

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a lush field. The foreground is filled with numerous white daisies with bright yellow centers. Behind the daisies, there is a dense field of purple flowers, possibly cosmos. In the background, a large, dark tree trunk is visible, and the top of the frame shows more green foliage.

# Megiddo Message

Vol. 84, No. 7  
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*The* joy of the  
Lord is your  
strength."



# I AM RESPONSIBLE

The very basis of civilization, the whole system of law and government is based upon individual responsibility. I can live happily in a free country along with other individuals, if I and they accept our individual and mutual responsibility. If I take the attitude that I can do just as I please without respect to the rights of others, if I act irresponsibly, I become a menace to society, and the whole structure begins to break down to the extent that I am a part of it.

The law of God stands on the same basis of individual responsibility. The Scriptures reveal man's continual efforts to evade it. When confronted by God, Adam did not say, "I have sinned." He blamed Eve. Cain, after taking the life of his innocent brother, cried out, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

## God's Word Insists On Responsibility

The families of Israel stood in silence before their aged leader. Joshua had just reminded them of their glorious history, and the dramatic working of God in their midst. He had read to them the law which God had given through His servant Moses. Now they stood expectantly upon this sacred ground at Gilgal, and were confronted with their own responsibility. Joshua's words rang clear: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15).

Quickly Joshua followed this statement with his own commitment to responsibility: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The people echoed his words.

The fathers of these people had left the land of Egypt. Now they, the sons, had marched across the river Jordan. Now they stood in the Land of Promise. But these facts were not enough. They still had to choose. Would they serve God, or not? As quickly as their choice reached the ears of the aged Joshua, Joshua shot back the words, "You can not serve the Lord," and he laid before them the responsibility they would be assuming. Once again they responded, "Nevertheless, we will serve the Lord."

Only one fact remained: to walk with God. They had to accept responsibility. Time quickly showed that as a nation they were not willing to do this.

God knows our frame and our possibilities, and He expects us to accept responsibility. We are even responsible for our own salvation. Said the

apostle Paul: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). The choice is mine; I am responsible.

Again and again, under the law, individuals were responsible. The man who dug a pit and failed to fence it was responsible for one who happened to fall into it (Ex. 21:33-34). The man who built a house with a balcony but put up no guardrail was responsible for one who might fall from that balcony (Deut. 22:8).

We readily accept such responsibilities, but the Word of God goes much further. It confronts us with responsibility in every aspect of our lives.

**We are responsible** for our conduct toward unbelievers (Col. 4:5).

**We are responsible** for our conduct to one another (Eph. 4:31-32).

**We are responsible** for showing a right attitude, a right example, and a God-directed life. In every area we must accept responsibility for our actions and for our lives, and realize that we are accountable. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

**We are responsible** for the company we keep. "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33).

To a certain degree, we are even responsible for the actions of others, and especially for our response to them. If a brother or sister goes astray, we are responsible to help them return to the right way, lest they fall and suffer harm. If we saw someone in an automobile driving very fast toward an area that was clearly marked "Bridge Out," we would make a serious effort to persuade that person to slow down and be cautious.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus took the matter of personal responsibility to its farthest limit. If a person has something against me, He says, it is my responsibility to try to put things right, and failure to do this will make my gift unacceptable at the altar of God. Paul said it another way: "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

Again, I am responsible.

Jesus used many statements which showed the degree of responsibility He expects in His disciples. "Ye are the light of the world," "Ye are the salt of the earth." These statements of Jesus have been repeated over and over, but have we

(Continued on page 27)



## MEGIDDO MEANS ...

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

## WE BELIEVE ...

- in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.
- in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- in ourselves as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

### The Herald and the KING

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

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

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# Megiddo Message

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# Ready or Not I'm Coming!

*God will  
always have the last  
word.*

*Undue and  
unwise carefulness  
about secondary things may  
endanger that which is  
most important—our  
salvation.*

It was a game many of us played in childhood, commonly known as "hide-and-go-seek." The game had a certain ritual about it. Whoever was "it" would close his eyes and begin to count, while everyone else ran to find a hidingplace. When the one who was counting reached one hundred, he would open his eyes and announce in a low, slow, reprehensive tone, "Ready or not, I'm coming!", at which instant he would uncover his eyes and dash forth to find the hiders. Everyone knew that the time for hiding was over.

"Ready or not, I'm coming!" These words speak to us of God's manner of dealing with men, also of the limitation which God places on man's time. God speaks; He warns—verbally, prophetically, or through His written Word. The days that intervene may be long; but inevitably the moment arrives when it is "Ready or not, I'm coming!" It means that the time of God's silence is ended; the time of His long-suffering is expired; the day of probation is done. The time has arrived for God to act—and act He will, whether or not the result is to the liking of His human creation. How else can He work? He must see His plan through to a successful finish; and He will.

What does this say to you and me today? First, it tells us that God will always have the last word. We can protest and fight and complain—and suffer the consequences of our folly; or we can feel ourselves privileged to be called to fit into His plans and comply with His stipulations—and live! The choice is ours. Secondly, these words speak to us of our obligation to prepare

ourselves so as to be ready whenever He speaks.

God is supreme—none can challenge that. Is not the Creator greater by far than any of His creatures? And when the time is right, God acts, and acts decisively. And He doesn't need to take an opinion poll to find out what men think might be the right time, or the right manner for His action. He dictates His own terms, formulates His own plans, and knowing the end from the beginning He is able to make those terms and plans for the best interests of all with whom He is dealing. Thus, when it suits His wise and considered purpose, He acts.

So accustomed have we become to the democratic ideals, to the idea of majority rule, to the consulting of the mass opinion before any action is taken, that we may be inclined to think God is rather dictatorial to do as He does. Is it right for Him to design His plan without consulting us, or to give no consideration to our opinion when He takes a decisive step? But let us check any such tendency quickly, before we are caught by His authoritative "Ready or not, I'm coming!" Who are we, after all, to question the great Omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth? Where were we when He was designing His system, anyway? Is it not rather our honored and rare privilege even to *know* of His plan—much more, to be called to participate in it?

God is supreme, and we are awed by that lofty supremacy. It is within His power to kill, and to make alive; to debase, or to honor; to make low, or to exalt. When we think of it, we in our natural state, are little more than helpless creatures of dust before Him. He had no obligation to give us life in the first place,



much less to perpetuate that life. And when we realize the standard maintained in His vast universe, we marvel that it is possible even to live before Him. Apparently those who saw angels in times past felt this way, as though they were looking upon God's holiness and were unworthy even to live. As Manoah said, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God" (Judges 13:22). Or Gideon, "Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." But "the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die" (Judges 6:22-23).

The Creator who made us knows our strength and our possibilities; and He also designs a way whereby we can live in His favor now, and continue on—and on—and on—even into the eternal age beyond. He is not a ruthless God delivering an ultimatum that we cannot survive whatever we do. There is no fatalism with God. He warns and warns before He acts: urgently, forcefully He warns; and then, when the time is right, it is His Divine prerogative to act. When it suits His wise and considered purpose, it is "Ready or not, I'm coming!" In other words, if you have heeded My warning, all well and good; if you have not, the fault is yours, not Mine; I gave plenty of warning.

### Ready or Not—in the Beginning

The Lord had not been working very long with the inhabitants of our planet before He said in effect, "Ready or not, I'm coming!" We find it in the very first record we have of God's dealings with men. Adam and Eve were in the garden where God had placed them, "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). But there were rules—"Thou shalt's" and "Thou shalt not's." Do we not find them in our lives today, express commands from the God of heaven meant to train us in the ways of obedience and right? There are times to speak, and times to keep silent; there are times to move forward and times to stand still; there are always many do's and don'ts, limitations intended for our

good, for "no good thing" doth He ever withhold from them who "walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11). The rules and principles He has set are for our good; we violate them to our own detriment.

What was the law to Adam and Eve? "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," they had been told. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

The law was plain, unmistakable. But the forbidden fruit looked so tempting—as forbidden things often do—and Eve decided, at the behest of the serpent (her own lower nature) just to *sample* it. She did, and the fruit was good—delicious! She gave some of it to her husband, and he agreed. They had found just what they liked!

But—but just at that moment, when all seemed so good, Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden, "in the cool of the day." What did this mean? It was one of those moments of truth, one of those times when the word was "Ready or not, I'm coming!" Adam and Eve were *not* ready, for they went and "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). Some of these trees they hid among may have had more of that delicious forbidden fruit; but there is no record of their being tempted by it now; the attraction was gone—their sins had been found out. They were in hiding.

But what did their hiding avail? It availed just as much as yours or mine or anyone else's does when they or we try to hide from God—*nothing!* "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). It was true then; it is true today. "The things written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). The lesson is there

for us: We cannot hide from God. And when our day of probation is over and we must face ourselves as we are and our record as it stands, there will be no successful hiding.

Suppose, though, that Adam and Eve had resisted the temptation to partake of the forbidden fruit. Suppose that they had done just exactly as the Lord had commanded them, had tilled and kept the garden as they were instructed, and had eaten only of the right tree. What would have happened then, when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day? Would they still have run to hide? Would they not have been *glad* to meet Him and to show Him how faithful and obedient they had been? Would they not have been *ready*? And will not we, when our day of probation is ended, if we have been faithful and true; will not we be glad and happy? Will we not be presented "before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy"? His ultimatum. "Ready or not, I'm coming!" will be a cause for joy if we are ready.

### Ready or Not—in Noah's Day

The whole problem with God's authority and finality of action, then, has been a lack of readiness on the human side. It was so in the time of Noah. When "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5), there was a long period of warning, ample time for any who would repent. But that time was not forever. The moment arrived when it was "ready or not, I'm coming!" The door of the ark was shut. The sky grew frightfully black, and it began to rain. And rain. And rain. It was the flood God had foretold. Whether the people were ready or not—and most of them were not—the hour had come. God's long-suffering had ended.

Who are  
we to question the  
great Omnipotent Creator  
of heaven  
and earth?



God warns  
and warns. Then, when  
the time is right,  
He acts.

### Ready or Not—in Sodom

There was another "ready or not" moment at the time God pronounced judgment upon the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The angels came with their warning cry; but few, very few, listened and took heed. It was just hard to believe that God meant what He said, everything in and about Sodom seemed so perfectly normal. But the Divine countdown had begun; the ticking of the clock was counting the seconds of grace remaining while the angels hurried the few would-be escapees.

"Escape for thy life," they urged, "look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain." It was a moment for action; it was a moment when God was saying, "Ready or not, I'm coming!" And scarcely had Lot and his family left when the fire began to fall.

### Ready or Not—Egypt

The "ready or not" moment arrived for the Pharaoh who refused to let the Israelites leave his land. His insolent reply, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" hardly did anything to win God's favor. He saw himself the ruler of a great and powerful nation. He saw not the Lord, the ruler and governor of all creation. And so the Lord went about to show him. Egypt's water turned to blood. Then, there were frogs everywhere—a plague of them! all over his land. Then there was the plague of flies. By this time it would seem that any half-perceptive person would have realized there was a power greater than Pharaoh. He was determined to hold out, and he did—to the bitter end. Not until ten plagues had run their destructive course would he give consent. Whether Pharaoh was ready or not (Pharaoh would never be ready to part with a host of productive slaves!) the time for action had arrived, and under the guiding hand of Moses the Israelites departed. The official decision of the Egyptians to pursue them only increased the Egyptian's grief and loss—their armies were drowned, and the hosts of Israelites were safe beyond the sea.

