

Megiddo Message

November/December, 2004



I will *praise*

You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And I will *glorify* Your name forevermore.

-Psalm 86:12

We Don't Have to Fall



RUTH E. SISSON

The twenty-first century has already seen a number of disasters in leadership. Almost daily we hear stories of confusion and cover up, of abuse and intrigue. Take, for example, the famed Martha Stewart. A billionaire, she is sitting in prison, accused of a trading scandal that netted merely thousands. Why? Was it the lure of money and adventure? If so, the losses clearly outweighed the gains. This "domestic diva" ended up losing hundreds of millions of dollars. Personally and as a public figure, she fell.

And it isn't just millionaires who can fall. It isn't just leaders and heroes who can succumb. Each of us is subject to temptation. Each of us can fall. Each of us *does* fall. This is why the Apostle Paul warned, *"If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin"* (1 Cor. 10:12 NLT).

The good news is, we don't *have* to keep falling. How can we be like the good man we read about in Psalm 37, who, *"though he stumble, he will not fall"* (Ps. 37:24 NIV)?

First, we need to realize why we fall. I would like to suggest one basic reason: spiritual weakness that results from spiritual malnutrition.

If you were to try a plan of eating just once a week, would you be surprised if you felt faint? You would be quick to discern the reason. How, then, can we think that our inner life can thrive without continual nourishment?

*Though he stumble,
he will not fall. —Psalm 37:24*

Didn't Jesus teach us to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread"*? (Matt. 6:11 NIV). He knew that we need bread every day. We also need spiritual bread daily. For *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matt. 4:4).

The Apostle Paul, like the rest of us, saw himself getting older, and not as strong as he used to be. Nevertheless he said, *"We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed"*—month by month? week by week? No, the renewal must be daily. *"The inward man is being renewed day by day"* (2 Cor. 4:16).

Neglect the nurturing of the inner life, and you will be spiritually weak.

No one plans to fall. No one intends to fall. Not even

Martha Stewart. Nothing is changing that much, and no one is likely to suspect our neglect. After all, we have a *reason* for the choices we make. We have a *reason* why we are undernourished. Others may need daily spiritual nourishment, but we are able to run all week on one good Sunday meal! We can go on functioning, helping others, and growing spiritually in spite of our hit-and-miss spiritual nutrition.

Or can we...? The answer is an absolute *No*. The inner life of the spirit must be fed constantly, or it will grow weak and die.

If we let the media, or even the day's events, dominate our minds, and thoughts of God and our spiritual goals are crowded out, we are preparing to fall.

Under Moses' Law, the showbread on the table in the tabernacle was to be fresh every day. The visual lesson is that we need fresh, spiritual bread from the Lord's table every day.

In our busy lives, we face constant temptation to let our spiritual needs go unsatisfied. Who is going to call us to account if we race from one duty to the next all day without a prayer or a heavenly thought? Who is going to know that we are running on empty? But whom are we fooling? Even the spiritual food that nourished us yesterday must be renewed in our minds today or it is only empty words.

Do you remember what happened when the children of Israel tried to live on yesterday's manna? *"It was full of maggots and had a terrible smell"* (Ex. 16:20 NLT).

God does not expect us never to fall, but He does expect us to keep growing stronger so that we do not keep falling. Let the Apostle Paul be our pattern: *"Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13–14). Whether he was sitting in prison, or walking down the road, or visiting with his brethren, or preaching and teaching, he was pressing for the prize ahead of him.

Did his peers criticize? It was a small issue; his real master was Christ. *"He who judges me is the Lord"* (1 Cor. 4:4). His greatest fear was that, after preaching to others and setting others on the right road, he himself might be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:27).

Paul wanted to finish well. As he looked to the future, he saw more bonds and imprisonments, more hardship and suffering. But he could say triumphantly, *"None of these things move me"*—none of these will make me fall. His one longing was: *"that I might finish my race with joy"* (Acts 20:24).

Let his goal be ours. We don't have to fall. ♦

3-D Praise!

We live in a 3-D world. Everything around us has three dimensions: height, width, and depth. Whatever replicates the real world—pictures, drawings, photographs—must appear to have these same three dimensions or it looks flat, uninteresting, and unreal.

Have you ever thought about giving three dimensions to your praise?

In writing to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul expressed his overflowing gratitude to the God who has *"blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"* (Eph. 1:3). These words give us one very broad dimension of praise, *praise for what God has done*.

The Psalmist caught a second dimension of praise when he exclaimed, *"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation"* (Ps. 68:19). For loads of benefits he had loads of praise. Here is *praise for what God is doing*.

The apostle Peter, grateful for the same Divine blessings, added yet a third dimension to gratitude: *praise for what God will do*. He praised God for *"an inheritance"* not yet in his possession but which had been solidly guaranteed *"by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* What was this inheritance worth? Hear him describe it: *"an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Pet. 1:3–5).

Here is the third dimension of praise: *praise for what God will do*.

So what is our 3-D praise?

PRAISE FOR WHAT GOD *has done*

Where shall we start? Can we even faintly realize all that God has done for us, not to even try to imagine what He has done through an eternity past? Immediately we find ourselves in realms too vast for our small minds—realms where planning, creating, designing and developing are done on a scale beyond our wildest dreams. What do we, little human creatures on one tiny planet in one corner of His vast creation, know about the works of our great God? What can we know about His works, except He tell us?

What has God done *in our behalf*? The Israelites were often reminded to include this dimension in their praise. Regular rehearsing of God's works was even written into their law. They were to repeat it from generation to generation, teaching it to their sons, and their sons' sons.

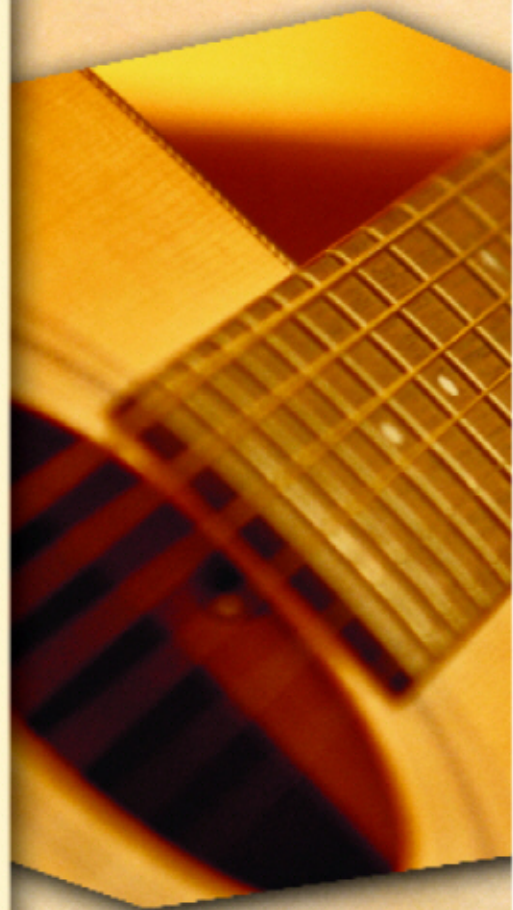
It was part of the laws of the Passover: *"And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage"* (Ex. 12:26; 13:8, 14). Never, never were they to forget what God had done for them.

Exodus 12:26 *"Then your children will ask, 'What does all this mean? What is this ceremony about?' [And you will] ...explain to your children why you are celebrating. Say to them, 'This is a celebration of what the Lord did for us when we left Egypt.'... And in the future, your children will ask you, 'What does all this mean?' Then you will tell them, 'With*

*Praise for what God
has done*

*Praise for what God
is doing*

*Praise for what God
will do*



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ABC's of Praise

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MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

WE BELIEVE...

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

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

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

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

THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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

mighty power the Lord brought us out of Egypt from our slavery'" (Ex. 12:26, 13:8, 14 NLT).

Did you ever notice how many of the Psalms reflect this dimension of praise, recalling the deliverance from Egypt, the ten plagues, the overthrow of the Egyptians, and the power of God demonstrated in a thousand ways? The Psalmist was looking back, not to glory in the past but to the God who was working in behalf of His people, guiding, teaching, overseeing, making a way for His will and His work. And what was his conclusion? "*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad*" (Ps. 126:3).

What shall be *our* first dimension of praise? Where shall we begin in rehearsing what God has done for us, we who have been so richly blessed?

We think first of blessings physical—the earth we live on, and the plan, design, and purpose behind it. We know nothing of how all these came about, or when. We can only offer praise to God!

Then we should think about the blessing of our free country, its government, and our right to worship and live according to our convictions. These tremendous privileges did not just happen. They were on God's planning board long, long before anyone on earth thought of them, and have come to us only through His goodness.

We should not overlook the benefits God has made possible for us to have from the fields of science and medicine. Human hands have done the work, but they could use only what was God-given, and could succeed only under His auspices. For centuries men have been learning, but they are only uncovering His secrets; and how directly those discoveries have benefited us. Shouldn't this be part of our praise?

Then we must look at what God has done for us in the realm of things spiritual—the rich blessings of hope, and knowledge, and insight, and love that are ours.

Look at the Bible, and the work of writing and preserving it for us. Have we thought about how enormous this project was, and how far it surpasses any human ability to accomplish? What contractor would bid on a job that would require 16 centuries to complete? And who would want to be responsible for assuring that forty different authors during those 16 centuries, writing in three different languages and on three different continents, would all be fully informed and all communicate the same, harmonious message? More than all this, the book, once written, would have to be preserved, copied—even copy-protected—for another 19 centuries! What mortal hand would have attempted this!

Shouldn't we say it again, "*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad!*"

Then we must not forget the great spiritual blessing which has given us hope: the relighting of the lamp of Divine knowledge during this last, late hour. How easily God could have overlooked this little moment of time at the end of the age and left us to live and die in ignorance. But no, people living today were part of His plan, and long before they were born He was taking steps so that they could have this sacred, priceless opportunity.

