

Megiddo Message



*As the deer pants for
streams of water, so
I long for you, O God.*

—Psalm 42:1, NLT

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Don't Judge Too Quickly

Flash judgments come so easily. Something happens, and we make a judgment—what appears to be versus what ought to be. The habit is universal. Worse, it is reciprocal. The teacher judges the student, and the student the teacher. The employer judges his employee, and the employee his employer. Judgment is everywhere, between men and women, between children and parents, between rivals and friends, between nations and leaders of nations.

These judgments so quickly drop into our conversation, and criticism and blame are expressed harshly or ironically, either outspoken or subtly. (We assume, of course, that our judgment is the best and that others should meet our standard.) Add to this spoken criticism our secret, unspoken judgments which can corrode deep into the heart in which they are harbored, and we have a power strong enough to break any friendship and alienate us completely from the love of God.

This is not to say that all judging is needless criticism, or that all judging is wrong. Jesus did say, *"Judge not, that ye be not judged"* (Matt. 7:1); but He went on to explain that we should not condemn another without first recognizing our own transgression. He summarized His thought with a clear command to judge: *"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them"* (Matt. 7:20). Jesus never wanted us to call bad apples good; neither would He condone sharp criticisms of good fruit. We should learn to distinguish, so that we may emulate the good and shun the evil.

But so often our judgments are of something superficial and not in the least important. Yet our judgment—even of the harmless—can cause harm if it is not governed by the principles of honesty, longsuffering and meekness in ourselves. Again, what we are judging in another may be something that does not affect us at all, and that does not have any relation to that person's eternal welfare; yet, when we make an observation, there we are with our little black book of judgment, ready to deliver the latest sentence.

What we forget is that usually we do not know the whole story. We cannot see the whole picture, nor do we know all the facts. We cannot know the secret thoughts and hopes of others; we have little idea of their struggles, their sufferings, their motivations. Yet, we judge.

Who has appointed us to be judge of our brother? Jesus, whose stature was far above ours, said it of one who came to Him: *"Who made me a judge over you?"* He who was able to judge held back. Doesn't our eagerness to judge show that we think our opinions are quite superior? Is there not possibly in our own heart a secret desire to show ourselves a bit above another? To criticize is to imply that we are better able to manage than the one criticized. What we forget is that the person we are criticizing in all probability tends to feel the same way. And if the law of God is not strictly governing, the result is a clash of personalities, and two stumble into transgression.

Perhaps the most serious effect of hasty judgments is that they call forth more of the same. One ungoverned trait incites another until we fall deeper and deeper into sin, as we counter one misjudgment with another and then seek to cover them over with a feigned show of sincerity.

Next time we feel like criticizing quickly, why not thank God first for our own deliverance, and pray for that *"meek and quiet spirit"* that can make allowance for what we do not know and that can judge others as we ourselves wish to be judged of God—by principle.

*Pray don't find fault with the man who limps
Or stumbles along the road, . . .
Unless you have worn the shoes he wears
Or struggled beneath his load....
There may be tacks in his shoes that hurt,
Though hidden away from view,...
Or the burden he bears, placed on your back,
Might cause you to stumble, too.* □

MEGIDDO MEANS ...

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

WE BELIEVE ...

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

The Herald and the KING

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

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

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Megiddo Message

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

LEST WE FORGET

Forgetfulness is a problem when our heart is not touched, when there is no emotional response within.

Let us go back some 3500 years, to the time when the Israelites are at the end of their long sojourn in the wilderness. The time has come for the people to enter the Land of Promise. The grand old lawgiver, his eagle eye undimmed by twelve decades, is delivering his farewell address.

Point by point he recalls God's dealings with this people who as children in Egypt saw the hand of the Lord in its terrible power against Pharaoh. He recalls the triumphant departure the night of the first Passover, the march through the Red Sea, the giving of the law from the mount that shook with fire, the many trials of the march, and the all-sufficient Providence which has not forsaken them.

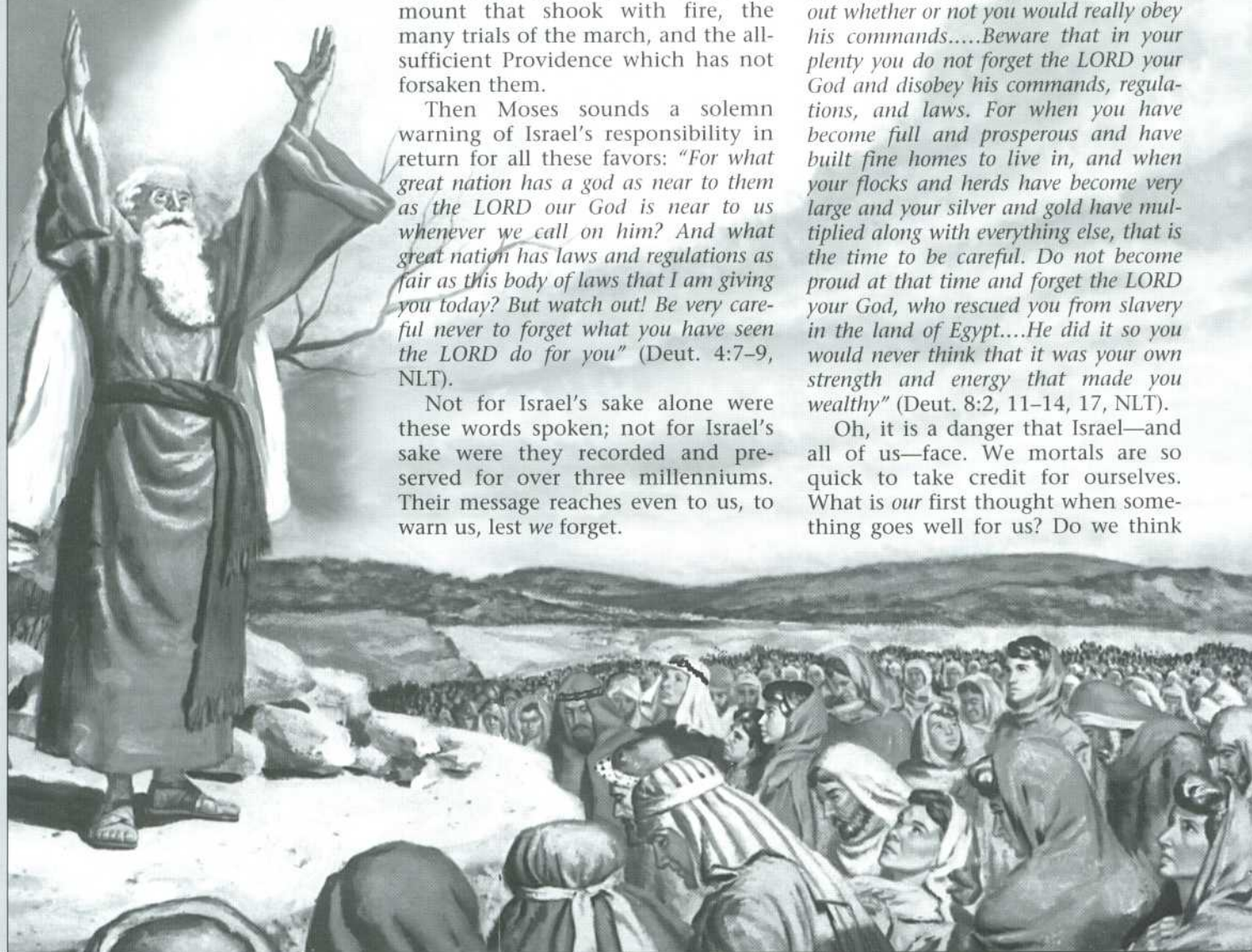
Then Moses sounds a solemn warning of Israel's responsibility in return for all these favors: "For what great nation has a god as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we call on him? And what great nation has laws and regulations as fair as this body of laws that I am giving you today? But watch out! Be very careful never to forget what you have seen the LORD do for you" (Deut. 4:7-9, NLT).

Not for Israel's sake alone were these words spoken; not for Israel's sake were they recorded and preserved for over three millennia. Their message reaches even to us, to warn us, lest we forget.

Nor was this Moses' only warning against forgetting. Grave danger would confront them when they should inherit "great and goodly cities" already built, "vineyards and olive trees" already planted and "wells" already dug. With all this suddenly theirs, would they still remember God? "Beware," warned Moses, "lest you forget the Lord" (Deut. 6:10-12).

Only a little farther on in the same address, the warning is repeated again: "Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would really obey his commands.....Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and laws. For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, that is the time to be careful. Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt....He did it so you would never think that it was your own strength and energy that made you wealthy" (Deut. 8:2, 11-14, 17, NLT).

Oh, it is a danger that Israel—and all of us—face. We mortals are so quick to take credit for ourselves. What is our first thought when something goes well for us? Do we think



commendingly of our skill, or our power, or our keen foresight, or our good judgment as making possible our success—and forget God? Let us beware, for the warning to Israel also applies to us: *“But I assure you of this: If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods, worshiping and bowing down to them, you will certainly be destroyed”* (Deut. 8:19, NLT). All honor, all success, all prosperity, all good work is possible only by what God has provided, and all credit should go to Him.

Visible Reminders

Because forgetting was so disastrous, the Lord arranged that Israel should have visible reminders. There was the yearly Passover, which they were commanded to keep throughout their generations to remind them of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt. Other sacred festivals were scattered all through the year to serve as reminders. Then there were the daily sacrifices and the regular gatherings at the tabernacle. All were to serve as visible reminders of their pledge to God and of God’s work in their behalf.

God always wanted His people to remember His work in the past, and to see themselves as called to be part of His ongoing plan. When God spoke through His messengers, He frequently identified Himself as part of their dramatic history with these words: *“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob your fathers.”* These great men were still living in God’s book of remembrance, and would not be forgotten.

Israel also had special memorials of stone set up to help them remember. At the time they first established a working covenant with God, when they were yet in the wilderness, Moses built an altar to ratify the agreement. We read that Moses *“rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel,”* lest they forget their sacred promise: *“All that the Lord hath said will we do”* (Ex. 24:4, 3).

When the children of Israel passed over Jordan, Joshua com-

manded each of twelve men to carry a stone out of the Jordan River from the place where they had crossed, and to take it to the place where they would lodge that night, *“That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan,...and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever”* (Josh. 4:1–9). It was another precaution against forgetting.

Our Remembrancers

Just as Israel long ago needed their stones of remembrance, so we today

everything that they had ever had—because they forgot God. *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,”* spoke God through His prophet Hosea. *“Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee; . . . seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children”* (Hos. 4:6). Their forgetfulness ended in national disorder and disaster.

How could they forget? With so many privileges and so many blessings—*“the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises”* (Rom. 9:4–5, RSV)—how could they forget?

Their story has been written for our benefit, because we, too, are prone to forget. Times without number we have forgotten our

*We are not likely to forget what is
closest to our hearts, what we truly love
or cherish or enjoy.*

need ours; for we, too, are prone to forget. A few stones of remembrance, though meaningless in themselves, become stones of intrinsic worth if they keep us aware of God’s mighty workings among us. It is a matter of wisdom and of duty to keep alive the heavenly experiences of yesterday. If we can look back and see God working among His people in times past, we can know with certainty that just so is He working among us today; we are part of the same plan.

