, and all can reverse their engines, or their power, and go back.

But there is no reverse about the engine of an airplane. It cannot back up. It dare not stand still. If it loses its momentum and forward drive, it crashes. The only safety for the airplane is in its forward, upward motion. Likewise the only safe direction for the Christian to take is forward and upward. If he stops, or if he begins to slip and go backward, that moment he is in danger.



The End of the Age

FROM THE DAYS OF NOAH

PART ONE

CHARACTERS:

Jubal husband
Derka Jubal's wife
Eber Jubal's young son
Dinah Jubal's sister

NARRATOR:

"Time that takes a survey of the world must have a stop." In these words a playwright of yesteryear penned an age-old truth which we need to remember: Time as we know it will have an end. The end of an age is even now upon us. God has spoken, and what He has foretold will most certainly come to pass. Prophets of automatic progress proclaim loudly that all things continue as they were from the beginning, but the Word of the Lord shouts even more loudly that all things do NOT continue as they were. We are approaching an end, the end of this age.

This is not the first such end in history. There have been others, lesser in significance perhaps, but no less final to the people living at the time.

Many an age has ended, but not without warning. God never sends a great destruction without first sending a warning. And when God warns, He means for us to listen. If we do not, if we disregard His warning, we do so at our own peril.

Let's go back to the time of Noah, the end of an early age, and see what happened, for there is a lesson there for us: *"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man."*

First, we hear the warning, as God spoke to Noah: (*sound of thunder, visible lightning, followed by loud, booming voice*).

VOICE:

"My spirit shall not always strive with man The end of all

flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them. And behold, I will destroy them.

"Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And behold, I even I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy. But with thee will I establish my covenant: and thou shalt come into the ark."

NARRATOR:

Days came, and days passed. Decades came, and decades passed. Suns rose, and suns set, just as they always had. Meanwhile, Noah was building, building, day after day, day after day (sound effects of hammers on wood in distance), for we read that Noah *"did according to all that the Lord commanded him."* One hundred twenty long years he labored, delivering God's message of warning to all who would listen. But as we might expect, he had little success.

Let's go now to the land of the Two Rivers and visit a family who had heard Noah preaching years earlier. In this family is Jubal, his wife Derka, and a young son Eber. When Jubal heard Noah preaching years earlier, he had dismissed it casually. Now it is raining and raining and raining, and Jubal is having second thoughts. Could Noah possibly have been right?

This is no ordinary downpour. For seven days and seven nights now torrents of water have cascaded from the blackened skies, and there is no sign of abatement.

Jubal and his family lived near a small tributary of the great Euphrates which is usually nothing to fear, being a dry bed of sand and stones the greater part of the year. But now it is a raging, frothing, turbulent, yellow monster spreading wider and wider over the fertile valley and already lapping hungrily at the low mound on which Jubal's house is built. Another cubit upward, and the floor

will be awash. Indeed, it is time for Jubal to have second thoughts about Noah and his message.

On the fourth day of the rain, Jubal had rounded up all his cattle, sheep and goats and crowded them into the rear of his none-too-large dwelling. Now the thick walls of sun-dried brick are steadily growing thinner. And to make matters worse, the roof is leaking. The outlook is growing steadily worse. Overnight the rising waters have reached the plain behind their ridge and as far as the eye can see stretches a vast shallow lake. Yesterday, Jubal's sister arrived, cold and drenched, flooded out of her lowland home. Wet, miserable, and more than half frightened they are, no mistake. But there is nothing to do but wait. And worry. And wish for what they might have done weeks and months and years ago.

(Curtain opens, Jubal and Derka, and son Eber, and Jubal's sister Dinah. Setting: Living quarters of Jubal's home, crowded, damp. Floor and furniture are wet, water everywhere.)

EBER: O god of the rivers, have mercy. Have mercy on us!
(kneels in prayer and lifts hands) O ever-shining sun-god, shine! Shine on us. We have had enough rain. Shine, O sun god. Shine—

JUBAL: Be quiet, Eber! *(sharply)* Do you want to bring us more bad luck? The more you pray, the harder it rains.

DINAH: And the higher the river gets.

DERKA: And the more the roof leaks.

JUBAL: Well,

DERKA: Well, what are you going to do about it? That's what I'd like to know.

JUBAL: Me? What can I do? I didn't start this rain.

DERKA: No, but you built the roof.

JUBAL: You know well enough what I wanted to do a long time ago. If we'd done as I said, we'd be dry and safe now. So there!

DERKA: Yes, I know, and it was a long time ago. You know why I wouldn't do it. Do you think I wanted to be a laughing stock in the neighborhood?

JUBAL: All right, all right, but we'd better be careful.

EBER: Old Noah will be laughing at us if this keeps up. *(Eber goes over and looks out window, picks up an old coat, holds it up and watches the water drip from it.)*

DINAH: No sense quarreling now. It won't do any good anyway. Take a look at the river now, Jubal.

(Jubal slips and slides across the muddy, cluttered floor toward a single window and peers out.)

DINAH: Maybe we're right, and maybe not. If anybody is right, I'd guess it's the man in that ark up there *(jerks a*

thumb toward the higher ground to the north).

JUBAL: That's what I say. You know, at one time, I believed in his God—more or less.

