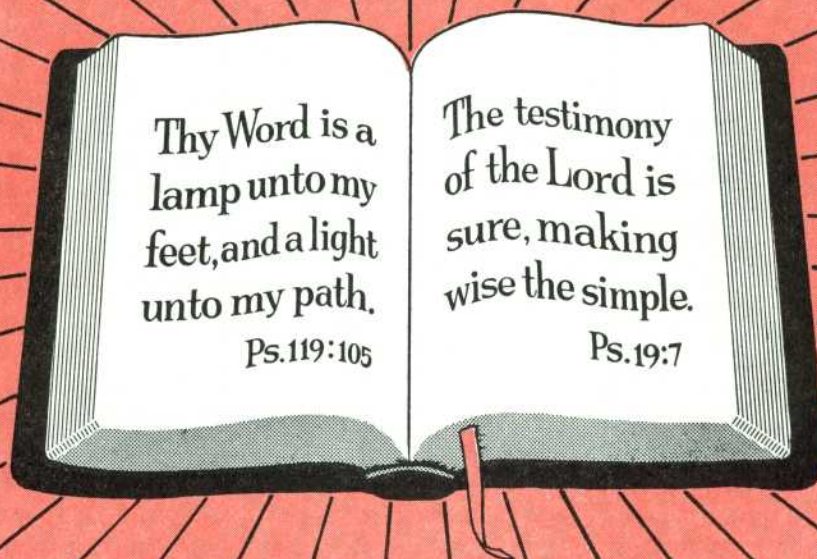


Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST



A Message of Hope and Triumph

Is Your Faith Fireproof?

Satan and Genesis

Index for 1974

Megiddo Message

Vol. 61, No. 12

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Editorially Speaking...

Don't Lose Your Head!

A slight breeze, and a great old willow falls prostrate to the ground. Suddenly, it seems, for no reason at all; yet it is not sudden, for parasites have slowly pulverized its heart.

Earnestly, pathetically, desperately did one of the students of the School of the Prophets call to Elisha the headmaster, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed" (II Kings 6:5). The lad had been busily engaged in chopping down trees by the bank of the Jordan, when suddenly the axehead had slipped from the handle and plunged into the depths of the Jordan.

Suddenly, yes, it had fallen into the river. Yet, on second thought, it did not fall so suddenly. Anyone familiar with axes and woodchopping knows that the axehead does not fly off the handle without warning. There comes the instant when the experienced woodsman will sense just a slight wobble of the head. Unless he stops chopping at once and makes the axehead secure, it will continue to loosen itself and become a real menace to himself and others.

The way of wisdom for the alert Christian allows no more alternative than that of the loose axehead. Stop at once, right where you are! You know that the axehead of your Christian conviction has begun to wobble? Your faith is not as strong as it was a week ago? Your conduct is not what it used to be? Your awareness of sin seems to be slipping? Stop at once! The axehead has begun to loosen. Take time to tighten it by earnest prayer and meditation and spiritual exercise. You could lose your head!

God gives us warnings, and we must keep our spiritual perceptiveness keen to hear them and apply them to ourselves. Do we find ourselves on the wrong track—do we feel somewhat light and foolish—or sensitive—or irritable? Stop at once, and say, "Lord, this is the wrong way. I will not go another step. This road leads to death. I turn back to Thee."

Or does our faith and hope in the world to come seem less vivid, less impelling? Is our absorption with the things of time so complete that it is obscuring our vision of eternity? Stop at once! How can we travel at maximum speed in the right direction when we cannot every moment feel the surge of determination to arrive? Read again the promises. Review the history of God's workings among men, and know for a certainty that the remainder of His plan *will* come to pass. Tighten the axehead of your faith, lest—suddenly—it slip!

Elisha's student did not intend to lose the axehead; he just took a chance. Judas never intended to end his days a suicide. He had been selected to be a disciple; but the first impulse to sin was not conquered; he thought about the coins he could have for his own—he slipped—he slid—and he was overcome.

God wants us to be more watchful. Is your axehead loosening—slightly? Tighten it by a deeper consecration and devotion to God. Don't lose your head! ●●

From the Apostle Peter

(First Peter, Chapter One)

A Message of Hope and Triumph

THE First Epistle of Peter has been called the Epistle of Hope. So dominant is the theme that it colors the entire narrative, giving beauty to life and meaning to suffering. It is hope that is real—not a wistful, nebulous optimism that in the end all will turn out right; but a fervent, sincere, solid confidence in the living God who raised up Christ from the dead and gave glory and faith to hope (I Pet. 1:21).

Peter's Epistle has been written and preserved for our learning, and we want to glean from it some vital, stirring lessons by which we can improve our daily Christian lives. But first we should look at the author. It is Peter, Simon Peter, a writer and a spokesman for the Eternal! We rejoice to know that in his mature years he attained the stature this Epistle reflects. High and wide and deep are the powers of hope when applied in the life of a Christian.

For Peter, the journey from fisherman to apostolic writer was long and arduous. This youthful dynamo was one of the closest friends of our Lord. He walked with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. He gave up his livelihood to join the company of Jesus. He ventured further with Jesus than any other of the Twelve. He tried to walk on the water. He shared in the Transfiguration vision. He was by nature bold, determined and self-confident: "Even if it means dying with you," he said, "I will never disown you" (Matt. 26:35, Phillips). He felt a loyalty so strong that it seemed unshakable.

But Peter also made mistakes—how very like us he seems at times as he speaks before he thinks, or runs before he is sent. His highly impetuous nature brought him to grief more than once. In one overzealous moment he even cut off a man's ear—the victim was a soldier in the party arresting Jesus. How grateful he must have felt in later moments of reflection, that Jesus could repair the damage.

Worst of all, Peter failed most tragically as he reverted to his old self the fateful night of the December, 1974

trial and three times denied that he even knew his Lord and Master. For the moment his hope and courage had vanished. Yet, one look from Jesus, and Peter turned and went out weeping bitterly in deep repentance of heart. Only three days later and he was running breathlessly to view the open tomb. Converted and humiliated, he made a brave comeback and in later years preached Christ fearlessly in the face of imprisonment and martyrdom.

Our hearts are encouraged as we note his early repentance, his rebounding faithfulness, and the genuine honesty with which he openly admitted his faults. His energetic and determined way of going forward in the Master's service kept him growing little by little into that great and strong character Jesus knew he could become once he had been steadied and shaped by the disciplines of life. Little by little the unlettered and impulsive fisherman was transformed into the God-honoring, God-directed disciple. Little by little the rough and untrained youth of conflicting impulses matured into the rock-like man of Christ, until he was no longer Peter the fisherman—he was "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ."

There are many lessons we may learn from Peter's experiences. The principle which helped him most is one which each of us would do well to emulate—the ability to take rebuke and benefit from it. No other disciple was so pointedly reproved by the Master. But this was how Peter learned to recognize his own weaknesses. He learned to see himself as Christ saw him; and he took his lessons without resentment, using them not for bitterness but for the betterment of his soul. Instead of discouraging him, each experience served to push him forward toward his higher goal. No small task was it for Peter to remold his own character, his own ideas, his emotions and passions, into the will of God; but he worked at it vigorously. And hope and triumph were the result.

The Epistle of First Peter might be called the Apostle's personal success story. It rings with the hope that kept him moving forward, and its ad-

For the Christian, all human existence is meaningful because it is set within the context of eternity; its origin and destiny lie outside the things that are seen.

monitions vibrate with the lessons he himself had to learn—lessons hard and long, but exceedingly worthwhile.

"To the strangers...elect..."

Peter addresses himself to "elect strangers." An unusual designation, yet it suggests a lesson which this Jewish-born Apostle was many years learning. "Strangers"—in the vocabulary of any good Jew—were Gentiles, and completely outside the scope of his interest and hospitality. The feeling had been rubbed in for many years and was not easily changed. Nothing less than a God-sent vision persuaded the devoted Jew, Peter that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). And even this was not a final victory, for at least fourteen years later Peter was still struggling with the same problem (see Galatians 2).

Does Peter's long battle with himself console us as we struggle and fall repeatedly over the same besetting sin? Let us remember Peter's struggle, but let us also remember Peter's triumph. He won the victory—and so may we.

"Elect strangers"—Peter's brethren were not alone in this category, for such is the status of all Christians in all ages. For "here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." To the Christian, every native land is a foreign land—because his citizenship is in the world to come. He claims no citizenship in a world that is destined for destruction, lest he perish with it. His first loyalties are directed from above.

If we would be Christians, we must proclaim our heavenly citizenship by living as citizens of that realm. We do this by prohibiting in our own lives everything that is prohibited in our heavenly country—all ugly bitterness, deadly resentments, wrangling sensitiveness; all spirit of rivalry, doubtful dealing, partiality and flattery. Every attitude and feeling not upbuilding to ourselves and others must go. Only by so doing can we ever prove ourselves citizens of that better world.

As Christians, we are aliens in yet another way—we are pilgrims in a land of soul shaping, in

an earthly school of life's perfecting. Here, like the Son of man, we can be "made perfect through suffering." Here we can learn the truth of the words of the writer to the Hebrews, that God lovingly chastises His children to make them "partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10).

For the Christian, all human existence is meaningful because it is set within the context of eternity; its origin and destiny lie beyond the things that are seen. Our King is God, and our home is in the Kingdom of God. And until we reach our home we are exiles in a strange land—exiles sustained only by our confidence that beyond the limitations and perplexities of the present we may experience a new life in a new and eternal realm. The reality of the future gives meaning and purpose to the present.

"Blessed be the God and Father...."

Here is a second lesson our beloved Brother Peter had mastered—he had learned to bless God. As Peter saw it, the Christian life was precarious. This is a fact hard for us to comprehend as we sit in our comfortable homes and come and go fearlessly each day in a land of religious freedom. But such was not the privilege of the first-century Christians scattered through the part of the world we call Asia Minor. The threat of persecution loomed large on their horizon. Professing Christianity in those days was serious business—as serious as life and death. Christian living meant a full measure of Christian *giving*—even to one's life, if need be. No one knew what would happen next. Already these scattered brethren were running into difficulty.

That is why Peter wrote to them. And what did he say? Did he open his letter with a note of sympathetic pity, saying, "Grace to you, my brethren, and how I wish you might know peace. It makes my heart ache when I hear how much trial and suffering you are having to endure—would that God might grant you an escape"? Is that the tone of Peter's letter? Or did he start by relating to them all *his* troubles? No! Rather, he opened his letter by ascribing praise and thanks to God: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Peter had learned to bless God, *whatever*.