But in spite of all the reminders, in spite of all the memorials and rites and religious ceremonies built into the lives of the Israelites, and the repeated warnings of their God-fearing leaders, Israel forgot. A few among them remembered, but Israel as a nation forgot. God was longsuffering, but His longsuffering reached a limit, and when they forsook him as a nation, He set them aside. How could He continue to tolerate a people for whom He had done so much, and who showed so little gratitude in return?

And so they perished. They lost

sacred covenant; times without number we have been unmindful that we were dealing with Omnipotence. But God be thanked, our time of judgment has not yet come. We still have time to rectify our ways. Nevertheless, our time *shall* come, and can we expect God to deal any less severely with us than He dealt with Israel—if we forget?

This is the warning of the book of Hebrews: *“Therefore we ought”—*there is no excuse. We may have excuses—even reasons—for some of our forgetting in this world; but before God? Never! *“For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”* (Heb. 2:1–3). If Israel met downfall through transgression and carelessness, how shall we escape if we neglect?

In this passage is spelled out the real root of the problem of forgetfulness: *neglect*. It is a word that describes the frightful tendency in all of us—it means literally “drifting.” It is not that we head in the

wrong direction. We simply do not put forth sufficient effort to be able to move against the current. And so we drift.

We can drift *away*, but we cannot drift *toward* God. We cannot drift into a perfect character. We do not accidentally become strong spiritual giants. We do not accidentally become spiritually mature. It is a carefully plotted course of diligence. It is a steady adherence to duty, and now is the time for us to be giving serious attention to it.

To "neglect" this great salvation is serious business. The same word translated "neglect" here is used in Jesus' parable of the marriage of the king's son. The king sent his servants out to invite people to come to the feast and the wedding, and

requiring thoughtful attention? Will God hold a certain amount of forgetfulness against us when we are really "too busy"?

When we stop to think about it, we realize that we have no excuses. Yes, we know how easily we can forget our great God and our great hope and purpose in life. But why? We are not prone to forget everything, however busy we get. We don't forget to breathe, or eat, or sleep. Nor do we forget the work which is our livelihood. We are not likely to forget what means the most to us, what is closest to our hearts, what we truly love or cherish or enjoy.

Forgetfulness is a problem when we are not sufficiently impressed, when our heart is not touched,

of only one thing; there is always something in the background of our minds, influencing our conscious mind. If we are not feeling well, we find ourselves quite conscious of it, however hard we try to concentrate on something else. And if we should lose our whole life's savings in a night, if our house were suddenly destroyed by fire and we lost everything in it, there are few of us who would be able to go a whole day without thinking of it for weeks—or even years—to come. Can we say, then, that we have any legitimate reason to forget our great hope and the wondrous future that is just ahead? God forbid!

Suppose we hired a man to repair a leaking roof. We would want to be sure he understood the problem, and that he had all of the materials and tools that he needed to repair it. At the end of the day we return to look over the new roof—but nothing has been done. When we ask why, the contractor tells us that he forgot just what he was supposed to do, and so not wanting to do the wrong thing he did nothing. What would we think of him?

Can we wonder that God deals severely with forgetters, when He has done so much for us, and offered so much—and required, comparatively, so little?

The Lord has laid out the work He wants us to do, and has provided us with everything we need to do it. He has given us life and all the materials we need to fashion the character He requires. Do we not show ourselves exceedingly unworthy and ungrateful if we *forget*?

Yet the danger is part of us. That is why we are warned, and warned, and warned to remember, to be stirred, to be mindful of, to not forget.

If our hearts have been touched by God's overwhelming goodness in giving us this magnificent opportunity, in showing us how to escape from a life of worthlessness, what can possibly distract us? If we are constantly aware that someday we may be made equal to the angels of heaven, never to suffer, never to die, never to know a disappointment, how can we forget?

God wants us to have a faith that works—by love.

their response was that they "*made light of it*" (Matt. 22:5). They did not openly refuse to come, but simply went their way, unimpressed, untouched.

Is this the way we regard our high calling? God forbid!

But here is the real root of forgetfulness—not open, outright refusal but lack of intensity; lack of concern; plain, cold indifference. Securing the great salvation offered us is no spare-time proposition. It is an undertaking that requires everything I have, everything I am. It is my life yielded to God, my will laid on His altar, my mind to think His thoughts, my hands to do His bidding, my heart to be centered on His promises. Anything short of this is neglecting or making light of the great salvation I have been offered. Is not this reasonable?

But someone might ask, Is all this necessary? Does God really expect us to remember our great hope from one end of the day to the other, when such a multitude of duties crowd our lives, each

when there is no emotional response within us which keeps the issue constantly alive in us.

A playwright, wishing to point out the lack of concern it is possible to have toward grave issues, created a setting in which another man was asking Pilate years after the crucifixion something about Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate answers meditatively, "*Jesus, of Nazareth...I cannot call him to mind.*" The ruler had forgotten, so little did Jesus matter to him!

We do not know that this actually happened, but it illustrates how hard a human heart can become. The same possibility threatens our spiritual lives. Grave issues are before us, issues of eternal life and eternal death. And if we are so unimpressed that we pursue our work from one end of the day to the other with scarcely a thought of God, do we not show ourselves unworthy? Our work may require thought and concentration, but thoughts dart through our minds so fast that there is seldom a time when we can say we were thinking

The Revealing Day

In an attempt to awaken people to think seriously about God and the coming Judgment, a modern-day artist has done a series of black-and-white sketches pointing up the dire consequences of forgetting. The first several sketches in the series show a man who attends church regularly, but who takes his religion casually, doing just about anything he pleases. God is obviously not in all of his thoughts, but the man appears to be enjoying life. Until—

Suddenly the pictures change to white on black. The day of Recompense has come, and the man is called to appear before the great white throne. His distraught countenance shows he has regrets, but there is no escape.

The man finds himself in front of a giant screen something like the modern television. His eyes quickly fasten on the screen, where pictures are flashing by. He watches with rapt attention—the pictures on the screen are scenes from his own life! There he is, in one familiar setting after another, doing the things he so well remembers. He sees himself on the street, in the shop, in his home, at the dinner table; he sees himself driving his car, camping by the lake, sitting in church. And over the sound system are being broadcast all his secret thoughts and motives! Now everyone can see and hear; there is nothing covered or hid.

At last the revealing is over, and the man must look into the piercing eyes of the Judge. He knows the sentence before it is spoken: *"Depart from me, I never knew you."* And with one swift gesture, the Judge condemns him to the left.

This is only a fantasy, but the revealing Day is coming. And how will it be with us then—if we have forgotten God and lived even some of our time to please ourselves? The words of the Psalmist come to mind: *"If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart"* (Ps. 44:20–21). If we have forgotten, we—you and I—how shall we escape God's searching eye?

Ananias and Sapphira met the consequences of forgetfulness. Bringing their money and laying it at the apostles' feet looked like a virtuous act, and many a man would have congratulated them for their generosity. But they forgot that they were dealing with the all-knowing God. They forgot, and their fate stands as a reminder to all would-be deceivers, who forget that they likewise are dealing with God, who cannot and will not be mocked by any man.

Lost Love

There were apparently some in the Church at Ephesus who were showing a lack of interest, lack of impression, lack of attention to spiritual matters, for Jesus sent them these

think more of yourself, your good name, your fine appearance, than you think of Me. You are no longer zealously affected for My cause. *I am forgotten.*

Let us take these words to heart, lest we forget, lest our love wane, and Christ say to us when He returns, *"You no longer love me as you once did."* In other words, you appear to be promoting the work of the Lord; but there is in your heart some secret love of the world, and your mind is there; God is second.

We may staunchly affirm all the fundamentals of our faith. Our outer life may be flawless. But if there is not a growing emotional response within us as we sound the depths of genuine Christian dedication and understanding, if our

What can we do to safeguard ourselves against the creeping peril of forgetfulness?

stern words of rebuke: *"You no longer love me as you did at first"* (Rev. 2:3–4, Weymouth).

The church was well established. They had a good record. They had labored hard for the cause of the Gospel. They were enthusiastic, ready to defend the faith against any accuser.

But deep in the heart of the church were signs of spiritual decay. They were forgetting some of the things that really mattered. There was no longer that fine rapture of devotion, that keen spiritual vision, that zealous courage that was ready to launch out against any stronghold of sin. It was a creeping danger. *"You no longer love me as you did at first."* You have slipped—backward.

This is the sin of forgetting. It is not a sin that stands alone. Beneath it and around it is a basic lack of concern, a loss of feeling, a lack of soul-involvement. This was apparently the problem of the believers in Ephesus, and that is why Jesus had to say it as He did: *"You no longer love me as you did at first."* You

affections are not stirred by the Gospel, it is not enough. God wants us to have a faith that works—by love (Gal. 5:6).

What can we do to safeguard ourselves against the peril of forgetting? How can we keep continually reminded of our covenant with God? There is only one way: to stake all our hope and ambition in God, to give ourselves wholly to the task of remaking ourselves according to His standard, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; to make His law our meat and drink, the sustaining power of our lives, more vital than our necessary food (Job 23:12). If God is all this to us, will we forget?

Let us search our heart and compare it with the Word, lest we forget. We know what happened to Israel when they forgot the law that thundered from Sinai, and *"how shall we escape if we neglect"* our great salvation? No, we the servants of God so near the end of the eleventh hour, the last hour of probation, face to face with the consummation of all things, *must not forget!* □

GOD's Perfect Plan

Extracted from an informal address by our founder, Rev. L. T. Nichols, in 1882, in McMinnville, Oregon

The Bible projects before our eyes a very real existence for all who will take the pains to search into its words, eternal in duration, free from all sorrow, sighing, sickness, disease, death, troubles, trials, disappointments, and fears; an existence where parting or death will be felt and feared no more; when this Earth will be all beautified, glorified, clad with peace, plenty, and happiness from one end to the other, the eternal home of all the sanctified ones. That good time will soon be here. And when it comes, all that belongs to this self-loving, sordid and evil world will end. Political strifes, national quarrels and animosities will forever cease. And hence, there will be no war.

Who would not like to be the means in Jehovah's hands of driving carnage, war, and bloodshed forever from the Earth? This state of things will come, as certain as the word of Jehovah is true: for the Prophet tells us, *"It shall come to pass, in the last days that the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains...and people shall flow unto it, and many nations shall come and say, Come and let us go up to the house of the Lord, and he will teach us of his ways...for the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against*

nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:1-3).

Has this good time foreseen by the Prophet ever been? Have these words ever been fulfilled? You are driven by the facts to answer no. That time has never come when nation will not *"lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."* And as this good time spoken of has never come, the question is, will it ever come? All Bible believers must answer emphatically that it will.

You may not have looked for such a grand, noble, and glorious state of things upon the earth; nevertheless if you believe the Divine record, you cannot help believing that such a time is coming. This is the good time we are looking for. And can you say that our faith and hope is not based upon Divine evidence?

