

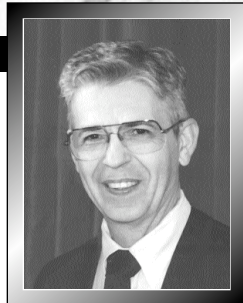


# Megiddo Message

Who Gets Your Best?

Vol. 88, No. 5  
June, 2001





## IT WILL HURT

**L**istening to some popular evangelists today, one would get the impression that serving Christ is like being on a never-ending excursion. Lean back in your easy chair, fold your hands, and enjoy the scenery.

While we do not for a moment wish to devalue the joy and happiness that come from serving God, we are not being fair to ourselves or others if we close our eyes to reality. The Christian life is a struggle, a battleground. It will hurt. Jesus experienced it. So did the apostle Paul, and so has every truehearted follower since. For many there were outside foes. For all there were (are) foes within.

How can anyone teach that it will be pain free?

The early Christians had serious external foes, authorities bent on stamping out their outlawed religion. These believers could worship, preach, and practice their faith only in the face of severest opposition. Do we wonder why the apostle Paul said, "...so fight I?" (1 Cor. 9:26), and to his own, "*Fight the good fight of faith*" (1 Tim. 6:12). At the close of his glorious career he could say triumphantly, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim. 4:7).

How does the idea of hurt go along with Jesus' promise of peace? Didn't He pronounce a blessing on every one who would follow Him? Didn't He say that each faithful one would receive a hundredfold of blessing in this life, to be followed by eternal life in the future?

But to have this peace, this blessing, one must die with Him. How is this possible? "*The death he died,*" says the eminent Apostle, "*he died to sin ... In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin*" (Rom. 6:10–12 NIV). Death means a life surrendered. And where a life is surrendered there will be suffering.

Jesus said it yet another way. He called His followers to lose their lives for His sake (Matt. 10:39), and loss means suffering.

I am reminded of a conversation I had with a theologian. His concept was no different from that of many others. "If it doesn't feel good, then God did not command it. He does not command anything that hurts," he said very emphatically.

With a little reflection one can see quite clearly that the god he studied was not the God of the Bible—or the God that Moses, Joshua, or Caleb trusted. Nor was he the God that Abraham, Isaac or Jacob obeyed. Nor was he

the God whose prophets declared His word at His command—and at their peril. The God whom all of these obeyed was the one God of whom Paul, speaking for all, said, "*For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live*" (1 Cor. 8:6).

Did this God make commands that caused hurt? Here is the experience of some who obeyed Him. They "*were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground*" (Heb. 11:35–38). Yes, obeying was not pain-free.

It is common knowledge among all Christendom that Christ was obedient unto death. Yes, it hurt as He agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew that within moments He would be arrested, tortured and put to death on a Roman cross. Yet, even knowing all this, He still did not rescind His commanded "*follow me.*"

Could it have been the persecution of those early followers who obeyed Him that prompted Peter to say, "*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). Yes, Christ commanded it: "*follow me.*" And following could hurt.

Christ still speaks today to those who will hear: "*Follow Me.*" And it still hurts because our old nature is at odds with Christ's, and we cannot follow Christ and hold onto our old nature. Paul compared this struggle to battle when he said, "*For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want*" (Gal. 5:17).

Why go contrary to nature (and cause hurt) when it would be so much easier to follow our instincts? Because the route that causes hurt makes life better right now (the hundredfold of present benefits that Jesus promised), and it is the only way to be eligible when Jesus comes to receive the greatest blessing: "*eternal life*" (Mark 10:28–30).

There is no other way. ♦

*Sometimes there is no help  
without hurt.*



***Malachi's message to the Jews in ancient Jerusalem (5th century BC) speaks also to us.***

# Who Gets Your Best?

*First exiles return*

*Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem*

*Ezra comes to Jerusalem*

*Malachi becomes prophet*

538 BC

515 BC

458 BC

430 BC

Life is a struggle. It was so among the Jewish captives who returned after their long exile in Babylon to re-establish their ancient nation. Vibrant with hopeful anticipation they set their faces toward Jerusalem; but only a century later a spirit of dull depression settled over the community. The zeal and energy that had rebuilt and dedicated their sacred temple was close to a century in the past. Cynicism and impiety mounted. Seasons of drought and famine depleted their seasons of abundance, until all dreams of prosperity died.

Why? Because spiritually they were dead. Even though the returned exiles had cleaned up their city, reorganized the government of their nation and revived their time-honored worship, their faith was lifeless, useless, inert.

To awaken them to their grave condition and rekindle their faith, the Lord sent a man of courage and conviction. This man was Malachi. His message, preserved for us in the last book of the Old Testament, has been called "A Message for an Age of Discouragement," and as such has something to alert us today.

At the time God sent Malachi, the nation was desperately in need of help. Among the priests, a mere perfunctory ritual sufficed for religion, while the people were largely skeptical, irreligious, and selfish.

How could they be otherwise? The promises made by the

earlier prophets had not been fulfilled. The age of prosperity had not yet come. The Messiah had not yet come. And so they murmured against God and questioned His providence and power.

How similar is human nature in every age. How easily ritual replaces righteousness and skepticism succeeds belief, even among those who profess the faith of Christ. Faith, if it is to thrive, requires continual nourishing. Because we cannot see the promises of God fulfilling as we think they should, we are inclined to wonder and doubt and murmur.

So Israel grew impatient. And in their impatience they forgot that it was their own negligence, their own infidelity that was withholding God's blessings from them.



The book of Malachi opens with an assurance of God's continued love for Israel despite their waywardness and ingrati-

*continued on page 5*

# Megiddo Message

June 2001  
Volume 88, No. 5

## EDITORIAL

- 2 **It Will Hurt** by Gerald R. Payne  
Following Christ does not assure freedom from pain.

## ARTICLES

- 3 **Who Gets Your Best?**  
Nine lessons from the Book of Malachi
- 7 **Lord, Increase Our Faith!** by Russell Hamby

## DIALOGUE

- 10 **Did God Command Abraham to Sacrifice His Son?**  
(Part 1) by Gerald R. Payne  
Do the Dead Sea Scrolls offer any evidence that God's command to Abraham is authentic?

- 13 **Know Your Bible**  
Who—What—Why? • About Children and Youth • Complete  
These Verses from Job

## FEATURE: LORD, IT WILL BE AS YOU SAY

- 14 **A Study of Bible Prophecy** (PART TWO) by Ruth E. Sisson  
Why Study Prophecy?  
*Seeing past prophecies precisely fulfilled tells us that we can trust that the unfulfilled prophecies will also happen—just as foretold.*

## BACK COVER

- 19 **Myself**

Front Cover: Clemantis. Photo by Mr. and Mrs. David Sutton.

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*Note: If you wish to remove label on cover, warm with hair dryer and carefully peel off.*

## 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.



tude. In their misery and dire need God has forsaken them—or so they think. Events have frustrated them, and they are repining.

The Prophet, to convince them of God's love, compares them to their neighbor-nation Edom. If things are bad in Israel, they are worse in Edom. The two nations, being so closely related, might be expected to share the same fate. But God's Divine judgment on Israel has triumphed in restoration; Edom still lies in desolation.

*"I have loved you very deeply," says the Lord. But you retort, "Really? When was this?"*

And the Lord replies, *"I showed my love for you by loving your father, Jacob. I didn't need to, I even rejected his very own brother, Esau...Oh Israel, lift your eyes to see what God is doing all around the world; then you will say, 'Truly, the Lord's great power goes far beyond our borders!'"* — Malachi 1:2-5 The Living Bible.

In rebuking the nation's ingratitude, the Prophet points out God's goodness. The Lord had made them His special choice—not because He was obligated to choose them, but because He loved them. He had extended to them a rare and undeserved privilege. And now they could not recall any of His goodness.