We should realize, too, how God has worked individually in our lives, to instruct us, to preserve us from harm, and to arrange circumstances so that we could compete for the eternal crown. It is all part of *what God has done* for us. Shouldn't we be grateful?

PRAISE FOR WHAT GOD *is doing*

Then let us move into the second dimension of praise, *praise for what God is doing*. As unfathomable as was *what God has done*, His work in the present is even more overwhelming; silent and unseen, but just as real. Indeed, what can mortals know of what God is doing this very moment?

But what is He doing for us? We look at our blessings of life, our health, strength, food and clothing, and sufficient of this world's goods so that we can escape the burdens of fear and poverty and concentrate most on seeking God and His Kingdom. Add to these the blessings of our family in Christ, whose shining examples of faith fire us with determination to go on—who can measure the magnitude of *what God is doing*!

Add the freedoms we enjoy—freedom to speak what we believe, freedom to live

*The Lord has done
great things for us,
and we are glad.*

—Psalm 126:3



Great is the Lord, and
greatly to be praised;
and his greatness
is unsearchable.

—Psalm 145:3

according to the dictates of our conscience without fear of intervention. Let us say with the Psalmist, *"Blessed be the Lord who daily loads us with benefits"* (Ps. 68:19).

Add to all this the work that God is doing in the world this very moment to prepare it for the coming of the King, so that the right people are in the right places at the right time to do what He wants done, so that His plan can move forward with precision and speed when the time is right. Add to this the work that He is doing in other parts of His universe, to carry out His plan in behalf of others. Then add to this His ongoing work of creation, in an eternally expanding creation. We can only exclaim with the Psalmist, *"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable"* (Ps. 145:3).

Here indeed is our second dimension of praise, *praise for what God is doing*.

But we must not stop here. Our 3-D praise is incomplete without the third dimension, and this third dimension is yet the greatest:

PRAISE FOR WHAT GOD *will do*

If we thought the first two dimensions were expansive, what about the third!

Yes, who can know or even imagine *what God will do in the future* for every one of His loving sons and daughters! Included in this dimension are all the wonders that left the Apostle Paul speechless as he called them *"exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think"* (Eph. 3:20). So vivid is even our feeble vision of this glory that it obscures the darkness of today and we become children of a living hope, sons of an unborn tomorrow. Our hearts burn with the joy of future glory, our lives are sweetened with gratitude for what is coming—yes, it is coming, and it will be immeasurably greater than the greatest our finite minds can imagine.

Oh, who can measure this third dimension of praise!

A very large portion of the Bible is devoted to prediction, because so much of God's work is future. Nothing He has done can even compare with what He has promised to do.

When we think about an inheritance that is *"incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away"* (1 Pet. 1:4), can't we begin to praise God for it even now? Shouldn't we make this our greatest *"heritage of joy"*?

Yes, who can measure what God can do for us, in terms of endless life, health, happiness, and the noblest associations among His family. Who can imagine what we can enjoy, in delight and pleasure? Who can tell the *"width and length and depth and height of the love of God—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge"* (Eph. 3:18–19)?

In the words of our hymn,

*"We now may let our minds expand with all their powers combined,
And yet we cannot comprehend the joys we there will find."*

Conclusion

What is the effect of 3-D praise? What does it do for us?

Isn't it enough to bring us to say, "Lord, I will do *anything* You ask, *anything, anything*—just let me be part of Your new world!"

What a loving God we serve! Isn't He drawing us with *"bands of love"* (Hos. 11:4)? Isn't He by His very goodness compelling us to obey? Who can refuse Him who has done, and is doing, and has promised to do—so much!

What was the response of the Psalmist when he realized God's measureless goodness to him? These are his words: *"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows...now in the presence of all His people"* (Ps. 116:12–14).

"I will pay my vows now." Let's do it. Whatever the price, whatever the cost in humiliation or suffering or human loss, let us pay our vows. Let us do what we have promised God we will do.

Let us make our praise truly 3-D, three-dimensional, and let it come from our heart, along with our new commitment and a fuller sense of all we owe to God.

After all, we don't want to stop with what God *has done*, or even what God *is doing*. We want to see and experience that third dimension of praise: *what God will do*. ♦



Radical

by RUSSELL HAMBY

Gratitude

"Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."
—Ephesians 5:20

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
—1 Thessalonians 5:18

From the same Apostle who gave us the instruction to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17) comes also the directive to give thanks always and for everything. *"Giving thanks always for all things,"* he said in his letter to the Ephesian Church.

This man of God was nothing if not radical in his counsel. Did he mean it? Who can pray constantly? Who can feel gratitude in every situation?

When Paul said, *"Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph. 5:20). He was talking the language of commitment. Expressing thankfulness bonds the thankful heart to God. Paul was recognizing our total dependence on God, and that gratitude is to be *"always"* and *"for all things,"* not just when things were going in our favor.

So much is ours as a result of this Divine-human relationship that the Psalmist could exclaim, *"My cup runneth over..."* and *"goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"* (Ps. 23:5–6). The resulting life becomes one of grateful, humble appreciation. We heed Paul's words as he said, *"In everything give thanks."* We sing with understanding, *"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."*

The nature of gratitude was understood by Abraham Lincoln who cautioned that we not forget, as he said, *"the gracious Hand which has preserved us in peace, and multiplied, enriched, and strengthened us."* Lincoln worried that too many among us *"have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own."* His sad appraisal was that *"we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us."* The weight of these remarks calls us to self-examination. We not only are thankful *for something* but we are thankful *to Someone*. And that Someone is God.

God is the One to whom our thanksgivings are raised. All praise points in God's direction. Radical gratitude prompts us

to thank God whatever the circumstances may be, and whether or not they are to our liking. Why? Because a kind and loving Father has allowed or arranged them.

As our nation pauses for Thanksgiving, God is less and less the center of it. God has been edged out. Our culture may use the word THANKSGIVING and list many things for which it is grateful. But grateful to whom? If they can acknowledge no God, no source of blessing, at least openly and publicly, how deep can this attitude be? How lasting? It is like *"fruits without roots."*

Genuine gratitude is focused on the Provider.

Thanksgiving may be the season to think of these blessings; there is nothing wrong with that. But beyond the day or the season let there be the life of thanksgiving. Every day, through all the days of our lives, may the Apostle's radical gratitude inspire us to give thanks—*"always for all things."*

Then our Provider will be pleased. ♦

*"Giving thanks
always for all
things."*



*"Teach me your ways, O Lord,
that I may live according to your
truth! Grant me purity of heart,
that I may honor you."*

—Psalm 86:11 NLT

Part Three

by GERALD R. PAYNE

ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY AND ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES

We find ourselves in a society largely devoid of Christian standards and values. "Politically correct" translates to non-discriminating, without solid commitment to right or wrong. Some of America's corporate giants are lauded as progressive because they are promoting anti-bias policies as standard business practice. New gay-friendly policies explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the work place, schools, and universities. And even in some churches, people are saying, If God loves everybody, what right do we have to condemn gays and lesbians? Homosexuality, they believe, is not wrong in any moral sense; it is simply an alternative lifestyle.

Those who promote or approve of the homosexual lifestyle say that being gay is not a choice, that it is a matter of genetic makeup and beyond one's control. And if God "makes" one a homosexual, then homosexuality is not a fault or a sin but only a *different* lifestyle.

A century ago, an accepted code of morality dictated minimum standards to a largely compliant society, and deviant behavior was frowned on. Enter the concept that "right" can be redefined by each individual and morality is an individual choice, and the result is a climate

We do not condone "gay bashing" or any kind of physical or verbal abuse of anyone for any reason. The Bible advises that "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people..." (Gal. 6:10 NIV). God judges according to character and we must leave judgment to Him.

of tolerance and license where a vast range of errant sexual behaviors are approved and even promoted.

God Does Not Change

Whatever the new moral climate, the Bible and the God behind it remain unchanged. The fact that Divine authority is unrecognized does not alter anything. Even the fact that large established churches place "loving relationships"—irrespective of kind or character—above the authority of the Bible does not change the laws that our Creator has written into the nature of His creation. God has given very definite rules for the protection and safety of the human race. We break them at our own risk. In fact, some even die from promiscuity, and put others at risk.

Because the moral laws of God (and the Bible) are built into the very nature of creation, it is important that we know what these laws uphold and what they condemn. For even though our society may approve any behavior, God's law does not change. And one day soon, God's authority will be demonstrated openly and everyone will know His law is *the* law of life. To resist that law will be to choose to die. He will not be tolerant (see Rev. 2:26; Isa. 26:9–10; 1:20).

One Authority

To learn God's thoughts on the matter we must go to His Word, the Bible. The Bible contains a code of laws that covers every aspect of human relations. It also reveals God's ways of working with the human family, and what He calls right and wrong.

God the Creator is sovereign over His creation. He is the ultimate authority. Being part of His creation, it is in our best interests both now and future to comply with the laws given in His Word. We can design our own laws; we can live by our own moral code, but we will have to pay the consequences. And those consequences may be severe.

If we want God's favor and blessing, we must be absolute in our compliance with His laws. Said Jesus, "*You are My friends if you do whatever I command*

you" (John 15:14). And in His post-ascension message, the book of Revelation, He says: *"Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book...Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city"* (Rev. 22:7, 14).

How do we obtain God's favor? Let Jesus answer: *"Keep My commandments"* (John 15:10).

What the Bible Says About Homosexuality

What does the Bible say about God's attitude toward homosexuality? Is it an acceptable lifestyle?

According to the Bible, homosexuality is absolutely immoral and forbidden. This was God's law, and for all who would be His children, compliance was not an option but a requirement.

In New Testament Times

The Apostle Paul, writing to his Church in Corinth, did not leave them to guess what was proper and what was improper moral behavior. He said, *"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Cor. 6:9-10). He is very specific: those who follow such patterns of life will not enter God's Kingdom.

