

Megiddo Message



Prisoners of Ourselves

Megiddo Message

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- Give you courage for these uncertain times
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Editorially Speaking...

Master or Mastered?

IS the Christian a dead leaf to be caught by an upsurge of wind, tossed about in the air, and the next moment swept downward in a different course?

Is the Christian a thermometer, whose mercury races high under the pressure of heat, only to plunge below zero when struck by an icy blast?

He is not. But the reason is not that his external circumstances are always placid and undisturbing; rather, his evenness of temperament is the result of an undisturbable *inner* calm. "My heart is fixed," cried the Psalmist in a moment of strong spiritual impulse. He was a man who knew well the meaning of change. But through all he retained his confidence in the God of his salvation, and ultimately triumphed in self-mastery.

"My heart is fixed"—*is* it? Can *we* say this? Or does close examination reveal that our emotions are affected by public opinion and adverse circumstances? Are we the master of our moods, or do our moods master us? When everything goes as we would wish, we are buoyant—who would not be! But let the tide turn against us for a while, and what then? Do we sink into a mood of depression? Does everyone know at a glance that the clouds are dropping cold water on our happiness?

We should think of Jesus—did He ever let moods govern Him? Everyone turned against Him—even His disciples forsook Him; but do we read that He became depressed?

Or think of a lesser mortal, the apostle Paul. Was Paul ever "under the weather"? After his unjust jail sentence, do we find him looking forlorn and despondent, as though the world had treated him bitterly? Did Paul ever feel sorry for himself?

Paul was buffeted continually, but he was buoyant. He was stricken, but not subdued; battered, but not beaten; cast out, but not cast down; whipped, but not whining; imprisoned, but not impoverished. Fearful as was his catalogue of suffering, there is in Paul no hint of any attitude of dejection, self-pity or gloom.

Paul was buoyant! Hear him glory in tribulations, in necessities, in reproaches, in distresses for Christ's sake! (II Cor. 12:10). He wrote again, "... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts" (Rom. 5:3-5, RSV).

He who is without God and without hope in the world may be mastered by his moods; under pressure and oppression his face may mirror his plight and despair. But not so the true abiding Christian. His is a joy unspeakable, a faith unshakable, and a peace indestructible. For by the help of God he is the master of his moods. ●●

Prisoners of Ourselves

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, Thou Mighty Creator of heaven and earth; Thou God in whom we live, move, and have our being: Upon Thee we are dependent for the very breath we breathe, and the life that we possess. Help us to realize more and more Thy goodness, Thy might and power, as we behold the wonders of creation and meditate upon Thy plan.

Help us to come before Thee with humble hearts, willing to listen to Thy Word, willing to let Thy law make impressions upon our minds so deep that they will never be effaced.

May we not seek ease, repose, days of uninterrupted smooth sailing; but may we court trials, conflict, the bearing of crosses, a constant state of siege with the flesh, as we battle relentlessly against evil.

Grant us the strength to live above the world, above the flesh, to banish from our lives every trace of sham and hypocrisy. Help us to set our affections on things above, using the things of here and now as a means to a much greater end, and not as an end in themselves.

May we borrow from the brightness of that approaching day, and now be shining lights for Thee in a world where many lives are darkened by sin, insecurity and despair. Help us to be afraid of ourselves, aware how easily some desire of the flesh may enthrall us again after we have been set at liberty by Thy superior knowledge.

May we spend each day in watchfulness, in avoiding the things that would weaken our moral fiber, and pursuing those things which bind us to Thee.

Be with all who are striving to learn and live Thy truth, with those in sickness or trouble, with those who are carrying on under adverse circumstances, and who do not have our advantage of constant assembly.

Encourage, support and help as Thou knowest best. Strengthen us to finish the work we have so nobly begun, and may we see Thy hand in all the affairs of life and always say, "Thy will be done."

In Jesus' worthy Name we pray. Amen.

DISCOURSE

IN THE following words, an eyewitness relates his reaction on seeing a human being deprived of his freedom.

"Recently I was riding in a bus from Rochester to Utica. Two young lads sat a few seats in front of me. Viewed from the rear, they seemed to be looking at the scenery and conversing like other passengers. Presently it came time for them to leave the bus. Then I noticed that they were handcuffed to each other. It is hard to describe the expression of their faces as they walked down the aisle. There was a look of humiliation, touched with bitterness. I tried to think how I should feel if I were led through a staring crowd shackled like a wild animal that could not be trusted with its freedom. Bitter is the shame of being a prisoner of the law.

Another kind of prisoner has been made familiar to us by recent wars. Brave men have been captured by enemy troops and held as prisoners of war. Captive peoples have been confined in prison camps. They have suffered privation, even torture, but they have been under no shadow of shame.

And there is still another class of prisoners. They are not shackled or subjected to public disgrace like prisoners of the law. They are not starved or brainwashed like prisoners of war. They may walk the streets or sit in their homes without any external restraint. Yet they are imprisoned by chains of their own making. We ourselves may be among these.

Psalm 142 is headed with this inscription: "A prayer of David when he was in a cave." If, as some think, this psalm voices the mood of David when he was in the cave of Adullam where he was rallying his followers around him, then it is not written from a physical prison. Yet this psalm contains the petition: "Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to thy name!" (RSV). David's spirit was in prison although his body was unfettered. So is it with many a person.

Prisoners of Our Bodies

Some of us may be prisoners of our bodies. Our

minds dwell in bodies; and whenever the body gets the upper hand, our spirits are imprisoned.

Watch an active small girl at play out in the open air. How carefree of her body she seems to be. It is just a wonderful instrument to be used in pursuing her play. Then think of that person fifty years later, and consider how much the concern of her body may have come to dominate her thought and consume her time. The care of the body's health, the coddling of its comforts, the beautifying of its appearance—all this becomes almost a major concern of some people. When this happens it is evident that the body has gotten the better of the spirit.

There are professional invalids in the world who spend their time and money going from doctor to doctor seeking health, yet are so completely shackled by self-pity and negative thinking that the cleverest doctor can do them no good. This same inconsistency exists among professing life-seekers. They tell themselves they want to be healed; they go to the Great Physician who is able to heal every malady. But they approach Him with a negative mental attitude, saying, "There is no hope, I cannot be cured. Evil habits have such a stranglehold on me that my disease is incurable. I cannot free myself from the prison of my own making."

A little girl, once hearing a sermon on I Corinthians 9:27, where Paul said "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection," reported at home that the minister said, "I keep my soul on top." Both Paul and the little girl had caught the spirit of Christ. Jesus merited the title of the Great Physician not primarily because of specific illnesses which He cured, but because He put the body in its proper place in the wholeness of life. He did heal men's bodies, but He told them that if they would seek first "the kingdom of God and his righteousness," their bodily needs would fall into their proper and secondary place. He knew that when persons are fired with a consuming purpose they become almost indifferent to food and raiment—yes, even to pain.

Much as we deplore war and its diabolical devastation, we cannot deny that during war people give less time to coddling their bodies and worrying about their peace of mind. We can see the point and the rebuke in the ex-soldier's remark: "During the war we died *for* things; now we die *of* things." Big purposes free us from petty fretfulness and little ailments. And there can be no bigger purpose for us to pursue than the purpose of fitting ourselves to merit eternal salvation.

Prisoners of Our Possessions

God can also keep us from being imprisoned by

our earthly possessions. We like to surround ourselves with our belongings. It is natural and right to desire nice things around us. God has given us "richly all things to enjoy." Our personalities are in part revealed by the furnishings of our homes. These surroundings show our taste, develop our artistic interests, enlarge our lives. But a house is made to be lived *in* and not to be lived *for*. Some women are better housekeepers than homemakers. Our material possessions are meant to be the scaffolding by which we build more stately mansions for our souls. But they can become our prisons.

We might well heed the words of the poet:

**Lift up the curtain; for an hour lift up
The veil that holds you prisoners in this world
Of coins and wires and motor-horns, this world
Of figures, and of men who trust in facts,
This pitiable, hypocritic world
Where men with blinkered eyes and hobbled feet
Grope down a narrow gorge and call it life.**

Jesus sensed the danger of our being enthralled by earthly things, and that is why He uttered the following words of caution: "Take no [anxious] thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:25, 33). He would have us keep the right proportion between what we live *on* and what we live *for*.

As Jesus looked out upon life in His time He saw men interpreting life in terms of the physical and immediate. They were prisoners of themselves. People regarded money, power and pleasure the important things. The degeneracy in religion was such that ritual, ceremonies, robes and ornaments had displaced the truer values of faith, mercy and righteousness. While the body of mankind was vitally alive, and its interest in the things which could be seen and sensed was keen, the soul was slowly but surely dying. The arena and the circus were the centers of attraction, while the spiritual values were in eclipse.

But Jesus' position was the very opposite. He had said that material values were *not* the most important, that the life of the true Christian must not be interpreted in the terms of "What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewith shall we be clothed?" (v. 31). Man could not live by bread alone, but by eating every word of God. The significant things were not money, food, clothes, power and pleasures; but faith, hope, prayer,

patience and obedience. These were the superior values, these were the things to be sought with unabating vigor.

As a rule, we are attracted by the things which are seen, yet the material values we are so prone to delight in have their limitations. Earthly possessions may seem so real, but taken together they cannot provide us with peace of mind; they cannot bestow upon us genuine happiness, or assure us of a life that will never end. In our highest moments we realize that "the invisibilities are the realities, and the intangibles are the permanencies." As said the Great Apostle, "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:18).

A sage of the nineteenth century spoke words that describe so perfectly today's attitude as to make them seem currently spoken: "Things are in the saddle, and are riding mankind." If those words were true in Emerson's day, they are ten times truer today. Luxuries have become necessities, and mere "things"—what shall we eat, and drink, wear and use—are riding mankind more than at any time in the past, making our lives cluttered and complicated. The average salaried man or wage earner, in an effort to keep abreast of the times, spends his money months, and sometimes years, before he gets it, making him a virtual slave to his creditors.