### APPLICATION

How strongly inclined is human nature to complain. When we feel overburdened with care or trouble or sorrow, how easily we complain. Like Israel, we forget the many undeserved happinesses that have fallen to us. We forget what God is doing all around the world, that His power reaches far beyond the borders of our small sphere.



Then, with the nobility of a major prophet, Malachi boldly and unflinchingly reproves the moral delinquencies of priest and people. First he arouses the priests from their complacency by attacking their supposed pieties and revealing the irreverence of their worship. Their sanctimonious rituals are as empty shells which God does not appreciate. Their pious posture is a deceptive pose by which God is not fooled. Their religious institutions are not bastions of righteousness, as they assume, but dens of evil.

*"The Lord Almighty says to the priests: 'A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. I am your father and master, but where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have despised my name!'"*

*"But you ask, 'How have we ever despised your name?'"*

*"You have despised my name by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar."*

*"Then you ask, 'How have we defiled the sacrifices?'"*

*"You defile them by saying the altar of the Lord deserves no respect. When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn't that wrong? And isn't it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased? Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is! says the Lord Almighty. 'Go ahead, beg God to be merciful to you! But when you bring that kind of offering, why should he show you any favor at all?'"* — Malachi 1:6-9 NLT

### APPLICATION

Why is Malachi's first condemnation directed to the priests? There is a saying, "Like priest, like people." Their sins are so great because their calling is so high. The clergy are the moral barometers by which the spiritual weather of an age is discovered. Each individual is responsible for his example, but more especially is the priest accountable because of his greater influence. Unfaithfulness and unpriestliness among those commissioned to uphold the reverence of God is the surest sign of spiritual decay.

The priests were Israel's spiritual leaders. If they had done their task well and given the people the teaching that was needed, this time of spiritual discouragement and apostasy need never have come. But they failed. Instead of maintaining the nation's spiritual morale, they were discouraged by the general atmosphere in which they lived.

Discouragement is very contagious. And *"bad company is the ruin of good character"* (1 Cor. 15:33 Moffatt).



Malachi did not condemn Israel's disrespect toward their faulty religious system for its own sake only but because it was a symbol of a general indifference toward God. It was an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace. A man who would deliberately offer the worst animal in his flock on God's altar, and a priest who would accept such an offering were obviously not right with God in their hearts.

*"Present it to your governor (and see) if he will be pleased with you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts"* (Mal. 1:8 Berkeley). Times were hard; money was scarce, and the better animals brought better prices at market; God could get along with less.

### APPLICATION

How often we are tempted to act in this way. We do not take something damaged, or soiled, or broken, and give it to our friend with the thought, "It's good enough for him." And yet we put God off with our leftovers.

In a spiritual sense we, too, are called to become priests of God. *"...for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation"* (1 Pet. 2:9 NLT). As prospective

priests each is accountable for our example.

If we have set out to imitate the example of our Lord, we must divest ourselves of all our selfish, self-centered ways, all our deceit and jealousy. Let us be careful, lest we are in some measure like those slovenly Jewish priests, wrecking our own faith and that of others by indolent, halfhearted service.

A religion that is fashioned out of second-rate material in one's spare time is more properly called idolatry. God not only deserves but demands the best when it comes to His service, His worship, and His people.



Were the people shocked by Malachi's indictment? If not, they certainly were jolted by his audacity in saying it.

But they were not alarmed. Their spiritual antennas had become so desensitized by their empty formalities that they could scarcely perceive the meaning of Malachi's words. "How?" they blandly responded, How *"have we ever despised your name?...How have we defiled the sacrifices?"* (Mal. 2: 6-7). Assuming that their meaningless motions would receive God's recognition, they could not humble themselves to seek His forgiveness.

#### APPLICATION

This was true in Malachi's day. It is just as true in our day. Let each of us ask ourselves: How concerned am I about the quality of my sacrifice to God? Is it the best, the very best that I can give? Or am I keeping something better for myself? Remember, *"God's sacrifice is a soul with its evil crushed: a heart broken with penitence, O God, never wilt thou despise"* (Ps. 51:17 Moffatt).

Malachi 1:10 continues with the indictment of the priests: *"Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain!"* (RSV). The rendering in The Living Bible is even more pointed: *"Oh, to find one priest among you who would shut the doors and refuse this kind of sacrifice. I have no pleasure in you,...I will not accept your offerings."*

Better a temple with its doors closed and its fires dead than a people with hearts cold and inner life extinct. Better no sacrifice at all than meaningless form and empty ritual.



After delivering the Lord's indictment, the Prophet issues a warning: God will send judgment. Those priests who have set

the bad example of indifference and indolent service must reform or suffer punishment. They made God contemptible in the eyes of the people; now He will make them contemptible.

*"Listen, you priests; this command is for you! Listen to me and take it to heart. Honor my name," says the Lord Almighty, "or I will bring a terrible curse against you. I will curse even the blessings you receive. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you have not taken my warning seriously."* —Malachi 2:1-2 NLT.

Malachi pronounces God's judgment; and like all prophetic messages of doom, this judgment is conditional. Even when such messages are stated in the most absolute form, it is always to be understood that change of heart will affect a change of fate. If the priests continue their present course, if their actions continue to show that the worship of God is of secondary importance, if they continue to accept offerings of inferior quality for God's altar, He will curse the special benefits which they enjoy. Their blessings will never mature, never ripen because they are not merited.

#### APPLICATION

That warning from God is for us also. If we will not hear and if we will not lay His warning to heart, our loss will be greater than that of Israel's priests. Disloyalty, unfaithfulness, negligence and indifference on our part will certainly result in our eternal rejection. No unfaithful one will ever receive the fullest blessing. God wants sincere servants, men and women who will lay His words to heart and rid themselves of every trace of hypocrisy and evil.

God gave Israel opportunity to repent, and He extends the same opportunity to anyone who will hear to anyone who will lay it to heart.



To climax the warning the Prophet uses a figure to express as forcibly as possible the complete degradation which will be inflicted upon those priests who refuse to change.