"...unto a lively hope..."

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again **unto a lively hope** by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3). The newer translations show even more of Peter's vivacious hope: "Praise be to the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (NIV).

To Peter, the most striking characteristic that distinguished the early Christian from his pagan neighbors was *hope*, living hope. The world of ancient Greeks and Romans was a world of fascination. It could boast of courage, intellect, power, poetry, beauty and art. But it was a world without hope. Life was a sumptuous banquet indeed; but when it ended—? The thought of the future struck chill to any heart.

In the midst of this pallid fear stood the early Christian's shining hope. They were men and women who could look steadfastly into the future without fear. The prospect of a future, eternal life—life without suffering or hardship or persecution—gave an enormous new dimension to the present.

Does not the buoyant spirit of these loyal Christians of the first century reprove our weak, flaccid faith? How many times have we, in the face of much lesser difficulties than they experienced, blessed and praised our God and Father, uplifted by our living hope?

Each of us should put himself to the test: Does *my* life stand out from the dreary background of modern paganism with the same striking contrast as did the lives of those early Christians? or is it my first desire to be practical, liberal and broad-minded? Have I that same zest for eternal life which captivated Peter's interest and controlled every aspect of his daily conduct? or is my interest detached, separated and dispirited?

Living Hope

How vital is Peter's living hope in our lives today! Without it, even the finest and best of earth is worthless, futile and fleeting. If we have no hope, all our ambitions and plans and preparations for the future are but tantalizing projections of fancy. Of what value is the finest education, or the noblest potential, or the most cultivated character if all ends hopelessly in a grave of extinction? Had the gospel called men to a higher life without giving them the vision of hope, we would have been awakened only to be plunged into a deeper despair as we faced an unknowable future.

But thank God, such is not the case. We have been called unto hope, and it is hope confirmed by history's greatest miracle, says Peter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The most powerful of man's masters has been defeated. Because of Christ's resurrection, our hope is a living,

active reality; it is hope which has the power to produce the "life of hope," a life in which every act and thought is directed toward one goal—God.

A living hope is not the product of wishful thinking, nor is it set in the passing and perishing aims of this time-bound world. As living waters flow from a perennial spring, so a living hope is one which issues from a continuous and unchangeable source—God. No trials and tribulation can ever stop it, for it is a spring fed from an eternal Source—God, who is alive and active even now.

The Christian's hope is nothing static. It is a power that changes life so drastically that Peter describes the man possessing it as starting life all over again: We are "begotten again," we have been given "a new birth." It is a totally new way of life. "Old things are passed away" and "all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17)—we have new aims, new purposes, new goals; new thoughts, new interests, and a new center of devotion—God.

Have we been so drastically changed that Peter could say of us that we are "begotten again"? Have we experienced this "new birth"? Have all things for us become new—totally new?

"To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled..."

God has great and wonderful things in store for all His loving, loyal children; they are "exceeding great and precious promises," and Peter has learned to cherish them. They are promises which have no tendency to decay, nor can they lose their bloom and freshness of joy. If our lives are becoming new, Peter tells us, if we are truly born anew into this living hope, we may look forward to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." The Apostle's words sparkle with the joyful expectancy he felt—do we feel it? Are we daily making progress at the task of transforming the old nature into a new, Christlike nature, so that we may realistically hope to receive that inheritance? Are we so completely absorbed with this prospect that to secure it is our first and foremost concern? Do we think about it so persistently and live in such constant awareness of the divine that we can confidently hope to be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"? (I Peter 1:5).

The most striking characteristic that distinguished the early Christian from his pagan neighbors was hope, living Hope.

The Christian's hope is nothing static. It is a power that changes life so drastically that Peter thought of it as starting life all over again.

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (I Pet. 1:6). Do we sense the impact of Peter's reasoning? Let us visualize ourselves face to face with an unsympathetic emperor, who was doing everything possible to make life unbearable for us—could we say with Peter that we had a hope wherein we *greatly rejoiced*, though at the moment we had trials manifold? Peter's words testify to the maturity of his character. Through years of trial and suffering for the cause of Christ, he had come to think of the joy of the future as foremost and supreme. Our hope and our rejoicing are primary; our trials and our heaviness are secondary—this was Peter's evaluation. Should it not be ours also?

Peter would agree with his friend Paul, who wrote, "Our light affliction . . . is but for a moment." "Our troubles are slight and short-lived; and their outcome an eternal glory which outweighs them far" (II Cor. 4:17, KJV and NEB). The thought of the glory ahead reduces the trials to what they really are—short-lived hindrances; minor, temporary inconveniences. This was Peter's reasoning; his eye was on the future.

There is laughter and glee in the world. There is lightness and mirth and gaiety; but it is empty and shallow and short-lived. The author of Ecclesiastes compared it to the "crackling of thorns under a pot"; there is fire, but it is soon burned out and all is cold and dead. The joy which Peter and his brethren shared was not of this nature.

Those early Christians rejoiced because they had hope; and this same hope can bring joy to our lives today. It is not idle dreaming, or joy that comes from building castles of air. It is joy with a distinct source and a definite future. It is a joy fed by the unfailing spring of divine faithfulness. It is a deep and positive assurance which nothing that happens today or tomorrow can affect adversely. It is joy in the realization that the great things God has promised *can be ours*—because we can see that we ourselves are being re-made into the new creatures which God has promised to perpetuate. Nothing in this world brings greater joy than the encouragement of success.

**"That the trial of your faith . . .
might be found unto praise"**

Peter has learned to look far into the future and visualize the Day when the Christ he knew in Galilee and Judea will return from heaven, as Judge and King. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:7). "Might be found" is Peter's allusion to the Judgment scene, when his work—and ours—will be examined and tried. And if in that Day it be "found unto praise and honour and glory," what matter the severity of the fiery trial? Peter's first concern is not the heat of the present trial but the possibility of "praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The affliction is not the end; it is rather a *means* to the end.

Faith is refined by trials, as gold is refined by fire; and a faith thus refined is "much more precious than gold which perisheth." And gold was the most enduring and the most precious metal known in Peter's day. Compared with salvation, it was of little worth. As Jesus said, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Peter learned to look at trials much as an athlete looks at his time of preparation. The rigorous training is not meant to make him collapse; it is meant to make him develop more and more strength. Likewise, discipline is painful; but its purpose under God's providence is to mature and temper us, to make our faith stronger and clearer and firmer than it ever was before. Above all, it is meant to fit us for the praise of God—is Peter thinking of the words he heard one day years ago from the lips of the Master Himself, that statement of acceptance which is reserved for every faithful one—"Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23)?

Faithful men and women in all ages have lived in the strength of God's promises with their faces turned toward the eternal future. And perhaps, according to Peter, even more than faithful earth-borns are anxious to see the splendor of the coming salvation, for Peter adds: "which things even angels desire to look into" (I Pet. 1:12). The word "look" suggests that even the angels are eager for us to experience the salvation they are enjoying; they would fain look into the blessedness of our salvation and share their glories with us.

What a fruitful reason for rejoicing, even "though
(Continued on page 20)

On Criticism

The question is not what a man can scorn, or disparage, or find fault with, but what he can love, and value, and appreciate. —John Ruskin

THREE GATES

If you are tempted to reveal
A tale to you someone has told
About another, make it pass,
Before you speak, three gates of gold,
Three narrow gates: First, "Is it true?"
Then, "Is it needful?" In your mind
Give truthful answer. And the next
Is last and narrowest, "Is it kind?"
And if to reach your lips at last
It passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear
What the result of speech may be.

He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help. —Abraham Lincoln

Consider the hammer—

It keeps its head.
It doesn't fly off the handle.
It keeps pounding away.
It finds the point and then drives it home.
It looks at the other side, too, and thus often
clinches the matter.
It makes mistakes, but when it does it starts all over.
It is the only knocker in the world that does any
good.

How seldom we weigh our neighbor in the same balance with ourselves. —Thomas a Kempis

Search thy own heart; what paineth thee in others
in thyself may be. —Whittier

*Do you want to know the man against whom you
have most reason to guard yourself? Your looking-
glass will give a very fair likeness of his face.*
—Whateley

What an absurd thing it is to pass over all the valuable
parts of a man, and fix our attention on his infirmities.
—Addison

How immense appear to us the sins that *we* have
not committed. —Madame Necker

Blame is safer than praise.—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The strength of criticism lies in the weakness of the
thing criticized. —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

*To avoid criticism do nothing, say nothing, be
nothing.* —Elbert Hubbard

It is much easier to be critical than to be correct.
—Benjamin Disraeli

Neither praise nor blame is the object of true criticism. Justly to discriminate, firmly to establish, wisely to prescribe, and honestly to award—these are the true aims and duties of criticism. —Sterne

Knockers are the folks who try to cover their own
faults by talking about the faults of others.

*The critic who begins with himself will be too busy
to take on outside contracts.*

*Your neighbor's windows look a great deal better when
you wash your own.*

Nothing pays smaller dividends in spiritual results
than making a specialty of talking of the short-
comings of others.

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

Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely.
—Luke 3:14

Speak not evil one of another. —James 4:11

*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge
righteous judgment.* —John 7:24

Meditations On the Word

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" —Luke 13:24

THIS sounds reasonable enough, and has a familiar ring to students of the Scripture; but how shall we square this warning with the promise of the same teacher in Matt. 7:7-8: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"?

There is no difficulty whatever, if we accept the qualifications provided by the Speaker. Certainly such a promise, if unconditional, would conflict not only with our text but with the familiar passage immediately following: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

It is evident, then, that there is more than one kind of seeking. Of the many courses which we may expect to find, not all can be right; in fact, it is revealed that only one is the true and successful way. All roads may lead to Rome, as the old proverb says, but all roads do *not* lead to the Kingdom of God, modern easy-going theology to the contrary notwithstanding. Personal salvation is a problem which can be solved by only one approach and one formula.

The principal reason for the unpopularity of the true and living way is the nature of the gate through which all its travelers must pass. It is not an easy way, and never has been. Good things do not come easy; that is an axiom in this life and a principle of God's evolution—the survival of the fittest. It is, as our text says, a "strait" or difficult way; restricted and narrow. Five other translations of this verse render it "the narrow door." It is so narrow that not one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) or the thirteen evils which lurk in the heart of man (Mark 7:21-22) can be carried through.

