

# Megiddo Message



*Forbid it, Lord, that I  
by word or deed unkind  
should mar Your  
perfect peace.*

## Expectation—Vague or Vivid?

A FRIEND was inquiring of a nine-year-old youngster about his younger brother Jonathan, who was severely handicapped. "He isn't very good now," the boy explained, "but Jesus is coming back"—the child's eyes sparkled—"and if Jonathan is good and patient now, then when Jesus comes, he will be able to walk and run, and make and feel things with his hands, and jump over things like that log. Jonathan will be able to do all kinds of wonderful things when Jesus comes."

It was a reply that the inquirer would never forget, a picture of confident, living, vivid expectancy that could not be questioned, much less disappointed. This same unwavering trust and confidence is the stay and support of every believer. It is the faith that sustained our beloved founder, Brother Nichols, a quality which he described as "simple, child-like faith in God."

Faith is the fundamental beneath all action. According to our faith we will work; according to our faith we will grow. Just according as we believe in the promises of God and keep them vividly in our mind, just so will we be preparing ourselves to receive them. As long they are only vaguely in the background, as we go along half-believing, half-trusting, half-aware of the reality of it all, we will be only half-committed and half-hearted in our service to God.

Strong, living, propelling faith is vital to each of us in these closing hours of the age. Whatever happens, whatever comes or goes, *we must not lose faith*. Constantly on our minds must be that vivid, lively expectation that Christ is coming. Perhaps today. If not today, then tomorrow. And so on and on. We who experience the suspense of not knowing must learn to live in perpetual expectancy—"lest coming suddenly he find" us "sleeping"!

The result of this vivid expectation will be a significant increase in the value we place upon each fleeting moment of time extended us. We will feel and know that what we do this moment *counts*. It counts more heavily than we can ever weigh. It carries more weight than we can ever measure. Oh, who can estimate the eternal consequences of each present, passing moment!

Vivid, ever-present expectancy will keep us awake, alert to any possibilities of danger. Our first and constant

thought will be, What does God think of this? Is He pleased by my attitude this moment? Will I want to be found doing—or saying—or feeling—or thinking—*this*, when Jesus comes?

Vivid expectancy will lift us to a higher plane of thought and action. And the precious privilege of that higher horizon will cast a soberness and a discernment over all things earthly. Living in the light of His coming will always create a certain distance between the Christian and the affairs of this world. Nothing of here and now will concern him unduly, nor will he be shaken or upset by events around him. His one thought, his one concern, will be to be found in a state of readiness when his master comes. No service will be too demanding, no sacrifice too dear, no testing too severe—if only he can be ready!

If our point of reference is in the world to come, we will not be trapped by any reactions of bitterness or cynicism; nor will we be controlled by what events and people do to us. Everything about us, everything we experience, everything we love or feel or fear, will be seen only as a means to our one great goal—if only we can be ready!

Our whole concern now will be to act responsibly, as stewards faithfully conducting the King's business while He is away, knowing that soon He will return and require an accounting of what He has entrusted to their care.

And when that Day arrives, what delight it will bring to each faithful one. Gone will be the trials, the disappointments, the hardships, the weariness of this world. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Then every worthy Jonathan worldwide "will be able to walk and run, and make and feel things with his hands, and jump over things like that log." In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isa. 35:6).

Let our expectation be real, vivid, constant; for as surely as God lives, the Day of the Lord *will* come, whether we have prepared for it or not.

## Megiddo means . . .

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

### We believe

—in God the Creator of all things, all men, and all life.

### We believe

—in the Bible as containing the genuine revelation of God and His purposes for men, and as being our only source of divine knowledge today.

### We believe

—in Christ the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was born of a Virgin, ministered among men, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.

### We believe

—in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.

### We believe

—in all mankind as providing the nucleus from which a superior, God-honoring people shall be chosen to receive the blessings of immortal life.

### We believe

—in ourselves as capable of fulfilling the demands and disciplines given us in the law of God, thus perfecting that high quality of character which God has promised to reward with life everlasting in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

### We believe

—in the promise of God, that a new age is coming—is near—when the earth will be filled with His glory, His people, and His will be done here as it is now done in heaven.

## Bible Quotations

Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version. Other versions are identified as follows:

**NEB**—New English Bible

**NIV**—New International Version

**NAS**—New American Standard

**RSV**—Revised Standard Version

**TLB**—The Living Bible

**TEV**—Today's English Version

**JB**—The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition

**Phillips**—The New Testament in Modern English

**Berkeley**—The Modern Language New Testament

**Weymouth**—The New Testament in Modern Speech

**Moffatt**—The Bible, A New Translation

**Williams**—The New Testament, A translation in the Language of the People

## About Our Cover

Our cover photo was taken in Genesee Valley Park, Rochester, New York, where the Genesee River crosses the Barge Canal.

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WHICH IS SECOND?

The **MEGIDDO MESSAGE** is a religious magazine devoted to the cause of Christ, and published for the dissemination of Bible truth alone. Official organ of the Megiddo Church. L. T. Nichols, Founder; Newton H. Payne, President and Editor. Ruth E. Sisson, Executive Editor.

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**MEGIDDO** is a way of believing and living, grounded solidly in the Bible as the reliable Word of our Creator. A total view of life, the world and the universe, it sees all events, men and nations moving together toward one God-ordained climax: the Kingdom of God on earth. This has been the plan of God since the beginning. Christ will return visibly, bodily, as King, and the governments of this world will be joined to form a totally new worldwide government. When the task is complete, our earth shall be numbered among the heavenly, glorified worlds and filled with immortal inhabitants. This is the purpose and goal of all creation.

*A Thanksgiving Message*

## What Gratitude Does for Us

*Scripture: Luke 17:11-19*

**T**HANKSGIVING comes each year to remind us that it is inventory time again, time to count our blessings and offer another sacrifice of praise to the gracious Giver of all.

In most stores or shops, the owners find it necessary each year to take a physical count of the merchandise on hand, so that they can know what they have available for sale. Book records may not reflect all the changes that have taken place since the last counting. And there is always the possibility of an error in entering a sale or a purchase, as well as loss from damage, theft, vandalism or obsolescence. The only way to actually *know* what is on hand is to count it.

The same is true in the matter of realizing our blessings. The only way to appreciate all that God has done for us is to physically review.

Modern accounting methods and computerized inventory systems have made practical another and greatly superior method of inventory keeping, known as perpetual inventory. By this method, a continuously updated record is kept of all merchandise bought and sold, so that the value and amount of merchandise available for sale is always known. Each purchase is immediately added, each sale is immediately subtracted, and management never has to wonder what is on hand.

### **Continual Praise**

There is a brief sentence in Psalm 34 which shows that the Psalmist was using the perpetual inventory method in counting his blessings. These are his words: "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. . . . O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together" (Ps. 34:1, 3).

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Note: *What Gratitude Does for Us* is available as a complete church service on cassette. Price: \$3.00

Do we realize the occasion on which he said this? The heading on the 34th Psalm is this: "A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed." This was the time when the people sang the praises of David, and Saul was not prepared to take it. The incident was the beginning of a long and trying period of his life, when time and again David had to flee for his life. Yet David's "continual" psalm of praise was not interrupted.

David recommended his practice of praising God to all God-fearing people in all places at all times. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord," he wrote, "and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: to shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night" (Ps. 92:1-2). Nothing annual or occasional about this gratitude—it was perpetual. It was "in the morning" and "every night."

What lay beneath the Psalmist's thinking here? Might it not be a bedrock truth of which he was persuaded after many years of living in the presence of God and receiving blessings from God, and which he wanted others to know about? Is it not his advice on how to keep our account current with God, and at the same time make life beautiful, fulfilled and meaningful? Yes, "it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord"—continually.

As we read the Psalms, we are impressed with his continual overflowing of praise. How many times the Psalmist exclaimed, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good." Again, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. . . . I will rejoice in the Lord. . . . Bless the Lord, O my soul!" (Ps. 106:1; 104:33; 103:1). These rhapsodies were not dashed off on the spur of a moment but were forged in the heat of hardship and adversity. The Psalmist knew the worst of times; still, he knew he had the

best—and he thanked God for all. His conclusion is simple and straightforward, without limitation or reservation. “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High.”

The Psalmist was not alone in his perpetual inventory keeping. Notice these phrases from the various Epistles of the apostle Paul: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing . . . I . . . cease not to give thanks . . . giving thanks always for all things . . . we give thanks to God always” (I Thess. 2:13; Eph. 1:16; 5:20; I Thess. 1:2). Accordingly he advised, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (I Thess. 5:18). Again, “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

Why? Why is it a “good thing to give thanks unto the Lord”? Why is it good to keep this perpetual inventory of our blessings and offer a continual offering of praise? What does gratitude do for us?

#### **Gratitude Humbles Us**

The first thing we ought to realize about expressing gratitude to God is that it humbles us. When we look at ourselves honestly in the sight of God, we see much that is not good. In each of us naturally is an over amount of self-esteem. Every way of a man being right in his own eyes, we tend to place an unrealistic value on *our* thoughts, *our* opinions, *our* ideas, *our* achievements, or *our* way of doing something. Those uncompromising words of the apostle Paul are addressed to “every man that is among you”—no exceptions. We all need the warning. We all tend to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. However little or much we have achieved, there is always the tug of our ego which tells us quietly that we have done a pretty good job!

The noble Apostle would have us counter this human tendency by thinking “soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith.” This is not easy. Nor natural. But it must be done before we can be recognized by God, and a continual sense of all we owe to God is a significant help in the transformation.