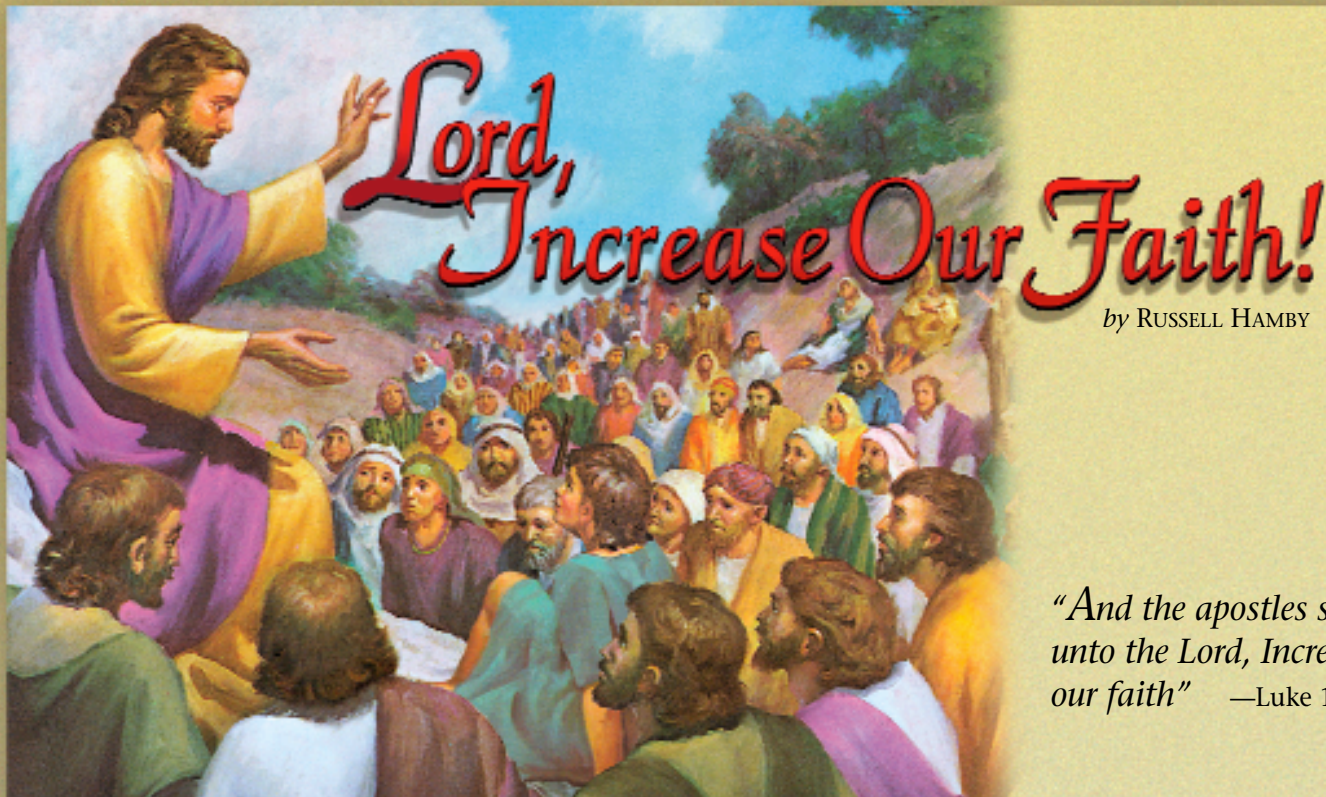
*"I will rebuke your descendants and splatter your faces with the dung of your festival sacrifices, and I will add you to the dung heap."* —Malachi 2:3 NLT.

They will be removed as completely as the refuse of their sacrifices if they do not reform. And in a spiritual sense, the unfaithful priests who have maintained an appearance of acceptable service in the eyes of the people will lose their false image; all their sham and hypocrisy will be disclosed under the all-seeing eye of God.

This was Malachi's method in ministering to the priests of his day. They had failed. But instead of dwelling longer on their mistakes, he reminds them of their high calling. To make his message effective he personifies the ideal, perfect, priestly class as "Levi." (Under the Mosaic arrangement, the Levites were the descendants of the tribe of Levi; their duty was to

*continued on page 8*





*"And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith" —Luke 17:5*

**I**n studying the text of Luke 17:5–10, we find a wonderful message that will help us in getting to where we need to be in our faith.

The disciples in the text have just cried out to Jesus, *"Increase our faith."* Jesus responds with the famous words: *"If your faith were the size of a mustard seed, you could say to the sycamine tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."* That is Luke's version of the more familiar saying in the Gospel of Mark: *"If you had faith you could say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and it would happen."* But whatever the image we perceive, the message is the same—there is a tremendous power available.

My first thought as I read this was that Jesus was condemning the disciples for not having enough faith. But it may be that Jesus is affirming the disciples in the faith they already have. It may be He is saying, If you would only use the faith you have and make it work for you, you should find that it has tremendous power.

Once again the disciples apparently have come up against frustration in their lives, something in the face of which they feel inadequate. This has happened before, and it has happened again. So they have come again to Jesus and have said, *"Increase our faith."* In other words, *"Tell us what to do. Give us some power. Add something on so that we can do more and be more effective."* And Jesus answers them saying, *"You have faith, use it."* Using it means going back into that frustrating situation and trusting this time that God goes there with you.

It took a little time, but soon they got the point, that faith is active, open trust in God, working with God to accomplish His will. Such faith is power.

So there you have it. Jesus is encouraging them to use the

faith they have and make it work for them. In that way, He says, they will develop *more* faith. He's saying that even if you consider what you have to be small, like the size of a mustard seed, you will be amazed at what it can do.

What a liberating message that is. It means that when you are faced with a situation in which you feel inadequate, you can enter that situation, trusting that you are not going in alone. Maybe you can't do what you want to do, or the way you want to do it, but trust that God can use what you do, and go ahead.

It is up to each of us individually. No wonder Paul talked so much about the Christian faith being freedom and liberation. There is nothing more liberating than being able to trust that we have God's help. Do what is right and leave the rest to God.

Christians have no supernatural knowledge that gives them infallible answers to all human problems. Faith does not overcome the human limitations that all of us must live with. But if a person has faith even the size of a mustard seed, you would be surprised at what God is able to do.

And if for no other reason than that, each of us that has it should hold on to it. For to have faith, even the size of a mustard seed, will lift you out of the drudgery and pessimism of your days, out of the discouragement and darkness of the present, and give you a new perspective. Although you cannot change the past and you are able only to cope in the present, you can do something about the future. And if you try, and if you move out in faith, then you will find that though the road is long and though there are mountains in the way, and though you can only climb a step every day, your faith will lift you and you will be able to stand. ♦



serve the priests. The priests were also of the tribe of Levi, but, more specifically, of the family of Aaron).

*"Then at last you will know it was I who sent you this warning so that my covenant with the Levites may continue," says the Lord Almighty.*

*"The purpose of my covenant with the Levites was to bring life and peace, and this is what I gave them. This called for reverence from them, and they greatly revered me and stood in awe of my name.*

*"They passed on to the people all the truth they received from me. They did not lie or cheat; they walked with me, living good and righteous lives, and they turned many from lives of sin" — Malachi 2:4-6 NLT.*

### APPLICATION

Here was the universal ideal. Here was the priesthood that was worthy not only of all the special benefits of the priesthood but of good of every kind—even *"life and peace."* These blessings were part of God's covenant with Levi. This true representative priest showed his worthiness by serving with fear, reverence, and humble awe. He was also capable of giving true direction. He could turn many from the wrong way by his example of uprightness. He could faithfully expound the will of God because they could see that he himself walked every step with God. Not merely did he talk about Him—he *walked* with Him. He was Jehovah's messenger. What a glorious ideal! The true priest was a veritable angel of God!



*"...They walked with me, living good and righteous lives"—these are essential elements of every truly consistent Christian life. Righteousness is a right state of heart, a conscious integrity of purpose which ensures our being "accepted of him," and brings with it a still deeper and purer peace.*

In contrast with this ideal of faithfulness and holy priesthood, the priests of Malachi's day are apostate. They have actually by their insincerity contributed to the spiritual depression and moral weakness of their community. *"'You have left God's paths. Your "guidance" has caused many to stumble into sin. You have corrupted the covenant I made with the Levites,' says the Lord Almighty" (Mal. 2:8 NLT).*

### APPLICATION

God wants His people to live in peace, that they *"might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74-75).* In the final analysis He holds them responsible.

Are we keeping our covenant pure? Or do we by our example, lack of faith, or halfhearted service corrupt the covenant of Levi?



The Prophet attempts to reason with the people: *"Are we not all children of the same Father? Are we not all created by the same God? Then why are we faithless to each other, violating the covenant of our ancestors?"—Malachi 2:10 NLT.*

To profane is to make common or unholy. The Prophet reminds them that unfaithfulness and unkindness to one another is profanity in the sight of God. They have all one common father—God; why not behave like brothers? But no. They violate even the common decencies accepted long ago as basic laws of life. They have broken the covenant by which God chose them to be His peculiar people, that covenant by which God placed Himself in special relation to them on condition that they keep themselves separate from the evil nations around them and avoid their evil practices. They have profaned this covenant.

### APPLICATION

In a spiritual sense, we are all children of God's creation; in Him *"we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).* Why should we be faithless to each other?