In the coming epoch of glory,

sorrow, sighing, and disease will flee away, all bribery and corruption will be abolished; unjust laws and unjust law makers will be driven from the earth; their tyrannical and rigorous hand will be felt and feared no more.

This good time coming will be directed by the King of Glory and His chosen ones. It will be illuminated by the *"Sun of Righteousness"* expanding the light until the entire Earth will be sanctified by the knowledge of Jehovah issuing in streams of glory, blessings of contentment and plenty upon every brow. We will no more hear profanity, or witness such ungodliness as we witness at the present time. Immorality will not be allowed in that age of beauty, and glory. Ungodly lusts will no more govern, degrade, and degenerate the human race. Grasping avarice will then expire and low, groveling

A tribute to L. T. Nichols

Born October 1, 1844

***"One who loved his God
and served his fellowman"***



folly cease to exist. Sin will be chained; injustice will no longer be executed; evil speakers and doers will be cast off, and men of folly and corruption be entirely annihilated. The opposers of Jehovah in that day will be broken to shivers and all classes of the wicked with the stiff-necked enemies of righteousness will be reduced to ashes to be no more.

This good time coming will cause the downfall of every government under the sun and will plant in their stead a righteous government and righteous rulers who will dispense universal equity, peace, plenty, and happiness abroad, causing the earth to burst forth with everlasting joy, liberty, and brotherly love. Health, vigor and beauty will stream from every part of the globe, made glorious and filled with the glory of the mighty and everlasting God. At that time, we will no more need police, marshals, and sheriffs; dungeons, jails, and prisons. Theaters and all profligate places of amusements with all their adjuncts of folly, misery, degradation and crime will be no more: and every nation and individual that will not peaceably submit to the new government of Christ and His saints will perish (Isa. 60:17-18).

Who would not like to be used by Jehovah in bringing about such a glorious state; in dispensing such blessings to all mankind; to be the means of fulfilling the promise of our text, that every one shall *"sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall make them afraid"*? There will be no accidents; no broken limbs, no smashed heads; no deformities, no dying in infancy, but all will live to be 100 years old, with peace, plenty, and abundance, enjoying long the labor of their hands (Isa. 65:17-24).

And then to think that the saints will be immortal, like the angels, with an eternity of joy, bliss, and happiness before them; nothing to disturb their peaceful rest! What is all the comfort, joy, and happiness you now enjoy at your very best compared to such eternal happiness as this! It is but a mere puff. Take your entire lifetime—how little it is

compared to that which can be yours in that good time coming.

But halt a moment and consider. Let each one ask this all important question: Can we be a participant in this high, noble, grand, glorious, joyous, happy and gladsome good time coming without laboring for it? Oh, let us ask this question in candor and sobriety, for it will not be given to us poor mortal creatures of the dust unless we get down into real earnestness and work for it with our whole mind, might and strength.

Why will you be so foolish as to let slip this opportunity of gaining so great a reward? You who are letting day after day slip carelessly by, do you realize that each day brings you that much nearer death, and that ere long the old Grim Monster will knock at your door? And though you may bolt the door, summon all the power within you and all the power of all your friends combined, you cannot stay death or keep it from marching in and carrying you to the cold, dark, gloomy, dismal, and—worst of all, (if you are not ready)—eternal tomb. For the living God has plainly told us, *"Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish....He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light"* (Ps. 49:20, 19).

See the teeming thousands that are going down to oblivion every year, yes, every day. It is said that one is struck out every second, which gives 60 in one minute, or 3,600 every hour, or 86,400 every 24 hours. And friend, have you ever seriously asked yourself the question: What can I do to liberate myself from eternal sleep?

If we wish to escape eternal death and become one who will take part in the good time coming, we must comply with the conditions which Jehovah in His mercy and goodness has seen fit to prescribe.

Ask yourself, Can I not afford to comply with any conditions, that I may live and eternally enjoy that good time coming? For is it not reasonable that the Almighty demands something at our hands before He will let us live in His eternity of bliss?

Suppose we could have all the happiness we can possibly imagine in this life—how long would it last? Only as long as this brief life continues, a time which is compared to the grass of the earth which today is and tomorrow is cut down. Therefore we bring before you Christ, of whom the apostle Paul wrote, *"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily"* (Col. 1:28-29).

We ask, Does this language mean anything? I for one am convinced that God means just what He has said. I am aware that the entire Christian world read over testimonies as though they were utterly meaningless; but God will not allow us to tamper with His Word with impunity.

We believe the Divine record means just what it says, that we must become wholly sanctified and reach entire holiness, yet it is not holiness described by the clerical authorities but the holiness Jesus described, which we find written in the unerring Word of Jehovah.

I call upon you to criticize all that I shall offer. If I do not give you chapter and verse for every testimony, do not accept it. At the same time, I shall take the same liberty to criticize anything that others believe, tearing down any rotten, wooden superstructure which is built upon the sand. I shall not, can not, dare not spare error in the least. There can be no compromise whatever upon Divine matters of truth. I have only love, kindness, and respect for you, but I have neither love, kindness nor respect for any error you may be holding; but abhor and detest it in every way and form. But truth, oh, how I love it!

I am a firm believer in moral perfection, in genuine sanctification, in true holiness. I believe in this for the following reasons:

Our text (Col. 1:28) tells us that we are to be presented perfect in Christ Jesus. And our great Teacher

commanded, after going over all the commands which if lived up to will cleanse us from every fiber of evil, *"Be ye therefore perfect"*—how perfect are we to become, Lord?—*"even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Matt. 5:48). You may try in every way to get around this, deny it, scoff at it, and still it remains untouched and unaltered and reads in words the same as fell from the lips of our great Teacher, who said, *"Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a Rock,"* (Matt. 7:24-25), the spiritual Rock, of which Paul said, *"that Rock was Christ"* (1 Cor. 10:4).

Are not the words in Matthew 5:48 the words of Christ the Rock upon which we must build lest the storm, winds, and floods sweep us into eternal oblivion? How can you become fully convinced that you must *"become perfect, even as your Father...is perfect"*? Read carefully the 5th chapter of Matthew, believing as you read that it means what it says. We will certainly be perfect even as He [Christ], and God His Father are perfect:

- when we are contrite in spirit;
- when we have become meek and HUNGER and THIRST after RIGHTEOUSNESS;
- when we are merciful and PURE in HEART;
- when we become peacemakers, and rejoice when we are persecuted, and men revile us, and say all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ's sake;
- when we become the salt of the earth and the light of the world, letting it shine out before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven;
- when our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of those around us;
- when we do not break or teach men to break even one of the least commands of the Rock, Christ Jesus;
- when we get so that we are never angry, or bring an accusation against a brother;
- when we are able to keep in a reconciled condition with all true brethren, and hence, with God;
- when we do not even look upon a woman to lust after her;
- when we unflinchingly and without hesitation refuse to fellowship any who separate from husband or wife except for the cause of fornication;
- when we refuse to take any oath upon our lips;
- when we neither resist evil by smiting back, or by seeking revenge but return blessings for cursing, doing good to those that spitefully use and persecute us.

With all the foregoing before us, can anyone conclude that Jesus did not arrive at the right conclusion and that His words in the 48th verse do not mean what they say? I cannot, neither can any one else, if they will only let reason and not theory, honesty and not blindness lead them. Hence, Jesus sums it up and says: In view of all the foregoing reasons, because ye are commanded to be meek, lowly, contrite and pure of heart, merciful, etc., etc., I give this one summary command: *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."* □



O God, direct our thoughts to You as we come into Your presence.

Grant us

Reverence as we remember Your glory;

Penitence as we remember Your holiness;

Gratitude as we remember Your goodness.

O God our Father, we pray for the humility which

Realizes its ignorance,

Admits its weakness,

Recognizes its need,

Welcomes advice,

Accepts rebuke.

Save us from pride in our knowledge, realizing the vast ocean of knowledge that still lies unexplored.

Save us from pride in our achievement, knowing that all that we have comes from You.

Save us from pride in our performance, and may we acknowledge anew our complete dependence upon You.

Help us, Father, in the days ahead,

To study with diligence,

To learn with eagerness,

And to live more nearly as we ought as we look eagerly forward

to Your coming Kingdom on earth. AMEN.

Then I saw a New Heav'n and Earth for the first had passed away,
And the holy city came down from God,
Like a bride on her wedding day.
And I know how He loves His own, for I heard His great voice tell
They would be His people, and He their God,
And among them He came to dwell.

He will wipe away every tear, even death shall die at last;
There'll be no more crying, or grief, or pain,
They belong to the world that's past.
And the One on the throne said "Look! I am making all things new."
He is A and Z, He is first and last,
And His words are exact and true.

So the thirsty can drink their fill at the fountain giving life;
But the gates are shut on all evil things,
On deceit and decay and strife.
With foundations and walls and tow'rs, like a jewel the city shines,
With its streets of gold and its gates of pearl
In a glory where each combines.

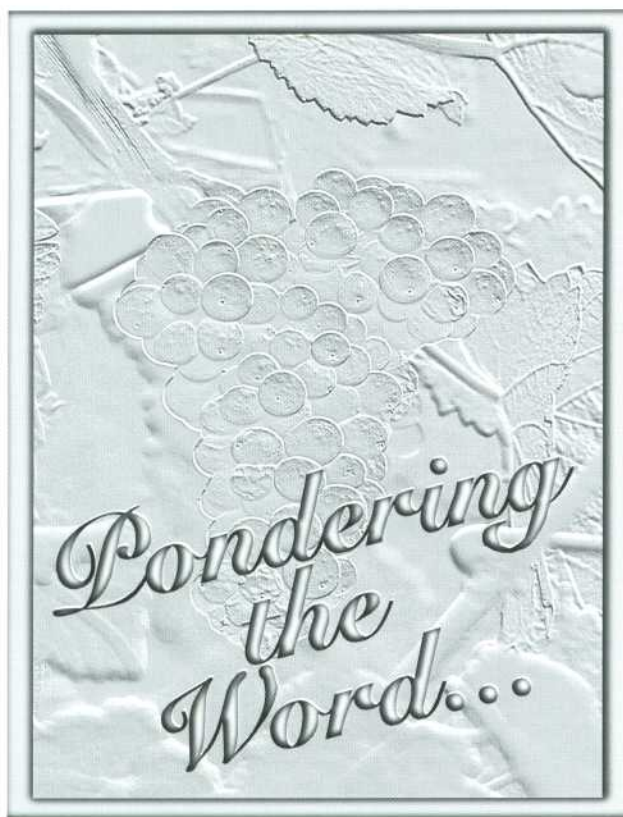
As they measured its length and breadth I could see no temple there,
For its only temple is God the Lord
And the Lamb in that city fair.
And it needs neither sun nor moon in a place which knows no night,
For the city's lamp is the Lamb Himself,
And the glory of God its light.

And I saw by the sacred throne flowing water, crystal clear,
And the tree of life with its healing leaves
And its fruit growing all the year.
So the worshippers of the Lamb bear His name in every place,
And they reign and serve and forever live,
And they look on His glorious face.

