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Charles the lightning comes of the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.

—Matt. 24:27, NASB

December, 1995 Vol. 82, No. 11

Modeling the Gospel

model is a copy suitable for imitation or emulation. If it isn't accurate, it isn't a model.

Children often spend many hours building models—miniatures of trains, airplanes, jets, rockets and ships.

Engineers build models as patterns of products they are designing.

Companies hire models to display their merchandise. In each case, the model has value in proportion to its accuracy. A model that distorts or misrepresents the original is useless.

The apostle Paul saw his role before the brethren as one of a model. He wrote to the Thessalonians, "Since we were with you we worked night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you....We did that to make ourselves a model for you to follow" (2 Thess. 3:7-9, NIV).

At the same time the Thessalonians were models for other believers. Paul wrote: "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with joy...and so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:6-7, NIV). They were modeling the Gospel to those newer in the faith.

God sent Jesus with the express task of modeling the Gospel. The truth He proclaimed was not only words to be spoken, or knowledge to be acquired, or even facts to be believed. Over and above all it was *a life to be lived*.

Every one of us is an influence on others, and every one of us is influenced by others. As bearers of the holy faith once delivered to the saints, it is our duty to be models of the life it produces. To do this we must scrutinize our conduct and rearrange our priorities. People are always looking for fresh models to follow. They have been disappointed in the past, and need something they can trust. That is why Paul charged his son-in-the-faith Timothy: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12, NIV).

The same noble Apostle told his church at Corinth, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"* (1 Cor. 11:1, NIV). In other words, watch me, and you will be able to *see* what you should become.

What is the advantage of watching a model? Because a lesson seen is far more likely to be remembered than a lesson *read*. A real-life demonstration of the Gospel is the best way to convince others of its true worth.

How well are *we* modeling the Gospel of Christ? Do others, observing us, recognize the cause we represent? How careful are we with our conduct? How like Christ?

We read in the book of Acts that when the people "saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13, NIV). What made them different? The Gospel of Christ working in their lives. They were modeling the Gospel.

Paul said it another way in his letter to the Romans: "Put on the character of the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:14, Moffatt). And to the Colossians, "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" [literally, "behave like Him"] (Col. 2:6).

As followers of Christ, every one of us has the obligation to model the Gospel, wherever we go, whatever we do; to display a different type of life; to show the ideal in Christ-like speech and deportment. The only thing about models: they must be ready at any time to be scrutinized, evaluated, compared, and copied. After all, what is a model for?

Being a model for God's great cause is serious business. How well did you model the Gospel today?

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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BEHOLD I COME DEN



udden events are part of this world. Sometimes for good, sometimes for ill, they remind us that we do not-and cannot-know everything that is or is to be. More than one of us has answered the door-

" Y_{e} men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"— visibly, bodily, and suddenly. -Acts 1:11

to learn of the unexpected passing of someone close to us. Only a few days ago we were talking with him, and he appeared to be in good health; now he is silent in death. It is the sharp chill of the unexpected.

bell, or the telephone, or read the newspaper

Sudden death creates a definite line of before and after, and we realize anew that we have no claim upon tomorrow. Life takes on a keener definition, and the importance of doing what we know we should do today is suddenly spotlighted by the lightning streak of death.

With equal suddenness can come good. "And suddenly" prefaces Luke's account of the appearance of the angels the night Jesus was born. The first angel appeared

suddenly in the shining glory of the Lord. The message he

delivered was also sudden, telling of the birth of "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11), an event which cut sharply and suddenly between past and future. And just as suddenly as the first angel appeared, a myriad more joined in a grand chorus of praise to God—a sight and sound beyond the ability of the shepherds to describe or comprehend. Just as suddenly it was all over, and "the angels were gone away" (Luke 2:9-15).

Sudden events—death, earthquake, fire, tornado, hurricane, automobile accident, disabling illness are the making of history and are constantly changing the destinies of men.

Even that which is foretold and to a certain degree expected can still be said to happen suddenly. More than once Jesus foretold His own death; yet, when it happened, His followers were struck with its suddenness. They had failed to comprehend the full meaning of the prophecy. And the resurrection which followed also foretold—happened so suddenly as to be at first incredible.

After the resurrection, Jesus was with His disciples forty days. And then, as He was walking with them one day outside Jerusalem something else happened-suddenly. While the disciples beheld, "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." He was gone; henceforth everything in their lives would be different. Only two angels tarried to deliver this important message: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). He had gone away suddenly. And how would He return? "In like manner"-visibly, bodily, and suddenly.

Jesus IS Coming

It has been said that the second coming of Jesus is mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament, and that this teaching occupies one in every twenty-five between verses Matthew and Revelation. The return of Christ seems to have been continually on the minds of the leaders of those early Chris-

God wants us to stop dabbling in that which He forbids, to quit playing with temptation, and love what He loves.

tians. And why not, as they realized that right then was their only chance to prepare for the great event?

From the abundance of New Testament teaching, the fact of His return is clearly established. Over and over the Master spoke words like these: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again" (John 14:3). "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels" (Matt. 16:27). "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants,...and commanded the porter to watch" (Mark 13:34). "The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him" (Matt. 25:31).

Should we not take His words seriously and remind ourselves of them often?

The apostles did. Paul, writing out of the depth of his soul's conviction, expressed the personal hope of himself and his brothers in Christ: "For our [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:20-21). Peter added his words of understanding, that "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ve shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4). James, writing in his usual practical manner, set forth the certainty of the second advent as a major reason for patience: "Be patient therefore, brethren," he wrote, "unto the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7). Out of a life rich in experience and hope, the beloved John wrote: "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28). Even the author of Hebrews, penning his profound comprehension of the plan of God, could not fail to mention this central hope of the followers of Christ: "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

Can we not agree, then, with the modern scholar who declares that we cannot question "what stands so plainly in the pages of the New Testament, what filled so exclusively the minds of the first Christians—the idea of a personal return of Christ at the end of the age. If we are to retain any relation to the New Testament at all, we must accept the personal return of Christ as Judge of all."

DID THE APOSTLES EXPECT JESUS TO RETURN IN THE FIRST CENTURY?

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he question is often asked: Did the early Church expect Christ to return in their day? Serious belief in the return of our Lord has lent urgency to the life and work of His loyal servants in all ages. A man who professed to believe in the return of Christ in any age but who showed no spirit of expectancy or urgency in getting ready for the great event would have little with which to convince others of his belief. To any We need every day granted us, and every hour of each day, to prepare for Jesus' coming.

man in any age, "Now is the accepted time,...now is the day of salvation." Whenever Christ might come, his own lifetime was his only chance to get ready.

But every believer has quite naturally wanted to know when: When will Christ come? Can I look for Him to come during my lifetime? this decade? this century?

Premature and misinformed answers to these questions have resulted in gross misconceptions and, unfortunately, much disbelief through the ages since Christ ascended. Even before He went away there was some misunderstanding as to the time when the Kingdom should be set up, for Jesus "spake a parable" unto His disciples one day as they neared Jerusalem "because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11). In the parable Jesus compared Himself to a "certain nobleman" who "went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return" (Luke 19:12). In Matthew's account of this same parable, Jesus told them plainly that it would be a "long time" before He would return to reckon with His servants (Matt. 25:14).

But the disciples seem to have been slow to understand, for the day Jesus ascended they asked Him again, thinking the time might finally have arrived: *"Lord,"* they asked, *"wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6). They had no concept of the long centuries which should intervene.

At least part of the problem in their lack of understanding in the early days may have been in their connection with Old Testament the prophecies. Many of the prophecies, with which they were so familiar, foretold the birth of Christ and then went on to tell the great work He would do at His second advent (see Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2). Thus, when Christ came in fulfillment of the words of the prophets, these people saw the event

as the dawning of a new age long foretold, the beginning of a whole series of prophecies to be fulfilled in succession. Only a matter of time, and all would be realized. They failed to comprehend the centuries that would intervene—or that He would have to go and return after a long time, a very long time.

Some people today—even some Bible scholars and ministers—feel no need to look for Christ because they say the apostles expected Him in their day and were disappointed. If the apostles expected Jesus then nearly two thousand years ago—and He did not come, why should we still look for Him?

What the New Testament Teaches

Let us see what the New Testament tells us about the beliefs of the early Christians and those who actually knew Christ. Did they believe, when fully informed, that their age was the time for the fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ's Kingdom? Let us examine some of their statements.

The first to come preaching the imminence of the Kingdom was John the Baptist. His was the special assignment of announcing the coming Messiah's earthly ministry, and his proclamation rang with urgency: *"Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matt. 3:2). His first word spelled action: *"Repent."* And his sec-

ond meant that no time should be wasted in doing it: "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

How shall we take these words? For surely the *"kingdom of heaven"* was not *"at hand"* then.

First let us attempt to see prophecy and history as the people of that time saw it. For nearly four thousand years prior to this, the advent of Christ had been foretold. And usually these prophecies included mention of His greater Second Advent-two events were often combined in one prophecy. Thus, when the long-standing prophecy began to be fulfilled, these people saw the plan of God taking shape before their eyes. Prophecy was being fulfilled, and they very likely had no idea of the time that would elapse before the fulfillment of all parts of the prophecies would be complete.

Furthermore, the word translated "kingdom" in our common version means more than a royal dominion. It means also, "kingly power, authority, royal dignity, majesty." John was saying that the person who would hold the highest office in the Kingdom, He who would be the embodiment of its power and dignity, even Jesus Christ, the royal Son of God, was at hand. It would be the fulfillment of the first phase of the prophecies concerning the coming Kingdom.