This is what always happens to those who try to withstand God's purposes—it is all defeat, defeat, defeat. We oppose God only to our own hurt. He is supreme. How else could He say absolutely, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10)?

### Ready or Not—in Israel

The people of Israel and Judah found themselves facing God's authority at one of those "ready or not" moments. It was after His mercy and long-suffering with them had run its course and they had proved themselves corrupt, apostate, forgetful of Him and His laws. He who had planted, fathered, protected, defended and nourished them—could they possibly be so dishonoring? But not forever. The time of judgment arrived, and with it war, destruction, captivity. These were the harsh realities that came with the "ready or not" pronouncement. Of course they were not ready. But the fault was not God's. He had sent prophet after prophet to warn them, to show them the error and folly of their lawless ways, to show them that they were hurting themselves and would have to suffer in the end. But they preferred to die rather than repent; and many did. Thousands perished at the hands of their enemies. Others were carried away to live in exile. The proud, independent nation was at an end. The beautiful temple lay in ruins; the holy city was burned with fire. It was that moment of "Ready or not, I'm coming!"—and for apostate Israel and Judah, it meant ruin.

### Ready or Not, Christ Came

It was so with the birth of His Son. "When the proper time had come, God sent His Son" (Gal. 4:4, Williams). "When the right time came" (Beck)—the right time according to God's schedule. It was not the right time if He had consulted Herod. For Herod, the time would never have been right for the birth of a rival capable of supplanting him. But God didn't consult Herod. "When the time was right, God sent forth his Son."

The gospel of Matthew records the instructions of Herod to the wise men: "Bring me word when you find the new-born king, that I may come and worship him also." And we are told that these words came not only from Herod but from "Herod and all Jerusalem with him." What does this mean? Obviously Herod and all his court, those who had a personal interest in maintaining the local power structure, were worried. Governments fight bitterly to prevent the loyalty of any people being given to any but the current leaders. The soldiers of Jerusalem also worried about a new king, so they eagerly destroyed every boy child under two years



of age. And the priests of the Jewish religion had been charged with the responsibility of keeping alive in the Jewish people the hope of a messiah, a Divine ruler to govern them. Under Herod's rule the priests enjoyed privileges they could not be sure of keeping under a new king; so they too, worried about the report of the wise men. The common people also preferred Herod. They knew him and could anticipate his actions. All Jerusalem worried with Herod. So, if God had consulted them, they surely would not have given consent. But they were not consulted; nor did their resistance hinder God's Divine purpose. It was one of those times when the message was clear: In effect, "Ready or not, I'm coming!"

If Herod and his co-agents could but have realized how great the power behind this great event in the history of the world, they would have been astonished that they even dared to resist it. But Herod never realized how silly and futile his efforts were. All the king's horses and all the king's men were powerless to stay the plan of God. And so it went forward. When it suited God's time for the king to be born, whether the world seemed ready or not, Christ came.

### Readiness

What, then, is the message of "Ready or not, I'm coming!"? Is it a message of inevitable doom? We know it is not, for God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). The only trouble is, the majority will not. Thus it often becomes a signal of His severity; but that same signal can mean goodness, deliverance, blessing, if men are ready. Consider the moment that came to Enoch. We read that "Enoch walked with God...three hundred years." A long time to walk and not grow weary; but Enoch did it. Then, one day, the moment arrived when Enoch "was not; for God took him." The "ready or not" moment had arrived, and to Enoch's everlasting credit, he was ready. His days of tribulation on earth were over; God was ready to take him to serve in

another phase of His great plan; and Enoch was ready.

What, then, are we to think of "Ready or not, I'm coming!"? It is not a threat or proclamation of doom; it is a warning to get ready. The whole focus is upon one word: readiness. If we are ready, it is a message of supreme joy; and if we are not—oh, let us make sure that the plight is not ours. It need not be. This is why the ancient prophet Amos spoke those solemn words: "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:12). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if we are not ready to meet Him, if our record is still spotted and marred by acts of willfulness, selfishness, pride or complacency; but if we have sustained a lively interest in those higher realms of life and activity, if we have fitted ourselves to the pattern He provided us and have made Him our closest friend, then what joy! What pleasure supreme to fall into His hands, to know that we are ready and that we are His!

But "ready or not" implies a singular quality of God's which we should never forget. It points out the *maximum limit of His mercy*. God is good, supremely good; He is long-suffering and benevolent beyond anything we can imagine. What man would be willing to wait six thousand years for the first small phase of His plan to succeed? The years have proven how exceedingly patient God is with His human family. Time and again we have transgressed His law; we have done the things we knew we should not do; we have left undone the things we should have done; and still His mercy waits. But this does not mean that His mercy and His goodness and His long-suffering is forever.

Nor is it equal to everyone. To the disobedient, the fault-finding, the hard-hearted and recalcitrant, His mercy is very limited. It is also

limited to those who harbor lesser sins of sensitiveness, jealousy, bitterness and pride.

"The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting" only "upon them that fear him....and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Ps. 103:17-18). Hence, if

we want His mercy, we must fit ourselves into this category. And there is a limit

to the time He will give us to do this; there is a limit to the years He will wait while we stumble and fall and rise and stumble again and again. There is a limit, even with our long, long-suffering God. True, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10); but neither are they removed from His book of remembrance until we have taken the steps to remove them from our lives. Soon or late the time will arrive when it will be for every one of us, "Ready or not, I'm coming!" Our opportunity will be ended, the day of grace will be done.

Oh, let us try the harder to use to the maximum the moments that are ours.

### A Lesson from the Evil Servant

This was Jesus' message in His parable of the evil servant, that servant who says either vocally or in his heart, "My lord delays his coming." He complains that his lord is late—when he himself is far from ready. What is the attitude of this servant? "My lord tarries" expresses a secret belief that the lord may not come at all—perhaps even a secret, hidden wish that He will not. He doesn't really want Him, because now, in His absence, he is free.

The possibility that He will not come removes all the trouble and worry and leaves him totally care-free. Now he can enjoy himself in any way his heart desires. Now he can eat, drink and be merry with no thought of accountability.

And so he does just as he pleases.

*"Watch...  
for ye know not  
what hour your Lord  
doth come."*

—Jesus



God's rules  
and principles are  
for our good; we violate  
them to our own  
detriment.

But what is the prospect for such a one? *"The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of"* (Matt 24:50). Caught unawares! And what shall be his portion? He shall be appointed *"his portion with the hypocrites,"* those who say and do not, and *"there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* All this because he was not ready. What a contrast with the commendation given the faithful servant: *"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath"* (Luke 12:43-48; Matt. 24:45-50).

Hence, Jesus' timely admonition: *"Watch."* *"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come....Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh"* (Matt 24:42-44). If we maintain this attitude, if we are fully concentrating on getting ourselves ready for that Day, there will be no feeling of *"My lord delays his coming."* If the time tarries longer than we expect, we will rejoice and thank God for extended mercy.

#### A Lesson from the Ten Virgins

The time for preparation is critical—upon it depends our entire future. Hence, He warns again and again. He warns us that we have no time for relaxing, diversion or distraction. If we would be ready, we must be conscious of every act, aspect and attitude of life that promotes or hinders that readiness. We must do everything aware of Jesus' warning—*"lest coming suddenly, [I] find you sleeping"* (Mark 13:37). It is the message He repeated again in His parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25). Some will be found ready, He says; others will not be ready. And where each of us stands depends entirely upon us. We are not predestined to be either accepted or rejected; God does not decree whether or not we shall be ready. The ten virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom could have all been ready and waiting for him, with their lamps trimmed and burning; they could have if they had made proper preparations, if they had all taken a sufficient supply of oil with them in their lamps. But they did not, for *"five of them were wise, and five were foolish."*

It is interesting to note in this parable

that all the virgins took *some* oil. All had some desire to be ready to welcome the bridegroom, and all had made *some* preparation. The difference lay in their *degree* of preparation. The five wise virgins had anticipated a possibly extended delay and had taken what they thought would be *more* than enough oil—just in case. The other five took only the normal supply. So when the hours of waiting proved unexpectedly long, the five wise virgins were able to hold out; the lamps of the other five went out. So it is with the supply of faith and endurance we need today. It must be a supply we keep continually renewing; if we do not, we shall find as the hours wear on that *our* lamps are going out, and we shall not be ready when our Bridegroom finally does appear.

The warning is there. There is no need that those five foolish virgins should include any of us. There is no shortage of this precious type of oil. The evidence is ours for the taking, and it can be quickly turned into burning and shining faith. We can be ready; we can keep our faith lamps fueled and burning brightly, *if we will*. We can be ready, if we will just set our hearts upon it. But we have to be acting *now*, for the hour draws ever nearer when it will be *"Ready or not, I'm coming!"*

#### Take Heed!

Jesus said it again in words too plain to misinterpret. *"Take heed to yourselves,"* He warned, *"lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares"* (Luke 21:34). Here again is the ultimatum. And Jesus, knowing the great and growing temptation to fill our lives and hearts to the brim with the affairs of time, gave this warning. No more needful or seasonable counsel could He have given for us in this final hour, than these words: *"Take heed to yourselves, lest...your hearts be overcharged with... [the] cares of this life."* Undue and unwise carefulness about secondary things—whether good health, good homes, good friends, good tasks in this world—may endanger that which is even more important—our salvation. They may do it simply by absorbing our interest to the exclusion of the direct service of God which is our means of deliverance from this world. They may so absorb our time and mind as to dwarf



the inner life and starve the soul. They may shut us up to the lesser and lower activities and so leave us little time or strength for spiritual meditation and exercise.

The warning is plain: "Take heed." If we would be ready when the great Day arrives, we must not be enlarging our interests in this world when such enlargement means spiritual shrinkage. We must not let the cares of this life crowd in and crowd out the culture of the inner man. If we do, if we put second things first and sacrifice ourselves to circumstances, we shall find ourselves unready for the advancing day and shall be caught unawares.

What is Jesus' preventive formula? "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). "Watch...and pray." And how great the results! How great, how surpassing the privilege—think of it! to be permitted to stand before the Son of man, He who has trod every step of this way before us, He who was crucified, resurrected, taken to heaven and glorified in the presence of the great Creator Himself! To think of standing before so glorious a being, now immortal, the King of the whole earth! No such privilege is afforded by even the greatest of earthly kings.

With such a prospect before us, should we not be downright earnest about our calling? Should we not be making an all-out effort to make it sure? To "stand" means that we are prepared to give a worthy account before Him, an account of our faithfulness, of worthy work well done. What shall we have to say? To "stand" means that we are prepared, prepared to show how closely we have followed His example, how obedient we have been, how fervent, how faithful. We shall also want to show how heartily we have sustained, valued and embraced our friendship with Him.

Jesus will also want to see how like Him we have become. We know that He is holy, and He will be looking for that same holiness in us. To stand before Him, then, we must be like Him, for He will look to those who stand before Him and judge them as to their purity of heart, their abhorrence of evil, and their love of good. He will look for their spirit of unselfishness that duplicates His, their devotedness, their humbleness of mind and their reverence and wholehearted consecration. He will look, and what will He see in us?

We shall each be called to stand before Him. It will be the moment of "Ready or not, I'm coming!" This is our whole purpose now, not to run and hide, but to prepare, so that we may meet Him with joy and "stand before the Son of man"—accepted and approved forever. □

## Are You Presentable?

If we were about to be ushered into the presence of some great dignitary of this world, or to be presented before some large audience for praise or recognition, we would be very concerned about our appearance. We would want to be sure that we were presentable.