It is to be expected that the masses, who are averse to effort of a mental or moral nature, would seek for an easier way, and this is just what we

find. There is plenty of seeking done in the world; the utterly irreligious person is comparatively rare. The quest for salvation or spiritual satisfaction is universal and timeless, appearing in a multitude of forms, from the most primitive fetishism or animism right on up: but

"Of all the creeds that mortals wrote,
Not one caught true perfection's note."

Of faith and zeal there is no lack, and never has been; but there is a woeful lack of knowledge to direct and control. Error has had more martyrs than truth, but it is still error. "Though I have all faith," said the Apostle, "... and though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Charity, or love, the keeping of the commandments of God (I John 5:3), includes and presupposes knowledge, the channel through which all other virtues come (II Pet. 1:2-3). Much seeking, but most of it doomed to failure because in the wrong way. Shrewd leaders have taken advantage of the universal desire for a wider gate and a smoother road, and have provided it by postulating a system of righteousness by proxy, or substitution. The people liked it, and they still like it, as witnesseth Jeremiah 5:31, plus our own observation and experience.

The natural Jew, who beyond question had the best opportunity ever placed before any people, rejected it because the sterile formalities of an obsolete law seemed easier. Sacrifices and offerings, feasts and holy days, could be managed without interfering with the inner man. The stark proposition of an utter cleansing, without and within, was too much for him, and his "seeking," though sincere and zealous, went for naught. Paul diagnoses their case in Rom. 9:31-32, "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumblingstone."

Then there is the individual, familiar to all of us,

who is never satisfied with any result unless it is attained by his own methods and ideas. The scholars of King James, in the sonorous dedication of their translation of the Bible, shrewdly appraised this class as "self-conceited brethren, who run their own way, and give liking unto nothing but what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil." We still have them. This is plain inflation, and the entire plan of salvation is definitely anti-inflationist. The old head must come down, and in the end be cut off entirely (Rev. 20:4). Not one of our own ideas will pass the "narrow door."

All these classes, without preferment or discrimination, are classified by the Master as thieves and robbers. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). We know that their climb will be fruitless, for we are plainly told in I Cor. 6:10 that no thief—natural or spiritual—shall inherit the Kingdom of God. It simply cannot be done, and the millions who attempt it are wasting their lives. There are but two gates and two ways—the narrow way of perfection on one side, and everything else on the other.

So much for the unenlightened world. But within the way of understanding there is a numerous class whose fate is even more tragic, because they could have finished the course and gained their objective. "Too little and too late" is their trouble, or most of it. The narrow door lies not at this end of the narrow way, but at the other. All the way through our probationary pilgrimage we are free to carry along some of self, some work of the flesh, some opinion or doubt or grudge or unlawful desire, right up to the gate of the City. Perhaps we are aware of some of this "excess baggage," but have a vague idea that somehow we can lay it off in time to get through. But that is another impossibility. We will find ourselves in the position of the man in the fable, who deliberately carried and nurtured a grudge to the end of his life, but finding that it blocked his passage into the heavenly city, he attempted to drop it, only to find that it had grown fast and become a part of him.

Then we will strive, then we will seek with the many, the great host of the unfaithful, to enter in, but shall not be able. It is too late. Our time is up; our works are not perfect before God.

"When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; . . . he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are; . . . depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." ••

December, 1974

December 25

What Is It?

THE question may have many answers, but one fact is certain: December 25 is NOT the birthday of Christ.

First of all, there is no Scripture proof that Christ was born in December, and proof we must have, for the apostle Paul says, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21). The Bible makes no mention of a winter date, nor does it associate Christ's birth with any account or event of the winter months.

On the contrary, there is Scripture evidence against the December date. Luke records that "there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). The climate of Palestine being wet and cold during the winter, shepherds made a practice of keeping their sheep in enclosed shelters, not in the open fields, between November and March.

There is an abundance of secular evidence that December 25 was a date borrowed from pagan religions and that it originally had no meaning to the Christians. In fact, the date was observed centuries before the time of Christ as the birthday of Sol, the sun-god. The date was also celebrated by the Romans as the time when the sun-god Mithras was conquering the darkness and gloom of winter. A book entitled, *The Story of Christmas*,

(Continued on page 19)

DECEMBER 25

the Birth of Christ?

NO!

**KNOW the evidence! GIVE it
to your friends.**

FREE LEAFLETS

Christ the Saviour Is Born

**Your supply is waiting.
SEND NOW!**

The Fruit



of the Spirit

Love--joy--peace--patience--kindness--goodness--faithfulness--gentleness--self-control (Gal. 5:22-23, NASB)

Section II

Read Romans 12:9, 21

GOODNESS, as used among these fruits of the Spirit life, is a rare and heavenly virtue. It has only one source: God. Of such high quality is this goodness that it is morally perfect; and it refuses to company with anything less. It is goodness which rebukes; it chastens, corrects, disciplines; because of its uncompromising nature, it has power to overcome evil (Rom. 12:21). Goodness is a heavenly quality; and if we would be "good," we must become Godlike.

The apostle Paul rejoiced when he saw this



Heavenly
Goodness

"Eat ye that which is good."

superior quality in his brethren. He complimented the church at Rome: "I myself am also persuaded about you, that you yourselves are full of goodness, having been filled with all knowledge, being able also to warn one another" (Rom. 15:14).

Would we be full of this special goodness? Then we must accept God's discipline and learn His ways, think His thoughts and keep His commands. For the good life is heavenly.

Prayer: Lord, teach me the meaning of Thy goodness. Help me to make my life so superior in quality that it will reflect Thy goodness. Amen.



Faithfulness--
the Continuing Kind

Read Matthew 25:21-23

FAITHFULNESS—steadfastness—fidelity. They all suggest action, and the right kind of action, and the continuation of the right kind of action. Faithfulness means knowing what is right, thinking what is right, and above all, *doing* what is right. And then, keeping at it.

There is no such thing as being faithful by a single act, however brave or right it be. In the Christian life there is no single, all-inclusive victory; no one battle by which we may win the war. As long as we are mortal we will have to keep fighting to prove faithful. And though we have been often victorious, we must keep watchful; there is no permanent victory.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," is Jesus' promise (Rev. 2:10). With such a prospect, how can we forget our duty to faithfulness, the continuing kind?

Prayer:

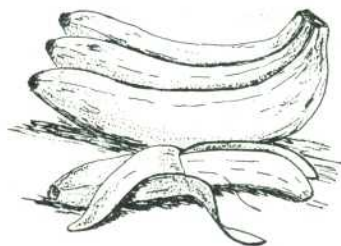
Give me, O God, all through today, a stronger sense of my duty, so that I will not shirk any task, or evade any decision, or avoid any responsibility that is rightfully mine.

Help me to be faithful to myself, so that I keep the covenant which I have made with You and never lose my self-respect.

Help me to be faithful to others, always showing the right kind of example wherever I must be.

Help me to be faithful to You, giving myself wholly to doing as You have commanded.

Help me to be faithful all through today, and faithful unto the end. Amen.



Gentleness-- That Is Firm

Read II Timothy 2:24

"STERN, firm, but kind," that is Bible gentleness. It is a quality of moderation, of balance, of Christian poise and symmetry. God doesn't want us soft and wishy-washy, neither does He want us rigidly unyielding. His wisdom decrees that we be "peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated" (Jas. 3:17), and at the same time "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10).

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.

True nobility comes from the gentle heart.

Prayer: O God, help me to show in my life the meaning of Thy gentleness. I would be firm and true to Thee, yet meek and submissive to Thy will. Amen.



Self-Control-- That Is God-Controlled

Read I Corinthians 9:25-27

SELF-CONTROL was the Stoic and Greek ideal of virtue centuries ago. It is the Christian's ideal also, but in a different way: No man is truly master of himself who has not been mastered by Christ.

Self-control means the ability to forego the things that are forbidden by the law of God. It means also to use with temperance those things which are allowed, so that whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, all may be done to God's glory and to the betterment of ourselves and others.

Self-control means self-restraint in our conduct, in our pleasures, in our business, in our conversation. It means keeping silent when we are bursting to speak, if by our silence we restrain the unkind remark; it means resting quietly when our every impulse would move us to seek revenge. Self-control means monitoring our every thought and feeling and motive, to see that it is in harmony with the law of God.

Would we be completely self-controlled? Then we must be God-controlled.

Prayer:

*All through today, O God, help me to be,
Quick to praise, and slow to criticize;
Quick to forgive, and slow to condemn;
Quick to share, and slow to refuse to give.
Grant me all through today*

*Complete control over my temper,
that I may be slow to anger;
Complete control over my tongue,
that I may speak no hasty word;
Complete control over my thoughts,
that I may think no evil. Amen.*

DON'T GROW WEARY

Just because you're few in number
And your offerings are small,
Just because you seem to battle
With your back against the wall,
Don't grow weary in well-doing;
Sure and great is your reward,
For your task is never little
When you're working for the Lord.

Crowds don't prove that you're selected
And that God is pleased with you
Any more than you're neglected
When your numbers are a few.
If we count success by people
And our blessings by a crowd,
Then I doubt if God is in it,
Though it makes us feel quite proud.

Just a handful followed Jesus,
If you read His Word divine,
And not many walked beside Him
When the chips were on the line.
And somehow I've got a feeling
That it hasn't changed today
From the time when our dear Saviour
Walked this lonely pilgrim way.

DON'T GROW WEARY, brother Christian,
Fight the fight of faith, be true;
There's a prize for being faithful
And a crown of life for you.
Take your eyes off crowds and people,
Get them on the Lord of love,
And you'll find more joy in service
On the higher road of love.

—Selected.

TIMELY TOPICS

THE word "pardon" has appeared frequently in the news since President Ford issued an unconditional pardon to former President Nixon for any crimes he had committed while in office. Whether this action was right, only God can judge. And its political aspects and effects are not our concern. However, the furor which it caused displayed a deep-seated weakness of human nature: the reluctance of one man to forgive another.

This non-forgiving spirit is demonstrated in the bloody feuds between uncivilized tribes, also between "civilized" families and neighbors who, if not openly fighting and hostile, remain uncommunicating and antagonistic. The provocation may be ever so slight, but the person wronged refuses to forgive and forget, making a mountain out of the proverbial molehill; and the feud continues.