Jesus began His public ministry with the identical words of His forerunner: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). He may have done this so that people would associate His preaching with that of His forerunner John. But in any case, we can know Jesus did not expect to set up His kingdom at that time. Sometime later He compared Himself to a nobleman going into a far country who would not return until "after a long time" (Matt. 25:14). Jesus understood the plan.

A correspondent has postulated that what the Bible calls Christ's second coming may not be yet future, but may refer to some other event fulfilled in apostolic times. "If Jesus' coming is still future," he queries, "please explain what Jesus meant when He said, 'And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand...verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come' (Matt. 10:17-23)."

In Matthew 10, Jesus was sending out His newly appointed twelve apostles on a preaching tour. The above quotations are part of His instructions to them: "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."

The meaning of the passage is clearer in the Lamsa Translation, which reads as follows: "When they persecute you in one city, flee to another; for truly I say to you that you shall not finish converting all the cities of the house of Israel, until the Son of man returns." In other words, don't be concerned if a city or town does not accept you—you can expect only limited success until I return in power and with authority.

Not "till the Son of man be come" the second time, not until Jesus returns will the task of teaching the gospel be completed, when the ultimatum "Fear God" is proclaimed worldwide (Rev. 14:7), when God's judgments are in the world (Isa. 26:9) and the inhabitants of all lands are compelled to learn righteousness.

When Jesus stood before Pilate and was questioned as to what He had done, Jesus replied concerning His kingdom, "My kingdom is not of this world [this cosmos, this arrangement of things]: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). God had not planned that Jesus should set up His kingdom at that time, or in that cosmos; the time had not yet come for God to send His judgments upon the nations and compel them to surrender. Jesus showed this openly as He read from the Scriptures in the synagogue in His own home town the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," He read, "because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to...set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord"-and there He stopped and closed the book, saying, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:18-21). But He had omitted that part of the prophecy of Isaiah which applies to His second coming: "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:1-2). The time had not yet come for Him to execute judgment, and Jesus was well aware of it.

In Matthew 24:34, Jesus made another statement which might sound as though He expected the people of His day to see the establishing of the Kingdom. He said, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Just prior to these words Jesus had been forecasting the signs of His second coming. He ended with a parable of the fig trees, saying that "when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Luke 21:29-31).

Jesus was saying in effect, You know when the fig tree puts out leaves that summer is here; so when you see these things I have foretold coming to pass, you can know My coming is near. But He did not say that the people living then would see "these things" fulfilled. The "generation" that would see their fulfillment would be those living and looking for Him at the time of His return, those who would recognize the signs of His second coming, who would see the "fig tree," symbolic of the living Word of God, bud

Let Us Pray...

O God most holy, most wonderful, Thy power and glory is reflected in the beauty and majesty of the world which Thou hast created, and Thou hast given us hearts which respond to beauty, truth and love. We come into Thy presence with thankful hearts for all the evidences of Thy goodness in the world around us, and with repentant spirits for having failed so often to fix our eyes and thoughts on whatsoever things are lovely and true and of good report.

Deliver us, we pray, from the folly of allowing our minds to dwell on those things which would retard our growth into holiness, which would feed our fears or increase our doubts, or deflect us from the high and holy purpose to which we have dedicated our lives.

We rejoice that we have been given an insight into Thy eternal plan and purpose, that we know we are now upon the very threshold of the greatest change that has ever taken place on our earth: that a time is near when Thou no longer will be silent, but Thy voice will be heard demanding that men and nations forsake their evil ways, or be promptly swept from the scene of action.

Help us to look ahead with believing hearts to a time when mankind will be obliged to come under the control of Christ, earth's coming King. We have been warned repeatedly that just such a day is coming, and to so live now as to be prepared for it when it arrives.

That day will come suddenly. One moment everything will be normal—business as usual—and the next moment the new authority will have arrived. And Thy great work of subduing all evil, once begun, will not halt or terminate until every knee bends to Thee and every tongue sings Thy praise.

Give us the good judgment to prepare for that Day while there is still time. May we who claim to be part of Thy true Church be living in perpetual expectancy, fully aware that that Day is coming, that that better Day may find us on the winning side. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh,...lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. —Jesus

again and bear fruit in the latter days after the long night of the apostasy; these are the "generation" who would "not pass away till all these things be fulfilled." There would be living believers to welcome Him when He returns.

Another passage sometimes misleading to those who believe the apostles expected Jesus in the first century is found in Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians. *"We which are alive and remain,"* Paul wrote, *"shall not go before"* the sleeping believers, but they will be resurrected and *"we"* with them shall be *"caught up together...in the clouds, to meet the* Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17).

From the reading of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, it would appear that the people of the Church at that time received the wrong impression and that Paul felt impelled to send another letter to correct the misunderstanding. After a brief introduction. Paul returned to the theme he had discussed in his First Epistle, only more explicitly stating the time when Christ should be expected. "Now we beseech you, brethren, by [concerning] the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,...that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" (2 Thess. 2:1-3, 5). He had told them all this before, but now he was trying to remind them that the great Day could not come until certain events took place. There should be an apostasy, a falling away from the faith—which had already begun at that time.

By saying *"we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord,"* Paul had referred not to himself and his brethren but to the whole body of believers. Paul knew there

would be living believers at the time of Christ's return, and all believers together compose one body, in which Paul included himself and his brethren. It is the same "we" who "must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10), the same "we" who are "the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27).

Paul's hope was not to see Christ return during his lifetime but to have a share in the resurrection when Christ should finally come: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" was his life goal (Phil. 3:11). He would have felt no need to share in the resurrection had he expected Christ during his lifetime. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ," he wrote at another time when discussing the resurrection, "we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19)-there could be no hope of anything beyond without the resurrection.

"Behold I Come Quickly"

Another passage which has caused considerable difficulty are the words of Jesus Himself, recorded in His last message to men. Jesus sent this message, as says the introduction, "to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1). And seven times in this book Christ speaks these words: "Behold, I come quickly."

MEGIDDO MESSAGE / December 1995

The statement cannot be overlooked. It is important; it shouts at us by a word meant to capture and hold our attention: *"Behold!"* The fact stated is foremost through the whole New Testament: *"I come."* It is a definite statement; Christ IS coming.

But the last word, "quickly," has raised questions. Did Jesus mean to convey that the time of His reappearance was soon—during the first century? Did He mean that the events portrayed in Revelation would "shortly come to pass," as we would think of something happening "shortly"?

We need to look at the original Greek word translated "quickly"; it is tachu. This word, or some form of it, is used about 36 times in the New Testament. One of its meanings is "in a short time, soon." But the Greek-English Lexicons give other meanings, which are: "without delay, quickly; at a rapid rate; swiftly," and the word seems to be used more often with these latter meanings. Tachu suggests quickness, swiftness, haste, speed. It is used in Luke 18:8, "He will avenge them speedily"; in Acts 12:7, "Arise up quickly"; in Acts 22:18, "Get thee quickly out of Jerusalem." The same word occurs in Luke 14:21, "Go out quickly into the streets"; and in John 11:31, "She rose up hastily and went out."

This same word *tachu* is often used in combination with other words to suggest speed. For example, *tachu* plus "runner" is a fast runner. *Tachu* "fruit" is fruit that ripens quickly. *Tachu* "writing" is speedwriting. *Tachu* "work" is work done quickly. *Tachu* "death" is quick or sudden death. *Tachu* plus "sailing" means to sail fast. *Tachu* plus "motion" means to move fast. The idea is consistently one of speed, swiftness, haste.

If we apply this meaning to Jesus' words in Revelation, "Behold, I come quickly," or "the time is at hand," we do not have a statement of when He will come but of how He will come. He will come as He described it Himself when talking to His disciples: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:27).

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance adds still another thought to the meaning of "quickly" which makes Jesus' words even more comprehensive. Tachu, rendered "quickly," may mean "by surprise, suddenly." In other words, "Behold I come suddenly." One moment everything is business as usual; the next moment He will be here among us. As one commentator says, "By 'quickly' is not meant that the Second Advent would occur soon after John completed the writing of this book. Rather, it means that the events of the Second Coming will occur so fast, one event quickly following another, that many will be taken completely by surprise" (Wycliffe Commentary, page 1105).

Is not this the teaching of the entire Scriptures? Many times Jesus warned that He would come by surprise, suddenly, and coupled His statement with a warning to extreme watchfulness. For example, "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44). Again, "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh,...lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:35-37). Again, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mark 13:33). In His last message, He was still warning: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments" (Rev. 16:15).

The apostle Paul wrote something similar in a letter to the Thessalonians. "Yourselves know perfectly," he said, "that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2). They knew perfectly, but the warning was so important that he repeated it yet again and added, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (vs. 4-6). But we should keep in mind as we read these verses that Paul was writing by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that his words were to warn and encourage believers in all ages to come. And his

illustration of Christ's coming "as a thief" carried no suggestion of when Christ would arrive but only of the manner of His coming. It would be sudden, a shocking surprise to those not ready; hence his admonition: "Let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

More Suddenness

Even certain of the Old Testament prophets conveyed the idea of suddenness. The prophet Malachi pictured the arrival of the King as sudden, even

though it will follow the announcement by His herald. "Behold, I will send my messenger," he wrote, speaking for God, "and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap" (Mal. 3:1-2). "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come."

The author of the New Testament book of James felt the imminent suddenness with which the Day of Christ

He who stands even now on the threshold is your Judge. His hand is on the latch. One more step, and He will be inside.