Imprisoned by Our Passions

Furthermore, our bodies can imprison us by their passions. We know what strong fetters are forged by sinful habit. All about us among the worldlings there are slaves of drink and drugs, lust and greed. But among us also are those who can testify with the apostle Paul, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). They have found that through the power of the gospel God can so fill men and women with hope and the higher hungers, that they can deliver themselves from the bondage of degrading appetites.

In our journey through life we fetter ourselves with chains of anger, jealousy, impatience, envy, sensitiveness. They are chains of our own forging; fashioned with our own hands, securely attached to our lives by our own fingers; and by our own actions we add to their growing weight link by link until, like the Prophet of old, we are—you are—"I am a burden to myself" (Job 7:20). So wearying and depressing is the effect of these prison walls as to rob life of its present joys, and destroy its future hope.

Perhaps we have chained ourselves with the de-

sire to receive honor from men, and have become so concerned with what they may say and think about us that the desire for God's honor is secondary in our thoughts. There are people who live on praise and approbation. Give such a man his shot of praise in the morning, and he will be buoyant and happy all day. Deprive him of his morning shot, and he will be disagreeable and morose the whole day long—or at least until he gets his dram of approbation. But Jesus stands ready to break his fetters with His advice not to seek honor of men. "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44).

If we have surrounded ourselves with the confining walls of selfishness, covetousness, pride, hurt feelings, we face a tedious task when we attempt to break out of our prison. If, on the other hand, we banish the evils before they imprison us, we become God's freemen. Herein lies the great secret of freedom from sin's binding chains: Rout the evil before it becomes linked to you. Do not give one evil desire the chance to become established in your thoughts. It is easier to *keep* free than to *secure* freedom after once you have been shackled.

We may not be able to prevent the birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep them from making nests in our hair.

When we wittingly put off doing the things we know we ought to do, we strengthen the prison walls that enslave us. If we would call our trials experiences, and remember that every experience develops some latent force within us, we would grow in grace and knowledge, and be happy and contented, however adverse our circumstances. Too often we forget that temptation is a proving ground to break our will. If easily slighted or offended it shows we are still in a prison of our own making. If easily provoked to anger, the trying tasks we dislike the most are the best experience we could possibly have. Every step of our development into a perfect character is the removal of a fetter of our own ways.

We need God's grace to keep our hearts free from resentment against those who wrong us. A reporter once sought an interview with Roland Hayes, the great Negro singer. He found him in a dingy room where he was eating his meal because the hotel denied him a better place of dining. The reporter exploded in anger, but Hayes said: "My earliest teacher in voice, himself a Negro, told me that as an artist, a black artist, I would suffer terribly if I allowed the barbs to penetrate my soul; but if my heart was right, and my spirit divinely disciplined, then nobody in all the world would be able

to hurt me. I now know that this is true. I try every moment of every day to live in such awareness of the divine that no bitterness can creep into my heart. Thus I have learned how to be happy, and I have discovered that nobody in all the world can hurt me except myself."

When a person can attain such an attitude, he has escaped from the imprisoning bitterness of mind and heart. In the words of Henry van Dyke:

"Self is the only prison that can ever bind the soul:
Love is the only angel who can bid the gates unroll;

And when he comes to call thee, arise and follow fast;

His way may lie through darkness, but it leads to light at last."

Today men delight in saying, I am a liberal. Well, if we are truly liberal, our hearts as well as our minds and our bodies must be liberated. When doors are shut against us, we are prone to draw into ourselves and lock our hearts against

Rate Your Recreation

A man's recreation—what he does when he is "off duty"—is a test of his true character. Not everyone is interested in the same type of diversion, and all do not have the same opportunity. But whatever one's interest and opportunity, good sense and Christian discernment are absolute necessities.

Will you be vacationing this season? Your Christian responsibility must go with you. Consider these thoughts:

- 1) Is my recreation in harmony with the law of God and the spirit of His Word?
- 2) Does my recreation tend to obscure my vision of God?
- 3) Is my recreation truly re-creative, building up physical, mental and spiritual strength?
- 4) Does my choice use only a justifiable amount of time, strength and money—or is it extravagant?
- 5) Does my diversion interfere with prior claims of greater importance?
- 6) Is it helpful and not injurious or dangerous to me? Is it apt to weaken another's spirituality or be physically dangerous to others?
- 7) Is it in harmony with my high life purpose and does it help me to attain my goal? As a Christian, I must keep the goal in sight.
- 8) Is my diversion one in which I can participate to the glory of God?

others. When others give us the cold shoulder, we turn to them a cold back. When we know that another dislikes or suspects us, we are likely to do the things which tend to arouse more dislikes or suspicion. Thus distrust begets distrust. Thus hearts freeze up into prisons of our own making, and we forget the divine injunction: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32).

Growth Versus Decay

We are made to grow. The creative God made us for creative growth. Growth is the law of our being. Violate that law, and you violate yourself.

It is true that the body ceases to grow after a certain time, and the process of slowing down and eventual decay sets in. This process of slowing down and decay may be minimized and postponed by inner states of mind, but in the end the body is destined to the dust. The mind and soul, however, are not necessarily linked with this inevitable bodily decay. Yet they may be.

Many people are so closely linked with their bodies that the decay of their body means the decay of the person. They have lived to make the body comfortable—to ward off sickness and death from it, to satisfy the cravings and appetites—so that their very persons are bound up with the fortunes of the body. When it decays, they decay. Life's supreme tragedy is to watch the triple decay of body, mind, and spirit in yourself or in another. No tragedy can compare with this.

This decay of the person causes more unhappiness than all other causes combined. All other causes are marginal; this is central. For to know that the central purpose of our being—the thing for which we were made—is unfulfilled, or worse, is being violated, should cause fundamental unhappiness at the very center of our being.

To the spiritually alert, no amount of marginal happiness can atone for this central satisfaction. Jesus said, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." If we are not a creative and growing person, we are an unhappy person. This central frustration spreads its dissatisfaction through all marginal satisfactions and makes them curdled and sour. On the other hand, when we are fulfilling the purpose for which the Creator designed us by being a growing personality, then this central satisfaction spreads through all the marginal happenings of life. Whether these happen-

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TIMELY TOPICS

IS our world today inhabited and controlled by demons, devils, ghosts and witches? Does the popular movie, "The Exorcist," present a true picture of supernatural power with which each of us must live? If we accept the Bible and place our confidence in the God who inspired that Bible, we must answer NO. It is a film which no Christian should witness. The current fascination with the occult could have decidedly injurious effects. Taken seriously, it serves only to weaken man's own responsibility for his conduct—a trend which *must* be reversed before mankind can progress morally; and a trend which *will* be reversed when Christ returns with power to

What About the Occult?

silence the forces of darkness and error.

Primitive peoples have always believed in unseen spirits, both good and bad. Evil spirits were thought to bring bad luck, poor crops, and even death. Uncivilized tribes would offer sacrifices of all kinds to their gods or "good spirits" when they needed rain, or when a member of the tribe was dying. Tribes occupying the Sepik river region of New Guinea today build what is known as the *haus tambaran*, a cathedral to house the spirits. A Dutch priest working with these people said, "I think it's ridiculous in this day and age to preach sin, Satan and hell to these people. In fact, when you come to think of it, we're almost as superstitious as they are."

This is a serious indictment of the status of religion today. For a member of an advanced (?) civilization to succumb to a belief in evil spirits is serious enough. But for any person or organization which purports to be "Christian" to attribute the existence of evil to devils and evil spirits—which must have been created by God!—is tragic.

Could we imagine a father who loves his children hiring a drug pusher to entice them into acquiring the drug habit? Could we imagine a government passing laws for the benefit of its citizens and then hiring people to infiltrate the country to entice others to break those laws? Could we conceive of an army training its soldiers to be proficient in battle and then hiring soldiers to help the enemy?

If God is the Creator of the universe and everything in it, and we know He is, then He must have been the creator of evil spirits, demons, devils, and witches, *if* such things exist. Man, then, is at the mercy of all these evil forces which God has created to harass him through life.

It would be discouraging enough to a striving Christian to know that a powerful being was at large in the world to tempt him to do wrong, if he could see and recognize him. But the devil of theology is an invisible monster never seen by anyone.

In a recent issue of a periodical published by an organization which believes strongly in a literal devil, the following statement is made: "Professed Christians and non-Christians alike claim success at exorcism: Catholics, Protestants, Jewish cabalists and even voodoo worshipers. Is God behind any of them? The Bible says, 'God is not a God of disorder but of peace' (I Cor. 14:33, Jerusalem Bible). He certainly does not work against himself by supporting opposing factions." But if God created or allowed a literal devil to tempt mankind, would He not be working against Himself? He would be defeating the very purpose for which He placed man on this earth, to select the inhabitants for His future kingdom on earth. The words of the apostle James are incontestable: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1:13-14). The Apostle leaves no room here for the traditional devil to tempt us to do wrong.

The mind of man has been intrigued for centuries with the occult. King Saul visited the woman of Endor who had a "familiar spirit," similar to those today who claim to have clairvoyant powers. Isaiah condemned those who "seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:19-20).

Closely allied with the belief in a literal devil is the practice of witchcraft. After a merciless persecution of purported "witches" during the middle ages, the practice seemed to be dying out. But recently witchcraft is showing a decided comeback—which is due, at least in part, to the disenchantment many feel toward established religion. Witches are supposed to possess supernatural powers and are organized into "covens" consisting of 13 witches each. There are reported to be over 200 covens in

the United States, and the number is growing. Witchcraft is taught in many colleges and even in some high schools there are professed "witches."

Witchcraft and all related practices are strongly condemned in the Bible. God's law to Israel classified all such among the "abominations" of the heathen nations: "When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that . . . useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God" (Deut. 18:9-13). Samuel placed "witchcraft" on a par with "rebellion" (I Sam. 15:22). The apostle Paul listed "witchcraft" a "work of the flesh" (Gal. 5:22).

