



# Megiddo Message

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*When We All Get Together*



# Think

## ON THY WAY

**N**one of us like to think that we do not think. But perhaps we do not think *enough*.

There is no escaping the fact that we could make better decisions and better judgments if we thought *more*. The Lord requires that we discern between good and evil, and discernment requires thought, observation, and careful judgment. It is so easy to be prejudiced, or opinionated, or just plain wrong—not to mention the possibility of being deceived.

In some areas of the Christian life, likenesses and differences are difficult to distinguish but we are often hard pressed to escape deception. Wrong can seem so pitiable, and right so stark and unadorned.

But we cannot afford to be on the side of wrong even if all the world stands against us. God's thoughts *must* be our thoughts, and His opinions *must* be ours, even if it costs us our popularity, or our station, or our good name among others. What will it matter in the day of Christ if ten thousand stood against us, if only we are found on the side of God and right?

Perhaps the greatest danger threatening us is that of calling evil good and good evil—because evil is so well disguised. Wherever we go, error and truth travel the same highways, work in the same fields and factories, fly on the same jets, and shop in the same stores. So skilled is error at imitating truth that the two are constantly being mistaken for each other. It takes a sharp eye to know who is Cain, and who is Abel. Not being able to read the heart, we can only judge by fruits, which may or may not tell the whole story.

We must be superwatchful of the patterns we copy. We must never take for granted anything that touches our soul's welfare. We can never know of a certainty what course another will take—it is hard enough to read our *own* hearts! David could not know of a surety what would be the course of his son Solomon. But he could take charge of his own life; he knew what he should do, and he could dictate the course of his actions when he fell into sin; he could bring himself to repent and reform—and he did.

But deception is so easy. Even the disciples, on the night of the last supper did not know who was the traitor among them; the only one who knew was Judas himself. The soft-spoken companion who smiles so pleasantly may prove untrue; whereas the rough, plain spoken one whom we would rather shun might be God's very prophet sent to warn us against eternal loss.

It is therefore critically important that we take full advantage of every provision God has made to save us from delusion. Among these are prayer, faith, meditation, obedience, and—last but not least—hard, serious thought.

*Prayer* is not a sure protection against delusion, for there are many kinds of prayers, most of them worse than useless. The only prayer of consequence is that which is according to the will of God. Said the apostle John, "If we ask anything according to his will" (John 5:14). In other words, if we do not ask according to His will He does not hear. This rules out all prayers made from selfish motives, all prayers offered in ignorance, all prayers issuing from impenitent hearts which are not seeking God as He wishes to be sought. The prophets of Baal leaped upon the altar in a frenzy of prayer, but their prayers went unregarded because they prayed to a god that did not exist. The Pharisees prayed, but God refused to hear them because of their self-righteousness and pride. Here is a lesson in reverse, a lesson of what *not* to do.

Yet, prayer may be a powerful and effective way to get right and stay right. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). All else being equal, the one who prays is much less likely to go wrong than the one who neglects to pray.

*Faith* is another defense against deception. The apostle Paul called faith a shield, implying that it is a protection against attack. The one whose faith is strong does not fear the comments, taunts, or sneers of unbelievers. The one who is strong in faith can walk at ease, protected by his simple faith in God. For whatever comes he knows God will

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

## Soon-coming events ...

### The Herald and the KING

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

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

The Bible pictures all events, all men and all nations moving together toward this one God-ordained climax, when "the kingdoms of this world" will become "the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15), a kingdom in which all who live will enjoy the blessings of peace, equity and prosperity. When the task is complete, our earth shall be numbered among the heavenly, glorified worlds and filled with immortal inhabitants, bringing to reality the promise of our Lord in His prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

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# When We All Get Together

*The great God has a great purpose in His creative work toward which all history and all events are moving.*

The apostle Paul was a great thinker, a great achiever, a great believer, and a great follower. And he was also one who could not be confined by his surroundings. He was a man of great vision, a vision that reached far into the future. Since he met Jesus on the Damascan Road, he had been captured by a great faith, and life could never be the same again. What happened with the politics in Rome, or anywhere else mattered not at all. His whole concern was how he could serve his new master,

how he could be counted worthy of his high and holy calling, and how he could help and encourage the members of his family in the faith. For Paul was not one to be selfish, or go alone. The great insights which he had into the plan of God were his to share with fellow believers. The deepest desire of his heart was that his brethren might be able to comprehend *"with all the saints what is the depth, and height, and breadth"* of the wonderful wisdom of God.

As he writes to the Ephesian brethren he is caught up almost immediately in a paean of praise and thanksgiving. *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints that are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph. 1:1-2). His cup of brotherly love is full and overflowing. And notice that he writes through *"the will of God"*—his Divine commission was never far from the Apostle's thoughts. His thoughts were not mere whims or idle wishes. He had not run without being sent. He spoke with the authority of God.

## **Greater Than All: Spiritual Blessings**

As Paul muses on the fathomless depths of God's goodness, he is anxious to be moving full speed ahead. And so he writes: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"* (1:3).

How quickly he moves from *"We bless the Lord"* to *"He blesses us"*—and in a sublimer sense, for we all exist by His goodness. All of us enjoy the blessings of life through God's munificence.



But in Paul's mind, the spiritual blessings crown all. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings."* The blessings that count most are those they share together in Christ. Social status, popularity, honors of this world matter not at all in the Divine scheme. And notice, too, that Paul says these blessings are *"in heavenly places"* and they are *"in Christ."* Here Paul strikes the keynote of his Epistles. The believers are one family in Christ. Together they share the fellowship of the saints in Christ. Together they are one with the saints in all ages past, present and future. What a glorious company!

### Heavenly Company

Was Paul lonely with such thoughts coursing through his mind—even though he was at that moment in prison? Far from it! His active mind was far, far from his surroundings. He was looking back and ahead, thinking about the big family of believers, all his brothers and sisters in Christ, thousands of known and unknown men and women who in their day kept—were keeping, or would keep—the faith, and serve in the great cause.

Paul was thinking, too, about the rich spiritual heritage they all shared together in Christ. Of course there were physical blessings; but most important were their spiritual blessings in Christ. We have one lively hope, and respect one authority. We have one God, one Lord, one faith, one joy, one ecstasy, one glory, one promise, one purpose, one task, one love, one loyalty. Together we rejoice, together we suffer, together we sorrow, together we fight, and together we may share the glories of the age to come. Does anyone wonder that we feel bound together by an unbreakable bond of unity? Can we not sing from the heart, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love"? And are we not duty bound to help each

other, to stimulate and encourage one another?

We are inheritors of blessings beyond measure, "spiritual blessings in heavenly places." Yes, the Divine truths can only be fathomed in "heavenly places," in minds that dwell on a plain above the soot and smog of this dark world. The depth and breadth of Divine truths can be appreciated only from that height to which faith is privileged to soar, that altitude where the orbit of eternity touches the horizon of time. Mountaintops have long been used to typify spiritual enlightenment, noble thinking, and communion with God. But in Paul's mind, even mountaintops were not sufficient; his noble mind yearned for the "heavenlies."

### Seeing, By Faith

Does such ecstasy seem out of reach to us? Then let us set to work at once reinforcing our faith. Let us go over and over again and again the evidence upon which we stand. We have not believed a lie. We are not blind followers in the dark. Our faith stands as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. Our confidence is as sure as the existence of Him who could say, *"As truly as I live..."* We, too, can endure *"as seeing him who is invisible."* We, too, like the saints of old, can be persuaded of that which is yet future. We, too, can enjoy moments of heaven on earth. We, too, can taste the glory to come. We, too, can get a glimpse beyond the veil, a breath of immortal air, if we envelop ourselves in the breadth and depth of Paul's thoughts, and follow him as he followed Christ.

Oh, how vigilantly we should be working to keep our minds thinking above our environment, above the humdrum tasks of every day, above the pains and troubles that distress us, above the low and self-seeking atmosphere that surrounds us. How carefully we should watch what we

look at, what we listen to, what we let into our minds and hearts. If Paul could do it, so can we. We do not want to be swept away with the present cosmos; so why should we let our minds be occupied with their low goals, their interests, loves and lusts?

From Paul's exalted heavenly vantage point he proceeds to cast a rapid glance over the chief landmarks in the Divine panorama. First, he singles out election, that Divine right of choosing which is to us unfathomable. As someone has said, God has not chosen to give us the key to His secret cabinets. Even so, He has revealed His plan. The great

*The coming great gathering of the faithful will be a gathering for judgment, glory and the bestowment of eternal blessings!*

God has a great purpose enshrouded in His creative work, and toward that one great purpose everything about us is moving. The Apostle writes: *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love"* (1:4).

### The Standard "Foreordained"

Is Paul saying that our position is guaranteed because we were chosen *"before the foundation of the world"*? Not at all. Rather, what was fixed from the foundation of the world was the standard that we must reach: *"that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."*

Here, says Paul, is the purpose of God. *"Having predestinated [foreordained] us unto the adoption of*



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*children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved"* (Eph. 1:5-6). Foreordination, or foreknowledge, is one of the prerogatives of God, He who knows the end from the beginning. But never does He interfere with free moral agency. Never does He overrule the human spirit that is free to obey or disobey. The lock on the human will is never forced, but only revealed to be open or closed. We do our Father's will, or refuse to do it, of

*The lock on the human will is never forced, but only revealed to be open or closed. We do our Father's will, or refuse to do it, of our own volition.*

our own volition.

God's pre-ordained purpose is His plan of adoption. We are not naturally His children. To be adopted into His family we must meet certain criteria. Paul borrowed the metaphor of adoption from Roman law, with which he was most familiar. It was not uncommon for a prestigious Roman family, for example, to adopt a child and give that child all the benefits of one born in the house. So we may be adopted into the family of God, with full rights of heirship and bear the Father's name. But there are qualifications to be met: we must be children such as He wishes to own. Here is the high goal of the human race, that of becoming "sons of God," stamped with the image of His eternal Son,

made co-heirs with the Son of God Himself and able with Him to breathe the heartfelt cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15).