The priests and Levites frequently had to present themselves before the Lord, and each fresh presenting meant fresh preparing. The Law forbade their coming directly from whatever they happened to be doing to perform their temple duties. The law was specific. They had first to make themselves presentable.

This was the lesson Jesus taught in the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son. There are, by specific design, minimum entrance requirements. Every guest must be properly attired. In His parable, one guest fell short of this, and what happened to him? The king immediately ordered that he be forcibly removed—because he did not have on the "wedding garment." He was not presentable.

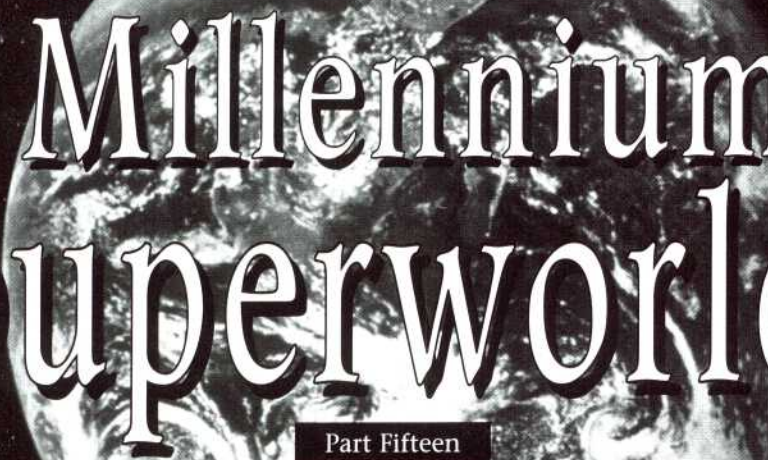
A great Day of presenting lies ahead, a Day when Jesus Christ shall take His faithful bride and she will be presented "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." That presenting will be honor and glory which is, from our vantage point, indescribable. With it will come a gesture of honor, a mark of approval, and all the glory that God can lavish on His sons and daughters who make themselves ready.

Who would want to be found unpresentable at such a time!

This great presenting was the cherished expectation of the apostle Paul. He longed to present his brethren as "a chaste virgin to Christ," to present them "holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight" (Col. 1:22), as the spiritual father of those he had begotten in the faith. Again he preached, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." Paul himself wanted to be included in that presenting, "knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2 Cor. 4:14).

What of us? Are we getting ourselves presentable? How well groomed are we? Are we putting on those garments of righteousness, so we may be among those presented faultless before the presence of His glory with "exceeding joy"? Are we presentable? □





# Millennium Superworld

Part Fifteen

*Pre-Millennialism*—the belief that Jesus Christ will return to begin the thousand-year period of righteousness;

*Post-Millennialism*—the belief that we are now in the Millennium (a period of unknown duration), Jesus is ruling over the earth, conditions will get better and better, Christianity will eventually be accepted throughout the world, then Jesus will return;

*A-Millennialism*—the belief that there is no Millennium, that the Church, founded by Jesus Christ, is the spiritual Kingdom of God, that conditions will continue to deteriorate until Jesus comes and ushers in the eternal state.



# PRE- POST- & A-MILLENNIALISM

Many different views of the Millennium have been propounded since Jesus ascended to heaven. Most have assumed that their position is grounded solidly in fact, and is therefore above challenge. The most common Millennialisms are Pre-Millennialism, Post-Millennialism and A-Millennialism (see definitions above).

These terms are only general classifications. Within each are wide variations.

The great question is not who holds any particular belief, or who defends it, but "what says the Lord?" or "what say the Scriptures?"—because we are talking about what will be in the future, and no one on earth has any power to know the future, much less to make it happen.

What shall we accept or reject? Let us look at each in more detail.

## Pre-Millennialism

Premillennialists believe that the Bible teaches the living hope of the direct intervention of God into history. God will send Jesus Christ to reverse history and rescue a world that has been sinking to ever deeper depths of evil. He will bring about a state of peace and righteousness and will reign in person as king during a thousand-year period (the Millennium), after which the eternal order will begin.

The premillennialists find ample evidence in Scripture and in the contemporary world to convince them that the coming of Christ is imminent. It may occur today, or tomorrow; it certainly will occur very soon.

The premillennialists deny all possibility that the world is growing better as the Millennium approaches. They believe world

conditions are worsening and will continue to worsen until the time of the end. In the meantime, they believe it is the function of the true Church to prepare people for membership in the new Kingdom.

Historians often state that this was the view of the early Christians immediately after Christ and the apostles, and into the first and second centuries. However, it soon changed, and by the time of Augustine was considered full heresy.

Variations among the premillennialists are many. Most believe in a rapture, during which Jesus takes His saints away from the earth, either temporarily or permanently. Most believe in one or two resurrections and judgments, to be followed by the establishing of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Dispensational Premillennialists divide God's work on earth into dispensations and believe that Christ's coming will be in two stages, the rapture and the appearing, with a considerable interval in between. After the rapture a Jewish remnant will take the place of the Church as God's agent on earth for the conversion of Israel and the Gentiles. The Dispensationalists also believe that God still favors the Jews and that He will literally fulfill the promises made to them in the Old Testament.

This book (*Millennium Superworld*) is a defense of Pre-Millennialism.

## Post-Millennialism

The postmillennialists view the millennium as the golden age of the Church sometime in the future and preceding the second advent of Jesus. They believe the Kingdom is the Church founded upon earth by Christ during His earthly min-

istry in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The Kingdom of God is now in full force, Jesus is now ruling and reigning over the earth (from heaven), and this kingdom is exercising a transforming influence on world society and culture in this present age due to more and more people being converted to Christ. They believe the Kingdom will continue to develop and expand on earth by means of God's Word, fervent prayer, and the labors of His people. The result will be unprecedented material prosperity and peace worldwide. Poverty will disappear. Disease will be checked, and crime will be virtually nonexistent. This golden age will last at least a thousand years, perhaps a hundred thousand years.

This "golden age" of spiritual prosperity will be drawn to a close by the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ, accompanied by a resurrection of all people in one final judgment. Christ will then introduce His people into the eternal form of the Kingdom.

The postmillennialists see Psalm 110 as the core of their belief: "*Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*" They believe this Psalm is now in full force, that Christ will remain seated in heaven until all His enemies are made His footstool.

Postmillennialists believe that the Gospel will gradually convert the majority of the world's inhabitants. True Christians will possess political power in every nation, controlling all aspects of the life of the nation so that there will be a genuinely Christian culture. Christ will get an earthly victory in history. This earthly victory will be the messianic kingdom in its full splendor.



During the late eighteenth and through the mid-nineteenth century, Post-Millennialism was strong. However, few today believe that things will gradually get better, and this philosophy has essentially died.

### A-Millennialism

A-Millennialism, a belief usually credited to Augustine, has been the dominate philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church from its inception. Augustine taught that the Church was the spiritual kingdom of God upon earth, and that the Church was presently in the Millennium. He believed his views were in harmony with his reading of Colossians 1:13-14, where Paul spoke of being "translated into the kingdom." He took the passages of Scripture which speak of the Church as the Israel of God and said that all men, if they are to be saved, must be in this kingdom. Amillennialists believe that Christ is now King of kings and Lord of lords, and is presently ruling over His kingdom, the church.

The amillennialists believe that when Christ comes the second time, this will be the end of the world. But Christ will not set foot on this earth again; rather we shall all be gathered together with Him in the air and taken to heaven. Paul states that at this time Christ will turn the Kingdom back to God who gave it (1 Cor. 15:20-28).

In the meantime, we should expect increasing lawlessness in the world, apostasy from the truth in the churches, the establishment of the anti-Christ over the entire world, and great tribulation for all those who fear God and keep His commandments. To such a world fully developed in sin, Christ will return.

The true victory of Christ in history is His saving of the elect church from sin. Since the church is made up of her elect members, amillennialists believe that the dominion of Christ is also His reign in the heart and mind of each of His chosen.

The victory of Christ is progressive. The perfection of it, as regards the church, the individual elect,

and the creation will be realized by Jesus Christ personally at His coming. However, the perfection of His victory is not to be within history but in the end of it.

### What Say the Scriptures?

#### Post-Millennialism vs. Scripture

The view of many of the reformers (Calvin, Luther, Malancthon) the Church of England, and the Augsburg Confession are largely post-millennial. Origen, also Eusebius, and Athanasias were also postmillennialists. The Campbellites were postmillennialists, as were Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and many of the Puritans.

But who can hold to such a belief today? One may say that "the world is growing better and better," but who will believe it in a century that has witnessed the horrors of Nazi Germany; the atrocities of Stalin's Soviet Union; the slaughters of Mao's China; the killings of Pol Pot's Cambodia; the cruelties that have taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of Africans; acts of lawlessness and terrorism between child and child, or child and parent—not to mention the disintegration of the family and the plummeting of social standards, our own nation sinking to the depths of approving homosexuality. Who today can honestly say the world is growing better?

The postmillennialists expect to see fulfilled *before* Christ returns the same texts which the premillennialists apply to the Millennial reign of Christ. They cite Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-5, and comment: "We are taught that the Church is to be prominent like a house on the top of a mountain, and that its guidance will be sought willingly in all phases of human life. The statement that 'all people will flow unto it' must mean that people all over the world are Christianized. Nations will no longer spend their energies and substance in destructive wars. To sit every man under his own vine and fig tree is a symbol of

contented peaceful home life."

But are men going to learn this on their own? What nation today is laying aside its armaments and pursuing only peaceful living?

Later in Isaiah 2 is a passage which speaks of the land being full of idols which the people cast to the "moles and bats" when the Lord arises "to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. 2:8, 19-21). This does not sound as though the nations of earth will give up their evil practices of their own volition!

The postmillennialists also cite Isaiah 11:1-10 as evidence for their position: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:...with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth:...the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb: and...they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

Isaiah 2:4 describes a time when men shall "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks." If all nations are to do this, when will the trend begin? Have they not been doing the reverse for all of recorded history? What will cause the change? Are nations currently preparing for peace?

No, the postmillennialists do not have Scripture to support their position. The Bible teaches plainly that nothing less than the judgments of God will compel men to obedience. And even then, many will stubbornly refuse and will have to die in disobedience (see Isa. 26:9-10; Zech. 13:8-9; Mal. 3:1-3; 4:1-2). God is not going to wait endlessly, while men blunder in sin and ignorance; He is going to ACT!

#### A-Millennialism vs. Scripture

The entire book of Revelation is an answer to A-Millennialism. Though the Bible does not provide all the details, it does state definitely that Jesus is coming, and that He will reign with His saints "on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10) and for a period of one thousand years (Rev. 20).



*"But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming"* (1 Cor. 15:23).

What basis do the Amillennialists have for saying that Christ will not set foot on this earth again, rather we shall all be gathered together with Him in the air and taken to heaven and Christ will turn the Kingdom back to God who gave it?

The prophet Zechariah says that *"his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east"* (Zech. 14:1-4). The Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem is a definite location on earth, and the prophet says *"his feet shall stand"* on that mountain. Either we must accept the testimony of Scripture, or we must reject it.

Where does the Bible say we shall all be gathered together with Him in the air and taken to heaven? Here is a statement without support. Paul did say that the living believers along with the resurrected will rise to *"meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:17). But this passage says nothing about *where* we will be *"with the Lord,"* and numerous texts state clearly that Jesus is coming to dwell among men (Rev. 21:3-4); that the saints shall *"reign on the earth"* (Rev. 5:10) and *"under the whole heaven"* (Dan. 7:27); *"the meek...shall inherit the earth"* (Matt. 5:5). Seven times in Psalm 37 the fact is reaffirmed that the righteous shall inherit or dwell on the earth.