DERKA: Yes, I know you did. You'd be all for joining his band of fanatics and turning your back on the rest of the world. As though he had a monopoly on God. Lucky you didn't stick to it and disgrace the family.

JUBAL: Well, I couldn't just see everything his way, but now I admit he had good judgment, to say the least. It's a good ark—

DERKA: With a good roof.

JUBAL: When I first heard old Noah preach, it made quite an impression on me, I even got rid of some of my household images. I well remember the first time it clouded up for a rain after that. I threw the rest of my gods into the fire and started for the ark. But on the way it cleared up, and I turned around and went home.

EBER: And made you a new set of gods!

JUBAL: Yes, but I didn't have much faith in them. Noah did that much for me anyway.

DERKA: The results of his work show he's using the wrong method. Here he's preached over a hundred years, and not one of the people of this whole valley could he get to stand by him very long. Only his wife and his sons and their wives! A miserably small showing, after all these years of preaching. Now if I were doing it—

JUBAL: *(dryly)* Yes, yes, but don't forget this; right or wrong, he's in and we're out. And—

EBER: And the river is still rising. So—*(long silence)*

DINAH: Trouble with this ark business has been the false alarms. People used to get a little excited when it started to flood, but the lowlands have been flooded probably forty times since he's been preaching. How can he expect anyone to take him seriously after all these years? The river has always gone down.

DERKA: And it will go down again.

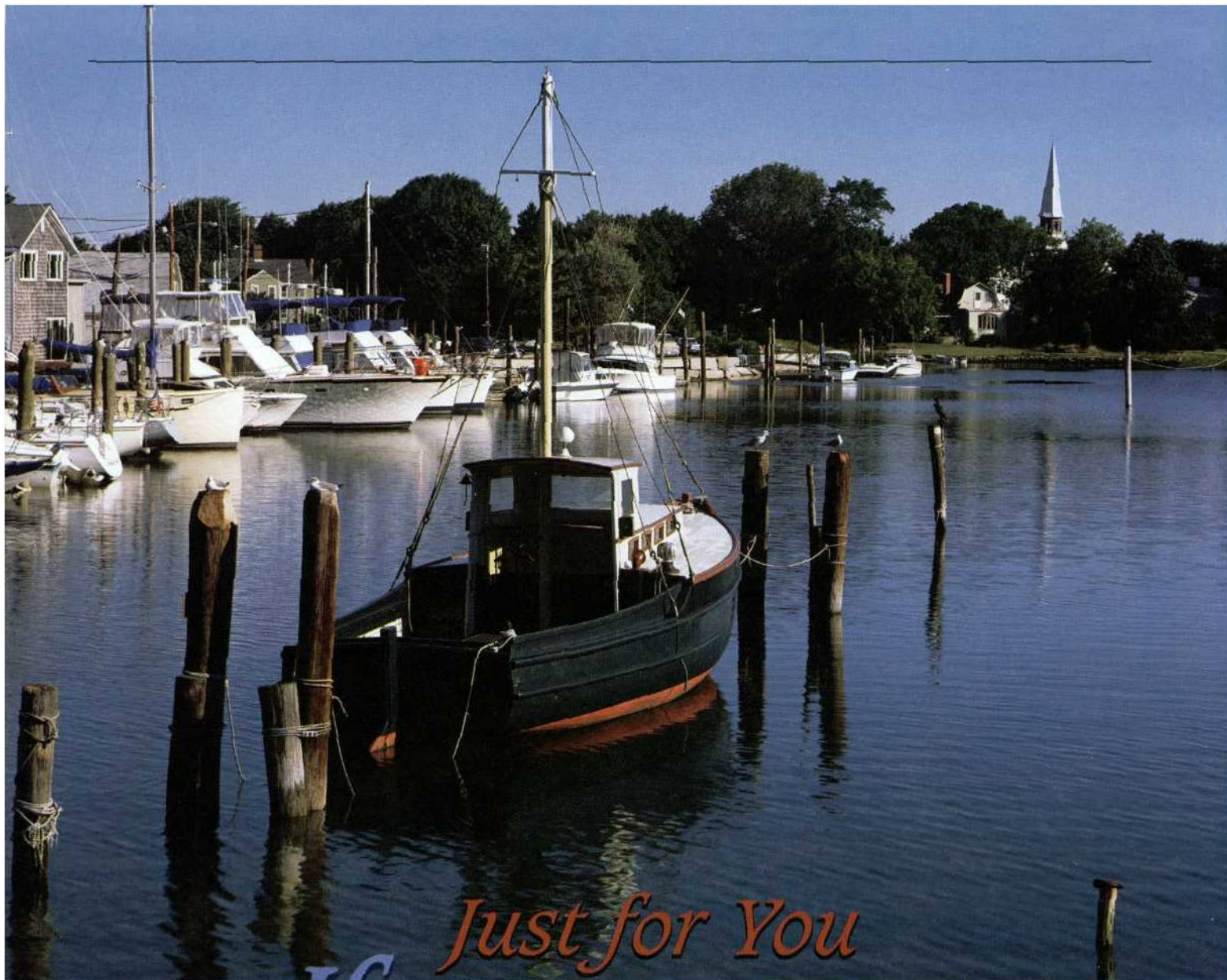
JUBAL: Did Noah ever say any of these floods was the big one he was preparing for?