—Christopher M. Idle

BASED ON REVELATION 21, 22

Then I Saw A New Heaven and Earth



Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." —Psalm 115:1

This verse is not a form of thanksgiving but a prayer. We pray not for our safety or welfare, so much as for the glory of God. Not to satisfy our revenge upon our adversaries, not to promote our own interest, but for the glory of God's truth and grace. Isn't it a great thought? We so easily seek credit for ourselves. Yet all we have and are belongs to God, and all we accomplish is by the grace of God. Time and opportunity, truth and mercy, all are of God.

When John was given a glimpse of future glory, he heard the redeemed shouting and singing for joy. And what were they doing? They were ascribing glory and honor and praise to God (Rev. 7:12). The glory of God was the theme of their song. Should it not be ours also?

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" —Revelation 2:7

The same solemn conclusion followed many of Jesus' parables. What does it say? That each must hear for himself. Christ may speak, but His message is lost if we do not have ears to hear. He is saying, God has made you able to learn His commands; so summon your powers, and obey Him.

Our Lord uses this expression, "He that hath ears to hear" when His subject is figurative or obscure, as

though to arouse the attention of His hearers. In other words, to obtain maximum benefit one must diligently apply his mind to the words of Christ, ponder them, and obey them. Many heard Him out of curiosity, as they would want to hear something new, or scholarly, or brilliant; not that they might lay to heart the things they heard and practice them in their lives. Hearing to be effective must be with the intent of amending one's life. Otherwise the value of the message is lost. As the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezek. 33:32).

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." —Romans 12:21

We all know what it feels like to be injured, and something within us resents it. Injury begets a desire for retaliation. Here is a subtle temptation which Paul would have us resist. Instead of being overcome with evil, he says, "Overcome evil with good." Like produces like. Strife leads to more strife. War begets more war. Paul's command is contrary to all this: "Overcome evil with good." When we meet evil with good, when we answer harshness with quietness, when we reply to an insult with kindness, when we give lovingkindness for coldness, the evil is overpowered, lessened, diminished.

This is what we must do: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." We must lose our worse self to find our better self. We must put down the evil by exalting the good. No other end will ever justify the means.

This is not the natural way, but it is God's way.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" —Psalm 133:1, NIV

There is a story of a father who wished to teach a lesson to his quarreling sons. One day he called his sons to him and, selecting the strongest one, handed him a stick. "Break it," he said. The son quickly did so with a gesture of contempt. Then the father handed him two sticks. "Break them," he said again. Again the son did so. The father then handed him another stick, and another, with the same order, until he had a bundle of 4, 5, or 6. The task was growing harder and harder. Soon the young man had to admit that he couldn't do it.

The lesson? In unity is strength.

How rare and exotic is the plant called unity. As individuals we are weak, but together we can be strong. And if we are linked with God, there is no power on earth that can defeat us.

Not only "how good" but also "how pleasant"—"how beautiful it is for brothers to dwell in unity," no strife, no rivalry. This was the idea Jesus pictured: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). □



On Steppingstones

Picture that lazy creek babbling among the rocks, making its way between the hills and valleys, clear and sparkling in the sunlight. The water between the stones is crystal clear, but you are looking at the stones. Your eye follows a path across the creek. Yes, you could almost make it to that point, hopping from stone to stone. Then your eye surveys another route. The stones seem to be daring you, as if to say, "Come." You set out. Some of the stones offer less than solid footing, while others are as secure as Gibraltar—and you don't know which are which until you step. That's the way with steppingstones.

And it's the way with life, too.

Steppingstones are something you have to tackle by yourself, for yourself. You can't push or pull somebody along. You can't take somebody along to balance you, or help hold you up, or pull you out of the water when you slide in. Some-

one else can urge you on, talk you on, cheer you on, but that's about it. But don't let him think he can stand on your stone just because you're there. On steppingstones, there's very little room for company.

And isn't that the way with life, too? Others can help us, encourage us, cheer us. But we have to take each daring step ourselves. And the consequences are ours, too.

That leaves all of us torn between daring and timidity, between caution and courage, between pondering and jumping. What should we do?

Right away we know what we don't want to do. We don't want to look behind us, because if we do, we can't make any progress ahead. Another point: we want to watch with all eyes where we're stepping. Our best judgment is none too good, and any careless step is sure to land us in the creek. But isn't that the inclination of so many

people moving through life? They get sidetracked by this pleasure or that, this preoccupation or that, looking back, looking around, and forget to look ahead.

Or they find a steppingstone to their liking, and put both feet firmly on it. They decorate it, reinforce it with concrete, as if they expected to stay there forever. But it is all wasted effort, because after all their efforts it is still only a steppingstone.

This life is like a steppingstone. The Bible says we are strangers and pilgrims in the earth. Paul says our citizenship is in heaven. This world is only a temporary stopping place, a step en route to better things. If we step carefully, we can find good, solid steppingstones. But steppingstones were never meant to be lived on. Their only use is to get us to our destination.

Let's stop standing and start stepping. It's the only way to get from here to there. □



Take The Detour

A man told of being on a commercial jet enroute to Houston. When the plane was flying around twenty thousand feet up, he saw on the horizon a massive cloud formation. Shortly there was a click on the intercom, and the captain announced, "You may have noticed the thunderstorm up ahead of us, folks. If we had to, we could fly through it, but it will take only five minutes additional flying time to detour around the storm." He continued, "Sorry for the delay, but in this business, it's 'Safety first.'"

The plane arrived in Houston a few minutes late, but there were no complaints. The captain had said that, if necessary, he could have subjected the airliner to the storm and survived, but no one insisted that he should have done this. Everyone on the plane agreed that a small detour was reasonable in the face of danger.

Doesn't that concept make good sense in our spiritual lives? How often we see little dangers to our spiritual

welfare. It might be an invitation to spend time with those whose interests are known to be different from ours. It might be a TV program which compromises our moral values, if only a little. It might be a book or a magazine in which the definition of "good" differs from ours.

Perhaps one would say that these "little storms" should present no spiritual threat to anyone having even average spiritual strength. But let us beware: dangers may accompany little storms.

If a small detour is sensible to avoid danger when one's physical welfare is concerned, how much more reasonable to take small detours when our eternal welfare is concerned. Wrote the apostle Paul, "*I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*" (Phil. 3:8, NIV).

Life offers enough inescapable storms to develop us. We don't need to knowingly enter a danger area we could avoid.

So what shall we do when there is a way around danger?

Take the detour! The concept makes good sense—with airplanes and—more especially—when our eternal life is at stake. □

THE GREAT APOSTASY

a-pos-ta-sy *n. pl. a-pos-ta-sies* 1. Abandonment of one's religious faith, a political party, one's principles, or a cause. [Middle English *apostasie* from Old French from Late Latin *apostasias* defection from Late Greek from Greek *apostasis* revolt from *aphistanai* to revolt apo- apo- histanai to stand, place.]
—The American Heritage Dictionary

apostasy: an abandonment of what one has voluntarily professed; a total desertion or departure from one's faith, principles, or party.
—Webster's New International Dictionary

apostasy: a term generally employed to describe a complete renunciation of the Christian faith, or even an exchange of one form of it for another, especially if the motive be unworthy. In the first centuries of the Christian era, apostasy was most commonly induced by persecution, and was indicated by some outward act, such as offering incense to a heathen deity or blaspheming the name of Christ.
—Encyclopaedia Britannica

"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but...they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." —2 Timothy 4:3-4, King James Version

*"A time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths."
—2 Timothy 4:3-4, New Living Translation*

INTRODUCTION

In an age when every tenet of faith must meet the challenge of a skeptical world, the Bible is still capable of self-defense. The divinity of its origin is certified again and again by its prophetic language. Prophecies stretching over periods short and long, from moments to centuries, are verified by the striking accuracy of their fulfillments recorded on the pages of history. Such facts convince us that the Book is the product of Divine intelligence.

Among the major prophecies of the Bible are those which describe a total apostasy, or departure from religion.

For many centuries God had a living, working people to whom He ministered faithfully through the Patriarchs, Prophets, Jesus and His Apostles. But God's way is ever narrow, rugged, difficult; and the time came when the people of God wearied of it and accepted another way which was less difficult. Following the trend of human desire and the line of least resistance, they so modified Divine law, they so enlarged and resurfaced the narrow way to life that it became the broad way to destruction. The original path to life was totally obscured. This was done during the night, the darkest night in human history, the night of the great apostasy. The darkness, however, was destined to give place to dawn. As clearly defined in Scripture as the beginning of the apostasy is its end. Begun by the work of "the man of sin," to whom light and true knowledge were abhorrent, the apostasy was terminated by the work of a man of God whose highest veneration was for the Word of God and whose most ardent desire was to live by its holy principles.

The apostasy—its beginning and its end, its causes and its consequences, its place in the plan of God—all is a major topic of Scripture. Read with an open mind, verifying each fact with your Bible, and you will find yourself exclaiming with the Sacred Writer, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

GOD CALLS MEN

"Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son."

In these words the writer of the Epistle to the

Hebrews (1:1-2) pictures the happy arrangement that prevailed from the time of Adam, when God first began working with mankind, to his own day. Under this plan, members of the human family desirous of living the higher life were informed of the pattern for that life.

During these years ordinary humans enjoyed direct contact with the Divine Mind through the ministration of angels and by knowledge transmitted through the medium of Holy Spirit power. Angels appeared directly to Abraham. Moses the great emancipator was permitted to hear the voice of the angel speaking from the burning bush. The laws given on Mount Sinai for the governing of the children of Israel were delivered by angels. They were the revealed will of God for that day.

The prophets of Israel delivered special messages from God to the people with whom He was working. They were always forthright and authoritative. The formula was, *"The word of the Lord came to"* so-and-so. There were a few intervals when no new truths were revealed in this way, when open messages or visions from God were very uncommon (1 Sam. 3:1) and the people had to rely on the record of what had already been given; but generally speaking, the dispensing of Divine knowledge by one means or another was constant.

In fact, the whole of sacred history is bound up in a single theme: God's call and man's response (or lack of response) to that call. It was God's purpose that earth's inhabitants should be informed about what He has in store for them, that they should know His will and be conscious of the blessings to attend obedience and the curses that will accompany disobedience. *"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live"* (Deut. 30:15, 19, NIV). It was revealed that ignorance alienates men from the life of God, but *"happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding"* (Eph. 4:18; Prov. 3:13).

God revealed His knowledge to the human race, and He expected them to remember it, apply it, and teach it to their children. As Moses told the Israelites, *"You must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again. Tie them to your hands as a reminder, and wear them on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."* (Deut. 6:6-9, NLT).

When God spoke through His Son Jesus, the people living at that time enjoyed the rarest of opportunity and privilege. Never before had men heard the Word of God through His Son, or seen in human flesh and blood an example of the flawless life the perfect law of God makes possible.