For who can lay any claim to being self-sufficient? As Paul continues, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5). In the true church, none is a unit constituting the whole; each is a member of the body and has his part in the body’s functions. Each is needed, and each needs the other. No

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### ***Who can lay any claim to being self-sufficient?***

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one has the right or the liberty to think himself all important.

But this is not our natural inclination. A prayer said to be by an elderly New England clergyman points up the tendency to arrogance in us. “O Lord,” he prayed, “as you know very well, here we are again. We are here to do one of the hardest things any mortal can do—to give thanks and really mean it. First of all, we don’t want to say thanks too broadly, because we want you to understand that we’ve done a few things for ourselves. Yes, we *do* thank you—but don’t be offended when you hear us telling others about what *we* did. It isn’t that we don’t appreciate *your* part, it’s just that others are so slow to give us the recognition we deserve.

“Also we appreciate your answering our requests; but . . . forgive us for asking . . . why didn’t we get more?”

Yes, we’ve all seen the people he describes. But before we look down at them, let us look closely to ourselves and see if there is any trace of this sentiment in *our* thanks. How do we feel about *our* blessings? Are we truly grateful for all we have received—without any trace of “why didn’t I get more”? And have we never flirted with false pride or congratulated ourselves, as though all that we have is the result of our own diligence? Do we realize that whatever ability we have, whatever talent, whatever brainpower, whatever degree of health and strength, even our very life itself, is not from ourselves but from God? And do we always appreciate *everything* He gives, even if it is not according to *our* timing and *our* measurement?

Yes, “it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord” because it helps us get our perspective straight. True gratitude brings us to our knees in humility, for without Him we would be nothing.

#### **Gratitude Changes Us**

A second reason why gratitude is good is its effect on us. Gratitude changes the way we look at the events of our lives, whether favorable or otherwise. Our natural reactions are not a safe guideline; we have to learn to see as God sees.

It doesn’t seem that anyone would deliberately

gather a handful of thorns to sit upon and then complain about it. But that is the description a seventeenth century preacher gave of a man who had every cause for joy touching his life but who rejected these in favor of sorrow and peevishness. The preacher himself had reason enough to complain, by most standards. He had just seen his home plundered, his family driven out of doors, his worldly blessings brought to nothing. What was his reaction? This is what he wrote:

"What now? Let me look about me. They have left me the sun and the moon, a loving wife and many friends to pity me, and some to relieve me. They have not taken away my cheerful spirit and a good conscience; they have still left me the providence of God and all the promises of the Gospel, and my religion, and my charity to them, too; and still I sleep and eat and drink, I can read and meditate—how can he that hath so many causes of joy and so great, be very much in love with sorrow and peevishness, to leave all these pleasures and choose to sit down upon his little handful of thorns?" But unfortunately there are a lot of people more ready to see thorns than blessings, more eager to count their frustrations than their blessings, to remember the worst instead of the best. This is easy to do. Life has a way of hitting everyone adversely at some time; no one is free from the fetters of things negative, things dif-

ficult, things discouraging. Still, there is never a situation in which we cannot give thanks. But as with most things, what we do about our problems is more significant than the problems themselves. That was the case with a Scottish writer who lived some years ago. He was one of those for whom life seemed always to be pitched in a minor key. Suddenly, out of nowhere, gloom would settle on him like cold, clammy fog; a sense of unworthiness would rush over him, and faith would fade. But he found a remedy for such depressions. He wrote: "I have found a law that always, even when at the lowest deeps, I can use to pull myself back into the sunshine: it is the duty of thankfulness." By countering discouraging circumstances with thankfulness, this man won his victories.

The Jewish Passover was meant to be an occasion of thanksgiving. The people were to remember their history and give thanks for the mighty intervention of God in delivering them from slavery in Egypt. In a similar manner, Christians are to remember their deliverance from spiritual bondage when they partake of the New Passover.

As self-evident as thanksgiving is in our religious heritage, we need to emphasize it continually. We need to echo the words of the Psalmist as he declared, "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to

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## *Let Us Pray . . .*

Lord of our life and God of our salvation, wilt Thou hear our voice and let Thine ears be attentive to our supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.

We come to Thee this morning, realizing anew how much we need Thy forgiveness. How often we have prayed for Thy Kingdom to come, yet neglected to make the seeking of that Kingdom the consuming interest of our lives; we have sought for righteousness, yet have been content with unrighteousness in ourselves; we have accepted Thy mercy yet failed to extend mercy to others; we have desired faith while clinging tenaciously to our doubts; we have coveted freedom but rejected its responsibilities; we have wanted happiness while being forgetful of the interests of others. We thank Thee that Thou in Thy goodness art still extending our day of opportunity, and may we give greater

diligence to make proper use of whatever portion may yet be ours.

We pray Thee to renew the spirit of gratitude in our hearts today. May we never be guilty of the forgetfulness of the nine lepers, as those who receive Thy gifts but forget the Giver. To Thee we are indebted for all that makes our lives rich and rewarding. Thou hast delivered us from the hopelessness of ignorance; Thou hast provided the balm which will heal us of our spiritual infirmities and prepare us for life in Thy Kingdom. May we be anxious to see our need, and gratefully accept Thy healing remedy, whatever the price in humility and self-effacement, realizing it is the way and the only way to life.

Wilt Thou be especially near today to all the members of Thy true church, wherever they may be, who are seeking Thee in sincerity and in truth. Lighten them in darkness, strengthen them in weakness, and hold them securely in the support of Thine everlasting arms. And may our hearts ring together with praise as we look forward with ever increasing eagerness to a place in Thy eternal Kingdom, that it may be our supreme delight to praise Thee forever in that bright, new world without end. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

my God while I have any being." These words need to become our own; they need to be the commitment of our lives. Let none of us be willing instead to love sorrow and peevishness, to sit down upon our handful of thorns when, in reality, we have so much to be thankful for.

#### **Thankful because . . .**

Then "it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord" because God has commanded it. God does not want ungrateful clods but loving children who appreciate what He has done for them.

How can we know this? One clear illustration of it comes to us from the days of Jesus and the account of the ten lepers He healed. Let us look closely at the account and see what lessons we can draw.

It happened somewhere between Samaria and Galilee, as Jesus was on His way back to Jerusalem, toward the end of His ministry. By the side of the road was a scene not uncommon in that land at the time. A group of lepers were there, men who had been separated forever from their homes and families because they were suffering from that dreaded disease: leprosy. We do not know how they learned of Jesus, but somehow they recognized Him as He passed by and called out to Him for help.

In the ancient world, no disease was more dreaded than leprosy, and because it was known to spread from one person to another by contact, the only way its spread could be controlled was by isolating the afflicted from all contact with others. History tells us that laws concerning this isolation were strictly enforced.

But imagine the double suffering this imposed on the afflicted. Without hope or help, life for them became a living death—physically, because of the deterioration caused by the disease; and emotionally, because of the isolation. Imagine the horror of being suddenly forced to leave your home, your friends, and all familiar associations and activities, to spend the rest of your life among the diseased and dying, begging for your food and crying out "Unclean, unclean" when anyone came near so that they would quickly turn away and avoid you—because it had been discovered that you had a small white spot of the incurable disease. Do we wonder that a group of lepers, seeing Jesus passing by, cried out "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us"?

What was Jesus' reply to the lepers? Did He postpone doing anything for them until the event could be announced? Or did He begin immediately to gather an audience to witness what He was about to do, and enact an elaborate ritual of healing? Did He offer a long prayer of pleading and entreaty to show the power

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### ***There is never a situation in which we cannot give thanks.***

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He had with God? No, He simply said this: "Go show yourselves unto the priests." A strange command, which these lepers could easily have disregarded altogether. What could the priests do for them? The priests could pronounce them cured, but everyone knew that no priest could cure leprosy.

But however small their faith in Jesus' seemingly hopeless suggestion, faith prevailed—what was there to lose! And so the lepers started for the city and the priests.

"And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." Jesus had healed them!

#### **The Test**

Now came the test. What was their first reaction when they discovered that they were healed?

Actually, we know only about one of them. We read: "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan." Here was the deep, spontaneous praise of a grateful heart. But this was only one out of ten.

"And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" (Luke 17:15-17).

Yes, where were the nine? We are not told, and yet we *are* told, because we know where they were *not*. They were not among the grateful. They are condemned not by what they did but by what they did *not* do. Their first thought was not of God, or gratitude for their deliverance from a life of hopelessness; their first thought was of themselves and what they could do and enjoy. Can't we picture them hurrying off to show themselves to their friends and families, and to join again in all the familiar circles? This was natural and innocent in itself, but what of the Deliverer? What of the Healer? Had they nothing for Him, not even a thank you?

In this short narrative is a parable of the meaning of Christian life with profound implications for us today. We, too, have been delivered from spiritual hopelessness. Are we grateful?

Many things we would like to know we are not told—why Jesus chose to heal *these* lepers, where they

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## *How much have we in common with the tenth leper?—or with the nine?*

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were from, what they did, where they went. We would like to know more of the power by which Jesus was able to heal them. And we would like to know more of the story of that tenth leper. Did he continue in the faith? Was his gratitude deep enough to move him to follow Jesus *all* the way?

We are not told, but what we *are* told is enough for us to draw several lessons for ourselves. How much have we in common with the tenth leper?—or with the nine?

### **Lessons for Us**

The incident tells us, first of all, that God wants our gratitude. The tenth leper was commended, the other nine were condemned.