The human mind possesses a great fascination for the mysterious. Ghosts, fairies, and haunted houses have made countless subjects for the novelist and storyteller. But such should have no attraction for the serious Christian. For in each "story" if all the *facts* were known, there would be no ghosts or spirits to write about. The story is told of an investigation of a house in England which was "haunted by a ghost." (For some reason, England seems to have had more than its share of "haunted" houses.) This particular house was being investigated by a man who did not believe in ghosts and was determined to get to the bottom of the claim that each night the ghost of the former owner would return and rummage through the attic. The man moved into the house. The first night the new occupant slept in the house, he heard the noise in the attic. He immediately went to the attic, but unfortunately the light would not work and he could see nothing. He was almost convinced of the reality of ghosts. However, investigation the next morning revealed a large raccoon had been the cause of the disturbance.

In condemning these forms of psychic phenomena, we do not intend to include revelations from God which have been conveyed to men in dreams, visions and other manifestations. But at the present time, God is not actively manifesting Himself to mankind. God's Word is all we have to guide us, and it is all we will have until Christ and His forerunner Elijah the prophet return.

In the interim, Christians must be exceedingly careful not to be misled and deluded by extravagant claims of spiritistic activity. There have been

many attempts to converse with the dead. Elaborate schemes have been set up by believers and others to try to prove life exists after death. But so far there has been no veritable success. And for good reason: "The living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything" (Eccl. 9:5).

The Bible teaches that man is responsible for his own actions. No one else—no demons and no devil. Paul foresaw that "evil men"—not evil spirits or demons or devils—"should wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (II Tim. 3:13). "Evil men" are the *deceivers* and the *deceived*. The source of all evil is clearly stated by Jesus to be the human heart: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, . . ." and all the evils which defile the human character (Mark 7:21-23). All proceed from "within, out of the heart of man," not from Satan and his demons and spirits. We will surely be condemned by God if we give obeisance to "gods that [come] newly up" (Deut. 32:17)—and demons and spirits are among these.

The teaching of a literal devil is a disservice to mankind. It implants a feeling of despair and frustration in the mind, for it is a power beyond man to control. (Here again a Bible principle is violated—if devils tempt men beyond human power to resist, then God does not prevent our being tempted above what we are able to bear, as He has promised—I Cor. 10:13.) Belief in a literal devil implants a feeling that one is powerless to control his evil instincts, that he is constantly being manipulated by an evil superpower. This is NOT true. The word "devil" as used in the Bible simply means an adversary or opposer; it is a personification of evil. Our founder Rev. L. T. Nichols summarized the Bible teaching on the subject when he said, "If you want to see the devil, look in the mirror."

For further evidence on the subject of the devil and demonology as used in the Bible, send for our booklet, *The Devil and Hell of the Bible*. ●●

One Smile

Someone gave me a smile today.
I tried my best to give it away
To everyone I chanced to meet
As I was going down the street.
But everyone that I could see
Would give my smile right back to me.
When I got home, besides *one* smile
I had enough to reach a mile!

"If Any Man Will Do . . ."

Among the divine promises contained in the Bible is one on which every one of us depends—the promise that God will impart His saving knowledge to all who will make use of it. This promise seems to be expressed by Jesus' words in John 7:17, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine. . . ."

Though this thought is solidly grounded in the divine plan, several of our readers have questioned its association with John 7:17. For the benefit of other readers who have questions, we are printing the following letter and explanation.

Our correspondent writes:

"Please explain something to me. In one of your books, you quote John 7:17 in part and out of context, like this: 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,' and you put a period there. You quote it this way to prove that a person who will do God's will shall have opportunity to learn what His will is.

"I don't doubt the truthfulness of that, but that is not at all what this particular verse is saying. The subject Jesus is discussing is not whether a person will live long enough to learn the truth, but whether He is teaching the truth from His Father or merely making up His own doctrine."

Our correspondent is correct; Jesus' subject was the authority behind the words He was speaking, whether they were from His Father, or whether they were His own. This is a point which proved a major stumblingblock to the Jews. When Jesus "stood up in the temple, and taught" (John 7:14-15), they marvelled that He was even literate! They did not expect Him to be able to communicate their own language effectively, much less to testify the words of God, so low was their opinion of Him!

Let us read John 7:17 in its context. We will begin with verse 16: "Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him" (John 7:16-18).

Many of the newer translations express the same thought, or emphasize it. For example, "My teaching is not my own but his who sent me; anyone who chooses to do his will, shall understand whether my teaching comes from God or whether I am talking on my own authority" (Moffatt Bible). "The teaching that I give is not my own; it is the teaching of him who sent me. Whoever has the will to do the will of God shall know whether my teaching comes from him or is merely my own" (NEB). "Anyone who resolves to do his will will know whether my teaching comes from God, or originates with me" (Goodspeed). "If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (RSV).

Clearly Jesus' point is the *authority* with which He was teaching. His reply (vs. 16-18) to the Jews' taunt (v. 15) is an attempt to establish His God-given right to teach and preach. He says, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." Jesus sought to convince them of *what* He said by telling them *whose words* He was giving them. He was teaching the words of His Father, who had sent Him and had commissioned Him to preach in His name. And anyone, He says, who is resolved to do the will of the Father will not be so blind and resistive as they were proving themselves to be; all such would recognize the divine authority behind His words.

This—and not the thought that God will enlighten all who will obey His will—is the main point of Jesus' words in this text (John 7:17). However, nothing in the passage contradicts the thought that all who will do God's will shall have opportunity to learn it. We might even observe that indirectly this thought *is* included in the text; for how could a man who was resolved to do God's will be able to recognize the divine Source of Jesus' doctrine if he had not first been made acquainted with the doctrine of God?

We also might observe the emphasis Jesus places on "doing" or "practicing" God's will—His whole concern is with such. Simply to know that Jesus received His doctrine from the Father and taught

to glorify *Him* would benefit no one. He addresses His thought to those who "will do [God's] will"—possibly inferring that the Jews to whom He was speaking did not fit in that category.

However, applying John 7:17 to the authority behind Jesus' teaching does not alter in the least the oft-repeated Bible principle that all who will do God's will shall have opportunity to learn of the knowledge of God. Knowledge is among the first of God's requirements for men, for "all things that pertain unto life and godliness come through the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue" (II Peter 1:4). Wisdom is classified as "the principal thing" (Prov. 4:7), therefore God could not leave any prospective heir of salvation without this fundamental enlightenment.

Through the ages God has used various means of revealing Himself and His knowledge to men. "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel" (Ps. 103:7). This was knowledge by open demonstration and revelation. But all people in all ages did not have this opportunity of seeing His acts and His ways, as did the Israelites. Therefore He arranged that His laws and plan be written. Accordingly, "He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions" (Ps. 107:20). Also, "Have not I written unto thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth" (Prov. 22:20-21).

God also has made His knowledge available to men through human agents. Paul reveals this fact: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, . . . that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:11-14). The knowledge of God delivers those who receive it from the deception so widely practiced in the name of religion.

Paul was a human agent appointed by God to dispense God's knowledge to those who would make use of it. He "was made a minister" to preach "the hope of the gospel . . . according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God." And Paul also states to whom He was to carry this knowledge: it was "even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the

Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:23-29). Paul preached and taught and warned with one objective: "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." It was all for the benefit of those who would do the will of God.

Jesus came to reveal God's knowledge to men, and He made several statements that show that all who will use that knowledge will find it. He said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Whoever should follow Him should "have the light of life," the knowledge by which he should walk. But Jesus also revealed that God does not purpose to give His knowledge to each and all. He said to His disciples: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries [the hidden wisdom now revealed] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt. 13:11). On another occasion He thanked God for withholding knowledge from the "wise and prudent" of the world, who would make no use of the knowledge, and for revealing it to "babes," humble ones ready to listen and to learn (Matt. 11:25).

God sees that His knowledge is made available to all who will benefit from it, but we must not assume that acquiring this knowledge is an automatic or miraculous process. There is no one dramatic moment when the knowledge of God suddenly takes hold of a man and transforms him. Knowledge, though made accessible by God, is acquired as a result of a man's own initiative. "Every man" who would come to Jesus must "hear" and "learn" of the Father. As "it is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (John 6:45). And, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Knowledge comes to those who manifest a willingness to see it: "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5). The noble Bereans were commended for seeking knowledge in this way; it is recorded that "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Not only acquaintance with God's knowledge is promised to the earnest seeker, but *full* knowledge is assured: "... if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Phil. 3:15). No prospective child of God will ever be lost because he did not have opportunity to know the way of God. Indeed, if any man will do His will "he shall know of the doctrine." ●●



Meditations

On the Word

LACK of control in the individual is the world's basic problem today. The conquest of our own individual selves is a difficult undertaking. No military campaign presents more hazards.

In one sense, it is a personal battle, yours to win or lose, and you yourself are the general. In the conquest or control of self the test of our generalship is the skill with which we use the resources at our command. Friends may offer good counsel, our companions may assist us in various ways; but in the grand climax *we* must take the steps required to have our body and will and emotions in subjection to Christ.

The apostle Paul, that courageous champion for the cause of Christ, was in no way negligent in practicing to perfection the noble principles he proclaimed to his fellowmen. What nobler sentiment could a minister of the Gospel adopt for a theme through life than the above words! For when all is said and done, a store of good deeds toward the furtherance of God's purpose would be no delight to men who failed to live the precepts of the Master in their own daily lives.

Self-control entails a series of steps. Each step is to be taken with the object of leading us higher, to a nobler life. Each step aids in the complete transformation of our lives, changing our ways from the natural and instinctive to the spiritual and God-directed. To His disciples Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The old ways of life must go. New tastes, new desires, new ambitions and aspirations must replace the old manner of living. Self-denial must be practiced until we acquire the ability to make ourselves do the thing which has to be done

"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" —I Corinthians 9:27.

at the time it has to be done whether we like it or not.

Some of the phases of self-control affect such branches of our life as appetite, speech, affection, talent. An individual

who eats what he wants, when he wants and as much as he wants until his health suffers, lacks definitely in control. Individuals who talk without discretion, who utter unedifying words, or those who take the other extreme and say nothing when duty demands that they speak, need training in speech. Talent or ability which men possess, always must be re-directed when one enters the Christian way of life. As for our affections, there just has to be a complete change from the earthly to the heavenly.