> will arrive. And he combined his reminder with another solemn warning for very practical preparation: *"Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door"* (James 5:9). Someone is going to be condemned, he warns. Don't let it be you. Get rid of all those grudges, those disgruntled feelings and memories of hurt—lest you be condemned. He who stands on the threshold even now is your Judge. His hand is on the latch. One more step, and He will be inside—suddenly.

We cannot fail to admire the lively expectation of those zealous first

Say! will you be ready for the coming of the Lord? Will you be ready when the King returns? Do you long to see Him with a heart that yearns? Will you at all be taken by surprise? Will His words, "Well done!" be a waiting prize? Will there be any shame or regret when you look into those piercing eyes? Will you be ready when this age adjourns? Will you be ready when the King returns? When the King returns— Will you be ready? century Christians who knew that the Day was yet far in the distance. Could we have done as well? How much more easily we should be able to maintain an attitude of expectancy; to no other people has the great event been nearer than it is to us this very moment. What if the Judge should lift the latch on our door this very morning and step across the threshold into our presence: How would we feel?

Imminence vs. Immediacy

We need to keep ourselves continually conscious of the imminence of Christ's coming, we who can see the prophecies of Scripture and can number nearly six thousand years of history behind us. But the words of Jesus are still true: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man" (Mark 13:32).

These words of Jesus expressly forbid date-setting, yet the desire to fix the time of Christ's return by one formula or another has persisted through all the years since He ascended. Those who did not comprehend the scope of the Divine plan were looking for Jesus at the end of the first millennium A.D. The year 1000 brought vast apprehension; surely that would be the end. But it was not. Dates were set again for a time between 1200 and 1260; but the end was not then. In the seventeenth century, a man named John Napier developed a new system of mathematics which he used to determine the date of Christ's return-somewhere between 1688 and 1700. His commentary went through 23 editions and several translations before 1700. After that, of course, it wasn't so convincing.

In 1843 William Miller proposed a date for the return of Jesus, and on the appointed date multitudes climbed hilltops and rooftops to await the appearing of Christ. But He did not appear. Then Miller reviewed his calculations and discovered he had made an error of one year. Again his dutiful followers climbed to the hilltops to watch; but Jesus did not return then either.

In our generation men are still speculating on dates, but Jesus' words stand: *"In such an hour as ye*

think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44).

It did not suit God's purpose to reveal the exact time when Jesus would come, only to point to the times and seasons by the fulfillment of prophecy. There may be several reasons for this. Foremost is His desire that His people maintain an attitude of constant expectancy and prepare steadily. Date-setting tends to postpone preparation. If we do not look for Christ to come until September 25, 2020, we won't be too concerned with what we are doing *today*—there is still plenty of time.

But this is not the attitude Jesus wanted us to have. "Behold I come quickly"—suddenly, swiftly—means He could come today, and we should be getting ready today. And if He does not come today, that we should look for Him tomorrow. And if not tomorrow, then the next day, and so on, ever remembering His words: "Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping."

Date-setting also tends to dull expectation when the specified time turns out to be wrong. For example, I tell myself Christ will surely come within the next two years. Good. I can forego the things of this world that long, and then everything will be different. I am confident I can hold on that long.

But what happens when the two years are gone if He has not come? Is there not danger of my deciding to go after the things of the world while I can still enjoy them?

Such is not the attitude which will help us in getting ready for the great Day to come. Jesus would have us spend every day preparing. We need every day granted us, and every hour of each day. The work we must yet accomplish is great, and time at best is short. And if we are not making some definite progress each day, the Day of the Lord could easily arrive and find us sleeping.

Jesus' arrival will be a sudden interruption in a seemingly endless stream of very ordinary days, and will find most people all absorbed in the routine of life, unaware and unprepared. Jesus drew a fitting comparison with the times of Noah and of Lot, when God sent swift destruction upon people who had been amply warned. I would like to read His words as recorded by Luke, and as paraphrased in the Living Bible:

"When I return the world will be as indifferent to the things of God as the people were in Noah's day. They ate and drank and married—everything just as usual right up to the day when Noah went into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all." Then He spoke of Lot's day and a similar situation: "People went about their daily business—eating and drinking, buying and selling, farming and buildinguntil the morning Lot left Sodom. Then fire and brimstone rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. Yes, it will be 'business as usual' right up to the hour of my return" (Luke 17:26-30, TLB).

What a warning to us not to become so involved in the everyday business of our lives that we forget what is just ahead; for any day even today—could be the last.

This, in essence, was Jesus' warning in His words: *"Behold I come quickly."* Behold I am coming, swiftly and suddenly. What an urgent admonition to constant readiness. What a warning to stop dabbling in that which God forbids, to quit playing with temptation, to learn to abhor what God abhors and love what He loves.

For upwards of a hundred years now our Church has been looking for Christ to come. This may seem like a long delay, as men count time. But we need to remember we are dealing with time as God measures it. And the time goes on just as God knew it would-and planned that it shouldfor our benefit. More than a few of us would have had no chance if Christ had come when our founder expected Him first. The day of Christ's return was imminent when he sounded the midnight cry; and it is still imminent-and much nearertoday. We today can repeat the words of the prophet Zephaniah even more meaningfully than could he: "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly" (Zeph. 1:14). And what a day it will be for each of useither of unutterable grief or of indescribable delight and joy!



"Jill He come," O let the words Binger on the ringing chords; Bet them echo far and near: Soon the Savior shall appear! Bet the moments in between In their golden light be seen: See them as your time to do All that God requires of you:

Jime to labor and to pray, Time to seek your Sod each day; Time to fashion, pure and true, Sarments for your Bord to view; For the blissful welcome home Just beyond that "Till He come"!

Are you weary with the fight, With the vigil day and night, With the suffering and sin All around, without, within? Hush, be ev'ry murmur dumb: It is only "Till He come."





See the suffering and the strife, See the wickedness that's rife; See the bitterness and hate, Man 'gainst man and state 'gainst state? See the world with vice o'er run? It is only "Till He come."

Do! the time is almost spent; Heaven's veil will soon be rent! Soon His feast of joy He'll spread, Call the guests and break the bread: Some on duty, resting some, Severed only "Till He come."

Hail the bliss He comes to bring! Bet the heav'ns with music ring! Bet the earth His praises sing: Christ is victor, Christ is King! What though suff'ring intervene, Sadness, weakness, woe between: Be the struggle short or long, It is only "Till He come."

-Contributed.

MEGIDDO MESSAGE / December 1995

All Races One Blood?

"Could you please tell me what Acts 17:26 is saying? Does this verse mean that all men come from Adam and Eve when it says that God has made 'from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,' and that God has 'determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwelling'? This has been bothering me for some time. Thank you very much."

To say that God made "all nations of men...of one blood" would seem to imply, upon surface reading, that all of every nation are descended from two original parents, especially since this thought has been dominant throughout Christendom for many centuries. It is possible that the blood of one race can be successfully transfused to another race, without complications. However, comparing the statement with our observations of the races today, leaves many questions unanswered. For instance, why do the different races have strongly differing features, which are transmitted consistently from generation to generation-if all came from the same parents? And as far as all being "one blood," not even all of any one race are of "one blood"-blood types are very specific within families, and cannot be combined successfully.

It would seem much more likely that the different races were created as we know them, and each descended from its own, with its own features.

The idea that all races descended from two individuals is more than a religious concept—it savors strongly of Darwinism, which would have us believe that all life as we know it progressed through billions of years from the simplest form to the most complex—a concept which would give us all common ancestors, far beyond Adam and Eve—a concept not supported by Scripture.

There is a further problem with Adam and Eve being the original parents of all the human race: The Bible does not teach it (refer to our publication, *God's Spiritual Creation*). Even a careful reading of the first few chapters of Genesis confirms this fact. Note that after Cain killed Abel, he went *"out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod,"* where he married a wife, and *"builded a city"* (Gen. 4:16-17). The explanation has been offered that Cain married his sister, but the Bible makes no such statement. It would be even more preposterous to think that he *"builded a city"* from his own family members. No, we have no reason to believe that there were not many other people on the earth at the time of Adam and Eve. The findings of archaeology amply confirm this fact. Though the earth was not populated to the extent that it is now, there were many other people living.

God has not revealed the details of how He created humankind, or how the different races began. In spite of all that has been discovered and all that has been revealed, there still are many facts not known (Deut. 29:29).

What are we to get from Acts 17:26? First it does not seem that Paul is talking about the different races of humankind. The word "blood" has been supplied by the translators, and is not in the original. It seems more likely that he is speaking of the human race collectively, and the features its members share in common as creatures of God's creation. Paul is extolling above all the creative ability of God, who has "made the world and all things therein," who has given "to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one...all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (vs. 24-26). Not that He made all out of one set of parents, but rather all the human family share the same basic gifts and needs. For all of them He has made provision, and has assigned to each their "times" and the "bounds of their habitation," in line with His eternal purpose: "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (v. 27).

God has a plan for this earth, and He has allotted a certain length of time to each stage of its development. Of many ages past we know little or nothing. The race began, doubtless, on the animal level, the individuals getting what pleasure they could from life and dying without knowledge of God or the future. About 6,000 years ago, God called the first couple (Adam and Eve) into His service, and gave them an opportunity to form a character worthy of perpetuation in the eternal kingdom He had planned. During the following 6,000-year period, all who would answer His call and live according to His law He promised to reward with life eternal, and make them rulers in His kingdom. We are now very near the end of this first 6,000-year period. During the next 1,000 years, all the inhabitants of the earth will be given a chance to pledge allegiance to the new government Christ will establish and to prepare for eternal life on this earth. Those who achieve the Divine standard will be granted eternal life, and the promise of Numbers 14:21 will be fulfilled: "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."