Gratitude is a heart quality belonging to all of God's chosen. But it is not instinctive. Animals are given certain instincts by which they are able to perform certain functions without conscious learning effort on their part. Not so the human creation. God has given us minds and wills, and He intends that we *use* them. Whatever we may seem to lack, we *have* what we need to acquire the character qualities God is seeking, and one of them is gratitude.

What are some of the characteristics of this gratitude? What can we learn from the tenth—and grateful—leper?

This tenth leper recognized the source of his healing: God. He was not a stranger to God, or he would not have remembered Him in that moment of supreme joy. He knew that Jesus could heal, and his immediate reaction when he was healed was gratitude.

What of us? What is our response to the deliverances—great and small—that God sends into our lives? Are we truly and immediately grateful for all He gives us? We think first of our great deliverance from the darkness and hopelessness of this world. We have been called to share an eternal inheritance with the saints of light. Are we grateful? We have been called to a deliverance which will ultimately free us from all the ravages of mortality—no more sickness, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more disappointment, no more weariness. Do we realize what this means? Are we grateful,

as grateful as we should be? Have we paused today to thank God?

**T**HEN we should observe that the tenth leper expressed the joy and gratitude he felt *to God*. Doubtless the others went home and expressed their joy to their friends and families. They were not lacking in joy for being healed. What they lacked was communication with God. They failed to acknowledge or appreciate the *source* of what they had received.

They were like those people of whom it was written that they worshipped the creature more than the Creator. The nine had not learned to recognize or appreciate any of their blessings as from God. They had not recognized their former good health as a blessing from God. And so when it was restored, they did not acknowledge Him as the Source.

It is easy to recognize what is seen and forget the unseen Power behind it. It is easy—even instinctive—to overlook the *source* of what we have, until it be suddenly withdrawn. And there is the everpresent danger that we will become so absorbed in enjoying what God has given that we will forget the Giver.

All ten had faith enough to *petition*; only one had faith enough to *praise*.

**W**HAT about the nine? What *was* their reaction? We can only speculate, but can't we imagine them overwhelmed with the prospect of the new life before them? Can't we see them making plans for all that they would do and be—without God?

There is yet another possibility. Might their reaction have been one of, "Why didn't He do this for us a long time ago, if it is as easy to cure leprosy as this!" Instead of being grateful, it was a quiet complaint.

The small experiences of every day are the materials God provides for the building of a godly character. He does not want us to wait for some great crisis to prove us, or we shall surely fail. He wants us to learn to use *every* opportunity that comes, however insignificant it may seem.

**T**HE TENTH leper must have been thinking about God. In that moment of supreme joy, his immediate reaction would not have been one of gratitude to God if he had not already learned to be truly thankful for ordinary blessings in the days before. Even though those days were clouded by the hopelessness of leprosy, this man had learned to thank God.

Gratitude, like every other virtue, must be learned through patient, painstaking practice. The saints who ascribe "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power"

to the great King on the throne, as graphically described in John's preview in Revelation 5, are not giving thanks for the first time. Their joyous, spontaneous outburst is the result of years of diligent training and practice, coupled with the overwhelming reverence and appreciation they feel toward the God who has redeemed them.

And underlying all is a fundamental recognition of a deep, inner need for God. Without Him life for us would be, spiritually speaking, as futile and as hopeless as it was for those ten lepers. We need God, and we need His mercy and healing. Only *He* can save. Only *He* can give us everlasting hope and consolation, and deliverance from the limitations of mortality.

Yes, we need God. Where would we be without Him? We have been freed from the hopelessness of sin. We have been freed from the accumulated poison of error and evil and given a fresh, clean atmosphere to breathe. We have been freed to start anew, to seek eternal joys and delights, to participate in a whole new order of creation that is coming to earth. Shouldn't we praise God?

**T**HEN, too, our faith has freed us from the paralysis of self-centered fears and given us the grace to become better than we are now, to be less selfish and self-centered, to think purer thoughts and lead more honest and upright lives. Through God we have renewed spiritual health, hope, and healing. Shouldn't we be grateful?

We have been freed from insensitivity to sin. No condition is more hopeless than that which does not recognize what God abhors. We have been delivered from the hopelessness and frustration of ignorance and have been made acquainted with a higher order of life, where the possibilities are beyond anything we can ask or even imagine. Shouldn't we return to thank God?

### **The Gratitude Challenge**

For each of us, there comes the challenge to examine whether we are taking God's gifts for granted or for gratitude, whether we are merely accepting them or appreciating and using them to their fullest. We have only to begin to count our blessings to realize how casual we are about our gratitude. Think about what we have been given—the gift of life itself . . . rich Christian relationships that enlarge and ennoble our lives . . . the capacity for joy and sorrow, the capacity for thought and holy aspiration . . . and surpassing all, the ability to prepare for a life that will go on and on and on through all the cycles of eternity—how super-abundant is the goodness of God to us!

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***Gratitude, like every other virtue, must be learned through patient, painstaking practice.***

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Yes, we have every cause to be thankful indeed, thankful as the man who, centuries ago, put our thoughts into these matchless words:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. . . . Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul" (Ps. 103:1-5, 20-22). MM

## **Concerning Control**

**I**N VAIN do they talk of happiness who never subdued an impulse in obedience to a principle. He who never sacrificed a present to a future good, or a personal to a general one, can speak of happiness only as the blind speak of color.

The first lesson in Christ's school is self-denial.

Most powerful is he who has himself in his own power.

The secret of all success is to know how to deny yourself. Prove that you can control yourself, and you are an educated man; and without this all other education is good for nothing.

Self-control is the result of a calm, deliberate, invincible attachment to the highest good.

The lower nature must always be denied when you are trying to rise to a higher sphere.

The truest conquest is the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

The monarch of his own mind is the only real potentate in the world. MM

# Before It's Too Late

**T**HE CAREER of Nicola Paganini, the famous Italian violinist (1784-1840), presents a striking example of the lasting effects of early training. In his boyhood days he was unable to find musical exercises difficult enough to satisfy him. So he wrote his own, which were often so intricate that their execution was impossible.

Paganini devoted all his time to his art, often practicing ten or twelve hours a day on single passages, until he would fall unconscious from sheer exhaustion. Of the results of this insatiable ambition and capacity for hard work his biographer says: "Up to his thirtieth year, Paganini continued his severe work of subduing the violin. By that time he had sounded its possibilities, and thereafter no one heard him play except in concert." Curious rivals spied upon him to learn, if possible, the secret of his uncanny mastery of his instrument which made him the sensation of Europe for years—but to no avail; his days of practice lay behind him.

At this distance we can readily see that there was no unknowable secret in his success; no fortuitous combination of circumstances that brought credit to his name; no sudden, meteoric rise to fame. It was simply talent brought to fruition by long, backbreaking hours of practice in youth.

The sooner we can sense our moral deficiencies and change ourselves, the surer we are to become what we want to be. The following maxim by the Chinese philosopher Confucius, while only partly true, may serve as a warning: "When a man at forty is the object of dislike, he will always continue to be so."

As long as life lasts we shall be subject to temptation, we shall be conscious of our contrary inclinations; but as we develop habits of righteousness stronger than these inclinations, we shall find that our contrary inclinations can be overpowered. We need not allow ourselves to be overcome by evil. Even though we cannot remove it from our sight or consciousness, we need not be dominated by it. We are masters of our fate, we are captains

of our souls. And we can rise above temptation—if we will.

But experience teaches us that good habits are far more fragile than bad. They require constant care and attention. Eternal vigilance is the price of safety. Evil habits, like weeds, require no cultivation—only neglect. To quote the Chinese master of learning again: "If the superior man abstains for three years from the observances of propriety, those observances will be quite lost. If for three years he abstains from music, music will be ruined." Even so by neglecting the law of God, the rewards we might have obtained may easily be lost to us, even after we have made much progress in the way of righteousness.

The solemn warning of the ancient Prophet is timely: "Give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness." Why? Because of the impossibility of changing habits at too late a date: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." We must form the habit of doing good *before* our feet stumble upon the dark mountain, for then it will be too late to change.

Let us work while it is called today, for "the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). In the words of the Apostle, "*Now* is the accepted time, . . . *now* is the day of salvation."

MM

*"If! If! we only will! hold on till the harvest." Harvest time is very near, the signs in the heavens are clear. All we hear these days from every side is: I think! I think! I think! Man has done too much thinking and not near enough listening to God.*

## New Pastor and President Leads On



ON October 14, 1985, Brother Newton H. Payne was officially appointed Pastor and President of the Megiddo Church, filling the vacancy left by Brother Flowerday's passing in September.

Brother Payne is no stranger to his new responsibilities. Brother Flowerday's wise foresight made careful plans that the good work would not be interrupted if the mercy of the Lord should extend beyond the end of his life, and Brother Payne was personally chosen and prepared by Brother Flowerday to be his successor.

Brother Payne was appointed Assistant Pastor in 1960, and worked closely under Brother Flowerday's leadership in both sacred and secular duties. During his declining years, Brother Flowerday valued highly the steady, loyal assistance and support of Brother Payne as, at Brother Flowerday's request, he shouldered an increasing share of church responsibilities.

His specific areas of service have been various. Since about 1962 he has taken responsibility for out-of-town funerals, and in recent years for most home funerals. He served as Bible School Superintendent until Brother Flowerday resigned the teaching of the adult class to him about 1977. About the same time he took responsibility for the editorial correspondence of the church, answering questions relating to Bible teaching and practice. He has also contributed articles for publication in the *Megiddo Message*.

Brother Payne has served several terms as a member of the church Board of Trustees and since the mid 1970's has acted as Chairman of all official church meetings. Since about 1980 he has led all Sunday worship services.