It is not expected that we as normal individuals would go through the process of bringing our bodies into subjection just for its own reward. Far from it! There must be a definite reason, a firm purpose and a hope of reward which far surpasses that which has to be surrendered. If there is any secret to successful self-control it is this. When we have an intense desire for the eternal things, when our heart is filled with awe and wonder at the handiwork of God; and when we love Him with all our mind, might and strength, then we can control our ways and doings, for we are motivated by a higher desire.

Paul had this intense desire for eternal things. His great ambition was, as he wrote to Timothy, to save himself and them that heard him. While bearing the good news to others he watched himself. He could say, "This one thing I do," and with this objective, at the close of his career he wrote, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." He left his mark; he

made many converts; the world remembers him. But most of us would have to say, "These forty things I dabble in." Our interests are divided, we do not maintain a definite objective, and we wonder why we are unable to control ourselves properly.

In military combat a decisive victory can never be achieved merely by winning small battles at scattered points while the central stronghold remains secure. So our struggling to master self will be unsuccessful when the center, the heart, is not fixed. We cannot serve God and mammon. If we try to, our loyalty will be divided, resulting in conflict; and a heart filled with inner conflicts cannot meet the trials and strains which are outside.

Fears, indecisions, resentments, and such like are characteristics which must be controlled. One who is possessed by these is whipped at every turn, for he is weakened before he starts the battle. And how much can be said about the evils of self-centeredness! If you find you are putting yourself at the center of conversation, or if in every situation you want to be the central figure, then plan a deliberate change at once. Give others the credit or the central point, or if you are one of those rare individuals who surpass their fellowmen, then give God the glory. Give Him the credit, as have all His great men in the past. Paul always did this, and his life was a success.

When the author of Hebrews wrote, "Without faith it is impossible to please God," he meant also that with the absence of this essential element of faith we cannot bring our bodies into subjection to Christ. For this gigantic task we need the assurance that God is working with us, that He is back of us. We need a faith that is sound. We need the conviction that all our principles of belief concerning

God and His plan of salvation are well-founded, that there is nothing questionable. We must feel that He is interested in our welfare, that His angel stands ready to guard and help our sincere efforts. Then when a crisis develops, instead of saying, "I want this, and if I don't get it I won't be happy," we can say, "I want this if it is the best thing for me. If I can't get it, I'll use the disappointment for higher purposes." Then we shall be making headway. We shall be useful, radiant and prepared to go forward.

All this adds up to one thing, and that is complete surrender to God. But this "pill" of complete surrender is not easy to take down. It has no sugar coating; it is plain bitter. Once swallowed, it has a marvelous effect. It then becomes comparatively easy to bring our bodies under, and keep them in control; for we allow God to lead and are willing to take what He gives, or do what He requires. When Jesus in Gethsemane said, "Not my will, but thine, be done," His victory may well be said to have been won even though the trial of the cross still awaited. He was resigned to His Father's will. Therefore nothing could hinder Him. ●●

From A Reader—

Decisions

As Christians, we must make many small decisions in our day-to-day life. Many of these decisions seem unimportant; we seldom give them much thought. Yet they really affect who we are and what we stand for. They are the building blocks of our big decisions.

Our job may consist of many small decisions. How do you work when no one else is around? Do you feel that you would leave a little early and come in late, or take extra time for lunch if only you could get by with it?

Sometimes it is hard to be a Christian in the little, seemingly unimportant things of life. It is easy to rationalize, "Everybody does it." But "everybody" doing wrong never made a wrong "right."

It seems sometimes that big decisions in life are easier than the small ones. We tend to think more seriously about them; we kneel and pray about the big ones.

But the little, unimportant decisions are what the Lord has given us to practice on in our daily lives. Being a follower of Christ isn't a simple matter. *Mrs. E. S., Wausau, Wisconsin*

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God."

Three Classes of Humanity

IT is a characteristic of human nature to try to make a shrewd bargain, to attempt to receive an unearned reward. People flock to an auction sale in the hope of buying merchandise for less than its true value; students at all grade levels have been known to cheat on examinations, hoping to get a better grade than that which they actually earned; laborers deliberately waste time on the job with the expectation of getting the same pay for less work.

And in the religious world it is little different. The average professing Christian takes his religion lightly, doing the least possible service for the Lord, trusting that somehow, some way he will be rewarded by being granted an entrance to heaven at his death (a false hope, nevertheless shared by the majority). He has devoted little time to the study of the Bible and his knowledge of the Book is meager at best, but he has been declared "saved" and he trusts that his salvation will spare him the confines of the tomb and usher him into blissful eternity at the end of his mortal existence.

In our modern world bargains may be found at auctions; degrees may be gained by purchased theses; paychecks may come for less productivity. But in the religious realm, where God is sovereign, only what has been earned will be paid. In God's scale of values professions and intentions weigh nothing. Only good deeds, good words, good works weigh in His scale. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed." At the Judgment credits cannot be begged, bought or borrowed. Each individual must stand on his own merits. God's servants, those who have hired out to Him, will be rewarded according to their works.

In the end, the worker will be rewarded for his works; the shirkers will be numbered among the unfaithful. Those who never hired out to Him will not be brought to account. "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be

judged by the law; for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:12-13).

Here we have the three classes identified: First, the ungodly who have sinned without knowing the law and will not be accountable; second, those who have sinned knowing right from wrong, and will be brought to Judgment; and third, those who heard the law and obeyed it, and who will likewise be brought to Judgment and judged faithful.

In our studies thus far on the subject we have completed the section on the faithful covenant-makers. In this issue, we will continue with the other two classes, following our outline:

- II. The Unfaithful Covenant-Makers
 - B. The Reward of the Unfaithful
- III. The Ungodly Class

We have learned that success in the Christian life does not come about by chance. Those who have engraved their names in the Book of Life, God's honor roll, did not do so without conscious effort. No one ever achieved perfection by happenstance. Rather, that status is gained by a daily walk in the ways of God, living a life dedicated to building Christian character. Contrariwise, those who become unfaithful do so of their own free will. All covenant-makers are given an equal opportunity to become faithful.

II. THE UNFAITHFUL COVENANT-MAKERS

Those who are in the end judged faithful or unfaithful will have earned that classification, for God is a righteous Judge; He makes no mistakes. God will show no partiality in judgment, He is no respecter of persons. Those who are judged unfaithful will be worthy of nothing better, for His righteous Judgment extends to all covenant-makers. **All who were called to be under covenant possessed the potential to become faithful; God is not to blame for their failure. It is "his own iniquities" that shall take the wicked, "and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins" (Prov. 5:22).**

B. The Reward of the Unfaithful

It is an everlasting principle of God "to give every man according to his works." It has been a part of the law of God from the very beginning and is stated and re-stated throughout the Scriptures.

Cain and Abel were among the first of whom we have record that were called into God's service. Both were given the same opportunity, yet one was righteous and the other wicked. The cause of Cain's wickedness lay within himself; it was his own decision to kill his brother. The Lord had said to Cain, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7), but Cain did not choose to do well. Because he did evil and killed his brother, he will be rewarded according to his works and will be numbered among the unfaithful.

This same everlasting principle was stated when the Law was given to Moses and it was one of the principles taught by Jesus and the apostles. Said Jesus: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). It will not be equal pay for unequal work, but pay according to every man's own work.

The apostle Paul, ordained by Jesus, taught the same: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7), and in his letter to the Romans he speaks of "God, who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6).

John the Revelator saw in vision "the dead, small and great, stand before God; . . . and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). And in the letter to the church at Thyatira, the same basic truth is stated: "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (Rev. 2:23). The message of Revelation was received from Jesus through His angels speaking to John and bears the stamp of divine approval: "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

1. God's Righteous Judgments. Knowing that God is Himself just and righteous, that He is omniscient as well as omnipotent, we can be sure that His servants will be rewarded justly. God recognizes neither race nor nationality: "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). "Justice and judgment are the habitation of [His] throne"; and He says, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his works, and ac-

ording to the fruit of his doings" (Ps. 89:14; Jer. 17:10).

Scripture writers agree that God is a righteous Judge. We will offer proof for this statement:

a. The witness of Jeremiah. "Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 32:19). **Jeremiah received his messages direct from God and he asserted God's ability to discern between the righteous and the wicked through His all-seeing eyes.**

b. The witness of Ezekiel. "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways. . . ." God further promised through Ezekiel that "if the wicked will turn from all his sins . . . and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live; . . . all his transgressions that he hath committed . . . shall not be mentioned unto him" (Ezek. 18:31, 21-22). **This proves that God offers equal opportunity to all to turn from sin and become one of His chosen ones.**

c. The witness of Peter. The apostle Peter described the Father as a righteous Judge, saying that "without respect of persons [He] judgeth according to every man's work," or, as it might be literally translated, "who judges each one impartially." **Surely God will show no partiality.**

d. The witness of Jesus through the Revelator. We need no better witness than that of Jesus, sent direct from the Father's right hand, by His angel to John on the Isle of Patmos. The Revelator was privileged to see the Judgment scene in a vision and to hear the voice of an angel say, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus . . . True and righteous are thy judgments," and again he heard another angel say, "These are the true sayings of God." One of these "true sayings" states that "in righteousness he doth judge and make war" (Rev. 16:5, 7; 19:11). Only an all-knowing God could judge righteously.

2. The Sword of the Lord. The class whom we identify as the ungodly, those who never made a covenant with God, will receive neither punishment nor pay. They lived their lives entirely outside God's law, hence are not subject to it. [This class will be fully discussed later.]

However, the unfaithful servants must pay for their evil deeds. They were afforded an opportunity which comparatively few of earth's millions ever shared, and because they spurned that opportunity and treated the word of God contemptuously, they must suffer the consequences. Their punishment ends with eternal death, but first they must be reminded of "all their ungodly deeds which

they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which [they] have spoken against him" (Jude 15). They must now work for the Lord under compulsion, cleansing the earth in preparation for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. They must serve in the Lord's army, which is figuratively described as His "sword."