Whatever one's race, God is no respecter of persons. All are on a par with Him, all are "of one"—none has any prior right to eternal life, or any special favor with God, only as they live in obedience to His laws. As Peter said, "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Crosses of Mercy

"As our mercies, so our crosses seldom come single; they usually come treading one upon the heels of another. They are like April showers—no sooner is one over, but another comes. And yet, Christians, it is mercy, rich mercy, that every affliction is not an execution, and every correction is not damnation. The higher the waters rose, the nearer Noah's ark was lifted toward heaven. The more thy afflictions are increased, the more thy heart should be raised heavenward."

— Thomas Brooks (17th century preacher)

CHECK YOURSELF: How much progress do I see in myself and my own spiritual life during the last year?

"NO" isn't hard to say when you know WHY you are saying it.



VITALIZE YOUR FAITH

vitalize: to endow with life; make alive; impart vigor or energy; animate.

L here are many hazards to the Christian life, but perhaps the greatest is a lack of concern.

Jesus said it to the Laodicean church: "I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. 3:15).

Paul said it to the Romans: "Your love must be genuine....Hate what is wrong, and hold to what is right" (Rom. 12:9, Goodspeed). "Be aglow with the Spirit" (Rom. 12:11, RSV). In other words, vitalize your faith. Make it live and grow.

Why are we at times lukewarm, lifeless, spiritless and dull? Only because we forget the gravity of the issues at stake: eternal life and eternal death.

Faith is to the spiritual life as breath is to the physical. Faith must have breath—deep, inner, vitalizing—or it cannot live.

There is no situation in life which becomes so pressing that we forget to breathe; neither should we allow the inner life of the spirit to be crushed by a lack of spiritual breath (faith). If we belong to God, every aspect of our life becomes part of our duty to Him, under His direction, His control. This is what Jesus meant in citing that first and greatest commandment, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength (Mark 12:30-31).

God has so arranged our lives that every day we have opportunity to strengthen the foundation of our service to Him; service which, faithfully performed, will bring us happiness now and eternal joy in the future.

Every individual, even the drifter, has some purpose in life, even if it be no more than to gratify his animal instincts. A few years ago there was a popular song, "You've Got to Serve Somebody," which carried this thought: "It may be the Lord, it may be the devil, but you've got to serve some-body." Whom do we serve? That depends on what love or what interest is first in our lives.

It is easy to make excuses for our lack of skill, ability, or training. But God is judging us not by what we have but by *how we use* what we have. He knows whether we are doing our best, whether we are making a wholehearted effort. In His presence there is no need to make excuse. Our self-discipline, our dedication, our determination and faith require nothing that we do not have; if we lack in any of these we are without excuse.

As we focus our minds on the Word of God, as we think about His promises, as we go over and over the great things of His law, we will find that our faith takes on new life and vitality. A new enthusiasm will fill us, a fresh hope animate us. As we see the great things God has promised coming to pass, our faith will move us to action, and soon we will be all warmed up. Our lukewarmness will be gone!

BEYINGTHE owever modern and sophisticated our high-tech world, the lowly alarm clock (or its digital equivalent) is still around. Found in every home, always loyal to its owner, saving him no end of trouble, delay and inconvenience, and asking nothing in return but a small amount of electricity, it is nevertheless the most thoroughly disliked of useful devices. The reason? Human perversity. While performing its once-a-day function of rousing the sleeper to activity, it at the same time acts as an irritant upon that part of him which loves indolence and repose, which says, "Let me sleep—just a little longer!"

Of course the solution is simple: Turn off the alarm clock and forget it. But the momentary triumph over the alarm clock soon turns into a daytime nightmare, as the sleeper misses the bus, or an important engagement, or loses his job—a high price to pay for a few extra moments of sleep.

Another too-familiar phenomenon is the post-alarm dream. The alarm sounds, but the sleeper decides to steal one more blissful minute—just one. Presently he dreams that he is up and dressing, but alas! A minute of bliss quickly turns into an hour. To prevent this distressing situation, the manufacturers have invented a special device, the snooze alarm. Properly used, this unique creation keeps at its bothering tactics until the sleeper is safely on his feet.

Our Heavenly Father has provided us with the best of modern-day alarm clocks: fulfilled prophecies. His clock even has a "snooze alarm" feature—not that it invites us to snooze, but because it keeps rousing us. Again, and again, and again it sounds, ceaselessly, ever increasing in volume as the morning of the new Day approaches.

An advertisement of a well-known alarm clock once read, "First he whispers, then he SHOUTS." The whispering days of God's alarm clock are past. Now its clear, brazen tones are sounding from every corner of the world. The darkness is passing; the rosy fingers of dawn are visible in the eastern sky. It is time we were on our feet and running. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14).

We have already stolen too many moments of slumber. Had we taken seriously the first whispers of the Divine alarm clock, we might long ago have passed the finish line. We have wasted more than enough time to complete our task.

We may cover our ears to shut out the rousing sound of God's alarm clock and drop back into slumber; but we deceive only ourselves by dreaming that we are alert and running. We alone will be the losers. This was the message Jesus gave to the Church at Sardis, "Thou hast a

God's alarm clock is sounding. We have no time for quibbling, or reservations, or rebellion; only for instant and decisive action.

name that thou livest, and art dead" (*Rev. 3:1*). And the saddest part of the message is that they sincerely believed that they were living and had need of nothing.

We must train ourselves to distinguish the sound of God's alarm clock from the multitude of noises that surround us. If we concentrate on its tone, if we keep our ear pealed for its ring, we will recognize it, and its sound will set our nerves vibrating and our feet flying.

God's alarm clock is sounding. We have no time for quibbling, or reservations, or rebellion; only for instant and decisive action. *"Awake to righteousness and sin not."* If we disregard God's alarm clock, our negligence will prove our ruin.

God's alarm clock is still doing its duty, but soon it will cease to sound. The Day of the Lord will be here. Let us arise now and prepare, *"be like men who are expecting their Lord when he shall return,"* lest He come suddenly and find us sleeping.

How Much Is IT WORTH?

"The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:44-46, NIV).



What is Jesus saying here? He is putting a value, a very high value, on the things He has to offer us. Here is a merchant who has found a treasure buried in a field. How much is it

worth to him? It is worth so much that he goes and sells everything he has so that he can buy that field. And here is a jeweler, one who knows value when he sees it. He discovers a pearl, beautiful beyond description. What does he do? He goes and sells everything he has so that he can be the proud owner of that one, perfect pearl.

And so the lesson for us: How much is the Kingdom worth to you? to me? The apostle Paul was willing to suffer the loss of all things that he might *"win Christ"* and be found *"in him"* (Phil. 3:8). Am I willing to go that far?

God isn't looking for great people, or brilliant people, or rich people, or highly trained people. All these may be good in their place, but they are only gifts that God has *given*. He is looking for something more. He is looking for those deep, heart-qualities of loyalty, courage and faith. He is looking for those who, come what may, cannot be enticed to sin. He is looking for those who are so committed, so true, so loyal that they are willing to set aside everything of their own and put Him first; give up all; sell out.

Do we feel that we do not have much to give, that our offering is small at best? Someone has said that serving Christ doesn't take *much* of a man; it takes *all* of him. And when God takes us like that, let us say, Lord, I go, eager for whatever You have in store for me. I go with expectancy. I go with humility, knowing that what You have offered me is worth infinitely more than the best that I could glean from this world.

God's Man of the Hour

Elijah

Por three and one half years the drought has persisted. The final showdown is near. Who is responsible for the drought—who can remedy it? At this point there is much more interest in the remedy than in assigning blame.

E DIVIDED KING

ISRAEL

BASHAN

AMMON

GILEAD

MOAE

The Challenge

Act II, Scene 2

Characters:

AHAB—King of Israel MELCHIDEK—King's Treasurer BIDKAR—Palace Guard OBADIAH—The King's Prefect JEHU—The Captain of the Guard ELIJAH—Prophet of the Lord

Setting: The well. Ahab and his retinue enter.

OBADIAH: This is the place, my lord.

AHAB: So! Well, where is your man?

OBADIAH: I do not know, my lord. He said plainly that he would be here at this hour.

AHAB: (menacingly) Well, he'd better be here soon, if he's any friend of yours.

OBADIAH: (looking about desperately) Something may have happened, my lord—I hope not. He will surely come, my lord. He is a man of his word.

AHAB: Listen, Obadiah, if this thing is a joke, it's a poor time to be playing jokes on your king. I've been good to you up till now, better than you deserve, as disloyal as you are. But this thing is just too much.

- MELCHIDEK: That's what I've said all along. One religion is plenty for one country, and sometimes too much. If I were the king, I would—
- AHAB: Well, what would you do?
- MELCHIDEK: Pardon me, my lord. These priests and their deviltry wear me down, and I speak too freely. But I do think it is time for a decision along this line.
- AHAB: It's coming. And if that so-called prophet doesn't appear very soon, I know what one decision will be. Sometimes I wonder who my friends are, or if I have any friends at all.
- (ELIJAH enters behind party)
- BIDKAR: Aye! There's your man, O king.
- ELIJAH: What troubles the king? (All turn quickly in surprise)
- AHAB: So you are the troubler of Israel. You are the man who has brought disaster upon this nation!
- ELIJAH: (sternly) It is not I, O king, who has troubled Israel. It is you, you and your family, who have forsaken the Eternal and followed Baal. Have you forgotten my words when I was last in your presence? Let your gods bring rain, if they indeed are gods.
- MELCHIDEK: My lord, you have heard all this before. Why should this fellow—
- ELIJAH: Silence! Now, O king, do this: Gather your people on Mount Carmel, with all 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Ashtoreth who are supported by Jezebel. Bring bullocks for the sacrifice. And there let it be proved once and for all who is the true God.
- AHAB: Do you give me orders?
- ELIJAH: Do as I say—unless you would rather have things go on as they are.
- Анав: I accept your challenge. Mount Carmel, at the new moon.