During the summer of 1984, Brother Payne was responsible for organizing and initiating a home facility for members of the congregation needing care—a plan which has already demonstrated its usefulness.

Like Brother Flowerday, Brother Payne's acquaintance with the church has been lifelong. His parents became interested in the church soon after the death of

Brother Nichols, and in 1914 decided to move, with their young son and daughter, to make their home among the church group. Brother Payne was at that time just four years old. Through the zealous and consistent training of the parents, both children received a thorough grounding in the teachings and principles of the faith—a priceless heritage they always appreciated.

The family's decision to support the Megiddo Church was a lasting one, and Brother Payne's father, mother and sister all remained loyal members of the church until separated by death.

Brother Payne was a graduate of the Megiddo School, and upon reaching adulthood became a master electrician, owning and operating an electrical contracting business until he retired in 1975.

His entire life has centered around the church ministries, projects and programs. Perhaps his most continuous contribution has been as minister of music, where he has used the changing resources of the group to make music—by band, orchestra, brass ensemble, or choir—a part of all church services and programs.

Brother Payne has also through the years contributed generously of the skills of his trade, installing and upgrading electric wiring in the church and church properties.

In the field of sound engineering, he has made valuable contributions to the church. He has been responsible for designing and installing a sound system to aid deaf members, also a broadcasting-by-wire system that delivers church services directly to the homes of local members. He is also responsible for the advanced recording and sound system which is used to record our church services and reproduce the tapes that are mailed regularly to distant members and friends.

Brother Flowerday valued highly the helpful and loyal support and assistance of Brother Payne, and we the Church Congregation are grateful today for his continuing strong leadership in these end times. With God's help, we follow on.

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## Alexander, the Defeated Conqueror

ALEXANDER III, also known as Alexander the Great, is well known for his rapid movement of troops, a strategy which played an important part in his victories. He moved with such speed that in Daniel's prophetic vision he is the "he goat" that "touched not the ground" (Dan. 8:5). According to history, Alexander the Great conquered Darius who had more than five times as many troops at his command (250,000 to Alexander's 47,000).\*

Alexander the Great was a man of decision and action. Immediately upon inheriting the throne, he had his domestic enemies assassinated and then set about to conquer the surrounding enemies. Within a period of three years he had conquered much of the vast territory of the known world of that time.

The achievements of Alexander the Great, a man whom history portrays as a great hero, would surely be commended in the Bible if man were its author. Even so, he did play a part in working out God's plan, though he was in no way a part of that plan himself. Through his efforts the Greek language became a second language of "the

world," a universal language which helped to pave the way for the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, the first and most important of a number of ancient translations of the Hebrew text into Greek (*Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*). But he was not counted great by God, for "the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). As a matter of fact, he died from a fever at the early age of 32.

Though Alexander the Great conquered the world, his personal life was a total defeat. He may have ruled the world but he never learned to rule himself, and the Bible tells us, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32).

Are we like the ancient conqueror with great worldly ambitions that end in death; or are our thoughts and ambitions much higher, on the eternal riches of God?

Though Alexander aspired to the wrong things, he is also a good example of achievement. He had the right ingredients of a conqueror: a man of decision, able to act quickly and decisively. These are characteristics that we as Christians should strive to cultivate. We, too, are mighty warriors. Though our warfare is spiritual, we must be

decisive and quick to act. Whenever we see any besetment in our fleshly nature, we must not be weak-hearted but make quick decisions and deploy every effort to subdue our enemy before a stronghold is established.

How do we measure up in our decision making? Do we have a sin or two lying near our door that we just haven't quite decided to eradicate? Are we perhaps waiting for a time when we aren't so engaged in other activities? Is it perhaps just a little sin that we think we can conquer most any time we decide? Or do we feel that the time just isn't quite right? A "yes" to any of these questions marks us as poor decision makers and in very great danger of losing the battle. We must make a firm decision quickly and stick to it, come what may.

The most dangerous aspect of a battle is retreat. Darius fled from Alexander and lost 40,000 men and the battle. A retreat in our warfare most surely will be devastating.

Brethren, let us never retreat, and once the battle is won, let us stay on the watchtower and watch for another enemy.

The children of Israel, when they began to go in to possess the land, were commanded to destroy all the molten images and pluck down all their high places: to destroy anything that had to do with the wor-

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\*Exaggerated accounts of antiquity place the number of Darius' army at one million men.

ship of false gods and to destroy and drive out all the inhabitants of the land that the Lord was giving them to dwell in. Israel was to make a clean sweep. But shortly after the death of Joshua and the elders of his day, the people of Israel began falling away from God. And instead of destroying and driving out the inhabitants, they made leagues with them.

We are not engaged in physical warfare as were the Israelites with the surrounding nations. We cannot drive out the heathen, the infidels or the idolatrous; but we *do* have a command that answers to the same purpose. It is found in II Cor. 6:17 which reads in part: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing."

We may have to be in the world, but we need not be a part of it. As citizens of the future world, our attitude should be this: be kind, courteous, and above all, radiant. Always have a cheerful attitude. Never act frivolous or foolish. If a question of religious beliefs arises, speak the Word of the Lord with authority and conviction. We can reverse, to a very great degree, the negative influences around us by our own positive influence for good.

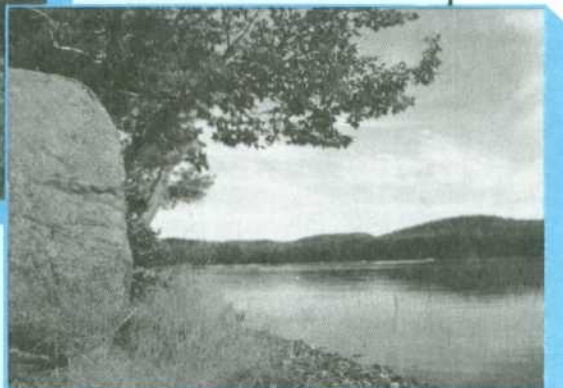
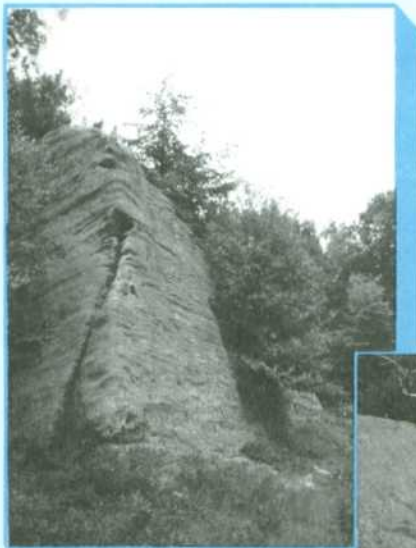
We must always remember that our warfare is not carnal. We are not in combat against our fellow-man, but rather a much greater enemy, ourselves. It is a day by day battle, one day after the other, never retreating but steadily pushing on. Let us take to heart Paul's advice to the Galatians: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (6:9). —Contributed.

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We do not solve our problems by postponing them.

## You Are Beaten—

- When "IF" controls your efforts.
- When you think you are a failure.
- When you get discouraged and lose heart.
- When you cease to stand up for your principles.
- When you let up in your efforts to push ahead.
- When you say "Yes," when you should say "NO."
- When you are a leaner, not a lifter; a trailer, not a leader.
- When you throw up your hands and surrender to obstacles.
- When you have no fixity of purpose, no one unwavering aim.
- When you don't demand of yourself the highest of which you are capable.
- When you fail to stand by your convictions like the Rock of Gibraltar.
- When you allow jealousy or envy to mar your life and make you unhappy.
- When you cease to do your best and are half satisfied with your second best.
- When you go about showing dejection and despair in your face and bearing.
- When you cease to work for a living, to strive, to struggle to get on in the world.
- When you choose the lower when the higher is possible. "Not failure, but low aim is crime."
- When you are not master of yourself but let your animal appetites and passions rule you.
- When you feel like a coward, a nobody, a down-and-out, and give way to discouragement.
- When you are afraid to step out of the crowd, to live a higher life, to accept a divine ideal.
- When you can't stand like a man and face the music, or take your medicine, whatever it may be.
- When you are making excuses for not standing up like a man when difficulties and obstacles confront you.
- When you are so sensitive that you can't take advice, and go all to pieces when criticized or crossed.
- When you cease to walk, talk and act like a conqueror; when you cease to carry victory in your very face and bearing.
- When procrastination runs in your blood; when you can't decide things; when you are forever on the fence, always reconsidering your decisions.
- When you choose the easiest way; when you are enamored of the easy chair; when you are not willing to pay the price for the larger thing of which you are capable.
- When you lose your backbone; haven't iron enough in your blood; when you are afraid to begin to do a thing you know you are capable of doing and ought to do.
- When you don't stand by your word, make good your promises. When you are not honest, straight, square, then you are beaten so far as being a man is concerned; and that is what you are on this earth for—to play the part of a man, to do your work with courage, good cheer, in a helpful spirit.
- When you are beaten by none of these things, you are on the road to becoming worthy of the greater manhood for which you were designed by your Creator.