Those who are unfaithful to their sacred covenant have, like unfaithful Israel, also profaned God's law. They have desecrated the holy purpose to which they had dedicated their lives. They have accounted the *"blood of the covenant by which"* they were *"sanctified,"* their sacred promise to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, *"a common thing, and [have] insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29).* This is the class of individuals who have *"profaned the Lord's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god";* made an unholy alliance with sin (Mal. 2:11).

Parallel with Israel's unfaithfulness to God is their moral unfaithfulness to their own wives and families (v. 14). The Prophet is sure that the distress of the times is due in large measure to the general contempt for the solemn obligations of marriage.

God detests unfaithfulness. Malachi spoke plainly: *"you drench the Eternal's altar with your tears, sobbing and groaning because he never heeds your offerings, because he will accept no gift from you. You ask, Why? It is because the Eternal was a witness at your marriage in youth to the wife with whom you have now broken faith—though she is your own mate and lawful wife. Not one of you has any trace of moral sense...Take heed to yourselves, and let none prove unfaithful to the wife of his youth, for I detest divorce and cruelty to a wife, the Lord of hosts the God of Israel, declares" (Mal. 2:13-16 Moffatt).*

Throughout the ages God has been seeking a godly seed. And He is still seeking today. Those who will be faithful to their sacred covenant with Him, who will be loyal to their hope in Him and not forget His law—these will form His *"godly seed."*





Unfaithfulness was not all of Malachi's message. He says further, *"You have wearied the Lord with your words."* The Prophet makes his charge. The faithless multitude have, as it were, worn out God's patience by their murmuring and discontent. Because their expectations of prosperity and glory were not at once fulfilled, they question God's justice and holiness: *"How have we wearied him?"* you ask. By saying, *"All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them"* or *"Where is the God of Justice?"* (Mal. 2:17 NIV).

These words are directed against the spirit of skepticism and discontent which prevailed among the Israelites in the time of Malachi. God was weary of their ignorance, their falseness, their impiety, their unfaithfulness. The creating and supporting of a universe does not weary God, for He *"will not grow tired or weary."* But the endless chatterings of skeptical and discontented children are more than He will tolerate.

## APPLICATION

Do we weary God with our words? How often has He waited in vain for actions to correspond to our high professions? How often have we said, "Lord, Lord," and not done the things that show He is our Master? Are we like those believers in Ezekiel's day, who *"with their mouth"* showed *"much love,"* but whose hearts pursued their covetous ends? (Ezek. 33:31).

Jesus said to the people who had thronged to hear Him: *"And I tell you this, that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle word you speak. The words you say now reflect your fate then; either you will be justified by them or you will be condemned"* (Matt. 12:36-37 NLT). Every idle word, words that have little or no meaning, airy words spoken in jest or simply to please, words which have no actions to support them—all words that do not edify men or glorify God—these weary God.

## SUMMARY

Like Malachi, we are living in an age of skepticism and indifference. In the minds of many people God is mocked, forgotten, or dead. But whatever people may do or think, God is still working. And He still demands our best, our very best—in commitment, self-sacrifice and blameless character. ♦

*Think of your mind as a castle.*

*When greed, ungratefulness and other enemies knock, don't let them in! "Guard" your heart with diligence (Prov. 4:23). We are mistaken if we think we can entertain wrong thoughts a little while and then expel them any time. It's not that simple!*



# Dialogue

## PART ONE

*"I have a problem with the idea that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. It does not seem reasonable that God would charge anyone to offer human sacrifice to prove his or her allegiance or love to Him. God teaches that He abhors human sacrifice done by the heathen nations and commands His worshippers to not follow the practices of the heathen nations around them that offer their children as sacrifices to the heathen gods. God, then, is credited with commanding Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering sacrifice to Him to prove his allegiance or perfect obedience to God?"*

*"I cannot see God commanding anyone to do that which He abhors as a proof that they love Him. If Abraham is willing to do that which God abhors, then that would only prove that he has no regard for all of his past instructions or would prove to the heathen that God really approves of their evil practices."*

*"Does this idea exist in the Dead Sea Scrolls? The passages in the copy I have of the Dead Sea Scrolls correspond to our Bible very well, but the part about the command to sacrifice Isaac is missing."*

*"Please shine the light of Truth on this subject if it is available so that I may come to a better understanding of it, or simply state that there are still a few things that we do not yet quite understand." —JN*

You have made an interesting observation, which naturally raises the question: Is God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac an authentic part of the Sacred Scriptures we can trust, or was it perhaps added at a later time?

In addressing this subject I will look at the following:

1. Do the Dead Sea Scrolls offer any evidence that God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac is authentic? Is this evidence, if existing, supported by other relevant ancient documents?
2. What does the New Testament say about God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?
3. Did God by His command to Abraham support human sacrifice?

### ***1. Do the Dead Sea Scrolls contain any evidence that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?***

The following commentary by Jeffery L. Sheler, published in the U. S. News and World Report (7/7/97) is informative regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls and, in particular, about Abraham:

"A provocative rewrite of the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac:

"In the traditional Bible, God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. At the last second, an angel stays Abraham's knife and points to a ram trapped in a thicket as a substitute sacrifice. The Biblical tale, says James VanderKam, a scroll editor and professor at the University of Notre Dame, has always posed a difficult theological question: How could God tempt Abraham to slay his son? The Qumran text, says VanderKam, attempts to 'soften the blow of God's action' by introducing a Satan figure, called Mastemah or 'prince of malevolence,' who goads God into the test. God thus does not originate the evil but merely countenances it and permits Abraham to prove his faithfulness."

The above citation shows that the idea regarding the command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was extant during the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls. But apparently scholar VanderKam regards this "Qumran text" as commentary (not Scripture): "The Qumran text, says VanderKam, attempts to 'soften the blow of God's action' by introducing a Satan figure."

As far as we know there is no consensus of opinion that this Qumran text (regarding the Satan figure) from the Dead Sea Scrolls is authentic Scripture. At least, none of the newer translations have added the Satan figure.



## DID GOD COMMAND ABRAHAM TO SACRIFICE HIS SON?

by GERALD R. PAYNE

You mentioned that the passages in the book you have correspond to our Bible very well, but that the part about the command to Abraham is missing (likely from damage of some sort?). So, if I understand you correctly, we cannot establish whether it was originally part of that particular Dead Sea Scroll.

A translator, commenting on one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, regards the passage pertaining to God commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a paraphrase. He says:

"Yet the rationale for their introduction is compelling, for the Biblical story does present a difficult problem: How could God command Abraham to sacrifice his own son? If God did not really intend Abraham to go through with [it], was God being deceitful? Why would God act as described? Our [Qumran] author urges an interesting solution to the problem by introducing the figure of Mastemah and rooting the entire episode in evil that God merely counte-

nances, but does not originate—just as in Job."<sup>1</sup>

Is the Qumran author making the comparison with Job to justify the introducing of the Satan figure, as though Satan would goad God into doing it? We cannot find any Biblical support for this idea at all. Is the author justified in trying to second-guess the purpose of God in giving this command? Does he have any basis for accusing God of deceit? Is it not more reasonable to allow what the Scriptures say, that God was testing (proving, developing) Abraham? (see section 3 below).

The details aside, there is enough text in this document (*The Dead Sea Scrolls, A New Translation*) to show that the idea of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac did exist at the writing of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This means that the idea existed at the time of Christ. We cannot say that a particular text does or does not exist based on the Dead Sea

Scrolls *alone* due to multiple copies with variation between them, as well as missing fragments and missing copies of the scrolls. But we can say with certainty that the passage was known at the time the scroll was written.