This inborn hesitancy to forgive is common to all mankind, life-seekers not excepted. For some unknown reason, perverse, unforgiveness defined human nature seems to "enjoy" holding a grudge or seeking revenge. It is not Christian; it is not Godlike; and if we would be disciples of Christ, we must learn the lesson Jesus taught to Peter, to be willing to forgive our brother even to "seventy times seven" times if our brother repents and asks our forgiveness that many times.

The words "forgiveness" and "pardon" are used interchangeably in the Bible; however, in the English language there is a difference. Forgiveness points to the removing of any inward feelings of resentment. When we ask forgiveness, we seek primarily to restore a friendship that has been alienated through our wrong. Were we to seek "pardon," we would look more for outward release from the consequences of our misdeed. Pardon is often applied to trifling matters, as when we ask pardon for interrupting a man, or for jostling him in the crowd. The civil magistrate grants pardon; he may or may not forgive.

This difference between forgiveness and pardon is important to the Christian. If we would live up to our profession, we must not only be willing to

pardon our enemy or the person who has wronged us; we must forgive and forget the wrong. An outward pardon may satisfy our opponent and justify us in the sight of our contemporaries, but it can never satisfy the great Judge or bring us the contentment which an inward forgiveness will assure.

No matter what the aggravation, in the final analysis God or Christ makes the decision whether to forgive or not to forgive. If the provocation is so severe that we feel we cannot possibly forgive, then we must leave the decision to a higher power—God will judge. We must never seek revenge. "Let the wrath of God have its way; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will exact a requital—the Lord has said it" (Rom. 12:19, Moffatt). Under no circumstances are we to "render evil for evil." To plan revenge denies the Christian the forgiveness he himself will so desperately need when he stands before the Judgment seat of Christ. In the words of Jesus, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).

"To err is human; to forgive, divine." And how divine a virtue forgiveness is, as it was demonstrated by men of God in ages past. Jesus displayed this spirit of forgiveness even when suffering the cruel torture of the crucifixion. His prayer was, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The test was surely supreme; and how nobly Jesus met that test. How many lesser men have failed in far less-demanding circumstances. If Judas had confessed his sin and repented and lived a righteous life, Jesus would have forgiven him. But Judas lacked the courage to take the first step—to face his Master; and then he compounded his sin by committing suicide, thus ending all possibility of obtaining forgiveness.

King David was an outstanding example both as the recipient and as the grantor of forgiveness. Though he committed many sins, he always repented. And God, who could read his heart, forgave him. When pursued by Saul, who was seeking David's life, David demonstrated a forgiving spirit. On two occasions he could have taken revenge and killed Saul; but he refused to do it, even though he knew that Saul under similar circumstances would have killed him.

To bear a grudge and refuse to forgive another is an exhibition of savage animal nature. Strong, mature Christian character is ever ready to forgive and to forget when the offender acknowledges his guilt and is ready to turn. ●●

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God."

Man and the Earth

WHAT is man and where did he come from? What are the sun, the moon and the stars and from whence did they come? Men have pondered these questions from the beginning of time.

King David pondered the question of man and the universe in his time: "When I look up at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars set in their place by thee, what is man that thou shouldst remember him, mortal man that thou shouldst care for him?" (Ps. 8:3-4, NEB).

David never doubted the creative power of God. Assuming man to be the product of His great creative skill, David thought deeper into the meaning and value of man's existence in relation to that of all the created universe. Man being so small a part of God's creation, David wondered why God should recognize him at all. Often in the Psalms we

find him extolling the wonderful work of his Maker, the Creator of all things.

In this issue we will briefly review the claims of the Creationists and the Evolutionists and proceed with the evidence for the truth of the subject, following our outline:

- IV. Evolutionism vs. Creationism
 - V. The Genesis Narrative—An Allegory
 - A. God's Master Plan
 - B. Basic Truths Revealed in Symbols

The theory of evolution has resulted from men trying to fathom the secrets of the Almighty, things which rightly belong to God alone. (Deut. 29:29). It was not meant for man to understand all the thoughts and works of God. Just how and when God created the universe is one of God's secrets; it has not been revealed.

IV. EVOLUTIONISM VS. CREATIONISM

Evolutionists believe:

- The earth was formed by a chance accumulation of gases that solidified into matter after a long period of time.
- All life began in the sea—again by chance.
- Certain molecules joined themselves together into a one-celled living creature known as an amoeba.
- From this simple form of life other more complex forms developed by natural processes, resulting in a creature that crawled out of the water and lived on the land.
- From the first land creatures developed reptiles, birds, animals and last of all, man, all by a "survival of the fittest" process of elimination known to science as "natural selection."
- Other new species were formed by what are known as "mutations," that is, freaks of nature.
- Man's closest ancestor is an ape-like creature from which man developed by the evolutionary process.

Creationists believe:

- God created the earth out of nothing about 6000 years ago in six literal 24-hour days.
- During what is known as "creation week," God created the sun, moon, stars, the light, the darkness, the seas and the dry land.
- During the same period God created all living things—plants, animals, birds, fish and man.
- God first created a man, then removed one of his ribs and from it made a woman for a help-mate. These two were the head of the whole human race.
- God brought all the animals He created before Adam to be named and gave Adam dominion over all of them.
- Man was created in the literal image of God—a perfect, sinless creature, able to live forever—but because he sinned he became subject to death.
- God placed all His creatures in a beautiful garden known as Eden.

From the evidence we have studied, the obvious conclusion is that the truth of the Creation is outside both the Creationists views and those of the Evolutionists. Wherein lies the truth? Only in the Word of God, and to it we will go.

V. THE GENESIS NARRATIVE— AN ALLEGORY

“In the beginning God created. . . .” These five words definitely point to God as the Creator, but contrary to the belief of the majority of present-day theologians they are not the preface to a narrative of a **literal** creation. True, God is the Creator. We firmly believe it. That He did create all “in the beginning” is without question—but He is not telling us of the physical Creation in Genesis.

(For further elaboration of this subject, see our booklet, **God's Spiritual Creation**.)

Genesis is neither pro-Creationist nor pro-Evolutionist. Rather, the early chapters of the Book are an allegory describing a **spiritual** creation, a creation yet in progress that is to be completed when God's plan is complete upon this earth. We cannot accept a literal interpretation of Genesis because it does not harmonize with the tenor of the other Scriptures. It is unreasonable and it contradicts known scientific facts.

As we have learned in our studies of other subjects, all the Bible cannot be taken literally. We have learned to be governed by God-given rules in our study, not the least of which is to compare spiritual things with spiritual (I Cor. 2:13), and to allow the Almighty to explain His own words and statements through these comparisons.

The writers of the Bible, moved by God's Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21), used various literary devices to reveal God's truth. These include parables, poetry, allegories, similes and symbols. While many parts of Scripture are easily understood at a single reading, some things require study. We must allow the Almighty to explain His own words by comparing them with other words of Scripture, always arriving at a conclusion consistent with general Bible teaching.

Such a study and comparison shows the early chapters of Genesis to be an allegory. The **Encyclopedic Dictionary** defines an **allegory** as “a story or narrative in which a moral principle or abstract truth is presented by means of fictional characters, events, etc. . . . any symbolic representation in literature. In an allegory as in a parable, the moral [or truth] is not stated, but is left to the hearer to discover. An allegory is usually long and elaborate, with many characters and incidents.”

Such is the Creation narrative of Genesis. Accepted literally, the account contains seeming conflicts with science. But understood as an allegory, the inconsistencies and conflicts disappear and the account harmonizes with general Bible teaching.

God did not intend that all His truth should be understood without study, else He would not have commanded through Paul, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15).

By declaring the Creation narrative of Genesis an allegory we are not denying the literal Creation. We are confident that God created the earth and life upon it, but we are likewise confident that it is not the literal creation about which He is telling us in Genesis. Rather, we understand the first few chapters of Genesis to be a preface to God's plan for this earth, an outline of His planned new creation, a creation that is yet in progress. It is His spiritual creation, a creation that will culminate in the Kingdom of God on earth.

A. God's Master Plan

When a new building is planned, whether it be a simple tool shed, a ranch-type house, an apartment complex or a condominium, the first step is to secure a plan, or blueprint showing the complete design of the structure. Such a plan is an absolute necessity in the completion of the building.

God, the Master Designer and Creator of this earth, did not start His work with man on the earth without a plan. “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite” (Ps. 147:5). Surely a Being of such infinite wisdom and understanding that He is able to declare “the end from the beginning” did not begin His work without first presenting His plan to man. This plan was revealed in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. The Hebrew word from which Genesis is derived means beginning; Genesis is the beginning of God's plan for this earth, not the beginning of the earth itself. We do not know when God began the literal Creation; the Bible does not tell us.

God's plan was made known to man and set in motion nearly 6000 years ago and it is now approaching its consummation.

Briefly stated, the first three chapters of Genesis outline this plan for the salvation of this earth. The Bible teaches that this earth was not created in vain, nor did God send His Word in vain, for as surely as there is rain in summer and snow in winter, “so shall my word be that goeth forth out

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Ed	Editorial
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Med	Meditation
Po	Poem
Pr	Prayer
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Qu	Quiz Questions
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of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). When God's plan is consummated, this earth will be inhabited by a race of righteous people, those who will do His will as it is now done in heaven.

The initial chapters of Genesis describe the means by which this blissful state is to be realized. It is not through a process of **literal** creation, but a **spiritual** creation, in effect a re-creation. It is the work of remolding the characters of men and women until they become new creatures worthy of being part of a perfect society that will one day envelop the earth.

This gigantic work requires six thousand-year periods to complete, represented by six days in the Creation narrative. (In Bible prophecy "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" —II Pet. 3:8). The details of the plan are to be found in the narrative, encased in symbolic language. It is these symbols that we will study next.

B. Basic Truths Revealed in Symbols

While much of the Bible is written in plain speech, other parts employ figurative language. Jesus' favorite means of teaching was the parable; the book of Ezekiel and also Revelation are filled with symbolism.