DERKA: Well, no-o-o

DINAH: He would have been in bad trouble if they had been, because it's just in the last month or so that he's gotten the ark finished.

JUBAL: That's what worries me. This is the first time that Noah has gone into the ark and shut the door. It looks like he really believes something is coming. Maybe he really has some message from God now.

(Continued on page 19)



Just for You

If...

If you are impatient, sit down quietly and talk with Job.

If you are just strong-headed, go and see Moses.

If you are getting weak-kneed, take a good look at Elijah.

If there is no song in your heart, listen to David.

If you like to think about the big picture, read Daniel.

If you are getting sordid and blue, spend awhile with Isaiah.

If you are chilly, let the beloved disciple put his arms around you.

If you need more courage, get acquainted with Peter.

If your faith is below par, read Paul.

If you talk too much, go visit with James.

If you are getting lazy, watch Jude.

If you are losing sight of the future, climb the stairs of Revelation with John and take a long look at the Promised Land.

—Selected

(Continued from page 17)

DERKA: Nonsense! Who is he that God should favor him with a warning? There are smarter men than old Noah in this valley and good people without number. Why should he be saved and they lost?

JUBAL: Never mind why; they are probably drowning now, while he is safe for some time to come.

DINAH: As for his believing something is coming, no doubt he does.

DERKA: He has preached it for so long he surely must believe it, by now it has gone to his head. He's just a simple-minded old fanatic with some practical ideas, I admit, but away behind the times. Our race has always lived in this valley.

DINAH: And it always will. *(silence again, while Jubal goes to window and peers through the driving rain to watch Noah's strange craft. Watches as flood swirls perilously near his walls. Eber comes over to his side, watches also.)*

EBER: Oh! this water—what if our house slides into the current!

JUBAL: *(springing suddenly)* Come on, folks. Let's get over to the ark while there is still time. Why should we stay here and drown!

Eber: Yes! Let's go! I don't want to die yet.

JUBAL: Noah will let us in, I'm sure.

DINAH: *(dubious)* You think so? You know, last month he warned you of this, and you laughed at him.

JUBAL: I know, but he won't turn a good neighbor down. I'm going. Nothing to lose! *(starts for the door)*

DERKA: *(grabs Jubal by the arm)* Don't be a fool, Jubal! You know what it means to go into that ark. It is to admit that he is right and all the rest of us are wrong! It's out of the question.

JUBAL: But what good is it to argue about right and wrong while we drown?

DERKA: We're not going to drown. This is just an unusually wet spell of weather, it has rained before, the river has risen before. We'll be all right. *(long silence)* If you leave here, don't go in with Noah. They think they're so much better than the rest of us. Why can't we wade across the plain to the next ridge?

JUBAL: Not a chance in the world. We'd be washed away in less than a furlong. You should have thought of that yesterday.

DERKA: Well, I didn't see any of the neighbors going, so I wasn't going to be the first to run.

JUBAL: And where are your neighbors now?

DERKA: You didn't see any trying to get into the ark, did you?

JUBAL: They may be glad to get in before this is over *(Jubal edges toward door)*.

DERKA: Jubal, sit down! You're not going out of this house. If the river comes up to the door we can take to the housetop. If we ever went into that ark, and the rain stopped, how would we ever face the neighbors? I tell you, I'm not going to make a fool of myself.

DINAH: Let's leave it like this: We are reasonably safe here until night, and if the river is up to the door by that time, we will go over to the ark and ask to be taken in. No use doing anything rashly. *(Jubal sits down resignedly)*

JUBAL: I guess that's the best plan. *(strains eyes again to see the ark)* It does *(very slowly)* seem to be getting a little bit lighter, perhaps. Maybe—maybe it is only a hard rain after all. And if worst comes to worst, Noah will let us in.

DINAH: Yes, Noah will let us in.

EBER: I sure hope so! ♦ *(To be continued next issue)*

The results of Noah's work show he's using the wrong method. Here he's preached over a hundred years, and only his wife and his sons and their wives stand by him! A miserably small showing!... Now if I were doing it—

Yes, yes, but don't forget this: right or wrong, he's IN and we're OUT. And—it's raining!!!



Why Are We Here?

"Why are we here? Has God put us here to suffer?" — from A Friend

The ultimate reason for life on earth is not suffering but supreme joy and pleasures. In fact, God Himself has promised that when His plan on earth is complete, everyone will enjoy a utopia, free of all that can harm or destroy. *"Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. And as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord. Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return to Jerusalem, singing songs of everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be overcome with joy and gladness"* (Isa. 11:9; 35:10 NLT).

About six thousand years ago God began working with the inhabitants of earth (Adam and Eve), informing them of how they could become part of His plan. Isaiah, speaking on this subject, declared long ago that God *"created the heavens and earth and put everything in place. He made the world to be lived in, not to be a place of empty chaos. 'I am the Lord,' he says, 'and there is no other'"* (Isa. 45:18 NLT).

Peter, referring to this same future time, said, *"in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness"* (2 Pet. 3:13 NIV).