If readings can vary widely and some are translations from Scripture while others are commentary, what is the value of the Dead Sea Scrolls? A search that lasted nearly a decade has produced thousands of scroll fragments from eleven caves. Scholars, using historical, paleographic, and linguistic evidence, as well as carbon-14 dating, have established that the scrolls and the Qumran ruins date from about c. 250 BCE to 68 CE,<sup>2</sup> which means they are older than any other surviving Biblical manuscripts by approximately 600 years. (Apart from the DSS, the oldest surviving manuscripts are the Codex Vaticanus<sup>3</sup> and the Codex Sinaiticus.)<sup>4</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls are not the only

### THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

A Strong Testimony to the Accuracy of the Bible Text

About the Dead Sea Scrolls...

- the term applied to hundreds of ancient manuscripts (of leather, papyrus, and copper) and thousands of fragments, some biblical and some commentary, discovered in desert caves in the wilderness of Judaea between 1947 and the mid 1960's
- the most important discovery in the history of modern Biblical archeology
- the manuscripts, dating between the 3rd century BC and 68 AD, are a thousand years older than those commonly used in translating Scripture
- include about 100 biblical manuscripts which represent the entire Old Testament except the Book of Esther.

Written in Hebrew and Aramaic, the Dead Sea Scrolls have dramatically confirmed the accuracy of the Hebrew Bible and heightened its respect among scholars. Why? The Dead Sea Scrolls are about a thousand years older than the Mesoretic texts (commonly used for the translations of the Old Testament.) Yet, when compared with the later documents, it is found that they are remarkably identical—a strong testimony to the care of the copyists!





external source of evidence from the time of Christ regarding the command to sacrifice Isaac. Josephus, still living during the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, was also aware of the passage. After commenting on Isaac being Abraham's son of old age, etc. Josephus continues:

"1. ...Accordingly, he [God] commanded him [Abraham] to carry him [Isaac] to the mountain Moriah, and to build an altar, and offer him [Isaac] for a burnt-offering upon it; for this would best manifest his religious disposition towards him, if he preferred what was pleasing to God before the preservation of his own son.

"2. Now Abraham thought that it was not right to disobey God in anything, but that he was obliged to serve him in every circumstance of life,..."

After more discourse regarding the sacrifice, the narrative continues,

"4. So he [Isaac] went immediately to the altar to be sacrificed. And the deed had been done if God had not opposed it; for he called loudly to Abraham by his name, and forbade him to slay his son" (The Complete Works of Josephus, Book 1, chapter 13, 1-4b).

Another source, the Septuagint (translated by Jews for Greek speaking

Jews), is a translation of the Old Testament which existed during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 BC). It also includes the passage in question.

Both the LXX and Josephus support the text regarding God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son. Therefore, the possibility of this text being recorded on one of the Dead Sea Scrolls is tenable. In fact, it seems conclusive that the text did exist at the time of Christ and before.

## 2) What does the New Testament say about God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

As can be seen from the above, the idea that God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering has been a problem for some scholars. However, our most reliable source is the Bible. The New Testament is backed by several thousand manuscripts.<sup>5</sup>

How do the inspired authors of the New Testament interpret the account of Abraham offering Isaac?

We find support in these words by the author of the book of Hebrews: "*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your*

*seed shall be called, concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense'*" (Heb. 11:17-19).

James also gives support, "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*" (James 2:21).

By making these statements these authors show that they believed God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt sacrifice, and the author of Hebrews indicates that Abraham had faith that one way or another God would be true to His promises regarding Abraham's posterity.

The author of Hebrews says that he received him in a figure as from the dead. That is, for all practical purposes, Abraham offered Isaac as a whole burnt offering. When God intervened so that the act was not carried through, it was as though Abraham received Isaac back from the dead, because Abraham had in his mind made the sacrifice.

James also testifies that because Abraham had full intentions of offering Isaac as a burnt offering he was "*justified by works,*" even without actually slaying his son. In his mind he had made the sacrifice. ♦

*to be continued*

<sup>1</sup>The following is an extract from part of that Dead Sea Scroll, "A PARAPHRASE OF GENESIS AND EXODUS 4Q225":

"Isaac is born and the Prince of Malevolence (Mastemah) conspires to destroy him (Gen. 21:1-3; 22:2-4)."

"And a son of lov[e] was born [to Abrah]am and he named him Isaac. Now the Prince of Malevolence (Mastemah) came [to G]od, and brought his animosity to bear against Abraham because of Isaac. And [G]od said [to Abrah]am, 'Take your son, Isaac, [your] only one [...] [whom] You [love] and offer him up to [Me] as a burnt offering upon one of the [high] mountains [which I will point out] to you.' So he [rose and we]n[t] from the wells [...] [...] And Ab[rah]am lifted [his eyes and saw the place at a distance.]

"The plot of the Prince Of Malevolence (Mastemah) is foiled because of Abraham's obedience (Gen. 22:7-12).

"Col. 2 [Then] Isaac s[aid] to Abraham, 'Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the [bur]nt offering?' And Abraham said, 'Go[d] will supply a lamb for the burnt offering, my son, for Himself.' Isaac said to his father [...] In those days Holy angels were standing upon [the mountain (?) to bring up] his son from the earth. And the angels of mal[lev]olence... and they] were rejoicing and saying, 'Now he shall perish and [...] he shall be found deceitful, and if not, shall he be found trustworthy?' [...] And God said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Yes!' And He said, 'N[ow] I know that you fear God.' [...] you shall not be loving. Then he blessed the

LORD [...] Jacob. And Jacob bore Levi [...] The days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Levi [...] and the Prince of Malevolence (Mastemah). I shall turn aside[...] "Prince of Male[vo]llence (Mastemah)." And Belial heard [...] — translated by Martin Abegg, The Dead Sea Scrolls, A New Translation, by Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., Edward Cook. Harper San Francisco. pp. 261-263" —<http://www.worldtrade.com/religion/scrolls.htm>

<sup>2</sup>The Qumran Library: The scrolls and scroll fragments recovered in the Qumran environs represent a voluminous body of Jewish documents, a veritable "library", dating from the third century B.C.E. to 68 C.E. Unquestionably, the "library," which is the greatest manuscript find of the twentieth century, demonstrates the rich literary activity of Second Temple Period Jewry and sheds insight into centuries pivotal to both Judaism and Christianity. The library contains some books or works in a large number of copies, yet others are represented only fragmentarily by mere scraps of parchment. There are tens of thousands of scroll fragments. The number of different compositions represented is almost one thousand, and they are written in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.—<http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/deadsea.scrolls.exhibit/Library/library.html>

<sup>3</sup>The Codex Vaticanus B (Vat. Gr. 1209, written in the fourth century) is considered to be the oldest extant copy of the Bible [before discovering the Dead Sea Scrolls], and is, along with the Codex

Sinaiticus, one of the two main witnesses supporting modern Greek texts and English translations. It contains in Greek most of the Old Testament with the Apocrypha (excluding 1 and 2 Maccabees and the Prayer of Manasses) and most of the New Testament.—<http://www.linguistsoftware.com/codexvat.htm>

This manuscript [Codex Vaticanus] had been in the Vatican's library since at least 1481, but had not been made available to scholars until the middle of the nineteenth century. This codex is dated slightly earlier than Sinaiticus and has both the Old and New Testament in Greek, excluding the last part of the New Testament from Hebrews 9:15 to the end of Revelation, and the Pastoral Epistles. For the most part, scholars accept Codex Vaticanus for being one of the most trustworthy witnesses to the New Testament text.—<http://www.latentprints.net/ag/bible.htm>

<sup>4</sup>Codex Sinaiticus: Discovered in St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai and dates to around 350 A.D. and contains the entire New Testament.—<http://www.latentprints.net/ag/bible.htm>

<sup>5</sup>"There is more manuscript support for the New Testament than for any other body of ancient literature. Over five thousand Greek, eight thousand Latin, and many more manuscripts in other languages attest the integrity of the New Testament." —*Prophecy Study Bible*, John C. Hagee





# Know Your Bible?

## WHO—WHAT—WHY?

1. Who prophesied, *"they shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them"*?
2. Who said, *"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished"*?
3. Who compares life to a shuttle?
4. Whom did Christ ask, *"can ye drink of the cup that I drink of"*?
5. Why did Paul say, *"we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen:"*?
6. What is the verse in Revelation about the new heaven and new earth?
7. Finish the sentence, *"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,"*
8. Where do we learn what *"the vineyard of the Lord of hosts"* and *"his pleasant plant"* are?
9. Who said, *"I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity"*?

## ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Of whom was it said that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures?
2. What young king chose wisdom rather than long life or riches?
3. What tall and commanding person was anointed the first king of Israel?
4. What youth watched the ark of bulrushes in which her infant brother had been laid?

5. Who was the son of Abraham and Sarah?
6. Who said, *"Am I my brother's keeper"*?
7. What king of Israel was a shepherd in his youth?
8. Who was the brother of Cain?
9. Who was the brother of Moses?
10. Who was the daughter-in-law of Naomi?
11. What child ministered to the Lord under the direction of Eli the priest?

## COMPLETE THESE VERSES FROM JOB

1. *"When the morning stars sang together, \_\_\_\_\_."*
2. *"Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: \_\_\_\_\_."*
3. *"They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, \_\_\_\_\_."*
4. *"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, \_\_\_\_\_."*
5. *"Shall mortal man be more just than God? \_\_\_\_\_."*
6. *"For wrath killeth the foolish man, \_\_\_\_\_."*
7. *"The righteous also shall hold on his way \_\_\_\_\_."*
8. *"Man is born unto trouble, \_\_\_\_\_."*

answers on page 17



• LORD, IT WILL BE AS YOU SAY. •

PART TWO

# A STUDY OF BIBLE PROPHECY

by RUTH E. SISSON

## WHY STUDY PROPHECY?

BIBLE PROPHECY...

- ✧ BUILDS FAITH IN GOD
- ✧ GIVES SOLID REASON TO BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.
- ✧ REVEALS GOD'S PLANS
- ✧ ANSWERS OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE
- ✧ WARNS AGAINST A CARELESS LIFE
- ✧ ENCOURAGES PATIENT WAITING
- ✧ GIVES MEANING TO TIME
- ✧ INSTRUCTS ABOUT COMING EVENTS AND STIMULATES PREPARATION
- ✧ FREES US FROM AN EARTHLY PERSPECTIVE





# STUDY PROPHECY?

When we are anticipating an important event, we start counting. Years. Months. Weeks. Days. Sometimes we hang a calendar on the wall and mark off each day, so that we can “see” how near we are to the great and wonderful event.

The Bible has information that all of us need today. Don't we want to know about what is soon to happen right here on earth?

Very soon, events will begin to take place that will change the entire course of history. Those events will change lives and present undreamed of opportunities. They will open the door to health and prosperity and happiness for everyone who will cooperate with the new regime. They will improve the quality of life for every living person. They will even open the way for communication and exchange between our planet and other parts of God's vast creation.

Along with the new era will come new modes of transportation, faster by far than anything known to us, and absolutely safe. New terms will describe speed and time. Perhaps even our term “light years” will become obsolete as new means of measurement are developed. (How does one relate time to units of eternity?)

All this is the subject of Bible prophecy. Jesus Christ is coming to set up a worldwide Kingdom and inaugurate a system of government that will transform our present, war-torn, strife-filled world into a dominion that will enjoy a thousand years of universal peace and prosperity.

Can you believe it? With so much turmoil in our world how could there be peace for a day, not to speak of a thousand years? How can the human heart be changed so that it will seek the good and not the destruction of its neighbors?

The answer to these and many other questions can be found in a study of *Bible prophecy*.

Many people today believe the Bible to be inaccurate, contradictory, and unreliable. Are you one of these? After studying what the Bible has revealed about past prophecies and their fulfillment, you may change your mind. You may want to know what it says about the future—your future and mine. And even if you do not change your mind, the facts will not change, and if you are living when these prophecies are fulfilled, it is very likely that you will believe. For this is God's earth, and His plan is going forward, whether we accept it or not; whether we cooperate with Him or not.

Jesus Christ is coming just as certainly as the sun will rise tomorrow morning.

Why study Bible prophecy?

## 1) BIBLE PROPHECY BUILDS FAITH IN GOD

It is easy to read history and learn about the past by digging into the depths of sand, soil and stone. But how does one learn about the future? The philosopher would say that we learn about the future by studying the past. This is true to a point, but if we want detailed accounts of the future, we are completely helpless to discover them on our own.

Just tell exactly what you will be doing one hour from now—or five minutes from now—with certainty. Ask a father to tell the exact situation of one of his children a mere twenty years from now, to tell where the child will be living, what he will be doing, with whom he will be living, how many children he will have, whether they will be boys or girls, and so on and on. This is a very simple task, compared to predicting the future of nations and governments over millenniums of time, yet the possibility is far, far beyond us!

But the God of the Bible has predicted the future thousands of years in advance. This is one way He has of proving to us that He is God. He has foretold thousands of years in advance the detailed circumstances of families, cities, and nations. And when prophecy upon prophecy is fulfilled to the letter, how can we fail to acknowledge the verity of the God behind the prophecy?

And when we read prophecies that were spoken or written centuries in advance and then read about their positive and clear fulfillment through the eyes and pen of the historian, archeologist, etc., we begin to realize there is a Mind and a knowledge here above the human level; One who knows the future as we know the past. If His past predictions happened just as He predicted, we had better pay attention to what He is saying about the future!

## 2) BIBLE PROPHECY GIVES SOLID REASON TO BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

When we study prophecy seriously, we gain confidence in

*Seeing past  
prophecies precisely  
fulfilled, we can trust that  
unfulfilled prophecies  
will happen just  
as foretold.*



the Bible that can be had in no other way. Anyone can read history and learn what happened in the past. But to look at a Divinely inspired prophecy in the context in which it was spoken, then read where and when it was fulfilled and in what situation, builds genuine confidence in the God who can read the future with such accuracy.

Jesus gave this act of building faith as a real reason for prophecy when He said: *"I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe"* (John 14:29). Notice what Jesus is saying: God tells events in advance *so that we will believe Him* when they happen. He *wants* us to believe, and what could be more compelling than fulfilled prophecy? When a prophecy has been written and history clearly records its fulfillment, how can we *help* but believe!

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible contains one prediction after another of coming events, people, situations. What is the score for the accuracy of God's predictions? Look at a few, and you will find it is 100%, no less!

Did Jesus come from the nation and the family that God's prophets said He would? *Yes!*<sup>1</sup>

Was the Savior born of a virgin as Isaiah predicted? *Yes!*<sup>2</sup>

Was He born in Bethlehem as prophesied by Micah? *Yes!*<sup>3</sup>

Was He of the lineage of David? *Yes!*<sup>4</sup>

Did He fall into the hands of sinners? *Yes!* Did they pierce His hands and feet? *Yes!*<sup>5</sup>

Did they divide His clothes by lot? *Yes!*<sup>6</sup>

Was He sold for thirty pieces of silver? *Yes!*<sup>7</sup>

Was He condemned by His own countrymen? *Yes!*<sup>8</sup>

Was He restored to life after a very short while in the grave—so short that His flesh did not see corruption, just as the prophet David predicted? *Yes!*<sup>9</sup>

Was He taken up to heaven to His Father's right hand, again according to the prophecy of David? *Yes!*<sup>10</sup>

And how about the children of Israel: Were they plucked out of their own land and scattered among all nations as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted? *Yes!*<sup>11</sup>

Did they remain a distinctive people even in exile? *Yes!*<sup>12</sup>

Did they return from exile when the time was right, and live again in their own land? *Yes!*<sup>13</sup>

Was their city eventually destroyed, and the people subjected to indescribable miseries? *Yes!*<sup>14</sup>

If *human* authors wrote this Book without Divine help, then prophecy is only human guesswork, and bound to be full of errors. What human prophet ever won long-term credibility? Again the words of the Biblical warning come to mind, *"When a prophet speaketh,...if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him"* (Deut. 18:22). But when the Lord God of heaven speaks, we can depend on it. It will happen, and *exactly* as He has said.