# Lines to Live By

## The Wisdom of Discipline

*Whate'er my God ordains is right;  
His will is ever just;  
Howe'er He orders now my cause  
I will be still, and trust.*

*He is my God,  
Though dark my road,  
He holds me that I shall not fall,  
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right;  
He never will deceive;  
He leads me by the proper path,  
And so to Him I cleave,  
And take, content,  
What He hath sent;  
His hand can turn my grief away,  
And patiently I wait His day.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right;  
He taketh thought for me;  
The cup that my Physician gives  
No poison draught can be,  
But medicine due;  
For God is true;  
And on that changeless truth I build,  
And all my heart with hope is filled.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right;  
Though I the cup must drink  
That bitter seems to my faint heart,  
I will not fear nor shrink;  
Tears pass away  
With dawn of day;  
Sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,  
And pain and sorrow all depart.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right;  
My Light, my Life is He,  
Who cannot will me aught but good;  
I trust Him utterly;  
For well I know,  
In joy or woe,  
We soon shall see, as sunlight clear,  
How faithful was our Guardian here.*

*Whate'er my God ordains is right,  
Here will I take my stand:  
Though sorrow, need, or death, make earth  
For me a desert land,  
My Father's care  
Is round me there;  
He holds me that I shall not fall,  
And so to Him I leave it all.*

—Selected.

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## Key to Index:

A .....	Article
BS .....	Bible Study
ED .....	Editorial
F .....	Filler
FB .....	Finally, Brethren
Ill .....	Illustration
MED .....	Meditating on the Word
PO .....	Poem
Q .....	Questions and Answers column
QA .....	Question answered in article
S .....	Sermon
SA .....	Short Article
ST .....	Story

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Now, what tomorrow's going to bring:  
 I really couldn't say.  
 I've quite enough to do myself  
 With getting through today.  
 And, if I worried till I'm ill,  
 What good would that do me?  
 So I'll just smile all through today,  
 And let tomorrow be.

When looking back across the miles  
 I've tramped along life's road,  
 I think not of the weariness,  
 Nor of the heavy load.  
 Though shadows lay across my path;  
 And made it dark and grey;  
 The sunshine lighted up the miles;  
 Of life's long uphill way.

*Courage, Sir,  
 That is what makes a man or woman look  
 their goodliest.*

## Keep Your Grit

THE MAN who does not falter  
 Beneath the pain within,  
 Who braces 'gainst hard pressure,  
 Is he who works to win.  
 Although your path may never  
 Lead through the roses' bed;  
 Your worth lies in true manhood—  
 Keep your grit and go ahead.

Life's hopes ne'er fill the measure  
 Which we in fancy place,  
 There's always something lacking,  
 That leaves an empty space;  
 But never strike your standard,  
 No matter what you dread,  
 Just bend your mind to business—  
 Keep your grit and go ahead.

Had you of wealth a fortune,  
 And yet were bought and sold,  
 What then would be your winnings  
 Besides your tempter's gold?  
 Far better sweat with labor,  
 Though you but earn your bread,  
 For honor crowns your strivings—  
 Keep your grit and go ahead.

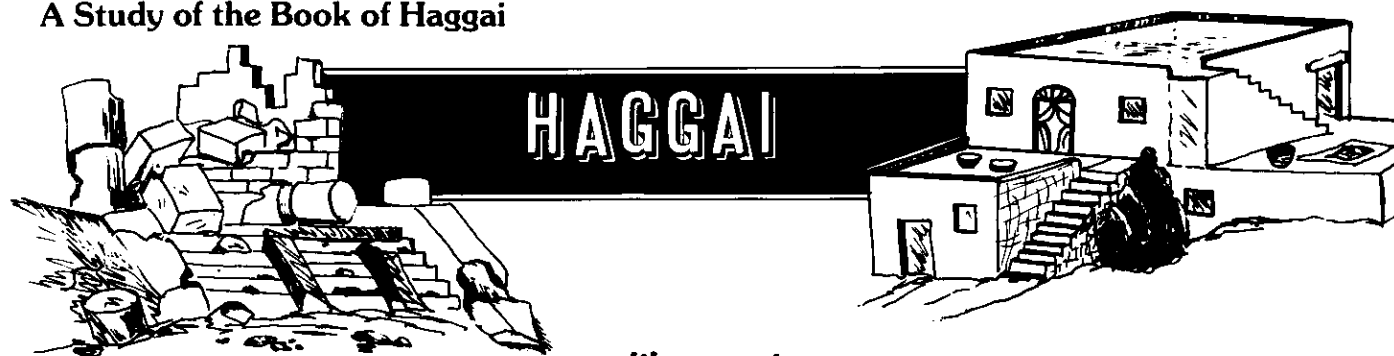
—Selected

## No Linger

*Why linger longer on the plain, when Zion beckons you?  
 Why put off till tomorrow all the things you have to do?  
 Tomorrow it may be too late—this is Salvation's day,  
 And can you sit in idleness, while moments speed away?  
 That wondrous Day, so long foretold, is surely drawing nigh,  
 When Christ, the King eternal, will descend the azure sky;  
 And only those found ready, with all evil cast aside,  
 Shall hear the joyful greeting, "Welcome, come, with Me abide."*

## Points for the Month:

- Week 1:** Everything on the inside must be on the Lord's side.
- Week 2:** Little thinking leads to little faith; great thinking to great faith.
- Week 3:** There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self.
- Week 4:** May we never allow anything to force us out of the orbit of God's will.
- Week 5:** It is not enough to have a good mind, we must use it.



Message #1:

## The Problem of Priorities

### Part II

*Hosea, Joel, Amos; Obadiah, Jonah, Micah; Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah; Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. What do they have in common? Who were they?*

*The books of the Bible which we identify as "the minor prophets" were authored by "holy men of old" just as were the better known books we call "major prophets." The former are "minor" only in one respect: their books are short and their words few. But those few words are among the mightiest in Scripture, when we consider their power-packed message.*

*This article is second in a series of studies on the Book of Haggai.*

**I**T WAS now more than fifteen years since the first group of exiles had returned to Jerusalem. They had come for the express purpose of rebuilding the temple and the wall and to re-establish the worship of the true God. But the project was little more than started when it was put on hold. Adversaries of the Jews, fearful of allowing the Israelites to prosper, had sent a letter to Artaxerxes, who returned word that all building should stop. The returned exiles were frightened, and promptly discontinued their project.

So instead of completing a beautiful temple, the disappointed Israelites scraped aside some rubble of the old temple in one corner and built an altar where sacrifices could be conducted. The altar served to fill a need temporarily, but an altar in the midst of the ruins of the temple was hardly a picture of optimum spiritual health.

Years went by, bringing with them a change in the political picture in Jerusalem: Darius became king in the room of Artaxerxes. This change opened the door of opportunity to the Jews. Once more the work *could* go forward, if only the people were willing.

But nothing was done.

In the meantime, the original returnees were joined by others; still nothing was done to restore the temple. And without a temple, there was little or no incentive to establish regular patterns of worship. Nor could there be.

**W**HY this condition? Perhaps to returned exiles the absence of a temple did not seem so serious—they had lived for years in Babylon without a temple. What made its restoration so important now? They simply lacked interest in the project.

There were probably two reasons for this lack of interest. First, all of those who remembered the old temple were now gone. Those who remained were a generation or two or three removed from the former days. They had grown up in Babylon and for the most part had not been taught to revere the beloved temple. Hence they looked upon the ruins with a more or less indifferent attitude. In addition to this, they were not men and women on fire for God anyway. For the most of them, the makeshift altar

was good enough—the real work of temple restoration could wait for other hands and other times.

Were they indifferent to the lack of a temple because of their spiritual destitution, or were they spiritually destitute because of having no organized form of religion? We cannot say, but whatever the cause, their spiritual condition was bad and declining; they were as indifferent toward God as they were toward His house. When their spirits had been high, they had been prevented from the work. Now, when opportunity was present, they had lost all desire to build for God; they were building neither God's physical house nor their own spiritual house.

The result: precious years—and lives—were being wasted in idle neglect. Children were growing up without spiritual training. Adults were growing older without growing spiritually. It was only a matter of time, and opportunity for many would be gone.

**W**HILE they were busy —instead of building a temple, they were using their time to build houses for themselves.

Building houses for themselves was, in itself, not wrong. They had to have shelter; God would not deny them this or condemn them for providing for their needs. But the Bible indicates that this building for themselves was much more than the simple meeting of necessities.

Yes, they had built houses that were more than a shelter from the elements. They were living in what were described as “ceiled houses,” or “paneled houses” as rendered in some translations. Apparently their homes contrasted sharply with the condition of God's house which still lay in ruins within the city limits.

We are told that typical Jewish homes at that time were constructed of rough hewn stone or clay bricks

that had been baked in the sun. Wood paneling was too expensive for the ordinary family, for it had to be imported from the hill country of Lebanon where the famous “cedars of Lebanon” grew. “Ceiled” houses suggests an excessive investment of time, money and effort that could in no way be justified at a time when the Lord's house lay in ruins.

### **Haggai, God's Man**

At this point, the Lord needed a man whom He could use to shock

work, a man who knew how to get things done, ready to work with his own hands to do whatever needed to be done. God would never choose a lazy man to stir others to work.

Haggai was also a courageous man. Well he knew that God's message would prove unpopular—and proclaiming it would make *him* unpopular. What people ever naturally liked to be told that they were doing wrong?

But fear of unpopularity did not stop Haggai. When the word of the

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*Were they indifferent to the lack of a temple because of their spiritual destitution, or were they spiritually destitute because of having no organized form of religion?*

---

the people to their senses and make them realize their dire spiritual condition before it was too late.

As usual, when God needed a man He had no trouble finding one. This time Haggai was that man.

Haggai lived among the people; he had been among the first group of exiles to return, and he knew the conditions. More, he was concerned about the situation. He could see the dire consequences of spiritual neglect, and knew what the outcome would be.