The city of Corinth, along with most of the Roman Empire, was notorious for its immorality. Paul made very clear that the Christian believers had been called to live by a different standard. What was acceptable conduct for the average Corinthian citizen was not approved for them as Christians.

Moral Laws in Israel

The moral code Paul was teaching was not new with New Testament times. No one was left to wonder whether homosexual behavior was right or wrong in Israel. *"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination...Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you"* (Lev. 18:22, 24).

Why did God command the Israelites to destroy the nations who were inhabiting Canaan before them? Because He did not want His people to learn their evil ways (Joshua 23:6-7). Canaanite worship was heavily involved with all sorts of immoral practices—including prostitution and homosexuality. An example was the city of Sodom, where Lot lived and from which we get our term "sodomy." When God sent two angels to visit Lot and inform him of the impending

judgments of God on the city, some men of the neighborhood revealed their immoral bent, surrounding Lot's house and making vile threats (Gen. 19:4-11).

The book of Judges records a similar incident. A visitor was threatened with homosexual abuse by certain men of the city whom the Bible described as *"perverted men"* (Judges 19:22). Why did this happen? Remember, this was the time when *"there was no king in Israel,"* and so *"everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 21:25). We can easily imagine the results!

When there was no law, no authority, and no religious restraint, such perversions flourished. The same situation exists today among those who have no defined religious or moral values.

Just how abhorrent was homosexuality to God? He spoke of it in the most detestable terms as He condemned abominations done by the people of the land who were there *"before [the Israelites] and thus the land is defiled."*

The Penalty

What was the penalty for homosexuality? The penalty was death. God knew that it was a destructive practice and did not want His people harmed by it. *"Whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people...If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death"* (Lev. 18:24-29; 20:13). The Lord told His people that they must not commit any of these abominations, *"lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you."*

God, our Maker knows how He has made us, and He has the authority and the knowledge to state which relationships are right and which are wrong. In answering a question to the Pharisees about divorce, Jesus said, *"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?'"* (Matt. 19:4-5).

In Romans 1, the Apostle Paul speaks out against those who *"exchanged the natural use for what is against nature"* (Rom. 1:26). He is speaking against female as well as against male homosexuals. Homosexual behavior is *"against nature,"* because our bodies are not made for it. To break God's law of proper human relationships puts us in danger of potential consequences, i.e., venereal diseases, AIDS, and other illnesses. Do we wonder why the law given to ancient Israel placed adultery, incest, homosexuality and bestiality

*Times have changed, but
God has not changed.*

*New views of sin don't
change God's standard.*

about homosexuality and alternative lifestyles?

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."

Leviticus 18:22, 24, 27-29

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination...Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you."

"Whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people."

Leviticus 20:13

"The penalty for homosexual acts is death to both parties. They have committed a detestable act and are guilty of a capital offense." [NLT]

Romans 1:26-27

"...God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relationships with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men and, as a result, suffered within themselves the penalty they so richly deserved." [NLT]

Jude 1:7

"And don't forget the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with sexual immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and are a warning of the eternal fire [destruction] that will punish all who are evil." [NLT]

all under the death penalty? (Lev. 20:10-16). The laws were designed to protect His people.

Can the homosexual change his/her behavior?

The Bible says Yes.

Is there any possible correction for homosexuality, sodomy, adultery, fornication, and any such related evils? Can they change their way of life? Yes, they can. In fact, Paul says that some of the Corinthians had already done so and Corinth was well known for its immorality during Paul's time. He says, *"And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God"* (1 Cor. 6:11). Some of them had already changed—proof positive that change was possible. To continue to practice immoral conduct was to forfeit all hope of entering Christ's Kingdom.

How is this done? You change your conduct, says the Apostle Paul, like you change your clothes. You take off the old, dirty clothes of sin and put on the new, clean clothes of right doing. He uses this simile in Ephesians *"Throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true."* (Eph. 4:22-24 NLT).

The Apostle Paul said it again in his letter to the Colossians, *"Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds"* (Col. 3:9 NLT). If we would please God, we must model our lives on Jesus. If we would please God, there are styles of behavior, attitudes, thoughts, and actions that God abhors and we must keep clear of them.

Unfeeling and Harsh?

Despite the protective benefits of God's moral laws, the Biblical position will strike many as unfeeling and harsh in a generation that has grown up with civil rights movements and the new tolerance. The Biblical position runs counter to the thinking of those who feel every person should be free to do as he or she likes, and there should be no discrimination against individuals on any grounds.

What is the problem with the current anti-discrimination laws? They are the product of human reasoning. The laws of the Bible come from our Creator, who has no obligation to consult human minds. Does God discriminate against anyone because of race or color? No! He is totally impartial (Acts 10:34-35). His law says we must do unto others as we would have them do unto us, as Jesus commanded (Matt. 7:12).

God gives every human being the freedom to obey or disobey His laws. Isn't this fair? After all, who has the last word on what is right and what is wrong? Who will have the final say on who lives and who dies—eternally?

Times have changed, but God has not changed. God discriminates where men do not. His laws are fixed. He brought fire down from heaven and destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain because of their deviant sexual behaviors. He brought a flood upon the people in the time of Noah because God saw that *"the wickedness of*

man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

Is the Bible's seemingly harsh, unsympathetic position about homosexuality out of line for today? Not at all! Is God excluding a lot of "good" people from His Kingdom? He only wants them to change. Is He being unfair by condemning people who cannot help themselves? If such were the case, He would be unjust. But the fact that God condemns their behavior is an affirmation that THEY are responsible for their deviant behavior, that it is a choice they made as free moral agents, and that they can change. Each individual is free to choose. If one wants God's approval, he or she can choose within the law of God. That is all God asks. God our Creator has the right to command how His people should live, and He will accept or reject them on the basis of their obedience.

Are the Scriptures out of date? Does the Bible not apply to people in the 21st century? Is it our place to say that a loving homosexual partnership is just as acceptable to God as one between a man and a woman? We cannot say this without opposing God's laws. God's law is absolutely right, and whatever violates His law is wrong.

God has given people the ability to make moral choices.

Society may choose not to discriminate against ungodliness, but God does.

We are not helpless victims controlled by animal instincts. We are able to decide how we will behave. And when one has done wrong, one can repent and be forgiven. For the homosexual the road back will not be easy. It takes discipline and persistence to curb one's instincts and emotions, but with the help of God and caring family and friends, an errant lifestyle can be left behind. Homosexuality is not an unpardonable sin, and it is not an irreversible part of one's nature.

Homosexual tendencies?

Is it possible for one to have inborn homosexual tendencies? How should this be viewed?

When Jesus was restating the laws of Moses and amplifying them to become part of the higher law of faith, He stated exactly where adultery and adulterous acts should be cut: at their source.

Preceding the lustful act is the lustful look, and Jesus points to this look as the checkpoint. "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28). He was not talking about the casual glance but the intended look, the look that is a response to temptation, in the cycle where the look breeds lust, and when lust has conceived it brings forth sin, and sin when it is fin-

Recent events affecting Christian and family values in the United States and Canada

(favorable events are indicated by italics)

June 17, 1962	Engel v. Vitale The Supreme Court restricts prayer in schools.	July 28, 2003	New York Board of Education announces the creation of a gay-oriented high school in New York City.
Nov. 17, 1980	Stone v. Graham The Supreme Court strikes down a Kentucky statute requiring display of the Ten Commandments in public schools.	August 5, 2003	The United Episcopal Church ordains its first gay bishop, and on August 7 affirms the establishment of "gay unions."
1996	The Defense of Marriage Act prevents federal recognition of same-sex marriage, and allows states to ignore same-sex licenses from outside their borders.	August 7, 2003	California State Legislature passes Assembly Bill 196 with the intent to "protect" transgendered people from employment and housing discrimination.
June 19, 2000	Santa Fe Ind. School District v. Doe The Supreme Court overrules a Texas law allowing high school students to pray at athletic events.	Nov. 6, 2003	Federal judges in New York and California issue temporary restraining order blocking enforcement of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act.
June 10, 2003	Three judges on the Canadian Supreme Court declare the exclusivity of marriage between one man and one woman to be unconstitutional.	Nov. 18, 2003	Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health The Massachusetts Supreme Court rules that same-sex couples can marry under the laws of that state.
June 26, 2003	Lawrence v. Texas The Supreme Court strikes down a Texas law prohibiting sodomy.	February, 2004	San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom decides to begin giving marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples.
July 1, 2003	Glassroth v. Moore The 11th U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals rules that a monument to the Ten Commandments placed in Alabama's judiciary building must be removed.	May, 2004	Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court grants marriage rights to same-sex couples.
		November, 2004	<i>Eleven states vote to ban same-sex marriages.</i>

GOD'S PLAN

All people are born with the animal instincts necessary for survival. But God has given His human creation more than He has given the animals: He has given us minds capable of reasoning, learning, and making judgments. Using this equipment we are able to read and understand His Word and raise ourselves above the animal level of existence, and so fit ourselves for a higher level of blessings. He says, *"If you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then..."* and He lists the blessings He holds for faithful servants (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 28:1). Will everyone comply? No. Each is free to choose. God's eternal principle is, *"Choose you this day whom you will serve"* (Josh. 24:15).

Why does God invite His human family to live by His laws? Because He knows that is the best way of life, and the only way of life that has a future. The Creator has a plan for this earth and its inhabitants (Isa. 45:17-18). He has planned to fill it with His glory (Num. 14:21). He has planned to send His Son to be king over all the earth (Zech. 14:9), to set up a worldwide Kingdom, so that His will can be done on earth as it is now done in heaven above (Matt. 6:10). He has planned that chosen, pre-qualified mortals will be Christ's associate rulers (Rev. 3:21; 17:14). Then, during the Millennial reign of Christ, He will choose the populace of His kingdom, a vast, unnumbered multitude who will submit to His authority and conform their lives to His standard of holiness, and multiply until the earth is filled with happy, God-fearing people. (For further discussion of this subject, send for the booklet, *These Things Shall Be*.)