### 3) BIBLE PROPHECY REVEALS GOD'S PLANS

Each of God's prophets received special insights into God's plans for the future, and they have been written down so that those who read the Bible today can have them all, right at their fingertips! Where would we be without this precious resource? Where would we be, but for the recorded messages of God's spokesmen?

Take, for example, Daniel's prophecies of the four world kingdoms, and the fifth (the Kingdom of Jesus Christ) that will follow.<sup>15</sup> What if God had not revealed anything about His Second Advent,<sup>16</sup> the Millennium,<sup>17</sup> the Judgment,<sup>18</sup> the coronation of the new King,<sup>19</sup> and the setting up of a New Government? What if He had told nothing of the success of the Divine takeover or the final end of the terrorism, lawlessness, and crime we see today?<sup>20</sup> What if God had chosen to keep all this information secret until it happened?

### 4) BIBLE PROPHECY ANSWERS OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE

Nothing sheds light on life like God's prophecies about the future. Bible prophecy helps to answer life's questions, questions such as:

Where are the dead?

Who will be resurrected, and when?

What is the future of Planet Earth?

Who shall reign when the Kingdom is established?

Who will appear at the Judgment seat of Christ?

Will the nations be judged?

What will life be like in the Kingdom?

Who will fight the Battle of Armageddon? When will it take place? Where?

What about the thousand-year reign of Christ? Who will reign with Him?

Who are the 144,000?

All these and hundreds of others can be answered by a careful study of Bible prophecy. And when we look back and see the accuracy with which previous prophecies have been fulfilled, hundreds of prophecies without one single error, we can trust His prophecies yet unfulfilled. Here is accuracy beyond anything we are familiar with. It is as accurate as history, like reading history in reverse...before it happens. *The Bible has the answers.*

### 5) BIBLE PROPHECY WARNS AGAINST A CARELESS LIFE

One of the strongest benefits of Bible prophecy is its influence in shaping character and conduct according to God's law of life. There is no topic more central to Scripture than the prophecies that concern the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. And there is nothing more effective in keeping a believer's life true and on target than the confident, real expectation that Jesus may return *any time*.

The preaching of Jesus was filled with admonitions to watch. Every time He mentioned His second coming, it was

*In the  
light of prophecy,  
today touches  
Eternity.*



accompanied by an admonition to “Watch.” And what were the believers to watch—the skies? the powers of earth? the progress of the nations? Though these would all be factors in His prophecies, the believers were to watch that their own growth in character be constant and abundant.

No one can seriously believe that Jesus may come any day, any hour, and not be concerned about preparing. Read the prophecy in the third chapter of 2 Peter as it unfolds in broad outline the drama of the future. The old order will be swept away and the new be ushered in (verses 7–13). So drastic will be the change that it is described as a great conflagration of the present order of heavens and earth (governments and populace). It is a change that will affect every living person on earth.

The real issue will be survival, because nothing of the old order will be able to withstand the power of an Almighty God when He moves to execute His judgments. There will be no way to flee, no place to hide, no avenue of escape for those who are ungodly and rebellious.

How can one prepare for the crisis? The Apostle Peter offers this advice: “*Since the whole universe [political] is to break up in this way, think what sort of people you ought to be, what devout and dedicated lives you should live! With this to look forward to, do your utmost to be found at peace with him, unblemished and above reproach in his sight.*” Notice the qualities that will be preserved: “*devout... dedicated... unblemished... above reproach.*” “*You, my friends,*” he continues, “*are forewarned. Take care, then, not to let these unprincipled men seduce you with their errors; do not lose your own safe foothold. But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory now and for all eternity!*” (2 Pet. 3:11, 14, 17–18 NEB).

## 6) BIBLE PROPHECY ENCOURAGES PATIENT WAITING

We read in James 5:7–8, “*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*”

Notice the emphasis: three times in two verses, a plea to “*be patient.*” Even though the whole world seems in a hurry, says James, “*be patient.*” Why? Because Jesus is coming, and nothing else really matters.

But the patient waiting encouraged by James is not idle-

ness. It is like the waiting of the “*husbandman who waits for the precious fruit of the earth.*” Even with modern techniques of farming, the time needed to mature a crop has not changed. But the farmer has much work to do while he is waiting. The time must pass, but it must be used in cultivating, irrigating, spraying, or his will not be the joy of an abundant harvest.

Prophecy encourages us to wait and work. Likewise the believer must wait, but not in idleness. There is much work to be done before the great Day of the Lord arrives, all the work of maturing a fully developed, Christ-like character. Prophecy—knowing that the Lord is coming—encourages us in this waiting and working.

God knew the vigil would be long, and the testing severe. He knew His people would need strong buttresses under their faith, rigid evidence to support their convictions. What could be more supporting than Divine promises—which are actually prophecies?

When the Apostle Paul wrote: “*Wherefore comfort [encourage] one another with these words,*” what were the words he referred to? He had just told them that the dead in Christ would be resurrected, and together with the living believers would rise to meet the Lord in the air. What a delightful expectation! God did not intend that we should know the day and hour of Christ’s return, but the Apostle Paul wrote to the anxious Thessalonians that “*the times and seasons*” would be known (1 Thess. 5:1).

## 7) BIBLE PROPHECY GIVES MEANING TO TIME

Did not Paul prophesy that the last days would be filled with peril? Did he not say that men would be “*unholy...haters of the good*” (2 Tim. 3 NIV)? Witness the decline in reverence for things sacred. When the First Congregational Church of Hampton, NH, looked into its 339 years of history, they learned that every service used to begin with a fanfare, then a solemn procession in which the Bible was carried into the sanctuary, followed by the minister and the deacons, all of whom had sworn to defend it. Such a procession today would likely be a cause for scorn, not reverence.

Add the prophecies of unrest among the nations,<sup>21</sup> the failed attempts at peace,<sup>22</sup> the rise of violence and savagery,<sup>23</sup> the almost universal state of fear,<sup>24</sup> the plummeting of morals, the acceptance of homosexuality, (now widespread),<sup>25</sup> reck-

### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 13

#### WHO—WHAT—WHY?

1. Isaiah (Isa. 49:10)
2. Jesus (Luke 12:50)
3. “*My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle*” (Job 7:6)
4. Zebedee’s sons (Mark 10:35, 38)
5. “*for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*” (2 Cor. 4:18)
6. “*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away*” (Rev. 21:1)
7. “*and afterward receive me to glory*” (Ps. 73:24)
8. Isaiah (house of Israel and men of Judah) (Isa. 5:7)

9. Peter to Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9–23)

#### ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Timothy (2 Tim. 3:15)
2. Solomon (2 Chron. 1:8–11)
3. Saul (1 Sam. 9:2; 10:23–24)
4. Miriam (Ex. 2:3–4; Num. 26:59)
5. Isaac (Gen. 21:3)
6. Cain (Gen. 4:9)
7. David (1 Sam. 16:11–13; 17:15)
8. Abel (Gen. 4:1–2)
9. Aaron (Ex. 4:14)
10. Ruth (or Orpah) (Ruth 1:6, 14)
11. Samuel (1 Sam. 2:18)

#### COMPLETE THESE VERSES FROM JOB

1. “*and all the sons of God shouted for joy*” (Job 38:7)
2. “*and here shall thy proud waves be stayed*” (Job 38:11)
3. “*reap the same*” (Job 4:8)
4. “*or loose the bands of Orion*” (Job 38:31)
5. “*shall a man be more pure than his maker?*” (Job 4:17)
6. “*and envy slayeth the silly one*” (Job 5:2)
7. “*and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger*” (Job 17:9)
8. “*as the sparks fly upward*” (Job 5:7)



less living (gambling, highway rage, binge drinking),<sup>26</sup> the uncontrolled use of illicit drugs.<sup>27</sup>

# 8) BIBLE PROPHECY INSTRUCTS ABOUT COMING EVENTS AND STIMULATES PREPARATION

Bible prophecy places a limit on the time that is now. It tells us that things will not always continue as they are. A change is coming.