Haggai was a concerned man. It is very possible that even before the Lord called him as a prophet, he had tried on his own to stir the people to work on the house of the Lord.

What kind of man was Haggai? We can only speculate. We can imagine him as one who stood out in the crowd, a man loyal to God, keeping His law though all others forsook Him. We can picture him young and strong, not afraid of

Lord came to him, he spoke it fearlessly.

**T**HE Bible record dates Haggai's prophecy with unusual precision: it was in the second year of the reign of Darius, some sixteen years after their arrival in Israel, about 520 B.C. His first message to the people was spoken on the first day of the sixth month. On the 24th day of the same month, he delivered his second message, and in the 7th month, his third message. His fourth and final message was spoken in the 9th month, thus completing his prophetic work in less than four months.

This first message came at a time when God was withholding temporal blessing from the captives. The people seemed to have forgotten the purpose for which they came, and at the same time they had forgotten God. And true to His word, as in days of old, when the people forgot God, He turned away from them.

The Lord was chastening the people in an effort to bring them to their senses. But so unperceiving were these Israelites that they didn't seem to even know it. So insensitive had they become, so hardened in their ways, they had all but forgotten God.

Hence the need for Haggai and his message.

**G**OD began the first message to Haggai by informing him of the excuses He had been hearing from

row what they didn't want to do at all.

It was only an excuse—and a reason for doing what they *wanted* to do. Could it be possible that they thought they needed more time to build their own houses—when they had already taken longer to build their simple dwellings than did Solomon to build his palace? Solomon was fourteen years building his house—did *their* building have to be so time-consuming?

But it is a timeless excuse, still

lies in ruins while each of you has a house that he can run to. It is your fault that the heavens withhold their dew and the earth its produce" (Hag. 1:4-11, NEB).

Haggai's words are a call to action: Go, bring, build. In other words, get busy. It is high time God's house was built. What are you doing here, spending your time on your own houses?

God, through Haggai, was challenging their right to build themselves expensive houses while His house lay in ruins. Their argument of not enough time was not acceptable; He knew they had not lacked for time. They were only making excuses, they had no real reasons.

He told them also why their harvests were so small: God was punishing them for their inattention to His work. It was their own fault that their harvests failed; they had been using their time and their means to build their own houses and letting His work go. He was letting them know that He would no longer tolerate their neglect. Their failing harvests were but their just deserts, punishment for their neglect of the house of the Lord. Their crops were so poor they didn't even have sufficient to feed their families. Haggai kept bringing the lesson home to them, that it was all their own fault.

Things had not always been so since their return. They had prospered at the first, else they would not have had the means to build fine houses.

**S**O the Prophet's lesson is, in essence, one of priorities, to warn us not to become so absorbed in the task of providing for our temporal needs that we lose sight of the eternal and forget the God who gives us life and breath. Never must we put our interests ahead of God's.

It is all a matter of where our

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***It is very possible that even before the Lord called him as a prophet, Haggai had tried on his own to stir the people to work on the house of the Lord.***

---

these people. He spoke to the people through His prophet: "In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel, . . . governor of Judah, and to Joshua, . . . the high priest: This nation says to itself that it is not yet time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt" (Hag. 1:1-2, NEB).

Why were the people not building? What was the excuse? "It isn't time yet to build." Not yet time? What does it take to be the time? Why had they started fifteen years earlier—if it wasn't time *now*? Why had they come from Jerusalem anyway? Wasn't it for the express purpose of rebuilding the temple and the wall of the city and restoring worship of the true God?

No, they knew that the project was due—long overdue. Saying that it wasn't yet time was just another way of trying to put off until tomor-

around today. The surprising fact is that we always have time for the things we really *want* to do.

It was not time that they lacked, but the will. They had drifted so far from God that they had forgotten the purpose for which they had returned. God was not in all their thoughts.

Haggai, speaking for God, took them to task for their laxity: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" or as rendered in the New English Bible: "Is it time for you to live in your own well-roofed houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now these are the words of the Lord of Hosts: Consider your way of life . . . Go up into the hills, fetch timber, and build a house acceptable to me, where I can show my glory, says the Lord. You look for much and get little. At the moment when you would bring home the harvest, I blast it. Why? says the Lord of Hosts. Because my house

hearts' affections are, and what we allow ourselves to think about. If we dwell on the things of here and now, our own interests and needs become the center of our universe. When everything goes smoothly, how easily we forget our Creator. Moses had warned Israel of the danger of forgetting God in a time of prosperity; of finding time for what we want to do and neglecting that which we ought to do.

"Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:5-6). Consider your ways, said the Prophet. Stop and think what you are doing. He did not want them to simply say, "How true!" and go on in the same old rut. He wanted to see change in Israel, to see the temple rebuilt and regular worship restored. The literal rendering would be, "Lay to heart"; "set your heart on your ways." Some translations read, "Think about it."

This is the only route to action. What does not impress us deeply and move us to *think* will never move us to action. God wants us to be aware of our spiritual condition, to realize our need of Him, to recognize wherein we err, so that we can take steps to correct the wrong.

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6).

They were experiencing crop failures; they were living in abject poverty. What little money they accumulated disappeared so fast it was as if they had put it into a pocket with holes in it. Had they stopped to consider, to think about it, they would have realized why they were not prospering. From the time God first gave them His law, He had commanded them that He was to

be *first* in their lives. Far from this, they were putting Him last—or not considering Him at all. They were indifferent toward God and His house. What could they expect from God?

And so the message of the prophet Haggai: Consider your ways. God warned them to consider carefully

We too need to watch that we are not putting our own personal "seeking" before seeking the Kingdom of God, that we are not seeking the things that matter least at the expense of the things that matter most.

**T**HE best part of Haggai's account is that his warning from God

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***Self-examination is always good; but it must come from within. And it must come from a heart of one who longs to be right and is willing to be fiercely honest with what he sees.***

---

the situation in which they found themselves, to reflect on their actions and the results they were experiencing. It was God's way of telling them how disastrously they had strayed from serving Him. As always, when they served Him faithfully, they prospered, but when they turned from Him, He allowed them to suffer to remind them that He was still in charge and to punish them for their evil deeds. They needed a jolt to bring them to their senses and to make them realize that they were hurting because of their own actions.

Self-examination is always good; but it must come from within. And it must come from a heart of one who longs to be right and is willing to be fiercely honest with what he sees.

Nor is self-examination to be reserved only for dire circumstances. It was what Israel needed then; it is what we need now. It has been good in all ages, and it is good in our day. "Look to yourselves," said the apostle John as a reminder to his brethren and to us. We too need to check up on ourselves, to examine our motives.

brought the desired results:

"Then Zerubbabel, . . . and Joshua . . . the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai, the prophet, as the Lord, their God, had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord . . . and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God" (Hag. 1:12, 14).

Only twenty-three days elapsed from the beginning of Haggai's reprimand until the day the work actually began. And we can imagine that much of that time was spent drawing plans and getting the site ready. The people were going to work!

And we can be sure that God was not long in prospering them.

*(To Be Continued)*

*In the midst of afflictions, many are brought to their senses; but when deliverance comes, they soon forget their good resolutions.*

---

# On Forgiving and Forgetting

*"I would like to know if forgiving and forgetting is Biblically a basic philosophy of Christianity. And what exactly does it mean to forget?"*

YOU raise an interesting question, whether the Christian must not only forgive but also forget, and just what it means to forget. In other words, is forgetting a voluntary act of the will?

As far as forgetting is concerned, the Bible seems to specify that some things must *not* be forgotten and some things *must* be forgotten. In everyday life, we know there are things we forget that we really want to remember; the reverse is also true.

Concerning what God commands us *not* to forget, we find several passages in the book of Psalms where the Psalmist says, "I will not forget thy word", "I do not forget thy law," "I do not forget thy commandments" (Ps. 119:16, 153, 176; see also Prov. 3:1 and 4:5).

In Matthew 18, in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Jesus points out something we must not forget. We must not forget the forgiveness we have received when the need arises for us to extend forgiveness to another. Very likely, our own need for forgiveness was—or is—the greater. This was the situation in Jesus' parable. The servant of a certain king was forgiven a very large debt, but when opportunity came for the forgiven servant to forgive *his* debtor—even of a much smaller

debt—he refused. Jesus severely condemned this.

There are, however, things we must forget. The apostle Paul was specific about this forgetting in Philippians 3:13, when he said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The "things behind" that are to be forgotten could include any number of things that might hinder forward progress—regrets for wrongdoing, injuries or slights, unedifying words, wrongs repented of and turned from, etc., etc.

What does it mean to forget? The dictionary defines "forget" as: to "fail to retain in one's memory, to cease or omit to think of." We might not be able to reach the point where we could not call to mind a certain incident or occurrence; but if it is something we should forget, we can "forget" it by not allowing our minds to dwell on it, by consciously displacing it with another thought whenever it comes involuntarily into our mind. In this way we can keep it from hindering constructive, edifying thought and spiritual growth.

The apostle Paul must have consciously worked to develop this skill. It seems impossible that he could have totally "forgotten" how he had persecuted devout members of the

church of Christ—even though he knew that it would not be held against him, it was a blot that all his regret could not remove. Still, he had to reach the point where it did not hinder his spiritual growth. This was very likely a life-long struggle for him, and was on his mind as he wrote the passage we find in Philippians 3:13-14. No matter what, he was saying, I'm going *forward*.

Another area where we must practice the art of "forgetting" is that involving petty slights and misunderstandings. These would most likely fall in the category of "grudge-holding," an activity which is strictly forbidden the Christian. Whatever the attitude of the offender, we have no license to hold a grudge—lest we condemn ourselves. James is explicit in chapter 5, verse 9, "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned."