Think what this means!—a fellowship of saints, brothers and sisters in Christ, and all children of the Eternal God! What an incentive to rise to the heights of His holiness, to crucify every fleshly tendency, and become like Christ in thought and word and feeling!

Paul talks of the gifts which God has "freely bestowed on us in the beloved," or as he said earlier, "in Christ." Here is the distinguishing mark of God's goodness to us. The Father loves the Son, and has given the Son power to bless whom He chooses. The Son chooses, by the Father's standards, those who are upright, pure, free from any defilement of sin; these, by virtue of a righteous character, become objects of the Father's love, heirs with all whose names are in the "book of life."

The Most High is glorious in holiness. But just as He loves and blesses the righteous, so must He act with fiery indignation against sin, that deadliest affront to Divine purity. If the Sovereign Lord is to be Sovereign right, He must punish sin, or else deny Himself; for the scales of Divine justice are never sliding scales. In His eyes, right is right, and wrong is never right.

The law of God is absolute. There can be no back talk, no second guessing, no reconsideration. His decree is beyond challenge. Here is triumphant proof that ours is not a ramshackle universe but a cosmos presided over by a Supreme Governor, One whose love is not grudging but cordial, abundant, inexhaustible.

### The Grand Climax

Paul says further: "*Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in*

*himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ"* (1:8-10).

Here is the climax of the ages: the coming great gathering of the faithful—gathering for judgment, glory and the bestowment of eternal blessings! Here is the Day when the great God will dispense His wealth to all His faithful children. This sublime spectacle draws from the Apostle an impassioned doxology. The plan has been in process for nearly six thousand years, and now its fulfillment is right upon us. Divine wisdom can be seen in the ordering and overruling of events, in the perfect timing of the various dispensations of Divine knowledge and the guiding of individual lives and histories through the ages, with one purpose: to bring all believers together in Christ.

Here is the overarching plan for this planet. God never forgets His purposes, though He executes them in His own way and time. "*In the dispensation of the fulness of time*," we read. "*In the fulness of time*" God sent His Son, thus beginning the consummation of His long-range plan. And in the fulness of time God will complete what He has begun.

Paul was optimistic, sure and certain in his forward look. A great gathering was coming, when God would "*gather together in one all things in Christ*." And Paul wanted above all else to be part of that gathering.

Now, nineteen centuries later, the time of that gathering is right upon us. Are we ready for it?

Let us think more about that phrase: "*In the dispensation of the fulness of times*..." What might we conclude from this? The text reads in the Revised Standard Bible, "*For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a*

*(Continued on page 8)*



# The K I N G D O M of G O D

When the thrones of monarchs tumble into ruin and decay,  
And the scepters that they wielded are forever put away;  
When the noise of sabers clashing, and the dreaded cannon's roar  
With the call, "To arms!" are silenced, to reverberate no more;  
When the automatic rifles, and all instruments that kill  
Are converted into plowshares, made to cultivate and till;  
When proud Babylon has fallen, to be trampled in the sod,  
There shall rise upon the ruins the eternal house of God.

When the grasping tax collector has his last collection made,  
And the memory of his letters has at last begun to fade;  
When the strife that now exists between employer and employed  
Has been ended, and the fruits of labor are by all enjoyed;  
When the gangster and his cohorts have been banished from the earth,  
And the fear that preys on mortals almost from the day of birth  
Has been changed to joy and gladness; when men sing with one accord;  
Then, my friend, you will be living in the Kingdom of the Lord.

When the surgeon lays his scalpel down, because there is no need  
For his operating technique, his consummate skill and speed;  
When the doctor leaves his pill-bag there, to molder in the dust,  
For the reason that his services no longer are a "must";  
When the jails and penitentiaries their doors have opened wide,  
And the guests of state and county shall no more within abide,  
It is evident there's been a drastic change through all the world,  
That the Word of God is now the banner o'er the earth unfurled.

God has promised He would send His Son to sit on David's throne—  
To rebuild again Jerusalem, and make His mandates known.  
In that day He'll stand upon the mount of Olives, in the East,  
And each living soul shall know Him, from the greatest to the least.  
He will bring to pass the promise, "God shall wipe away all tears;  
There shall be no pain, no death, or sorrow, through successive years."  
But the ones who wait upon the Lord shall have their strength renewed;  
"They shall run, and not be weary," with fresh vigor be endued.

In the Kingdom of the Saviour shall the faithful be set down  
To the King's own marriage supper, being men of great renown.  
Whether they be Jew or Gentile, white, or colored, matters not;  
They have washed their robes of character, removing every spot.  
And it matters not if they were rich, or counted very poor,  
They were humble, meek, and lowly, which by God is counted more.  
They have donned the wedding garment, having purified from sin,  
And with Christ shall reign forever—a new era shall begin.

Then the subjects—favored nation—shall in peace and plenty live,  
Till a thousand years are ended; their account they then must give  
At the second resurrection—then the worthy ones will sit  
At the Master's second table, and resent it not a whit.  
They'll enjoy a feast of fat things, with their Elder Brother share  
Life eternal in the Kingdom, with rejoicing everywhere.  
Then comes "peace, good will" forever, as Jehovah long has willed,  
As with "Israel, my glory" all the earth at last is filled.



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*plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him." Or as phrased in the New English Bible "to be put into effect when the time was ripe." Over the ages, God has been working with the human family with but one purpose in view: to select and fit a people for perpetuation, and ultimately to fit the earth for their eternal abode. This purpose was foreshown in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." This accomplished, things in earth and things in heaven will be united*

*"In the fulness of time" God sent His Son, thus beginning His work among men. And in the fulness of time God will complete what He has begun.*

in Him, earth will be annexed to heaven, and heaven will extend its gates to take in the earth (Eph. 3:14-15).

The fact that God is silent today is no sign that He is not working. Fulfilled and fulfilling prophecies are shouting that the time is at hand. The Day will shortly arrive when Christ will reckon with His servants. Paul anticipated this time of reckoning when he wrote, *"The hour of reckoning has still to come, when the Lord will come to bring dark secrets to the light, and to reveal life's inner aims and motives"* (I Cor. 4:5, Moffatt). We cannot fool God. Whatever we have sown we shall reap, and the harvest will be either unspeakable joy or desperate sorrow. But it will be just as we have sown.

The day of the dispensing of the

rewards is mentioned often in Scripture. Jesus spoke of it in His Parable of the Laborers, where He indicated that at the close of salvation's day He would return to reckon with His servants, those who had agreed to serve Him. Again in His Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25), Jesus revealed that *"after a long time"* He would reckon with them, as His own servants.

The servants of God have lived during many centuries of history. At the beginning, God allotted six days to accomplish the first phase of His work, *"one day"* being *"with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"* (II Pet. 3:8). Following this plan, we have a period of 6,000 years. At the end of this time will come the great ingathering, at the consummation of the ages.

At present, many of those who will be at that gathering are asleep. Righteous Abel, the first faithful one spoken of in a long list enumerated in Hebrews 11, is now sleeping. Abraham, the father of the faithful, is lying cold and silent. But when the time is fully ripe, these who have died in faith will be awakened and gathered together in one grand company.

## Dispensations Past

Let us look at a few of the dispensations that will be represented in that grand assembly.

✠ *Noah's Dispensation.* We read that Noah was *"a preacher of righteousness"* (II Pet. 2:5), and that he *"being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith"* (Heb. 11:7). Picture Noah preaching year after year, year after year to hardhearted, cold, unbelieving

neighbors and passersby. Imagine this going on for 100 years, while he kept building steadily on the ark. It was not easy, to hear their taunts and sneers. But when the heavens grew dark, and the pealing thunders rolled, and the lightning flashed, and the earth quaked, then they knew that Noah had been right. And what was the message of Jesus? *"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man"* (Luke 17:26).

We need not be caught in that great destruction. We have been warned. A merciful and loving God who inhabits eternity has told us what to do. We can escape—if we act now.

✠ *Moses' Dispensation.* The time of Moses was another dispensation of the law of God. Great Hebrew statesman, lawgiver and leader of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to independent nationhood in Canaan, Moses was one of God's great men.

Moses dispensed the knowledge of God to a very stubborn and rebellious people at the time of the departure of Israel from Egypt. He also was obliged to dispense secular justice in the many trying situations that arose with such a large body of people huddled in one huge camp. His was an enormous assignment, and when the Day of Ingathering arrives, he will surely have some to show for his efforts, some faithful servants to present to God.

The dispensation that followed Moses' leadership was the era of the Judges of Israel. Some outstanding leaders were developed during that time, and while the record of the behavior of Israel during those 400-odd years was not glorious, the era had its bright moments. It produced some great leaders, and through them some drastic reforms were accomplished. Among the great ones of this dispensation are such familiar names as Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samuel. Surely the final



gathering together of the people of God will include a faithful remnant from the period of the Judges.

☒ *The Dispensation of the Kings.* The nearly 500 years of the existence of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were a dispensation that would certainly have produced good material for God's coming Kingdom on earth. Take, for example, the days of David, second in the succession of Israelite kings. David was a great leader, also a great follower. While he had some shameful weaknesses, he also possessed some remarkable virtues. He had great reverence for God, and kept himself humble and approachable even when filling a high office.

The warmth and spirituality that accompanied David's prayer of thanksgiving at the time he offered materials for the building of the temple, near the close of his life, shows the type of character he had developed, also the kind of leadership he had provided. And the hearty response of the people shows the quality of some among his followers. His was a dispensation long to be remembered. It was spoken of again and again in the New as well as in the Old Testament, and surely provided some faithful ones for God's true Church, for the Day of the great Ingathering, when all things are gathered together in Christ.

The early years of Solomon's reign should have produced some finished material for God's Kingdom, and we can rest assured that some among the people remained true to their God even after their king and spiritual leader apostatized.