Recognizing that types, symbols and figurative language form a part of the Scriptures, must we accept the Genesis creation narrative as literal? Creationists would answer in the affirmative, but reason does not allow it. There was a time when men would accept anything spoken by the church hierarchy. The 6000-years-ago, six-day creation that involved grass growing before the sun was created, man created in the express image of God and a woman made from the rib of a man, were considered infallible church doctrines. But today, when the average man understands the geological facts that date the earth as between four and five billions, not mere thousands of years old, he discards such theological doctrines as absurd and joins the ranks of the unbelievers.

We are confident that the Bible offers no contradiction to known scientific facts. Placing the Genesis narrative in the category of symbolism, as an allegory, removes the absurdities and shows the opening chapters of Genesis to be a preface to God's plan of salvation, an outline as it were, of the Bible, covering briefly the whole plan. It is an allegory; the people, places and things are symbols,

readily understood with careful study.

Since figurative language is commonly used and readily understood in the literary field, should we not allow God the same privilege? And if we are able to study literature of the secular writers and understand allegories, should we not be able to perceive the meaning of whatever symbols might be used in the Scriptures? We will study some of the symbols from the creation narrative.

1. The heavens and earth of Genesis 1:1. God is the great Creator. He created the heavens and the earth, but He is not writing to us about that creation. Rather, He is setting forth His plan for a new creation which He has planned for this earth. When completed, the new heavens and the new earth will be the rulers (heavens) and subjects (earth) of God's Kingdom.

Such usage of the terms heavens and earth is not foreign to the Scriptures. Isaiah (1:1, 2, 10) addressed the aristocracy of Israel first as "heavens" and then as "rulers"; and the subjects of the realm he identified as "earth" and then "people." "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: . . . Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers . . . and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth." It was the people he was speaking to, not the literal heavens and earth.

The new "heavens" is now in the process of being created. It is to be composed of Christ the head, and the Church His body, as we learn from studying the word "beginning" (Gen. 1:1) in the Hebrew Lexicon. It is here defined in part as: "Head, chief . . . the first of its kind . . . with regard to time; firstfruits . . . firstborn, firstfruits of things created by him . . . Christ, head of creation, with regard to dignity; the first." The lexicographer cites Revelation 3:14 as an example of its usage: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

Christ alone will not fill the position of the "new heavens." His title, "King of kings" indicates that He will have associates, a fact confirmed by His own statement: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (Rev. 3:21).

Christ said of Himself that He was born to be King (John 18:37), and He is destined to hold a preeminent position in the Kingdom. He is described as "King of kings and Lord of lords" by the Revelator.

The development of the new "earth" or the subjects of the Kingdom is yet future. While the nucleus of this new earth will be living when Christ comes, the great majority of the subjects will be developed during the Millennium. They are the "great multitude" that were taken out of "all na-

tions, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" seen standing before the throne in Rev. 7:9.

2. **The man placed in the garden.** We read in Genesis 1:26 that God proposed to make man in His image, after His likeness. Who is this "man"? Certainly not mankind. Mortal, corruptible human beings, subject to sickness and disease, and of varying stature and mental capability cannot possibly be in the image of God. The difference between the natural man and the image of God is so great that man cannot begin to compare with God.

We shall study some details of this "man."

a. **He is representative man.** Adam, in the Genesis narrative, is a representative man. He was not the first man created, but the first to be called to work for God. He represents the first called to conform to the image of God, to be "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). This "man" is composed of Christ the Head, and the Church His body (Col. 1:18), which will be complete when Christ comes.

b. **He works in the garden.** The Garden of Eden in which God placed the man and commanded him to work is the field or vineyard of the Lord. There never was a literal "Garden of Eden," centuries of searching by literalists have failed to locate it. **The Garden of Eden is symbolic: "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant" (Isa. 5:7).**

c. **He is commanded to obey.** When God placed the man in the Garden, He commanded him strictly concerning the fruit of the trees. God provided both trees that were for food and one tree that was not. **He left man a free moral agent; he was free to choose to obey or to disobey. The penalty for disobedience was death—not natural death, but penal death. The unfaithful will not be allowed to inhabit the Kingdom, but are to be cast out (Matt. 22:13).**

Adam and Eve, the first characters mentioned in the Bible, were not the first to inhabit the earth as evidenced by geological discoveries. They were the first man and woman to enter the garden of the Lord, the first to agree to work for eternal life. Their names are used in the allegory to represent two classes of people, faithful and unfaithful.

These two classes have been present in all ages, even as today. Like Adam, they covenant to work in the garden and then shirk; they agree to resist the wiles of the serpent and then yield; they promise to avoid the forbidden fruit and then partake. At the Judgment at Christ's coming, these unfaithful servants will be expelled from the garden forcibly.

At the same time the faithful, those who have made themselves into the image of God morally

shall be made physically like Him. It is then that the man created in the image of God will be given dominion—not over an animal kingdom, but "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Ps. 72:7), and "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27). This "him" is the man made in God's image, the man composed of Christ the Head, and the Church His body.

God's grand plan of Genesis will not be fully consummated until the end of the Millennial reign of Christ, but it will not fail, for God is both its Author and its Executor. His purposes are as unalterable as the order of day and night, as sure as sunrise tomorrow morning. His Kingdom will come and His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

3. **Other symbols.** Other symbols are easily understood when viewed allegorically. The woman said to have been made from Adam's rib represents the true church that is being taken out of all mankind during the 6000-year Day of salvation. God did not create a literal woman from a literal rib.

The serpent that tempted the woman was not the devil, but represents man's own natural desire to do that which is forbidden.

The "two great lights" are likewise spiritual. Mental illumination, knowledge, is an essential part of God's plan. Jesus represents the **greater light** of the narrative. He is frequently referred to as the "Light," and He will be the "sun of righteousness" that is to arise (Mal. 4:2). We now have the "lesser light," the word of God by which we walk.

The river of Eden, which divides into four parts and on whose banks grows the tree of life, is not a literal river. It is the "river of God" (Ps. 65:9), the "living water" to which Jesus had access. It is the water which, if a man drinks, "shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). It is the water in which we must wash and become clean (Isa. 1:16; John 15:3), until we are "holy and without blemish, . . . not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:26-27) if we would be part of His glorious Church.

Understanding the creation as spiritual removes all supposed contradictions and absurdities.

Reprints of these studies are available upon request.

Satan and Genesis

OUR EARLIEST record of sin is in the first book of the Bible. Adam and Eve, representative of those whom God calls to serve Him, are placed in the garden of Eden, the spiritual field or vineyard of the Lord, where they must "obey and live," or "disobey and die." But at the enticement of the serpent, their own evil desires, they partake of the forbidden fruit and receive the consequent punishment for their sin.

This is one interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve, and one which we believe to be the Biblical interpretation. But all religious groups do not agree with this.

According to the majority of Protestant and Catholic faiths, the devil began his work at what is called the Fall. God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a perfect world, free of sin, disease, and even death, where they might have lived on forever in perfect health and happiness had they not disobeyed the divine injunction: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

But also in the Garden was a serpent, a wily subtle serpent who deceived Eve with the enticing words: "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). The forbidden fruit *did* look tempting; and yielding to the serpent's enticement, Eve partook. And she "gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."

What was the result of this transgression, according to theology? We quote from a typical Protestant constitution:

"Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This, their sin, God was pleased according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

"By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation."*

A penalty—a penalty of death—passed upon Adam and Eve and all their posterity. Assuming that all mankind are descendants of Adam, they teach that this one transgression or "original sin" condemned the whole human race, and therefore all men are sinners and subject to death.

However, this is *not* the teaching of the Bible. Physical death was in the world long before the death of Adam, as is evidenced by the prehistoric remains of men and animals. The death to which Adam was condemned was not natural death, the result of mortality, but *penal* death, condemnation at Judgment, eternal death. His receiving the disapproval of God did not change his physical nature from immortal to mortal.

And furthermore, the guilt of sin is not inherited. God does not condemn us for the sin of our father, our grandfather, or our greatest, greatest, greatest grandfather Adam. Every individual is responsible for his own sin. The divine principle is plain: "The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin." "Every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." "Every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (II Chron. 25:4; Jer. 31:30; II Kings 14:6; Deut. 24:16). Every man shall die for *his own sin*—not Adam's. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20)—*it* shall die, and no other.

* The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (1805-1952).

To summarize, all mankind are not condemned as a result of Adam's transgression. The Fall of man is a doctrine totally unscriptural.

The Serpent in Eden

According to the Genesis narrative, the serpent was responsible for this disastrous "fall of man." But was this serpent the devil? Who or what tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit?

To understand this serpent we must recognize that the first three chapters of Genesis are not a story of literal events but are an allegory, a symbolic representation and outline of God's plan for the redemption of mankind.

Following the Bible rule to compare spiritual things with spiritual (I Cor. 2:13), we see Adam and Eve not as the first man and woman to live on earth but the first man and woman called to work in the spiritual vineyard or garden of the Lord (Isa. 5:7) for the reward of life eternal. "Early in the morning"—early in the day of salvation (II Cor. 6:2)—the Lord went out to hire laborers to work in this spiritual vineyard (Matt. 20:1-7). Thus Adam and Eve are representative of those men and women down through the ages whom God calls to serve Him. They are children of God (I John 3:1) in the process of development. They are told to obey the commands of the Lord, but how often they yield to temptation and transgress.

What tempts them to do wrong? a literal serpent? No, they are tempted in the same manner as you and I—"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14). *Every* man—Adam and Eve, and all of their posterity—is tempted "*when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*"

Man is a generic term including both men and women, and James says that men are tempted by their own lust. Eve was tempted in like manner. Her own desires, not a crawling serpent, tempted her. The subtle serpent, which was "more subtle than any beast of the field" was her own human heart which, says Jer. 17:9, is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." When Eve saw the forbidden fruit of the tree—fruits of the flesh, "idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, . . . and such like" (Gal. 5:19-21)—she let her lust conceive; she allowed her desires to lead her, rather than obeying the divine command. And then, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15).

The apostle Paul tells us just how Eve was tempted. We may know how the serpent tempted Eve if we know how easily our own minds are

corrupted by the promptings of our evil hearts. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

The minds of the people of the church at Corinth were corrupted from the simplicity of the doctrine of Christ by their own tendency to cling to their former beliefs and notions—our minds are corrupted in the same manner today.

And this is the very way Eve was beguiled by the talk of the serpent. She listened to the promptings of her own mind. There was no more a literal serpent in the Garden of Eden than there is in our hearts now. Adam and Eve, as representative of all covenant-makers, simply wanted their own way and were led astray from single-hearted devotion to God by their own fleshly minds.