From Revelation 19:15 we learn that Christ will have a "sword," indicating His army: "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations." That it goes "out of his mouth" indicates His control over His army. In verse 19 the ecclesiastical powers of earth are pictured as joined together "to make war against him that sat on the horse [Christ], and against his army."

We learn who makes up this "sword," or His army from Psalm 17:13: "Deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword." Other testimonies offer further proof:

a. **Jeremiah 51:20:** "Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee [the wicked] will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms [nations]." Jeremiah vividly pictures the destruction of Babylon in this chapter. Babylon is used to represent the forces of evil in Scripture phraseology, as in Revelation 18 where a voice from heaven is heard to say, "Come out of her [Babylon], my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (18:4), referring to the time of God's judgments upon the earth.

b. **Isaiah 13.** The prophet Isaiah also described the Lord's army, clearly portraying the judgments of God in this chapter: "I have given my warriors their orders and summoned my fighting men to launch my anger; they are eager for my triumph. Hark, . . . the sound of a vast multitude; hark, the roar of kingdoms, of nations gathering! The Lord of Hosts is mustering a host for war, men from a far country, from beyond the horizon. It is the Lord with the weapons of his wrath coming to lay the whole land waste . . . The Day of the Lord is coming indeed, that cruel day of wrath and fury [God's Judgments], to make the land a desolation and exterminate its wicked people" (vs. 3-5, 10, NEB).

c. **Isaiah 65.** Here again the Prophet speaks of the Lord's army and the time of His judgments: "I will not destroy the whole nation, . . . my chosen shall inherit them and my servants shall live there. . . . But you that forsake the Lord and forget my holy mountain, . . . I will deliver you to your fate, to execution, and you shall all bend the neck to the sword, because I called and you did not answer, I

spoke and you did not listen; and you did what was wrong in my eyes and you chose what was against my will. . . . my servants shall rejoice but you shall be put to shame; my servants shall shout in triumph . . . but you shall cry from sorrow and wail from anguish of spirit; . . . and the Lord God shall give you over to death" (vs. 8-15, NEB).

The suffering referred to is not physical, but mental. The unfaithful servants will be made to understand the great blessings they have missed and it will cause them to "cry from sorrow and wail from anguish of spirit." God is merciful and just, even with the unfaithful covenant-makers.

Because they refused to serve Him and turned away during their lifetime, they must now serve Him in His army. They were free to choose, and they chose to "forsake the Lord" and to "forget [His] holy mountain" (representative of His authority), and instead chose to follow the wicked ways of the world. Because they made the wrong choice, they must serve as conscripts under Christ, cleaning up the earth and making it a fit place for God's Kingdom.

3. The Second Death. After the unfaithful covenant-makers have completed their work of cleansing the earth, they will not be permitted to share in the glories of the Kingdom they have seen taking shape. They will realize what they have missed, but it will be too late to make amends. Jesus made this perfectly clear in His teaching. We read in Luke 13:23-28 in the New English Bible, "Someone asked him, 'Sir, are only a few to be saved?' His answer was: 'Struggle to get in through the narrow door; for I tell you that many will try to enter and not be able. When once the master of the house has got up and locked the door [the final separation], you may stand outside and knock, and say "Sir, let us in" but he will only answer, "I do not know where you come from Out of my sight, all of you, you and your wicked ways!" There will be wailing and grinding of teeth there, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrown out.'"

To be "thrown out" of the Kingdom represents the second death, penal death. The wicked or unfaithful servants will not be tormented forever as is sometimes taught, but will return to death's slumber. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death," but "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable," and all wicked unfaithful servants "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 2:11, 21:8). **The "lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" is not a literal lake of fire, but represents penal death, the**

second death as is clearly stated by the final phrase of the verse. A righteous God would not subject even the most abominable to such a cruel death.

Paul, writing to the brethren at Thessalonica, spoke of the righteous judgments of God, saying "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; . . . when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (II Thess. 1:6-9).

These verses picture the destruction of the unfaithful. Those who "obey not the gospel" must have known the gospel, hence were covenant-makers who failed to keep that covenant. The "flaming fire" is figurative of God's judgments as the "lake of fire" of Revelation. Their punishment is "everlasting destruction," verse 9, penal death or the second death. Such will be the end of all those who "hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them . . . Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. . . . But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things" (Rom. 1:18-19, 32; 2:2).

III. THE UNGODLY CLASS

That there is a class of individuals who are not accountable to God is obvious from numerous Scripture references. In the parable of the Nobleman who went into a far country to return later, it was his **own servants** who were called to account at his return. The Nobleman represented Christ who was to be taken up into heaven to return at some future date.

The prophet Daniel was given information concerning a time when "many that sleep in the dust of the earth" would be resurrected—**many**, but not **all**. Likewise the prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when "thy dead men shall live," when God's sleeping servants shall arise," when they "that dwell in dust [those long dead]" would be cast out of the earth, raised to mortal life to be judged (Isa 26:19). Again, it is "thy dead men," those who have pledged themselves to God's service, that will be raised, alluding to the fact that not all will be called to account.

Who are the class we identify as "ungodly"? The

multitudes who have lived and died, and many still living who have never heard or known of God.

A. The Ungodly Identified

As before stated in this lesson, Paul identified all three classes that we have been studying in one simple statement in his letter to the Romans: "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified . . . but where there is no law there is no transgression" (Rom. 2:12-13; 4:15, RVS). Again in chapter 5, verse 13, Paul amplifies the subject further: "Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law." **Those who never knew the law of God cannot be said to have transgressed against it.**

This same principle is also shown in the words of Jesus to His disciples: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin" (John 15:22). **Before they heard and learned of the Father they had a cloak of ignorance; after they learned, they lacked this cloak. Many never heard or learned of Him, hence have a cloak.**

1. **Ignorance as a Cloak.** Ignorance is the cloak that covers the sins of the ungodly. The aforementioned verses make this point crystal clear. None can be held accountable for sins committed if they had never heard or learned God's law. Because of this cloak, they will sleep eternally in the grave. The Scriptures are likewise plain on this point. The ungodly are said to—

a. **Be as though they had not been.** "For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been" (Obadiah 16). **The heathen nations, that know not God, shall disappear as though they never existed.**

b. **Sleep a perpetual sleep.** The prophet Jeremiah visualized the ungodly in his prophecy of the judgments of God: "For the Lord God of recompences shall surely requite. . . . and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts" (Jer. 51:56, 57). **They never knew God's law; they will not have to suffer, but sleep the sleep of death eternally.**

Reprints of these studies are available upon request.

ISRAEL

Yesterday Today Tomorrow

Introduction

Is the modern State of Israel a fulfillment of Bible prophecy? Is God blessing Israel today because of the promises He made to their fathers centuries ago?

Who are the Israel chosen of God to be His people forever?

What is the significance of the present-day "return" of Israelites to the homeland?

In four sections of this study, we have seen who is the true Israel who shall inherit God's eternal blessings. But what is the role of natural Israel? In this section we shall begin our study of certain specific prophecies relating to Israel and see how they relate to the entire scope of God's plan for the earth and mankind.

Modern Israel and Bible Prophecy

It began about 1878, when scattered and persecuted Israelites began to catch the spirit of independence that was coming alive in Europe at the time. If other subject people could regain their freedom, why not Israelites? Disraeli of England promoted the idea at the European Concert of Nations in 1878 by making it a matter of International Law that Jews be given the right to settle in Palestine. At the same time England assumed a general protectorate over the Asiatic provinces of Turkey, among which was Palestine.

Near the turn of the century, Dr. Herzl, as leader of the Zionists, actively advanced the movement among the Israelites by appealing to Jewish pride and patriotism. To promote the idea of returning to Palestine, the Zionists established societies among the Jews in various countries. Gradually the idea began to take hold, and the Jews started to return. Faster and faster they came, until the land began to be transformed and much of the non-Jewish population of the country was displaced. A total Palestinian population of less than

300,000 (by official U. S. government statistics in 1878), one-eighth Jewish and seven-eighths Arab, grew to a million, and two million, and three and four: now two-thirds Jewish and one-third Arab. A state was born and a nation built from the cast-offs of Europe and the Arab countries.*

A miracle? A fulfillment of Bible prophecy? Many believe so; yet the heart of the movement returning Jews to Israel has been political, not religious. The impetus came from a handful of writers and thinkers who were, in fact, anti-orthodox; not steeped in ancient Jewish law, but keenly aware of political and social changes sweeping the world. (Some devout Jews today even consider the movement a heresy because it has not been ushered in by the Messiah.) Israel today is not a nation united in serving God. Three religions exist side by side in Israel, though the vast majority of Israelis are Jews. In practice, however, only about 25 percent of Israelis observe and keep the many religious precepts. ‡

And very few are willing to recognize Christ as the Messiah.

The Significance of the Return

Among the serious students of the Bible are those who believe that the present revival of Jewry in the land of Palestine is a fulfillment of the writings of Israel's prophets. They believe God has special favor and special blessings reserved for natural Israel because of His promises to their fathers, and that the modern nation Israel is a definite witness to the faithfulness of God. They believe also that the present renaissance of this ancient people is closely associated with other omens (lawlessness, crime, pleasure-seeking, etc.)

* *Prophecy in the Making*, ed. by Carl F. H. Henry (A Report of the Jerusalem Conference, 1970).

‡ *Foder's Israel* (1973), pp. 74, 96, 161.

which according to Bible prophecy portend our Lord's second advent.*

These conclusions result from numerous prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments. We must examine the prophecies singly to get a complete picture of the subject. But in attempting to apply them, we should proceed with greatest caution; for when it comes to prophecy, we have no all-sufficient surety in interpretations. And we are, so to speak, treading on holy ground. We should realize that when we handle prophecy, we are handling the words of the Almighty God of heaven, and that His words are holy, inspired and divine; they are prophecies the fulfillments of which are as certain as the existence of the Omnipotent Being Himself.

We should remember also the words of the apostle Peter, that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:20-21).