What did Paul mean by writing that Christ will deliver up the Kingdom to the Father? The text reads: *"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power....And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all"* (1 Cor. 15:24, 28).

Paul is describing the time when the earth is a finished project, when all sin and evil is fully subdued, and all is perfect and complete. But Christ will still be reigning. Many

passages of Scripture describe the Kingdom as eternal, unending, everlasting, without end. The promise made at the time of Jesus' birth was: *"of his kingdom there shall be no end"* (Luke 1:33). His kingdom was prophesied to be *"an everlasting Kingdom"* (Dan. 7:27), and an everlasting kingdom does not have an end. Again, the prophet Daniel foretold that *"the God of heaven"* would set up *"a kingdom that shall never pass away...it shall stand forever"* (Dan. 2:44).

When Paul says that the Kingdom will be *"delivered up"* to God the Father, there is no change in the eternal status of the earth, its rulership or its inhabitants. Paul is merely stating in graphic language that Jesus has finished His task, the eternal state has begun, there is no more sin or suffering to subdue, no more strife or contention; now all is perfect peace, perfect love, perfect joy, perfect harmony, perfect delight, and God is *"all in all,"* world without end.

#### **Pre-Millennialism vs. Scripture**

The premillennialists find ample proof for their position in Scripture. Christ is coming *"with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him"*—before Him, not behind Him, as the postmillennialists teach (Isa. 40:10).

Though not all premillennialists agree, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is coming to initiate the steps that will bring about the Millennium. Far from returning to a world of peace and righteousness, it pictures him breaking into history at a time when the *"sea and the waves"* are *"roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear, for looking after those things which are coming on the earth"* (Luke 21:25-26). His return will precipitate a time of trouble *"such as never was since there was a nation"* (Dan. 12:1). Isaiah says that *"when the enemy shall come in like a flood...the Redeemer shall come to Zion"* (Isa. 59:19-20).

Jesus in parable compared Himself to the nobleman who goes into a *"far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return"* (Luke

19:12). The comparison would be incorrect if Christ came back to a kingdom already set up and an earth already in a perfect state.

Jesus' words in His post-ascension message reveal the same promise: that Christ will return to an unconverted world. *"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him,...and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him"* (Rev. 1:7). Also His words to His disciples: *"As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man....Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot;...even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed"* (Luke 17:26-30).

History confirms that the early Christians were looking for the visible, bodily return of Jesus to set up His kingdom (Acts 1:10-11), and this teaching prevailed during the early years after the apostles, though it soon encountered opposition. The Alexandrian school, particularly Origen, also opposed it. One of the first known opponents of Pre-millennialism was Caius, a Roman presbyter about the year 200. According to one historian, *"one great reason for the remarkable change of sentiments [from the expectation of the early return of Jesus to the belief that the Church was the kingdom] is to be found in the altered condition and prospects of the Church. Christians at first yearned for the reappearance of the Lord. Moreover, it was impossible for them to raise their faith and hopes so high as to expect the conquest of the Roman Empire by the moral power of the cross, independently of the personal and supernatural interposition of Christ. But as the Gospel made progress, the possibility and probability of a peaceful victory of the Christian cause over all its adversaries, by the might of truth and of the Spirit, gained a lodgment in the convictions of good men"* (McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 6, p. 265).

The early church was looking for Jesus to return and bring in the Millennium, and we today, nearly two thousand years nearer, share the same bright expectation. □



# Independence Bell

**T**here was tumult in the city,  
In the quaint old Quaker town,  
And the streets were rife with people  
Pacing restless up and down—  
People gathering at corners,  
Where they whispered, each to each,  
And the sweat stood on their temples  
With the earnestness of speech.

**A**s the bleak Atlantic currents  
Lash the wild Newfoundland shore,  
So they beat against the State House,  
So they surged against the door;  
And the mingling of their voices  
Made a harmony profound,  
Till the quiet street of Chestnut  
Was all turbulent with sound.

**W**ill they do it?" "Dare they do it?"  
"Who is speaking?" "What's the news?"  
"What of Adams?" "What of Sherman?"  
"Oh! God grant they won't refuse!"  
"Make some way, there! Let me nearer!"  
"I am stifling!" "Stifle, them!"  
When a nation's life's at hazard,  
We've no time to think of men!"


**S**o they beat against the portal,  
Man and woman, maid and child;  
And the July sun in heaven  
On the scene looked down and smiled  
The same sun that saw the Spartan  
Shed his patriot blood in vain,  
Now beheld the soul of freedom,  
All unconquered, rise again.

**S**ee! See! The dense crowd quivers  
Through all its lengthy line,  
As the boy beside the portal  
Looks forth to give the sign!  
With his little hands uplifted,  
Breezes dallying with his hair,  
Hark! with strong, clear intonation,  
Breaks his young voice on the air.

**H**ushed the people's swelling murmur,  
List the boy's exultant cry!  
"Ring!" he shouts, "ring! ring! Grandpa,  
Ring! oh, ring for Liberty!"  
Quickly at the given signal  
The old bell-man lifts his hand,  
Forth he sends the good news, making  
Iron music through the land.

**H**ow they shouted! What rejoicing!  
How the old bell shook the air  
Till the clang of freedom ruffled  
The calmly gliding Delaware!  
How the bonfires and the torches  
Lighted up the night's repose;  
Above them like a giant flame  
Our glorious Liberty arose!





**T**hat old State House bell is silent,  
Hushed is now its clamorous tongue;  
But a spirit was awakened  
When that great old bell was rung;  
This, the land of God's own choosing,  
Was true freedom's home to be;  
And God was moving in those patriots  
A desire for liberty.

**H**e a nation was preparing  
Where His Truth might live again—  
"Where the Spirit of the Lord is,  
There is liberty" for men.  
As from day to day we gather,  
Free to praise and worship God,  
We, the most for independence,  
Should our thanks proclaim abroad.

**A**s we greet the smiling sunlight  
On this bright Fourth of July,  
Let us hear again the echo  
Of that bell—'twixt earth and sky—  
Mighty was its tone there pealing,  
Joyful was its sounding cry,  
As it rang out, "Independence"  
Which please God, shall never die!  
—Selected

## SECURE In INSECURITY

**H**ave you ever seen the destruction caused by an avalanche as it thundered down the mountainside, sweeping huge rocks, trees and buildings before it as though they were pebbles or matchsticks?

Or have you ever been eyewitness to the devastation left in the path of a hurricane, a tornado, or a tidal wave?

If so, you know the meaning of insecurity.

The news media continually keep us aware of other insecurities in our world: of erratic shifts in a country's economy; sudden upheavals in government; atrocities of terrorists, hijackers, and guerrillas; devastations caused by earthquakes, famines, and plagues.

Security, where art thou?

Instinctively, all of us crave security. Who would not welcome the feel-

ing of "all's well in the world," that warm, comfortable sensation of being totally secure and satisfied? Yet there is danger of developing a false sense of security by trusting things that are in themselves insecure. Too easily we trust in things which have but shaky foundations. We feel comfortable with our choice of stocks and bonds, our friends, our careers, any or all of which may fail us. Sometimes our judgment is on a par with that of the field mouse, who thinks the farmer's cornfield the perfect place to build her nest and raise her young in late summer—when corn harvest is only weeks away. There is grave danger of looking for security in the things that are seen, things of the present, which will shortly be swept away—and we with them if we have become part of them.

It is very easy to be lulled into a false sense of security.

Where, oh, where is true security? In an insecure world, is anything rock sure?

Let the apostle Paul answer this question. These are his words: "*I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Cor. 12:10, NIV). Paul had spoken previously of experiences with hardships—beatings, hunger, imprisonment, shipwreck. Certainly these experiences would leave anyone feeling insecure. Yet we find him expressing joy and delight in his lot. What is his closing remark? "*When I am weak, then I am strong.*"

Paul is saying in effect, "When I am insecure in the things of the present, when troubles would over-

(Continued on page 26)





## Making It Right

Jamie was in the first grade, and the most important thing to him was being liked and accepted by his classmates. Somehow he got the feeling that nobody liked him, and try as he might, he couldn't think of anything he could do to change this.

Then one day he had an idea. Jamie had no concept of the value of money, but he thought that having some might help him. It happened that he knew where to find a rather large amount of money. It was at his grandfather's house—his grandfather lived just three houses down the street. It was in a tin box in a bookcase in his grandfather's study. Every time his grandfather would empty his pockets, and there was a little change and maybe a dollar bill or two, he would drop it into this box in the bookcase. Grandpa had showed it to him one day, with the comment, "See how little things add up?"

Jamie thought about the money, and thought about it. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed like a good idea. Grandpa didn't really need that money, and "no one will ever know if I take what's in that tin box," he thought. "Or maybe I'd better take just part of it," thought Jamie.

He planned very carefully. It wasn't difficult, because Jamie spent a lot of time at his grandfather's house.

Jamie watched for just the right time when no one was anywhere around, so that he was sure no one was watching him. Quietly he opened the tin box and scooped a big handful of the money into an empty cookie bag, then he quickly darted home and hid the bag in the bushes by the front porch.

That evening at home seemed unusually long. And Jamie was very quiet. He just couldn't seem to act normal. And he couldn't forget the money. How rich he felt, with so much money—and yet he wasn't

really happy about it. He couldn't share that secret with his mother as he always did. At dinner that night he felt like his parents were looking at him all the time. At bedtime when Jamie said his prayer he made it very short because he didn't want to tell Jesus about the money.

The next morning as he left for school with his treasure bag carefully concealed, he felt excited. He could already see the smiles he would get from all his friends.

At the little store across from the school he bought enough candy for the entire class.

On the playground that day, Jamie was king. Soon all the children, even those who had never included him in their play before, were crowded around him. They all wanted to be his friends now—because Jamie was giving out candy and coins!

After school some of his new friends wanted him to stay and play with them, but Jamie refused. Jamie's mother had arranged for him to go straight to his grandpa's after school, because his parents had to go out of town for the day and wouldn't be home until late. Besides, Jamie didn't want to raise any suspicions—not right now.

When Jamie arrived at his grandfather's house, he was astonished to see his parent's car in the driveway. Was his mother really here, or...? Surely they couldn't be home yet!

Jamie wasn't going to take any chances. Instead of going in through the front door, he decided to sneak in the back way, through the basement entrance. Quietly he tiptoed up the basement stairs to the kitchen and slowly opened the door. And there, right in the middle of the room was his mother looking straight at the door, as if waiting for it to open.

"Good afternoon, young man!" she said firmly.

"Oh, Mom! I...I...I didn't expect to see you," Jamie gasped.

"Jamie—" his mother seemed to stare right through him—"your grandfather has been saving money for a long time to get you a bicycle for your birthday next week, and someone has taken part of the money."

Jamie's heart sank. What should he say?

"Tell me, Son, what do you know about it?"

Jamie knew his face was as red as a beet. "Uh...uh... how did you find out about it?" he stammered, looking past her.

"Never mind how I found out. Tell me all you know about it. Look me in the eye and tell me the truth," she said. Mother was intensely serious.

Try as he might, Jamie could not keep his bottom lip from quivering. He knew that he could not lie to her. There was nothing to do but tell her the truth, the whole truth.

Bit by bit, between tears and sobs, the story came out. Yes, Jamie knew all about the missing money.

"But what can I do about it?" he said, after the story was out.

"You've got to return the money."