What is our obligation now? What type of life does God expect of us? To have the privilege of living in Christ's coming Kingdom, to obtain the eternal life He offers, we must listen to God's Word and accept it as our law of life. There is no other way to live a life that is acceptable to God. Our behavior, our morals, our attitudes, our words, our desires, our ambitions, interests, actions, pleasures must all be directed by the commands in His word. The Apostle Paul put it meaningfully when he said, *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (1 Cor. 10:31).

ished brings forth death (James 1:13-15). Every part, from the lustful thought to the lustful act, is wrong, and the end brings death.

Paul directed the people in Corinth to *"Flee sexual immorality"* (1 Cor. 6:18), indicating that it is not an irresistible inborn tendency.

Does one have tendencies that could lead to harmful acts? The law of God says we can bring them under control by practicing thought control (2 Cor. 10:4-5). To help us in achieving this obedience, Paul advises: *"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth....therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire"* (Col. 3:2-5). Inclinations

which are *"put to death"* offer no more temptation because they are removed from our sphere of life. We put our inclinations *"to death"* refusing to gratify them.

Christians must live with one purpose: to please God, not to satisfy fleshly passions and lusts.

"Those Who Practice Such Things"

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul speaks of a number of types of deviant behavior, homosexuality among them, calling them *"vile passions"* (1:26), and the word translated *"vile"* means disgraceful, dishonoring, bringing reproach or shame. He also describes God's attitude to those who are subject to these vile passions. He says that they know *"the righteous judgment of God, that those that practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them"* (Rom. 1:18-32).

What are the underlying weaknesses? First is a lack of reverence for God. They fail to recognize God's superiority, authority and sovereignty (Rom. 1:18).

As a result, God *"gives them up"* to the way of life they choose for themselves (Rom. 1:24, 26). From this point forward, the process is a downward spiral, ending in eternal death.

Living in a society where immoral behavior provides the subject matter for much popular entertainment, we look forward to the time when Babylon (a term the Bible uses to describe the world of pleasure, lust, entertainment and undisciplined ease), will come crashing to the ground. This cataclysm is pictured graphically in the book of Revelation (chapter 18).

Does anyone want to escape? Act now, says the Revelator. *"Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities...for strong is the Lord God who judges her"* (Rev. 18:4-5, 8). ♦

How Different!

*Still higher than the highest mount,
And broader than the widest sea;
Still deeper than the deepest fount
Is now, O Lord, Your Truth to me.
Once I refused to hear the Word
That You would speak, my feet to guide;
My being had not yet been stirred;
In this world I was satisfied.*

*I heard Your goodness oft proclaimed,
Your mercy and Your might extolled;
And still I did not feel ashamed
To say that I was not enrolled
Beneath Your Banner; I could see
No glory in Your service, Lord.
Your cause did not appeal to me,
And so Your calling I ignored.*

*I went my way, in calm and storm,
In pleasure, in adversity;
The spark I kindled kept me warm.
That was the way it seemed to me.
I did not see—for I was blind,
My true condition wretched, cold;
Nor would I pause to seek and find
The joys of which the Scriptures told.*

*But now, how different the scene
Since I have been enlightened, and
Enabled from Your Word to glean
A bright view of the Promised Land.
What once I thought a far-fetched tale
Is easy now to comprehend,
Since from my eyes is torn the veil,
Now I can see the glorious end!*

*Your service now is my delight,
Your Truth the choicest Gem of all,
Since You have given me my sight
And I have heard Your loving call.
Now I will ever lift my praise:*

*With all my heart I seek Your throne,
My joy to serve You all my days,
Until You claim me as Your own.*

by LIOT L. SNYDER



FAITH *in Action*



by RUTH E. SISSON

IN JAIL AT PHILIPPI

THE SINGING SAINTS



READ ACTS 16:25-34

Jailers on duty in prison were no doubt accustomed to hearing cries and curses and shouts throughout the night. Prisoners being punished were not a happy lot. But this jailer was not prepared for what he heard from these extraordinary prisoners.

1. How did Paul and Silas occupy that night in prison? (16:25) _____
2. Who was their audience? (16:25) _____

Imagine those two missionaries, beaten mercilessly and locked up in prison, their legs cramped and hurting, their backs bleeding, yet they were praying and singing praises to God!—and heartily enough so that the other prisoners heard them.

This act of praise was an intentional, thought-through response to their tribulation. It was not a natural reaction. It was praise from a heart full of gratitude to God for allowing them to be His witnesses, even to suffer for His sake. It was praise, genuine praise to the God they



PHOTO COURTESY OF TODD BOLEN IN ISRAEL

Alleged prison cell in Philippi where Paul and Silas were imprisoned overnight after being beaten.

Bible Text: Acts 16:25-34

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

served for the hope they shared and the glory ahead. It was praise that could dull the pain because they remembered Jesus' words, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

Let's imagine a bit of their conversation:

Silas: (in a whisper) It's midnight. There's the call for the change of guard. Paul? How are you doing, Brother?

Paul: (trying to move a little) Oh, about like yourself—sore and stiff but thankful to be alive. *(pause)* Actually Silas, I was thinking of the prophet Jeremiah down in that awful mud pit—left to die. We're better off than that. Silas, those prophets are our brothers in suffering—I'm proud to be here for Christ's sake!

(both silent with their own thoughts)

Silas: We aren't here because we did something wrong.

Paul: Neither was Jeremiah in that pit because he had done wrong. He was there because he spoke for God.

Silas: Truly we are honored to be followers of Jesus Christ. I wonder what Timothy and Luke are doing.

Paul: Praying for us, I'm sure. No doubt they can't sleep, knowing what happened to us.

Silas: Let's join them in prayer, Paul!

Paul: Actually, Silas, I feel like singing. Let's try out the acoustics in this inner dungeon. *(with a laugh)* A bit different from the temple. What about a psalm of David? What's your favorite?

And so they sang: "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with thanksgiving. Know ye that, the Lord, He is God. It is He who has made us and not we ourselves..."

The acoustics were good. The walls echoed with their hymn of praise. The other prisoners roused up—not believing their ears. And then...

Earthquake!

This was a very special earthquake, a miracle earthquake, a chain-breaking earthquake.

The walls and the foundations of the prison shook, all the doors were opened and everyone's chains fell off. Suddenly, every prisoner in this prison was free—and alive!

Understandably, the jailer was in a state of shock. Earthquakes were common enough in that part of the world, but no one ever gets used to them. And this was not even a regular earthquake. No doubt the jailer was overcome with a sense of paralyzing helplessness.

3. What was the jailer's instinctive response to seeing the prisoners free? (16:27) _____

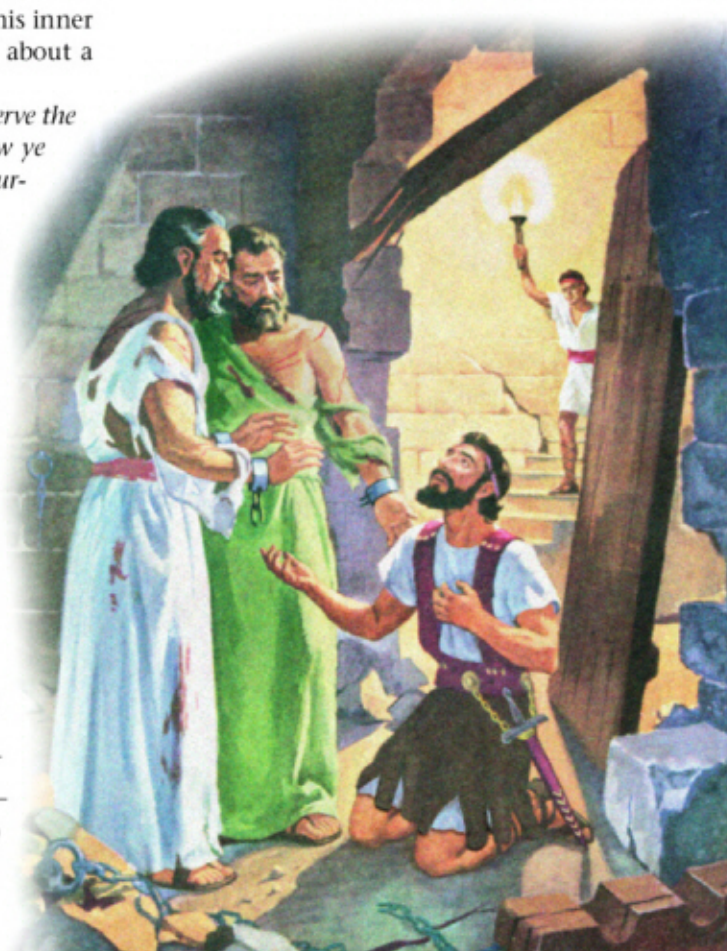
4. Who intervened in behalf of the jailer? What did he say? (16:28) _____

Experiences like this bring all of us to think about the basic realities of life and death.



**“We are
ambassadors
for Christ”**

—Paul (2 Cor. 5:20)



The jailer, impressed by these two unusual prisoners, seeks to know how he can obtain what they offer.



Insight

Three steps to salvation

The person who seeks eternal salvation, a life free from sickness, sorrow, pain, disappointment, and any and all of the problems that are common to the human race, must take three steps.

1: Learn the fundamentals.

Each seeker of salvation must learn the plan of God, the principles of Christian belief, and the behavior and character which God requires of those whom He will bless with eternal salvation. *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom. 10:17). *"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy..."* (Rev. 1:3). Every potential child of God must be taught about God (John 6:45). *"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6).

2: Obey.

As we learn what God wants us to do, then we must show our belief by a committed life of obedience to God and His principles. Love for God is fundamental. The first and greatest commandment is, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30). We show that we love God by keeping His commandments (John 14:15; 15:14), by forming our character according to the pattern of Christ (Rom. 13:14). *"Blessed is he who reads...and keeps those things which are written in it"* (Rev. 1:3). We must *"repent...and be converted"* that our *"sins may be blotted out so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

3: Be changed to the immortal state.