Breaking the News

ACT II, Scene 3

Characters:

AHAB—King of Israel Arzaad—Priest of Ashtoreth BAAL-ZEKAR—Priest of Baal Soldiers

Setting: The private parlor of the high priests. Baal-Zekar and Arzaad enter, and take their seats.

ARZAAD: Not a bad dinner, considering the times.

- BAAL-ZEKAR: No, considering the way things are on the outside. It was a good day for us, Arzaad, when we chose the priesthood. (both laugh)
- ARZAAD: Right you are. Here the nation is starving, and we haven't missed a meal. And pretty good fare, too. Jezebel sets a good table.
- BAAL-ZEKAR: Certainly we live on the fat of the land, and

why not? The people want us to have it. Remarkable, isn't it, how trusting the people are?

- Arzaad: They'll believe anything, even if it hurts.
- BAAL-ZEKAR: I've said it before—all gods are the same images of gold and silver, wood and stone. Baal—Jehovah—what's the difference? We understand, but how can you expect these peasants to know anything?
- ArZAAD: They believe anything we tell them—fortunately, for us. But who's this coming...?
- (ENTER Ahab and two soldiers)
- AHAB: (with mild irony) Good evening, merry gentlemen.
- BAAL-ZEKAR: (bowing low) And how may we serve our lord the king this evening?
- AHAB: I come in search of an expert opinion.
- ARZAAD: (pompously) Command us, my lord, and the wisdom of the ages is at your disposal. What disturbs my lord the king?
- AHAB: I don't know that I am disturbed. But I do have one question: Do you really believe one god is more powerful than another?
- BAAL-ZEKAR: Definitely, my lord. There are many gods, all are not equal, any more than all men are equal. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon.

ARZAAD: Is that so?

- AHAB: Then you are pretty sure that should we come to a test of power, Baal would come off first.
- BAAL-ZEKAR: Oh, certainly!
- AHAB: And if Baal and Ashtoreth join forces, they are practically unbeatable?
- ARZAAD: Absolutely.
- AHAB: Well, I certainly hope you know what you're talking about, because— (a tense, impressive pause)
- BAAL-ZEKAR: (softly) Because ...?
- AHAB: Because you're going to have a chance to try. Do you remember Elijah?
- (Priests are dismayed, but try to conceal it under a mask of contempt.)
- BAAL-ZEKAR: What! that wild-looking beggar from the desert?

ARZAAD: Is he still alive?

AHAB: Very much so—for the time being, at least. On behalf of Jehovah he has challenged us to a test of power on Mount Carmel at the next new moon. You will be there, with all your helpers, to show what you can do.

BAAL-ZEKAR: This is ridiculous, my lord.

- ArZAAD: It's beneath our dignity to contest publicly with this uncouth outlaw.
- AHAB: It's not beneath mine. I need rain. And we're going to find out once for all who is telling the truth.
- ArZAAD: (stiffly) We have never claimed to be rainmakers, my lord. If we were—

- AHAB: Never mind. I don't even know what the test is to be. We'll find that out when we get there.
- ARZAAD: Has the queen been consulted?
- AHAB: The queen is not going to be consulted. I was here before she was. This is my party.
- BAAL-ZEKAR: We are permitted to think this matter over?
- AHAB: No, the challenge has been accepted, and the arrangements made. I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. Eight hundred fifty against one—isn't that fair enough? Why should you be afraid?
- BAAL-ZEKAR: Oh, oh, I'm not afraid. What is there to fear? The whole thing is ridiculous. It is an insult to the temple.
- AHAB: Never mind about the insult. Baal can take care of himself, if he's at the top. That's all. Good night, gentlemen. Sleep well.
- (Exit AHAB and SOLDIERS)
- ARZAAD: Well, now, what do you make of that? Is the king out of his mind?
- BAAL-ZEKAR: I'm sure he is not. But come, Arzaad, don't be nervous. We have nothing to fear. This Elijah certainly hasn't anything more than we have. His God is just another god, and what is one more than another?
- ARZAAD: Well, I don't know. Something or somebody is causing this unusual weather, and I never did like the look in that fellow's eye.
- BAAL-ZEKAR: As I see it, the whole thing centers around the question of rain. You'll find that's what the test of power will be. He cannot make it rain any more than we can. If it's going to rain, it will rain, and we have just as much chance of striking the right moment as he has. And there are far more of us, so we can hold out longer. It's just a big waste of time and effort, and a blow to our dignity. But one good thing, it will get rid of this pest Elijah. He can't get away this time.
- ArZAAD: Has the king promised the protection of his troops?
- BAAL-ZEKAR: No, but we'll have it. He talks big now, but the queen will have something to say. Don't lose any sleep over it.
- Arzaad: (meditatively) Gold and silver, wood and stone. All alike. I certainly hope you're right.
- BAAL-ZEKAR: (suddenly confidential) Just between us, I do, too!

For Life or Death

Act II, Scene 4

Returning to Israel after three and a half terrible years, the stern old prophet reveals himself to OBADIAH and summons AHAB to his presence, at which time he issues his challenge for a conclusive test of power on Mount Carmel: Jehovah or Baal? One lone prophet of God against eight hundred and fifty false prophets, "One with God is a majority." The King accepts, and breaks the news to his priests, who are something less than enthusiastic.

The scene on Mount Carmel, one of the most thrilling in the whole Bible, follows, ending in the triumph of the Eternal and the destruction of the prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth. Then the rains begin again, in abundance, washing away the evil memories of the long thirst.

Characters:

AHAB—King of Israel OBADIAH—The King's Prefect JEHU—The Captain of the Guard BAAL-ZEKAR—Priest of Baal ARZAAD—Priest of Ashtoreth SOLDIERS ELIJAH—Prophet of the Lord MELCHIDEK—King's Treasurer BIDKAR—Palace Guard

- Setting: Mount Carmel. Elijah stands before Ahab, who sits on a portable throne, surrounded by military guard. Priests and officials are attending.
- ELIJAH: Ye people of Israel, how long do you halt between two opinions? If the Lord Jehovah is God, then follow him; but if Baal is god, follow him...

Oh ye will not answer? Ye say not a word! Have your king and queen so cowed you that you know not your own minds?...Are you, freeborn Israelites, fearful of them? Are you slaves as were your fathers in Egypt, or are you the freemen who occupy this land?

I am only one. There may be others who worship Jehovah, but they worship Him in secret. Here on the other hand are the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty of them, sleek, well-fed, smooth, oily. They are many. I am but one.

But let us take two bullocks. You, false prophets that you are, choose one for yourselves. (pauses) Ah! you have chosen the better one, of course. That is good. I am glad that you did so. I want this test to be altogether fair. Now cut it into pieces. How? It matters not. Cut it as you would when you make your customary sacrifices.

But light no fires. That is the test. Only call upon the name of your gods. Call upon all of them. Call on every Baal you know, from the least to the greatest, to send fire from heaven. If they answer, then let them be God. You shall have the first chance. I shall wait until you have tried.

Your bullock has been cut up. Good! Lay the pieces on your altar. And now, pray. Pray as you have never prayed before. Pray to your idols. Pray to your false deities. Pray to the adulterous gods whom you worship... "Baal, hear us!" You cry, and in much desperation. But he doesn't hear. He doesn't answer.

Where is your fire? See, there's not a spark. There's not even a little warmth. Call louder upon him. "Baal, hear us! Baal, hear us!"

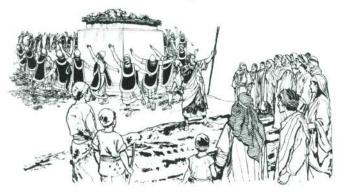
What, are there no Baals? or are they deaf, that they

cannot hear; or dumb, that they cannot answer? have they no power? Could they not even so much as light a little fire under your burnt offerings?

Cry aloud! For he is a god, is he not? Ah, but perhaps he is talking, and does not hear your voices. Or maybe he is off hunting somewhere, pursuing the deer of the highlands. Or maybe he is on a journey. Peradventure he is asleep, and must be awakened. Keep on calling. "Baal, hear us! Baal, hear us!"

Louder—louder. Leap higher. That's right cut yourselves—he loves to see the blood flow. Louder! What? Does he not listen? Do you cry in vain?

Well, now, wait, and I shall show you what the Most High can do. Give me a knife. I cut my bullock...I place it on the wood...Now have I fire or flint or iron in my hand? (spreading out his hands) Now come near unto me, all of you, that you can see what the Lord of hosts, the God of your fathers, can do. I have built an altar of twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob.



But now see what the Most High will do. What happened when these false prophets of Baal pleaded with their gods to light the dry wood upon their altar and consume their burnt offering? Nothing! Nothing at all! But now see what I shall do. Fill four barrels with water. No, fill them full. Now pour them on the burnt offering which I offer to Jehovah. Yes, on the wood, too. No, pour it on more slowly, so that every stick of wood is as wet as it can be.

Now fill them again. Pour the water on once more. Good! Now do it yet again, a third time. Good! That fills the trench, too. Now, is there anyone who could kindle a fire on this pile of wet wood?...No? Good! Then we shall see.