"But I can't. It's all gone."

"You must do what you can. Monday morning you must take the extra candy back to the store and ask for your money back. Then you must go to school and recover every coin that you can."

"But I gave them away to my friends."

"You must tell your friends that they were not yours to give away, and ask them to give them back to you. They will, if they are good friends."

There was a long pause, then Mother continued. "Jamie, what you did was very wrong. 'You must not steal,' God told His people long ago. It not only hurts the person you steal from but it puts a bad mark on your record before God."

"Mommie, if I tell Jesus all about it and ask him to forgive me, won't that take care of everything and make it all right?" Jamie asked hopefully.

"You should tell Jesus about it,



dear, and ask Him to forgive you. But you also must do all you can to correct what you did." Putting her arm around the sad little boy she added, "I am sorry my little boy can't expect a bicycle for his birthday this year, but I'm sorry most of all that my little boy can't be trusted."

It was a long weekend for Jamie. He just couldn't stop thinking about the task that awaited him on Monday.

At last Monday came, and Jamie started for school with a heavy heart and his nearly empty cookie bag. He took the leftover candy to the little store and got the money back. That was easy.

The hard part was facing his friends at school and asking for the money back. With the help of his teacher, he was able to retrieve a few of the coins that he had given away on Friday. But oh, what a painful task! And Jamie just knew everybody was talking about what he had done!

At home that night he showed his mother the meager results of his hard work and asked her if she would give the money back to his grandfather. "No, Son, that is your job. You must do it. And you must apologize to your grandfather for taking the money and tell him that you will work this summer to make up for the rest of it. But first you must apologize to him."

"I can't do it!" he cried. "Grandpa won't like me anymore!"

"Grandpa will like you much more if you tell him you're sorry than if you don't do anything to make it right. He will forgive you if you show him that you are truly sorry."

"But I can't do it!" Jamie cried again. He couldn't bear the idea of facing his grandfather when he knew that he had fallen so far short of his expectations. Oh, what a mess he had made of things!

But Jamie knew that when mother said something, she meant it.

Jamie cried himself to sleep that night thinking about it. Inside he felt like the whole world hated him, and that no one would ever trust him again. And on top of it, he wasn't going to get his bicycle.

Several days went by, and every time he saw his grandfather, he felt

sad and unhappy.

Then one night, as he was sitting beside his grandfather on the big sofa, it just seemed like the right time. No one was around but he and Grandpa and Buster the dog. "Grandpa..." he said softly.

"What is it, Sonny?" Grandpa answered in his usual bright, cheery voice.

"Grandpa..." Jamie said it again, but he could go no further.

Realizing what was on the child's mind, Grandfather gently drew Jamie to him. "What can I do for you, Jamie?"

"Grandpa...I'll...I'll...I'll never never do it again."

"Do what, Jamie?" Grandpa tried to be consoling, yet realized that Jamie needed to tell him the story.

"Grandpa...its about...about the money I took. Here is all I could get back..." Jamie thrust a few coins into his grandfather's large hand. "I'll...I'll work hard for you this summer to pay back the rest?" Jamie was sobbing his heart out. "I know you'll never ever trust me again."

"Jamie, I would love to have you help me with the yard work this summer. We'll work it out together. But as for trusting you, I wouldn't be right with God if I never trusted you again. God has forgiven me when I have done wrong, and I must be ready to forgive you."

All was silence for a moment, then Grandfather said quietly, "Jamie, I believe you have learned your lesson, and I will forgive you. But you must still pray to God, and ask Him to forgive you. And you must promise never, never to do anything like that again."

"Grandpa, I have asked God to forgive me, and I promise! I promise! I will never take anything that doesn't belong to me again."

Jamie felt like the world had rolled off his shoulders. What a relief! Now he could enjoy his grandpa again. Now he could look him in the eye and feel like he had a true friend.

"Jamie, it is good that

you learned this lesson here at home. Suppose you had taken something from the store, and someone had caught you. You would have been taken to the police station, and to court, and maybe even to the boy's reform school." Jamie was silent. The very thought of it made him shudder. "Then you would have had a bad mark on your record that would go with you all your life."

"But I have the bad mark anyway."

"You do," said his grandfather. "But if you never, do it again, God will forgive you."

Weeks went by, then one afternoon Jamie's father called him to come outside. Thinking that he probably had some chore for him to do, Jamie got up lazily and went out onto the front porch. There, to his surprise, was the whole family, including Grandpa. And what did Grandpa have in his hands but a brand new 3-speed bicycle!

"How about that, Jamie?" said his father.

Jamie couldn't look at the bike. Crying, he ran over to his grandfather and hugged him. Tears came into Grandpa's eyes, too, as he held Jamie for the moment.

"Grandpa," Jamie said softly, "is it really for me? Really?"

"Yes, it's really for you, Jamie." Grandpa spoke reassuringly: "For my little man that made it right! Come now, let's see if we can ride this bike!" □





## Pondering the Word...

*My heart has heard you say, 'Come and talk with me.' And my heart responds, 'LORD, I am coming.'"* —Psalm 27:8, NLT

David's response to the Lord shows keen attention and prompt, eager obedience. More, it is *heart* obedience, not mere formality. David is saying, "Lord, I am ready to give you my undivided attention. I will listen to no other voice."

When the Lord spoke, David's heart offered no excuse, pleaded for no delay, asked for no reasons. It said simply, "Lord, I'm coming." In other words, "Lord, I'm already on the way." It was his delight to obey.

What is *our* heart's response when the Lord says, "Come"?

*Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap."* —Eccl. 11:4, NIV

What is this text saying? There will always be something to fear, some reason to postpone action. But if you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.

This is especially true of our service to God. We think we will be able to serve Him better after the children are grown up, or after we find a new job, or after we move to another location, or, or, or...there is always some reason not to act in the present moment. But to fail to act is to invite the greatest disaster.

If we put off serving God, He will surely put off giving us the crown of life—we will never get it.

*And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him.*

*"Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done".* —Col. 2:6-7, NLT

Paul compares the active, growing Christian to a healthy tree, which puts down deep roots so as to draw constant nourishment, so as to be strong and vigorous in the faith he has been taught.

What is the source of the Christian's nourishment? It is the word of God. Deep roots have two purposes: they draw greater nourishment, and they provide stability in the storms of life.

*Lord, help me to put my roots deep into Your Word.*

*Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway."* —Prov. 8:34, NIV

The picture is of an eager scholar, whose intense desire to learn brings him to the teacher even before the gates are open.

God wants listening ears, even listening before He speaks—such listeners never miss any command, or any blessing.

*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* —Jer. 29:13, NIV.

God recognizes no half-hearted effort. He wants wholeness. An occasional thought, a 911 call to Him in an emergency, or request for more help, more wealth, more happiness, or more justice, is not the way to seek God.

We will find God and know God just according to the earnestness and intensity we put into seeking Him.

"Seek...find." Here is the precious promise: that God is ever within the reach of the wholehearted seeker.

*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"* —Rom. 8:31, NIV

If God is on our side, we have nothing to fear. But how can we be certain that God is on our side?

We must take the steps to place ourselves on God's side. We must stand for what He stands for, and oppose what He opposes. In our own lives we must uphold righteousness, for we read, "*The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright*" (Ps. 11:7). He "*loves righteousness and hates iniquity*" (Heb. 1:9), and so must we. The more we become like Him, the more He will be "for us," and the more we can be sure that He will defend and protect us.

God has not promised freedom from trials, but victory in them.

*Taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."* —Psalm 34:8

When David says, "*The Lord is good*," he is not speaking from a problem-free life but from one filled with trouble, sorrow and woe. Yet he encourages others to make the same discovery he has made: "Taste and see for yourself what it is like to know God."

What is David's conclusion? *God is good*—when life goes smoothly AND when trouble strikes. God is good, because He is making all things work together toward an eternal destination. We don't expect everything in this life to be perfect—the perfect world is ahead.

In the meantime, *God is good!* Come, taste and see. Serve God, and experience it for yourself! □



# SIFTING

## Men for Service

Things were in bad shape in the nation of Israel, about as bad in every way as they could be. This time it was the Midianites who overran the land, and held the leaderless people in almost abject slavery. With them were joined two other nations, the Amalekites and the Children of the East. When the crops were almost ready to harvest, these raiders swooped down in great numbers and destroyed all the crops and drove away all the stock.

Then, as usual, when they were in trouble the Israelite people remembered God and cried for help; whereupon He planned another great deliverance.

First of all Gideon, the leader, was chosen and put through a course of schooling. Then this trained young leader gathered his band of helpers. Now we want to mark keenly how these three hundred men were sifted out of the thousands for service. They were sifted out. They sifted themselves out. In that army of thousands were just three hundred who had the needed qualifications for the type of service God wanted done.

Look over the gathered thousands: Which are the chosen three hundred? No one knew. They didn't know themselves until the tests came. They chose themselves by the way they stood the three tests.

Even so is God ever sifting out men for service. The more difficult the service (the higher the grade of leadership needed), the severer the test. The testing both reveals the qualities, and in part makes them.



### The First Test

The first quality these men had was *willingness*. They were all *volunteers*. When the call came they rallied to the leader's side. How did Gideon find them? He sent runners through that whole section. They went first to his own family clan, then to his own tribe Manasseh, then to three neighboring tribes. The runners said that God had called upon Gideon to lead a movement against the Midianites and their allies, and he wanted every man to come and help.

A good many did not respond to the summons.

Some were simply indifferent. They could not help hearing the call, but there was no response, no change of expression in the eye or face. They went right on in their heavy, dull way as though they had not heard. They were utterly indifferent to the call.

Some criticized. Who was Gideon? He had no skill or experience. And the people had no weapons. The enemy had stolen everything of that sort away. And they were clearly outnumbered.

And, and, and! There they were talking, criticizing, and not responding to the call. Such critics seldom respond. Helpers criticize in a very different way. It takes less brain to criticize unwisely, capriciously, far less than to help. Almost any harebrain can tear things to pieces. And nothing is more common than just such criticism.

Some ridiculed: "Gideon going to be a national leader? Ha! Ha! Ha!" And whip the enemy? Ridiculous! Absurd!" The whole thing was impossible.

These men tried to keep others from going.

But many came. A crowd of volunteers came hurrying from farms and caves, bringing such weapons as they had been able to keep in hiding. They were willing to respond. It was a motley crowd, no doubt. There were thirty-two thousand of them.

These men had the first great qualification for service: they were willing, actively willing. They willed to come down to the front and help fight the enemy, and deliver their nation.

Willingness is a great quality. God reckons our service not by our ability alone but by our willingness. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8:12). Whatever is given out of a true, willing heart is eagerly accepted by Him. Willingness is a heart quality. It is the heart volunteering. This was the first test.

Thirty-two thousand out of four tribes stood this test. Gideon's army had one great qualification at the start.

*Courage is a heart quality. Courage is the heart fighting. It faces fearful odds and keeps right straight ahead—regardless.*



## SIFTING Men for Service



### A Second Test

Now these men are put to a second test. The next morning God surprised Gideon by telling him that he had too many men. If the victory were given them with so many men, they would feel that they had done the thing themselves. They would grow so large as to shut God out of their landscape. Each man would feel that he was the essential factor. They would go back to the home folks to tell of themselves.

God seems to know us mortals.

Now He would lessen their numbers, but in doing it He would pick out the best. The men are encamped on the hillsides overlooking a valley. Across the valley to the north lay the encamped armies of three nations. They were a vast host. They were spread out as thick as the grasshoppers of Egypt had been years before; swarming everywhere.