The history of the kingdom of Israel is a record of perpetual backsliding, but even during those years of disloyalty there must have been a faithful remnant who were loyal to God. Some from this period will be present at the great Ingathering when the dispensation of the ful-

ness of time has come and all God's worthy children are gathered together.

☒ *The Captivity.* Even the captivity in Babylon was a dispensation in the plan of God, and produced some men and women of high quality, perhaps more than would have been produced during a period of peace and tranquillity. Here is a timely lesson for us: We do not have to have the best of conditions to be able to build worthy characters. Christians live above their environment.

Among the bright stars of this period was Daniel. His lot was cast right among the worst elements of infamous Babylon, right in the king's court; yet he kept himself undefiled, even meriting this high commendation from the angel Gabriel: "Ob, Daniel, thou art greatly beloved." Daniel's three companions are also names written high on the Lord's honor roll. And certainly they must have had friends and followers, a few who fitted themselves for an eternal place in God's heavenly Kingdom upon earth.

The prophet Ezekiel was a product of these years. A priest without a temple, he served faithfully, even when his people were forced to live on foreign soil.

And we should not forget those of the *dispensation of restoration*: Ezra the scribe, Nehemiah the astute leader, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah. All of these were the product of the years immediately following the captivity. And doubtless there are others from those critical years who will be part of the august assembly when the winners of the different dispensations are gathered in.

☒ *The Interim.* Were it not for one glimpse given us in Luke's Gospel, we would have no assurance that any were living the holy life during

the 400-odd years from the close of the Old Testament record until the birth of Christ. But from Luke's report, we know that there were. The report reads: "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:5-6). And doubtless there were others. When the Lord needed one to be the mother of the Messiah, He found her, and others near of kin.

*We have not believed a lie.  
We are not blind followers in  
the dark. Our faith stands as  
solid as the Rock of Gibraltar.*

Christ's ministry was unique. Never man spake as He spake. Everywhere He went He was revealing God's plan. There was to be a Kingdom, and He Himself was to be the King.

Jesus had an entirely different way of working. His personal demonstration of the God-life among the people of His time was beyond anything they had ever seen. His hearers were impressed as no other people had ever been impressed.

☒ *The Apostolic Dispensation.* During the Apostolic period, much notable work was accomplished for the cause of God. The scope of Christ's true Church was expanded during this period from the mere 120 who waited in expectancy for the Holy Spirit on the first Pente-



## When We All Get Together

cost, until in obedience to Jesus' command His disciples preached the Gospel everywhere, reaching all parts of the then-known world, even to some of the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire.

Perhaps no dispensation was richer in endowments and in the exposition of the knowledge of God than was the Apostolic Age. And no man was more forward in promoting this excellent dispensation than the great apostle Paul himself. During this dispensation, the "door of faith" was officially

*The coming great gathering of the faithful will be a gathering for judgment, glory and the dispensing of eternal blessings!*

opened to the Gentiles, though in no age had God barred those outside His chosen family. When Jesus appeared to Paul placing him in the ministry, He gave him a special assignment: *"I have appeared unto thee for this purpose,"* He said, *"to make thee a minister and a witness...delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light"* (Acts 26:16-18).

✠ *The Apostolic period* saw some unhappy events as well, among them the end of the Jewish Age. This great change was signaled by the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews. The people of that era experienced the termination and

withdrawal of the power of the Holy Spirit, by the help of which they had been able to make such phenomenal progress in spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom. Believers of that age must have felt keenly the loss of such invaluable assistance. But it was part of the plan, and we can be sure that many great characters were developed in spite of it.

✠ *The Apostasy:* Then followed the early days of the Apostasy. In keeping with the Divine forecast, deceivers crept in, men and women not satisfied with the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ.

These individuals fashioned religion after their own liking, and gradually turned away all teachers of the faith from the truth to fables, until at last the Apostasy became all inclusive and darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.

✠ *Our Dispensation.* This brings us to our own day and time, the short period following the long dark night of 1260 years in which no one listened to the Word of God. During this time, as foretold by Daniel, one would arise on this side of the river of time, one who had the courage to stand up and herald forth the Word of life.

We have heard the midnight cry, and a few have been awakened and are earnestly preparing themselves for the great Day of Ingathering which is now so near. A new dispensing of the grace of God has been given especially for us, and we should be strong in this grace. We, who are living so close to the culmination, have in our possession the full written Word of God, all the exalted principles taught by our Lord, the means by which we may become pure and holy and free from all moral

imperfections through the *"washing of water by the word"* (Eph. 5:26).

## The Grand Consummation

In Revelation 14 we are given a brief preview of the consummation of the age, the time when the great wedding feast, the marriage of the Lamb will be spread. John said, "I looked." He looked with eagerness as the angel pointed out the Lamb, the central figure of the grand panorama, standing on mount Zion, and He was not standing there alone; with him were *"an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads"* (Rev. 14:1).

Not only were they standing on mount Zion with the Father's name in their foreheads, but we read further of their super-achievement: *"And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God"* (v. 5). They had all attained that ultimate standard of holiness, to be able to stand faultless before the throne of Christ (Jude 24-25).

As John saw them, they all had harps in their hands, and were harping and singing as they harped. And what were they singing? *"And they sang as it were a new song...and no man could learn that song but the hundred forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth."*

Soon, very soon, these things will be a reality. Shall we be one of the few who will be ready? or will we be one of the masses who go on unbelieving until they are forced to see?

God has given us our choice. We can either believe or reject these things. We can either go in the narrow way with the few, or in the broad way with the masses to destruction.

May God help us to make the wise choice! □



*Dear God, as I begin this day  
Let me turn my thoughts to You,  
And ask Your help in guiding me  
In everything I say and do.*

*Give me the Patience that I need  
To keep my peace of mind.  
And with life's cares, I hope, dear God,  
Some happiness to find.*

*Let me live but for today,  
Not worrying what's ahead,  
For I have trust that You will see  
I get my "Daily Bread."*

*Give me courage to face life's trials  
And not from troubles run,  
Let me keep this thought in mind,  
"Thy Will", not "Mine", be done.*

*And if some wish I do not get  
Though I have prayed to Thee,  
Help me believe and understand  
You know what's best for me.*

*I've failed You many times, I know,  
But when tonight I rest,  
I hope that I can kneel and say,  
"Dear God, I've tried my best."*

*A great deal of what we see depends on what we  
are looking for.*

*Feeding your conscience with excuses is like giving  
sleeping pills to your watchdog.*

*A Bible in the hand is worth two in the bookcase.*

*One of the greatest mistakes we make is to think  
that if we could just solve some particular problem  
or change the outward circumstances of our lives, we  
would be happy. That is not true. The place to change  
is within ourselves.*

*If you don't enjoy what you have, how could you  
be happier with more?*

*Watch your attitude toward the thing that troubles  
you! Your attitude may hurt you more than the thing.*

*A living church is one that remembers the past,  
lives in the present, and works for the future!*

*Worry is praying to the wrong God.*

## WHERE ARE YOUR KEYS?

A man once told of hearing that his pastor-friend had lost his keys. It was his custom before going to his study each day to pause at an altar in his church and offer a prayer to God. On this particular morning he laid down his keys as he stopped to pray. When he reached his study, he realized he had left his keys behind—and a lesson struck him. "Roy," the man said to himself, "can't you see what the Lord is trying to tell you? That is just where the keys to your life belong—on the altar."

Where are your keys—and mine? Have we left them at the altar? Is our life in all its activities, in all its duties, in all its relationships, fully committed to God? Does He have the right to enter any part, any corner, any area—any time?

This is a good question for all of us to face. Does God have all the keys on the ring—our families, our homes, our Church, our job, our car, our financial records, our promises—are all on the altar? Are we ready to say—and mean—at every turn and junction of our life, "Thy will, not mine, be done"?

In a study of the growth in power of certain news media, an author showed how news is not simply reported—it is invented, managed, interpreted, edit-

ed, even omitted. The determining factor is not "truth" but ratings and profit. Everyone and everything is evaluated by one criterion: How will this bit of news affect ratings? Personal careers and national interests are being sacrificed to the god of Mammon.

For the committed Christian, there is only one criterion by which anything can be judged, and that is the law of God. Everything stands or falls by its compliance with that law. Anything which opposes that law is evil, for God is holy. Anything which opposes that law is foolish, for God is wise. Anything which opposes that law is destructive, for God is life. No price is too high to pay for bringing our wills into alignment with the will of God. No prize can be worth the cost of disobedience.

Where are your keys? Are they all on the altar? Is Jesus—His law, His truth, His example—the rule and guide of your life? Does He possess and control everything you do, everywhere you go, every conversation or activity you engage?

Complete consecration is not a few moments—or even hours—spent in church or in prayer. It is a moment-by-moment turning over our lives to the direction of God, until all our keys are on the altar. □



# Sanctified... How?

*"Sanctify  
them through  
thy truth: thy  
word is truth....  
And for their  
sakes I sanctify  
myself, that they  
also might be  
sanctified  
through the  
truth"*

*—John 17:17, 19*

These are among the words our Lord spoke in His high priestly prayer that night in the upper room before going to Gethsemane. He was thinking of the greatest issues of life; here He spoke of sanctification.

As is well known, the meaning of "sanctify" is to "make holy," or "separate," "set apart for special use." As Jesus uses the word here, it describes a very singular work—it is a process in which God assists; again, it is something that each individual must do for himself. "Sanctify them," Jesus prayed to His Father. How? *"Through thy truth."* Again He said, *"I sanctify myself."* It is a work, then, that must be done together—God working with us, we working with God; and all following the example set by Christ who could say, *"For their sakes I sanctify myself."* God set Jesus apart for His special use, to be separate and holy; at the same time Jesus was sanctifying Himself that He might be able to present to His Father a perfect, clean, holy vessel *"sanctified and meet for"* His Father's use. In the same way it was of utmost importance that Jesus' disciples become holy, the holy messengers of a holy Master.

