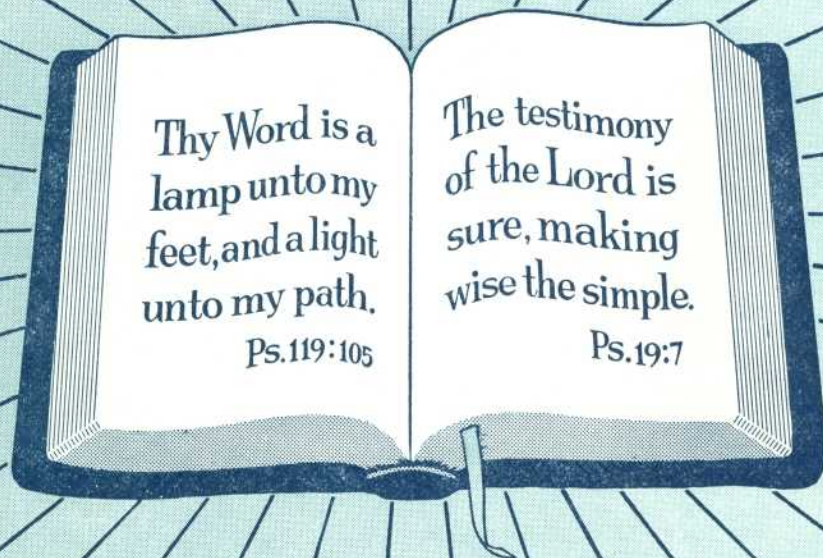


Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST



Blessed Are the Finishers!

Coping With Criticism

The Prophetic Word

Israel

Megiddo Message

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A religious magazine, devoted to the cause of Christ and published for the dissemination of Bible truth alone.

The MEGIDDO MESSAGE will

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- Answer perplexing religious questions
- Give you courage for these uncertain times
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- Reveal to you how to develop a character acceptable to God
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Editorially Speaking...

Is Emotion for Christians?

EMOTION has come to be a disturbing word, especially when it is attached to religion or faith. Some religions, in fact, are built on emotionalism with no sure foundation for faith.

But let us immediately distinguish between emotion and emotionalism. Between emotion and emotionalism is a great gulf fixed. The person who feels some emotion need not think he is victim of destructive emotionalism.

Emotion is as much a part of a man as his nervous system. A person without emotion would be a mere animated clod. We are creatures capable of joy and sorrow, and we are commanded to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." We possess a sense of wonder; we are moved by beauty or ugliness; we respond to pleasure or pain. This is normal, so long as our emotion does not take us beyond the bounds of respectable Christian conduct.

And what about in religion? Emotion is not a Biblical term, but who can read the Book without feeling? We feel the severity of its prophets, the intensity of its poets and thrill to the melody of its singers. Even the factual report of the primitive Church, the book of the Acts of the Apostles, is a report of a church on fire. Can any devoted Christian read the Sermon on the Mount and feel no stir within him?

A noted poet once spoke of "hollow men." Perhaps Paul had such in mind when he wrote of those who had grown emotionally dead toward God, men "past feeling," who had "alienated themselves from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4: 18-19). Whatever the dangers of excessive emotion, the absence of it is equally frightful—and calamitous.

We shiver to think what the Bible might be, had it been written by men without feeling. A Jeremiah who could not weep; or a David who could not praise; or a Christ who could not love; or a Paul who could not rejoice—these would present an entirely different picture of the Christian ideal than we have in the Sacred Writings. Christian stoics may exist; but none is mentioned in the Scriptures.

Christianity is not emotionalism. It is not preoccupied with men's feelings; but neither can it be genuine without them. The Church that is directed to do everything decently and in order is also commanded to be fervent in spirit. Human sensibilities are never ignored. And none can be a Christian who has no feeling.

Try to imagine the plight of running a business, or a government, or a home, or a school without any feeling for that institution! What runner ever won a race who had no emotion, no deep inner compulsion to obtain the prize? What army ever marched victorious who had no desire to win?

We can easily understand why Paul advised, "Set your affection on things above"—that is the only right way! ●●

Blessed Are the Finishers!

AN engineer constructs a magnificent bridge. All but the last span.

An electrician wires a motor. All but the final connection.

A marathon runner speeds down the appointed track. And stops—ten yards short of the finish line.

The student prepares his lessons. And fails the final.

An oil prospector drills deep into the earth. And gives up—only inches short of the rich reserve.

In each case there is effort. There is intelligent, directed, purposeful effort. But in each case the effort is fruitless—simply because the task is not finished.

A tablet just short of the summit of Mount Washington in New Hampshire tells the same story as it marks the spot where a woman climber died of exhaustion one summer day. Another hundred steps and she would have reached shelter. But a sudden blinding snowstorm descended on the peak, and she was ill-prepared for the breath-taking wind. She perished, never knowing how near she was to her goal.

Emerson tells that a hero is no braver than the next man—he is only brave five minutes longer. Battles have been won by the army that could hold out the longest. Prizes in everyday life go to those who keep at the problem until it is solved. It is all the simple story of the plodding but persistent tortoise who kept steadily on his course until he had finished it.

In any area of life, the ultimate test of human character is the ability to finish. Achievement does not consist of one spectacular moment, an occasional flash of energy or a burst of applause. It is a moment-by-moment persistence in one's chosen line. Many a life has failed to achieve only because it failed to finish.

Blessed are the finishers!

To no class of persons is this test of human character so serious as to those who have set their stakes at the gates of Zion. To no class of persons is the strength to see it through so vital. If the Kingdom is our goal, our power to endure means success or failure; eternity or nonentity. There is

no middle mark. We have started. We may have gone a great distance. Still, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." He that shall endure unto the end—and none else. The blessing is reserved for those who *finish*!

The First Step—A Good Beginning

A good beginning is not to be scorned or lightly considered. Indeed not! it is essential. The bridge erected on a sandy riverbank without foundation or support cannot be expected to hold up under heavy traffic, however elaborate its superstructure of steel. The runner who never mastered the fundamentals of muscle coordination can never expect to win the race. The student who never learned to concentrate his mind in serious study cannot realistically look forward to becoming an instructor in his chosen field. In all cases, a good start is necessary.

The same is true in our Christian career. We must first acquaint ourselves with God's plan and purpose and acquire a working knowledge of His law and its requirements for us. We must learn what He offers and how we may obtain it. We must be convinced of God's faithfulness and dedicate ourselves to meeting His requirements. This gives us a good start.

But a good start is only part of the success story. Unfortunately, all good starters are not good stayers. And the crown of life is not laid up for the winner of the fifty-yard dash; it is reserved for him who runs and keeps on running steadily and patiently clear through to the end of the lifelong race. "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

The Problem—Finishing

This was the problem with Demas. It would be well for us to reflect a moment on this Bible character. We are not told very much. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures mention him only three times; yet these three references draw a long curve of defeat. On three separate occasions Paul mentions Demas:

1) "Demas, Lucas, my fellow labourers" (Philemon 24).

2) "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas" (Col. 4:14).

3) "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (II Tim. 4:10).

What a drama in three sentences! Tragic scenes unfold as we read between these lines of the changing description, from Demas, Paul's fellow laborer, to Demas the quitter. These texts are the condensed biography of a man who made a splendid beginning. He entered the work of the Lord with energy and courage. Had the race for eternal life required only a vigorous beginning, Demas might have made it. He started well. But he did not last. "Demas, my fellow laborer" dwindled to just "Demas" and finally ended as "Demas the quitter."

We can easily imagine the possibilities for Christian excellence which this man Demas threw to the wind. We would treasure the opportunity that was his—a personal association with the great Apostle. Think of the time when Demas could have given Paul a bit of encouragement; when he could have listened eagerly to words of warning and instruction from his spiritual father; when he could have turned his eyes and mind from the world around him and fixed his attention on the things of God. Demas had great opportunity.

We tend to think of Demas as a fool. But let us take a long, hard look at ourselves. Can any of us say we have never felt the temptation to which Demas succumbed? Might there not be something of Demas in us? Is our first love for God and His truth still strong and growing stronger?

The price of perseverance is high in down-to-earth terms of self-denial and personal discipline. We face it daily. The opposition of our old nature is strong. Who naturally likes to be told what to do and what not to do—much less to command himself against his nature! Right is continually assailed by the all-too-powerful wrong. Truth is ever challenged by the formidable foe Error. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). Our every firm resolve to win this battle against the flesh is assailed by an inner instinct which seems to say, "Why bother? Why be so particular? Why worry so much about details of character that don't really matter that much?" But in the Christian's life, no detail is too trifling to escape his active concern.

It has been said, "To persevere is tragic." But not so. The real tragedy is the opposite: to be blessed with a fortunate youth, to follow with the

bloom of manhood, and then to crash without ever concluding the work so hopefully begun—this is the tragedy of Demas.

The real test of quality comes with time. A new broom sweeps well; but the test of the broom is not the first day of its use. After a normal period of wear, does the broom continue to perform its work? And after an unusually long period of usage, does it still sweep clean?

A ship is launched amid hurrahs. Its maiden voyage is usually sensational. Yet the test of the ship is not the launching. The real test comes only in its repeated resistance to tempestuous waves, angry winds, and the vicious elements of the sea. If the old ship can ride the waves and proudly sail into port after this struggle for survival, then we know it is truly seaworthy.

Bible Finishers

"If you can wait and not be tired by waiting"—or watch, and not grow tired of watching; or work, and not grow tired of working—this is the test of the finishers.