The thought of some day standing face to face with Jesus puts an urgency on our need to obey Him, to be like Him, to be pure as He is pure so that we can face Him unashamed (1 John 2:28; 3:3).

The Scriptures warn frequently that the real reason for being pre-informed (prophecy) is so we can be prepared for what is coming. We prepare by applying what we learn. Prophecy is always followed with an impelling “therefore,” either spoken or implied.

Jesus said on one occasion, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). The Apostle Paul said that we are “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Again Jesus said in parable, “Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13).

In this last, late hour of the day, we should be living in the glow of the “any time now” return of Jesus. We know that the Day is near and imminent. In the words of Paul, we should be pressing on to secure “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). In the light of prophecy we can wait, and watch, and work.

Prophecy gives our lives perspective and direction. Scripture is not just an interesting book to read. It is the Word of God; it is the story of the world’s future, our future. Its promises are sure and certain. Let us hear the resounding words of Jesus, “Behold I come quickly,” and John’s yearning heartfelt response, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:12, 20).

The prophecy of the soon coming events on earth: Jesus returning with a multitude of the heavenly host, a resurrection of the dead and their judgment, a cleansing of the evil elements by force which will result in destroying two thirds of the world’s population cannot be ignored if we truly believe it. And, if we take Bible prophecy seriously, studying it and comparing it to historical, archeological and scientific evidence, how can we but believe!

# 9) BIBLE PROPHECY FREES US FROM AN EARTHLY PERSPECTIVE

A knowledge of Bible prophecy gives a real hope that changes our perspective in this world. It is a hope based on two worlds, this world and the next. We are not citizens here, we are “citizens of heaven, and we wait for the Saviour who comes from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body that belongs to our low estate till it resembles the body of his Glory, by the same power that enables him to make everything subject to himself” (Phil. 3:20–21 Moffatt).

The future is important right now because in the light of prophecy, today touches eternity. And where we will be tomorrow depends upon what we do today. If we live for this world and the present system, which is doomed and perishing, we will perish with it. But if we use the present to prepare for the great future God has planned, we belong to God and the future, and shall one day, if faithful, see God’s will done on earth as it is now done in heaven above. ♦

Propheesied	.....	Fulfilled
<sup>1</sup> Jer. 23:5;	.....	Matt. 1:1; Luke 3:33
<sup>2</sup> Isa. 7:14	.....	Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:26–35
<sup>3</sup> Micah 5:2	.....	Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:4–7
<sup>4</sup> Jer. 23:5	.....	Matt. 15:22
<sup>5</sup> Ps. 22:16	.....	John 19:37; 20:25–27
<sup>6</sup> Ps. 22:18	.....	Matt. 27:35; John 19:24
<sup>7</sup> Zech. 11:12	.....	Matt. 26:15; Matt. 27:3–10
<sup>8</sup> Isa. 53:3	.....	John 1:11; Mark 14:63–65
<sup>9</sup> Ps. 16:10	.....	Acts 2:29–32
<sup>10</sup> Ps. 110:1	.....	Acts 2:29–32
<sup>11</sup> Jer. 20:4–6	.....	2 Chron. 36:13–21; Jer. 52:3
<sup>12</sup> Jer. 29:10	.....	Ezek. 20:40–42
<sup>13</sup> Jer. 29:10	.....	Ezra 1:1–4
<sup>14</sup> Jer. 20:4–6	.....	Neh. 1:3
<sup>15</sup> Dan. 2:31–45	.....	Dan. 5:30; History–4th c. BC; 27BC to 476 AD
<sup>16</sup> 1 Thess. 4:16–18	.....	Future
<sup>17</sup> Rev. 20:4	.....	Future
<sup>18</sup> 2 Cor. 5:10	.....	Future
<sup>19</sup> Rev. 19:16	.....	Future
<sup>20</sup> Isa. 33:17–18	.....	Current
<sup>21</sup> Luke 21:25	.....	Future
<sup>22</sup> 1 Thess 5:3; Jer. 8:11	.....	Current
<sup>23</sup> 2 Tim 3:1–4	.....	Current
<sup>24</sup> Luke 21:25–26	.....	Current
<sup>25</sup> 2 Tim. 3:1	.....	Current
<sup>26</sup> 2 Tim. 3:1–4	.....	Current
<sup>27</sup> Rev. 9:21 (cf footnote NKJV)	.....	Current

*If you don't climb the mountain, you can't see the view.*



## NO TIME?

A Fantasy

I knelt to pray, but not for long  
I had too much to do,  
Must hurry off and get to work,  
For bills would soon be due.

And so I said a hurried prayer  
Jumped up from off my knees.  
My Christian duty now was done,  
My mind could be at ease.

All through the day I had no time  
To speak a word of cheer.  
No time to speak for Christ to friends,  
They'd laugh at me, I feared.

No time, no time, too much to do  
That was my constant cry,  
No time to give to those in need—  
At last 'twas time to die.

And when before the Lord I came,  
I stood with downcast eyes  
Within His hand He held a book,  
It was the Book of Life.

God looked into His book and said,  
"Your name I cannot find.  
I once was going to write it down  
But never had the time."

You can't get a good  
action from a bad thought.

The currency of time can purchase  
for us the riches of eternity—if we  
will  
only use it wisely.

A groundless rumor often covers  
a lot of ground.

A broken character doesn't knit  
easily.

Happiness is not the greatest end  
of life; it is character.

You can't get the worm out of the  
apple by polishing the apple; you  
have to get inside.

Let us not sit down and wait for some opportunity to  
knock at our door, but make use of the one that is now  
knocking.

This One faith is a working faith. It will move us to  
action.

## ANOTHER VIRTUE

Seeing a little fellow patting his father's  
horse that was standing in front of his house,  
a passer-by asked, "Can your horse go fast,  
my boy?" "No, not very," he replied; "but he  
can stand fast."

The largest room in the world is room for improve-  
ment.

To give thanks sincerely one must give more than  
thanks

If I do a little too much, I shall never regret it. But, oh,  
the danger of coming short.

Stretch your ladder of faith to the very highest height  
and lean it on unshakable Divine certainties, and no  
trembling of earth can alarm you.

Speak kindly today; when tomorrow comes you will be  
in better practice.





# Myself

*I have to live with myself, and so  
I want to be fit for myself to know,  
I want to be able, as the days go by,  
Always to look myself straight in the eye;  
I don't want to stand, with the setting sun,  
And hate myself for the things I have done.*

*I don't want to keep on a closet shelf  
A lot of secrets about myself,  
And fool myself, as I come and go,  
Into thinking that nobody else will know  
The kind of person I really am;  
I don't want to dress up myself in sham.*

*I want to go out with my head erect,  
I want to deserve all men's good respect;  
But here in the struggle for fame and pelf  
I want to be able to like myself.  
I don't want to look at myself and know  
That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.*

*I can never hide myself from me;  
I see what others may never see;  
I know what others may never know,  
I never can fool myself, and so,  
Whatever happens, I want to be  
Self-respecting and conscience free.*

—Selected