What again, is the reason Jesus gives here for sanctifying Himself? It is for the example that He is to leave to His disciples who will follow on, *"that they also might be sanctified through the truth."* The example of a holy life is the greatest proof of the reality of faith. Others may refuse to see the truth of our arguments, may say "it can't be done," but when they can see that it actually *has been done and is being done*, what can they say to that? Such a life adorns the faith and makes it beautiful, real, vital. Holy

living trains the children of God to be part of His family; and the nearer we live to God while we live, the more ready we shall be to dwell in His presence for ever. Holy living is necessary, for there must be a moral readiness for the "inheritance of the saints in light"; if there is not, it can never be shared.

Let us concentrate for a moment on the phrase "I sanctify myself." This sanctification included every aspect of His life. He was separated first from the confidence and fellowship of His family—*"neither did his brethren believe in him"* (John 7:5). Then, too, He was separated from the comforts of home. He was separated from the confidence of the Jewish clan who held to the old law, because He did not support them in their ostentation. *"I sanctify myself"* was a continual experience in His life.

But it was not all negative. It was not all separation *from*; there was an equal amount of separation *for*. He was separated to do the will of His heavenly Father. He was separated to leave a perfect example for His disciples to pattern after. He was separated to receive the greatest honor ever promised an earth-born. All this put together meant many things. As we study His life among men, we see Him again and again carefully marking the way for His disciples to go. We see Him again and again taking the hard and rugged way of obedience rather than the easier way of pleasure and pride. The quiet, beautiful home in Bethany among people who not only understood Him but loved Him fervently was not the haven in which He was to spend all His mortal days. More than once as the road was hard and the accommodations poor and the people



unreceptive, there must have come the temptation to say, "Pity thyself."

But Jesus did not yield. Resolutely He put all that behind Him and separated Himself from the things of earth to seek the true treasures of heaven. What a battle must have been fought to the finish that night in Gethsemane! But He won. And here He was strengthened by an angel; the Father was with Him in that trying hour. Behold Him in Pilate's judgment hall refusing to answer in self-defense, while on the cross He refused to call upon angels to come and save Him. Why? Because He was sanctifying Himself; He was submitting to the will of His Father. This is what the apostle Paul so perfectly described when he said Jesus became "*obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2:8). Paul also recognizes that the lesson is for us, for he includes these words: "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 2:5).

Another purpose of the sanctification process is told us in the same chapter in John. "*And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world*" (John 17:19, 18). Jesus was setting the example, pointing the way, revealing to them the secret of separating themselves continually to His service before they could work effectively in ministering to others. The work of preparation was first and primary. Again the lesson comes to us. We must prepare; we must be schooled, disciplined, trained in paths of service and duty before we can be truly "sanctified" or set apart for God. Knowledge is not enough; knowing that we must be set apart is not enough. Even knowledge and complete, correct doctrine are not enough; we must be men and women of a holy passion, a consuming desire for God and His holiness; we must be His willing, eager servants, ready to do whatever He commands, ready to surrender whatever He asks. This is entire sanctification; this is full sacrifice. Are we prepared to think of sanctification as complete separation from all the old ways of our old carnal self? Have we grasped the parallel truth that it also means separation to Christ for a life of service, a separation from the good things of this world in exchange for the better things of the world to come?

Let us measure the apostle Paul's own life by the above standard and see if he qualified as

one of those who, following Christ, "*might be sanctified through the truth.*" Paul could say, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*" (I Cor. 11:1). Again, "*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ.... That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death*" (Phil. 3:7-8, 10). Follow him through his ministry, if you will, and see him choose the rugged, narrow way, in the footsteps of his Master. His was no easy, safe life but one of ceaseless toil and pain until at last he could say with full assurance, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day*" (II Tim. 4:7-8). He knew that he had laid his all on the altar of sacrifice. Does he not indeed pass the test of sanctification?

Have we caught the meaning of that same sanctification as it will affect our lives? Are we ready to listen to the full import of Jesus' words as He said, "*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.*" (Matt. 19:29, NRSV)?

Are we willing to be sanctified when it means separation from the closest relationships of life when those relationships are hindering our relationship with God? The price is high; yet, does Christ ask more of us than our government? Men and women leave home, friends, children, lands, for their country. Shall we do less for Christ if such be His call?

Will we enlist for the all-out campaign, the entire sanctification? The Master pointed the way: "*I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*" Through the truth—there is our key, the means to our sanctification. We have it in our possession; it is ours to hear and heed. And since our Instructor has gone the whole way and has sent word back that He made it, that it is possible, shall we not follow gladly that we may share with Him the glorious life to come? □

*Sanctification  
is a separation from the GOOD  
things of this world in  
exchange for the BETTER things  
of the world  
to come.*



# KEEPING UNSPOTT

A young woman was defending her continual attendance at doubtful places of amusement. "I just can't see anything wrong with it, if I behave myself. I think a Christian can go anywhere," she said.

"Certainly she can," replied her friend, who continued by relating an incident. A short while before, she with a party of friends had toured a coal mine. When the group assembled for the tour, one of the young women in the party arrived dressed in a dainty white frock. When her friends remonstrated with her, she appealed to the old miner who was to act as guide to the party.

"Why can't I wear a white dress into the mine? What's the difference?" she asked petulantly.

"Ma'am," returned the old man, "there's certainly nothing to keep you from wearing a white frock down into the mine, but there will be considerable to keep you from wearing one back."

It was not without reason that Jesus called His disciples to be "not of the world" even as He was "not of the world" (John 17:16); and the apostle Paul said plainly, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (II Cor. 6:17). "Touch not"—in other words, hands off!

There are places a Christian cannot go; there are things a Christian cannot do—and remain a Christian. The separation must be sharp and clear.

God has always called His people to be separate. The very word "holy" means "set apart," separated unto God. "I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine" (Lev. 20:24, 26).

How are we doing? Are we wanting to make as little as pos-

sible of the differences, so that others will hardly be aware that we are not one with them? Or are we proud to say by our conduct, our commitment and our character, "I belong to God!"

Worldliness is condemned in Scripture as that which is contaminated, sinful, despised and rejected by God. In the language of the Bible, the "world" is all that lies outside the realm of Christian license. There are many good, clean and wholesome things "in the world" that we are permitted to use and enjoy. But there is much more that is condemned by God, that is contrary to the standard He has set for His people, and which they must scrupulously condemn and avoid.

The world has love, interest and pleasure. The Christian also has love, interest and pleasure. But there is a distinct cleavage between the two. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, "we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God" (I Cor. 2:12). J. B. Phillips translates Romans 12:2: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within."

In addition to the world outside, there is for all of us "the world" inside, our own lower nature, which is carnal, selfish, proud, corrupt. By nature we are all on the animal plane, endowed by God with instincts for survival. But we have also the mental power and the will to rise above this level, if we will. We are all tempted by what is low and base, but we need not yield.

It is worldly to be covetous. It is worldly to be resentful and hold a grudge. It is worldly to be unforgiving in attitude toward anyone. It is worldly to be deceitful and underhanded. It is worldly to be jealous and envious. It is worldly to plan another's downfall even in the slightest way. It is worldly to be cross and cantankerous, uncoop-

*"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds within."*



erative and resentful. Whatever is contrary to God's law of life is, in His eyes, the way of the world.

If we would belong to God we must keep as far as possible from everything that contaminates, everything that defiles. When the world and all that pertains to it is swept away and only "he that doeth the will of God" abides, we do not want to be any part of it (I John 2:15-17).

Many things may seem quite consistent for a person of this world to do, which a believer cannot touch at all simply because he is a believer in Christ. The question is, Can I do this to the glory of God? Do I want to connect the name of Christ with this...or that? Can I be part of this or that and keep my garment of character clean and white?

Let us guard our garments of character with all carefulness. Let us keep as far as possible from anything questionable. If we do not, we may find ourselves like the young woman in the white frock in the coal mine—there is nothing to keep us from wearing our white frock of character into the world, but there will be considerable to keep us from wearing it back—the whiteness will be all gone.

Perhaps this was what James was thinking when he gave his brethren that very special definition of "pure religion": *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"* (Jas. 1:27). □

## WHAT PLEASURE?

*The pleasures of earth are too fleeting for me;  
They're here for a moment, and then cease to be;  
While those who enjoy them are wearied and vexed  
In seeking diversions, and wonder, "What next?"  
The TV, the movies, the ball, and the beach,  
Are tried for that thrill that is just out of reach;  
The cycle continues, around, and around,  
But that which they seek is nowhere to be found.*

*The cigarette smoker attempts to deceive  
Himself by the thought that his vice will relieve  
The pangs of his yearnings, that grow with each puff;  
And few have the courage to say, "'Tis enough!"  
While some turn to drink for a respite from care,  
And think to find joy in forgetfulness there;  
To be disillusioned—their rapture is brief—  
For all they have done is to add to their grief.*

*The number is legion that keeps on the go,  
That rides on the tide of humanity's flow;  
But though the search takes them to countries afar,  
One "fly in the ointment" continues to mar  
The joy that would make life worth living, complete,  
To cast down, instead, to inglorious defeat:  
It is this, though their cup overflows from the store,  
Not resting content, they are hungry for more.*

*Not so with the servants of God and of Christ;  
For them, worldly pleasures have never sufficed.  
They cherish the promises found in the Word,  
The glorious hope of which few have e'er heard.  
For them is the prospect of unending joy,  
Eternal, supernal, without an alloy,  
When Zion's fair portals swing wide at the cry,  
"The King of the ages is now drawing nigh!"*

*This world cannot offer the pleasures worthwhile;  
Their glitter and gloss only tend to defile;  
While those of the Kingdom of God promise more  
Than our finite mind can conceive held in store.  
So just count me out in the quest for more "fun";  
I'm willing to wait till my course has been run;  
In the meanwhile, I'll work to be worthy to share  
The pleasures awaiting the faithful ones there.*

—L. L. Snyder



## Literal Fire on Sodom?

**"Did God use literal fire and brimstone to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, or was the fire only a symbol?"**

Whatever technique God used to destroy the ancient wicked cities of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah, it was completely effective and immediate. According to the record in Genesis, *"The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire...out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground"* (Gen. 19:24-25). Jesus, comparing the time of His second advent to the time of the destruction of Sodom, says that, *"The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all"* (Luke 17:29). It would seem from this that Jesus understood the terms in their literal sense. We have no reason not to believe the record as it is written.