Consider the case of Enoch. We are briefly informed that "Enoch walked with God...three hundred years... And he was not, for God took him." Three hundred years was a long time. Though the span of life was longer then than now, his divine walk represented over eighty per cent of the duration of his life. Suppose he had wearied of keeping the law of God after two hundred years, or two hundred and fifty, or two hundred and seventy-five years; or suppose even after two hundred and ninety-nine years he had wondered how much longer he would have to resist every temptation, and had wearied of waiting for the time when he could know that his last trial had passed and he could say, "It is finished." He might have anticipated a life of many more years—his great grandfather Adam, according to the years enumerated in Genesis 5, was still living when Enoch was translated!—and so Enoch might have braced himself for several hundred more years of patient continuance in well doing, in order to finish his job.

It might seem that after so long a life of character developing, righteousness would have become second nature; but not so. Human nature is not so constituted. Evil was ever present, even away back there, for we read in the first book that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Murder had been in the heart of Cain not so many years before. If Enoch had not stood steadfast until the three hundredth year when God saw fit to transfer him to

some other world, all that he had done in the preceding 299 years would have availed him nought. He was a good example to us, in that he passed that ultimate test of character. He had the strength to see it through—he was a finisher.

Centuries later rose the brightest star among God's high achievers—Jesus Christ. His earthly career, extreme in its brevity, still inspires us today. But why? Why do we remember His righteous example, or His Sermon on the Mount, or His power-packed parables? It is because Christ's life came to a proper conclusion, because He was faithful to the end. Had He done any less, He might have been forgotten with His contemporaries. Had He escaped the agony of crucifixion by denying that He was born to be a king, who would remember Him? But Jesus was able to say triumphantly, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And God remembers and rewards the finishers.

Carved in the rock of ages is the name of another noteworthy finisher, that stalwart apostle Paul. So persuaded was he that "nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths—nothing in all creation" could separate him from achieving the final purpose of his life (Rom. 8:38-39, Jerusalem Bible). All through his brilliant career, from the auspicious moment on the Damascan road, through the fiery trials and dire persecution in the years that followed, he had but one purpose: "that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). And Paul's determined perseverance won—from the Roman prison he was able to write the triumphant words: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7-8).

Finishing—Perfection

The Bible describes the remarkable attainment of the finishers in one challenging word: perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect," are the words of Jesus as He brings the Sermon on the Mount to its mountaintop ideal. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

This single word "perfect" carries with it a volume of meaning. To be "perfect" means "to be complete, brought to an end, finished, accom-

I Had No Time

*The day slipped by and time was spent,
And all the good things that I meant
To do were left undone because
I had no time to stop and pause,
But rushed about, went here and there,
Did this and that, was everywhere.
I had no time to kneel and pray,
Or seek for strength to meet the day.
I had no time to meditate
On worthwhile things. No time to wait
Upon my Lord so He could say
"Well done, my Child," at close of day.
And so, I wonder, after all,
When life is o'er and He shall call
Me to appear before His throne
To be repaid for what I've done—
Shall I rejoice with all His own,
And praise Him for the crown I've won?
Or will I hang my head and whine,
"Forgive me, Lord, I had no time"?*

plished." Used of one's age, it means "full-grown, mature." Used of moral development, it means "fully up to standard in a certain respect, . . . fully developed in a moral sense." It describes work that is finished according to a set standard, perfect, complete.

"Perfect" requires that supreme standard of acceptable character attainable by all who will merit God's eternal favor. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:27-28). To be able finally to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12)—this is the Christian's aim and the key to everything our God has promised. "Perfect" describes the man who offends "not in word," who is able also to bridle the "whole body" (Jas. 3:2).

"Perfect" describes those who "are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14).

"Perfect" are those who have come "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

"Perfect" are those who "let patience have her perfect work" and "go on to complete a balanced character that will fall short in nothing" (Jas. 1:4, NEB). These words of James are a plea for thoroughness, for steadiness, for endurance, a plea

for those who are taking up their cross to carry it all the way to the end. "Let steadfastness [that superquality of stickability] have its full effect." Never give up, says James, until your Christianity is perfect and complete; until, so far as your life and character are concerned, you lack in nothing.

In this business of Christian living, we need never to weary of the race and drop out. We need never to say, "I have done enough; my life is useless." Never! for we are called to go all the way, however far, until we have given the last finishing touch to a perfect work. We are called to be "men of mature character, men of integrity with no weak spots" (Jas. 1:4, Phillips). We are called to be finishers!

The Meaning of Perfection

The great artist Michelangelo was once pointing out the details of a picture to a visitor, when the visitor exclaimed, "But these are only trifles!" Michelangelo replied, "Yes, but trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle."

And so it is in all fine arts; the seemingly trivial touch means the difference between greatness and mediocrity. And so it is in our Christian artistry; what many would call trifling details make the difference between our receiving the glad commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant" or the stern "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity" in the Day of Judgment. Such fine trifles as the tone of our voice, or our attitude, or our countenance, or the hidden motive behind our deed—these are the trifles which are the building blocks of perfect character.

As Christians, we must count no aspect of our mental or moral life too insignificant for careful scrutiny and comparison with the Word of God. Faithfulness in little things leads to greatness in greater things. For if we cannot develop our faithfulness in the little services of everyday life at work and at home, how can we prepare for greater service? If we cannot bring ourselves nearer to God in our personal lives, how shall we inspire others to seek Him? If we cannot learn to keep transient, ultimately useless things in their proper places, how shall we ever be able to discern real value?

Striving for perfection means making every smallest detail of our lives count toward that character which will receive the crown of life eternal.

When forced to company with those who do not share our faith, how well do we guard against trifling talk?

Do our daily lives radiate the sunshine of devotion and hope?

Are we glad to serve our family and our friends

in the small, scarcely discernible kindnesses which are the mark of the true Christian?

Do the smallest trifles ruffle our feelings? Do the little barbs of everyday life prick us deeply?

These are some of the trifles which the Lord is using to prepare us for greater service in broader fields. For if, to use the simile of the prophet Jeremiah, we cannot run with the footmen, how shall we learn to contend with horsemen (Jer. 12:5)?

And so the task of perfection becomes our daily business, our whole-life concentration, as we say with Paul, "Straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14, RSV). The "prize of the upward call of God"—that is our goal.

Footraces were common in Paul's day, and Paul saw in them a meaningful illustration of the Christian's course. The races were long and cost heavily in physical endurance. Many started, few finished.

This was what Paul had in mind when he wrote, "So run, that ye may obtain." Run, run and keep on running! Run, run all the way. This was what Paul did; he started well, and he was determined to keep on until he had finished well. There are many who start well, even as Demas, Paul's fellow laborer; but their enthusiasm wanes.

And what of us? we hear the call to service, and we answer with a shout of triumph, sure that we will make a great showing. But after a mile or two, there is danger that our initial energy may be spent; our strength begins to flag, and our shout

Always A Way

*There is always a way to rise, my lad,
Always a way to advance;
But the road that leads to Mount Success
Does not pass by the way of chance.
It goes through the stations of Work and Strife,
Through the Valley of Persevere;
And the man that succeeds while others fail
Must be willing to pay most dear.
For there's always a way to fail, my lad,
Always a way to slide,
And the men you find at the foot of the hill
All sought an easy ride.
So on and up, though the road be rough,
And the storms come thick and fast;
There's a crown at the top for the fellow who tries,
And victory comes at last.*

of triumph is subdued. Where is the zeal which could see us through?

Ahab, before a battle, sent a message to Benhadad, king of Syria, in which he said, "Don't let the man who puts his armour on boast like the man who takes it off." Benhadad had been boasting about what he was going to do to Ahab and the Israelite army when the battle commenced; but Ahab said, "Don't be too sure." The tendency is to boast at the beginning and say, "Oh yes, I can do it; that is no problem." But so often those who say this never reach the point of being able to take the armour off in triumph, with a victory won and a job done.

Finishing does not consist in the spectacular moment, the occasional flash, or the initial burst of enthusiasm. It is the product of steady moment-by-moment living, the long-term developing of the keenest sensitivity to sin, and the patient maintaining of a relentless vigil over our own hearts and characters. It is the persistent willingness to give ourselves and our time to the Lord and with undying purpose to pursue the heavenly goal on which we have set our hearts.

Whether we climb, whether we plod,
Space for *one* task the scant years lend—
To choose the path that leads to God,
And keep it to the end.

Faith to See It Through

What are the qualities which will see us through to the end? They can be summed up in two very important ones. They are qualities that grow—and must be cultivated—in the deepest recesses of our hearts.

Faith is the first and foremost of these important heart-qualities. For staying power is closely associated with faith, trust, and confidence. It is faith that will keep us plodding, pushing, pressing; it is faith that will keep us building by the steady process of accretion, particle by particle, thought by thought, fact by fact. It is faith which will open our ears to the words of the Wise Man who said, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard: consider her ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6).

We remember the words of the Psalmist: "I had fainted, unless I had believed" (Ps. 27:13). How true. How often we would faint, but for our belief, our faith, our confidence in God and the working out of His plan. We would fold up, go flat, and fall apart, if we denied our faith. Faith believes God, faith has confidence in Him, faith obeys Him. A man of faith is willing to take a stand and even to step ahead, though he cannot see the ground beneath his feet, because God has told him to step.

Be Firm!

Be firm! whatever tempts thy soul
To loiter, ere it reach its goal,
Whatever siren voice would draw
Thy heart from duty and its law,
Oh, that distrust! Go bravely on,
And 'til the victor's crown be won,
Be firm!

Firm when thy conscience is assailed,
Firm when the star of hope is veiled,
Firm in defying wrong and sin,
Firm in life's conflict, toil and din,
Firm in the path by martyrs trod,
And oh, in thy love to man and God
Be firm!

Faith is an absolute prerequisite to going through to the end. It can grip our heart, our mind, our will as nothing else can. The sum total of faith is to place God in absolute charge of our life.