Enmity Between the Two Seeds

In the Genesis allegory we read further of enmity which existed between the woman and the serpent. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

"Between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed"—what are the two seeds? Would the Lord be talking about enmity between the children of the literal woman and the offspring of the literal serpent? What foolishness!

But enmity has always existed between the children of light and the children of darkness, the children of evil. We read: "Wisdom is justified of all her children" (Luke 7:35); and "Ye are all the children of light, . . . we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (I Thess. 5:5). Enmity exists between those who walk as children of light, or the seed of the woman, and those who walk after the flesh, governed by the serpent nature.

Let us look at the first case of enmity related in the Divine Record, the enmity which existed between Cain and Abel. The apostle John tells us the cause of this enmity: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Here was enmity between two seeds, an enmity which led to the death of one. The enmity was between a child of our mother, divine wisdom, and a child of the flesh, the serpent or devil.

The enmity has been the same through the ages: between Jeremiah and his persecutors, Daniel and his adversaries, Stephen and those who stoned him, Jesus and those who betrayed and crucified Him.

We read further in the Genesis allegory: "It [the seed of the woman] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The seed of the serpent bruises the "heel" of the seed of the woman—it does no vital damage to the seed, for such bruising cannot do eternal harm; it cannot affect its prospects of eternal life. The seed of the woman bruises the serpent on the head, and such harm is significant. The woman, the "Elect Lady and her children" (II John 1), the faithful servants of God, will strike at the serpent's head—at the theories, the doctrines, the superstitions and errors, and all the evil that is perpetuating the serpent nature. Ultimately, sin and all sinners will forever cease to exist and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). The crushing of the serpent's head will then be complete. ●●

From A Reader—

Pride, Deadly Pride

Recently I read an article in a newspaper from which I would like to quote a few portions:

"What is pride?

"It is inordinate regard for myself.

"It is putting my own ego above any kind of compassionate or truthful consideration of other persons.

"It is thinking first, last, and always of my own point of view.

"It is when I decide on a course of action, not by asking whether it is right or wrong, good or bad for myself or others, but simply by choosing to have my own way.

"A good example is found in the couple who came to a pastor for counselling. The woman spoke first and at some length. When she finally wound down, she concluded by saying, 'Now that I've told you my side of the story, let me tell you his.'

"Adam and Eve were the first ones called by the Lord. He made it as plain as He could that all would be well if they would just remember to think first of Him as they moved about.

"But they didn't. They had to have it their way."

The dictionary also lists "pride" as "arrogance, conceit, splendor, display."

A small word, but what a large battlefield to conquer!

Mrs. E. S., Wausau, Wisconsin

December 25-What Is It?

(Continued from page 9)

tells of the date December 25: "It was, in particular, the greatest feastday of the Mithraic religion, which appeared, for a time, to be rivaling the Christian faith as the state religion of the Roman Empire. . . . The reverence that the Mithraists paid to 25 December certainly had its influence in deciding the Church authorities in fixing the official birthday of our Saviour on 25 December. . . . To select 25 December, then, as the official date of the Nativity was to adopt, to the service of Christianity, a feast of immemorably ancient origins and world-wide observance."

Many of the pagan customs anciently observed on this day are still practiced. The burning of the yule log, the hanging of the mistletoe, the eating of the boar's head, the decorating of the evergreen tree, and many more customs all had their origin in Babylon or other ancient pagan societies.

But what difference does it make? some will say. What if our customs were borrowed from the pagans? What if the date was originally a Roman Saturnalia—does it make any difference to us today?

That all depends on what we are attempting to do with our lives. If we want to conform to the customs of the majority and observe the holiday as one of them, we may. But if we are conscientious about our duty to God and doing only what will honor Him, we have no right to honor a pagan feast day.

Has God ever permitted His people to have part with pagan worship, even if they did it in a modified "Christian" manner? Did He tell the Israelites upon entering Canaan that they could celebrate the same days the Canaanites celebrated so long as they remembered Him in all their celebrating? Or did He tell the prophet Jeremiah to tell his people, "You may learn the way of the heathen; only do it unto me, not unto their gods"? No, the command was always definite. "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them [the foreign nations], . . . and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. 12:30-31). And, "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jer. 10:2).

Which shall be the stronger force in our lives—the "way of the heathen" or the "way of holiness"? We cannot follow both ways at once. We cannot be both pagan and Christian. We cannot observe December 25 and be faithful to God.●●

A Message of Hope and Triumph

(Continued from page 6)

now for a little while you may [suffer] grief in all kinds of trials" (I Pet. 1:6, NIV).

"Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind..."

Peter continues with the word "wherefore" (v. 13). What he is going to say now bears a definite relation to what he has just said about a living hope, an incorruptible inheritance, a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time which even the angels are anxious to see bestowed.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:13). Here is hope again, this noble Apostle is living in hope—hope of the "grace" or reward, the salvation that is "to be brought... at the revelation of Jesus Christ." His mind is fixed so firmly on the day when Christ shall once more dwell with men that he mentions it again and again.

"Gird up the loins of your mind"—here is advice straight from Peter's own wealth of experience. Had he learned to do this sooner in life, he could have avoided so many failures. Had he had his mind girded the night of the trial, he would never have denied Christ. And so he writes to his brethren, "Gird up the loins of your mind." It is a gesture for vigorous action. Peter would have us get down to some hard and serious thinking. "You must therefore be like men stripped for action, perfectly self-controlled" (NEB). "Concentrate your minds, with the strictest self-control, and fix your hopes on the blessing that is coming for you" (Twentieth Century New Testament). We have no time to be absorbed with the concerns of this present life, no time to pursue all its pleasures and profits if our hearts are set on the "blessing that is coming."

We should never content ourselves with a flabby and unexamined faith. God wants us to set to and think things out and think things through. We must be thoroughly convinced that our faith is no mistake; we must be satisfied that we are right, absolutely right, and that our confidence in the Word of God is sure. Only then will we be willing to relinquish everything of the present in hope of obtaining the more abundant life God has offered. Only then will we have the mental power to keep our minds focused forward. Only then will we be able to "gird up the loins of [our] mind" with faith.

More Admonitions

But Peter's advice does not end with a mind that is girded and fixed; he says also, "*Be sober.*" That means our attitude must be right. Keep cool. Keep steady. A mind that is girded with faith is level, sound, solid, and balanced in judgment. That is how God wants us to be, not carried away with this or that or the next sudden enthusiasm. It is natural to be quickly intoxicated with the latest fashion, or the newest craze, or to feed our minds on stories of human interest and dwell on them. None of this for the Christian, says Peter. Be sober, steady, even-tempered; give your mind conscious direction; be the master of your attitudes.

"*And hope to the end.*" There is an end in sight, the days of struggle and testing will not continue forever. For Peter and his brethren, that "end" was the termination of their mortal lives; for us who have the privilege of living very near to the close of the six thousand years of man's rule, the "end" may be even closer. Any day may be the day for the "revelation of Jesus Christ." Peter was looking forward to that day far in the future; to us it is very near. How the prospects of that day should stir us to keep the loins of our mind girded and ready for action, to "be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought... at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

If our hope is set on the grace, or reward, that will be brought with the return of Christ, our whole life will show it. We will be living like men who are expecting their Lord, and everything of this world—whether pleasure or pain—will be used as a means to that great end. Any struggle, any effort, any toil or inconvenience or irritation or sacrifice will be seen for what it really is—in view of "the grace that is to be brought unto [us] at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We will live as though we really believed that Christ is coming to bring that "grace" to us.

"*As obedient children.*" If we are patterning our lives after Christ, we will be obedient children. He did not model His life after the world around Him, but did always those things which pleased His heavenly Father. He lived a holy life, and Peter tells us that we must do the same. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:15-16).

As Christians, our duty is to obey God. And in prospect of the highest joy that He has offered us, our obedience should be our delight and our pleasure. Why should we feel any desire to fashion ourselves according to the prevailing customs and

mores of society when God has called us to holiness?

"Be ye holy." Too often in our modern world holiness is associated with a sanctimonious piety that feeds on hypocrisy. Such an idea has no part with the holiness of God. God is holy, and we are called—and privileged—to be holy also. Genuine holiness is a key word in Scripture. To be holy means to be separate, set apart for a special and unique purpose. God is holy, and He delights most in those who are most nearly like Him.

Israel was called to be a holy, separated, peculiar people, to perform a unique role in history, to be the "chosen" agency through which God dealt with men and worked His purposes. The members of the Christian Church are the new Israel, and they, too, are called to be "holy . . . in all manner of conversation [conduct]" (I Pet. 1:15). They are called to be "saints," men and women upon whom the character of Jesus Christ is so impressed that they are "set apart" for God.

"Pass the time . . . in fear." Not fear that cowers in the face of danger, not fear for the things that are happening on earth, not fear that the powers of evil will prevail; the fear of God is a reverence and proper respect for God and His laws. "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (I Pet. 1:17). It is that fear which is the beginning and ending of wise thinking and living; it is a respect that gives us a deterring fear, lest we treat lightly any of God's mandates and lapse into spiritual weakness in the day of testing. It is fear that recognizes the demands of the love of God, as expressed in the hymn:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

We have no license to shirk the discipline and duties of Christian living—our hope requires something of us. It means intellectual effort and spiritual application. God has given us minds, and He means for us to use them. He has given us words of inspiration and faith, and He wants us to ponder them and apply them to our own situations. He is ever calling us anew to the strenuous but exhilarating adventure of trying to understand more and more deeply our own hearts and characters as we compare them with His law. We have to learn to evaluate our own progress in the divine life, to see our lower natures, our motives and desires that are too often wayward, and conform them all to His love and law.

Here is the acid test of the Christ-life. Peter's challenge is to mental effort, to sobriety, to hopefulness, to antiworldly struggle, to holiness, to reverence. And all of this means nothing to us if we do not apply it in our own daily lives.

But always there is the promise and the hope. We do not struggle merely for the satisfaction of having struggled; we do not strive for holiness simply for the happiness that it brings. We do not endure trials and persecutions for the sake of the trials. Through all the suffering and sacrifice and testing, through all the effort and application to develop the virtues God esteems there is one pervading purpose: to be found ready to receive that "grace that is to be brought . . . at the revelation of Jesus Christ." In those few words lie the pinnacle of hope and triumph. Goodness is not to be its own reward; we are seeking eternal recompense, even immortality!