According to *Halley's Bible Handbook*, in the area of the Dead Sea where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are believed to have been, there remains today "a great fortified enclosure, evidently a 'high place' for religious festivals,...from the period dating between 2500 B.C. and 2000 B.C." There is also "evidence that the population ended abruptly about 2000 B.C." Archaeologists also suggest that the region "was densely populated and prosperous," and that it "has been a region of unmixed desolation there since," as though to "indicate that the district was destroyed by some great cataclysm which changed the soil and climate." One writer suggests that the area has a stratum of salt 150 feet thick, and above it a stratum of "marl mingled with free sulfur." He feels that "at the proper time God kindled the gases," and a "great explosion took place, the salt and the sulfur being thrown into the heavens red hot, so that it did literally rain fire and brimstone from heaven."

Whether or not this is true, it is not beyond the scope of God's power to use natural materials in His supernatural way, to bring about the purpose He had decreed.

Fire being a destructive agent, it is often used in the Bible as a symbol of destruction and of the judgments of God. For example, in Ps. 18:8: *"There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it."* We cannot imagine smoke lit-

erally coming out of the Lord's nostrils, or fire from His mouth. But it is a poetic description of His destructive power.

John the Baptist, speaking of Christ, said, *"Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor; and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"* (Matt. 3:12). We certainly do not believe that He holds a literal "fan" in His hand, nor that He is threshing literal "wheat" to store in His literal "garner." Neither is the fire literal. It is a symbol of the destruction which will be the reward of disobedience.

Paul uses the same simile in II Thessalonians 1, describing the judgments that will accompany Christ's second advent. *"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Then he continues to describe exactly what that fiery vengeance is: *"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe"* (II Thess. 1:7-10). The "everlasting destruction" is described as "flaming fire."

The prophet Isaiah used the term fire to describe the just retribution which will fall on the enemies of God. The prophet Ezekiel associated the fire of God's wrath with His indignation (Ezek. 21:31; 22:21, 31). Zephaniah speaks of the "fire of his jealousy" (Zeph. 1:18; 3:8), or His "blazing wrath" (Ezek. 38:19, NRSV).

The prophet Zephaniah, speaking of the judgments that will accompany Christ's second advent (3:8), says that *"All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy."* We cannot picture the literal earth being devoured with literal fire, but as symbols, the term is significant, the people being the offensive element to be removed and the "fire" being symbolic of their destruction. And of one fact we may be certain: the destruction will be effective, so effective that the promise will be fulfilled: *"The king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more"* (v. 15).

In the book of Revelation, fire is used even more vividly to describe the judgments of God. Exactly how those judgments will be dispensed, or by what means,



we are not told. Fire is a fitting term because it consumes completely and finally. Revelation 20:10 and 14, also 21:8 define the term "*lake of fire*" as "*the second [penal] death*," that final and penal death from which there is no awakening, which is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). But there is no thought of eternal torture or torment. That which is burned is destroyed, not kept eternally burning. God set before His human children "life and death" (Deut. 30:15), not life in happiness or life in torment. Jesus said, "*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction*," not eternal torment (Matt. 7:13).

The destruction at the end of the Millennium is fittingly represented as a "*lake of fire*." As fire destroys everything cast into it, so the second death will totally eliminate the wicked. The fire of God's judgments will completely destroy them, they shall be left "*neither root nor branch*" (Mal. 4:1).

The symbolic nature of this fire is confirmed by the point that death itself shall be cast into it (Rev. 20:15). Paul made the same point when he wrote that "*the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*" (I Cor. 15:26). Ultimately death and hell (the grave) will be "*swallowed up in victory*" (I Cor. 15:54).

Whatever means the Lord uses to destroy the rebellious and wicked, the righteous will be preserved unharmed.

#### ◆ No Immortal Soul?

"I just received your response to my last letter, and I am writing to ask another question.

"In response to my statements about the lake of fire, you say: 'Jesus Himself pointed out the 'strait gate and the narrow way' which leads to 'life,' as opposed to the 'broad way' which leads to—the lake of fire? No, only 'destruction' (Matt. 7:13-14).

"Am I correct in inferring from

this that you do not hold the commonly accepted position that man has a part of him that is immortal (call it soul, spirit, or whatever), that will live forever either in bliss with God or in torment with the devil? If you indeed do not agree with this, would you send me some information about your position?

"This information does not have to be any more extensive than you care to make it; but I would greatly appreciate receiving it as soon as possible, because I am currently involved in a 'continuing discussion' with some friends concerning this very point. (My friends are on one side, I'm on the other.) I'd be greatly interested in your comments on this issue."

I believe from what you say that we are on the "one side" with your friends—not just because we want to be different or contrary, but because that is the side for which we find Bible support. Throughout history, peoples of all races and cultures have clung to a dominant idea that man possesses an immortal soul, or some part that is undying or perpetual, but the mere prevalence of the idea does not make it true. The Bible position is positive and clear: (Job 14:1-2 and Ezek. 18:4,20). Man is compared to beasts, and we read that "*As the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one*

*breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast*" (Eccl. 3:19).


Our Founder in the 1800's offered \$1000 to anyone who could find anywhere in the Bible where the soul of man is described as immortal, deathless, or undying. To date no one has ever received that reward.

As the Bible uses the term "soul," it is the whole person, the living being, not any separate part of the person which survives the death of the body.

Since no one living on earth today has been through the death state and returned to life, we are limited for our information on this important subject to what God has revealed in His Word. The idea of an immortal soul seems to have originated with Aristotle and Plato, the Greek philosophers. It was adopted by the early Church as the Church apostatized from the true teachings of Jesus.

Belief in an immortal soul, as you observe, requires belief in a hell or some place for the wicked. But since the Bible does not support the first, the teaching of an immortal soul, it does not support the latter either.

For more information on these topics, see our Bible Study Course, Sections 3 and 7: "*Of Life, Death, and Immortality*," and "*The Hell of the Bible*." □



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# Spiders: Snare Specialists

## Did You Know...?

- ✓ ...that spiders are not insects—insects have six legs, and a three-part body; spiders have eight legs, and a two-part body.
- ✓ ...that a single spider may kill as many as 2000 insects in its short lifetime. Without spiders, we would be overrun with insects.
- ✓ ...that spiders range in body length from 3 1/2 inches (in warm climates) down to species that are almost microscopic.
- ✓ ...that not all spiders make webs, but all produce silk. Some use their silk to make cases for their eggs, or to spin strands for ballooning—drifting long distances on the wind.
- ✓ ...that jumping spiders can jump up to forty times the length of their bodies.
- ✓ ...that spider silk can be as sticky as glue or as slippery as ice, depending on what the spider needs.
- ✓ ...that all spiders have poison fangs, used to subdue their prey. The venom of only a few (e.g. black widow, brown spider), is harmful to man, and is seldom deadly.
- ✓ ...that the silk of certain spiders is the strongest natural fiber known: steel drawn out to a similar diameter would not be as strong.
- ✓ ...that spider silk is also elastic—some can be stretched to three times its length without breaking.
- ✓ ...that in most species, the female spider is larger than the male—sometimes as much as 100 times larger.
- ✓ ...that species of spiders which must hunt prey have excellent eyesight. Some have eight eyes.
- ✓ ...that spiders are found throughout the world; no climate is too rugged for them. They have been seen at an altitude of 22,000 feet on Mount Everest—a full mile above the vegetation line, and in caves two thousand feet below the earth's surface.

Spiders are one of the most numerous species inhabiting the earth. Scientists have named about 34,000 species, but it is thought that these represent only about one quarter of all the different spiders in the world. A British naturalist took a spider census on a one acre plot in the English countryside and determined that more than two million were in residence there, either above or below ground.

Why so many spiders? It may be that our great Designer saw a need for them in controlling the insect population. Spiders eat quantities of insects—grasshoppers, mosquitoes, pesky flies, locusts, beetles, caterpillars. A single spider may kill 2000 insects in a year. Without spiders, harmful insects might take over our summer landscapes. Someone calculated that spiders in England each year destroy insects equal to more than the weight of the human population of the area!

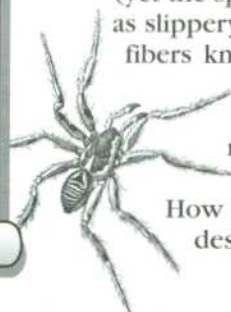
Even spiders are not chance creatures but show highly specialized design. They have jointed legs (a spider's leg has eight sections) and a skeleton on the outside of their body. As the baby spider grows, its hard outer skeleton splits and a new one takes its place (a process called molting). This may happen as many as 10 or 12 times, and within a relatively short period of time (the average life of a spider is less than a year).

**Skilled silkmakers.** All spiders make silk, and many use their silk to build webs. Most accomplished among web-building spiders is the orb-weaver. Its webs, marvels of geometric design, are real death traps for flying insects, and the snared prey seldom escape. At the end of the day, the orb weaver spider often eats its web and, working in darkness, builds a new one (in about an hour). Baby orb spiders spin miniature versions of the same webs.

Shall we think that this tiny creature had to learn the art of web-building by trial and error?—or shall we believe that it has been equipped by its Creator with all the engineering skills and tools it needs to spin near perfect silk strands which are marvels of strength. The web strands are also very elastic. The finest strands can be stretched by at least a third without breaking!