Faith in God gives us an entirely new relation to the world and its events, even to life itself. The average man may take the events of life with an iron will-power and a stoic resignation. What about the Christian? He can *rejoice* in tribulation, for he sees in it the making of his character and the achieving of his goal. Whatever happens, he knows it is according to God's purpose; and that out of a thousand trials, not 500 will work for his good, but 999—and one beside. For "*all* things work together for good to them that love God." What greater assurance do we need to see us through to a successful finish!

The result of faith in God is absolute confidence. True faith frees us from the taunting cosmic apprehension which threatens to crush those who, like flotsam and jetsam, drift without purpose, without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). Paul had this faith. Can you imagine a more disheartening situation than a throne with Nero on it? This inimical power, with its diabolic outreach, was what Paul was up against in his preaching. But even Nero's brainsick rule could not shake Paul. He had faith and confidence in Almighty God's assignment, and he labored on—beaten, ridiculed, persecuted, but triumphant. If God had put him into it, He could also pull him through it.

Difficulties are not the decisive factor for those who maintain faith, for faith gives the power to persevere. With faith, we direct all our power in one direction—the direction in which God would

have us move. Then, without further question, we follow, unmindful of what the cost may be, supremely joyful to be able to step in the divine footprint. Nothing else matters. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" And with such a philosophy who can fail to *finish*?

With such a faith in our hearts, every sinew of our body and every brain cell of our mind, placed under God's direction, will issue us nerve and power. God is our refuge and strength, and the gospel our power. Against such might no sin can ever stand; all self-seeking, all pride, all selfishness, all hatred are driven to the four winds.

Of himself, man is powerless; he can do nothing; he is a totally dependent creature. But with God to give him life and strength and hope, he has real power. And when man learns to appropriate God's power in faith, he is in touch with infinite power; all the volts of the universe are at his disposal. He becomes a potentially moral and spiritual giant, and goes forward into the work of purifying his heart from every trace of evil, *and he finishes!*

Courage to See It Through

A second quality vital to finishing the task so nobly begun is *courage*. True courage is rare and admired. Throughout all history few have been the men who had the courage to stand forthright and unflinching upon their convictions until they could say, "It is finished." An ancient example is the three Hebrew children, who refused to worship the image Nebuchadnezzar had set up. The penalty for failure to bow down and worship the image was death. And when these three men refused, they were hauled before the tyrant. But hear their ringing, uncompromising declaration: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:17-18).

These men had the kind of courage that could carry them all the way to a successful finish. It would be good moral discipline for us to stand with them against the sinful habits that assault us, and say a positive: "We will not." That is the courage that will see us through.

The Threat of the Ordinary

One of the most serious threats to our finishing our course is the threat of the ordinary. We are so constituted as to live by repetition—which is good. Who would wish to learn anew each day how to eat and walk and talk? But repetition, however

needful, becomes monotony as the days go by in endless succession, with nothing of the heroic, the tragic, or unusual. Weeks and months lengthen into years, each bringing its familiar routine of work, eat, sleep, worship, perhaps a little recreation—repeated and repeated again and again. These are the dangerous days. These are the days when our high Christian resolution may too easily be drowned in the whirl of the ordinary. We set out to be finishers. Yet our living faith so quickly can become a lifeless, mechanical, habitual thing. Our lips may repeat familiar phrases while our thoughts are elsewhere. Our spiritual life droops for lack of sustenance, while the cares of life crowd in amain. What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewith shall we be clothed? come to occupy the first place in our cumbered lives; and that which should be a tool, a temporary means to an eternal end, unconsciously becomes an end in itself.

Ordinary days may end as eventful and significant days. "Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth," said the inspired writer. We are expecting great and wonderful things to take place on this earth, in our day and age. We have seen through the glass darkly; it may be we have wanted to hurry the hand of God. The story may have grown old; the days seem dull and tame and ordinary. But in reality, they are not. They are laden with significance and evidence of the working of the plan of God. And some day—some day, such a day as this—the change will come: so suddenly, so simply, so naturally will it come that we will wonder that we ever doubted.

But it will also be so final. And where will we stand? among the finishers? In that day it will either be, "I did," or "I wish I had."

Living as we are so close to the end of man's age of misrule, with the consummation of all things foretold by the holy prophets and sages right upon us, how absorbed we should be in putting the finishing touches on our characters. For if we are not, we show by our attitude that we are surrendering to the lazy man's philosophy of "time enough yet," and the day of the Lord will come upon us as a thief and we shall see our mistake when it is everlastingly too late.

We have contracted to finish our job. And nothing short of this will get the finisher's pay. The thought should stimulate us to greater exertion in the divine life, for never before have we been so near the finishing line. Let us so work that we may "lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward"—full pay.

Blessed are the finishers! ●●

On Forgiveness

Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth. —Prov. 24:17

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

—Matt. 5:44

Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
—Matt. 7:3

When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.
—Mark 11:25

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.
—Luke 6:37

If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.
—Luke 17:3

Recompense to no man evil for evil. —Rom. 12:17

Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.
—Eph. 4:32

Life that ever needs forgiveness has for its first duty to forgive.
—Bulwer

A wise man will make haste to forgive, because he knows the full value of time and will not suffer it to pass away in unnecessary pain. —Rambler

The narrow soul knows not the godlike glory of forgiving.
—Rowe

August, 1974

A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirit.
—Hannah More

"I can forgive, but I cannot forget," is only another way of saying, "I will not forgive." Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note—torn in two, and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one.
—H. W. Beecher

It is in vain for you to expect, it is impudent for you to ask of God forgiveness for yourself if you refuse to exercise this forgiving temper as to others.
—Hoadly

Forgive many things in others; nothing in yourself.
—Ausonius

There is nothing more advantageous to a man than a forgiving disposition.
—Terence

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.
—Mahatma Gandhi

He who forgives ends the quarrel. —African Proverb

Never does the human soul appear so strong and noble as when it foregoes revenge, and dares to forgive an injury.
—Chapin

It requires only an ounce of grace and a thimble full of brains to hold a grudge; but to entirely forget an injury is truly beautiful.
—The Defender

Forgiveness is better than revenge; for forgiveness is the sign of a gentle nature, but revenge the sign of a savage nature.
—Epictetus

In the sphere of forgiveness, too many hatchets are buried alive.
—Lem Hubbard

Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.
—Mark Twain

The Prophetic Word

IN the Scriptures of truth are many prophetic statements. Some are set forth clearly and concisely, and are easily understood. Many of these have already been fulfilled, and the others will come to pass in God's time and way.

Still other prophecies, though equally true, are stated less definitely, often veiled in figurative language which only the fulfillment itself can reveal. To try to explain all their details of meaning would be to speak words without knowledge. They are prophecies to be believed, but we must await their outcome before understanding their full meaning.

In studying Bible prophecy, we should observe a few basic points about prophecy in general.

First, regarding the NATURE of Bible predictions:

1) All Bible prophecy is concerned with future events beyond the power of man to foreknow. This means that the prophecy must necessarily be the product of divine inspiration.

2) All Bible prophecy was spoken in the context of the times in which it was delivered. The prophet spoke of the future in terms of his own society and experience. Thus the prophecy was intelligible to the people to whom it was addressed. Only the future could disclose the meaning of its terms as they would apply in the ages to come. For example, if a prophet were speaking of a weapon of war to be used perhaps a thousand years in the future, he would refer to it as a "sword"; the same prophet if speaking today might illustrate his prophecy by calling that weapon a missile.

3) All Bible prophecy was primarily moral in its purpose. The prophet had to live his life in a certain time and place, and his message was directed toward the people of that time and place. Hence, prophecy was given to influence the present action of the people who heard. For it was the underlying view of the future which gave emphasis and meaning to admonitions about the present.

Some prophecies were intended to grant people assurance and comfort; others were to arouse them to a life of obedience and devotion; others were intended to bolster courage in critical times. But all were meant to be a moral stimulus. As such, prophecy becomes a message for the prophet's generation, and a lesson for future generations.

4) All Bible prophecy focuses toward one ul-

timate goal: the eternal Kingdom of Christ on earth. The prophets saw all events as they contribute to the realizing of that final goal.

Second, regarding the FORM of Bible predictions:

1) Some prophecies are literal; that is, they state exactly what will happen in the manner of its occurrence. For example, the prophecy of Elisha: "Thus saith the Lord, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria" (II Kings 7:1). And the prophecy was fulfilled in just that manner.

2) Some prophecies are figurative; that is, the language in the prophecy is obviously and intentionally not literal. For example, the prophecy of David concerning the resurrection of Christ (Psalm 16:10): "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [sheol, the grave]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." He speaks as of himself, but is referring to his greater son, Christ.

3) Some prophecies are poetic; that is, they create more of a picture than was intended to be literally fulfilled, or they use Oriental hyperbole to illustrate a point effectively. For example, Micah's forecast that "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (Mic. 4:4). No one expects to find every man during the Millennium employing himself as a small farmer, with vine and fig tree; rather, the prophet used the illustration to create a picture his hearers could understand. This is true of all Bible prophecy, as it employs imagery that mortals can comprehend, though all they can conceive may be only the faintest suggestion of the reality.

Third, regarding the FULFILLMENT of Bible predictions:

1) Many Bible prophecies are *conditional*; that is, their fulfillment was made contingent upon man's fulfilling certain conditions equally as binding as the prediction. God promised to respond to men as men responded to Him. God said, "If thou wilt, . . ." "then will I . . ." All depended on the response of the men involved. Such prophecy had a definite moral end, to motivate men to holiness and obedience. And should men fail to respond, God could change His promises (see Jer. 18:7-10).

The Lord advised Solomon, "If thou wilt walk in my ways, . . . as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days" (I Kings 3:14). But Solomon did not; and the promise was never fulfilled.