Those who read and believe the principles of Christ and conform their lives to be like Christ will, when Christ returns, receive the change to the immortal state. Said the Apostle Paul, *"We eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body"* (Phil. 3:20-21). The corruptible dying body will be clothed with immortality, so that the saying may come to pass: *"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O hades, where is your victory?"* (1 Cor. 15:53-55).

5. What in the account tells us that the jailer was thinking deeply at this moment? (16:29-30) _____

Compare the countenance of the frightened jailer with the steady, untroubled confidence of Paul and Silas. The prisoners were those in command of the situation. Most people in their situation would have spent the night protesting the injustice of their punishment. Paul and Silas spent it in praises to God. With God's help they had the ability to rise above the situation and turn it to good.

6. What was the response of Paul and Silas to the jailer's question? (16:31) _____
7. Were they saying that a simple statement of assent was all that was necessary to salvation? In other words, what does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? _____

The night that began in misery and punishment ended with Paul and Silas preaching the word of God to the jailer and his household.

8. What did the jailer do for Paul and Silas? (16:33) _____
9. What did Paul and Silas do for the jailer and his household? (16:32-33) _____

The jailer must have been impressed as he saw faith in action. He was not accustomed to men who could take suffering in such a spirit, or regard him—the jail keeper—as a friend. He was not accustomed to a faith which included forgiveness.



The hardened jailer was now a disciple! With his own hands, he gently washed the wounds of his prisoners. He could not set them free but he could ease their pain and comfort them. He could also *"set food before them; and he rejoiced having believed in God with all his household"* (16:34).

Can we imagine the conversation at that dinner table! Paul and Silas were doubtless hungry. Did they hold back because the jailer was a Gentile? Not at all. Did they question whether they should enter a Gentile home or eat at a Gentile table? There was none of that, only a full heart of joy because the jailer and his family had found a new faith in the living God of heaven.

No doubt the jailer asked many questions about this new faith and how it would change his life and that of his family. What should they do differently? How should they conduct themselves as new believers? What did this new Gospel require of them? What did it mean to *"believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"*?

Of one fact we may be sure: They understood that it was a faith to be lived. Nowhere do we read that the Gospel saved people just as they were. They had to become new. It was a life to be lived, not in the old rut but in the new and living way. The old ways of selfishness and pride, greed and resentment, hatred

and anger had to be put off, just like one takes off old, dirty clothes. And there were new, clean clothes of right doing to be put on, new ways to be learned, ways of humility and love, of integrity and peace, of patience and longsuffering. It was all new to the jailer and to his household. But it was a way with a glorious future, even eternal salvation in the Kingdom of Christ. Paul preached Christ and His coming Kingdom everywhere he went (Acts 28:31).

In the morning

 READ ACTS 16:35-40

The hot-headed officials must have done some thinking during the night, because by morning the attitude toward Paul and Silas had changed greatly. We read that the officials of the city sent word to the jailer that the Jewish prisoners should be released.

So the jailer told Paul, *"You're free to go. So go in peace."*

10. What was Paul's reply? (16:37) _____

11. When the city officials heard about Paul's objections, what was their reaction? (16:38) _____

Now the missionaries who had been horribly mistreated and imprisoned have the city officials at their door, full of apologies, wanting to make amends, and begging them to leave town as quickly and quietly as possible.

Why the sudden turn? Why didn't Paul and Silas insist on their rights the night before? Perhaps there was no opportunity. Perhaps the mob was out of control, and they had no chance to speak. Or perhaps they were concerned that if they asserted their rights, the vengeful magistrates would attack Timothy and Luke, who were with them, and were not Roman citizens.

There is another possibility. Perhaps Paul and Silas, by insisting on their rights now, were taking a step to ensure the survival of the fledgling Church. Perhaps it was a way of saying the Church was viable, and the people of the town should recognize and allow them.

12. What else did Paul and his company do before leaving town? (16:40). _____

"When they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed" (Acts 16:40).

Notice "we" has changed to "they." Apparently Luke stayed with the believers in Philippi when his companions left. Perhaps he stayed to strengthen and

help the new believers, or perhaps to practice his medicine for a time. We are not told. The next time he joins the missionaries is on the third journey, which brings Paul once again to Philippi (Acts 20:5-6).

Luke was the dedicated, *"true yokefellow"* Paul commends in his letter to the Philippians (4:3).

As three missionaries left Philippi, they took the road that headed south toward Thessalonica—and more new brothers and sisters in Christ. ♦

(to be continued)

Bible Text: Acts 16:35-40

[35] And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

[36] So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

[37] But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No in deed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

[38] And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.

[39] Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city.

[40] So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.



Insight

Believe...?

Belief is meaningless without an appropriate response.

If the weather bureau issues a warning that a hurricane is expected to pass through your area, and you go about your day's activities without any concern, without any change in your schedule, without taking any steps to prepare, could anyone think you **believed** the weather warning? You might say that you believed, but if you did not take any steps to prepare for the hurricane or to insure your safety and that of your family, it would be very hard to explain that you believed the warning.

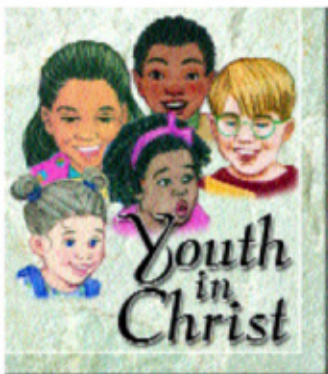
Just so, belief in Jesus is more than an intellectual assent. If we believe in Jesus, we believe what He taught. And if we believe that He taught us to live according to His law of life, to love the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, how can we say that we believe in Him if we do not make any change in our way of life?

Even though we might not know how to behave under every possible circumstance, if we believe in Christ and respect His principles and teachings, we will be making an effort to make our lives correspond to His pattern.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TODD BOLEN IN ISRAEL

The Egnatian Way—looking west from ancient Philippi's forum. No doubt, Paul and his companions would have taken this route when they left Philippi.



PRETTY On the Inside

Kay and Karen loved visiting Grandma because she had such interesting things to play with. Today it was dressing up. The girls giggled as they awkwardly made their way down the stairs wearing some old silk dresses which were much too long, and hats that grandmother had worn a long time ago, and some fancy shoes they could hardly keep on their feet.

Don't decorate yourself on the outside, but be pretty on the inside.

—1 Peter 3:3–4, free paraphrase

"These were pretty clothes long ago, weren't they, Mother?" said Kay.

"They were probably somebody's prettiest clothes," her mother answered. "They look funny now because nobody wears that kind any more. Clothes change. But I know a way of dressing up that never changes and never gets old."

"You do?" asked Karen. She wanted to know all about it.

"Yes," her mother explained, "by dressing up on the inside you will always be pretty."

"But how can we dress up on the inside?" asked Karen.

"Well, you see," said her mother, "when God looks at you, He sees more than just the outside of you. He sees your heart or inner self. This part of you, you can dress and decorate by being kind and friendly, sweet and cheerful."

"God wants us to dress up by being kind and helpful, doesn't He, Mother?" said Kay, beginning to understand.

"That's right," said her mother. "And because Jesus wants everybody to be pretty on the inside, Jesus says He will marry the ones who have that special wedding dress on. The Bible says the bride's dress is without spot or wrinkle and it is made up of right acts, doing what is right. Peter wrote, Don't just decorate yourself on the outside, but be pretty on the inside."

Kay looked at her shoes and dress. "Is it wrong to dress up and be pretty on the outside?" she asked.

"Not necessarily," her mother answered, "For example, when we go to God's house, we wear our best and are neat and clean to show our respect for the Lord. But if we dress to be praised by others, then we are not pleasing God. It's much more important to be pretty on the inside, because that's what God sees." ♦

They giggled still more when they heard their mother coming to see what was going on. Their mother laughed, too, when she saw her daughters carefully making their way down the stairs. "How grown up my young ladies look today," she said.

Let's talk about this:

What were the girls giggling about? When were those old clothes pretty? Why doesn't that kind of "pretty" stay pretty? In what way does God want us to be pretty? Why is it better to be pretty on the inside? How can we become pretty on the inside?

PRAYER:

Dear God, please help us be pretty on the inside by showing Jesus' love for each other. Teach us to be kind, lovely, clean, and friendly inside, and forgive us when we are mean and selfish and proud. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Savior and King. Amen.

MEMORY VERSES:

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. (1Pet. 3:3–4 NIV)



HIS DEADLY ENEMY



Jealousy is as cruel as the grave.
—Song of Solomon 8:6



A missionary in Alaska had a number of dogs trained to draw his sled from place to place. There was one dog that always took the lead, and he seemed proud of his place as head of the team. The missionary thought it wise to train another dog, in case anything should happen to the leader he would not be greatly hindered.

But the very first time he harnessed the second best dog ahead

of the first, the first one sat down and refused to move. When his master compelled him to go on, he gnawed the harness of the new dog so that he was freed, and he himself again was the leader. Several times he did this, until his master became tired of it and took him out of the team and tied him up. Now he could do nothing but watch the new dog get trained as leader. He was so jealous of the new lead dog, he refused to eat. He would rather die than give up first place.