Spider silk is no mean product. It can be as sticky as glue (yet the spider itself never seems to get "stuck" in it) or as slippery as ice. And it is one of the strongest natural fibers known. Steel drawn out to a similar diameter would not be as strong. Why? because what looks like a single strand of spider silk is not single at all but many strands drawn together to form a cable.

How does the spider make silk? This marvellously designed creature has six different kinds of

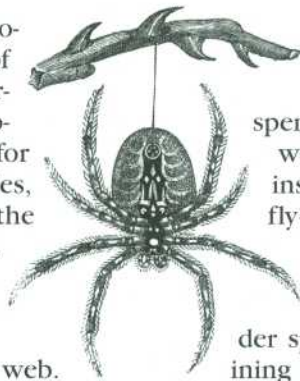




glands, each of which produces a different kind of silk for a different purpose—one type for wrapping its prey, another for producing sticky globules, another for making the cross strands of the web, etc. The spider is a true silk specialist. Heavier cable-like silk strands are used to support the web. Lighter weight strands make up the web itself.

The spider forms the silk threads in 3 or 4 pairs of spinnerets located at the end of its abdomen, which open to the outside through tiny spigots. A single spinneret may open through thousands of spigots. As the spider spins silk, the streams of silk from the different spigots unite into a single cable-like strand.

When starting a web, the orb spider attaches a strand of silk to a weed stalk, porch railing, pole, or whatever, then drops down with the strand attached to its body, crosses to the desired location and climbs up and pulls the line taut from the point of beginning. This is called the bridge line. Once the bridge line is up, the spider drops a plumb line to create one side, crosses back to the first side, adds another plumb line, completing the frame with a lower bridge line. Within this square this artistic weaver, without architect or blueprint, constructs a perfectly proportioned web.



Then it is time for the spider to wait. Spiders are very patient. Many spend most of their lives just waiting for the hapless insect to fall—or jump, or fly—into its trap.

Immediately when an insect touches the web, the watching spider springs into action. Examining its captive, it covers it with sticky silk, turning it as on a spit as though to punish it before giving it a lethal bite and carrying it off to a place of storage for later meals—unless the captive is a butterfly or moth. If the spider finds a moth in its web, it bites the moth *first*, as though knowing that the moth has remarkable ability for getting free of the web, due to its scales. (How did the spider learn this wary tactic?)

Insects usually leave the web in need of repair. The spider may repair it, or if the damage is too great, he simply abandons it, rests awhile, then makes another web.

Some very large spiders in tropical climates produce silk in huge quantities. A scientist once stripped 6 feet of silk a minute from one of these spiders and stopped only after he had extracted 450 feet! A naturalist exploring the jungles of Central America noted a large spider dangling on a line attached to a tree limb more

dred feet above the ground. As he watched, the spider began taking up the silken strand, reeling itself up into the canopy of the jungle. The spider could take up the line, store it by consuming it, then recycle and reuse it.

### *Chance or Design?*

Various types of spiders are variously equipped for their hunting tasks. If the spider is a type that depends on its web-building skills, it has a larger brain, keener sensitivity, and poorer eyesight. The highly sensitive legs of the web builders can feel even very minute vibrations on their webs—that is how they locate their prey. Spiders that seek prey by sight have keener eyesight and a smaller brain. (Did the spider decide how much brainpower, sense of touch, or eye-power it needed?)

Spiders that climb slippery leaves and branches have pads of sticky hair on the bottoms of their feet to keep them from slipping.

**CRAB SPIDERS** wait for prey on flowers, then use their legs to grasp the victim and give it a lethal bite.

**JUMPING SPIDERS** locate their prey, then pounce on it. These spiders are able to jump very far and very accurately. If we could jump as far in relation to our size, we could spring the length of a city block in a single bound.

*(Continued on page 21)*



### *Who taught the spider its trickery?*

The **NET THROWER SPIDER** doesn't just wait for insects to land on its web. It spins a small net, then hangs upside down. When an insect crawls by, it throws its net over the insect, and catches it.

**SPITTING SPIDERS** don't bother to build a web at all. They simply wait for an insect to come near, then spit a zigzag stream of sticky glue over the insect, sticking it to the ground until they can give it the lethal bite.

**TRIANGLE SPIDERS** build a triangle shaped web, then sit nearby, holding on to a single strand of the web. When an insect hits the web, the spider shakes its line and tangles the insect in the sticky web.

The **FUNNEL WEAVER SPIDER** builds a web in the grass shaped like a funnel, then hides in the small end of the funnel. When a hapless insect wanders in, the spider rushes out from its hiding place and grabs it.

The **COBWEB SPIDER** has special teeth on its back legs to comb its web. This makes the silk look soft and fluffy. Actually, it is a maze of tiny, sticky silk loops to trip insects and tangle them up.

The **ORB WEAVER SPIDER** builds its symmetrical web of almost invisible strands, then sits in the center to wait for an insect to fly into it.

The **SHAMROCK SPIDER** hides alongside its web until it feels a vibration, then rush-

es out to attack the prey.

**PURSE WEB SPIDERS** build tube-shaped webs alongside tree trunks. They mix dirt with their silk to make the tube look more like part of the tree, then spend most of their lives inside the tube waiting for insects to come by. When an insect enters the tube, the spider instantly thrusts its fangs through the silk wall of the tube, grabs its prey, pulls it inside, and eats it.





**Y**our table is a mess!"

I looked at our children's little red table. Coloring books, crayons, papers, pencils were all in a heap. I soon had the children very busy cleaning up.

Later the same day, I passed by my own desk and was I chagrined by what I saw! The thought flashed through my mind—had the children noticed it? There it was, piled high with books and papers from a Bible study committee meeting I had attended the evening before. Plus the day's mail. Plus a letter I had started and not finished. Plus a news magazine or two. And, and,....

Feeling rather guilty, I hastily put it in order. But that made me think: What kind of example am I setting?

I was reminded again the other day when my six-year-old daughter told me with greatest satisfaction, "Mom, I'm just like you!" *I'm* far from being what I want to be. Do I want her to be *just like me*?

There is no escaping the fact. We parents live with our children day in and day out, and they are watching us, imitating us, learning from us. Think what power we have to influence young lives for good and for God! No one else is in the position *we* are in to influence *our* children.

What we as Christian parents must do is to make a conscious effort to *be* what we want our children to be. The more I think about it, the more I realize what a tremendous job it is. But it is our responsibility before God. Wasn't that the law in Israel long ago? "*Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons*" (Deut. 4:9).

Lately in our home, we've been checking up. What are the children learning from us about ordinary everyday living? We want our children to learn a pattern of clean, orderly living that will be an asset to them

throughout life. But how can they ever learn if *our* home is a hubbub? Some people say it doesn't matter whether things are picked up and tidy, but we've decided Paul had a reason for using that little word "all" when he wrote, "*Let all things be done decently and in order*" (1 Cor. 14:40). He meant "*all things*"—including at home.

More than anything else, we want our children to catch a vision of God's future. We want them to make eternal life in God's Kingdom on earth the goal of their lives. For this reason we want them to sense the value of solid Christian character. We want them to see that serving God brings the only real happiness. We want them to learn to live—and *love*—the practical Christian walk that will prepare them for life in the world to come.

Will they want it? A lot depends on what they see in us, their parents.

How bright is *our* vision of the future? Do they get from our conversation that the Kingdom is really the most wonderful place to live and the one thing we really want?—or do they hear more about what kind of car we should drive and the high price of food?

What we say—even in casual comment—is important. Whoever thought that little ears don't listen? If someone were to come along and ask our children, they could readily find out what we think of the Palmer's elaborate "mansion," and old Dr. Jenkin's long nose, and Mrs. Simmons' dozen outlandish wigs, and Mrs. Smith's caustic tongue, and how Bessie can spend more in a week than poor old John can bring home in a month, and, and—if *that is what they have heard at home*.

What we say is important, and also *how we say it*. Have you ever heard your children speaking harshly to one another, and realized—with shame—that that is what they heard from *you* the night before? Have you restrained their outbursts of temper, only to find yourself displaying the same when their peevishness was more than you thought you could take? We see them fuss and fret and complain—but did they never see anyone else do the same?

When we talk to them of God and the future and the kind of people God wants them to be, we can't expect them to understand it all; but they will understand *something*. And when they grow older and comprehend more, the already familiar will become much more meaningful.

We want our children to have reverence for God and His Word. But have they ever searched the house for Mother or Dad and found them bowed in silent prayer? Do they see us reading the Bible and sense the joy we find in it? Do they observe those high qualities of kindness, patience, love and unselfishness—yes, any and all of the Christian virtues—in *us*? Have they seen us apologize when *we* were wrong?

It is quite likely that our children's attitudes will be a



reflection of *our* attitudes. And what do they see? When we are out shopping, or at the doctor's office, or among the crowd on the street, with those who do not share our faith, do they see our courtesy and confidence in doing what God approves, and sense that we are glad to be different? Or do they feel a certain shame and embarrassment for our modest dress and careful deportment? *They* will feel it—if *we* feel it.

And what about the atmosphere around home? Are we cheerful no matter what the weather, no matter what the change in plans, no matter *what*? Do we have a feeling of goodwill toward all? Or do the days sometimes turn blue when the children are moody—like *we* are—?

Jesus said to the Jews, "*If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me*" (John 10:37). Could we say that to our children?

We are trying to give these questions a lot of earnest thought. Example is so important. And after sizing up the model I'd like to be and comparing myself with it, I am, well—I have no time to waste.

We can't accomplish the change overnight. But if we are making the effort to live by God's commands, our children will know. And as they grow older, they may try, too.

Our struggle is your struggle also. This is the time to check up.