Peter's First Epistle is filled with exhortations. As we penetrate his words, we feel the heroic spirit of his life, the secret springs of his power and persistence, the relentless spirit of perseverance which pulled him from the depths of despair and set him on the road of hope. Peter, like ourselves, had his struggles. Indeed, it was only as he himself lived by these holy precepts that his heart was fed and filled with hope and triumph.

That same obedience can do the same for us today, so that we, with Peter, may be a "partaker of the glory that shall be revealed" (I Pet. 5:1).

What greater hope could stimulate us to triumphant living! ●●

Just Thinking . . .

I hadn't realized how short life is until I turned the average seventy-year span into seconds. It figures out, in round numbers, at about 2,250,000,000 seconds, of which the average man is likely to awake for 1,500,000,000 seconds.

I thought, how foolish of any of us to spend those precious seconds—those eyewinks of eternity—quarreling, worrying, or pursuing our own selfish interests. I have resolved to be a reformed character from now on. My friends tell me I stand some reforming. I could tell them a thing or two, too—but there goes another precious second, never to be recaught!

—from A Reader

Johnny Forgot to OBEY

JOHNNY DUNCAN had looked forward to the trip with his father and mother to visit his aunt in Oregon, and now they were on their way. There was one strict rule that Johnny's father and mother had made for the trip. "When we get out of the car to take pictures, or for anything else, Johnny, you must stay with us or near enough for us to see you."

Johnny promised that he would always do this. They had been traveling for four days, and in only a few hours more they would reach Aunt Molly's house. Mr. Duncan stopped the car on the edge of the road. They were driving along a winding road that climbed around the edge of a mountain. They could see beautiful Shasta Lake and the great white mountain called Mount Shasta.

While father and mother were looking at the beautiful scenery and snapping pictures of the views they liked best, Johnny looked over the edge of the road and saw, down below, a rushing, green river that tumbled over the rocks and through the canyon on its way to Shasta Lake.

Johnny wanted to get nearer the water, so he climbed over the rocks and down the mountainside until he reached the edge of the tumbling water. The river hissed and roared as it rushed between the walls of the mountains that rose on each side of it. Johnny looked up toward the road above, but he could not see the road or his father's car. There were too many rocks and trees between him and the road above for him to see.

"I guess Dad and Mother can't see me either," he thought. But here he was beside the green rushing water. So he decided to stay a little while. He was throwing rocks into the water and having fun. Then something terrible happened—a part of the bank of the stream where Johnny was standing caved in, and he found himself struggling in the icy, foaming water. He felt himself being swept away from the bank and down the rushing river. He could not scream, for his eyes and mouth were filled with water.

It seemed a long time that he was being pulled and pounded by the swirling water, and he thought he must have been carried for miles. Then something struck him, or he struck it. He reached out both hands, grasped whatever it was, and held on for dear life. When he could lift his head and open his eyes he saw that it was a big, rough boulder sticking up out of the stream, but it was far from the bank and he could never cross that roaring water. His cold hands could barely cling to the slippery rock.

But above the river, where Johnny had fallen in, his parents had suddenly missed him. They could not find his tracks so they flagged down the first car that came along—a pickup truck with a man in it. The man soon found Johnny's tracks, where he had gone down the embankment to the river. He ran back and took a rope from his pickup, and with Daddy following him, climbed down to where the bank had caved off with Johnny.

"That's what I was afraid of when I saw his tracks," the man said. "Come on!" He started off down the edge of the river with Mr. Duncan behind him. For about a quarter of a mile they ran and then, rounding a bend in the river, saw a bedraggled, shivering Johnny hanging onto a big rock in the middle of the stream.

"Thank God, he is alive," said Mr. Duncan.

"He can't hang on there very long," the man said. "Good thing I'm a cattleman and know how to handle this rope." He twirled the loop in the end of the rope around his head, then threw it toward Johnny, letting the rest of the rope run through his fingers.

He had to throw the rope several times before it caught around the rock where Johnny clung. Then Johnny wrapped it around his body, and the man pulled him through the water to shore. Father bundled the wet and shivering boy into his own coat, and both of them tried to thank the man for what he had done for them. But he waved at them and smiled as he got into his pickup.

"It's a good thing that I had my lasso along today," he said as he drove away.

When Johnny was warm and in dry clothes once more, and they were on their way to Aunt Molly's again, Johnny said, "I got myself into trouble because I didn't mind very well, didn't I?"

"You certainly did," Father agreed, "and maybe this will be a lesson you will always remember. Forgetting to obey *nearly* cost you your life. That is why the Bible says, 'Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.' Everyone has to learn to obey. You, Johnny, have to obey us; and we have to learn to obey God."



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"What is the atonement that Phinehas made for Israel (Numbers 25:13) by slaying two of the offenders?"

It would seem from the account in Numbers 25 that Israel was going astray and worshiping the gods of other nations—which God had strictly forbidden. The command to Israel was: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (Ex. 20:5). And though Numbers 25:6 does not tell us specifically what was the nature of the transgression, the Psalmist, speaking of the same incident says that "they provoked him [God] to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them" (Ps. 106:29). The apostle Paul understood that the offenders were "committing fornication" (I Cor. 10:8).

Whatever Israel's sin, God saw fit to punish by sending a plague, which killed many thousands and caused deep sorrow in the camp of Israel. At this point, a certain Israelite came into the camp bringing a foreign (Midianite) woman—and consenting with the idolatry of her native land—in open defiance of the command of the Lord and the punishment He had sent. Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, took action immediately. He slew both the Israelite and the Midianite woman, who were transgressing the law of God for Israel.

The Lord commended this action by Phinehas, and promised him a great blessing: "Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:12-13). By removing the offenders, he made an atonement, or a reconciliation, between God and Israel. And the source of the transgression being removed, "the plague was stayed." A footnote in the Berkeley Version of the Bible, comments that Phinehas' action was "an unprecedented means of atonement; not a required sacrifice but a voluntary deed prompted by his righteous indignation against sin as opposition to God." To make an atonement means to do that which will restore a friendly relationship between two individuals. All that God ever asked was the removal of the offense or transgression. He never requires that one man suffer for another's misconduct. The Bible principle is, "Every man

No Time to Waste

We surely do not have any moments to waste as the time is swiftly passing and we must get our thoughts and minds on something worthwhile. Whatever our thoughts are dwelling on, that is what our conversation will be. And once we have spoken, our words can never be recalled. Our words will stand for or against us. "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36-37).

So let us always watch and guard our thoughts and words.

Winterset, Iowa

F. B.

Not Too Easily Satisfied!

As I read, I am encouraged to keep going on indeed, to strive harder after the things of God and run the race until final victory. I realize how like Esau we can be. How foolish when we can have God's best to let ourselves be satisfied with the mess of pottage, which could be anything that takes our fancy and our feet from treading God's road. How many times we have done this.

With so much at stake, we must not act the fool and become in danger of losing eternal life. For we are in a privileged position. We have been called to be God's sons and daughters. We have so much to win, or so much to lose. Let us not make the mistake of Esau.

Nottinghamshire, England

H. L.

Time Is Passing

Hours, days, weeks, and months and years pass away so very fast. Looking back in any way is dangerous. The great day of the Lord is almost here. Let us be careful that our Lord does not find us sleeping, all taken up with the affairs of this present life. We must keep pressing on more and more strongly towards the mark for the great prize.

Vernon, British Columbia, Canada

Mrs. A. S.

Appreciative

Recently I was reading in your booklet on the Trinity, on page 29, "Did God Forsake Jesus?" I was at first startled and then it sunk into my senses. I have been reading religious literature all my adult life, but never anything that made me feel so relieved. You are so right.

Coos Bay, Oregon

Mrs. W. W.

shall be put to death for his own sin." Those who died, either in the plague or at the hand of Phinehas, were guilty of the transgression; they were not killed simply to appease the wrath of a vengeful God.

"Under the law of Moses, every Israelite had to pay a half a shekel to the tabernacle. This money was called a 'ransom for his soul' and was to 'make an atonement' (see Exodus 30:11-16). Why was this a 'ransom' and an 'atonement'?"

The Lord commanded Moses to take up this money—a half a shekel from every adult—at the same time he ordered a census of the people. The command involved all Israelites twenty years of age and older who were not priests or Levites. The payment of the half shekel might be thought of as a membership fee, or a token of belonging to the nation of Israel. And its being specifically commanded for those who had no part in the tabernacle or its duties would suggest that it was each person's way of showing his support for the church God had set up. This small offering gave each person individually an opportunity to contribute to the religious system of the land. In this way it was an "atonement" or a reconciling agent between Israel and God, confirming Israel's part of the covenant.

"As I see it, the 'remnant of Israel' have to be all Israelites, no Gentiles, as in Micah 5:3, 7; 7:18; and Jeremiah 31:7."

God selected Abraham to be the father of a nation. To these people He gave the opportunity to enjoy special blessings and privileges if they would prove faithful to Him and live by their sacred covenant.

As we know, Israel the nation disobeyed. Nevertheless, God had a few faithful servants, a "remnant" of Israel who remained loyal. This remnant is mentioned frequently by the prophets. Once it is called a "very small remnant" (Isa. 1:9). For the benefit of these few, God was longsuffering with the rest of the people.

This "remnant of Israel" is also used as an illustration of the faithful few whom God recognizes in other ages. His loyal children have always been few. And it is this faithful remnant to whom God promises special and eternal blessings. It is they whose iniquity He promises to pardon, and on whom He shows mercy (Mic. 7:18). They shall be as "a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass" in "the midst of many people" (Mic.

5:7). The apostle Paul described them as "a remnant according to the election of grace," a few who were worthy to receive the promises which the majority had spurned (Rom. 11:5-7).

We today can become a part of this faithful remnant by qualifying as members of the "chosen generation," the "royal priesthood," the "holy nation" (I Pet. 2:9). We can become Jews indeed, the remnant of Israel who shall be saved (Jer. 31:7), Israelites indeed (Rom. 2:28-29).

"If the land of promise to Israel, the land of their fathers, were the 'new earth' promised to spiritual Israel, then God could not meaningfully have had Isaiah repeatedly speak of Israel's *returning* to Zion. No one can *return* to the new earth where no one has ever been. That is a stultifying contradiction in terms. The remnant of God's heritage, Israel, *can* return to Zion in Palestine, though. That is the only land to which they can return. It is the only land from which they have been away.