Whether or not the application of various prophecies to modern-day Israel is best in all cases is difficult to judge, for we cannot claim to know all the workings of Omnipotence. God has not seen fit to reveal all His plans; thus our knowledge is at best incomplete. Nor can we claim to understand fully all He *has* revealed. (Even Daniel could not understand all that was revealed to him—Dan. 12:8).

All we can do is, using our limited ability to reason and relate, to apply His words as they would seem best to harmonize with the plainly revealed general teaching of the Bible. This done, we can only put our confidence in God and wait to see the working out of His divine purposes.

The restoration of Israel as it might appear in the light of Bible prophecy should not be disregarded, as there are numerous texts which would seem to lend credence (see Jer. 32:37; Isa. 11:12; Deut. 30:3; Ezek. 36:24). And we know that Bible prophecy is subject to more than one application. Recall how Jesus took Isaiah's prophecy of Himself (Isa. 61:1), which the prophet Isaiah foresaw as a Messianic hope for the latter days, and applied it to His first advent by omitting the "day of vengeance" which is singular to His second advent (Luke 4:18-19).

Our only caution must be that we scrupulously avoid any applications of Scripture which would

militate against plainly revealed Bible teachings; for the whole of the inspired Word must present *one* divine harmony.

Long-Range Plans for Israel?

We know that "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:17). Therefore, if He in His omnipotent wisdom sees purpose or advantage in favoring one people above another, it is His divine prerogative to do so. He can give or withhold, as best suits His long-range plans.

God made a covenant with Abraham and his seed, promising to give them the land of Canaan for "an everlasting possession." The promise was conditional, and Abraham met the conditions; yet Abraham received none of this "everlasting possession," "no, not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5). In like manner, many other of the promises to Abraham proved to be long-range. In the meantime, Abraham died; and he who merited the promise was compelled to wait until he is resurrected to receive the fulfillment of that promise.

Abraham proved worthy of the promises of the covenant, and did not receive their full fulfillment. His descendants, as a people and as a nation, proved unworthy of the promises, and did not receive their full fulfillment. The children of Israel entered the land of promise, conquered and divided it in a partial fulfillment, but future generations proved even more wayward and sinful. Times without number Israel rebelled against God, only to find themselves in difficulties from which only God could save them. And so their record is an unvarying cycle of transgression, estrangement, supplication and deliverance, followed shortly by more transgression.

Israel as a nation proved unworthy. The predicted curses came upon them, and the divided and decadent kingdoms of Israel and Judah went into captivity. The covenant had been broken; Israel was unfaithful.

Nevertheless, God had made a promise He could not forget: He had promised not to leave them in captivity, but to bring them back to their native land. He said, "For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jer. 30:11). He promised to bring them back to their land: "Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and

* This thought is drawn from Jesus' parable of the Fig Tree, in which the budding of the fig tree is seen as an illustration of reviving natural Israel. Note, however, that Jesus gives no conclusive interpretation to the parable.

the city shall be builded upon her own heap" (Jer. 30:18).

In due time God vindicated His promise; many returned and rebuilt their native land and the city of Jerusalem, including the temple and the wall.

But Israel as a nation continued to be apostate.

With the advent of Christ, the Jews had one more opportunity; but again they rejected it, so God cast them off as a nation. And when Jerusalem was destroyed (A. D. 70), Israel was scattered.

But their rejection, as many understand it, was to be only temporary—only "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25). When that time arrives, they shall once again be restored to favor and given further opportunity to repent and turn to God.

And so the modern state of Israel is seen as a significant sign of this great coming restoration, a first evidence of the approaching Day when the King shall return to reign in Zion.

Trouble Ahead for Israel?

Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, are often thought to be prophetic of events which Israel and the world shall yet experience, though their similes are sometimes applied with little certainty of correctness. In chapter 38, the Prophet foresees an assault against Israel by a power from the "north," under the leadership of one called "Gog." Under his direction are such allies as Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer, and Togarmah. These are ancient names, and their counterparts may not possibly be identified with accuracy today. And this is not essential.

This attack is made after Israel has been "brought back from the sword" and is dwelling safely in the land; therefore it must be still future. At present, Israel stands by her military might, in continual danger of attack.

Some people believe that the country from the north is representative of Russia, who will invade and defeat Israel. Others say that there is no sound evidence for this. A footnote in the Amplified Bible suggests that Gog may be "a symbolic name standing for the leader of the world powers antagonistic to God." Still others associate Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 38 with "the time of Jacob's trouble," mentioned by Jeremiah (Jer. 30:7). Opinions differ greatly as to who and how and when, but the prophecy in Ezekiel pictures divine intervention in behalf of Israel at a critical point, at which time Christ returns to set up His government in the land and rescue His people: "Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and

they shall know that I am the Lord" (38:23).

Interpreting symbolisms is difficult, and there are many interpretations extant; but all agree generally that divine intervention will bring devastating results for Israel's enemies: "So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord God" (Ezek. 39:7).

It is thought that this dramatic defeat of Israel's enemies by direct divine intervention will open the eyes of the Israelites to know the Lord, and they will seek instruction in the ways of the Lord. They will repent from their long years of rejecting the Messiah, and "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him" (Zech. 12:10). It is then that the Lord will make His new covenant with them, and many shall prove themselves worthy of inheriting the blessings of His kingdom.

How correctly or incorrectly the above-mentioned prophecies may be applied, we cannot say. But it does seem certain that the prophets often had in mind *two* Israels and *two* times of fulfillment when they spoke. For prophecy was always given primarily to benefit those who heard it; it contained a message for the prophet's generation, and a lesson for future generations.

Though we find no text which fits squarely the present restoration of Israel, the present return may be implied in the forecasts as a partial fulfillment, just as Jesus included a prophecy of the dispersion of the nation of Israel (Matthew 24:15-20) among His forecasts, which prophecy was literally fulfilled in A. D. 70. In like manner the desolation of Edom was foretold (Ezek. 35:9; Jer. 49:16-17) and literally fulfilled. The prophets of the captivity had a fixed expectation of a return, but their vision of the far distant return was so much more glowing that their primary attention focussed on it.

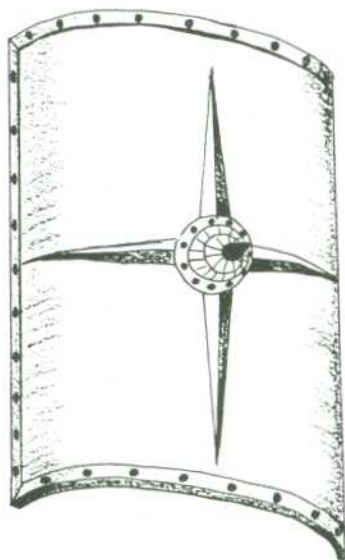
Our understanding at best is incomplete; suffice it to say that whatever men do or think, God is working out His supreme purposes by everything He allows in the affairs of men, and not one of His promises shall fall short of the complete fulfillment for which it was intended. ●●

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE)

If you are going to train children at home, it's necessary for both parents and children to spend some time there.
—Wes Izzard

CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

The Shield of Faith



The Roman soldier's shield

IN the days of Paul, soldiers fought man to man and hurled flaming darts or arrows at the enemy. This is why Paul mentions the shield of faith. It is one of the most important pieces of the Christian's armor. Paul says of it, "Lift up over all the shield of faith, upon which you can quench all the flaming missiles of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16, Amplified Bible).

Fighting soldiers in olden times had to be alert. When a soldier saw a destructive missile making its way through the air and coming directly toward him, he had to immediately lift his shield to stop it and "quench" or put out the fire. He had to watch on all sides for the approach of these deadly weapons.

Our King James Version of the Bible reads, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." The Christian's spiritual shield is the shield of faith. Do you know what "faith" is? Faith is belief and trust in God. It is belief in something which we do not see. The Bible makes clear to us what true Christian faith is. "Faith means that we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1, Moffatt). This faith is difficult to obtain because most people are not willing to believe in what they cannot see or understand. Still, many people do have faith in some things they do not see. For example, a farm-

er sows his seed in the springtime. He has faith that the sun will shine and the rains will come to make his crop grow and mature into a bountiful harvest. But this same man may not have the faith to believe that God will set up His Kingdom on earth and establish a government of peace and right.

Notice again the word Paul used in regard to this shield: "Above all taking the shield of faith." He tried to impress upon the mind of every Christian the need for faith. It is most important, for without it we can never be pleasing to God. "Anyone who wants to come to God must believe that there is a God and that He rewards those who sincerely look for Him" (Heb. 11:6, Living Bible).

True faith is living and growing. It can always deal with the darts of temptation that the enemy (our own old man) hurls at us with such determination. A Christian will find that the darts hurled by the enemy can come thick and fast, and it is an absolute necessity that he be very alert at all times. It may seem at times that our spiritual warfare has slowed down, almost to a halt. But be watchful! Be alert! Be on guard! The enemy is probably changing his tactics and he (our own old man) will soon strike from a different direction. Keep your shield ready!

Read again the familiar story of David and Goliath. Goliath was very self-confident because he was so tall and strong. He did not have his armor ready. That is why David was able to conquer him. Of course, God was with David and fought with him. But Goliath was not alert. He was entirely

(Continued on page 24)



"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

"Put on the whole armour of God...that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

"And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, ...and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6: 10-17).

Showers of Blessings

The Blessing of Teachers

HOW are you, Children, today? Have you counted any of your blessings yet today? Did you count your teachers as a blessing? Or maybe you said, "I don't even go to school yet. I don't have any teachers."

But school teachers are not the only kind of teachers. If you do go to school, you know how hard the teacher works to help you learn to read and to help you learn to write and make your A B C's plain. Teachers help you learn to count and to do arithmetic problems. Thank your school

teacher sometime for helping you learn your lessons. It will make your teacher very happy.

If you don't go to school yet, you do have teachers just the same. Doesn't Mommy and doesn't Daddy teach you to do things? Surely they teach you to dress yourself and how to be good. Maybe you have a big brother or sister who teaches you things, too. Does someone teach you how to color pictures and remind you to stay inside the lines? Did someone teach you how seeds are put in the ground and how the warm sunshine and rain will make them grow into vegetables that taste so good?