Gideon spoke to his men. He said, "*Fellow Israelites, there is the enemy. Take a good look at them.*" His followers looked, and as they looked some of them began to get scared. They had not realized just what was involved. Their footwear seemed to grow too large. They were shaking in their boots.

Then Gideon said, "*Now, every man of you that thinks it can't be done—I wish you would go back home.*" And he watched. They commenced to move away in squads, in scores, in fifties. Great gaps were left in the mob of men. Here is a fellow standing, looking. He thinks, "It looks pretty bad, sure enough; but then, I suppose, if God is planning..." But—the fellow by his side has gone, and on this other side, too. "I guess I'd better go, too." And off he goes. Fear is very contagious. There is great power in feeling another by your side. And two-thirds of them disappear over the hills.

The motto of these disappearing men was this: "It can't be done."

And, true enough, it couldn't be done with them; but it could be done *without* them.

There remained ten thousand. These men by their staying said, "It ought to be done. What ought to be done can be done. What can be done we can do. And what we can do we will do."

Here is another man standing, looking at the vast host across the valley. He is thinking that it is a desperate case, but he thinks of God's call through Gideon.

Just then he notices that his neighbor on the left has taken to his heels, and on his right also. That shakes him for a moment. His heels say, "You go, too." His heart says, "No, stay." He obeys his heart. He says, "I'll stay if I stay alone."

That was the stamina in these remaining ten thousand. They stood a double test in remaining, the desperate situation seen in the presence of such an enormous army, and the desertion of their fellows. They had not only willingness but courage.

Courage is a heart quality. Courage is the heart fighting. It faces fearful odds and keeps right straight ahead regardless.

Such a man can't be whipped. He doesn't know when he is whipped. And the man who doesn't know when he is whipped, never *is* whipped. No man can be whipped without his own consent. Courage, is a heart quality. These ten thousand were not chicken-hearted, nor down-hearted. They were lion-hearted, stout-hearted.

It was a keen stroke of generalship on Gideon's part that sent the timid, discouraged ones back home. Nothing is more demoralizing than the presence of such people. And there was no discipline much finer for those who remained than to feel their fellows leaving them.

It is hard to be left by those who have been in touch. It is hard to stand alone. There is no harder test of character than that. And, too, there is no finer thing to make character. Think how the fiber of those ten thousand toughened and strengthened as they stood there, with men on every side hurrying away. This was the second test.

But the men who can stand testing are growing fewer. Thirty-two thousand men were willing. Only a third of them are both willing and courageous. These men are more than volunteers. They have seen the foe. Their fiber has stood the test, and toughened in the test. They are courageous volunteers.



### A Third Test

But there is a third test. God speaks to Gideon and says, "*You have too many yet, Gideon.*" Too many? Yes, this is to be a quality fight. No common fighting here. God works best with the men who come nearest to having His own thought about things. Numbers do not count. You can't "count" men for service. You must "weigh" them, and feel the firmness of their fiber.

There is a little brook running down the valley. Gideon gives an order to his men to advance a little distance. And he watches them. Most of them as they



come to the water stretch out leisurely on the ground and putting their mouth to the water take a good long drink, and another, and another. They seem to say by their action, "Well, there's some hard work ahead, but we must take care of ourselves. We must not get unduly stirred up over the thing. We're not fighting yet."

But one man comes along with a quick, nervous step, his eye still on the enemy. He is all on tenterhooks. His eyes flash fire. He reaches down with a quick movement and gathers up some water in his hand, up to his mouth, and hurries on. Then a second comes, and a third, and more.

Gideon is watching. As each of these comes along he calls him off to one side. When the whole number of men have crossed the brook there are just three hundred of the hot-hearted, intense-spirited ones.

God said, "*Gideon, keep these men; send the others home.*" These thousands sent back were sturdy men. They would make good fighters in many a campaign, but they would not do for the higher kind of campaign planned for that day.

The little band remaining had stood a third test: they were willing, and courageous, and enthusiastic.

The proportions are worth noticing here. Thirty-two thousand were volunteers. A third of that number are courageous volunteers. About a thirty-third of these, less than a hundredth of the original, are hot-hearted, courageous volunteers.

This is Gideon's Band—three hundred young men who were willing, and courageous, and alert, all heart qualities. They stood every test. They faced a foe that humanly they had no chance to overcome, and because of God's call they were not only willing and stout-hearted, but intense in their desire to get at the fighting. They were the ones by whom the Lord saved His people, and delivered the Midianites into their hands. Those who watched were chosen, all the others returned home.

What a lesson to all who have started in the way to life! What a lesson that God's soldiers must always be watchful. Nothing will come to us but what will be for our

good, no trial "*but such as is common to man*" (1 Cor. 10:13). God will always make a way of escape so we will be able to bear the little petty trials of life.

When the Lord appeared to Gideon and said: "*Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites,*" Gideon was humble. He felt unsuited to the great work to which the Lord was calling him. And he answered, "*O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.*" But God saves not by might, or strength of man. And the Lord said to him, "*Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.*"

But Gideon wanted more proof, he wanted to make sure that it was the Lord that was actually speaking to him before he took the first step, so he asked for a sign. He said: "*If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me.*" Gideon then went and prepared a "*present*" or "*meat offering*" or food for the Lord. At the angel's behest he laid the cakes he had made, and the flesh he had prepared, on the rock, and poured out the broth. At the touch of the angel's staff fire appeared and burned up the food and consumed the broth. This miraculous act impressed Gideon that it was God who was speaking.

This one demonstration gave Gideon the faith to take his life in his hands and with the help of ten loyal servants destroy his father's altar to Baal and cut down the grove, risking the displeasure of Baal's many worshippers. They reacted as he had expected—and demanded his life; but were unable to press their demands.

Gideon now sent messengers to the four tribes nearest him: Manasseh, Asher, Zebulon and Naphtali. The more steps he took, the more he realized the seriousness of the work he was undertaking. So he asked God for another sign. He said, "*If thou wilt save Israel in mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine*

*hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water*" (Judges 6:36-38).

At first this seemed like a fair test, but then the thought occurred to Gideon that someone may have poured water on the fleece, to have brought about that result, so he asked the Lord for another sign, and it was given him. The Lord did not condemn him for asking, and granted his request, and that night the fleece was dry, and all the surrounding ground wet with dew (vs. 39-40).

These three demonstrations gave Gideon the needed faith to go ahead and prepare for the battle. The three tests we already have described were accomplished, the three hundred alert men chosen, and the next step was the actual showdown.

The sight of the hosts of Midian and Amalek who lay along the valley like grasshoppers for multitude nearly daunted Gideon. He could barely overcome the fear of what might befall him and his miniature army. So the Lord permitted him one more sign. The Lord said, Take Phurah your servant, and go down to the host under cover of darkness, and you will hear something that will give you confidence. He did so. He heard a man telling his fellow a dream. He said, "*Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay*" flat on the ground. "*And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand God delivered Midian, and all the host*" (Judges 7:9-14). This gave Gideon courage to go ahead with the conquest.

How often we have needed our faith strengthened, and how often we have been supplied with the means for a stronger faith. It is now for us to "*man the fortress, watch the road; strengthen [our] back, summon all [our] strength*" (Nahum 2:1), if we would conquer the Midianite hosts in our own evil nature, and come off "*more than conquerors through him that loved us.*" □



## WHAT IS THE "MYSTERY OF CHRIST"?

***"What is the 'mystery' that Paul talks about in Ephesians 3? What is the 'preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery'? (Rom. 16:25)?"***

The apostle Paul in his Epistles used the term "mystery" often (twenty-one times) when speaking of the Divine revelation. He spoke of the "mystery of the gospel," "the revelation of the mystery," "the mystery of God," "the mystery of Christ," "the mystery of the gospel," "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," the "mystery of the faith." What did he mean?

One thing we can be sure of: That he was not thinking of a "mystery" in the sense in which the word is commonly used today. He was not thinking of something weird that defies explanation, or something having magical properties, baffling comprehension, as in the mystery religions of the time. The knowledge of God is not in any sense mysticism, nor is it mystic in quality. It is practical, rational, and factual. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you," said the apostle John (1 John 1:3). Shortly after Pentecost, Peter and John said the same: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). They were declaring facts, and they were as sure of them as of their own existence. They were preaching about a real Jesus, the Son of God, who had really been born, lived, been crucified, resurrected, and now had ascended to heaven. It was all real—they were witnesses (Acts 2:29-32).

Why, then, was the revealed knowledge of God called a "mystery"?

The word "mystery" is translated from the Greek *mysterion* which is a derivative of *muo*, and means literally, "to shut the mouth; a secret or mystery through the idea

of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites. Hence to initiate, to teach:—instruct" (Strong's Analytical Concordance).

According to Thayer's *English-Greek Lexicon*, it refers to a "hidden thing, secret, mystery," as "religious secrets confided only to the initiated and not to be communicated by them to ordinary mortals." Another definition is: "a hidden purpose or counsel, secret will." Then follows this comment: "In the New Testament, God's plan of salvation which was once hidden but now is revealed—Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26." It is also applied to "the secret purposes relative to the kingdom of God," Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; used of certain single events decreed by God having reference to His kingdom or the salvation of men, Rom. 11:25... used generally of Christian truth as hidden from ungodly men."

A Greek-English Lexicon by Bauer, Arnold and Gingrich adds that it is used of "knowledge too profound for human ingenuity,... the secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God which are hidden from the human reason, as well as from all other comprehension below the divine level, and hence must be revealed to those for whom they are intended."

It seems that Paul by using the term "mystery" distinguished knowledge that can be known only as God chooses to reveal it, and knowledge that can be acquired from human resources.

Why did Paul say "mystery"? Why not just "revelation" or "truth" or "heavenly wisdom"? The term seems to describe at least partially the deep love and gratitude Paul felt for having a share in the wisdom of Christ. To know Christ and the hope He set before men was treasured knowledge indeed, valu-

able beyond anything he could imagine. And it was knowledge that had to come from God, it was not available by any human means or from any human source; only through direct inspiration or connection with the Divine mind. Paul felt especially favored to be "in" on this knowledge, he who considered himself the greatest of sinners because he had persecuted the Church of Christ (1 Cor. 15:9).

Why is God's knowledge called "secret"? Because its scope and magnitude cannot be comprehended by those uninitiated. It is "a hidden thing, secret" in the sense of not being revealed or understood by the majority—because only a few would take the initiative to search its depths along with the humility and faith to receive it; to the rest, the Divine knowledge would remain a mystery. Jesus Himself indicated that the knowledge of God would not be universal. He said, in prayer to His Father, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Luke 10:21).

The singular feature of the Gospel at this point seems to have been the ministry to the Gentiles. This feature of God's plan was revealed to the apostle Paul at his conversion; for when Jesus appeared to him on his journey to Damascus, He said, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness...delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:16-18).

This is Paul's point in Ephesians 3: that God "by revelation...made known unto [him] the mystery," and



that they by reading what he had written could understand his "knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:3-6).

In this text Paul mentions three points about the privilege that had been granted to the Gentiles:

1) that now believing Gentiles **"should be fellow heirs"**—i.e., all the benefits of the covenant were now open also to Gentiles. Now Gentiles, as well as Jews, could be "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" because "they are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

2) that now believing Gentiles could be **"of the same body,"** i.e., "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Jews and Gentiles were to be alike baptized into one body by one spirit, with one head, even Christ, the head of both. The Gentiles were not there by permission of the Jews, nor the Jews by permission of the Gentiles. Both were equal in their relationship.