What kind of adults will your children grow up to be—if they are *just like you*? □

## Spiders: Snare Specialists (Continued from page 19)

The UNDERWATER SPIDER, like all spiders, must have air to breathe. How can it survive underwater? When it goes under water, it carries a bubble of air with it. Then it spins a sheet of thick silk, which it attaches to the stems of water plants a few inches below the surface of the water. Then it surfaces and carries air bubbles down to the sheet. After many trips the spider has a dome filled with air in which it can live.

WANDERING SPIDERS have *two* claws on each foot. Between the claws is a pad of hair, which gives them a firmer footing.

Web building spiders have *three* claws on each foot. The middle claw hooks over the silk threads of their webs.

Web building spiders have larger and more powerful jaws—because they have to grab and hold their prey without the aid of a web.

What human hand has fashioned these wonders? What human mind can even comprehend them all? Who will say there is no great Designer? Truly, the hand that made even the lowly spider is Divine! □

For scientific data in this article we are indebted to *The Book of Popular Science*, Volume 2, pp. 259ff; *Marvels and Mysteries of Our Animal World*, "Spiders," by L. Hemingway, published by the Reader's Digest Association, Pleasantville, New York, pp. 101-103; *Zoobooks*, "Spiders," published by Wildlife Education, Ltd., March, 1988; and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Fifteenth Edition, 11:94-95; 13:924ff.



As Christians, we all need one "MP" at the center of our lives: "Moral Perfection." And here I would like to borrow the army's "MP" for "control" comparison.

The army's MPs (Military police) are for controlling army people. The Christian "Moral Perfection" is God's standard for controlling His people. The difference, of course, is that we must be our own "MP" always on duty, and not depend upon others to "haul us in" when we break the rules. We have to work out our own salvation. Others may guide us, but we have to keep the law ourselves. And we have to keep working until we can keep it perfectly. I see "MP"—Moral Perfection—as the key.

How is moral perfection the key? Simply because when I keep my moral attitude under control, the "narrow way" doesn't seem all that narrow. There are plenty of pleasures and satisfactions every step of the way—the kind of pleasures and satisfaction that leave an "afterglow." When my carnal nature slips in, it steals from me, and it doesn't take

long to know the results, because I see real quick-like that the pleasures and satisfactions are false—because there is no "afterglow." I've been robbed.

There is no worldly pleasure that can equal the "afterglow" of right things done or said under God's law of Moral Perfection.

I realize that I am using the word "afterglow" somewhat boldly, but isn't that what it really is: someone's achievement in *life*, not *death*? If the "afterglows" are not created in our mortal life, it's certainly too late to create any when death overtakes us.

Afterglow and memory walk hand-in-hand, yet they are different. We have both good and bad memories, while afterglow is a state of well-doing, i.e., doing or speaking well. I therefore choose the term afterglow, applying it to things done and said under the law of Moral Perfection, which count toward achieving the goal of eternal life.

As long as we are alive, it is never too late to create afterglow. Just start with Moral Perfection; the rest will follow naturally.

—Contributed by R. Hamby



## “Study...Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth”

### *Common Sources of Alleged Errors*

**T**he most common sources of alleged errors in the Bible are difficulties caused by:

- 1** *Our lack of correct, complete knowledge of the Bible.*
- 2** *Errors in copying the Bible.*
- 3** *Errors in translating the Bible.*

#### **1 Difficulties caused by our lack of correct, complete knowledge of the Bible**

We cannot blame the Bible or its authors when a question arises because our knowledge of its teachings is incorrect or incomplete. This is why Jesus commanded, “*Search the scriptures,*” and the apostle Paul advised: “*Study to show thyself approved unto God*” (John 5:39; II Tim. 2:15).

Jesus spoke of those who were dull of hearing, whose “*eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them*” (Matt. 13:15). The apostle Peter addressed a certain class as being “*willingly ignorant*” (II Pet. 3:5). God is not to blame when He caused something to be recorded and we fail to read it.

How else may we lack correct knowledge of Scripture?

**A: We may fail to understand the symbolic, figurative, or allegorical language in a passage.**

The Bible, like most literature, makes

broad use of symbolic as well as literal language. If we apply a literal meaning to a passage that was intended to be symbolic we may miss its meaning altogether, or we may draw a wrong conclusion. The solution to the problem is not easy, because the Bible does not always tell us what is to be applied literally and what should have spiritual significance. Our only guideline is the rule given by the apostle Paul to “*compare spiritual things with spiritual*” (I Cor. 2:13)—in other words, be consistent within a passage. God also appeals to us to use our powers of reason: “*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord*” (Isa. 1:18). If a passage is not reasonable or understandable when understood literally, then we are justified in seeking a symbolic meaning. But never must we mix symbolic and literal within a passage. For example, we cannot read the first of Genesis and think of a literal Adam and Eve being in a spiritual garden. If we confuse literal and spiritual we miss the message of the text, build upon an erroneous foundation, and set ourselves up to be attacked—justly—by critics.

Sometimes the Bible authors explain themselves. For example, Isaiah 5 talks about a vineyard which is planted “*in a very fruitful hill*” and given very special attention. Before the passage concludes, the author has explained his symbols: “*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant*” (Isa. 5: 1-7).

Ezekiel 34 tells about the flock of God and how they are cared for, protected,

► *We cannot  
blame the Bible  
because our  
knowledge of it  
is incorrect or  
incomplete.*



and saved (Ezek. 34:17-25). Then in verse 31, he explains, speaking for God, *"And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God."*

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet is talking about a vision which God gave him, in which he saw a valley full of very dry bones. What do the bones represent? Right within the story is this revealing statement: *"Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel"* (Ezek. 37:11).

When Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a great image, a dream which he could not remember or interpret, God's prophet Daniel gave both the dream and the interpretation as he received it from the Lord, revealing that the various parts of the image represented a succession of kingdoms which in time would displace one another, until the time that *"the God of heaven"* shall *"set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed"* (Dan. 2:1-44).

In the book of Revelation, the Revelator saw a vision of a *"great whore that sitteth upon many waters"* (Rev. 17:1). Later in the chapter, the meaning of the waters is stated: *"The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues"* (Rev. 17:15).

Facts such as these make a study of the Bible somewhat like assembling the pieces of a large puzzle: when they are all fitted together properly, the picture comes out right.

Sometimes a simile is stated in one passage and explained in another. Jesus Himself said, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman...I am the vine, ye are the branches"* (John 15:1, 5). No one thought of Jesus being literally a vine, or His disciples being literal branches. The purpose of the illustration is to show that the true believer's life must be fruitful in a spiritual sense (bearing "good fruit," or virtue, as the fruit of the Spirit—Gal. 5:22-23). Just as a natural tree bears fruit, said Jesus, *"you should produce much fruit and show that you are my followers, which brings glory to my Father"* (John 15:8, NCV).

Fruit-bearing trees appear in a number of passages of Scripture, all suggesting that God wants His people to live lives

fruitful in goodness, holiness, righteousness and truth (Ps. 92:12-14; Gal. 5:22-23; John 15:1-8; Matt. 7:17-20; Ezek. 47:12; Rev. 22:1-2).

Because one passage often is needed to explain another, the Bible is best studied by subject rather than by straight reading, so that we may learn what it says about a certain topic in various contexts.

**B: We may misunderstand a passage because we fail to read it in its context.**

Someone has said that a "text out of context is a pretext." Very often the surrounding narrative sheds light on a problem passage.

Who, unfamiliar with the context, could understand the meaning of the passage: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth"* (Gen. 1:26)? Has the human race been given dominion over every living and creeping thing? But when we understand that the passage is describing a representative "man" who will, under trial and discipline, be perfected and then be given authority over all opposing forces, over men and women who naturally possess animal instincts, then we have a meaning in harmony with other passages

## What Makes an Error in Scripture?

*"Let it be proved that (1) each alleged statement occurred certainly in the original autographa of the sacred book in which it is said to be found. Let it be proved that (2) the interpretation which occasions the apparent discrepancy is the one which the passage was evidently intended to bear. It is not sufficient to show a difficulty, which may spring out of our defective knowledge of the circumstances. The true meaning must be definitely and certainly ascertained, and then shown to be irreconcilable with other known truth. Let it be proved that (3) the true sense of some part of the original autographa is directly and necessarily inconsistent with some certainly known fact of history, or truth of science, or some other statement of Scripture certainly ascertained and interpreted."*

*"We believe it can be shown that this has never yet been successfully done in the case of one single alleged instance of error in the Word of God."*

— B. B. Warfield



► *Studying the Bible is somewhat like assembling the pieces of a large puzzle: when they are all fitted together properly, the picture comes out right.*

in the Bible.

What would we learn from this passage, read out of context: "*There is no God*"? for the entire Bible is the Word of God, and all creation is His silent handiwork. But when we read the text in its context: "*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God,*" (Ps. 14:1), we have no question as to its meaning.

What would we think of reading that God commanded, "*Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled*"? But again the context makes the meaning plain, that God is condemning those who are a law to themselves, who pursue their own goals apart from Him and disregard His authority (Isa. 50:11).

**C: We may misunderstand a passage because we fail to understand correctly the use of type and anti-type in the Bible.**

The Book of Hebrews speaks of the law of Moses being "*a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things*" (Heb. 10:1). Hebrews 9:23 makes reference to the "*pattern of things in the heavens*" in contrast to "*the heavenly things themselves*." Built into the Law of Moses were numerous "types" (sacrifices, ceremonies, observances)—outward rituals in the Mosaic system intended to teach various aspects of the higher, superior system of faith and obedience by which one can obtain salvation. Typical language lends depth and breadth to a narrative, but at the same time makes the passage more difficult to understand without study.

**D: We may apply an incorrect meaning to a word (or words).**

When a passage seems difficult to understand, the problem may be that we have not defined some key word correctly. Sometimes word meanings change over time. For example, the word "hell" as used by the King James translators was to them a term for the grave, a place of burial, with no inference of torment. In our day the word has very different association, wholly devoid of the idea of "a place of burial."