You are correct in stating that many of the promises concerning Israel speak of Israel's *returning* to the land of their fathers (see Jer. 31:8; Joel 3:1-2; Ezek. 36:24; Isa. 10:20-22; Jer. 30:3, and many others).

There is a definite reason for this: The majority of prophecies are two-fold in meaning, having a short-range partial fulfillment and a longer-range complete fulfillment. To have this double-application understandable, the prophecy must be thought of in general terms and over-all meaning, rather than in specifics of detail. And the primary purpose of all prophecy was for the benefit and spiritual uplift of those who heard it spoken. The prophecies concerning the return of Israel to their land were spoken at a time when the people of Israel or Judah were facing the dark days of captivity. The nations had sinned and broken their covenant, and God had promised a recompense, a punishment. They would have to go into captivity.

But along with the stern prophecy of judgment came the promise of a return. Israel's people would not always suffer in captivity. The power of the foreign ruler would end, and many Israelites would be able to return to their homeland. This return was prophesied frequently, and it *was* to be a *return*—to the land they had been forced to leave. This being the primary reason for the prophecy at the time it was given, the point of Israel's *returning* is mentioned often. It was the one hope of the faithful remnant at that time.

When we come to the longer-range meaning of the prophecy, we do not take every term of the

prophecy literally. For example, when we read Isaiah 19:23-25, we do not visualize a literal highway out of Egypt to Assyria, on which Assyrians and Egyptians come and go freely. And when we read Jeremiah 30:8, where the Lord promises to "break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him," we do not think of a man wearing a literal yoke that must be broken, or literal bonds which need to be burst. Much Biblical language is symbolic and pictorial, written to teach an essential truth or an over-all thought, rather than all the details of the story. It is true that spiritual Israel was never dispersed from a land they never inhabited; that only literal Israelites can actually *return*; but the *returning* in the above-mentioned prophecies was fulfilled when the captive Israelites did return to their homeland after the captivity, and the future ingathering shall be far more significant than a race of people coming by land or sea to the land of their fathers. For we read: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:10). Such a prophecy had not yet been fulfilled to natural Israel—nor shall it ever be. For it is a promise to the "redeemed" or "ransomed of the Lord." They shall *return*, and this returning shall be "with songs and *everlasting joy* upon their heads." ••

Is Your Faith Fireproof?

(Continued from page 27)

apostle Paul. Realizing that without holiness "no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:4), we have no choice but to meet the divine requirements of the Word of God.

Here is the challenge for us; here is our test of fire. Will we prove ourselves pure gold in every thought and word and deed? Will our every motive and ambition stand the test of fire?

We must have sufficient testing now to determine the quality of our substance, for there is coming a greater testing by the fire of God's judgment: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). All that endures must be brought through the fire of God's supreme testing.

Shall *we* stand the test?
Is *our* faith fireproof? ••

Worry?

Worry? Why worry? What can worry do?

It never keeps a trouble from overtaking you.

*It gives you indigestion and sleepless hours at night,
And fills with gloom the days, however fair and bright.*

*It puts a frown upon the face, and sharpness to the
tone.*

We're unfit to live with others and unfit to live alone!

Worry? Why worry? What can worry do?

It never keeps a trouble from overtaking you.

Pray? Why pray? What can praying do?

Praying really changes things, arranges life anew.

*It's good for your digestion, gives peaceful sleep at
night*

*And fills the grayest, gloomiest day with rays of glow-
ing light.*

*It puts a smile upon your face, the love note in your
tone,*

Pray? Why pray? What can praying do?

*It brings God's help from Heaven, to live and work
with you.*

HAVE YOU

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THE COMING OF JESUS AND ELIJAH
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THE COMING OF ELIJAH AND JESUS
AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Per Dozen50

A POPULAR song describes the three Hebrew children in Babylon as men who “wouldn’t bow, wouldn’t bend and wouldn’t burn.” These three young Hebrews, friends of the prophet Daniel, had come to a point where they could not conform to the wishes of the king, Nebuchadnezzar. When they stood by their refusal to bow and worship the golden image which he had set up, the time had come for Nebuchadnezzar to take revenge—or so he thought. They would be bound and cast into the fiery furnace.

The attitude of these young men toward the king and the situation in which they found themselves is noteworthy. They were, first of all, servants of the most High God. As such, their first responsibility was to conduct themselves in such a manner as to remain faithful to Him and to glorify Him by their lives. This duty they fulfilled with remarkable courage.

These three youths are first mentioned in Daniel 1:6-7. Nebuchadnezzar had given orders that certain of the finest among the captives which had been taken to Babylon from Judah were to be set aside for special training.

“Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.”

The prophet Jeremiah had foretold this captivity many years earlier. When the captivity had become a reality, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the captives in which he gave them some excellent advice.

The letter is recorded in the 29th chapter of his book. Part of the letter reads thus: “Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace” (Jeremiah 29:5-7).

The three young Hebrew captives were certainly aware of this letter, and they were intent on doing what was right and proper.

To be faithful to their God, they were to seek the peace of the city. And this meant a fine measure of spiritual growth, for it is not natural to promote the best interests of those who have mistreated you and your nation. They could not be lawless or disagreeable or even resentful. They were in a foreign

“More precious than gold is
faith which has stood
the test.” --I Peter 1:7, NEB

land, and they were to seek the best interests of the authorities in that land.

These young men, along with Daniel, had been chosen for high office in this heathen land. They held responsible positions in the king’s service. And as far as we know, until the incident of which we read in Daniel 3, they were in a position of favor with the king.

Every child of God must prove himself, however, and these children were no exception. Nebuchadnezzar had been good to them, but he was still an arrogant idol-worshiper. He was king of all about him, and he wished everyone to know it.

So he built this great image and gave orders that all people should worship it. Faithful as these three Hebrews had been to this point, this was something totally foreign to their thinking, and contrary to the direct command of God.

They were well acquainted with the law of their God, which forbade their worshiping any image or the likeness of any such thing. Nor were they to acknowledge any other god save the living God, the one true God, their Creator.

Here was the test, and they decided to remain true to their God. Yet their attitude is worthy of notice. They were not resentful to the king for putting them to this test. They were not self-righteously indignant, as though the whole thing were a personal affront to them. They recognized the situation for what it was—a test of their devotion and loyalty to the God of heaven.

And there was no lack of respect on their part as they gave their simple, straightforward answer to Nebuchadnezzar. “. . . O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:16-18).

Just a simple, straight answer to tell the king where they stood! This principle was later taught by Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 5:37, “But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

Their absolute faith in God helped them to re-



main calm and in command of themselves and the situation. It was not so, however, with the king. His fury blazed at them.

"Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:19-20).

God was able to deliver, and He did deliver. For these three faithful young men, from all appearances helpless and lost, came forth in triumph with not so much as the smell of fire on their garments.

They stood the test of fire. They were victorious. Why? Because they had a living faith in the living God whom they served, and were not afraid, if need be, to die for what they believed.

Here is a lesson for each of us.

There are many trials which we must endure. God allows testings, and they will either make us or break us. The result depends upon what we have within us—what we are made of. Every man's faith must be tested—even tested by fire.

God must test us, for He must know whether or not we are fit for residence in the new world which shall one day come into being here on earth. There will be no evil in that new world, so each of us must be proven now.

The apostle Peter experienced the fiery testing, and advised concerning a proper attitude toward it: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when

his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (I Pet. 4:12-13).

A strong and abiding faith is the first prerequisite for salvation. Without it we have no claim upon any of the promises of God. Said the sacred writer to the Hebrews: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

But faith is not implicit until it has been tried and proven. Saying we have faith is not sufficient. Our faith must be tried by fire.

Peter speaks again of this supreme trying of our faith: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:7). Faith, thus tried, will be proven genuinely fireproof, and what praise and honor and glory it will bring to its possessor!

God allows the trials to come, but in His superior wisdom He never permits a trial beyond our ability to endure. He knows just what is best for us. His only desire is to purge from our lives those traits which are offensive to Him and harmful to us. We must remember that *all* things do indeed work together for the good of those who have been called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9), hence the need for many trials now to burn away the dross and leave only the pure gold of a righteous character.

But we must be willing to be tested—and to test ourselves according to the fire of God's divine Word. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" admonished the

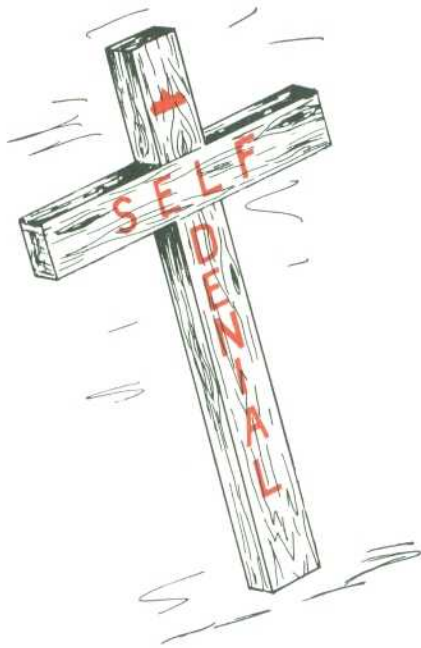
(Continued on page 25)

I carry a cross in my pocket,
A simple reminder to me
Of the fact that I am a Christian
No matter where I may be.

This little cross is not magic,
Nor is it a good luck charm.
It isn't meant to protect me,
From every physical harm.

It's not for identification,
Or for all the world to see.
It's simply a sign of a covenant
Between my Saviour and me.

When I put my hand in my pocket
To bring out a coin or a key,
The cross is there to remind me
How wide awake I must be.



My Daily Cross

It reminds me, too, to be thankful
For my blessings day by day,
And to strive to serve Him better
In all that I do and say.

He said, in words plain and simple,
"If any will come after Me,
Let him take up his cross-bearing daily,
Deny self and so follow Me."

It reminds me of my greatest duty,
To confirm every word that I say
By actions becoming a Christian
At every step of the way.

It's also a daily reminder
Of the peace and comfort I share
With all who know my Master
And give themselves to His care.

So, I carry this cross in my pocket,
Reminding no one but me
That Jesus is Lord of my life
If only I'll let Him be.

—Author Unknown.