God's ultimate goal for this earth is an everlasting Kingdom occupied by loving, happy individuals who will not suffer but enjoy life free from care, disappointment, heartache, illness, sorrow and death. There is a wonderful future life for all who truly love God—a life like none ever experienced, surpassing anything that has ever entered the mind of any man or woman (1 Cor. 2:9; Eph. 3:20).

Experience tells us that all mortals suffer to varying degrees. History is replete with war and strife, disease and death, plagues and all sorts of atrocities. Despite what we call modern times and the great strides made in science and medicine, the human experience today is no different. The news is filled with stories of suffering and death. As the wise man said, *"...time and chance happen to them all"* (Eccl. 9:11 NIV). Job said, *"How frail is humanity! How short is life, and how full of trouble! Like a flower, we blossom for a moment and then wither. Like the shadow of a passing cloud, we quickly disappear"* (Job 14:1-2 NLT). It may seem there is little to offer beyond a few fleeting years of life, with whatever mixture of happiness and ill it may bring.

Even in the midst of a world of suffering and strife, most find a degree of happiness and pleasure. In fact, pleasure is the goal of most. If this life were all, the majority have

much for which to be grateful. But while many may be happy with life as it is, the thinking man or woman wants more than this life has to offer. While science has managed to extend our life expectancy, it has failed to give us lasting life or any hope of life without pain or sorrow. If we put confidence in our fellow beings and hope for more, we shall be disappointed. As the Psalmist said, and I am sure you will agree, *"It is better to trust the Lord"* (Ps. 118:8 NLT).

A preparation time

What is the purpose of this present life?

Before any individual can realistically look forward to having a share in God's final plan for this earth, there must be a time of preparation. No one is forced to participate. It is left up to the individual. *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve,"* said Joshua (Josh. 24:15). Here we come to a fork in the road. The rest of our life will be determined, to a great extent, by which road we take. Jesus described one road as the broad way which leads to death, while the other is a narrow way leading to everlasting life (Matt. 7:13-14).

Up to this point our eye has been on the present, the life of here-and-now, the broad way. We can choose to remain in that way, or we can look beyond to a future life. Be assured, neither road is free from suffering and hardship. If we choose the broad way, we may live to an old age with a fair amount of happiness, or our life may end after the next breath. But one fact is certain: we will die. The only escape from this final, dismal end is to choose what Jesus called the narrow way, and that road leads to life, everlasting life.

There are only two roads. One leads to death, the other to life. It would seem that everyone would choose the road to life. But, as previously stated, it is "narrow." The very description indicates that there are sacrifices to be made, and the majority, hoping for an easier route, are not attracted.

What can one choosing "life" realistically expect along the narrow road which Jesus said leads there? Would you expect a college degree without first preparing to pass the required exams? Neither can one expect to pass the final exam at the Judgment seat of Christ without preparation.

Just as it takes discipline to pass a course of study, so discipline is needed in preparing for eternal life. And discipline requires some giving up, some loss, some suffering.

It seems that the righteous have suffered at the hands of their unsupportive, often antagonistic peers, almost from the time Cain slew Abel. Persecution was off and on through the reformation. It is well documented how the early Christians suffered terrible atrocities, first from the Jews and then from among members of their own ranks. This situation was prophesied by Paul when he said: *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock"* (Acts 20:29). At times, persecution and suffering were so great that Isaiah informs us: *"The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come"* (Isa. 57:1).

The plan called for both the wicked and righteous to dwell together for a time. *"Let both grow together until the harvest: and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares [representing the evil], and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat [the righteous] into my barn"* (Matt. 13:30 NKJV). Both inhabit the earth. Both receive good from God, who makes *"his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matt. 5:45). But when Christ returns the wicked will be destroyed, while the righteous will be saved.

While we cannot deny that God's plan involves suffering, it is not suffering without purpose or benefit. The apostle Peter declared that we should not think it a strange thing to suffer. *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you"* (1 Pet. 4:12 NLT). If we are servants of Christ we can expect to undergo a certain amount of suffering, if we must call it that. But think of the scholar, the athlete, or one studying for a career. The tests are for their development. So it is with those who aspire to becoming sons and daughters of God through covenant. They will have tests, or as Peter calls them, trials. Abraham was tried when he was called upon to offer his only begotten son Isaac. Moses was tried when he *"refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter"* and chose rather *"to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time"* (Heb. 11:25-26 NIV).

The crown of all victories was Christ's, who suffered leaving an example for all who would come after Him. Did He not say, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Matt. 16:24)? It is a life of denial, and who can deny that this is suffering? Paul compared it to dying. *"I die daily"* (1 Cor. 15:31). Some think it is terrible to have to give up smoking, drinking, cursing, swearing, or any one of a host of self-destructive habits. It is a sacrifice. But like any discipline, whether it be

for a career, for education, saving for a new car, or just preparing a meal, discipline is involved. This is how God is working with His own.

Paul tells us about this discipline: *"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should*

we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:7-11 NIV). Discipline is for our training,

to develop in us an upright character. Or, as verse 7 of the NLT reads: *"As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined?"*

God does not force us to come under His discipline. He informs us of what our duty is as His son or daughter and what He will give us if we comply with His instructions. If we come under the yoke of Christ we will never be forsaken as long as we remain under that yoke. *"I will never leave thee"* is a Divine promise (Heb. 13:5). Christ did not say that we would not have some load, some burden: but He did say that *"my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matt. 11:30).