The majority of God's promises are conditional—they depend upon the response of men, the human element which must meet the conditions of the unalterable IF: "If ye will obey my voice indeed," or "if ye keep my commandments," or "if thou wilt walk in my ways."

2) All Bible prophecies not conditional are *absolute and unconditional*: that is, they will be fulfilled whatever men may or may not do. Such is the promise of Numbers 14:21, "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." And there is the promise of the second advent of Christ: "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

Many prophecies of Scripture include both a conditional and an unconditional element. For example, the prophecies relating to the establishing of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Kingdom itself is part of God's eternal purpose, and it shall be established, whatever men may do. It is the subject of sacred covenants and has been confirmed by God Himself; it cannot and will not fail to be realized in its proper time. However, the participation of individuals in that promise is conditional. The inheritors of that Kingdom must be judged on the basis of their individual life and conduct. It is a matter of unconditional promises and conditional participation in those promises.

3) The fulfillment of Bible prophecy is often *telescopic*—the prophet sees near events and far events and passes over the interval between without mention. For example, the words of Isaiah: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor. . . ." Note the combination of a near and a far event in this passage. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given"—this prophecy was fulfilled when the child was born; but the government was not immediately placed upon His shoulders; in fact this part of the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. But the uninformed contemporary of Isaiah who might have heard the prophecy given could hardly have guessed that nearly two thousand years were telescoped in the Prophet's utterance.

4) Or the fulfillment of a Bible prophecy may be *progressive*—a single passage may set forth a whole sequence of events to be fulfilled in the future. These events may or may not be in perfect

order, though their basic sequence is usually observable.

5) The fulfillment of a Bible prophecy may be *partial* in the near aspects of its significance, *complete* fulfillment being reserved for its long-range meaning. Partial, immediate fulfillments may be confused with the longer-range meaning, but emphasis is usually to be placed on the closest adequate fulfillment. Millennial significance can usually be distinguished by promises of permanence and enduring blessing.

6) The fulfillment of a prophecy in the Old Testament must be understood in the light of the New Testament explanations and clarifications, if any; for the authors of the New Testament were likewise inspired. And we may rightly reason that if the same God guided the inspiration of both testaments, then He must possess the right to explain to us in the one what He meant in the other.

Our main purpose must always be to seek harmony of teaching with the general principles of the Bible. ●●

Coping with Criticism

DURING the period when Sir John Simon served in England at the very unpopular post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, his wife kept a plaque on his study wall bearing these words: "To escape criticism: Say nothing, do nothing, be nothing."

The only way you and I can ever avoid criticism completely is to be willing to resign ourselves to a kind of nothingness—"Say nothing, do nothing, be nothing." This being so, our first thought should be to prepare ourselves to expect it. We cannot please everybody. There are those who will disagree with us and take issue with us. There are those who find fault. And there may even be those who will take an opposite view simply for the sake of disagreeing. Criticism is inevitable. In the words of a famous playwright, "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny." It is a fact of life.

Criticism can be one of the highest forms of compliment. It can mean that you are not a cipher being rolled this way and that. It can mean that you are something more than a Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. It can mean that you have worthwhile convictions, that you have the courage to take a stand,

and that you have made a positive response to the call of God. The more one sets himself apart and above deadening conventionality and dulling conformity, the more certainly he will be criticized.

Great men and women have always been maligned. Indeed, the most holy Person who ever lived was cut with cruel criticism. Remember how the scribes and Pharisees followed Jesus like a pack of snarling dogs wherever He went—waiting for a word with which to take issue, waiting for a position or an act to criticize, waiting for a move to condemn. If this noblest life could not escape the barbed arrows of criticism, who are we to think we shall escape them?

Criticism? Expect it!

A second thing to remember in dealing with criticism is this: Listen to it and learn from it. Whether or not the criticism was necessary or justifiable or kindly delivered, we can usually find in it something worth learning. Said a noted minister, "For self-knowledge we depend on others, and if we listen only to those who praise us, we know only a bit of ourselves; and when we are criticized and slighted, we ought dispassionately to consider what is being said, for those critics may be the very servants of God doing His work."

None of us naturally welcome criticism. It is a threat to our sense of security. And yet, a mark of our maturity is our ability to take criticism—to listen and to learn from it, even though for a time the process be painful. This capacity to listen and learn was demonstrated by Abraham Lincoln. At one period of crisis during the Civil War, Lincoln sent an important message to Stanton, his Secretary of War. The messenger returned in obvious embarrassment. "Did you deliver my message?" the President asked. "Yes, I did." "And what did Mr. Stanton say?" The messenger looked down at the floor and hesitated. "Mr. Stanton tore up your letter," the messenger replied at long last in a barely audible whisper, "and he said that you are a fool." "Mr. Stanton called me a fool?" asked the President. "Yes, Sir." There was a moment of silence, then Abraham Lincoln said, "Well, if Mr. Stanton says that I am a fool I must be one. Mr. Stanton is generally right. I had better look into the matter."

If men in secular affairs can show such wisdom and self-control, how much more should we who are working to shape that perfect, blameless character, learn to accept criticism gracefully and gratefully. We ought to recognize that the key to coping effectively with criticism is to be found in our own attitude. Do we want to improve? Do we want to search out the depths of our hearts? Do we want to transform that proud ego into a spirit that

can rejoice even when it is made low?

We might do well to note an infallible test for measuring a man's character used by a well-known journalist. Called to interview a prominent man—statesman, business leader, professor—he first asks what that man thinks of a fellow statesman, business leader, professor. Many begin with a few positive, complimentary comments, but soon they speak a disparaging word or offer a derogatory remark.

A third step in learning to cope with criticism is to be watchful of the criticisms we give to others. The estimates we make of others are often estimates of our own lives. The criticisms we make of others are frequently self-criticisms at heart. A selfish man suspects the unselfishness of others. A dishonest man charges every other man with dishonesty. A cowardly man doubts the reported bravery of other men. A liar has difficulty believing the words of others. We have a strong tendency to see in others the weaknesses we have in ourselves, and we are likely to criticize in others what we have in ourselves—and should be criticizing in ourselves!

One more thought on criticism: Paul rose above criticism because he constantly remembered, "He that judgeth me is the Lord." More important to him than the opinions of other men was the judgment of God.

The greater our desire to know what God thinks, the greater our determination to do God's will, the more we will appreciate the criticism of men. ●●

Words to WALK By

There are thousands hacking at the branches of evil for one who is striking at the root.

Of all knowledge, the wise and good seek most to know themselves.

The first step to self-knowledge is self-distrust.

Worry is interest paid on trouble before it comes due.

To be sincere is easier than to be accurate.

Minds are like parachutes—they only function when they are open.

The best part of a good man's life is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.

A good memory is one that is so poor you can't remember what you worried about yesterday.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God."

Three Classes of Humanity

IT is a universally recognized truth that no man can serve two masters. Jesus illustrated His point using God and money as the two masters, but it is equally true in all aspects of life. There comes a time when a man must choose, and a choice cannot be evaded.

Always men have been free to choose their master and in so doing they choose their destiny. The Lord said to Adam, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). He must choose to eat or not to eat.

Joshua put the choice squarely to the people: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15). Choose today, or tomorrow. The choice could not be evaded, even by procrastination. Elijah issued a similar ultimatum: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (I Kings 18:21). "And the people answered him not a word." They could not make up their minds; they had to wait for the evidence.

There are always two possibilities: God or mammon, good or evil, the true God or the god Baal. All who have come under covenant with the true God must constantly choose. All the choices that must be made are not necessarily as sharply contrasted as these; sometimes only a fine line divides the right from the wrong side. But always the Christian who makes for the Kingdom must be on the right side. One who hesitates and refuses to take a firm stand is on the wrong side, headed for destruction and not for the Kingdom.

Throughout the ages the choice has always been left to the individual.

"A checkerboard of mingled light and shade?
And we the pieces on it deftly laid?
Moved and removed, without a word to say,
By the same Hand that board and pieces made?"

"Not pieces we in any fateful game,
Nor free to shift on destiny the blame;
Each soul doth tend its own absorbing flame,
Fans it to life, or smothers it in shame."

God with divine foreknowledge knows in advance who will choose to serve Him and who will choose to ignore Him, but He does not predestine anyone to either life or death. As in the above quotation, we are not free to shift the blame for our failures. Rather, our destiny rests squarely on our own shoulders. We have heard and have learned of the Father, we have had our senses exercised to discern both good and evil, and "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

These words apply only to those recognized as covenant-makers, those who ultimately fall either in the faithful or unfaithful class. As we have learned in the previous lessons on this subject, all others are not recognized by God. They live and die oblivious to Him, and shall remain in the grave.

In this issue we shall complete our study of the three classes, following our outline:

- IV. Bible Allegories that Teach the Classes
 - A. The Two Seeds of Abraham
 - B. Other Allegories

A day of division is coming; the Judgment is coming as surely as tomorrow morning's sunrise. The approaching sunrise may be obscured by clouds; nevertheless the sun will rise. And though some may scoff at the Biblical prophecy of the literal return of Christ to earth, He will nevertheless come. His coming will bring the inevitable Judgment Day when all who have covenanted to serve Him will be called to account. Then, and not until then, will the three classes of humanity be fully determined.

IV. BIBLE ALLEGORIES THAT TEACH THE CLASSES

Symbolism, allegories and parables are as much a part of the Bible as are law and prophecy. God, through His Spirit, using both men and angels,

frequently used indirect means to teach the lessons He wanted to impress. Example is always more forceful than precept, and an object lesson is not soon forgotten.