Maybe sometimes you have a babysitter stay with you. She may teach you how to tie your shoes or button your clothes. She might even teach you a little game, or teach you how to say a big word.

That is how you learn, by having teachers. Sometimes you learn by watching other people. You learn when others answer questions or explain something to you that you do not know.

Where do your teachers come from? Your teachers are people, and God made the people. God made Mommy and Daddy. God made your brothers and sisters. God made grandparents, too. He made babysitters and school teachers. And do you know that God made you, too?

Teachers are a big, big drop in your showers of blessings. You would never learn anything without them. Be thankful for your teachers, and when you count the blessings God has given you, be sure to mention your teachers. ••

Be a C W

GERTRUDE'S mother had just baked some special fruit bars and had given Gertrude permission to take some to her little friends next door.

As Gertrude ran toward the garden, she heard loud voices. Sure enough, Alice and Joan were at it again, arguing. She stopped and listened.

"No, Joan, you are not going to take my wagon. Uncle Ted gave it to me. You might get scratches on it. Or tip it over. Or get it broken on this rough ground. No, you can carry those baskets yourself—you've done it before."

"But Alice, those baskets aren't very light, and you know it. I'll put paper in the wagon so it won't get hurt, and I'll be careful."

"No, Joan, I said not to touch it. It's mine and I want to use it only on the sidewalk."



Gertrude looked over the fence at the girls and then called to them, "Come, Joan, Alice. I have some fresh cookies for you, two for each. I know they're good—extra good!"

The girls came running. "I'm as hungry as a bear," shouted Alice, and Joan echoed with "Me too!"

"I heard you girls arguing over your wagon, Alice," said Gertrude. "I want to tell you the remedy Mother has for Dick and me when we are selfish. She reminds us to be a C.W."

"What's a C.W.?" asked Alice as she leaned against the fence and took another big bite out of her fast-disappearing cookie.

"Well, do you want me to tell you a bird story Mother told us? It's about a *Cedar Waxwing*, a pretty brown and grey bird with a topknot on its head. It's the best-dressed bird in America and has the best manners, too."

The two girls came closer and listened intently while Gertrude told her story.

"Have you seen a cedar waxwing? We never saw a bird like that," said Alice.

"Yes, we saw some when we were visiting in the mountains last summer. They are so nice and pretty, you'd like them, too," nodded Gertrude as she continued her story.

"The reason Mother tells us we should be like them is because you never see these birds fighting. Half a dozen of them will travel together and sit close on a limb, and they will pass a cherry down the whole line and maybe back again, without any of them eating it. They are very polite and they are never selfish. So," concluded Gertrude as she knocked an ant off the fence, "when anyone starts to be selfish in our house, they get reminded to be like the C. W. And Mother really makes us ashamed when she says, 'Just think, the little bird behaves better than you children.'"

"That's a nice story," said Joan.

"Don't you girls want to join us and be C. W.'s too?"

"Sure, let's join. I think it would be fun," laughed Alice. She put her arm around her sister and said, "You may take my wagon, Joan, and put a paper in the bottom like you said you would. I know you won't hurt it." ●●

If we try to follow the game of life in today's world, we are sure to be frustrated; we are twisted on the inside, tied in knots we cannot unravel. Better to forget the world and seek God; then we will know peace.

Prisoners of Ourselves

(Continued from page 6)

ings are happy or not, we are centrally happy, "sorrowful yet always rejoicing." Human happiness is a by-product of being a creative, growing personality. God has set eternity in our hearts; but to win it, perfection of character must be achieved.

The trials and struggles of today are but the price we must pay for the accomplishments and victories of tomorrow. Most certainly the apostle Peter was acquainted with the walls of confinement that imprison human nature, and no doubt he had been shut in by them more than once before he wrote the words: "For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Pet. 2:19, 20). Doubtless Peter was aware that this was setting a very high standard for erring mortals, many of whom live for praise and die of censure, but he had received this information from the lips of Jesus Himself. No one naturally likes to be told of his faults, much less endure criticism when he has done well; hence this is one of the most sturdy chains from which we must unshackle ourselves. The task is as difficult today as it was in Peter's day.

We should bear in mind that God knows our hearts and in His "Book of Remembrance" every good deed is recorded. Temporary honor may be forfeited because our virtues are not recognized. Perhaps even humiliation will have to be endured because of unjust blame. But the great, good soul, is affected by neither. These things are not worthy of mention compared with the honor of having our virtues recognized and acclaimed by God in the eternal future. When we get the larger, liberating outlook, we distinguish between the transient and the lasting.

Soon dawns the Day of Account when we shall stand before the just Judge. Our supreme desire then will be to possess the ticket of admission to the new world, with privileges to "ride upon the high places of the earth," and mount aloft with the freedom of the wind. But all this hinges upon our ceasing now to be prisoners of ourselves.

Freedom, not Bondage

God's plan for us is freedom, not bondage. He has called us to freedom, freedom from ourselves. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the

truth shall make you free." To know the truth, is to know the truth of God's Word, to accept of that which can be proved, and reject that which conflicts with the general teaching of the Bible.

Then it is even more important to know the truth about ourselves. Naturally we are prisoners of ourselves. We have been brainwashed, to use a modern term, in favor of ourselves. Our eyesight is defective, so that we cannot see ourselves in our true light. The transgression that appears like a plank in the eye of our brother appears as only a small splinter if it is in our own eye. Therefore we need to be freed from ourselves, before we can know the truth about ourselves.

This thralldom is ours naturally; it is our heritage from birth. "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world," said the Great Apostle. "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:3-5). We have been made free, but freedom has its price. The fact that we have been made free is no sign that we shall continue to be free if we do nothing to secure our freedom. In Galatians 4:8, 9, Paul rebukes the Galatian Church for their infidelity in wanting to turn back to their former bondage: "In those days, when you were ignorant of God, you were in servitude to gods who are really no gods at all; but now that you know God—or rather, are known by God—how is it you are turning back again to the weakness and poverty of the elemental spirits? Why do you want to be enslaved all over again by them?" (Moffatt).

The bondage to self is real, and it comes upon us naturally. Therefore the Apostle issues another warning in Galatians 5:13: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." We have been called to liberty; but if we use our liberty as an occasion to the flesh, to satisfy our naturally wayward desires, we shall find ourselves immediately recaptured by ourselves. The moral corruption of our nature asserts itself again and again, and it can bring us into bondage which is just as real—and even more hazardous—than bondage imposed by the law of the land. Peter spoke understandingly of this bondage when he said, "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (II Pet. 2:19). It was for this reason that Paul warned the Roman church: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The shackles of the flesh keep coming back on, unless we maintain an eternal vigilance against them.

In Romans 8 Paul spoke again of the hazards of this bondage and how to get free from it: "For if ye live after the flesh,"—in bondage to the ways of the natural mind—"ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (vs. 13-15). To cease being prisoners of ourselves we must submit to the guidance of God through His Word, must be led by His spirit of truth.

The Source of Our Freedom From Ourselves

We read in Gal. 4:26: "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." In the Scriptures, the authority of the Eternal and the system of laws which directs the lives of His people, are figuratively referred to as "Jerusalem." In this chapter Paul speaks of the two covenants, the one taking its authority from the Mosaic or Ten Commandment law given on Mt. Sinai (already obsolete), and the law of Faith which alone could bring eternal life and freedom from the bondage of mortality. The two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, one by a bondwoman, and the other by a free woman, by promise, are used allegorically to typify these two covenants. Jerusalem, once the seat of God's temporal kingdom on earth, was now, with her children, in bondage both literally and spiritually. But Jerusalem from above, typifying the Authority of God's future arrangement of things on this earth, is free, and the Mother of us all.

Primarily, divine authority is said to come from heaven. "He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up." "Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven" (Ps. 57:3; 76:8).

At best, human life upon earth has been one long period of bondage to fear, hate, turmoil, revenge, to merciless individuals, to tyrannical overlords, to say nothing of the bondage to the evil propensities of human nature. By accepting divine Authority, allowing the Word of God to act as a ruling force in our lives, we no longer are in bondage to our inherent moral defects. Wrath, malice, pride, jealousy, deceit, stubbornness are among these traits which held us in bondage. And only by accepting the surveillance of the Word of God, and amending our lives can we know the fullness of freedom.

No freedom in life equals the bliss of becoming free from ourselves. Compare the worth of

the moral strength that makes it possible for us to sit down and calmly talk over our differences with one who strongly opposes us or has done us a wrong, with the natural instinct to let our tempers go, talk back, and make wild and groundless statements to our opponent which we will regret afterward. Is it not a release to be able to conquer our pride so that the possession of wealth, temporal power and authority over others, will not puff us up or lead us to think too highly of ourselves? If enjoying the moral freedom of the sons of God we can even be told of our own faults and shortcomings and take it with good grace and profit by it. In Isaiah 42:6-7, the Prophet alludes to this bondage to self as being in prison, and predicts its ultimate end with Christ's second coming: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."

The Ultimate Freedom

But desirable as is the possession of these freedoms we have enumerated, they are not the only freedoms the "Jerusalem from above" has to bestow. The freedom from pain, disease, old age and otherwise inescapable death, is what we long for. And we are not left to doubt that the "Jerusalem from above" can and will bring us these things. We have the assurance from the Revelator that "God shall wipe away all tears from [our] eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

In II Cor. 5:2 Paul speaks of the change from mortality to immortality as being "clothed upon with our house . . . from heaven." "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." We do not want to be unclothed: we want the moral change, the release from sin, from the smallness and pettiness of our carnal natures—and if sincere we will be working daily to get that change.

But we want more.. Above all we desire the physical change. We "groan" or yearn earnestly to be clothed upon with our house from heaven, with immortality, "that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Let us burst the chains that manacle us and smash the confining walls that have held us in abject slavery to ourselves, that becoming God's freemen and free-women, we may at last be freed from the bondage of mortality, and with all His faithful servants join in the triumphal acclaim, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" ●●

Where Is God?