To one living during these fruitful years, it could easily appear that as long as people were living on earth, some among them would possess this knowledge of God and choose to loyally live by the Eternal's superior laws. Yet the same holy men through whom God was speaking revealed that this would not be the case. A time would arrive when man's inborn perversity and rebellion

The Bible Prophecies the Apostasy

The Apostle PAUL

2 Tim 4:1-4

- men would rewrite doctrines to please themselves
- would turn from truth to fables

2 Thess. 2:1-4, 7

- one would sit in the place of God
- one would call himself "god" to the people
- this event would precede the coming of Christ (vs.1)
- evidence of apostasy already beginning then (vs. 7)

Acts 20:29-30

- trouble from outside (grievous wolves)
- trouble from inside (men arise... of your own selves...)
- evidence of apostasy already beginning then

JESUS

Matthew 24

- "Great tribulation," which would be "shortened" for the "elect's sake," or none would be saved (vs. 21-22)
- "Immediately after" it comes the end times (vs. 29)

Matthew 25 (Parable of the Ten Virgins)

- Apostasy would be total ("all slumbered and slept")
- Apostasy would end with "midnight cry"

The Prophet DANIEL

Vision of the fourth beast (Daniel 7)

- "little horn" would have "mouth speaking great things"
- would "wear out" saints of the Most High (7:25)
- would change God's "times and laws" (7:25)
- would dominate for "time, times and a half" (7:25)

Vision of the Ram (Daniel 8)

- removed "daily sacrifice"
- cast truth to the ground
- "practiced and prospered"

The Prophet ISAIAH (chapter 60)

- "darkness covers the earth"
- "gross darkness the people"

The Prophet JEREMIAH (16:19)

- Gentiles will come "from the ends of the earth" acknowledging false teachings

The Prophet JOEL (1:4-12)

- "palmerworm," "locust" and "cankerworm" have destroyed the crop
- "vine" dried up (God's people)
- "all the trees" dried up (vs. 12)
- "joy" withered away (joy of doing right)

REVELATION

- Rev. 11: "Two witnesses" lay dead in the streets 3-1/2 days
- Rev. 12: "woman" fled into wilderness for 1260 days (v. 6)

against Divine authority would totally overpower his slightest desire for Divine guidance and he would depart to formulate religion after his own liking and apostatize from the true teachings of God Almighty.

"FOR THE TIME WILL COME..."

The great apostasy from true religion is among the major subjects of Bible prophecy. At least six different prophets wrote of it over a period of some five hundred years, and their prophecies present the facts in a number of different ways.

Prophecy Explicit

The apostle Paul, among the last to prophesy by the power of God's spirit, wrote most explicitly concerning it. He said, addressing his son-in-the-faith Timothy, *"I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus—who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths"* (2 Tim. 4:1-4, NLT).

The language here is emphatic. Sometime after Paul's day an era should arrive when men would not endure sound doctrine; but pursuing their own lusts they would seek *"something to tickle their own fancies, and...collect teachers who will speak what they want to hear. They will no longer listen to the truth, but will wander off after man-made myths"* (Phillips).

Paul spoke again of this apostasy in his farewell address to the elders of the church of Ephesus. He foresaw that men would arise who would not be satisfied with the simple teachings of Christ and His apostles but who would fashion a religion after their own liking and depart from the faith. He said, *"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."* (Acts 20:29-30). The cause of the apostasy, said Paul, would be twofold: First, *"savage wolves"* would invade the flock, bringing with them corrupting influences; secondly, and even more seriously, members of the Church would turn apostate and would proclaim doctrines contrary to the teachings of Christ and would seek to lead men and women away from the truth.

This same Apostle in his Second Epistle to the Thesalonians forewarned again of this corruption of true religion by sinister forces. In chapter two, verses 1 and 2, Paul speaks of the second advent of the Messiah, an event which at that time was still long distant. Paul was telling them plainly that a period of years would separate their own day from Christ's personal return to earth. And during this time, some spectacular events would take place:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [the

day of the Lord] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (vs. 3-4). Later we shall identify the power carrying out this shameful program. The *"falling away"* or *"apostasy"* (Weymouth's translation) was inevitable, because the people of God would tire of resisting the powers of evil. And this falling away was not reserved for the dim, distant future—the existing Church in Paul's day was already feeling its effects. Wrote Paul, *"This lawlessness is already at work secretly"* (2 Thess. 2:7, NLT).

The Prophecy in Parable

Before Paul wrote, Jesus had already prophesied of the coming apostasy, and His prophecy is in the form of a parable.

To differentiate between the careless and the alert among those who have entered God's service Jesus built a parable around ten virgins, listing five as wise and five as foolish. The bridegroom would be absent for an extended period of time, and the ten virgins were to wait, being ready to welcome him whenever he might return. The parable speaks figuratively of Christ, who was soon to go to heaven where He would be seated at the Father's right hand, until the right time for Him to return to His people on earth.

But according to the parable, during the bridegroom's absence all the virgins would *"slumber and sleep."* Now sleep is a state in which one is oblivious to what is going on. While asleep, one is powerless to accomplish anything or to know anything. He cannot reason, make decisions or act upon decisions made. And this is the illustration Jesus used to describe the condition of God's true Church during the time of His absence: *"all"* would *"slumber and sleep."* Wise and foolish virgins alike would lapse into a state of slumber, apostasy, departure from true religion.

Among the religious systems which recognize the Bible teaching about the apostasy, most ignore the Divine forecast that this apostasy would be total during the Bridegroom's extended absence. Many claim that even during the darkest days of the Medieval Age God had a few living witnesses upon earth. But the words of Jesus leave no room for doubt: *"they all slumbered and slept"* (Matt. 25:5).

The Prophecy in Vision

God gave His prophet Daniel a vision to reveal what would happen in the years to come. In this vision Daniel saw coming up out of the *"sea"* (of nations) *"four great beasts, each different from the others."* Each beast is representative of one of the four major world kingdoms (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome). Each had its day and then succumbed to a nation more powerful, until the fourth beast arose, *"terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns"* (Dan. 7:7, NIV).

But this was not all. This fourth beast had another "little horn," which represented yet another power which would arise and "wear out the saints of the most High." And this power, this "little horn," was to be an outgrowth of the fourth "beast." "And, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things" (Dan. 7:8). This "little horn" was destined to be the destructive agent: "He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time." (Dan. 7:25, NIV).

In still another vision the prophet Daniel foresaw this same power which would be instrumental in bringing about the apostasy: He saw it as yet "another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low. Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in every-

thing it did, and truth was thrown to the ground; and it practiced, and prospered" (Dan. 8:9-12, NIV). Note that this power would make war with the saints and prevail against them. It would "wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws"; and it would "cast down the truth to the ground," and practice and prosper.

Other Prophecies

Other Biblical forecasts picture this complete falling away from true religion directly or in figurative language.

The prophet Isaiah, depicting the situation that shall prevail when God's saving knowledge begins to be broadcast to all mankind at Christ's second coming, has this to say: "Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all the nations to see! For the glory of the LORD is shining upon you. Darkness as black as night will cover all the nations of the earth" (Isa. 60:1-2, NLT). The masses of mankind will be in darkness regarding true religion.

The prophet Jeremiah describes the reaction of the people at this same time, in these words: "...to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, 'Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worth-

less idols that did them no good'" (Jer. 16:19, NIV)—the apostasy had been complete.

In figurative language the prophet Joel (chapter 1, KJV) forecasts the rising of a sinister power which would destroy the food crops. This power would lay God's vine, His people, waste and inflict such damage that the vine would become completely dead, its branches bleached white. Verse 12 is revealing: "The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth;...even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men." Always the fruits of righteousness create joy, because of the consciousness that one's works are pleasing to God and therefore one is sure of an abundant future life. When all effort to bear good fruits ceased, when the goal of moral perfection no longer challenged the will of man, when the reward of eternal life no longer captured his desire, thrilled his imagination and influenced his life, then God withdrew. No living water fell from heaven; the rivers of life ceased to flow, the pastures dried up, drought overcame the land.

God's prophets spoke plainly. It remained for time to verify their statements. □

(Continued next issue)

Now with respect to the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to meet Him, we entreat you, brethren, not readily to become unsettled in mind or troubled, either by any spiritual revelation or by any word or letter alleged to come through us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it cannot come unless the apostasy comes first.

—2 Thess. 2:1-4, Weymouth Trans.

Know Your Bible?

When God Remembers

1. Whom did God remember when He destroyed the cities of the plain? What was God's relationship to this man? (James 2:23)
2. Who said that God has remembered us in our lowly estate? (Ps. 136:23)
3. What very affectionate simile did a prophet use to describe God's constant remembrance of His people? (Isa. 49:15-16, NLT)
4. Complete this verse: "God is not unrighteous to forget _____ and _____ of _____". (Heb. 6:10)

When We Must Remember

5. Who prayed to God to remember him for the good that he had done? (Neh. 4:14; 13:14, 22, 31)
6. What verse describes both a forgetting and a remembering of past miseries? (Job 11:16)
7. Who prayed to be remembered even in death at God's "set time"? (Job 14:13)
8. Complete this verse: "Some trust in _____, and some in _____; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." (Ps. 20:7)
9. Who prayed to God not to remember the sins of his youth? (Ps. 25:7)
10. When David could not sleep at night, instead of counting sheep what did he think about? (Ps. 63:6; 119:55)
11. To what very earthly substance does God compare us in our natural state? (Ps. 103:14)
12. Upon whom does God promise to bestow His eternal mercies and righteousness? (Ps. 103:17-18)
13. What did David say about remembering Jerusalem? (Ps. 137:6)
14. Whom did a very wayward king admonish young people to remember? (Eccl. 12:1)

15. What will be remembered about the old order after the new heavens and earth are in place? (Isa. 65:17)
16. What did Hezekiah say about the memory of those who are dead? (Isa. 26:14)
17. What did Paul tell Timothy he would be if he would "Put the brethren in remembrance of these things"? (1 Tim. 4:6)
18. What faithful Apostle labored diligently so that his brethren would always remember the stirring admonitions of their faith? (2 Pet. 1:12; 3:1)
19. What very special gift did Jesus promise His Apostles to assist them in performing a very critical work? (John 14:26)
20. What noble Apostle reminded his brethren to remember a very special statement by a very outstanding person? What was the statement they should remember? (Acts 20:35)
21. About whom was Paul speaking when he said that he remembered the unfeigned faith of this man's mother and grandmother? (2 Tim. 1:5)
22. Who promised to give an inheritance and a remembrance "better than of sons and of daughters," even an "everlasting name"? (Isa. 56:5)
23. About whom did the prophet write, "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun"? Who was the prophet? (Ps. 72:17)
24. A certain event painfully reminded this man of a promise to faithfulness that he had made only about 24 hours earlier. Who was the man, and what was the event? (Luke 22:61; Matt. 26:75)
25. Complete this verse: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, _____, when we _____ Zion"? (Ps. 137:1)
26. Who advised us to remember our own evil ways and doings, and for what purpose? (Ezek. 36:31)
27. What did Jesus say one should do if, when offering a sacrifice at the altar, he remembered a certain thing? (Matt. 5:23-24)
28. What is the shortest sermon on remembering ever preached? Who was the preacher? (Luke 17:32)
29. What does God promise about remembering the sins and iniquities of those who have truly repented? (Heb. 8:12; 10:17)
30. For what purpose did Joshua command the Israelites to take 12 stones out of the Jordan where they crossed into Canaan? (Josh. 4:7)

(Answers on page 26)

Exercises NOT To Do

Below are some common exercises NOT to do. Each relates to a lesson or a warning given us in Scripture. Find the Scripture warning in the right column that relates to each phrase, then write the number of that Scripture on the line provided. (Some phrases may relate to more than one Scripture).