3) that now believing Gentiles could be **"partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."** There is no promise of the new covenant that is not equally sure to Gentile and to Jew.

#### ◆ The Fellowship of the Mystery

"What does Paul mean when he says that we are 'to make all [men] see what is the fellowship [dispensation] of the mystery'?" (Eph. 3:9).

Other translations of this text use the word "administration" in place of fellowship: "To bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God" (NASB); "to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God" (NIV). It seems that Paul is talking about the distribution of this special knowledge, or God's method of administering it to those concerned. Paul feels himself an honored vehicle, called of God to dispense knowledge that is priceless. "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery." He feels the weight of his calling, the breadth of his responsibility before God, and the deep privilege in which he shared, though he felt unworthy because of his unworthy past. But no one could dispute his credentials. His calling had been directly of Christ, who had appointed him to this ministry at the time of his conversion. He was to be Christ's minister to the Gentiles, and this meant preaching the "unsearchable riches of Christ," along with making plain God's method of distributing this priceless knowledge.

#### ◆ Unsearchable Riches of Christ

"What did Paul mean when he spoke of the 'unsearchable riches of Christ'?" (Eph. 3:8).

The Apostle does not specify what is included in the "riches of Christ." But Scripture shows many aspects of Christ's knowledge (wisdom,


teaching) that may properly be called "riches" and also "unsearchable." They are "riches" because they have eternal worth, even providing the means to eternal life. And they are 'unsearchable' because, like the mysteries, they are only truly understood by those initiated, born into the family of Christ.

The riches of Christ are also unsearchable because their full value cannot be appreciated by mortal minds. Unlike anything else familiar to us, their value cannot be diminished with time or use. In fact, time will actually increase their value.


The salvation which Jesus offers is everlasting. Jesus compared it to the water of an everflowing fountain (Rev. 7:17). The Psalmist described it as a river of pleasure (Ps. 36:8-9). The prophet Isaiah called it a well, suggesting a limitless source of supply: "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3). It is the same well of which Jesus spoke: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14)—again it is riches unsearchable.

Again, it may be called unsearchable riches *because there is no limit to the supply available.* The only limit is on the side of those receiving, who may be slow to recognize true worth. From the standpoint of God, this wisdom "was hid for ages"—until someone was ready to receive and use that knowledge. □

### Be Content with Your Lot



A mule whose job was to pull a vegetable cart to and from the village complained loudly of such a menial task. When not working he would frolic about the pasture fancying himself a great race horse. "I believe my mother must have won many races," he mused, "and I take after her. I know I can run as fast as ever she could." And he set off across the pasture at what he thought a fast pace.



One day the mule's master found it necessary to get to the village in a great hurry. Jumping on the animal's back the farmer prod-  
ded the mule to greater speed. Then he began to flog him. That night as the mule stumbled into the barn bone tired he muttered to himself, "Pulling a vegetable cart isn't so bad after all."



# Before YOU CRITICIZE...

*"If thou wouldst be wise, be so wise as to hold thy tongue."*

Criticisms come so easily. If we don't say it, we *think* it: a complaint, a quick judgment, an ill-considered conclusion about what **I** could make happen if the responsibility were **mine**.

Not all criticism is negative. Our input may be helpful and constructive—but *is* it? Or is it merely murmuring?

Next time, before you criticize, check your attitude by asking yourself these questions:

1. *Why am I seeing this situation as a problem?* Is it because I am standing for right against wrong, or am I merely insisting on my own opinion? Can I truthfully say, God wants it to be done this other way, or is it only *my* idea?
2. *Am I part of the problem?* Remember, God uses irritations to teach us; tribulations to correct us. I don't want to miss an opportunity to be molded into His image.
3. *What is my real reason for wanting to complain?* Impure motives include wanting to be noticed, or promoted, or getting our own way, or blaming others, or trying to get another to be seen in not quite so good a light. Right motives come from praying and meditating upon Scripture. They are not self-serving, or self-gratifying.
4. *Is there a Bible principle being violated behind the matter that concerns me?* If I were to look into what the Bible teaches on this subject, I might discover that my complaint is based on personal taste or style rather than on a real issue.
5. *Am I being humble, gentle, and patient in my approach to this problem?* Am I bearing with others in love? Step back, and look at yourself from God's perspective. What does He think of you?
6. *Am I showing a willing spirit to cooperate with others, or am I insisting that things be done my way, according to my ideas?* Beware! The Psalmist prayed, "Teach me thy way, O Lord," not "Lead me in the way that I want to go." Our desire to see it done "my way" might actually be a case of disguised rebellion.
7. *Am I genuinely grateful for my Christian friends and fellow believers?* God does not want us to go "solo" through life. He wants us to learn to work together, worship together, pray together, work together, grow together.
8. *Am I more demanding of others than I am of myself?* If I would please God, I must reverse this, and demand more of myself than I do of others. Then instead of criticizing from afar, I will be holding up the hands of the ones near to me, like Aaron and Hur did for Moses.
9. *Can I state my criticism in the form of constructive suggestions rather than of complaint or abrupt censure?* Fortunately, there is more than one way to offer a suggestion. There is more than one way to disagree. We do not have to be harsh, overbearing, or hurtful, to hold firmly to right principle.
10. *Am I willing to be part of the solution to this problem?* Jesus recommended that we be peacemakers, not troublemakers. This means taking definite steps to bring about a resolution of conflict, not merely watching it happen and hoping for the best. Jesus set the example in solving problems, not making them. Let us back up our words with actions, and wrap everything we do in brotherly love, and then we will have less problems.

There are two ways of looking at almost anything. The glass may be half full, or it may be half empty. Both statements are true, yet each reflects a different mind set.

The more we become like Christ, the less we will want to criticize, and the more helpful, constructive suggestions we will be able to offer. This is changing our ways for Christ's.

*Lord, help me to take on more and more of the likeness and spirit of Jesus Christ.*



# Know Your Bible?

## Bible Gifts and Presents

1. Kind of meat which God gave the Israelites in the wilderness when they complained.
2. Gifts which the wise men brought to the Christ child.
3. Colorful gift which Joseph received from his father.
4. Gift Elijah gave to his successor.
5. What Jesus has promised to give all who love His appearing.
6. Food which the Israelites received without having to plant or cultivate.
7. Person for whom Jacob prepared an elaborate present to assure a peaceful meeting.
8. Present which Joseph tucked into a sack for a special person.
9. Gift which Jacob sent to "the man" in Egypt to win his favor.
10. The gifts of this great man ruined another who sought to obtain them by deceit.
11. Wicked king of Judah who took silver and gold out of the house of the Lord to stop an invader.
12. Visitors from a certain country brought a present to Hezekiah, to which he responded by showing them all his treasures. What was the long-term result of this action?
13. This king prepared elaborate gifts for a project he was told he could not complete.
14. Sacrifice which all are dutybound to make to God.
15. What was the required quality of every sacrifice presented to God?

## Words, Words, Words

Fill in the blanks:

1. "In their mouth was found \_\_\_\_\_: for they are without fault before the throne of God."
2. "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words \_\_\_\_\_?"
3. "If I justify myself, \_\_\_\_\_ shall condemn me."
4. "The Lord shall cut off all \_\_\_\_\_ lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things."
5. "Keep thy tongue from \_\_\_\_\_, and thy lips from \_\_\_\_\_."
6. "My tongue shall speak of thy \_\_\_\_\_ and of thy \_\_\_\_\_ all the day long."
7. "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not \_\_\_\_\_."
8. "The words of the LORD are \_\_\_\_\_ words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."
9. "My tongue also shall talk of thy \_\_\_\_\_ all the day long."
10. "Deliver my soul, O LORD, from \_\_\_\_\_ lips, and from a \_\_\_\_\_ tongue."
11. "A wholesome tongue is a \_\_\_\_\_."
12. "The tongue of the just is as \_\_\_\_\_."
13. "There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, \_\_\_\_\_ altogether."
14. "These six things are abomination to the Lord: a proud look, a \_\_\_\_\_."
15. "\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."
16. "Whoso keepeth his \_\_\_\_\_ and his \_\_\_\_\_ keepeth his soul from troubles."
17. "A \_\_\_\_\_ worketh ruin."
18. "By thy \_\_\_\_\_ thou shalt be justified, and by thy \_\_\_\_\_ thou shalt be condemned."
19. "If ye abide in me, and \_\_\_\_\_ abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."
20. "Neither at any time used we \_\_\_\_\_ words...God is witness."

(Answers on page 26)



(Continued from page 15)

whelm, then my courage is renewed and I find firm security in the promises of my God."

Bible history abounds with glowing accounts of God's heroes, all of whom found unshakable security in the midst of insecurity.

How secure was Daniel in the lions' den? Just as secure as he had been on the streets of Babylon, because God was His security. Wherever He went, He went *with God*. And out of the lions' den came the triumphant declaration, "My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouth of the lions. They have not hurt me" (Dan. 6:21, NIV).

How secure did three young Hebrew men feel at the door of the fiery furnace? Recall their statement of unshakable faith: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. But if not..."—whether or not God chose to deliver them changed nothing; they were sure of their security.

How secure did Moses feel in the presence of Pharaoh? The strongest, most powerful dictator on earth was powerless to touch this chosen man of God.

How secure were Peter and John as they stood before the Sanhedrin and said to the Jewish authorities "We ought to obey God, rather than man"? They could be bold because they knew God was with them, they had a work to do, and God would make a way for His work to be done.

How secure was Paul as he stood

before governors, officers, the Jewish proconsul, even the Emperor? Paul was immortal until His work was done.

How secure was Jesus as He stood before Pilate? Jesus said it too plainly for mistake: "You could do nothing to me at all except it be given you from above." Why? Because God is in control.

How secure did Elijah feel as he stood on Mt. Carmel obeying God; one man against thousands of the opposition? Elijah had no reason to fear. He knew he was not alone.

What did all these men have in common? Simply this: They had a built-in security because their faith, their hope, their confidence were centered in the God to whom they had committed their lives. Whatever might happen, they knew that their lives were in the hands of God. They were relying on the promise so aptly presented in the Psalm of David, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (Ps. 91:1-2, NIV).

What of us? Where is our security? Are we attempting to find it in a world that is filled with danger, a world that is tottering on the brink of ruin? Or will we follow the example of Moses, David, Daniel, Elijah, Jesus and Paul, and look to God for our security?

Thank God for His sure and unfailing Word, that Word which offers us the surety of the "secret place of the

Most High" (Ps. 91:1). Thank God for the might of His "everlasting arms." Thank Him for the provision of "everlasting strength" (Isa. 26:4), He who "fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa. 40:28), He who has promised that He will "cover [us] with his feathers, and underneath his wings [we] will find refuge" (Ps. 91:4, NIV).