Best of all, choosing to serve God is a no-risk choice. We are guaranteed success in obtaining eternal life if we do our part. *"God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him"* (1 Pet. 1:5 NLT). How can we fail with the help of God? As Christ said, *"with God all things are possible"* (Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27).

We also have the assurance that no temptation will come into our lives that is more than we can bear. *"Remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it"* (1 Cor. 10:13 NLT).

At first glance a Christian life may seem to have no advantage over a "normal" life. However, happiness does not depend on wealth or fame, good health and friends, but upon our own state of mind. Life at best is short and will soon end without hope of any future unless we abide by the precepts of God. *"For that which befalleth the sons of*

Choosing to serve God
is a no-risk choice. If we do
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men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity" (Eccl. 3:19). But for the Christian "there is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while" (1 Pet. 1:6 NLT).

The early Christians maintained a joyful attitude even during severe persecution because they kept the words of Christ in mind: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets" (Matt. 5:11-12; Luke 6:23).

Paul said that we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also." How could they do it? Because: they knew "that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3-5 NKJV).

Paul instructed the Thessalonica Church to "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you..." (1 Thess. 5:16-18). These words are timely for us in these last days preceding Christ's return. "And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him, you trust him; and even now you are happy with a glorious, inexpressible joy. Your reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:5-9 NLT).

What is the key to this inexpressible joy? It is hope, hope of eternal salvation. The words of the spokesmen for God proved inadequate to describe the greatness of the blessings God has in store for every faithful one. They are "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," exclaimed Paul (Eph. 3:20). We simply do not have the mind to comprehend them.

Why are we here? For the training, for the hope of eternal inexpressible joy (salvation). And for all this, God demands that we worship Him only and obey His righteous precepts. In light of what He offers, far more than we can ever begin to earn, can we think for a moment that He is asking too much? ♦



Is Your Light Darkness?

"If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness" –Matthew 6:23

Jesus said that the difference between truth and error, between right and wrong, between good and evil is like the difference between light and darkness.

Consider the flickering glow of a lightning bug. This lowly creature has the remarkable ability to combine two rare chemicals, luciferas and luciferin, to produce a tiny amount of light that is visible in the darkness of summertime.

Now set this amount of light beside the light of the sun, with its blinding brilliance. Couldn't you say that the lightning bug's light is, by comparison, "darkness"?

In Matthew 6, Jesus cautioned His hearers about living for the riches of this world, and urged them rather to lay up their treasures in heaven, "where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Then He illustrated by referring to the eye as the "lamp" of the body. If our focus is on spiritual values, we will be full of light. But if we live only for earthly riches and selfish pleasure, then what we think is light is in reality only darkness.

Wasn't this what Paul meant when he said that the invisibles are the realities, and the intangibles are the permanencies? "For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

As long as we are living for the things which this world can give or take away, from God's viewpoint we are in darkness. Only God is the source of light that gives life, eternal life.

What Is the New Covenant?

"What is the new covenant of Hebrews 10, that God will write in the hearts of His people, and He will wipe out their sins?"

The passage to which you refer is in Hebrews 10:16-17, and follows a discussion of two previous covenants.

At the beginning of the chapter, the author speaks of "the law" which could "never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year make those who approach perfect." He speaks of the sacrifices required under the Mosaic system, where the blood of bulls and of goats was offered for transgressions but could not remove sin (Heb. 10:4). Then, by way of contrast, he mentions a better system than that of sacrifices and offerings. It is the offering of one's self in obedience to the will of God, as Christ did: "Then said I, Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God" (v. 7). He then comments that the sacrifices and offerings under the law did not give pleasure to God as did the law of obedience (v. 8), then adds that the first (the law of sacrifice and offering) was taken away to make place for the second (the offering of one's self in obedience). The latter was the sacrifice which Jesus offered, in contrast to the daily offerings of the priests under the law, "which can never take away sins" (10:4). The second plan, which Christ followed, was the far more effective, after which He "sat down on the right hand of God; from that time waiting, till His enemies are made his footstool" (Heb. 10:12-13). The second plan, of offering our bodies a living sacrifice, wholly consecrated to God, is the arrangement by which all who would partake of the blessings with Christ must be "sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

Verse 15 then speaks of a third covenant, which applies after the two previous. We read: "after that he had said before," and the passage quoted is from Jeremiah 31:33-34: "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Then the final comment is added, "Now where remission of these is, there is no more an offering for sin" (v. 18). That is, where sins are forgiven, there is no more need for any sacrifice.

In Jeremiah 31, the context of this passage (vs. 33-34) indicates the covenant arrangement under which the populace of the new kingdom set up by Jesus at His return will live. They, too, like those who went before them, will have to be purified, tried, developed in character, so as to qualify for a favored place in the Divine plan (Zech. 13:9). Ezekiel speaks also of this refining and purifying, as a

covenant: "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 20:37-38). The rod indicates law enforced, as in Rev. 2:26-27, speaking of Christ, "He shall rule them with a rod of iron." The purging indicates the removing of those who rebel, who will not accept the authority of God's law.