Exercise

- A _____ Tooting your own horn
- B _____ Feeding your pride
- C _____ Hitting the ceiling
- D _____ Fishing for compliments
- E _____ Dragging your heels
- F _____ Adding fuel to the fire
- G _____ Passing the blame
- H _____ Jumping at conclusions
- I _____ Jumping on the bandwagon
- J _____ Running in circles
- K _____ Beating around the bush

Scripture Warning

- 1 "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him" (Prov. 18:13).
- 2 "You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things a beginner must learn about the Scriptures" (Heb. 5:12, NLT).
- 3 "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:11).
- 4 "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Eccl. 7:9).
- 5 "The people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God" (1 Sam. 15:21). Saul would not openly admit his guilt. Instead, he blamed the people.
- 6 "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).
- 7 Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent (Gen. 3).
- 8 "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23:2).
- 9 "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" (Gal. 5:7).
- 10 "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44).
- 11 "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips" (Prov. 27:2).
- 12 "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth" (Prov. 26:20).
- 13 "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

(Answers on page 26)

ARE YOU WILLING...

to stoop down and consider the needs of children?
 to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing older?
 to stop asking how much your friends love you, and to ask yourself if you love them enough?
 to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear in their hearts?
 to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke?
 to carry your lamp in front of you so that your shadow will fall behind you?
 to make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings with the gate open...?

Are you willing to do these things even for a day?

Then you will be—

Better, bigger, and happier today!

—Selected

About the Antichrist

Is the antichrist visible today in Iraq, or Africa, or China, or any of the terrorists in the Middle East? Many ideas are extant, some believing that a specific person matches the Scripture prophecy. What can we logically conclude from a study of Scripture?

The word "antichrist" occurs only in John's letters in the New Testament (see 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). The word is derived from a combination of two Greek words, *anti* and *Christos*. *Anti* is a Greek preposition meaning "against." *Christos* is the Greek word for "the anointed, i.e., the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus Christ" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*). Antichrist is literally anyone opposed to the Messiah or His teachings or His plan of action.

William Barclay comments that antichrist may imply, from its root words, either an opponent of Christ or one who seeks to put himself in the place of Christ. In this latter case, antichrist might be one who subtly tries to take the place of Christ from within the Church and the Christian community as by subtle infiltration, instead of open opposition. The antichrist could act in either way.

We do not see any reason to attempt to identify a specific person as the antichrist mentioned by the apostle John. All through history there have been individuals opposed to Christ, some quietly, some violently.

In 1 John 2, the elder begins by stating that *"this is the last hour."* (verse 18). In the Bible, the *"last days"* was sometimes used to describe the period of time after Jesus' first advent, because Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. His coming was the fulfillment of some four thousand years of prophecy. In this perspective, the time between His first and second advents becomes the end time, or final age, a period of unknown length. The first verses of the book of Hebrews use the term in this sense: *"God...hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."* It designates a time during which the plan of God is being brought to fruition, of which the arrival of Christ (first advent) was the first visible fulfillment. It is not a fleeting moment but rather a period that marks a next stage in the realizing of God's plan for the earth. Other passages take the *"last days"* as the final days of this period between Christ's first and second advents (see 2 Tim. 3:1; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3).

The apostle John is issuing a warning that demands all the vigilance and faithfulness of believers. It is a call to remain steadfast against any opposition; for opposition there will be. This call is always urgent, always timely, always needed, both in light of the

believers' obligations and in the light of the future Judgment. John foresaw a great *"sifting"* in the Church, and his heartfelt warning is, *"this is the last hour."* With these words John adds urgency and weight to his words. The true Church is not true unless it be united. And the true Church permits no heresy of delayed action discipleship. Thus is imposed a great constraint and urgency upon every member: The time is now.

What is the purpose of the symbol of the antichrist in such a context? It is a warning, always needed, always timely in every historical setting. In essence, the antichrist is an idea or person that denies or opposes Christ.

John's passage adds another thought about the antichrist: that it may refer to false brethren from within the Church itself—a very real issue in those days when the apostasy was approaching. The apostle Paul warned against the same problem (Acts 20:29–30). Every false idea, untrue belief, or spirit of error or heresy is really *"antichrist."* Says John, *"even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time....They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us"* (1 John 2:18–19).

It has often been true that the fiercest opponents of Christianity have been not its declared enemies but its false friends, those who are opposed because of petty jealousies or bitter differences, and general weariness or boredom in living the Christian life. They *"go out"* because they never really grasp the truth and power of the life that Christ came to show them. And in so doing they become the worst enemies of the cause.

Antichrist also signifies, *"one who opposes Christ by assuming the guise of Christ."* The faith is ever imperiled by those who undermine Christian truth with corruptions of it. The epithet *"They went out"* describes many modern believers whose faith has lapsed because their original commitment was exacted too cheaply and whose original loyalties were established too weakly. Contrast the costly demand Jesus imposed on those who would follow Him with the easy going, conventional way many churches today receive new members.

The antichrist is the liar, one who *"denies that Jesus is the Christ, ...he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also"* (1 John 2:22–23, RSV). There may be honest differences of opinion, but to oppose Christ is to oppose God and the whole Divine scheme, and can only end in disaster. □



How To MAKE PEACE

William Lad, a minister of peace, related the following story from his own experience:

"I had a fine field of grain growing on a piece of ground which lay at some distance from the homestead. Whenever I rode by I would see my neighbor Pulcifer's sheep in the lot, destroying my hopes of a harvest. These sheep were of the gaunt, long-legged kind, active as spaniels: they would spring over the highest fence and no partition wall could keep them out.

"I complained to neighbor Pulcifer about his long-legged sheep, and sent him frequent messages, but all to no avail. They might be kept out for a day or two; but no longer, for the legs of his sheep were long, and my grain more tempting than the adjoining pasture. I rode by again and the sheep were still there. I became angry, and told my men to set the dogs on them; and, if that did not dissuade the sheep, I would pay my men if they would shoot the sheep.

"I rode away much agitated; for I was not a peacemaker then; I felt full of fight. All at once, a light flashed in upon me. I asked myself, 'Would it not be well for you to try in your own conduct the peace principle you are teaching to others?' I thought it all over, and tried to decide in my mind as to the best course. The next day I rode over to see neighbor Pulcifer. I found him chopping wood at his door.

"'Good morning, neighbor!' No answer. 'Good morning!' I repeated. He gave a kind of grunt without looking up. 'I came,' continued

I, 'to see about the sheep.' At this, he threw down his ax and exclaimed, in an angry manner: 'Now, aren't you a pretty neighbor, to tell your men to kill my sheep? I heard of it. A rich man like you scheming to shoot a poor man's sheep!'

"'I was wrong, neighbor,' I said; 'but it won't do to let your sheep eat up all that grain; so I came over to say that I would take your sheep to my homestead pasture, and put them in with mine; and in the fall you shall take them back, and if any one is missing, you may take your pick out of my whole flock.'

"Pulcifer looked confounded; he did not know how to take me. At last he stammered: 'My Squire, are you in earnest?' 'Certainly I am,' I answered; 'it is better for me to feed your sheep in my pasture on grass, than to feed them on my

grain; and I see the fence can't keep them out.'

"After a moment's silence, 'The sheep shan't trouble you any more,' exclaimed Pulcifer. 'I will fetter them all. But I'll let you know that when any man talks of shooting, I can shoot too; and when they are kind and neighborly, I can be kind, too.'

"The sheep never again trespassed on my lot. 'And, my friends,' Lad would continue when addressing an audience, 'remember that when you talk of injuring your neighbors, they will talk of injuring you. When nations threaten to fight, other nations will be ready too. Love will beget love; a wish to be at peace will keep you in peace. You must overcome evil with good. There is no other way.' □

—from *Manners and Morals*,
Published ~1890

Give—

*to your enemy, forgiveness
to your opponent, tolerance
to your child, good example
to your parents, deference
to everyone, sunshine
to your God, your heart.*

Man is no bigger than his ability to do little things well.

Silence is a great peacemaker.

Learn from the mistakes of others—you can't live long enough to make them all yourself.



One Last Look

There is something different about the last of anything, some fond feeling that "last" is "best." "One last look" suggests that we are seizing a singular, non-recurring opportunity... until we think about Lot's wife and the price she paid for one last look toward Sodom.

Yes, hers was one last, satisfying look. But oh! the price.

Why should a single backward look have been judged so severely? Because by it she showed her open disregard for the command of the angel to *"Look not behind thee."* *"Look not"* meant exactly that—there was to be NO looking back for any reason whatever.

Three of the four realized the seriousness of the command and immediately set their minds to

obey it. Absolutely. Completely. Even before Lot's wife was stricken, they knew that God meant what He said, that this was no time for any thoughtless moves—their lives were at stake! Every muscle, every nerve, every thought was put under constant, conscious control. No aspect of their behavior was left to reflex or chance. Eyes, face, shoulders, feet—all were pointing forward. And not even the deafening roar of the thunder from behind or the blinding flashes of the lightning that reflected across the leaden sky could distract them.

It seems possible that the forward-looking three never knew what happened to Lot's wife or why she was suddenly left behind—unless the angels told them. They certainly did not see her look back, nor did they look back when she was stricken to see what had happened to her. If they had, they, too, would have been numbered with her.

What does it say to us? That

when God speaks, we had better listen. When He says No, He means just that. Didn't Jesus say as much when He told the backward-looking would-be disciple that *"No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God?"* (Luke 9:62). There are no exceptions.

It is easy to look back and paint glowing pictures of the directions we might have gone and the "great things" we might have been or done had not the gospel of God touched our lives. But any and all such backward-looking is strictly forbidden and will, if persisted in, cost us our life. It says to God that we don't really appreciate what He is offering us, that we would have been better off if He hadn't "interfered"!

If the things ahead do not mean more—immeasurably more—to us than the things we left behind; if they do not mean enough to us to totally absorb our attention, if our eyes are pulled in two directions, we surely are not *"fit for the kingdom of God"* and shall never be there.

No, we can't afford even a single backward look. The price is too high. □

Who Goes To Hell?

◆ "Who goes to hell, and for what reason?"

A very simple answer to your question is that all who die go to "hell," because the word "hell" as used in the Bible means simply "the grave," "the pit," "nonentity." The Bible does not teach that there is consciousness in death. Why do they go there? Because the grave (death) is "the house appointed for all living" (Job 30:23). All are by nature mortal, subject to death.

You may or may not agree. Some feel that to deny belief in literal hellfire is to contradict Jesus, who said clearly that the wicked will suffer "the damnation of hell."