He was just a little lad, and on a Sabbath day was wandering home from Sunday school, and dawdling on his way. He scuffed his shoes into the grass; he found a caterpillar; he found a fluffy milkweed pod and blew out all the "filler." A bird's nest in the tree o'erhead, so wisely placed and high, was just another wonder that caught his eager eye.

A neighbor watched his zig-zag course and hailed him from the lawn, asked him where he'd been that day and what was going on.

"Oh, I've been to Sunday school." (He carefully turned the sod and found a snail beneath it.) "I've learned a lot of God."

"M'm, a very fine way," the neighbor said, "for a boy to spend his time. If you'll tell me where God is, I'll give you a brand new dime."

Quick as a flash his answer came, nor were his accents faint. "I'll give you a *dollar*, Mister, if you'll tell me where God *ain't*!"

—*Author Unknown.*

The Shield of Faith

(Continued from page 20)

unprepared for the unusual manner of attack that David used.

Hebrews 11 is sometimes called the "faith chapter." It tells of many people of old who possessed this great virtue. Read this chapter through and see how many godly people are mentioned. There is no power on earth so strong and effective as the shield of faith properly used.

God is handing this shield of faith to us. Will we accept it and *use* it as He wants us to use it?

Take the shield, cling to it tightly and use it to quench every fiery dart of evil. ●●



Abundance of Rain

We have had such abundance of water lately, that it reminds us of the time spoken of by Ezekiel, when the living water shall spread across the land ever increasing in depth. But it will not spread devastation and spoil as floods do today; it will be spiritual water bringing blessings to all who drink and cleanse themselves in it. It will bring blessing and healing to all the nations.

What a blessed time that will surely be, in contrast to the dry and thirsty land we see today. And what a wonderful work is in store for all who will now prepare themselves. To be able to be among these exalted ones we must be humble and obedient to the commandments of God and be ready and willing to submit to His will in everything. Jesus said we are clean "through the word." We must surely realize the necessity of being filled with this life-giving water now, so that no impurities of the carnal mind remain in us.

Warwick, Queensland, Australia

J. B.

Strong in Faith

I thank God that though my eyesight is getting dim, my eye of faith is still strong. Many years ago a prophet of God was inspired to write, "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people" (Isa. 60:2). It seems the world is that way now.

It seems strange that so many people who profess to know God and live by His Word go on disobeying the words of Jesus, to not be a part of the world but to be a separate people. I am so thankful that I know in whom I believe, and that He will be faithful to what He has promised.

Newfoundland, Canada

M. A.

Eternity in the Balance

The words of the Lord are ever on our lips—they must be when we sit in our house, when we lie down, or rise up, or walk by the way. So at all times we must "eat our bread with quaking," and "drink our water with trembling, and with carefulness," as Eternity is hanging in the balance. How will all end for us? Life or death? We must give our very best efforts to the things which are eternal. Our main concern must be about the things which will last forever, so we can avoid the "death sentence."

We realize God's thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts. But His ways are not our ways until we make a complete change-over to the spiritual and eternal things and allow God's commands to invade every conscious moment of our life.

As I read in a *Message*, it is never wise to assume that we have safely reached this exalted plane of spirituality, for so long as we remain in the flesh we shall be subject to its temptations, which we must not underestimate.

Swansea, South Wales, England

G. S.

"Show Us the Father"

In John 14:8-9 we read: "Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Jesus said that He was in the Father, and that the Father was in Him and the words that He spake were not of Himself but were of the Father. In other words, He showed the Father's work and purpose through Himself.

The question asked by Philip is an important one. The question was not, Is there a God? but, What is God? I think Jesus answered his question admirably, and I think Philip found the answer.

We must have faith to live by, and a purpose to live for. No one had ever seen the Father. In the mortal state, no one could see the Father and live, so we are told! But they saw His Son, and someday we can see Him also!

Wausau, Wisconsin

J. T.

Looking Forward

We are looking forward to Jesus' return and the time when He sets up His righteous rule. The government will be 100% honest then and fair, and there will be no more crimes committed as they are today.

We are living at the close of the day of salvation, and there is not much time left. It is much like it was in Noah's time when he was telling people to get into the ark because the flood was coming. We must hasten now to get into the ark of God's safety, as the time is drawing near.

Carrollton, Ohio

M. W.

Truth Is Not Popular

I can understand why you are not very popular for telling the truth. The truth has never been popular. Jesus Christ came to show the way to salvation, but so few were interested in learning of it.

Our world today is spiritually bankrupt and needs His teaching. He told us to be overcomers.

Dinuba, California

R. J. L.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"If a foreign nation ever attacked my country, I would defend my country. Is this wrong? My personal opinion is that war can be morally right. Many people are oppressed. I feel that these oppressors are an abomination to God, and if His warriors were here right now He would lead them in battle against these evil people."

There was a time when God had a literal kingdom on the earth, the kingdom of Israel, and He directed their affairs and governed their battles, often fighting for them. When they forsook Him, He allowed them to be oppressed; when they returned to Him, He would overcome their enemies, often in miraculous ways.

Since the termination of that kingdom, God has operated a different plan which was stated by Jesus: "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Also by John the Baptist: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely" (Luke 3:14).

At the present time, God is not working openly to direct the affairs of men and nations, therefore, not being able to know the exact will of God in a given situation we must obey the commands of His Word and "do violence to no man"; otherwise we could without realizing it violate His plans. We have the promise that the "angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7).

When we are asked to fight for our country, we are conscientious objectors—a classification which enables us to serve our country in some way other than by bearing arms.

"In Luke 17, Jesus speaks of the time when the good people will be 'taken' and the wicked will be 'left' to be destroyed. Then His disciples ask Him where He will take His faithful people, and Jesus replies, 'Where the body is, the vultures gather.' Can you explain this more clearly to me?"

You apparently apply Jesus' words in Luke 17: 34-36 to what many churches call a "rapture." By the "rapture" they mean the coming of Christ to earth to take the faithful away to heaven. However, there is nothing in the Bible to substantiate this belief of anyone going to heaven with Jesus. First Thessalonians 4:16-17, speaking of the return of Christ, says that "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them

in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." But it does not say that we shall "ever be with the Lord" *in heaven*. The prophet Zechariah tells where the faithful shall be with Christ: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, . . . and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee" (Zech. 14:4-5). Jesus says that the meek "shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Proverbs 10:30 states that the "righteous shall never be removed." Six times in Psalm 37 we are told in slightly different words that the righteous will inherit *the earth* and dwell there forever.

Many people take Jesus' words about being "taken" or "left" as a picture of the rapture, when the faithful will be "taken" with Jesus to heaven, and the wicked will be "left" to be destroyed, or punished. But if we accept the Biblical teaching that the righteous shall remain on the earth and dwell here forever, we cannot picture their being "taken." It is the unfaithful, the rebellious element of mankind, the "transgressors" (Prov. 2:21-22) who shall be "taken." "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (Prov. 2:21-22). The righteous shall be *left*, not *taken*.

What is the meaning of Jesus' reply to the disciples' question: "Where, Lord?" You imply that the disciples were wanting to know where Jesus was planning to take His faithful. But knowing that the righteous shall inherit the earth, would it not be more logical for the disciples to be asking where the righteous would remain? And Jesus' reply may answer this question: "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." The thought is that of vultures flocking to the carcass upon which they feed. Just as the birds flock to the place from which they obtain their life-sustaining food, so shall the faithful remain on the earth with their Sustainer, Christ, who gives them life and with whom they share the Kingdom.

*O happy home, where Thou art loved the dearest,
Thou loving Friend, and Savior of our race,
And where among the guests there never cometh
One who can hold such high and honored place!
O happy home, where each one serves Thee, lowly,
Whatever his appointed work may be,
Till every common task seems great and holy,
When it is done, O Lord, as unto Thee!*

—Selected

On Freedom

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. —John 8:32

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. —John 8:36

He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. —I Cor. 7:22

Use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh. —Gal. 5:13

There are times in the lives of all people when freedom is the twin of duty, sacrifice the companion of happiness, and when courage—parent of fortitude, endurance, determination—is the first virtue.
—Dorothy Thompson

Who then is free? The wise man who can command himself. —Horace

Freedom is a need of the soul. . . . It is in striving toward God that the soul strives continually after a condition of freedom. God alone is the inciter and guarantor of freedom. He is the only guarantor.
—Whittaker Chambers

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. —Constitution of The United States, Amendment I

Man is really free only in God, the source of his freedom. —Sherwood Eddy

Freedom has only the meaning with which men endow it. It is not enough to pay lip service to the concept of religious liberty. We must pay heart service to it, as well, else it remains an empty phrase instead of a living reality.
—Kenneth B. Keating

We on this continent should never forget that men first crossed the Atlantic not to find soil for their ploughs but to secure liberty for their souls.
—Robert J. McCracken

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.
—Gal. 3:28

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Gal. 5:1

We find freedom when we find God; we lose it when we lose Him. —Paul E. Scherer

No man is free who is a slave to the flesh. —Seneca

Freedom is not an ideal, it is not even a protection, if it means nothing more than the freedom to stagnate. —Adlai E. Stevenson

The basic test of freedom is perhaps less in what we are free to do than in what we are free not to do.
—Eric Hoffer

No man is free who is not master of himself.
—Epictetus

No man was ever endowed with a right without being at the same time saddled with a responsibility. —Gerald W. Johnson

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
—Thomas Jefferson

No man has a right to do what he pleases, except when he pleases to do right. —Charles Simmons

None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free. —Goethe



God Send Us Men!

God send us men whose aim 'twill be
Not to defend some worn-out creed,
But to live out the law of Christ,
In ev'ry thought and word and deed.

God send us men alert and quick,
His lofty precepts to translate
Until the laws of Christ become
The laws and habits of the state.

God send us men, God send us men!
Patient, courageous, strong and true;
With vision clear and mind equipped
His will to learn, His work to do.

God send us men with hearts ablaze,
All truth to love, all wrong to hate;
These are the patriots nations need,
These are the bulwarks of the state.

—Selected.