Once the purifying and purging are complete and the rebellious element is removed, those who remain will be those submissive to law, and these will be willing to walk in God's ways. Of them it will be written, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). They are a generation of people instructed in the ways of the Lord, as the same passage indicates: "They shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." And they will also be a people obedient. God promises forgiveness to all who turn from their evil ways (Ezek. 18:27; 33:18-19). So abundant is God's forgiveness, that He promises not even to mention the sins of those who have turned and done "that which is lawful and right" (Ezek. 33:16).

The result will be a people and a time very different from that familiar to us now, when sin and lawlessness are rampant and the innocent often have to suffer.

And when there is no more sin, there will not need to be any more "offering for sin" (Heb. 10:18).

At the end of the Millennium, when everyone who lives will be immortal and earth becomes a part of heaven (Matt. 6:10), all sacrificing—including the sacrificing of oneself as an offering to God—will cease.

◆ Samuel a Priest?

Was it really any more lawful for Samuel to offer sacrifices than for Saul? (1 Sam. 14, 15). If so, why was Saul condemned? Wasn't the offering of sacrifices the duty of the priests?

Under the Law of Moses, offering sacrifices was one of the duties reserved for the priests, along with teaching the Law and conducting worship services (see Leviticus, chapters 1, 2, 3, 6).

Was it any more right for Samuel than for Saul? The genealogy of Samuel's family in 1 Chronicles 6 shows that

Samuel was a descendent of the Levite family of Kohath, therefore Samuel did have a right to act in the office of priest.

Also, there is evidence that Samuel filled the office of priest at other times. First Samuel 2:18 says that "*Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with the linen ephod.*" The linen ephod was a symbol of the priesthood. Years later, when Israel was troubled by the Philistines, Samuel prayed to God for the people and offered sacrifice, and the Lord heard (1 Sam. 7), and Samuel "*built an altar to the Lord*" at Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17).

Saul disobeyed the commandment of the Lord by not waiting for Samuel to return and offer the sacrifice. As a punishment, Samuel prophesied that God would take the kingdom from his family and give it to another who would be more worthy. When Saul was killed in battle, his sons died also, fulfilling the prophecy, and the kingship went to David and his lineage.

◆ Holy Spirit Changes One's Nature?

"Some of my friends believe that the Holy Spirit changes their nature and keeps them from sinning. Is there any evidence for this in the Bible?"

There is widespread belief that those who are converted receive help from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enters their hearts at the time of their conversion, they believe, and are immediately given full knowledge of correct belief, right

and wrong, and guidance in what they should and should not do. If this be true, one wonders why the diverse beliefs among so-called Christians, also the widely differing views on issues of all types. Were all guided by the same spirit, it would seem that all should agree, and walk by the same rules.

The Holy Spirit, according to the Scriptures, was not given for this purpose. During His ministry, Jesus promised it, for the primary purpose of giving perfect recall to those who would be writing the sacred Scriptures, so that the text that they wrote would be absolutely reliable (John 14:26). It was given to the apostles to "confirm" their words (Mark 16:20), to demonstrate the authority behind their words. No where in Scripture do we find evidence that the Holy Spirit restrained an individual from sinning, nor can we think that that was its purpose.

God has never seen fit to use miraculous means to make men and women righteous. Throughout 6000 years, righteousness has always been an individual matter, requiring individual cooperation and obedience. Contrary to popular belief, God does not compel or make anyone righteous. We read that "*Cain, who was of that wicked one, ... slew his brother*" (1 John 3:12). Also that Abraham's faith was reckoned unto him for righteousness (Rom. 4:9), and that the promise was confirmed to him "*because thou hast done this thing...because thou hast obeyed my voice*" (Gen. 22:16, 18).

Paul said clearly that everyone will be judged for the things done in his body, whether good or bad. The responsibility is on each one individually (2 Cor. 5:10). ◆



AS I GROW OLDER

Lord, You know I am growing older! Keep me from closing my eyes to the fact.

Keep me from becoming a pest, or a self-appointed sage with the annoying habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Keep my mind free from the repetition of past experiences and endless details.

Seal my lips about my aches and pains.

I do not ask for improved memory, but for less cockiness about my memory of others.

Teach me to admit that sometimes I am mistaken.

Make me sweeter and mellow as my age progresses.

Let me never grow old—only older. Though my outward man perish, may my inward man be renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16).

— Selected

Know Your Bible?

OF FLOWERS AND GARDENS

1. Of whom is Job speaking when he says, "He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down"?
2. Complete the sentence, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but _____ shall _____."
3. Which Old Testament character wanted his neighbor's property for a "garden of herbs"?
4. What famous garden was "over the brook Cedron"?
5. Who thought at first glance that the risen Lord was the gardener?
6. Complete the sentence: "As for man, his days are as _____: as a _____ of the field, so he flourisheth."
7. Who owned the garden in which Jesus was buried?
8. Who asked Peter, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?"

ANGELS

Name the Bible character to whom an angel appeared, in each of the following cases.

1. The angel stood in a narrow pathway.
2. The angel stood between heaven and earth holding a drawn sword in his hand.
3. By a fountain of water in the wilderness.
4. The angel touched the man as he slept under a juniper tree.
5. The angel called to a man who was about to kill his son.
6. The angel smote the man who was bound with chains in prison.
7. The angel appeared in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.
8. The angel appeared at the man's request, but refused the feast that was offered.