The Bible begins with an allegory. The narrative of the Creation contained in the first three chapters of Genesis presents God's over-all plan by means of symbolic representation. God is pictured as working for six days and resting on the seventh. The seven days represent the 7000 years during which God will complete His plan for this earth. He is pictured as working for six days and resting on the seventh. The six work-days represent the 6000 years allotted to man to have dominion over the earth, during which God is working, preparing a righteous people to be co-rulers with His Son, Jesus Christ, when He returns to set up His Kingdom on earth.

The seventh day, likewise a thousand years, is ushered in by the return of Christ and the Judgment of the covenant-makers. Jesus portrayed the Judgment scene with symbols, describing the division of the faithful and unfaithful servants as a shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats, setting the sheep on his right hand and the goats on the left, the faithful sheep being ushered into the Kingdom while the goats are left outside (Matt. 25: 31-34).

Jesus taught the people in parables, using symbols of everyday life with which they were familiar. It was written by Matthew that "all these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them" (13: 34). He used as symbols wheat and tares, sheep and goats, sowing and reaping, fishing, leaven that was added to the dough to make it rise.

We readily recognize the meaning of such symbols: the good sheep, the good seed that brings forth fruit, the good tree that bears good fruit, and the wheat—all representative of good or righteous people. And on the other hand we have the tares that are gathered and burned, the seed that withers and dies and produces no harvest, the goats, and the tree that bears evil fruit, or no fruit—all representative of wicked or unfaithful people.

Other symbols and allegories may not be as easily recognized or understood; these we shall study in this lesson. Isaac and Ishmael, the two sons of Abraham, Jacob and Esau the two sons of Isaac, Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph (grandsons of Jacob), were symbolic heads of contrasting classes of people.

A. The Two Seeds Promised to Abraham

One phase of God's plan, pictured in Genesis,

was set in motion by His call to Abraham: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, . . . unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. . . . Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-15).

"Seed" indicates offspring, but Abraham and his wife were childless. Being human, he could not comprehend the words of the Lord, and when the Lord again appeared to him in a vision, Abraham said, "Behold, to me thou hast given no seed . . . and the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir [Eliezer, his servant, had been named his heir since he had no son]; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (Gen. 15:3-4).

Abraham, though 86 years old, was not to remain childless. He was to be the father of two natural sons, one by Hagar, whom he took for another wife; and the second by his wife, Sarah.

1. Ishmael. At Sarah's suggestion, Abraham took her maid, Hagar, for a wife. As a result of this union, Ishmael was born. Before his birth an angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, and said unto her, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude" (Gen. 16:10). Thirteen years later the Lord confirmed that promise to Abraham: "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; . . . and I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 17:20).

Ishmael was representing the subjects of the Kingdom, the great multitude to be taken out during the seventh day, the Millennium. Those who submit to the new Ruler during the Battle of Armageddon will be Ishmael seed and will form the nucleus of the servant class, the righteous subjects who will ultimately fill the earth with God's glory.

These were seen in vision by the Revelator, as described in Rev. 7:9: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

They were said to be many in number, a great multitude—not literally more than could be counted,

but an unrevealed number. They "stood before the throne," hence were of the servant class, subjects of the Kingdom. They had been taken out of all nations—they had worked out their salvation during the thousand years and had made themselves worthy to be subjects. Because they performed their work under more favorable circumstances, they are not worthy of so high honor as those taken out during the 6000 years, hence they are servants and not rulers.

2. Isaac. Isaac was a child produced by divine intervention. Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah his wife was 90 when the angel of the Lord appeared to tell them they should have a son and should call him "Isaac." The record reads: "And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. . . . And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land . . . for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17: 15-16, 7-8).

"Kings of people shall be of her," said the angel of Sarah. She was to be the mother of Isaac, the titular head of the ruling class, those who shall be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," while Ishmael, the son of Hagar, was to be the titular head of the servant class, the subjects of the Kingdom.

The ruling class are also seen in vision by the Revelator as those who have been redeemed "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," and are made "kings and priests" and "shall reign on the earth." Again he sees them in vision: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 5:9-10; 20:4).

B. Other Allegories

1. Ephraim and Manasseh. We have another example of an allegory that teaches the classes in the figures of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph, grandsons of Jacob.

Jacob had been forced to leave the land of Canaan because of a famine. His son, Joseph was in charge of the food supply in Egypt and invited all his kin to settle in the land of Goshen. Seventeen years

later Jacob was near the point of death and as was traditional in those days, he called his sons and grandsons before him for a blessing. After the blessing of the sons, the grandsons were placed before him. "And Israel [Jacob] beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these? And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons."

It was the custom to give the greater blessing to the elder son, but God was guiding the blessing of Joseph's sons. We read: "And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him [his father]. And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn" (Gen. 48:8-9, 13-14).

"And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head" (v. 17). "Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see" (v. 10), and Joseph thought his father was innocently mistaken.

It was, as aforementioned, customary for the chief blessing to go to the firstborn, and Joseph thought that because his father was old he did not know what he was doing, hence Joseph attempted to shift his father's hands on the heads of his sons. But Jacob knew what he was doing; witness that he was "guiding his hands wittingly." God was behind the move, and Jacob said to Joseph, "I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (vs. 19-20).

Ephraim represents the seed who will become the rulers with Christ in the Kingdom. The spiritual seed of Ephraim would be **greater in rank**, but the spiritual seed of Manasseh were to be **greater in number**. It was to be with their spiritual offspring as Paul wrote in Romans 9:12: "The elder shall serve the younger," or as rendered in the margin of the Authorized Version, the "greater" in number shall serve the "lesser" in number.

The allegory of Ephraim and Manasseh has reference to rank as well as to numbers. Those who work out their salvation during the thousand years, the Ishmael seed of whom we have studied, will be lesser in rank and greater in number. They will be the servants of the Kingdom, here represented by

Manasseh. The lesser number represents the Isaac seed, the class who will reign with Christ over the nations.

2. Two reapings, two harvests. We have shown that there are definitely two groups of people who are to share in the Kingdom of God upon earth: the rulers and the subjects. By comparison, the former group is small, while the latter is a great multitude who will fill the earth when His plan is complete. These two groups of individuals are "reaped" a thousand years apart, hence two reapings, or two harvests are used to depict the events.

a. The firstfruits. The 14th chapter of Revelation opens with a vision of the Lamb [Christ] standing on Mt. Zion "and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Verse 3 reveals that they "were redeemed from the earth." They "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth...being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (v. 4).

These are the Isaac seed, those taken out during the 6000 years. They have written the "Father's name," His word in their "foreheads," their minds. They "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"—they go where He leads, they do what He wants them to do, they say what He wants them to say. They have rendered perfect obedience during their lifetime, hence they are worthy to be among the firstfruits, those chosen to be rulers with Christ. "In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (v. 5).

In verses 14 and 15 of the chapter, the coming of Christ and the judgment of the covenant-makers is described as a harvest, or reaping. Christ is pictured as sending out an angel having a "sharp sickle,"... "and he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth and the earth was reaped." **This is the first reaping, the harvest of the firstfruits, the Isaac seed, the rulers of the Kingdom.**

We learn from Paul that Christ Himself is the first of the firstfruits: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept....But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (I Cor. 15:20, 23).

"They that are Christ's at His coming," also firstfruits, are those chosen at the Judgment described above, the reaping of the earth.

b. The afterfruits. Reading further in Revelation, we learn of another reaping, that of the "clusters of the vine of the earth," the great multitude of servants of the Kingdom.

Surface reading might lead one to believe that this reaping immediately follows the first, but such is not the case. **These two events are 1000 years**

apart. Revelation 20 provides us with this specific information: The devil, or Satan, representative of all evil, is bound for a thousand years; the Judgment is set and the faithful of the 6000 years are chosen. This is referred to as the "first resurrection," not first in number only, but first, meaning "chief," first in rank. Those chosen at this resurrection and Judgment "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (v. 4), "but the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (v. 5).

Verse 6 vividly describes those who have been chosen and rewarded with immortality at the first resurrection and Judgment: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Again, this is a description of the firstfruits.

To return to Revelation 14, we read of another angel with a sharp sickle, and he was commanded: "Thrust in thy sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe" (v. 18). **This is the harvest of the afterfruits, the subjects of the Kingdom. It is the judgment of the "rest of the dead," those who have lived and died during the thousand years, those who make up the subjects of the Kingdom. They are the same class as was seen in vision in Revelation 7:9-10 after the 144,000 had been chosen. They "stood before the throne," and a voice was heard saying, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" (v. 13). The answer was: "These are they which came out of [after] great tribulation...they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night" (vs. 14-15).**

IN SUMMARY

We have seen how God views His human family. It is part of His divine right to judge and divide according to His eternal standards. "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." In His infinite wisdom He will judge, and we know that, being a righteous God, He will do right.

It is our part now so to live that we may be on acceptable terms with Him, that He may desire us for His eternal sons and daughters. Whether we qualify or not rests entirely with us, for He will "render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6).

*Reprints of these studies are available
upon request.*

ISRAEL

Yesterday
Today
Tomorrow

Introduction

The Bible contains numerous prophecies relating to Israel and the future of God's chosen people. Some were intended for immediate fulfillment; others were longer-ranged. Still others were given for the far distant future and God's ultimate purpose upon earth. Some applied to the natural nation of Israel; others may be applied more significantly to the true Israel of God, Israelites indeed, the eternal heirs of His Kingdom, a people selected from every nation.

A single prophecy may have more than one application, but we must be careful not to accept any application which contradicts other Bible teachings or makes a prophet contradict himself. This is especially true when we try to apply Bible prophecies to present-day occurrences in Israel. Sometimes, careful analysis reveals inconsistencies in these applications, as they are explained; and certain prophecies are definitely taken out of context and misapplied. We will discuss a few of these.

Concerning the Return of Israel

Many of the prophecies often applied to a present-day return of Israel apply more completely when thought of as descriptive of the return that followed the ancient captivity of Israel. The significance of this return should not be minimized: It was God's solemn promise that Israelite captives should return, that their exile was to be only for a limited time, and that they would again inhabit their native land.