Could Baal light the wood on this altar and consume this sacrifice? No. He couldn't consume dry wood, and how would he burn wet? But watch now, and you will see. "Baal, hear us! Ha-ha-ha! Baal, hear us!" Four hundred and fifty shouting to the very hilltops, but Baal couldn't hear your prayers. Asleep, off hunting, or talking so loudly he couldn't hear your voices.

(Elijah, clasping his hands in prayer)

Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy Word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou wilt turn their hearts unto Thee again.

(He rises to his feet and extends his hands toward his altar. There is a blinding flash of light and a loud report. All present except ELIJAH recoil, covering their faces)

ELIJAH: It burns, it burns. The sacrifice is consumed!

- THE PEOPLE: *(in tumultuous shout).* The Lord, He is the true God! The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!!
- ELIJAH: (turning on the priests) And as for you and your prophets, your day is done. You are not fit to live. You have deceived this people, you have murdered the prophets of Jehovah. Their blood is on your hands, and cries out against you. Your lies and your hypocrisies and your murders have condemned you before Jehovah and before all Israel. In the name of Jehovah, I condemn you, as enemies of all that is good, to death by the sword, that the land may be cleansed and that the heavens may no longer be shut up. O king! Jehu! Bidkar! Take them all. See that not one escapes. Slay them at the brook!
- BAAL-ZEKAR: (groveling before ELIJAH) Spare us, Spare us, O righteous one! Spare us!
- ELIJAH: These two wretches—first of all. (*JEHU and BIDKAR close in*) (to AHAB) Go up, O king, eat and drink. Make haste! For I hear the sound of a great rain!

THE PEOPLE: Rain! Rain!! Rain!!

RAIN!!

ACT II Scene 5

Characters:

ELIJAH—Prophet of the Lord Servant

- Setting: The top of Mt. Carmel. Elijah sits on a stone. His servant enters from behind and touches him.
- ELIJAH: (pointing) Go up and look toward the sea, and tell me what you see.

SERVANT: (returning) There is nothing, my lord.

ELIJAH: Nothing? Go again.

- SERVANT: (returning) Still nothing, my lord.
- ELIJAH: Are you sure? Go, look again.
- SERVANT: I see nothing at all, my lord.
- ELIJAH: Go yet again. (servant shakes head, Elijah sitting upright, points silently)
- SERVANT: (excitedly) I see a little cloud rising out of the sea, no bigger than a man's hand.
- ELIJAH: It is well. Go quickly and tell Ahab to harness his chariot and start, lest the rain stop him.
- (SERVANT leaves. Sky darkens, sound of great rain storm. ELI-JAH rises and stands with lifted hands in praise and thanksgiving). (The End)



will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; his young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon. O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me.

-Hosea 14:5-8, NIV

How Shall We

n these verses the prophet Hosea paints a beautiful word picture of luxuriant spiritual growth. Could words better express how the Divine power can transform the human soul and cause it to blossom and bear fruit, to grow in beauty and in usefulness?

The Prophet employs a combination of emblems—lily, cedar, olive, cornfield, vineyard—because all are needed to furnish an adequate picture.

First is the picture of growth and fruitfulness: "*He shall blossom as the lily*." There are various plants of the lily family that flourish in Palestine, which are noted not only for their beauty but for their rapid and luxuriant growth. So many varieties of lilies, but they all *grow*—some in heat, others in coolness; some in soil, others in water. Some are tall, others grow with broad leaves over the surface of a quiet pool; but they all bloom.

We cannot stand still spiritually. Our spiritual life cannot be like the unprogressive motion of the squirrel in a cage who jumps onto the wheel and turns it, the faster he frisks the faster the wheel revolves, yet he himself makes no progress. If we are not advancing, we are going backward.

Every normal child delights in being measured. He is 36 inches tall. Next time he measures 38 inches, then 40. Time passes, and he has reached four feet. Each time a gain is discovered, how delighted he is! How anxious he is to be as tall as father, or some admired friend. Then comes the time when he stops growing; he will never be any taller. That time need never come in the spiritual life. However long one lives, his character can keep on growing, expanding, becoming nobler and nobler with the passing years.

If each of us had been measured a year ago and then again today, would we find a gain in height, or a loss? What would the results show?

Here are some searching questions we need to ask ourselves. Each of us was once a little child in the spiritual life. What have we done for ourselves? What have we gained? What have we lost? We are stronger in muscle, stronger in intellect, stronger in body, but what of the higher nature? Consider Paul's catalogue of faith, hope, love. Have we gained in these, or lost? Is it easier to pray, or harder, now that we are older? Have the experiences of life brought us nearer to God and made Him seem more to us, or have they carried us further from Him and made Him seem more shadowy and unreal? What have we done with ourselves? Have we grown, or have we lost?

But Hosea used other symbols to show luxuriant growth. "He shall ... cast forth his roots as Lebanon." The lily grows fast, but is fragile; stability is also needed. The tender plant that grows quickly to maturity is quickly killed by frost. Not so with the cedars of Lebanon. This faithful plant of the Lord grows "like a lily," but "casts forth its roots as Lebanon." It is like the plant the prophet Jeremiah pictured: the tree "planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. 17:8). There is no substitute for deep, firmly anchored roots that can draw a steady supply of water and nourishment from the soil. Just so the plant that is God's true "Israel." He "shall...cast forth his roots as Lebanon," and find the source of continual nourishment.

Then, too, "his branches spread." The allusion here is again to the cedars of Lebanon. It is an image of fixedness and forceful reserve. The cedar of Lebanon is far-famed for its strength and stateliness. Very deeply rooted, its main trunk sends out numerous branches that spread out horizontally, tier upon tier, until the diameter of the ground compassed by the tree is even greater than its height. In like manner, the branches of God's spiritual plants spread, when the roots are struck down deep into the hidden life of faith, prayer and fidelity to God. Such a plant is morally robust and strong to withstand any temptation that arises.

Then Hosea pictures beauty. "His splendor shall be as the olive tree, and his fragrance as Lebanon." There is doubtless a natural glory in the slender gray-green foliage of the olive; but to the people of Palestine, the attractiveness of the olive consisted largely in its capacity to yield fruit, from which they pressed valuable oil. This emblem is thus a suggestion of the beauty of holiness, a growing, vigorous character which shows itself in yielding fruit unto holiness. If our life has high moral tone, intense spiritual earnestness, strong and deep-rooted convictions, an attractive Christlike character, it will be beautiful in the sight of God and all who are godly. And "they that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."

To such, God will be "as the dew," providing the life-giving moisture so vital to growth. "I will be as the dew unto Israel:... his young shoots will grow...."

Thank God, we can grow! In this respect, a tree is more wonderful than a mountain. The mountain is dead, the tree is a thing of life. While the mountain is slowly crumbling away, the tree is growing and becoming a parent of new trees. And how much more wonderful is a man than a tree. With a man, as with a tree, growth is the law of life. When growth ceases, decay begins. We not only *can* but *must* grow, else we shall die.

How shall we grow? "Like a lily," casting forth our "roots as Lebanon," with branches that spread and beauty that shall be "as the olive tree." This is Hosea's picture of thriving, spiritual growth.

And what does that mean, translated into our terms? It means a more teachable Spirit, eager to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him; a sturdier Faith, a faith that grasps the unseen Hand and holds it even amid the shadows; a bolder Courage that hails difficulties with delight and is ever on the offensive against wrong; and a more consuming Love, a love that forgets self and is lost in the service of God.

Oh, that I may grow!
What though time cuts his furrow in my face,
My heart may ever add grace unto grace,
Grace with added days still keeping pace.
Oh, that I may grow!

A family's car broke down, and the family was stranded and had to spend the night in the wilds. The next day, at the motor shop, they learned that the problem had been the failure of a part that cost \$1.99.

It isn't the big things that often block our progress. Most often it's the \$1.99 size. Watch out for the little things!

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We need to stand in holy reverence before the God who is and be awed by what He says. We need to stand strong in the face of temptation and fear most "lest I sin against thee."

We need to live without vacillation, showing by our lives that God is God and that before Him we stand, and that His laws are not negotiable.



Y ou are the fellow that has to decide Whether you'll do it or toss it aside. You are the fellow who makes up your mind Whether you'll lead or will linger behind. Whether you'll try for the goal that's afar Or be contented to stay where you are. Take it or leave it, here's something to do, Just think it over, it's all up to *YOU*!

Why Did the Jews Reject Christ?

"I've wondered why the Jews had such hatred for the new doctrine of Christianity. They treated Paul (one of their own) terribly (see 2 Cor. 11:23-39)."

The Jews, though looking for the long-promised Messiah, refused to accept Him when He came. Probably the most obvious reason for their rejecting Christ was that they were looking for a king, one who would come in pomp and power, not be born as a baby.

There is also the issue of the law of Moses, to which the Jews adhered meticulously. The law which Jesus taught was a law far deeper, and not to the liking of the majority of Jews. For instance, a person might harbor hatred for another, but as long as he did not harm another outwardly, he was not a law breaker. Christ's law required the heart to be right as well as the actions, hence, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15). The Jews were content with their outward form, comfortable in their ignorance, not concerned about their salvation. When Jesus came to rescue them from these false concepts, they would not listen.

But before we blame the Jews for rejecting Christ, let us realize that the Gentiles are no different. While proclaiming Christ loud and long, they reject His vital message of obedience, giving little heed to Jesus' own words, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Whatever one's nationality, human nature is the same in every age, ever ready to maintain a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5).

About the Rich Man and Lazarus

"Last Sunday I heard a preacher talk on the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). I have heard several sermons on this story. I believe that Lazarus refers to the Jews. They rejected Christ and have been persecuted for centuries.