9. The angel told the man to go toward the south on the way from Jerusalem to Gaza.
10. "A devout man, and one that feared God" had a vision in which an angel appeared to him.

AGRICULTURE

1. For what price did the laborers agree to work in the vineyard?
2. What does Jesus say about one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back?
3. What was the old Mosaic law about the "corners of the field" at the time of reaping?
4. According to Hosea, what will those who "sow the wind" reap?
5. Which Old Testament prophet said: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved"?
6. In the parable of the tares, why were not the tares rooted out before the harvest?
7. What were the men of Bethshemesh doing when the cart with the ark (returned by the Philistines) entered the field?
8. Finish this text: "The harvest truly is plenteous, _____ are _____"
9. What happens to him "which soweth sparingly"?
10. What did Amos mean when he said: "The plowman shall overtake the reaper"? (Amos 9:13)

BLOOD

1. On what occasion did "sweat pour down as drops of blood"?
2. To whom did Paul say, "Your blood be upon your own heads"?
3. On what occasion was blood sprinkled over doorways?
4. Who declared he was "innocent of the blood of this just person"?
5. On what occasion did Jesus say, "This is my blood of the new testament"?
6. Which patriarch, in connection with the blessing of Judah, used these words: "He washed his clothes in the blood of grapes"?
7. To whom did God say: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground"?
8. The "waters turned into blood" was part of what series of incidents?
9. Complete the sentence: "Without shedding of blood is no _____."

(Answers on page 26)

Preparing to Die or LIVE?

Ancient Egyptian ruler King Tutankhamen ("Tut" for short), longing for immortality, spent a lifetime and a fortune in a futile effort to prepare for life after death.

Visit Cairo's Egyptian museum and you will see the evidence of this great King's elaborate preparation for the afterlife. When he had completed the project, two life-size, black wooden statues of this Pharaoh stood guard over a sealed door leading into the burial chamber. In the burial chamber were two massive solid coffins and four immense wooden funerary chambers completely overlaid with gold leaf. King Tut's tomb, when unearthed, also contained furniture inlaid with gold and semi-precious art objects of alabaster and gold, priceless and intricately fashioned jeweled ornaments. All these treasures were assembled to give Tutankhamen—according to his plan—a secure place in eternity. He spent the wealth of his kingdom in a vain attempt to purchase a corner on eternal life.

Now contrast the lifework of the apostle Paul. After

having spent his life in the service of Christ, he could say with confidence at the end of his career, "...the time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return" (2 Tim. 4:6-8 NLT).

For Paul, the "crown of righteousness" was a crown of life, life he looked forward to sharing with his Master and all the victorious servants of Christ through the ages. He needed no gold or silver, or precious objects of art but only the record of a pure and upright character and a life of devoted service to God, and he could look forward to life, real LIFE through the eons of eternity to come, when earth is annexed to heaven and God's will is done here as it is done in heaven above.

What is your preference: getting ready to die—or LIVE?

Faith is not like gasoline that runs out as you use it, but faith is like a muscle that grows stronger as you exercise it.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 25

OF FLOWERS AND GARDENS

1. Man (Job 14:1-2)
2. "The word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8)
3. King Ahab (1 Kings 21:2)
4. The garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1; Matthew 26:36-37)
5. Mary Magdalene (John 20:15, 18)
6. Grass, flower (Psalm 103:15)
7. Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60)
8. A servant of the high priest and a relative of Malchus (John 18:10, 26)

ANGELS

1. Balaam (Numbers 22:26-31)
2. King David (1 Chronicles 21:16)
3. Hagar (Genesis 16:7-8)
4. Elijah (1 Kings 19:2-5)

5. Abraham (Genesis 22:11)
6. Peter (Acts 12:7)
7. Moses (Exodus 3:1-2)
8. Manoah (Judges 13:8-16)
9. Philip (Acts 8:26)
10. Cornelius (Acts 10:2-3)

AGRICULTURE

1. A penny a day (Matthew 20:2)
2. He is not fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)
3. They were to be left for the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10)
4. "The whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7)
5. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 8:20)
6. Because they could not be removed without destroying wheat (Matthew 13:29)
7. Reaping their wheat harvest (1 Samuel 6:13)
8. "But the labourers are few" (Matthew 9:37)

9. "He shall reap also sparingly" (2 Corinthians 9:6)

10. Seed for the second harvest will be planted before the first crop is reaped.

BLOOD

1. When Jesus was in agony in the garden (Luke 22:44)
2. The Jews at Corinth (Acts 18:5-6)
3. The Israelites did so to prevent their firstborn from being killed during the plague against the Egyptian firstborn (Exodus 12:21-23)
4. Pilate (Matthew 27:24)
5. During the Last Supper (Mark 14:24)
6. Jacob (Genesis 49:1, 11)
7. Cain (Genesis 4:9-10)
8. The ten plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-12)
9. Remission (Hebrews 9:22)

There is danger that we may be most wrong and the least aware of it.

Knowledge not put into practice is useless.

There is no failure more disastrous than the success that leaves God out.

We shall be greatly rewarded for believing without seeing.