Unfortunately, some humans feel the same way. But remember, jealous is deadly. ♦



THE BOY AND THE GRASSHOPPER

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you... —Matt. 7:12 NIV

Ted was a cruel boy. One day he found a lively grasshopper and amused himself by tormenting it in all sorts of ways. He laughed when one leg broke off and the poor grasshopper couldn't jump anymore. Suddenly the grasshopper began to grow. It grew and grew and grew, until it became a large and terrible creature—much bigger than Ted. Then the grasshopper began to treat Ted as he had treated it. It made Ted jump and jump, until he was so tired he could jump no more. The grasshopper tortured him in other ways and was about to step on him when Ted awoke—and found it was only a horrid dream. ♦

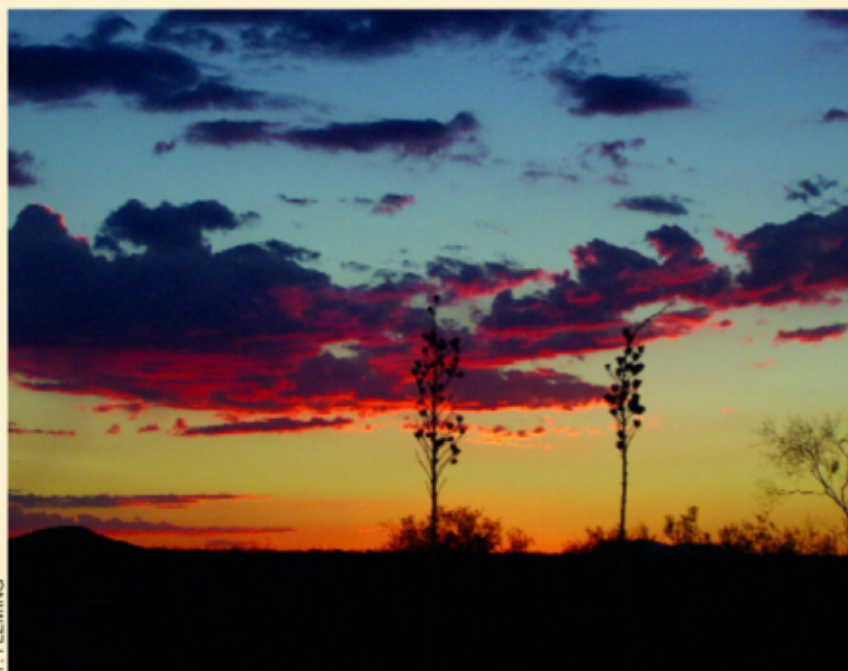
EVERY DAY BETTER

by P. FLEMING

Yesterday we traveled over 300 miles (all in Texas), and we saw some awesome sites. I never cease to be amazed at the beauties God created in this world. If the earth-made-over-new has more than we can ask or think—well, what can I say? Words fail me! What a day that will be! There is so much good that we experience now; but to have everything good and wonderful, that is truly incredible. But God has promised and it will be (1 Cor. 2:9).

It will be worth every sacrifice we make now. It will be worth the working, watching and waiting. The day of the Lord's coming is drawing nearer and nearer. We really need to concentrate each day and hour to make the preparations needed. Life is short at best, and these days may be even shorter for us at the end time.

My prayer is that every day may find us better prepared to meet our Master and King!



P. FLEMING



What about DECEMBER 25?

Scripture or Tradition?

What happens when tradition crosses paths with Scripture? Which rules, tradition or Scripture?

Many people regard it as “no big thing” that December 25 is not the birthday of Jesus Christ. So long as the Christmas lights flicker, and the gifts are exchanged, and families get together happily, the missing “reason for the season” does not really matter.

Or does it? Can it possibly be “right” to observe an adopted pagan festival in honor of Jesus?

When a festival is associated with the sacred name of Jesus Christ, and is supposedly in His honor, we need to think seriously about the implications, especially considering the well-documented history of the December date—and the widely recognized fact that Jesus was not born on December 25.

If you are a conscientious believer, you might want to ponder these points:

1) Most historians recognize that Jesus’ birth was first celebrated on December 25 somewhere near the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century AD.

Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world. – Romans 12:2 NLT

2) The celebration was instituted as a Catholic tradition, meaning, “Christ Mass”.

3) The name of St. Nicholas was used to slip the pagan tradition of gift giving into the church.

4) Before being adopted by the Catholic Church, December 25 belonged to a season of revelry and festivity among the ancient Romans, in honor of the sun gods, and was celebrated with reckless abandon. The original symbols associated with December 25 were wolves, Nimrod, and sun gods. Christ was not in the picture.

5) Most of the customs currently associated with Christmas are derived from pagan or non-Christian peoples.

6) Jesus, however much He may be lauded, is not the central figure in the celebration.

7) Christmas has been commercialized to such an extent that those benefiting most from the holiday season neither honor nor believe in Christ.

8) The season is a time of year known for excesses—more depression, more child and spouse abuse, more liquor sales, more suicides, more credit card abuse, more debts.

9) Observing Christmas on December 25th today is largely a social event, and becomes so much a part of people’s lives it is difficult to give it up—not because it gives honor to Jesus, but because of the pleasing festivities.

Why celebrate Christmas on December 25? Is it to honor Christ, or to conform to a custom borrowed from those who did not know Christ?

We want to honor Christ. We want to give Him all glory and praise. But how can we do it on a day that was borrowed from pagan Saturnalia keepers? How can we do it with a dominant mode of commercialism? How does God honor the perpetuating of customs that had nothing to do with His cause?

What does God say about borrowing customs from those who do not know or worship the true God? The Bible has a few unambiguous commands: “Do not act like other nations” (Jer. 10:1–2 NLT). Also, “Do not join a crowd that intends to do evil” (Ex. 23:2 NLT). Also, “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” (Rom. 12:2 NLT).

As a Church, we choose to step out from the norm and honor Jesus in the spring of the year.

If we could stop the commercialism, if we could change the date to one associated with a sacred event, if we could remove the pagan customs, if we could remove Santa Claus and St. Nicholas, and honor Jesus in a fitting manner, with prayer and praise and happy festivities, then we would celebrate. And we would be following Scripture, not tradition. ♦

ALTARS

1. Who, following God's instructions, built an altar and laid his son on it as a burnt offering?
2. Who, while waiting for two friends in Athens, saw an altar with the inscription, "To the unknown God"?
3. Who was given the nickname of 'Jerubbaal' after he knocked apart the altar of Baal?
4. Which King, while visiting Damascus, saw an unusual altar and had Urijah, the priest, build one just like it in his hometown?
5. Who built an altar out of stones on Mount Ebal and wrote each of the Ten Commandments on the stones?
6. Which King, because he disobeyed God's command and burned incense on a holy altar, was stricken with leprosy?
7. Which general of David's army murdered two generals, and was slain at a tabernacle altar as punishment?
8. Which angry King's arm became paralyzed after he threatened a prophet who said an altar would split apart with its ashes spilled to the ground?
9. Who, after building an altar at Beersheba, had his servants dig a well?
10. Which king had bones taken from mountainside graves, and burned them on an altar at Bethel to defile it?

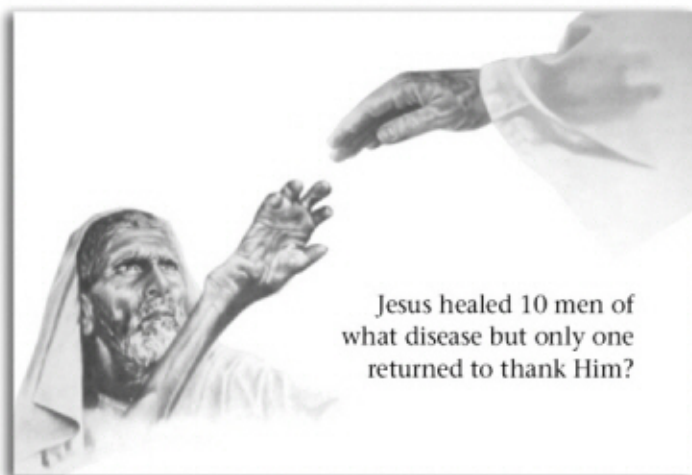
ABOUT THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

1. Who directed that the Ark of the Covenant be built? Who actually built it?
2. What materials were to be used in making the ark?
3. What items were placed in the Ark of the Covenant?
4. How was the ark to be carried?
5. What was the cover of the ark called? Of what material was it to be made?
6. How many gold cherubs were to be built to hover over the mercy seat?
7. What was the purpose of the mercy seat?
8. During the conquest of the land of Canaan, the Ark of the Covenant was carried around and around what city?
9. What happened when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and placed it in their pagan temple before their idol?
10. What happened to the Philistine people while the Ark was in their country?

Know
Your
Bible?

ABOUT DISEASES

1. Jesus healed the man with the _____ hand.
2. The sick, _____, _____ and _____ came to the Pool of Bethesda hoping to be healed.
3. Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, before healing a man of _____?
4. When Moses scattered ashes toward heaven, God sent a plague of _____ on the Egyptians.
5. Four men suffering from _____ went to surrender to the Syrian army but found the Syrians had abandoned their camp.
6. King Asa of Judah died due to a severe disease of his _____?
7. Elisha healed Naaman, commander of the Syrian army, of _____?



Jesus healed 10 men of what disease but only one returned to thank Him?

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Picture: Leprosy (Luke 17:11-19)

ALTARS

1. Abraham (Gen. 22:1, 2, 6-9)
2. Paul (Acts 17:15, 16, 23)
3. Gideon (Judges 6:27-32)
4. Ahaz (1 Kings 16:10-11)
5. Joshua (Joshua 8:30-32)
6. Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-21)
7. Joab (1 Kings 2:5, 29-34)
8. Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:1-5)
9. Isaac (Gen. 26:23-25)
10. Josiah (2 Kings 23:15-16)

ABOUT THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

1. God commanded that it be built (Ex. 36:1); Bezaleel built it (Ex. 37:1)
2. Acacia (shittim) wood, overlaid with gold (Ex. 25:10-11)
3. The stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed; a golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod (Ex. 25:21; 16:32-33) (Heb. 9:4)
4. Using gold covered poles slipped through gold rings that were attached to the sides of the ark (Ex. 25:13-14)
5. The mercy seat, made of pure gold (Ex. 25:17-18, 21)
6. Two (Ex. 25:18)
7. "There I will meet with you." (Ex. 25:22)
8. Jericho (Josh. 6:1-16)
9. The next morning, Dagon, their idol had fallen on its face in front of the Ark (1 Sam. 5:3). The second

morning the idol fell again—this time its head and hands were broken off (1 Sam. 5:4-5)

10. The people were struck with a plague of tumors (1 Sam. 5:6, 9)

ABOUT DISEASES

1. Withered (Matt. 12:10-13)
2. Blind, lame, and paralyzed (John 5:3)
3. Dropsy (Luke 14:1-4)
4. Boils (Ex. 9:8-10)
5. Leprosy (2 Kings 7:3-5)
6. Feet (2 Chron. 16:12-13)
7. Leprosy (2 Kings 5:9-14)

Meet the Amazing Engineers!