"In verse 31, Jesus makes the point that they had Moses and the Prophets, but would not listen to them; neither did they accept Christ who rose from the dead.

"God has given us life and breath. We cannot see either of them, but when the breath leaves the body, it dies immediately. Smith's Bible Dictionary defines 'life' as follows: 'Being alive, breath, spirit existence, living, breath, air, wind.' Neither life nor breath are separate entities that live on after our decease. Am I correct?"

Jesus taught many things by parables. Sometimes He explained in great detail the exact meaning of the parable, such as the Parable of the Sower, or the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. At other times, as with the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, He gave no explanation whatever. So we must draw our conclusions by studying His other teachings, keeping in mind the overall teaching of the Bible.

Your application of Lazarus to the Jewish people in this parable has some facts to support it. The Jews were a persecuted people, and as a nation they rejected Christ. But this information seems contradictory to the point of the parable, as Jesus makes Lazarus His "hero"— after the Rich Man and Lazarus die, Lazarus receives "good things," such as acceptance in the Father's house, and a place in Abraham's bosom (a symbol of happiness and ecstasy). Meanwhile, the Rich Man is in "torments." In Jesus' words, Abraham says to the Rich Man, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke 16:25). If Lazarus was a representation of the Jewish nation, Jesus would seem to be approving their rejection of Him, which we know He did not.

The Jews did have Moses and the Prophets; so did all other believers at the time. The concluding statement of the parable is made concerning the five brethren of the Rich Man, that if they did not listen to Moses and the Prophets, *"neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead"* (verse 31).

It seems more in line with Scripture teaching to take the Rich Man as representing the unfaithful covenant makers, who accept what they wish of the law of God and reject the rest, and Lazarus as the faithful believers who are eager to hear and obey every law of God. Then the conclusions of the parable are parallel with the rest of Scripture teaching: The faithful awake after the resurrection to enjoy eternal bliss; the unfaithful awake to receive the reward of their faithlessness: disappointment and anguish and ultimately eternal death.

Contrary to the belief of most people, this parable does not teach that we are conscious after death. You are correct in your statement that "when the breath leaves the body, the body dies immediately." You are also correct in your statement that "neither life or breath are a separate entity that lives on after our decease." When the body ceases to breathe and perform the functions of life, it dies, and no separate part of it lives on or leaves the body at death. The Psalmist says that when a man dies, "his thoughts perish" (Ps. 146:3-4).

• What About Jury Duty?

"My friends tell me that serving on a jury is part of being a good citizen, and I want to be a good citizen. But I wonder, is it lawful for a Christian to sit on a jury?"

We are grateful to our government and its founders for our judicial system. Though the system is far from perfect, history has seen worse, much worse. Even the systems of justice set up by the early colonists allowed such horrors as trial by fire and trial by water. At present, it seems that our government is erring on the side of too lenient rather than too severe. But given the limitations inherent in humans judging humans, perfect justice is impossible. Trial by jury, where the decision is the considered opinion of a number of persons, is probably the best that unaided humans can devise. The law in ancient Israel provided that an accusation be established only "in the mouth of two or three witnesses." But the inevitable problems arise, when there are no witnesses, or the testimonies of witnesses conflict, or witnesses are dishonest.

Should a Christian serve on a jury?

The present system follows a plan of sending out jury summonses to citizens apparently eligible to serve. To the best of our information, answering a jury summons is required; actually serving on a jury depends on one's being selected, and the selection process allows one to state his or her religious convictions, which may be grounds for dismissal.

Though we have no direct instructions in the Word of God, whether to serve or not to serve on a jury, several Biblical statements might be helpful.

1) The jury system is part of the present government, and if we follow the example of Jesus, we will keep separate from it. Jesus was politically minded-He testified that He was born to be a King (John 18:37). But He said at the same time, "My kingdom is not of this world" (verse 36). As Christians, as aspiring citizens of Christ's coming Kingdom, we have committed ourselves to His service. Any service to the governments of this world would be a conflict of allegiances. If they could understand, they would not want dedicated Christians on their juries or in their governments. Christians do not think like those who belong to the present system. Their opinions, their values, their standards are not those accepted in political arenas today. If our present government should enforce judgment by Christian standards, the entire system would be upset.

2) Believers are commanded not to be entangled with "the affairs of this life." The Apostle wrote: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). Serving the present government in any official capacity (as holding public office, serving as a judge or on a jury) could easily be understood as an entanglement with the affairs of this world, creating a situation in which one is responsible for defending values which he or she does not espouse.

The Apostle says further that no one will be crowned "except he strive lawfully" (2 Tim. 2:5), that is, according to the rules. Paul was well acquainted with competitive sports, where for a single infraction of the rules one forfeited his right to the prize. Hence he says that no one will be crowned "except he strive lawfully"—according to the rules. 3) The Bible tells us that God is sovereign over the rulers of this world. "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:17). Those in power today are serving in positions not open to committed Christians at the present time. But Christians are to respect their authority as God's instruments to keep law and order so "that we may

Christians do not think like those who belong to the present system. Their opinions, their values, their standards are not those accepted in political arenas today.

lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

4) Christians are commanded to be "subject to the powers that be," to live as obedient subjects, being, as Paul said, "Subject...for conscience sake" (Rom. 13:1-5), except for a situation where the law of the land conflicts with the higher law of God. The present rulers, in establishing and operating civil governments are doing a service in keeping law and order, and as Christians we must pay our taxes, respect them, and obey them as "God's ministers." But Christians today do not have the right to participate in government. When God had a nation on earth and had placed the government of that nation in the hands of His people, His people were rightly advised to participate. They could declare war, prosecute criminals, and enforce legal measures. That arrangement, however, terminated, and since then God's plan has been to let the nations exercise authority as they wish, while the believers give their time and effort to seeking *"first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness"* (Matt. 6:33).

Christians have no right to be part of the present government structure but must wait the time when God will restore His Kingdom and make His people "officers of peace and exactors of righteousness" (Isa. 60:17-18).

5) Christians today, not having Holy Spirit power, lack the ability to make a proper judgment which they can support to the level required by their conscience. To non-believers and those not committed, judging according to evidence available is necessary. But with the Christian's higher allegiances, such a judgment is not possible. The Bible mandate is, *"He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord"* (Prov. 17:15). As Christians, we can have no part in condemning an innocent person, and unless we ourselves were witnesses, we could not be sure of the evidence provided or know of a certainty which witness' testimony was truthful and which was not.

6) Serving on a jury could mean exposing ourselves to information which could make our Christian effort to offer a pure and untarnished service to God more difficult. This is not to say that Christians do not have sufficient defenses to combat such, but the exposure could do nothing to help us fulfill the command "to keep [oneself] unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

In the future, after Christ returns, the situation will change. Then, the "in" party will be *our* party, and the candidates for office those whom we can endorse. The executive authority will once again be in the hands of God's people. We want to be ready to take part in that new administration, by living as citizens of His kingdom now.

• "Thus saith the Lord" ...?

"I have been a subscriber to your MESSAGE for several years, and think it speaks for itself. But I have a question: Should Christians be embalmed as the practice is today? Should Christians have implants as are done today? And what about cremation, is it Christian?

"I am only seeking God's will on these subjects, a 'Thus saith the Lord.' I don't think Christians today are going deep enough into the spiritual. Your comments please."

(Continued on page 26)

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WHAT ARE MY CHILDREN READING?

b r o w s i n g through the religious section of our local bookstore the other day, trying to hunt down some suitable books for our children. To us parents who are trying to raise our children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," finding suitable reading material can be a real challenge.

was

I was encouraged by the large selection on display. Looking over the section for ages 7-10, I selected a book with a colorful cover, and leafed through it. It was a version of the Bible designed for children to read for themselves. Filled with colorful, imaginative art that would hold their interest while they read favorite Bible stories, this book I could see immediately, would be one that little Peter would love and treasure. Then, looking closer, I stopped to wonder: If I gave this book to Peter, I would have to spend much time with him, going over carefully what was true in it, and what was not. Of course it opened with the Garden of Eden, and a large serpent coiled, hanging by its tail, and talking to Eve. On another page was the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, and the angel had enormous wings.

I replaced the book upon the shelf, and picked up another, this one a "Read With Me" Bible for younger children. Again the cover was colorful, but the illustrations inside told me at a glance that this was not the book for my children. The people of the Bible were portrayed as comic book caricatures, often irreverent and silly. Yes, the children might like the book, but what would they be learning? I quickly closed the book and replaced it on the shelf, then made another choice.

Wamily 172 atters

And so my search went on.

We are very thankful to live in a part of the world where well-written, colorful books are available. But we must be constantly watching what we give our children to read, because we want them to develop a deep reverence and love for the Word of God that will go with them all through their life, that will keep them choosing the best. I bought one book that day; it was a story about Jesus. It was not everything I would like it to have been, but its tone was reverent and its message instructive.

As Christian parents, we have to be extra discriminating in our choice of reading material, both for ourselves and for our children. That is why my husband and I always make a practice of looking through books before we give them to our children, whether the books are from the religious bookstore, the variety store, the supermarket, or the library.

Besides the inaccuracies in many religious books, we must constantly guard our children against that which

We must teach our children to judge between mediocre reading and that which is really worthwhile. is even worse: the onslaught of mediocre and nonsense literature which is everywhere today, stories of monsters and pictures of terror. The best way to keep our children from comic books and unreal stories, we have found, is to provide them with plenty of edifying, instructive books. Fortunately, there are still wholesome materials available. But even the apparently harmless books-stories about the earth and its natural wonders, true-to-life stories about boys and girls and their problems-all need careful previewing. Remember, our children are continually learning from what they see and read.