But lest we misjudge Jesus' words or anyone else's, let us look carefully at the meanings of the words the Bible authors used.

Language is a living science, and word meanings often change with time. To properly understand Jesus or any Bible writer we must understand what were the meanings of the words at the time He used them. Consult a dictionary of theology and you will learn that "hell is the abode of evil spirits: the infernal regions, where the devil rules supreme, and whither lost or condemned souls go after death to suffer indescribable torments and eternal punishment either for wickedness inherited from the sin of Adam or for more or less serious infractions of the Divine law. This region was generally thought of as being beneath the earth in the darkness of vast underground caverns" (*Encyclopedia Americana*).

Dante's 'Inferno' gives perhaps the most vivid depiction in literature of the place of eternal punishment for evildoers. "Hope not ever to see heaven," Dante writes. "I come to lead you to the other shore; into the eternal darkness; into fire and into ice." But remember, this is Dante, not Bible.

The Old Testament Scriptures, spanning some 4,000 years of Bible history, contain no reference to punishment in hell or hellfire. The word "hell" in the Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew word *sheol*, which has several meanings, not one of which suggests a place of torture, punishment or torment. In the Hebrew language, *sheol* meant "hades or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat), including its accessories and inmates:—grave, hell, pit" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*). The word *sheol* appears 65 times in the Old Testament. It is translated "hell" 31 times, "grave" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times. At the time the King James Version of the Bible was translated (in the 17th century), the Old English word "hell" meant what we would call "the pit," or "the grave." Modern translators frequently recognize this fact, and use the word "grave" instead of "hell." For example:

- The KJV of Psalm 9:17 reads, "The wicked shall be turned into **hell** [*sheol*]" ; whereas the New Living

Translation reads: "The wicked will go down to **the grave**."

- The KJV of Psalm 16:10 reads: "thou wilt not leave my soul in **hell** [*sheol*]" ; whereas the New International Version translates it, "you will not abandon me to **the grave**."

- Psalm 18:5 (KJV) reads: "The sorrows of hell [*sheol*] compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me" ; whereas the NIV translates: "The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me." The NASB leaves the term *sheol* untranslated, but the rest of the verse explains the author's meaning: "The cords of *Sheol* surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me."

- Psalm 55:15 (KJV) reads: "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into **hell** [*sheol*]" ; whereas the New Living Translation reads: "Let death seize my enemies by surprise; let **the grave** swallow them alive."

- Proverbs 5:5 (KJV) reads: "Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on **hell** [*sheol*]" ; whereas the New Living Translation reads: "Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to **the grave**."

- Isaiah 14:15 (KJV) reads: "thou shalt be brought down to **hell** [*sheol*], to the sides of the pit" ; whereas the NIV translates it, "you are brought down to **the grave**, to the depths of the pit."

In the New Testament, hell is translated from the Greek word *Hades*, which occurs 11 times, also *Gehenna*, which occurs 12 times, and once from "Tartarus."

Hades, like the Hebrew *Sheol*, denotes the abode or world of the dead, the state of death, the dominion of death; literally that which is "in darkness, hidden, invisible or obscure." Jesus used the word *hades*, meaning "darkness, death" when he said: "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to **hell** [*hades*]" (Matt. 11:23). Again, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [*hades*] shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

Wilson's *Emphatic Diaglott* has the following comment. "To translate *hades* by the word *hell* as it is done ten times out of eleven in the New Testament, is very improper, unless it has the Saxon meaning of *helam*, to cover," attached to it.

Peter quoted this passage about Jesus from the Psalmist: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*hades*], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Acts 2:27). If *hades* was a place of torment, Jesus was there!

Gehenna, the most common word translated "hell" in the New Testament, is a transliteration from Aramaic of the Hebrew *gehennom*, meaning "Valley of Hinnom."

The Valley of Hinnom was a valley near Jerusalem used for the disposal of refuse. In the days of the kings, children were burned in this valley in sacrifice to the pagan god Molech (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6). The area took on a sinister association and later became a dumping ground for the disposal of all kinds of refuse, along with carcasses of beasts and the unburied bodies of criminals who had been executed. Fires were kept burning to consume the refuse.

So it is not strange that *Gehenna* is used in the New Testament to symbolize death and utter destruction. People at the time would readily understand the meaning by association. In no place does *Gehenna* signify a place of continuing torment. Refuse thrown into *Gehenna* was not tormented or tortured endlessly but cast out or destroyed. And just as fires were kept burning continually in *Gehenna*; the term "fire" was used figuratively to describe the destruction of the wicked—not that they were continually tortured but that their destruction was total, final and irreversible. Knowing that the disciples were familiar with the fires of *Gehenna*, Jesus used that term as description for the destruction of the wicked, as in the following passages:

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna]" (Matt. 10:28). *Gehenna* indicated a final, irreversible destruction.

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell [gehenna]?" (Matt. 23:33). Again, *Gehenna* indicated a final, irreversible destruction.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell [gehenna meaning death, the grave] than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell [gehenna], into the fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:43). Unquenchable fire again is a symbol of irreversible destruction.

"But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell [gehenna, meaning to destroy eternally, take away all prospect of future life]; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:5).

The word "*Tartarus*" appears only once in the Scriptures (2 Peter 2:4) and is translated "hell" in the Authorized Version. According to a footnote in the Berkeley translation, *Tartarus* was the corresponding Greek name for the Jewish *Gehenna*. Later *Tartarus* was described as the place in which "the spirits of the wicked received their due punishment," in the "lower world." But note that this idea had no origin in the Bible.

Other reference works also recognize that "hell" was not thought of as a place of torture. The *Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home* states: "In the Old Testament the abode of the dead is called *Sheol*. The prophets and teachers of Israel made few formal statements about life after death, but many legends and folk tales arose about it. *Sheol* was not thought of as a place of punishment." *Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* says concerning *Sheol*: "early Hebrew writings give no detailed picture of the state after death to correspond with the pictures of

Mohammedanism, Zoroastrianism, the religion of Egypt, or medieval Christianity. Prophetic influence was against any emphasis on [a continuation of] life after death. The place of the abode of the dead was called *Sheol*. The origin of the word is uncertain. Another primitive quality of *Sheol* was its non-moral character. It was not a place of punishment or reward. There were no compartments for good and bad."

Hell is not a place of fire or torment. All, good and bad, sleep in the grave until Jesus returns to judge and reward His servants for what they have done (Luke 14:14; 2 Cor. 5:10).

◆ Correct Understanding?

"I am concerned about your words 'correctly understanding' the Bible. To me the Bible is black and white. The different denominations are irrelevant to me. What our Lord has given us in the Bible is what I know is true."

We admire—and share—your respect for the Bible. We agree fully with your statement: "What our Lord has given us in the Bible is what I know is true." The Bible is our one sure foundation. Without it, we have nothing solid upon which to stand.

But I'm not sure I understand what you mean when you say, "To me the Bible is black and white."

If you are suggesting that everything the Bible teaches is obvious and on the surface, I have to disagree. True, as the Bible says, the voice of wisdom speaking, "*All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge*" (Prov. 8:8-9). But we must study carefully to arrive at that point of "understanding."

What are the possibilities for misunderstanding? I think you will allow that the Bible has been one of the most misunderstood books ever written. Look at the diversity of beliefs in the world, even among so-called Christians. Now a million different ideas does not change the fact of what the Bible says, but it does tell us that not everyone can be right. There were false teachers in the Apostles' days, as Paul and Jesus and John all warned (Matt. 24:11-13; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; Acts 20: 29-30; 2 Peter 2:1) and there are false teachers today. We need to study to be sure that we have a correct understanding, i.e., one which is supported by the general teaching of the Bible itself, not what Peter called a "private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20).

Understanding the Bible is a lot like understanding a language. You and I can communicate if we understand the same language. But suppose you were to write to me in German (and I have no knowledge of German), and I were to write to you in Greek (and you have no knowledge of Greek). How could either of us benefit from the communication? But when we share a common language, when we both associate the same definitions with the same words, then we have a common ground for understanding each other's thoughts.

In a sense, the Bible has its own language, defined by

the various authors themselves, and we must understand its terms as the Bible writers used them. For example, when it uses the term *logos*, it does no good to apply a definition of the word which came into use during the twelfth century AD, when John used the term during the first century. We need to define Bible terms using the definitions given them by the Bible authors themselves, or we cannot hope to "correctly understand" the Bible. But by taking all that the Bible says upon a given term or topic, we can more safely draw conclusions as to the author's meaning. And sometimes a single word will have more than one meaning. For example, take the word "grace." Peter spoke of the "grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). This "grace" is obviously different from the term as Paul used it when he said "By grace are ye saved through faith," or "the grace of God that bringeth salvation...[teaches] us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world" (Eph. 2:8; Titus 2:11-12).

Another passage from Scripture which shows that understanding requires instruction comes from the book of Acts. When the Lord told Philip to approach a man who was riding in a chariot, Philip found the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. He asked the man if he understood what he was reading. The man answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:26-31). He wanted Philip to explain the meaning of the passage to him.

Don't we find ourselves often in a similar situation? One can easily read words, without any idea of what the words are saying, unless one has background knowledge in the language (the Bible) to understand.

After the Captivity, when some of the Jews had returned to their homeland and had rebuilt the temple and the wall, Ezra was concerned for the spiritual life of the people, and instituted a type of class instruction, which was intended to teach the people the laws and commandments of God. We read that those who were teaching "read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them [the people] to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). Instruction, along with explanation, helped the people to learn what they should do to obey the laws of God.

In the book of Acts, the Bereans were commended because they applied themselves to searching the Scriptures daily, so as to distinguish between what was true and what was false teaching (Acts 17:11).

It always seems that something we understand is easy and plain, something about which we have no knowledge is difficult. Take calculus or trigonometry. If one is totally uninformed about the subject, a book about it would have little or no meaning. But to one who was conversant with its language and rules, a book on the subject would be full of meaning and interest. The same is true about the Bible. If one is acquainted with its fundamental principles and understands its overall teachings, less familiar passages often "make sense" and one can readily see what the Bible author is saying. On the other hand, to one who is unacquainted, it is a mystery, just as a book about advanced calculus is a mystery to one who does not understand the fundamentals of the science.

Jesus gave a reason why the people of His day were so slow to understand the things he said. "This peoples' heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should

AFTER

*After the toil and trouble,
Cometh the day of rest;
After the weary conflict,
Peace at the Lord's behest;
After the aimless straying,
No more in sin to roam.
After the wilderness journey,
The comforting light of home.*

*After the night of darkness,
The shadows all flee away;
After the day of sadness,
Hope sheds her brightest ray;
After the strife and struggle,
Cometh the victory won;
After the work is over,
The Master's own word, "Well done."*

*After the hours of chast'ning,
The spirit made pure and bright;
After the earth's dark shadow,
Clear is the morning light;
After the guiding counsel,
Communion full and sweet;
After the willing service,
Peace at the Saviour's feet.*

*After the pain and sickness,
Tears will be wiped away;
After the Saviour cometh,
No more of earth's decay;
After the deep heart sorrow,
Cometh the end of strife;
After the daily crosses,
The glorious crown of life.*

—Selected

be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:15).