They may not use the same materials you would use in a construction project. And they may not have the same tools or equipment, but you will have to work fast to keep ahead of them. In a single night a colony of beavers have been known to build a dam across a stream, effectively stopping the flow of the water. They have even been known to build the dam with two or three tiers upstream from the dam to hold back the force of the water. Then, in the pond that forms behind the dam, they build their lodge.

Beavers are second only to humans in their ability to manipulate their environment. Living in rivers, streams, lakes, marshes, and swamps, beavers take on large-scale construction projects. Masters at dam building, they can completely change the vegetation and animal life of an area.

How do they do it? They are doing what their great Creator—and ours—designed them to do!

In researching this fascinating little animal, I came upon



many statements that sounded like

the beaver made his own choices—i.e., the beaver has a very heavy fur because he needed it to survive. The beaver has very sharp teeth because he must use them to fell trees to survive. I also read that the beaver coated his teeth with iron because gnawing wood is very demanding on the beavers' teeth! (Did our ancestors choose to enamel their teeth with calcium?)

Those who hold to the common views of evolution believe that small animals such as the beaver survived because little by little over many years they adapted to their environment. In other words, beavers do well in water because they have lived so long in the water that they have developed the appropriate type of feet, limbs and fur necessary for survival—as though they solved their own problems without intelligent direction. (If so, how did they survive while they were in the adapting process?)

Think about it as you are reminded of the wonders of this small, common animal—and give praise to the great Designer, who, the Bible says, “made...the earth and everything in it” (Neh. 9:6).

Beavers are designed for the water

Beavers inhabit the waterways of almost every state and province of North America. Powerful animals about 4 feet in length and weighing as much as 60 pounds, they are North America's largest rodent. Able to move well on both land and in water, they are best in the water.

What does one need to live and work in shallow, cold water?

□ A waterproof suit?

The beaver has an inch-thick, double fur, fully waterproofed by an oil which the beaver makes and combs into its fur (the beaver has a special split nail on one toe of each of its hind feet to serve as a comb for this purpose).

□ Ability to swim?

The beavers are excellent swimmers—when first born they are able to swim! Their large hind feet, six inches across, give them strong propulsion through the water. (By contrast, their front feet are only about 2 to 3 inches across, but are just right to hold sticks and branches while they are swimming or walking on their hind feet.) Our Creator has even designed beavers to have



2" FRONT



6" HIND

their own built-in flippers—their hind feet have webbing between the toes, just like a duck.

❑ *Stoppers for ears and nose?*

The beavers have valves in their ears which close to keep the water out when they are swimming. They also have valves in their nostrils which form a watertight seal, so that they do not get water up their noses when they dive or swim under water. And beavers have one more—they have a flap of skin behind their front teeth so that they can cut with their front teeth and keep their throat closed. Useful? Surely is when they need to cut down a tree underwater. Or carry a stick in their front teeth while swimming underwater. (How did Mr. Beaver figure out how to accomplish this?)

❑ *Goggles to protect their eyes?*

The beavers have something better than goggles. Their Designer has equipped them with a transparent eyelid that closes when they enter the water. This special eyelid protects their eyes from nasty debris floating in the water, so that even with their eyes “closed” they can keep swimming and see where they are headed.

❑ *Ability to steer themselves through the water?*

Beavers are clearly built to travel through water. Their broad, flat tails function as rudders, helping the beaver to maneuver large logs and to swim in the direction they intend.

Designed to build

What does one need to be able to build in a woody, wet environment? Our marvelous Designer has equipped Mr. and Mrs. Beaver with a set of tools that go with them wherever they go.

❑ *Sharp cutting tools*

A beaver is said to be able to cut down a willow tree 5 inches in diameter in a minute. (Have you heard the phrase, “working like a beaver”?) How do they do it? Our great Designer has provided the tools: two self-sharpening, chisel-like incisor teeth on each jaw at the very front of the beaver’s mouth. It just happens that the upper teeth overlap the lower incisors(!), creating friction that keeps the teeth at chisel sharpness.

Don’t teeth wear down from continually gnawing, chopping, and chewing tree trunks, branches and bark? Beaver teeth come with a lifetime warranty—their front incisors never stop growing as long as the beaver lives. (Did the beaver plan or design this feat? Wouldn’t we like to grow ourselves a new set of teeth as we age?!)

❑ *Superstrong cutting tools*

The beaver’s front teeth are also superstrong. While our teeth are covered with calcium, the exterior surface of the beaver’s teeth is covered with iron. The beaver’s teeth are built for durability.

Engineering skills

Often the first evidence of beavers is the sudden appearance of a dam across a river or creek. Quickly the area behind the dam becomes a muddy pond—just what the beavers want. The main reason: their chief predators don’t like to walk through muddy, wet areas.

The beaver’s engineering skills are amazing. If the water is



A mother beaver in the safety of her lodge nurses three kits while a fourth explores on its own. Gnawed branches, rocks, grass, and other debris were cemented with mud and clay to build the lodge.

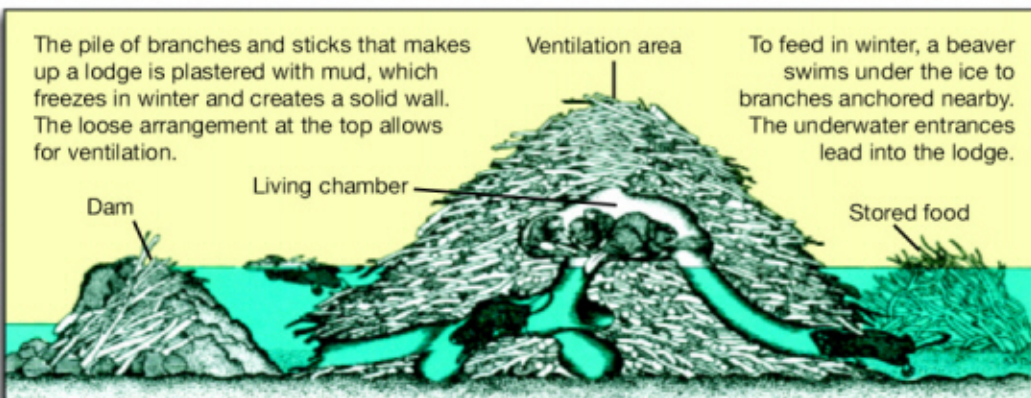
slow moving, the beaver will build a dam straight across the water. If the water in the stream is fast flowing, they will build the dam on a curve, so that it can withstand the force of water more effectively. Beavers have even been known to slow down the speed of the river upstream by piling in branches to reduce the water’s speed so that it won’t wash away their home.

In the shallow water above the dam, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver construct their lodge, or sometimes in the bank adjacent to the river or pond. Using small intertangled twigs, sticks, branches, and other debris, they create a large mounded structure. This lodge has one central above-water chamber, usually eight to twelve feet high and three feet wide. All the entrances are submerged—an ingenious design to keep unwelcome predators (like eagles and wolves) out of the beaver lodge.

In the fall of the year, the beavers plaster the outside of their lodge mound with mud, making a concrete-like layer that no predator can easily break through. This also makes the lodge waterproof—except for the peak, which is

continued on page 25

CREDIT: ABC'S OF NATURE, I.D., RICHARD L. SHUEHL



The beavers’ dam, lodge, and pile of stored food are shown here in a cutaway view.

HOW WAS CHRIST "MADE SIN"?

A TV pastor made the statement that "God made His Son sin and let Him be crucified for us." I believe Jesus was without blemish. Am I right or wrong?

You are correct that Jesus was without blemish, sinless. The book of Hebrews describes Him as "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). He never disobeyed the law of His Father after the right way was made known to Him. We also must realize, however, that He was not born immaculate and sinless. He "learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). The book of Hebrews also tells us that as the Captain of our salvation He "was made perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10). And "For in that He Himself has

Jesus was "without sin"— how could He become sin?

suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). He can "sympathize with our weaknesses" because He was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). When tempted He did not sin.

The TV pastor you heard was stating the popular Christian teaching, that when Jesus was crucified He took the sins of the world on Himself and died for us, in that way becoming "sin" for us all, so that all may be saved. Does the TV pastor have any Scripture to support his point?

The pastor is likely referring to a passage in 2 Corinthians 5, where the Apostle Paul said that Christ was "made...sin" for us (2 Cor. 5:21). If Jesus was without sin, sinless, made perfect through sufferings, what could the apostle Paul have meant by saying Christ was "made...sin"?

The Bible tells us that "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), and if Jesus did not transgress the law,

how could He become "sin"? How does anyone become "sin"? How could you or I become "sin"? We might become sinful, or sinners, but how could anyone become sin? Doesn't it seem that we are missing something in the Apostle's thinking?

Our Message: "Be Reconciled to God"

If we look at 2 Corinthians 5, what has he been saying? If we look at the context, Paul had been talking about being reconciled to God and how this reconciliation comes about. He says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, that the one who is in Christ becomes "a new creation," a new creature all together, totally changed. In verse 18 he says that God "has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ", and "has given us the ministry of reconciliation." Then in verse 20 he continues to explain that this ministry of reconciliation is not Christ's but ours. He says: "Now then, we are ambassadors for

Christ, as though God were pleading through us: We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." What is our mission as ambassadors for Christ? We are to be Christ's voice, and the message we are to teach is, "be reconciled to God." Here is an obligation on us, not Christ. Christ has already died and been resurrected, and here is a work yet to be accomplished. We still must be reconciled to God. We still must bring ourselves into line with His demands. There is something to be done on our part, and this is our ministry of reconciliation on behalf of Christ.