Jeremiah is often called the prophet of the captivity; and though his messages frequently looked far beyond the Jewish captivity, their main focus was on the immediate future of the people to whom he spoke. They were given to serve a present need, as their context clearly indicates.

One such prophecy is found in Jeremiah 30. Whatever its long-range significance, it certainly

described the fear that prevailed at that time. "For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? . . . and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble. . . ." (vs. 5-7). *

To give a ray of hope to those of his hearers who had faith to look beyond, the Prophet foretold the end of the troublous time; divine deliverance was a certainty. "But he [Jacob] shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke"—the "yoke" was a symbol of Babylonian oppression (see Jer. 27:2, 8; 28:14). "And [I] will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him" (Jer. 30:3-8).

The Prophet climaxes his message with a brief glimpse into a time then far distant, when the Messiah should return and "they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them" (v. 9). The language is symbolic—they shall not be servants of the David who ruled on Israel's throne, but of Christ, the greater Son of David. And he says further, "I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return and be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid" (30:10).

God NOT Instigating the Present Return

Jeremiah 16:14-16 is often used to show how God moves men to carry out His designs, but this

* Some commentators feel that Jeremiah was at the same time looking beyond the time of the captivity to the Day of the Lord. For the Day of the Lord shall begin with a time of great trouble for all the nations of the earth, including Israel (Dan. 12:1). And this time of trouble shall end by bringing blessing and salvation for all of God's chosen, as vs. 8-10 indicate.

prophecy definitely relates to the time of the captivity—in fact, it is prophetic of the *captivity itself*, and not to any *return*. The text reads, “Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks” (Jer. 16:16). Those who apply this text to the return of Israel today see the “hunters” and “fishers” as those circumstances and persecutions which caused the Israelites to be dissatisfied with the land in which they have lived as strangers and to return to their native land of Palestine. However, the following verses (17-18) show that this pre-millennial application is out of context with the Prophet’s thought. The Lord is telling of His seeking out disobedient Israelites to *punish* them. “For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes. And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double”—the captivity was to be for the punishment of their sins—“because they have defiled my land, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable things.”

Ezekiel 20:33-38 is also applied to the present-day return; and it may be fitting to a certain extent; but certain portions of the passage definitely are yet future. “As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you; and I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you....” The “fury” of the Lord is applied to the troublous circumstances which motivated Israel’s present return to Palestine. And the “wilderness of the people” is sometimes thought to suggest the unsettled world conditions that bring fear and anxiety today. But the time has not yet come when the Lord will “plead” with them, when “I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me.” Israel today is not yet purged of all who “transgress” and rebel against God.

God is *allowing* the present-day return, but He is not *instigating* it in behalf of a people who are ready to seek Him. All must agree that present Israel is unworthy of divine favor; and anything which He is allowing or doing is not because of their merits.

Present Prosperity in Israel NOT A Sign of God’s Special Favor

Modern Israel is economically prosperous—no one questions this. But that prosperity is *not* the result of God’s special favor toward His people, nor is it the eternal prosperity promised by Israel’s ancient prophets.

Modern methods of irrigation have literally converted desert wastes into productive cropland. Some connect this with the prophecy of Isaiah (35:1) that the “desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.” But the remainder of the chapter identifies the time when this shall be: it is when “they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God” (v. 2); when “he [Emmanuel, God with us] will come and save you” (v. 4); when “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (v. 5); when “the lame man [shall] leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (v. 6); when “the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (v. 10). That day *is* coming; these prophecies shall be fulfilled, all of them—but they have not yet been fulfilled.

Jeremiah 31:12 is another prophecy incorrectly applied to present-day prosperity in Israel. Here again the context tells of a better age than now. “Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord”—present Israel has not gathered “to the goodness of the Lord”—for “wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and”—notice especially this last phrase: “they shall not sorrow any more at all.”

Also applied to the present prosperity of Israel is the prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 61: “And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations” (v. 4). However this text might fittingly describe the present prosperity in Israel, both the preceding thought and the verses which follow point to a future time. For these people shall be “called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (v. 3). And they “shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves” (v. 6).

“The Time to Favor Her”—Now?

A prophecy in Psalm 102 is frequently applied

as evidence that the present revival and prosperity of Israel is a sign of God's favor and a sign of Christ's second coming. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come" (Ps. 102:13). Verse 16 is applied to the same "set time," which many believe is now: "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory."

Is God building up Zion today, or are the Israelites doing it? A contemporary writer suggests that Israel today has all but given up looking for the Messiah, and is going ahead with the work which for centuries they trusted He would do. As a nation, their interests are temporal and secular; they show no interest in God's plans and purposes—the majority even continue to reject Christ. How then can God be said to be building up Zion and by this action showing now that the "set time" to "favor her . . . is come"?

The translation of this verse is clearer in other versions than in the King James. The Moffatt Bible states the two events—building up Zion and appearing in His glory—as one act of turning toward a repentant people. "When the Eternal builds up Zion, appearing in His majesty, when he turns to the forlorn, despising not their prayer, then pagans will revere thee, all kings on earth will own thy majesty"—a prophecy definitely *not* fulfilled at present.

The American Bible also clarifies the text, showing that the Lord's building up of Zion and His appearing are at the time when the "nations will fear the name of the Lord." "And the nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory, when the Lord rebuilds Zion, when he is seen in his glory, when he turns himself toward the prayer of the destitute, and does not despise their prayer."

Verses 19-21 picture another parallel event—a spiritual revival among the people of Israel: "For [the Lord] hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary" upon a people who "declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord." Certainly this aspect of the prophecy is not fulfilled today.

Present-Day Israel NOT Dwelling Safely

The prophet Jeremiah foresaw that regathered Israel should dwell safely—a promise which must apply to a future time, as the modern nation exists due to its military power. The prophecy reads, "I will bring them again unto this place, . . . and I will cause them to dwell safely" (Jer. 32:37).

Amos 9:14, cited to prove that Israel's present August, 1974

restoration is part of a divine plan, also pictures a lasting state of peace and safety—a state not existent today. The state of Israel today is in constant danger of attack from hostile neighbors.

We might observe also that those who quote Jeremiah 32:37 to show that regathered Israel will dwell safely also see in Jeremiah 30:3-5 a prophecy of a present fear and trembling among the Israelite people—a slight inconsistency, as the two prophecies could hardly apply to the same nation at the same time.

Present Israel NOT Recognized By All Nations

The prophecies regarding restored Israel picture a nation respected by all peoples of the world because of the notable work of God in her behalf. For example, the prophecy of Ezekiel (20:41): "I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." And again (36:23): "And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes."

At present, the Lord is not sanctified in the eyes of Israel; nor are Israel's neighbors ready to acknowledge that the Lord has done anything for Israel. It is interesting to note that the nation of Israel does not even appear on Arab maps. The Arab peoples keep up, at great cost of common sense and convenience, what has been called "an elaborate pretence that Israel does not exist."

Israel Today NOT the Self-Governing Nation Promised

Some people believe that an independent state of Israel as it exists today is the ancient hope of Israel brought to realization. They point to the prophecy of Jeremiah: "And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21).

However, such an application of this text seems inconsistent with the context of the prophecy. Jeremiah 30:19 tells of God's *glorifying* these people, and no Israelite today has been glorified. Verse 20 states that "their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them." Surely this is not fulfilled at present. And the remainder of the verse which might suggest a self-governing state today says of the governor-to-be: "I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me. . . . And ye shall be my people, and I will

be your God" (Jer. 30:21-22). No present-day governor of Israel may be said to "approach unto [God]," nor do the Israelites as a nation seek God. Israel's Proclamation of Independence (May 14, 1948) states the aims of the modern state entirely outside the limits of Israel's ancient Hebrew faith. We quote:

"The State of Israel . . . will be based on the principles of liberty, justice, and peace as conceived by the Prophets of Israel; will uphold the full social and political equality of all citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex; will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education, and culture; will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and will loyally uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter."

Also, a prophecy of Ezekiel clearly states that the nation of Israel which will be God's re-established nation and which will merit His recognition should not exist after its final collapse (A. D. 70) until the end of the Gentile age and the return of Christ.

The prophecy reads: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, . . . remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: . . . I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him" (Ezek. 21:25-27).

Israel today may be possessing their former inheritance, but God has not yet re-established His ancient throne among His people, for "he . . . whose right it is" has not yet come.

God's Covenant with Israel **CONDITIONAL**

Often the significance of modern Israel with respect to Bible prophecy is built upon the premise that God's covenant with Israel was absolute and unconditional. God promised Abraham, "I will give unto thee and to thy seed . . . all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:7-8).

These words might suggest an unconditional guarantee of a possession. And in one sense, the prophecy was absolute: God had a purpose, and He would fulfill it. But the original covenant did not define *who should* or *who should not* be among the inheritors. However, as we observed earlier, history was not long in revealing that only a select line were inheritors, even by natural descent. Of the two sons of Abraham (Isaac and Ishmael), only one (Isaac) was chosen. And of the two sons of Isaac (Jacob and Esau) only one (Jacob) was blessed. Thus even in Abraham's *near* descendants only a certain few were selected. How then, in our present time, nearly four millenniums later, could a whole

nation be thought to be eligible for special blessing under the terms of the original covenant?

Also cited as guarantees of God's promises to Israel are the words of Isaiah: "... and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (55:3). Isaiah spoke the truth: God's covenant is everlasting, and His mercies sure; the only question lies with *who* will receive those covenant blessings. It is to be only those who respond to the Lord's entreaty: "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good. . . . Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live" (vs. 2-3).