Forgiving is a Bible principle, and once a wrong is forgiven, it need not—must not—be remembered any more as standing against the offender. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," we pray many times. Forgetting is a part of forgiving. We haven't adequately forgiven a wrong if we are constantly brooding over that wrong.

We see the benefit of this principle even in the present world. An extreme example of not forgetting a wrong is the feud in Ireland which goes back many years even beyond the present generation, and which has cost many

lives. If they could forget the past and build a foundation of peace and forgiveness, how much better it would be for all concerned. Many times in cases involving wrongs and grudges, the issues are complex, but the Christian must not harbor any resentment over any wrong, whether it be real or imagined.

The same condition exists between the Jews and the Arabs. If they could forgive and forget, how much better it would be for all concerned.

While it is not likely that any striving Christian will express an unforgiving spirit as violently as either the Irish or the Jews or Arabs, forgiveness is a virtue that must be cultivated. And to truly forgive, we must also "forget," not in the sense that we will not be able to bring the incident to our minds, but that we will not cherish the thought of it or let it dwell in our active memory. Forgetting is a large part of forgiving.

If we sincerely forgive, we will sincerely try to forget.

It seems that President Reagan was demonstrating a Christian principle in visiting a cemetery when he was in Germany during recent months. The present generation of German people cannot be held responsible for what their parents did.

MM

## Furnace and Hammer

*PAIN'S furnace-heat within me quivers,  
The deepest pain my heart doth know;  
And ev'ry nerve within me shivers  
Trembling at the fiery glow;  
And yet I whisper—"As God will!"  
And in His hottest fire stand still.*

*He comes, and lays my heart, all heated,  
On the hard anvil, minded so  
Into His own fair shape to beat it  
With His great hammer, blow on blow;  
And yet I whisper—"As God will!"  
And under heaviest blows hold still.*

*He takes my softened heart and beats it;  
The sparks fly off at every blow;  
He turns it o'er and o'er and heats it,  
And lets it cool, and makes it glow;  
And yet I whisper—"As God will!"  
And in His mighty hand hold still.*

*Why should I murmur? for the sorrow  
Thus only longer-lived would be;  
Its end may come, and will tomorrow,  
When God has done His work in me;  
So I say trusting—"As God will!"  
And trusting to the end, hold still.*

—Selected.

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## IS THIS (FOOLISHNESS)



for  
**CHRISTIANS?**

## The True Remedy

**"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy"**  
(Proverbs 28:13).

**I**T IS not true, say the naturalists, that the ostrich buries his head in the sand and imagines he is concealed. If it were, ostrich hunting would be a tame affair and the species long ago extinct. Possibly an unusually stupid individual did such a thing once upon a time, giving rise to the legend.

Nevertheless, the reputed action of the bird is so thoroughly characteristic of a familiar trait in human nature that the myth survives among our figures of speech. For we have all, without exception, been "ostriches" in our efforts to conceal our shortcomings, and with about as much success.

We may deceive ourselves—that is easy. All we have to do is to shut our eyes, so to speak, and we can imagine anything. Man is a rationalizing being, rather than a rational one, and seldom knows—at least, to the point of acknowledgement—the real motives underlying most of his acts. In order to "save face" with himself, he selects a reason which places him in the most favorable light, and proceeds to convince himself of its genuineness. Dispassionate, completely objective appraisal of one's own motives is one of the most difficult tasks in the world.

We may also deceive our fellowmen in regard to our failings—all of them some of the time and some of them all of the time. But the deception is seldom as successful as we imagine, as it involves us in an endless sequence of embarrassing complications. All in all it would be far less of a strain to avoid the transgression in the first place, if we but had the will to do so.

All our cheap dissimulations, whether deliberate, habitual or unconscious, are a waste of time and effort, for one colossal fact stands like a mountain athwart our crooked path—we cannot deceive God. And, after all,

that is the only thing that matters, if we are really in earnest.

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit?" cried the Psalmist, pursued by dark memories of an unsuccessful attempt to conceal a darker sin, "or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Psalm 139:7, 11-12, 3-4).

The prophet Ezekiel warned a people unusually prone to double dealing: "Thus saith the Lord; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel, for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (11:5).

Those who cover their tracks seldom prosper in this life, and in the Day of Judgment, when the secrets of the heart are revealed and all true motives underlying our every action stand naked before our Judge, instead of prosperity there will be grief and desperate sorrow (Isa. 17:10-11). Since "the eyes of the Lord are in every place" (Prov. 15:3), since He knows our every thought, word and action, what profit shall we find in concealing temporarily from our brethren? Why will we allow a "proud look" to lead to "a lying tongue" (Prov. 6:17) in a vain attempt to bolster our credit with mere mortals? It isn't worth it. It is far more sensible, and, as we said before, in the long run simpler and easier to wash our "face" than try to save it.

This washing is a twofold process, the basic elements of which are *confession and forsaking*. The second is

impossible without the first, and the first is worthless without the second. There has been a great deal of confessing done in the religious world since the founding of the Roman church, but very little forsaking, which is by far the greater part.

Since we have all sinned, and the commandment is definite that we must confess our sins, the question presents itself, To whom are we to confess? Well, that depends upon the nature of the transgression. The confessional, as practiced by the formal churches, is thoroughly unscriptural, being based upon the false doctrine of a succession of Apostles with delegated power to forgive sins. As it seems to work out in actual practice, it is an endless round of sin and confess, sin and confess, go and sin some more, always hoping that the end of the way will find you in a position to make one last confession and receive final absolution.

Nevertheless, in spite of its illegitimacy and its abuses, the institution of oral confession fulfills a deep psychological need; and while our secret sins and our struggles with self may be confessed privately to our Heavenly Father, we shall often find it helpful to "talk it out" with a trusted spiritual advisor, and then make a new start with a lighter heart. The personal counselor is as important to the health of the soul as the physician to the body, and more so. It goes without saying that

an injury to another must be acknowledged to him or her personally, and that flagrant public offenses require public acknowledgment.

Far preferable is it, of course, not to sin, and that is the peak to which we must attain; but before we reach that peak, all of us offend against Divine law many times, even after knowing its requirements. But the God who enacted that Law and who knows our frame, remembering that we are dust, has decreed in His mercy that the old score need not stand against us. From the beginning of the plan of salvation, the hope of mankind has been the forgiveness of sins. It requires no penalty, no bloody sacrifice of an innocent man, to wipe out the dark record of the past, but only a reformation of our lives, a turning away from every evil way and the performance of good.

The cleansing formula is given by Isaiah (1:16-20): "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Then, on these conditions and no other, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." MM

## Jewels in Rough Packages

**O**UR TRIALS are great opportunities. Too often we look upon them as great obstacles.

If we would recognize every difficult situation as one of God's chosen ways of proving to us His love, and look around for signals of His glory, every cloud would indeed become a rainbow and every mountain a path of ascension and a scene of transfiguration.

If we will look back upon the time past, many of us will find that the very time our Heavenly Father

has chosen to do the kindest things for us, and has given us the richest blessings, has been the time we felt strained and shut in on every side. God's jewels are often sent in rough packages; but within we find the very treasures of the King's palace and the Bridegroom's love.

Every hard duty that lies in your path, that you would rather not do, that will cause you pain and struggle or more effort to do, has a blessing in it. Not to do it, at whatever cost, is to miss the blessing.

Every piece of road on which you see your Master's footprints and along which He bids you follow Him, leads to blessings which you cannot get if you do not go over the steep, thorny path.

Every point of battle to which you come, where you must draw

the sword of the spirit and fight the enemy, has a possible victory which will form a rich blessing in your life.

Every heavy load that you are called upon to lift hides within itself a source of great strength. MM

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## • Concerning David's Throne

### *"Where is David's throne?"*

The angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, made the following statement, referring to Jesus: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32).

The prophet Isaiah also spoke of the throne of Christ, in chapter 9:6-7. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever."

While we do not believe that the throne of David has been continually occupied since the time it was first set up, the Bible does promise that the throne of Christ will be at Jerusalem and that throne will last for ever and ever. His dominion was promised to be "an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14).

Some texts speak of "my servant David" or simply of "David" meaning the greater descendant of "David," or Christ. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of this greater son of David in Jeremiah 23:5, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness." Also the prophet Ezekiel: "And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them" (Ezek. 37:24).

The government of Christ will include the "saints" — "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" (Dan. 7:27) and the man David will be among those saints. Not only Christ, the descendant of David, but the original King David will reign with his Master Christ.

We are even told the location of that future government or throne of David in Isaiah 2:3. "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The same prophecy is recorded by Micah (4:2).

Jesus, in Matt. 5:34-35, also gives the location of His throne, "But I say unto you, Swear not at all . . . neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King."

King David's temporal throne was located at Jerusalem. The throne of Christ (the greater David or descendant of King David) will also be at Jerusalem, though Jerusalem then will be a vastly different city. We are told in Zechariah 14:4 that the present location of the city of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives will be the scene of a great earthquake which will change the contour of the land, forming a great valley, in which will be located the new city.

## • Concerning the Mark of the Beast

*"I read in a religious magazine that in the near future every individual will be given a number, something similar to our Social Security number, and the way I take it, it would be the mark of the beast, and no one could buy nor sell without the number. This probably would be done by the antichrist. What is your opinion? How would one escape this thing since we would be forced to receive the number?"*

Study of the Scriptures indicates that the work of the antichrist was accomplished during the centuries following the Apostolic Age. We do not see sufficient Scriptural backing for the current belief that an antichrist will develop in the near future instigating a "time

of trouble" which will precede the great time of trouble to accompany Christ's return from heaven. It is *after* Christ's coming that the Battle of Armageddon will be fought (Revelation 16), and a time of trouble will develop, a time "such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time . . ." (Dan. 12:1).