Some words used in the King James translation of the Bible have since become archaic (remember, the King

James translation was made in the seventeenth century). Word meanings often change with time. The Bible authors used words with meanings current in their time, not a meaning that came about years later. To understand such words the newer translations are helpful, often giving a clearer picture of what the author intended to say than we can get from a surface reading of the King James rendering.

We must also be careful to apply the meaning correctly in the context of the passage. Very often words have more than one meaning (compare our English verb "to dust"—when a woman "dusts" furniture, she *removes* dust from the surface; when a farmer "dusts" his potatoes, he *applies* a powder to their leaves.)

## 2 Difficulties caused by errors in copying the Bible

We today do not have any original documents of the Bible. All that we have are copies of the original, and many of these have been copied many times.

It is easy to understand how these copies came about. Just put yourself in the place of the early Christians. Imagine that your Church group received a letter from the apostle Paul, along with instructions to share that letter with several other churches. What would you do? Before sending the letter on to the next Church, you would do your best to copy it, so that the letter could be read and re-read in your church. Perhaps several in the church would copy it, so as to have Paul's valuable admonitions close at hand. The same copying would be done at the next church to which Paul's letter was sent, and so on and on. As time passed, these copies would be preserved with the treasured documents of the churches, or of the families of the believers. When the documents began to deteriorate, another generation of believers would copy the copies of the letter to preserve them.

This is what happened with the Bible writings. The miracle is that the copies are as near perfect as they are.

Our belief in the inerrancy of the Bible is in the inerrancy of the original documents, called the Autographs, as



they were produced by the inspired authors. (The importance of the inerrancy of the Autographs will be discussed later.) Copies made by human hands are subject to human error. Though there is a minimal amount of error, and though there are no known situations where an error totally obscures a doctrine or teaching of Scripture, still errors cause questions. This is why, when a passage seems to contradict the teaching of Scripture, it may be important to compare the reading of the text in the various manuscripts existing, in case an error occurred in copying.

Just how accurate are the books of the New Testament as we have them today? A professor of Biblical criticism, F. F. Bruce, has conducted an in-depth study of the accuracy of the New Testament documents, and has published a book, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Intervarsity Press, 1974). About the New Testament writings he says, "This is a most important and fascinating branch of study, its object being to determine as exactly as possible from the available evidence the original words of the documents in question. It is easily proved by experiment that it is difficult to copy out a passage of any considerable length without making one or two slips at least. When we have documents like our New Testament writings copied and recopied thousands of times the scope for copyist errors is so enormously increased that it is surprising that there are no more than there actually are.

"Fortunately, if the great number of manuscripts increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is not so large as might be feared; it is in truth remarkably small. *The*

*variant readings about which doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice.*"

Says another scholar, Sir Frederic Kenyon, about the reliability of the New Testament: "The last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the *authenticity* and the *general integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established" (from *The Bible and Archaeology*, p. 288).

How can we verify exact words used by the New Testament writers when copyist errors exist? This is relatively easy, because "there are in existence about 4000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in whole or in part." And these manuscripts are, for the most part, very early copies. "The best and most important of these go back to somewhere about A.D. 350, the two most important being the Codex Vaticanus, the chief treasure of the Vatican Library in Rome, and the well-known Codex Sinaiticus, which the British government purchased in 1933 for one hundred thousand pounds, and which is now the chief treasure of the British Museum."

Mr. Bruce says further: "In addition to the two excellent manuscripts of the fourth century, which are the earliest of some thousands known to us, considerable fragments remain of papyrus copies of Books of the New Testament dated from one hundred to two hundred years earlier still.... A more recent discovery consists of some papyrus fragments dated no later than A.D. 150." Earlier still is a fragment from the Gospel of John dated around A.D. 130, showing that the latest of the four Gospels was already circulating

► *When studying the Bible, we must be careful to apply the correct word meaning considering the context of the passage.*

*There is no ancient book which has been handed down to us with so good a text and so few various readings as the Bible.* — J. C. Ryle



in Egypt at this time.

With so many copies of the Bible extant, and from very early dates,\* it is not difficult to find the correct original word used in a passage, and determine its meanings.

### 3 Difficulties caused by errors in translating the Bible

Much more frequently, a difficulty in understanding is caused by an error in translating the original text.

Translation is a subjective art, and any translator, however objective he may try to be, has influence upon the text being translated. This is unavoidable, because many words have no exact equivalent in another language. Some words have multiple—even opposite—meanings, and the translator must choose the most suitable

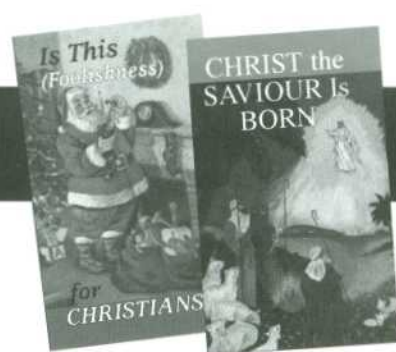
rendering according to his perception of the passage. In all he must work within the framework of his own background and knowledge.

When translators of the Bible believed doctrines other than those taught in the Bible, it is not strange that their translations sometimes reflect their ideas.

How can we solve questions that arise from varying translations of a passage? What should we do when a passage seems to contradict the general teaching of Scripture? The solution is to consult the original Greek or Hebrew to determine the word used by the author, find its possible definitions, and choose the definition that is appropriate to the context and that is in harmony with the general teaching of the Bible. This method has proved repeatedly successful. □

(To Be Continued)

\* The date from which manuscripts survive adds significantly to their value. On this point F. F. Bruce comments, "Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works." He mentions Caesar's *Gallie War* (written between 58 and 50 B.C.) for which we have 9 or 10 good manuscripts, the oldest being some 900 years later than Caesar's day. He mentions also the Roman *History* written by Livy (he lived between 59 B.C. and 17 A.D.). Of these, only 35 survive, and they are known to us from not more than 20 manuscripts of any consequence, and only one is as old as the fourth century. Of the 14 books of the *Histories* of Tacitus (written about A.D. 100) only 4 1/2 survive. Of the 16 books of his *Annals*, 10 survive in full and 2 in part. And the text of these two depends entirely on two manuscripts, one dating from the ninth century and one from the eleventh. The *History of Thucydides* (written about 460-400 B.C.) is known to us by 8 manuscripts, belonging to about A.D. 900, and the same is true of the *History* of Herodotus, dating from the same period. Yet, Mr. Bruce comments, "No classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of their works known to us are more than 1300 years later than the originals." Why, then, should the books of the Bible be questioned?



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## True Greatness

- to bear up under loss;
- to fight the bitterness of defeat;
- to be a victor over anger;
- to smile in the midst of turmoil;
- to resist evil and base instincts;
- to hate hate and to love love;
- to go on when it would be easier to quit;
- to seek ever the eternal glory of God;
- to look up with unquenchable faith to the ideals and promises of Christ—
- to set the mind on things that are good, and wholesome, and pure, and true.



*A snow avalanche*

## Think ON THY WAY

*(Continued from page 2)*

make all things work together for his eternal good. With such an assurance, what is there to fear?

But when we talk of faith, let us be sure of what we mean. For faith is not simple optimism, though it may breed optimism. Neither is it cheerfulness, though the one whose faith is strong is likely to be cheerful. It is not a vague sense of general well-being, nor is it a buoyant and friendly personality. Faith is confidence in God, a firm conviction that the things not seen *will be* because God Himself has decreed them. Faith is confidence in what is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

*Meditating on the Scriptures* is another defense against deception. Why? because it fixes in our minds ever more firmly the word of faith, the word of life, the word which God has revealed to the children of men. If we would go right and stay right, the word in our hearts will help us. The Scriptures will purify, instruct, strengthen, enlighten, inform. We will be blessed by them if they become a living, working force within us.

Another defense against deception is *obedience*. What benefit is any knowledge unless it is applied? Let the weather bureau inform a town that a hurricane is about to strike. If no one takes action, of what benefit is the warning? Or post a sign on a highway to inform travelers that a bridge is out 10 miles down the road. If

no one takes heed, if everyone must travel 10 miles down the road (and 10 miles back) to see for himself, of what use is the sign?

So with the law of God. God's warnings are of value only as they are heeded.

The Scriptures contain no shred of encouragement for the coward, the stubborn, the self-willed. Only the tame sheep can be led; only the humble child can expect guidance from the Heavenly Father. When all the evidence is in, it may well be found that none but the proud strayed from the truth, and that self-trust was behind every transgression of the law of God.

There is no escaping our duty: *we must think*. In the words of the ancient Prophet, "Consider your ways." Thought has its limitations, but where there is little thought there is not likely to be any strong defense against evil. There are those today who believe that using the human intellect is a waste of time. Such thinking is destructive. To neglect to think is to discard one of life's most valuable resources. The whole drift of the Bible emphasizes the power of knowledge, wisdom, and right thinking. The Scriptures simply take for granted that the saints of the Most High shall be serious minded, thoughtful men and women.

God grant us the discernment and the will-power to think on our way, that we may avoid the calamity of being deceived, or wasting our most precious God-given resource, which can be for us the way to life.

We cannot think ourselves into the Kingdom, but we can never get into the Kingdom *without thinking*. □





*O* Lord of light, and love, and power,  
How joyful life might be  
If in Thy service every hour  
We live and moved with Thee;  
If youth in all its bloom and might  
By Thee were sanctified,  
And manhood found its chief delight  
In working at Thy side!

*T*is ne'er too late, while life shall last,  
A new life to begin;  
'Tis ne'er too late to leave the past,  
And break with self and sin;  
And we this day, both old and young,  
Would earnestly aspire,  
Our hearts to nobler purpose strung,  
And purified desire.

*N*or for ourselves alone we plead,  
But for all earnest souls  
Who serve Thy cause by word or deed,  
Whose names Thy book enrolls:  
Oh, speed Thy work, victorious King,  
And give Thy workers might,  
That through the world Thy truth may ring  
And all may see Thy light.