When His disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to them in parables, He answered, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Then He went on to explain that the majority would not understand, but theirs was a special privilege: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to

hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matt. 13:10-11, 16-17). They did not understand His parables simply by hearing them, or Jesus would not have had to explain to them. Likewise many times we do not understand a passage of Scripture until we are able to relate it to another passage, which helps us to know the meaning of its terms.

It also seems there are many passages which we will not have knowledge of until we have further revelation from God. At the present time, we must walk by faith. □

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 19

Exercise

- A 11, 3 (6) Tooting your own horn
- B 6 (3) Feeding your pride
- C 4 Hitting the ceiling
- D 10 Fishing for compliments
- E 9 Dragging your heels
- F 12 Adding fuel to the fire
- G 7 (5) Passing the blame
- H 1 Jumping at conclusions
- I 8 Jumping on the bandwagon
- J 2 (7) Running in circles
- K 5 (7) Beating around the bush

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 18

When God Remembers

1. Abraham (Gen. 19:29), and Abraham "was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23)
2. David (Ps. 136:23)
3. Isaiah. "Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you!" (Isa. 49:15-16, NLT)
4. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love" (Heb. 6:10)

When We Must Remember

5. Nehemiah (Neh. 4:14; 13:14 22, 31)
6. "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away" (Job 11:16)
7. Job: "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!" (Job 14:13)
8. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses" (Ps. 20:7)
9. David: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord" (Ps. 25:7)
10. "I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches" (Ps. 63:6; 119:55)
11. Dust. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14)
12. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him...to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Ps. 103:17-18)
13. "If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:6)
14. "Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth" (Eccl. 12:1)
15. Nothing. "The former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17)

16. "They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish" (Isa. 26:14)
17. A good minister of Jesus Christ. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6)
18. Peter. "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things...This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance..." (2 Pet. 1:12; 3:1)
19. When they would be writing the Scriptures, He promised them the Holy Spirit, which would "teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26)
20. Paul. He told them to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)
21. Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5)
22. God, speaking through His prophet Isaiah (Isa. 56:5)
23. It was a prophecy about Jesus (Ps. 72:17). David was the prophet.
24. Peter, when he heard the cock crow, remembered his promise not to forsake or deny his Lord (Luke 22:61; Matt. 26:75)
25. "We wept, when we remembered Zion" (Ps. 137:1)
26. Ezekiel, so that we may "loathe" (or despise) ourselves for our sins and turn from them (Ezek. 36:31)
27. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar...first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24)
28. Jesus' words: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32)
29. "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12; 10:17)
30. So that they would remember their miraculous crossing. "These stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever" (Josh. 4:7)

Life is not merely length of time but the daily web of character that we unconsciously weave. Our thoughts, imaginations, purposes, motives, love, will, are the under threads; our words, tone of voice, looks, acts and habits are the upper threads; and the passing moment is the shuttle swiftly, ceaselessly, relentlessly weaving those threads into the web of life. It is not woven by wishing, but is unavoidably woven by what we are, moment by moment, hour by hour.

What is our life weaving out?

*Faith, mighty Faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries, "It shall be done."*

Humility can be compared to the cross-weave in the garments of righteousness—it will be seen in and through every move in the life of every true follower of Christ.

The set of the sail decides the direction in which the ship will go; even so, if we have set our hearts to reach the Kingdom of God and are determined nothing shall hinder us, we shall sail in that direction.

YOUR MEMBERSHIP

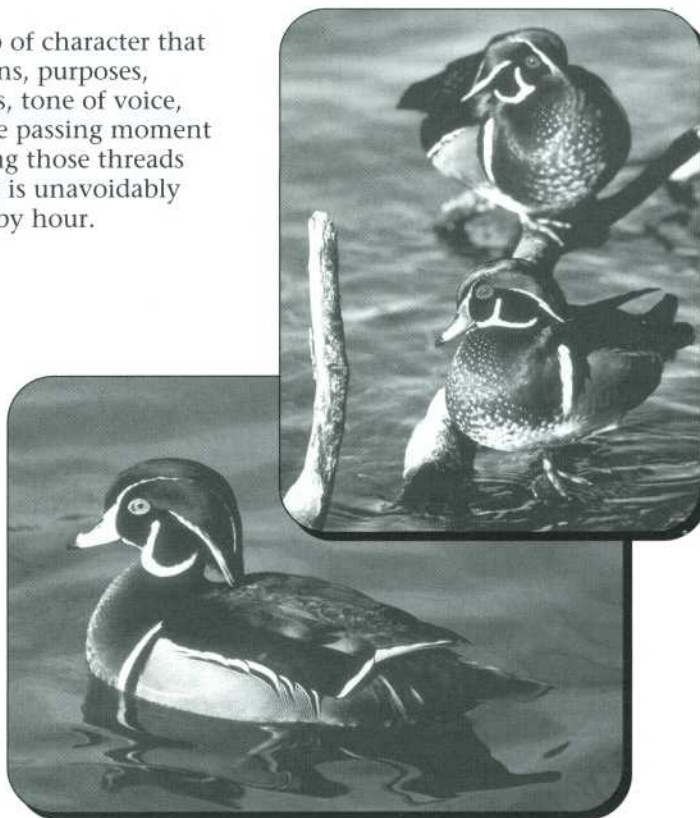
*Are you an active member
The kind who would be missed,
Or are you just contented
That your name is on the list?*

*Do you attend the meetings
And mingle with the flock,
Or do you stay at home the while
And criticize and knock?*

*And do you take an active part
To help the work along,
Or are you satisfied to be
The kind who "just belong"?*

*Do you ever pay a visit to
A member who is sick
Or leave the work to just a few
And talk about "the clique"?*

*So think that over, member,
And learn the right from wrong;
Don't be "another member,"
The kind who "just belong."*



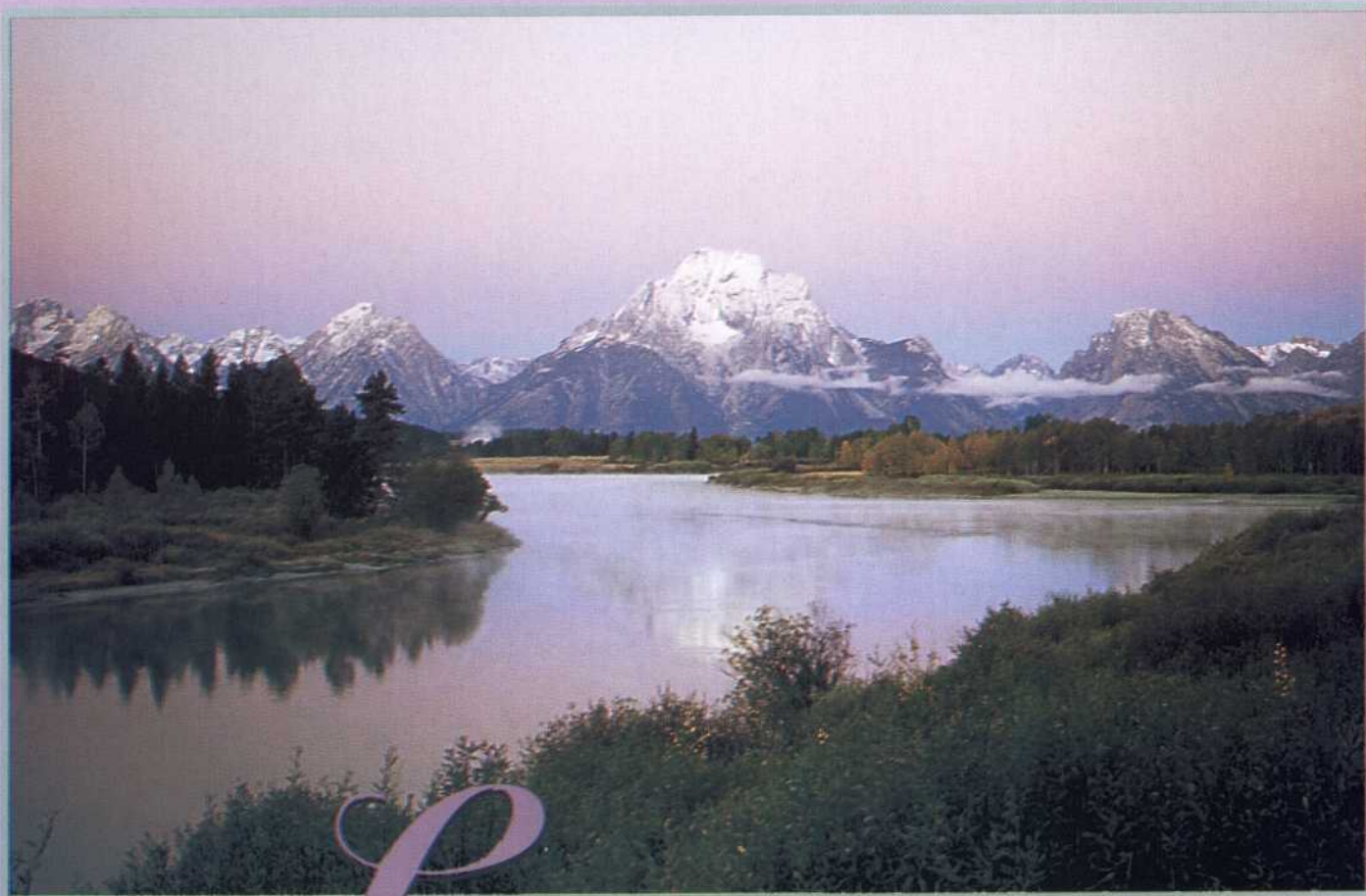
Coming Soon—Immortals!

People often complain about the monotony of ordinary days. But is there anything ordinary about these days just preceding the greatest event ever to take place on this earth? These are days tense with anticipation and preparation. Soon, very soon we shall find ourselves face to face with immortal men from other planets. Meeting these extraordinary persons will be an experience far surpassing anything we have yet known. Standing before these immortal beings, we shall realize that they are able to judge and evaluate us, not only by our utterances and outward appearances, but by our true, inner, moral character.

The greeting and the handshake we receive from them will be according to what our life has been. If we feigned spirituality when we felt none, if we listened to counsel from the Word of God and our spiritual friends and then went our own way, privately retaining our own opinion, we shall then realize that such fruitless dissembling is no longer possible.

One of the special needs of our day is more time for meditation and reflection.

Happiness is a perfume that you cannot spray on others without getting some of it on yourself.



ord, in the quiet of this morning hour
I come to You for peace, wisdom, and power
To view the world to day as through Your eyes;
To be more patient, understanding, wise;
To see beyond what seems to be, and know
Myself as You see me; and so
To seek the best and only good behold;
Make deaf my ears to slander that is told;
Silence my tongue to aught that is unkind;
Let only thoughts that bless dwell in my mind.
Let me so kindly be, so full of faith,
That all I meet may see in me Your grace.
O clothe me in Your beauty, this I pray,
Let me reflect Your love, O Lord, this day.