If I stop to think before I speak, I won't have to worry afterward about what I said before.

There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, no tonic so powerful as the expectation of something better tomorrow.

You don't get much done by starting tomorrow.

There is no medicine like hope, no tonic so powerful as the expectation of something better tomorrow.

The Test of Faith

It's easy to trust when the going is smooth
And we have no requests to make known;
It's easy to believe when life's best we receive,
That God still rules on the throne.
It's easy to feel that He answers our prayer,
If all that we ask is bestowed;
It's easy to say, "Just trust and obey,
He'll guide you along life's road."
But when we pray long, with sincere, hearty zeal
(And in unshaken faith we abide)
For the end of some strife that exists in our life
And find our request is denied:
'Tis then comes the battle, the real trying hour
That puts earnest faith to the test:
To accept our loss, humbly take up our cross,
Believing His way is the best.

A HAPPY LIFE

1 cup good thoughts
2 cups thoughtfulness
1 1/2 cups kind deeds
3 T unselfishness
3 cups forgiveness
1 1/4 tsp thankfulness
1 can longsuffering or patience



Combine all ingredients; then add one cup fresh **water of life**. Beat until light and forms a peak. Fold in 1/2 cup each of **prayer** and **faith**. Carefully pour mixture into your daily life. Sprinkle generously with **Christian zeal**. Serve with a **smile**.

Christ is the best Physician; He never takes down the wrong bottle.

The only repentance God accepts is to turn from our sins.

Adversity borrows its sharpest sting from our impatience.

If God sends us on stoney paths, He provides strong shoes.

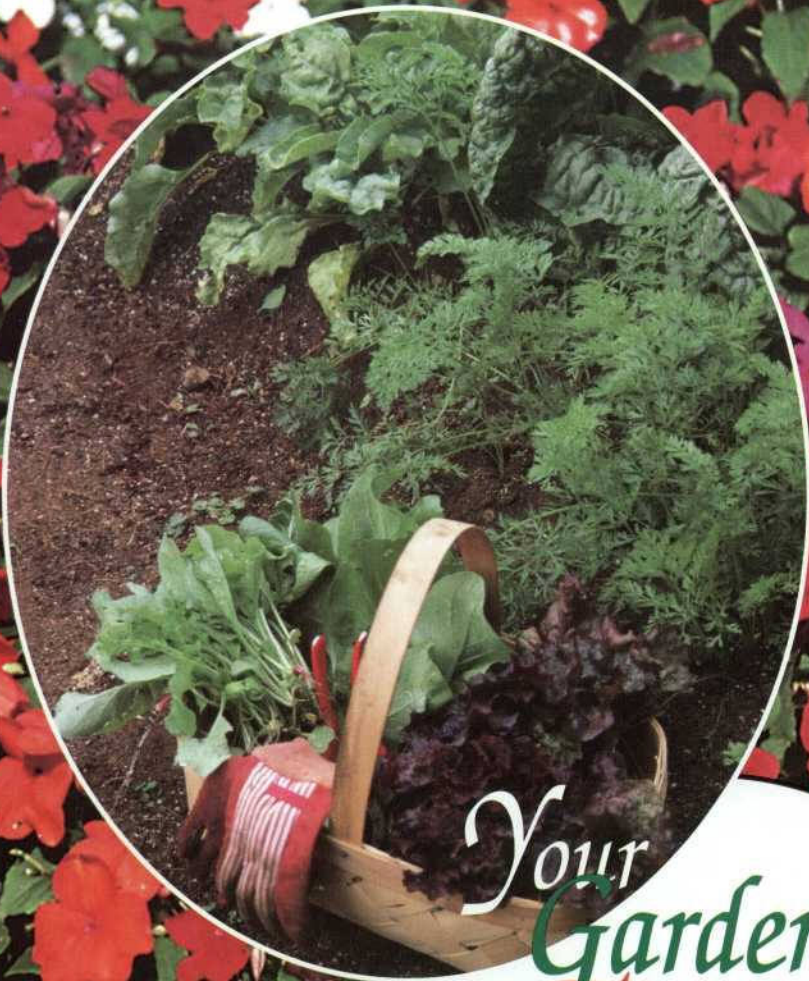
Check every thought; let only the best thoughts live.

Let Us Smile!

The thing that goes the farthest towards making life worthwhile,
That costs the least and does the most, is just a pleasant smile,
The smile that bubbles from a heart that loves its fellow men
Will drive away the cloud of gloom and coax the sun again;
It's full of worth and goodness, too, with loving kindness blent—
It's worth a million dollars and doesn't cost a cent.

There is no room for sadness when we see a cheery smile,
It always has the same good look, it's never out of style;
It nerves us on to try again when failure makes us blue;
The dimples of encouragement are good for me and you.
It pays a higher interest, for it is merely lent—
It's worth a million dollars and doesn't cost a cent.

— Anonymous



Your Garden of Thoughts

*D*ig a big hole in the garden of your mind.

*I*nto it put all your disappointments, regrets,
worries, troubles, doubts, and fears.

*C*over well with the earth of fruitfulness, water
it from the well of contentment.

*S*ow on top the seeds of hope, courage,
strength, patience, and love.

*T*hen when the time of gathering
comes, may your harvest be
rich and plentiful.