The text about the mark of the beast occurs in Rev. 13:16-17, and reads: "And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

First let us identify the "beast." Of whom is the beast composed, and what is his mark or character?

In Daniel 7 the Prophet represents four world empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, by four beasts. Out of Rome, this fourth beast, should arise a power which would wear out the saints of God, and change His times and laws (Dan. 7:25 and 8:12). We read again of this "beast" in Revelation 17, a beast with seven heads and ten horns. This power, we are told, would make all nations drunk on her false, pagan doctrines.

In this figurative illustration a woman is represented sitting upon the beast. Upon the forehead of the woman is written: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" (Rev. 17:5). Babylon means "confusion"; all the false doctrines are written on the forehead of this woman, who has made all nations drunk. Unlike the saints who stand with Christ, she does not have the Word of God written in her mind. Instead, her mind is filled with evil and iniquity and false doctrine.

To subscribe to any false doctrine is to have the mark of the beast.

In Rev. 17:9 we read: "Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth." And in verse 18 we are told: "the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." The Papal power, seated in Rome, the city built on seven hills, is admittedly the world's leading ecclesiastical power.

Now this "beast" or antichrist, is to cause all, "both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: . . . that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast." To subscribe to any false doctrine is to have the mark of the beast. He who really believes false doctrines has the mark in his forehead; but if he merely assents because others believe them and it is policy to do so, then the mark is said to be in his hand.

In contrast to this mark, the faithful who will stand with Christ upon Mount Zion have the "Father's name written in their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1). They obliterate the mark of the beast by writing God's Word in their minds and forsaking all error.

The Revelator indicates a time when Roman monopoly would be so tight that no man might "buy or sell" save he that had the mark of the beast. The entire passage being figurative, this can have no reference to literal merchandising but more possibly applies to the trafficking in men's souls. By the most apt of illustrations, in Revelation 18 those who promulgate false doctrines are classified as "merchants." Always truth is free, "without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1-3); ministers of the true gospel accept no salary for their services (II Cor. 11:9; I Thess. 2:9). But these merchants of Babylon "teach for hire" and "divine for money" (Mic. 3:11); good pews are costly; indulgences to sin are bought with a price.

During the Dark Ages all religious "merchandising" was controlled by the bishops of the church so that no man might "buy or sell" any doctrine which did not bear the mark of the beast. As the historian states, they fashioned dogmatic creeds and catechisms and forced men and women—under torture and many times threat of death—to subscribe to them. If any felt impelled to proclaim any religious doctrine, he had to do so according to the dictates and discipline of the ruling church; many were cruelly tortured and others put to death because they dared declare anything in opposition to the man-made creeds.

We feel confident that our present—or coming—civil monetary system has no connection with the Bible prophecy.

MM

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## The Inevitable

*I like the man who faces what he must  
With step triumphant and a heart of cheer;  
Who fights the daily battle without fear;  
Sees his hopes fail, yet keeps unfaltering trust  
That God is God, that somehow, true and just  
His plans work out for mortals; not a tear  
Is shed when fortune, which the world holds dear,  
Falls from his grasp—better, with love, a crust  
Than loving in dishonor; envies not,  
Nor loses faith in God; but does his best,  
Nor ever murmurs at his humbler lot;  
But, with a smile and words of hope, gives zest  
To every toiler, he alone is great  
Who by a life heroic conquers fate.*

—Selected

**Habit-Making**

I have been fighting the good fight. I take a single day at a time and I am convinced that anyone can overcome if he tries and keeps trying. I was rereading the article "When Hatred Isn't Enough." It is one thing to be disgusted with yourself and rant and rave and condemn yourself and browbeat yourself, but it takes a man to turn around and stop doing those things he knows are wrong. It is awkward at first, like learning to do something new, but as you repeat the operation it becomes less awkward and a part of your life style: a good habit.

I must live my life with courage and the conviction that the promises of the Father are real. I can't be totally committed to the Lord and have a piece reserved for myself. If my will prevails for even the least, then I am not truly dedicated and will be rejected as unfit. The effort must be sincere and complete.

*Louisiana*

D. K.

**Watch!**

The great day of the Lord is drawing near, and will soon be a reality. Are we always on our watchtower, or will we be caught unawares? Let us watch lest we be found asleep and caught off guard.

We can read, study, meditate, and count our many blessings. And we can ask the Lord to help us to resist all temptations and endure the trials that come to us.

We must keep a steady pace towards the Kingdom, and keep first things first, and hold fast to the end lest we make a slip and be found wanting.

*Kansas*

W. R.

**For Our Benefit**

All too quickly passes the time of our sojourning here. How are we using the time granted us? Mercifully the Lord is still stretching the shades of evening for our benefit.

Surely we have much to feed on, to keep the new man in good repair every day. We have a wonderful God; our faith in Him should never slacken or grow dim. If we are with Him, He will certainly be with us. Whatever of good or ill He in His wisdom sends, we can trust His hand is behind it all to lead and direct.

The world conditions are not getting better but worse. Man's misrule and negligence can be seen in every department of this present world. It speaks to us that we had better hurry, get right with God, lest we be found ashamed to meet our Lord.

I've been thinking how so many people attend the church of their choosing so regularly, yet are not sure whether they will get to heaven or not. We have a hope that is sure and certain. If we keep all the commandments of God, become spotlessly pure and clean, we can be sure of "an abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord."

*New Jersey*

L. K.

**Grateful**

I enjoy sitting on my front porch early in the morning and meditating on the Word of God and the things that He has prepared for them that love Him.

I thank God for all that I have and that I live in a land where we can worship God.

*West Virginia*

W. W.

**Take Time**

We must take time to be holy and draw close to God. If we do not read and meditate daily on His Word, how can we expect to call Him "Father"? We can find time for everything else we have to do to make our lives comfortable. We can and must find time for God, too. And we must put Him first and foremost in our lives above everything else. If we do not, we will never hear those welcome words, "Well done, enter into your rest."

Time is only 24 hours long each day. The time we spend with God takes only a small fraction of it. Most of it is spent sleeping, working and eating. Let us spend more time with Him than we do with anyone or anything else. We will be amply rewarded in closer fellowship with God.

*Ohio*

M. W.

**Grateful**

Thank the good Lord who giveth us all things to enjoy. We have so much to be thankful for. The good Lord has abundantly blessed us with more than we are worthy of.

We have been listening to the cassette sermons; they point us to the end of the age, which we know is very near. These tapes are wonderful; they remind us of the nearness of the time. We must take heed, as Hebrews 2:1 tells us. We are a privileged people, our blessings cannot be numbered.

What a wonderful day when all sickness, sorrow, and death are a thing of the past when, as Isaiah the prophet said, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick."

*Newfoundland*

G. W.

## Which Is Second?

A thoughtful doctor was probing the life goals of his patient. Handing him eight pieces of paper, he told him to write on each, something that was very important to him. That done, he asked the patient to arrange them in order of importance. The man found he had no trouble writing down eight things that were important in his life, but arranging them in order proved very difficult—in fact, all but impossible.

Establishing our priorities is certainly one of the most difficult decisions we must make in life. Not only what comes first is important, but what we consider second, third, fourth, and so on. The order of importance we set determines pretty much the whole direction of our lives.

High on the list of the average young person today might be what he or she considers a good education, to prepare for a life career. Second might be success in that career. Everyone wants to be successful in what they undertake. Third might be that sometimes illusory thing called “happiness.” Next might come money. Whether we like to think of it or not, our present existence is quite dependent on having available a certain amount of money. Then, in the places remaining, might be some items like leisure, possessions, and so on and on.

But—what is wrong with such an order?

The Christian reading this should observe one obvious lack: God is left out. If our goals are all in this world, then the resources of this world are enough to satisfy our need. But if we have set our goals beyond this world, if we are seeking that which is eternal, that which only God can give, then it follows that He must be first priority in our lives. When the Pharisees asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment of the law, He answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37).

In determining our life’s goals, what we put first is of primary importance. If we are serving God, then God must be first in our priorities. What He says, or does, or commands, or offers, must be above every other word, or deed, or order, or promise in the world.

This means that we will honor Him with all our love and devotion. Obeying Him will be to us more important than anything else we do.

Placing His interests first, above everything else in this life, might seem to make all the rest of our decisions easy. But practical experience teaches otherwise. When we have established that God is first in our lives, we still have many questions unanswered in the matter of our life’s priorities; because when God is first, it follows that He must approve what comes second . . . and third . . . and so on.

Many simplistic answers may be given, but none is sufficient.

The whole point is this: If we put the wrong things second, and third, and fourth, we are not truly putting God *first*. For if He is first, He must be leading, guiding, directing, overseeing all other aspects of our lives. Without this, we cannot truly succeed in any other endeavor.

The secret of the properly ordered life was disclosed by the great apostle Paul when he wrote, “Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God’s mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart. Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect” (Rom. 12:1-2, NEB).

If we follow this advice, our formula will be simple: God and His Kingdom first; *everything else*, second. MM

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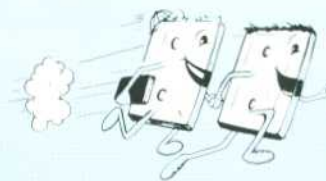
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