The words of Jeremiah in chapter 33 are also applied to prove the certainty of eternal blessings upon natural Israel: "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne" (vs. 20-21). God's promise is as certain as the sequence of day and night; but Jeremiah's thought is not a blessing upon natural Israelites. Rather, he is speaking of the promise that David should have a son—that is, Christ—to reign upon the throne.

Covenant Blessings Reserved for Believers

God cannot fulfill His long-range and eternal promises to those who fail to meet His standards without violating His eternal principles of justice. If by allowing Israel to return at the present time God is fulfilling His covenant made with Abraham, God is favoring a people the majority of whom do not even recognize Christ as the Messiah. Jews today range all the way from ultra-orthodox to non-believers.

Furthermore, we might observe that Bible prophecy cannot have both an immediate and a long-range fulfillment realized at the same time. There must be an interval of time between, also a shift in application from natural to spiritual. If God were fulfilling His ancient promises to the natural seed of Abraham today, this fulfillment must shortly merge into a spiritual fulfillment when the spiritual seed of Abraham obtain the greater inheritance promised, even the whole earth—a definite inconsistency, as a prophecy cannot be both natural and spiritual in one fulfillment.

The apostle Paul showed absolutely that Jews and Gentiles are equal in the sight of God. He spoke of Abraham as "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11). And again, speaking of himself as among those who were Jews by birth, he wrote, "What then? are we better than they? No,

in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles; that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:9-10). Natural Jews are no better than natural Gentiles; and the Almighty will never show favor to either who does not become worthy of His favor. God honors character, and character alone (I Sam. 2:3).

Paul said yet again, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). Nationality has *no* influence on one's standing in the sight of God.

God Is No Respector of Persons

If we conclude that God is showing special favor and blessing to Israel today, because they were once called to be His chosen people, we violate a principle stated in the divine Record: that God is no respector of persons. In His sight, Arabs are equal with Jews, as far as their qualifications for life in the world to come are concerned; and neither, in an unregenerate state, is of any special value. "All nations before [God] are as nothing; they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity" (Isa. 40:17). Every man, whatever his race or nationality, must meet the same moral requirements to merit eternal favor and divine blessing.

There was a time, as we have seen, when God's primary concern was with the natural descendants of Abraham, though other nationalities were never rejected simply because they were foreigners. God's covenants with Abraham and later with Moses and the Israelite people were not absolute; they were always conditioned upon man's obedience. God's primary requirement was always *character*; and His calling always brought with it a full weight of responsibility. God chose to work with the children of Israel because He saw among them more material of suitable quality for His purposes than He saw among other nations. We might compare God to a sower who chooses the best soil he can find for the planting of His choice seed. Israel was the best available at the time, but simply planting the seed in their soil did not produce a harvest. The seed had to grow and mature; and this was Israel's responsibility. And when Israel failed to produce the harvest desired, God looked for other, more fertile soil.

Paul affirmed his belief in God's just impartiality in his letter to the Romans. He wrote, "God . . . will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and

do not obey the truth, . . . tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:5-11). A contentious Jew was no more highly esteemed by God than his Gentile counterpart.

The Jews received a *prior* opportunity in being the first nation called to serve God as a nation, but this did not give them any superior rating by nature. For "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11). ●●

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE)

From A Reader—

Weaving to Music

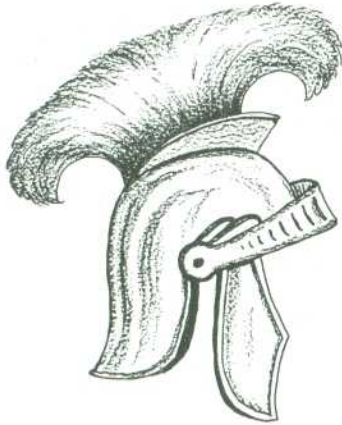
Some of the most beautiful carpets in the world are made in India. I was surprised to learn that most intricate weaving is done to music. The unique designs are handed down from generation to generation. Each pattern has its own tune. Instructions for these rugs are made out on pages of script resembling sheets of music. First foundation cords are stretched on large wooden frames; groups of workers are seated on long benches behind the webbing. Music begins as the master in charge gives directions for each stitch in strange chanting tones. The colors he wants are denoted by the rise and fall of the music of his voice.

We too are weavers. Day by day we intertwine the threads, now dark, now bright. These make up the design of our life. Every strand is woven progressively into the fabric according to His perfect pattern. Are we letting the wave notes of God's love color our thoughts and deeds today so that our testimony becomes an increasingly beautiful tapestry of grace? God's song in our heart should be seen in our face and be evidenced in our works.

Mrs. G., Danville, Virginia

... We have
Kind words for the stranger,
And smiles for the sometime guest,
But for our own the bitter tone,
Though we love our own the best.
—Anon.

CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS



**Take the
Helmet of
Salvation--**

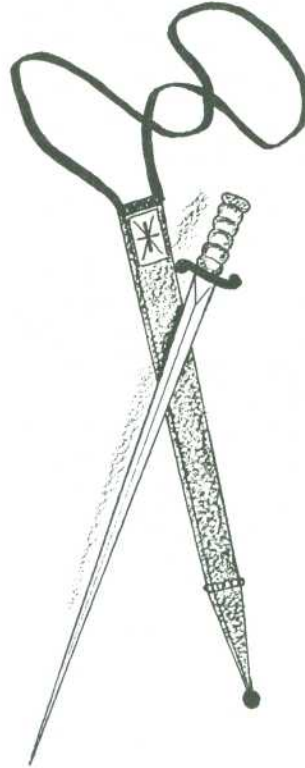
IN olden days every soldier wore a helmet to protect his head from injury. The helmet was made of hard material to resist impact. No soldier in the days of Paul would have thought of going to battle without his helmet, and Paul made certain to include a helmet when he was describing the armor a Christian soldier must wear. The Christian's helmet is salvation. What, exactly, does that mean?

We know that salvation is the highest goal in a Christian's life, but we do not possess it now. How, then, can we put on the helmet of salvation? We, who have been made acquainted with God's plan, realize that we must perform a work to become worthy of salvation. We have a knowledge of what God requires of us and we are familiar with what He commands us to do. This knowledge is contained within our brain. Also, we must possess a determination to gain salvation. Nothing must be allowed to deter us in our quest. Hence, this knowledge of what to do to gain salvation and a determination to do it is the helmet that protects from the doubts and uncertainties that would try to penetrate and destroy us. With the world in the condition it is today, skepticism, doubt and unbelief on every side, it is difficult to keep this helmet firmly fastened, but fasten it we must if we are to be a true soldier.

With this helmet on our heads and the other pieces of armor tightly clad about us, we are ready to meet our foe. ●●

A Christian soldier might have on every piece of the spiritual armor, but without the trusty "sword of the spirit" he is not ready for battle.

The word "battle" signifies that there is an encounter with the enemy, a skirmish, a conflict. Let no soldier enter this battle without a full knowledge of how to use this mighty sword. This great sword is "the Word of God." Many years ago when Jesus was tempted He always replied, "It is written."



**and the Sword
of the Spirit**

Jesus used this great weapon in His warfare and He conquered, too. He never faltered.

Every true soldier must fight to win. When our "old man" strikes with deadly darts, we, too, must fight him with the Word of God.

Does a fiery dart called "Anger" make its way directly towards you? Quench it with your shield of faith and stoutly proclaim, "Cease from anger and forsake wrath" as you bear down upon your old self who has hurled the dart. Strike with your sword again with the words, "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools." Follow this with, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and all evil speaking be put away from you." This mighty sword, the Word of the Lord, is a weapon more powerful than any this world has ever known. It alone can destroy the strongholds of sin.

Keep your sword ready for use at a moment's notice. The enemy is wily, and you must be ready. A soldier who leaves his weapon behind will never be a victor. ●●

Showers of Blessings

The Blessing of Water

WATER is one of the many, many blessings which we enjoy that we sometimes forget to be thankful for. How many things can you think of that water is used for? We use it to drink. Mother uses it when she cooks the food. We use it to take a bath, to wash our dirty clothes, water the lawn and the garden and many other things. We couldn't live if we didn't have water.

Has Mother or Daddy ever explained to you where the water comes from when we turn the handle of the faucet on the sink? Oh, yes, I know

the water comes right out the faucet. But where did it come from before that? Do you remember those days when it rains so hard all day long? God plans a big blessing for us when He sends the rain. Clouds are formed in the sky from moisture in the air. Then the moisture gathers together and forms drops which fall to the ground, and that is how it rains.

When it rains, some of the water soaks into the ground; some of it runs into brooks or rivers and lakes. Then some men put great big pipes together and the water from lakes goes through the pipes to reservoirs where the water is stored. Other pipes bring the water from the reservoirs to your home so it is ready to run out the faucet whenever it is needed.

If you live in the country you may get your water from a well. A well is a deep hole dug or drilled into the ground until a stream of water running under the ground is found. Then the water fills the well and is ready to use anytime. But we must remember that whether our water comes from a well or a faucet, it was once rain that God sent.

Ask your Mother or Daddy and maybe they can tell you more interesting stories about where water comes from. Or maybe they can tell you some other things that you use water for at your house that you have never thought of before.

The next time you take a nice long drink of fresh, cool water when you are very thirsty, I hope you will remember how very good God is to give us water, and won't you say, "Thank you, God, for the good water you send us and the other nice things you have sent us, too"?

We can never thank God too many times for our "Showers of Blessings."



Always Keep Your Promise

Leland stood by the gate, holding on to his little red wagon.

"Where are you going?" asked Danny.

"I am waiting for Philip. Father said I could sell my wagon to him. Philip has gone to get the money."

"I want a wagon like that, Leland. How much did you sell it for?"

"Two dollars," answered Leland.