The very best book available is, of course, the Bible and today its stories have been rewritten many times for children of all ages, from toddlers to teens. In the Bible are stories of adventure and excitement: stories that touch the heart, that inspire, and teach deep lessons of character. And best of all-these stories are true! These are about people we look forward to meeting, and which we can tell our children about. The children can learn what actually happened, and can learn to have confidence in God, just as these people did. This will give them background knowledge which they will need to live dedicated Christian lives in their mature years.

But even the best Bible story books must be scanned for stories which leave the wrong impression or are not according to the facts contained in the Word of God. Such points can often be easily corrected—and with good purpose, because our children have to learn that they cannot trust everything they read, *(Continued on page 26)*

WHAT ARE MY CHILDREN READING?

(Continued from page 25)

that they must be careful and discriminating, and believe only what the Word of God teaches.

At our house, we like to set aside a certain time every day for Bible story reading. Even a few minutes a day can mean a lot. Our children never have to be coaxed into sitting down and listening. Even the youngest loves the stories and pictures and can identify many of the Bible characters.

Our reading time also provides us with many topics of conversation for the day-whether we are at work, or at the table, traveling in the car, or even walking down the street. These unplanned talks give us another opportunity to convey our enthusiasm and love for God and His Word to our children in a real-life setting. The more we teach our children about the Bible, the more they will talk and think about the people who served God in former times, the more real these godly people will become in their lives, and the more our children will want to copy their examples (or learn from their mistakes).

Very soon our children will be choosing their own books to read. It is our privilege now to give them a desire for the very best.

Are We As Prepared?

Many little creatures have a life of only one season. And during that time they must produce their fruits. In the count of God's time aren't our lives just like that? We have only one short season in which we may work out our salvation. If we do not produce good fruit during this time, there will be no resurrection unto eternal life. No matter what stage of life we are in, we must be producing good fruits. G. P.

Georgia

Not the Easy Way

I want to work harder than ever before to rid myself of every ungodly characteristic that is dragging me backwards or slowing my progress in becoming the kind of person God wants me to be and the person I have to be if I expect any eternal rewards!

Being a Christian is much like slavery. Striving to be loyal to the true faith is the hardest labor of one's entire lifetime. When following Christ our life is

Questions & Answers (Continued from page 24)

We find nothing in the Bible that can be used as an argument either for or against embalming as it is practiced today. Nor does the Bible give us any guidance on the subject of implants, or cremation. From God's standpoint, there is no need to preserve the physical body beyond the end of one's life because God, who created us, can as easily remake us when He wishes.

The Bible teaches that all believers will be resurrected at the return of Christ, to be judged and rewarded according to what they have done. When we speak of the resurrection of the body to life, it would probably be more accurate to say the reconstruction of the body. In many cases, the deceased body has been lying in the grave for hundreds or thousands of years, and would be totally disintegrated. But this presents no problem to God.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proof positive that we also may be resurrected if we meet the criteria God has established. Our chief concern today should be, Are we living up to His standards so that we can merit a resurrection?

If one can live a longer, more productive life by having an organ of his body replaced or by receiving a blood transfusion, we find nothing in the Bible to prohibit it. During the days of Jesus and the Apostles, when they had Holy Spirit power, they could heal without the need of the cumbersome methods used today. That power will soon be restored, and the "inhabitant shall not say, I am sick" (Isa. 33:24). This is the ideal, but until that time we must depend for healing upon the natural laws God has set in motion and the expertise of the medical profession.

Although you do not explain, your comment that the religions of today do not go "deep enough into the spiritual" is surely true if by "spiritual" you mean the remaking of the inner heart and life according to the law of God. Jesus advised His hearers to "make clean the inside of the cup and platter" (Matt. 23:26), to lay up good thoughts in one's mind ("good treasure," Matt. 12:35-36), and to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30-31). Again He said that that which cometh from inside a man's heart is what defiles the man (Mark 7:21-23). Truly these teachings are not central in the majority of churches today. \Box

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most certainly not our own. I can understand why so few followed Christ in His day and why so few are seeking the Christ-like life and truth today. Few wish to give up their own way, their thoughts and adhere to a strict life style. Instead, they prefer to follow religious leaders that say and do the things these people wish to hear and that lead them to walk that broad road. Most are searching for an easy way without any real effort on their part. Perhaps, when Elijah comes some will see the folly of their ways and change.

Maine

R. D.

Most Concerned

Iowa

We know Christ will be here before long, so why should we worry about anything-only our own self, that we may be ready. I know the Lord has helped me so much. I'm most concerned about myself, if I am not ready. But I keep working, trying to do right. What a gathering we are looking forward to!

E. T.

Obituary Reta M. Bedard

We have received the following word from Alfred Bedard (husband of Reta), of Kamiah, Idaho:

Reta had a hard fight, that she could not win. Disease destroyed her mind and body but not her faith in the Lord.

Up to the end she sang praise to the Lord and we studied the Bible each day. Her last words were, "O merciful God."

I thank each one of you for your faithful inspiration that helped Reta stay on the road of truth.

Reta Bedard died August 1, 1995. She subscribed to the Message for more than forty years, made several visits to the church in Rochester, and corresponded regularly as long as her health permitted. She is survived by her husband, two daughters, two sons, two brothers, two sisters, and many grandchildren.

Did you cover more ground than you usually do Because of the grouch that you carried with you? If not, what's the use of a grouch or a frown, If it won't smooth a path or a grim trouble drown? If it doesn't assist you, it isn't worth while, Your work may be hard, but just do it—and smile.

Things Unseen

Do you believe only in the things you can see?

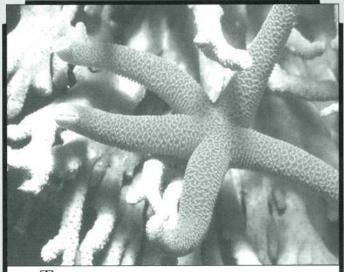
The things not seen are the most important—a house is a thing seen, but a home is unseen; a brain can be seen, but a mind is unseen; you can see a mother's face, but not the love behind it; you can see a word, but not an idea; a church, but not God; flags, but not patriotism.

Some of us are inclined to seek only the tangibles of life, such as food, clothes and money. But behind every tangible object we should look for the intangible, which is more essential and of far greater value.

If we are unhappy, perhaps it is because we're starving—not for lack of natural food but because we don't draw from the boundless supplies that are available to us in the storehouse of God's Word. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faith and love are just as available as the atmosphere we breathe, yet we foolishly neglect to take them into our hearts and let them strengthen us.

The poorest man, the humblest soul can be happy if he but opens and revels in the infinite storehouse of unseen treasures that are his.

I o work without complaining, to be tolerant, tender and forgiving with someone who may be a little slower than we; to wait with calmness when someone does the right thing the wrong way, or the wrong thing the long way—this is patience.



"The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land." —Psalm 95:5, NIV

Kind Words Heal

Kindness is a language the dumb can speak and the deaf can hear. Kind words soothe, quiet and comfort the hearer.

Have you stumbled and been overtaken in a fault? Do not become discouraged. Accept it as an opportunity. Arise and forget the things of the past and go forward—beyond yourself.

God does not comfort us in order to make us comfortable but to make us comforters.

Take Advice!

There is a story told of a man too proud to take advice.

Long ago an English fleet lay at anchor near Portsmouth. Among its ships was the Admiral's, *The Royal George*, the finest and most valued of the fleet.

Just as everything was ready to sail, the First Lieutenant discovered that the water pipes were out of order. He decided, however, that it would not be necessary to haul the ship in to dock for the repair; they could simply keel her over a little until that part of the ship was above water.

This was done, and the workmen remedied the trouble. The ship had not been righted when another vessel came alongside the ship. A carpenter on board the second vessel had seen danger and wanted to tell the Lieutenant that his ship must be righted at once. The Lieutenant, a proud young man, told the carpenter to mind his own business and he would mind his ship.

The danger increased, and the carpenter sent warning a second time to the lieutenant. The ship must be righted at once, instantly, or all would be lost. This time the officer saw the danger, but too late. Water was already pouring into the ship and before help or rescue could be found, down went the ship.

The gallant ship was lost because one man was too proud to take advice.

INFLUENCE

U rop a pebble in the water, just a splash and it is gone, But there's half a hundred ripples circling on, and on, and on, Spreading, spreading from the center, flowing on out to the sea, And there is no way of telling Where the end is going to be.

Urop a pebble in the water...in a minute you forget, But the little waves are flowing, there are ripples circling yet; All the ripples flowing, flowing, to a mighty wave have grown, And you've disturbed a mighty river Just by dropping in a stone.

Urop an unkind word or careless, in a minute it is gone, But there's half a hundred ripples circling on, and on, and on. They keep spreading, spreading, spreading from the center as they go, And there is no way to stop them, Once you've started them to flow.

Urop an unkind word or careless...in a minute you forget, But the little waves are flowing, there are ripples circling yet; And perhaps in some sad heart a mighty wave of tears you've stirred, And disturbed a life that's happy When you dropped an unkind word.

Drop a word of cheer and kindness, just a flash and it is gone, But some half a hundred ripples circle on, and on, and on, Bearing hope and joy and comfort on each splashing, dashing wave, Till you wouldn't believe the volume Of the one kind word you gave!

Urop a word of cheer and kindness...in a minute you forget, But there's gladness still a-swelling and there's joy a-circling yet; And you've rolled a wave of comfort, whose sweet music can be heard Over miles and miles of water Just by dropping one kind word.