This is the promise of God, who is faithful, and who will do just as He said, now and through an eternity to come...if only we fulfill our part of the contract; if only we love and serve Him with all our heart. □

## ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 25

### Bible GIFTS and PRESENTS

1. Quail — Num. 11:31-32; Ex. 16:13
2. Gold, myrrh, and frankincense — Matt. 2:11
3. Coat of many colors — Gen. 37:3
4. Mantle — 2 Kings 2:13
5. Crown of righteousness — 2 Tim. 4:8
6. Manna — Ex. 16:4, 14-15
7. Esau — Gen. 32:13-15
8. Silver cup — Gen. 44:2
9. Honey, spices, money, myrrh, nuts, almonds — Gen. 43:11-12
10. Naaman — 2 King 5:21-25
11. Ahaz — 2 Kings 16:8
12. Babylon — 2 Kings 20:12; also Isa. 39:1; the Israelites would be taken captive to Babylon — 2 Kings 20:17-18
13. David, giving gifts for the building of the Temple of the Lord — 1 Chron. 29:1-23
14. Living sacrifice of ourselves — Rom. 12:1
15. Without spot or blemish — Lev. 1:3, 10

### Words, Words, Words

1. no guile. Rev. 14:5
2. without knowledge. Job 38:2
3. mine own mouth. Job 9:20
4. flattering. Ps. 12:3
5. evil, speaking guile. Ps. 34:13
6. righteousness, praise. Ps. 35:28
7. with my tongue. Ps. 39:1
8. pure. Ps. 12:6
9. righteousness. Ps. 71:24
10. lying, deceitful. Ps. 120:2
11. tree of life. Prov. 15:4
12. choice silver. Prov. 10:20
13. thou knowest it. Ps. 139:4
14. lying tongue. Prov. 6:16-17
15. death, life. Prov. 18:21
16. mouth, tongue. Prov. 21:23
17. flattering mouth. Prov. 26:28
18. words, words. Matt. 12:37
19. my words. John 15:7
20. flattering. 1 Thess. 2:5

## A Prayer

*That I may grow a little braver  
to face life's trials and never waver  
from high ideals that I have made;  
to face life squarely, unafraid;*

*That I may yet more patient be  
with those who, faltering, lean on me,  
to profit by mistakes I've made  
and let them from my memory fade.*

*That I may always faithful be  
to those who put their trust in me.  
For these, dear heavenly Lord, I pray  
that I may prove worthwhile today!*



## A Recipe for Happiness

*Take a quart of joy and goodness,  
A bushel of love and peace,  
Twelve pounds of meekness spirit,  
And toss in some gentleness.*

*Take a large amount of giving,  
And spread it generously;  
Read directions in the good Book,  
And apply them faithfully.*

*Garnish well with human kindness  
On crystal leaves of cheer,  
And you'll have the fruits of happiness  
Through every day and year.*

In return for loyalty, we are showered with blessings from on high. Our pathway glows with the richness of God's love and our hearts are filled with peace and hope. If we will take the Word of God for our Friend, it will govern our thoughts, words and actions. It will become our comfort, our trust, our staff; it will be a steadfast Friend because we have opened our hearts to obey its mandates. — *Selected.*

*The most illuminating light that ever spread its silvery rays upon the human heart is the light of understanding that comes to the person who has banished hatred, envy and selfishness.*

If only we would visualize Christ standing beside us, the more earnestly and the more often we would ask, "Master, what wilt thou have me to do?" surely we would have less failures and more victories in the way of Life!

## I AM RESPONSIBLE

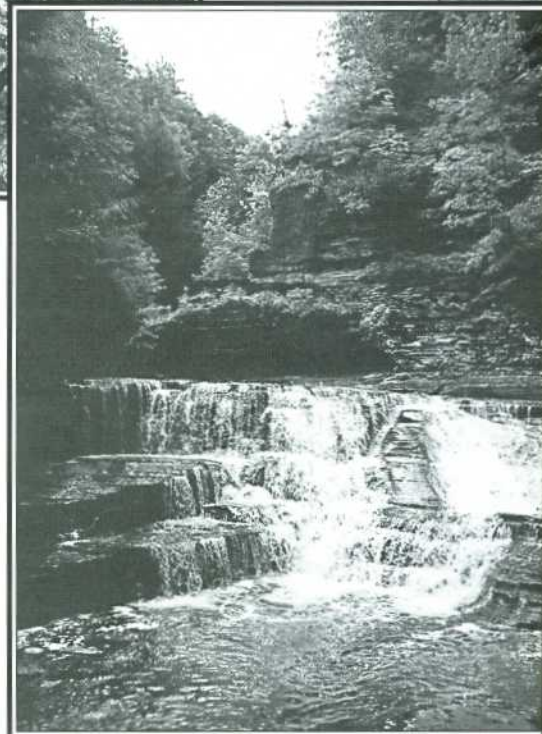
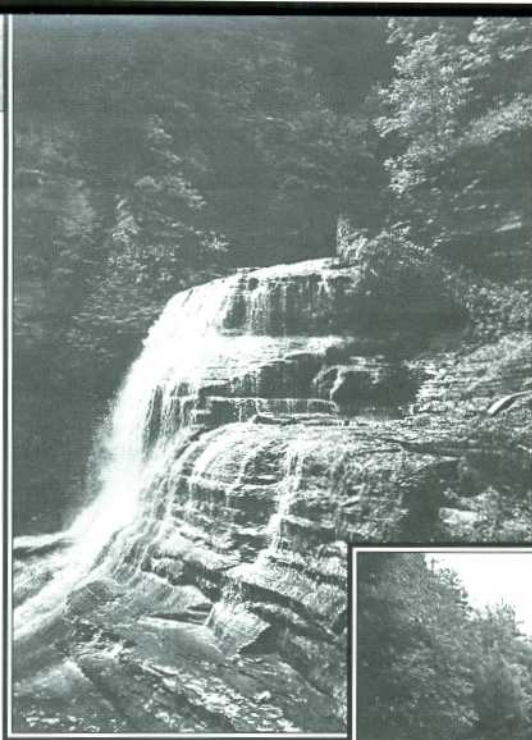
*(Continued from page 2)*

felt their message? Do we realize what it is to be lights in the world and salt of the earth when our Master has given the command? To evade our responsibility, to blame someone else, only brings disaster. Look at the ill that befell David when he failed to act responsibly. Look at king Saul, blaming the people and losing his kingdom, his honor, and his right of successorship.

Accepting responsibility is the route to freedom, joy, hope, and ultimately salvation. Accepting responsibility at home results in happy relationships and strong bonds in Christ. Accepting responsibility in the community brings peace and wholeness, stability and growth.

It all comes down to one fact: I am responsible. I must choose, I must decide whom I will serve.

And I need to decide today. □



*To have freedom is only to have that which is absolutely necessary to enable us to be what we ought to be, and to possess what we ought to possess.*

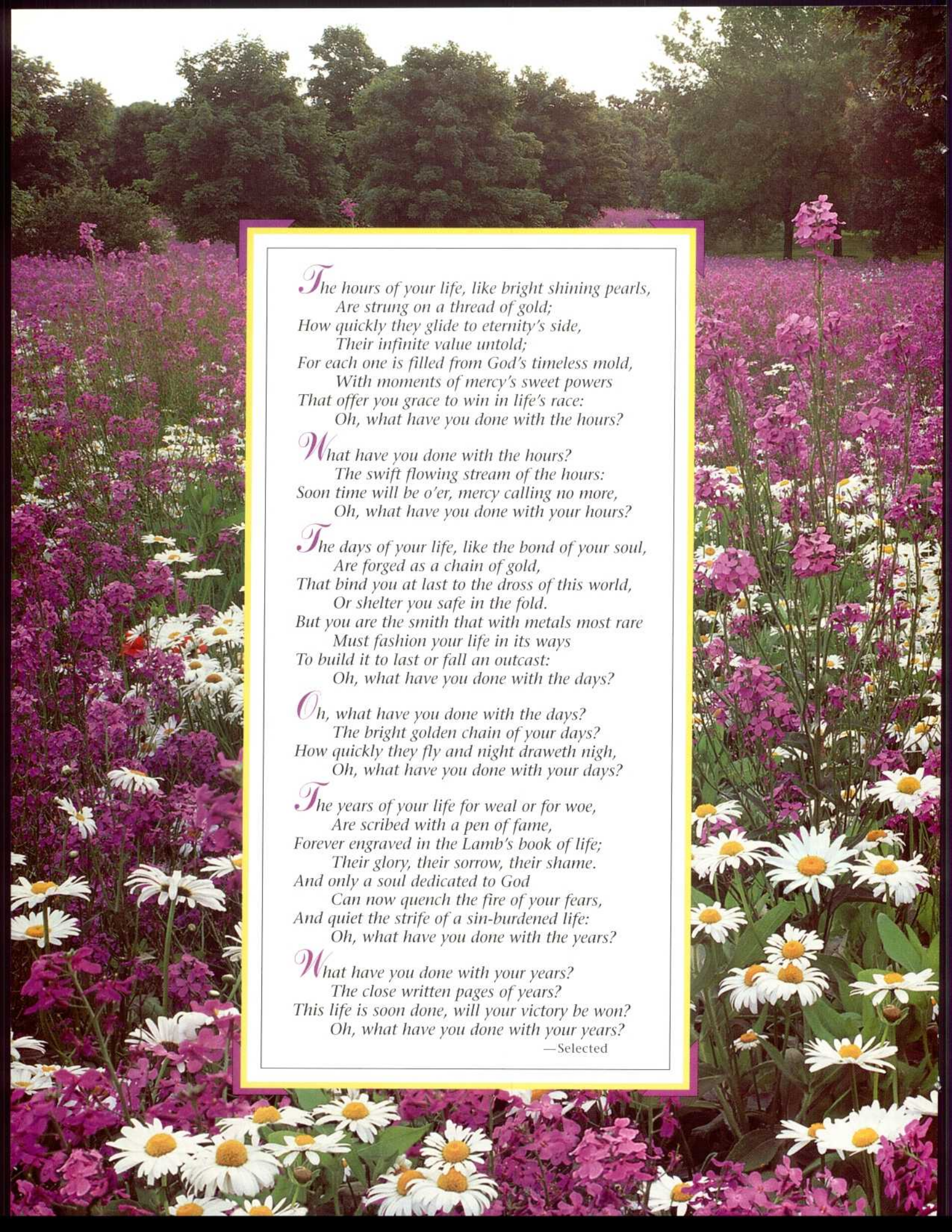
The greatest freedom man has is his freedom to discipline himself.

*We must first have faith in God before we can enjoy the blessing of liberty, for God is the author of liberty.*

Liberty is like a sharp knife. But it may be held in the hands of a doctor or the hands of a convict.

*Is entire consecration our aim, or are we like the boy who said to his mother: "I would like to be just such a Christian as Father is, for no one can tell whether he is a Christian or not?"*





*The hours of your life, like bright shining pearls,  
Are strung on a thread of gold;  
How quickly they glide to eternity's side,  
Their infinite value untold;  
For each one is filled from God's timeless mold,  
With moments of mercy's sweet powers  
That offer you grace to win in life's race:  
Oh, what have you done with the hours?*

*What have you done with the hours?  
The swift flowing stream of the hours:  
Soon time will be o'er, mercy calling no more,  
Oh, what have you done with your hours?*

*The days of your life, like the bond of your soul,  
Are forged as a chain of gold,  
That bind you at last to the dross of this world,  
Or shelter you safe in the fold.  
But you are the smith that with metals most rare  
Must fashion your life in its ways  
To build it to last or fall an outcast:  
Oh, what have you done with the days?*

*Oh, what have you done with the days?  
The bright golden chain of your days?  
How quickly they fly and night draweth nigh,  
Oh, what have you done with your days?*

*The years of your life for weal or for woe,  
Are scribed with a pen of fame,  
Forever engraved in the Lamb's book of life;  
Their glory, their sorrow, their shame.  
And only a soul dedicated to God  
Can now quench the fire of your fears,  
And quiet the strife of a sin-burdened life:  
Oh, what have you done with the years?*

*What have you done with your years?  
The close written pages of years?  
This life is soon done, will your victory be won?  
Oh, what have you done with your years?*

—Selected