"Two dollars?" cried Danny. "Sell it to me. I will give you more than that."

"I can't," said Leland, "My father said I must always keep my promises." ●●



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"Can you please tell me who the 'guests' are in Jesus' parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt. 22:10-11). If this parable is likened to a wedding, you would have: 1) a bridegroom; 2) a bride; 3) guests. If Christ is the bridegroom and the one hundred forty-four thousand elect are the bride, then who are the guests?"

"Also, these guests had on a wedding garment. Is this different from the marriage garment of righteousness which the bride wears?"

Deceased

I am writing to you today to let you know that my husband, Almer Chisamore, has passed away. He had been in and out of the hospital for several months. Kindly pass this information on to the other members of the Megiddo Church.

Mallorytown, Ontario, Canada

Mrs. A. E. Chisamore

To Be A Doer

I went to church and Sunday School all my life. But what a shock it was when the truth just opened to me. It seemed like the Lord said, This is the truth you are getting now, I felt so happy to learn the truth of God's Word.

I had always thought before that when you died, if a Christian you went to heaven; if a sinner, you went right into hell and started burning. I believe some churches still teach that way. My parents always taught us to do good, not to steal or lie or use God's name in vain. Mother would always say that God looks down and sees everything we do, knows everything we say. She also taught us to do to others as we would have them do to us.

Now I want to do all the Lord wants me to do. He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." I want to be a doer of His Word.

Shady Cove, Oregon

I. C.

Every Moment Every Day

The victory over self is gained only by watchfulness and self-control. It requires discipline to form a character with which God will be pleased. We must show by our words and actions that eternal things are dearer to us than temporal things.

It is necessary that we keep in mind every moment every day the wonderful thoughts of Psalm 119:59-60, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."

Davenport, Iowa

W. P.

A Great Help

I feel that the Signs of the Times show that very soon Elijah will make his appearance and the Kingdom of God will be established.

Your Message magazine has been such a great help to me in preparing myself for meeting Jesus when He comes the second time. I want to continue it as long as possible.

Franklin, Tennessee

Mrs. H.

A parable may have more than one application. It may teach a certain lesson to one group of people, and another lesson to another group.

As members of the true Church of God in these last days, it is our chief concern to be ready to be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb at the return of Christ, as you postulate. Hence, this is the timely message for our day and time.

However, Jesus spoke this parable in Matthew 22 to the Pharisees (see verse 15), the professedly religious among His contemporaries. Up to that time, God had worked primarily with the nation of Israel; they had been given every chance to be loyal, yet they had proved disloyal again and again. They had killed God's prophets; they had persecuted those who had spoken to them the Word of God (verses 2-6 picture this). And so Jesus was showing in this parable how God would reject Israel as a nation and turn to a wider group, the Gentiles, whom the Jews despised.

Matthew 22:6 and 7 foreshow the defeat of the Jews in their war with the Romans, A. D. 70, the capture of Jerusalem by Titus and his Roman legions, and its destruction by fire.

Verses 8-10 picture the calling of the Gentiles from "the highways"; verses 11-14 depict the plight of the unfaithful among those called after the Jews as a nation were rejected.

In another application of the parable, more relevant to us, verses 10-14 may picture a condition that will exist after Christ returns and the proclamation goes forth: "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come" (Rev. 14:7). When Christ the bridegroom is joined to His faithful bride, the 144,000 elect, the wedding will be attended by "guests," those who during the Millennium will become the populace of the Kingdom. This will be the compelling time (Luke 14:23), during which all will have to submit to the law of the new order or perish. At the close of the Mil-

lennium there will be a second judgment. At this judgment, the man who in Jesus' parable was found without a wedding garment will be the unfaithful from among those who have lived during that period, and he will be "speechless," having no excuse to offer for his indifference and carelessness.

You ask also about the wedding garment which the guests wore, as compared with the garment of righteousness worn by the bride. The wedding garment worn by the guests will most certainly be different from that worn by the bride or true Church. It is said that the guests at a Jewish wedding were expected to wear *clean* clothing, but no special wedding clothing was provided. In Revelation 7, this same group of people is seen standing before the throne; and they, the populace of the

new world, are pictured as having "washed their robes and made them white." This agrees with the analogy in Jesus' parable.

There is a difference between the two robes. In each case it is a robe of immortality, a robe of life. It is a symbol of the outstanding Christian accomplishment of the wearer, the assurance that he has become pure and holy through and through. But the garment worn by the guests will lack the authority of those who sit with Christ in His throne of power.

A similar illustration occurs in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, the prodigal representing the subjects of the Kingdom. He receives the best robe, obviously the best robe that was left—the very "best" robe had already been given to the faithful.

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Meditations

On the Word

A too-critical critic once complained that the book of James, while intensely practical, was lacking in imagination. Even if true, this charge is no cause for complaint. What the book lacks in subtilty it makes up in forthrightness and comprehensibility. One never needs to wonder or inquire what this or that means; anyone who can read can understand James. Its five brief chapters are crammed with simple, direct and vital ethical teaching. There are no other five consecutive chapters in the entire Bible which approach it as a mirror of the human heart and as a guide to practical Christian living. We are glad that it is so. We would be infinitely poorer without the little General Epistle of James.

While the author dealt mainly with human problems which lie close at hand and are timeless, such as profession without practice, the unruly tongue, snobbery, worldliness, and the like, the closing chapter in its opening verses is prophetic. It will be necessary to read from the beginning of the chapter to get the background for our text.

"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth."

In an age and a nation torn apart by labor disputes, these words are more than timely, they are

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

startling. Only by divine inspiration could the Apostle have seen the conditions which confront us at this very moment. It requires no stretch of the imagination, no filling in of blank or doubtful places, to see the fulfillment. It can be no other time but our own.

This can be proved by more than one line of approach. In the first place, the time is specifically stated to be the "last days," just before the coming of the Lord; and the writer knew that between his day and the great event many centuries would intervene, many significant events would occur. Modern critics often assert that the apostles expected the Second Coming in their day, but in so saying they exhibit their own ignorance.

In the second place, at no other time in the world's history have conditions so perfectly answered to the prophecy. In the days of the apostles, when this Letter was composed, the Roman industrialists and land owners were extremely rich and as oppressive and dissolute as can well be imagined. But they were dealing exclusively with slave labor, while this passage describes the exploitation of free or hired labor. Through the Middle Ages the world was relatively poor, but with the industrial revolution in the early 19th century came a sudden increase of wealth, which has continued to the present time. The rise of the millionaires, multi-millionaires and billionaires is in itself a fulfillment of this prophecy, for the conflict between the classes presupposes the existence of great wealth and its concentration in the hands of certain persons who have misused its power.

In this connection, a correspondent recently asked how these words of James could be har-

monized with the present position of labor, its high wages, short hours, improved conditions, legal standing, etc. It is true that at the moment Labor is riding high—higher than ever before, but that does not mean that Capital has had a change of heart. There are some terribly black pages in the history of industrial relations, and they are not all accounts of the destructive violence of rebellious labor. The industrial revolution gave rise to a permanent class of wage earners, and these leaderless masses have often been ruthlessly exploited and oppressed by Capital, to whom Labor was a commodity without human value, to be bought in the open market at the lowest price. The fact that just now the shoe is on the other foot is no assurance that Big Business has reformed, or that if conditions were suddenly reversed it would not be as selfish, greedy, arrogant and inconsiderate as in the days of old, or as Big Labor has been for the past few years.

Deplorable as the situation is, with its many wrongs on both sides, the Christian can view it without passion and without alarm. We do not have to take sides in a battle which does not concern us, a phase of a system which is doomed to pass away. We are interested in it only as a fulfillment of the Word, a bulwark for our faith, a signboard by the way, a token of the imminent coming of the Lord. Nothing we can do as individuals or as an organization can check the mounting fury of the class struggle. All we can do—and it is a full-time task—is to prepare ourselves for the great Day when “a King shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment” (Isa. 32:1). Viewing the confused scene from this detached vantage point, we can rejoice in hope of the soon-coming time when injustice and the conditions which breed it will be wiped out, when great Babylon’s “merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently and for durable clothing” (Isa. 23:18).

It is a particularly fitting similitude which the Apostle employs—that of a farmer waiting patiently for the maturing of his crop. The seasons may come and go, storm and sunshine may alternate, the affairs of the world may have their ups and downs, yet his patient interest is in the fruition of his labor. But this patience, as every farmer knows, is not to sit with folded hands waiting for Nature to do her part. It is a battle right up to the end—cultivation, spraying, watering, and at the end the strenuous days of harvest.

So with the cultivation of character. There is

little waiting and no idleness; it is continual effort. Yet through it all runs the patience of the saints. We cannot hurry the hand of God; but if we can see a satisfying growth into holiness in our own lives, the confused affairs of the world, whether political or economic, sink from sight, their place filled by an inward peace which passes understanding, a confidence that the present distresses add up to one vitally important thing—“the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” ●●

The Zigzag Way

We climbed the height by the zigzag path
And wondered why—until
We understood it was made zigzag
To break the force of the hill.

A road straight up would prove too steep
For the traveler’s feet to tread;
The thought was kind in its wise design
Of a zigzag path instead.

It is often so in our daily life;
We fail to understand
That the twisting way our feet must tread
By love divine was planned.

Then murmur not at the winding way,
It is our Father’s will
To lead us up by the zigzag way
To break the force of the hill.

—Selected.

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A Prayer

*Thou Light of Ages, Source of Living Truth,
Shine into every open seeking mind;
Let toiling age and pioneering youth
Each day some clearer, brighter pathway find.*

*Thou Light of Ages, shining forth in Christ,
Whose brightness darkest ages could not dim,
Grant us the spirit which for Him sufficed,
Rekindle now our torch of love for Him.*

—Selected.