Now the next verse starts with the word "for," linking the next thought to the previous. In other words, the following statement gives the reason for the preceding one. Why must we say, "be reconciled to God"? Why is this important? What is the fact that makes this message so important? It is because of the example set by

Christ Himself, He who did not sin, though He was treated like a sinner. This thought, from Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, makes the message meaningful and in harmony with the rest of Paul's teaching: They treated Him, who knew not sin, as a sinner. As you observed, "Christ could not be made sin" when He Himself was sinless, but He did receive the treatment of a sinner—He was crucified like a common criminal. He suffered death rather than deny His faith, in this way making the ultimate sacrifice, total obedience even to death (Phil. 2:8). In doing this, He showed the completeness of dedication which all of us must give to our faith, so that in Paul's words, "we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." We become righteous by following His example, and in this way we take the steps necessary to become like Christ, to be like Him, reconciled to God.

The Concordant Version of the Bible, by A. E. Knoch, offers a helpful rendering, "For Him who knew no sin, He made a sin offering on our behalf." Jesus did indeed give Himself as an offering to God—not by His death only but more especially by His life. And that offering was on our behalf, as well as His own, because He "learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8), as He "pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3); as He "suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

This is how we become reconciled to God, by giving up our own will, our own way, and delighting to do the will of our Father, just as Jesus did. As it was written of Him, "Behold I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7; see also Ps. 40:8).

God required purity of His Son, and He requires the same standard from all the other members He chooses from the human family. Christ offered His body a living sacrifice, just

as every prospective son or daughter of God must do (Rom. 12:1), and that was a sin offering, the offering for the removal of sin—not an offering by physical death but an offering through a lifelong obedience. Jesus made that offering not by laying down His literal life but by surrendering His right to think and speak and choose as He would have wished. This is the offering God wants, as was prophesied of Christ Himself: *“Then said I, Lo I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart”* (Ps. 40:7–8). What are the sacrifices God accepts? *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise”* (Ps. 51:17).

By offering this sacrifice of Himself, giving up His will to do the will of His heavenly Father, he became the *“author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (Heb. 5:9). Notice He is the author of eternal salvation to—all who accept it, or to all who believe in Him? No, but only *“to all of them that obey Him.”*

Jesus is the author of our salvation not because He won salvation for us but because He showed us how. He is also the one who will bring salvation when He returns. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body”* (Phil. 3:20–21). ♦

OBITUARY

LEWIS SUTTON

We have received word of the passing of Lewis Sutton, of Washington, Iowa, on October 28, 2004, at the age of 91. Mr. Sutton was a long-time subscriber to the *Megiddo Message*. He is survived by his wife Kathryn, with whom he lived happily for more than 60 years; his son Dwight of Washington, Iowa; a sister, Viola Taylor of Mount Vernon, Iowa; and two brothers, David and John, both of Rochester, New York, also several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were conducted at the Beatty Funeral Home in Washington, Iowa, on October 31, 2004.

MEET THE AMAZING ENGINEERS! continued from page 23

left open to allow air and light to enter.

In addition to building very cozy lodges, the beavers also dredge out underwater channels—grooves in the bottom of the lake, likely connecting their favorite eating places.

Who taught the beaver these highly specialized techniques of construction?

Dinner and snacks

Beavers are vegetarians, feeding primarily on the inner bark, leaves, and shoots of woody plants. They eat the bark, buds, stems, and twigs of trees such as aspen, maple, willow, birch, black elder, and black cherry. They really like soft plants, too, and grasses, mushrooms, ferns, and the roots of water plants are favorite snacks.

When fall comes, the beavers start stockpiling winter food supplies. They sink large amounts of branches into the mud close to the entrances of their homes, so that even during a severe winter they have plenty of food just outside the door.

Can we think that a beaver just happened? This amazing animal that is capable of organizing its work, and planning its construction projects—can we think that this little animal developed by chance, without any intelligent guidance? Can we think that its nose flaps and ear flaps, and its remarkable ability to stay submerged for as long as 15 minutes just happened? Did the beaver design its own front teeth and coat them with iron so that they would be super sturdy? Did the beaver’s teeth start growing continuously during its whole lifetime just because they were needed?

Such awesome designs, we can only exclaim with the Psalmist, *“I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works”* (Psalm 9:1). ♦

For the information in this article we are indebted to:

http://www.edhelper.com/AnimalReadingComprehension_125_1.html
<http://www.birkenheadscouts.co.uk/beaverfacts.shtml>
<http://www.nps.gov/dewa/Kids/MJH/kidBEAVR.html>
<http://www.nationaltrappers.com/Beaver.html>
http://www.baylink.org/lessons/beaver_right.html
<http://www.nhptv.org/natureworks/beaver.htm>
<http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/dnr/fur/species/beaver.html>
<http://www.bcadventure.com/adventure/wilderness/animals/beaver.htm>

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Surviving the Storms of Stress

We all have those moments when we feel as though the stresses of life are too much. Research tells us that many people are literally killed by stress. How can we attack the roots of stress? How can we keep under control in circumstances beyond our control?

We may get some answers from the account of the most violent storm experienced in the New Testament. It is described in Acts 27, and it threatened the ship transporting Paul to Rome. Inside this story are four skills we need to survive the storms of stress.

1: Get rid of cargo you don't need.

When the storm persisted three days, they threw the ship's cargo overboard to lighten the ship (Acts 27:18–19).

Some of our extra cargo may be bad things we have accumulated, some obsession with money, sinful habits we hang onto until a storm exposes how they are sinking us. There may be jealousies, there may be pride; there may be ugly things in our life. Any of these need to be jettisoned. We don't need to accumulate them; we don't want them around. Any one of them taken separately could hurt us; together they're just too much.

2: Get busy with things that matter.

In Paul's situation, the ship was to be wrecked. But that did not matter. Every life would be saved (Acts 27:22).

Our shifts, the project, the schedule, the budget may get lost on the rocks. Priorities are important. We have to keep our perspective—what is really important?

3: Get back to a healthy routine.

As Paul's ship was about to go aground he urged the crew to eat (Acts 27:33–34).

When a strong disturbance batters our ship our daily routines are the first things that get thrown overboard. We miss sleep, we miss meals, we miss time with God and we start sinking. Healthy routines keep us strong both on sunny days and stormy days.

4: Get on your knees and pray.

The Apostle Paul was not alone through that shipwreck. When he took command of the situation and told everyone what to do, he was not going on his own. He faced the disaster with assurance and confidence because God's angel was with him. "There stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve," said Paul. And that angel had told him that he would reach Rome, and all on board the ship would be saved (Acts 27:22–26).

When we keep with God and God has a purpose for us, He is only a prayer away. When we are on His side, we do not need to fear the stresses of life.

There will be storms in our lives. We have to expect them. The sun doesn't always shine. But the storm is not the real issue from God's point of view. What we need to correct is the imbalance in our priorities. It is something so subtle that we hardly see it until the turbulence gets our attention.

Our plans may be interrupted by storms, but God's plans never are. If we don't abandon the ship, the winds of adversity will blow us right where we belong. ♦

*If when things go wrong we rejoice in the Lord;
if when someone is unkind we return good for evil;
if when the day is dark we spread a ray of sunshine;
if when we suffer loss we smile and say,
"Lord, not my will, but thine be done";
if in the face of all the wickedness in the world we bear
the fruits of the Spirit love, joy, peace,
longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
meekness, temperance, patience
then we will stand with the winners!*

We have no time to complain, no space in our minds for even a thought of discouragement.

Thanksgiving opens up the way for every good work. It creates an attitude of faith, cheer, love.

It isn't what you have in your pocket that makes you thankful but what you have in your heart.

When you stop to think, don't forget to start again!

Perseverance is the only sure mark of character.

Thanksgiving is the constant and characteristic note of the Christian life.

THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

In some parts of Mexico hot springs and cold springs are found side by side. Because of the convenience of this natural phenomenon, the women often bring their laundry and boil their clothes in the hot springs and then rinse them in the cold ones. A tourist, watching this procedure, commented to his Mexican guide: "I imagine that they think Mother Nature is pretty generous to supply such ample, clean hot and cold water here side by side for their free use." The guide replied, "No, my friend, there is much grumbling because she supplies no soap."



Prosperity is not always a blessing.

Thanks for prayers that have been answered,
Thanks for what has been denied,
Thanks for storms that have been weathered,
Thanks for all that's been supplied,
Thanks for pain and thanks for pleasure,
Thanks for comfort in despair,
Thanks for peace that none can measure,
Thanks to God for all His care.

We should be thankful for the good things we have and also for the bad things we don't have.

God judges our thankfulness to Him by our actions, not by our words.

Try for one day to notice all the little things that help make your day smoother and your work easier, and see if you are not richly blessed.

The value of the Bible lies not in knowing it but in obeying it.



ABC's of Praise

Although things are not perfect
Because of trials and pain,
Continue in thanksgiving
Do not begin to blame.

Expect things to be hard sometimes,
Fierce winds are bound to blow—
God is forever able:
Hold on! Do not let go!

Imagine life without Him
Joy would cease to be;
Keep thanking Him for all His
Love imparts to thee.

Move out of "Camp Complaining,"
Nor ever visit there;
One day Earth will be singing
Praise everyone can share!

Quit wasting hours in dreaming,
Redeem the time at hand;
Start every day with worship
To "thank" is a command.

Until we see Him coming
Victorious in the sky
We'll run the race with gratitude
Xalting God Most High
Yes, better times are coming for
Zion by and by!

- Author Unknown

