

SPRING 2018 • VOLUME 105, No. 1

Megiddo Message

Death is
swallowed up
in **VICTORY!**

-1 Corinthians 15:54

by GERALD R PAYNE

CAPTURED BY THE DREAM

Have you ever wondered how to carry your zest and fervor for Christ into those days when the car won't start, or the furnace quits, or the children are sick—or your job is suddenly gone?

What is the source of the spirit that moved the prophet Jeremiah when he said the Word of the Lord was in his heart *"like a burning fire shut up in [his] bones"*? (Jer. 20:9). What made the difference between the flamingly zealous apostle Paul and his cool-hearted helper Demas, whose fire finally went out?

How does one move from a promise to a passion? What makes the difference between one who serves with spirit, and one who only does a duty?

I'm thinking that the real issue is what draws us to God, the underlying incentive, the dream in our hearts, that bright picture in our minds of His promise of future glory and our grip on it, something you and I really want. Each one of us wants eternal life, but we need something more specific, a clear mental picture of what we want to do or be or enjoy in Eternity! This picture may be very individualized. I happen to like being with Christian friends, and even a day or two visiting with the angel Gabriel, along with an invitation to visit his celestial home, would be pure delight. Maybe you are one who likes to learn. You are ready to enroll in Zion University under the direction of the angels, and take whatever courses they offer. Or maybe you yearn to create, or design—a new flower, a new pattern, or a perfect work of art that at this time you can't even imagine.

Or maybe your longing is travel—the doors to the universe are waiting to open! Yes, all this is well within the wonder of God's promise, which is *"exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!"* (Eph. 3:20).

People in the Bible were captured by these dreams. You will recall that the old patriarchs were looking for a country, because they were aliens and pilgrims in this one. They really had no place to call home, but would have liked very much to have one. Yet they were willing to leave their place called home in search of a far better, future one. For this future home they were willing to spend everything. Abraham was among these, for we read, he looked *"for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb. 11:10). At the present time Abraham is sleeping. But one day soon when Jesus comes, he with all the faithful will awake, and Abraham will become the blessed inhabitant of that eternal city, and right here on earth! (see Rev. 21).

Yet we all have a tendency to dwell in the here-and-now. True, there are matters that require our immediate attention. But is this all we want? Never!

How can we dwell beyond the here-and-now? The apostle Paul had the secret: *"Forgetting the things that are past and reaching forward."*

*"Forgetting the...past
and reaching forward..."*

—Philippians 3:13

WE BELIEVE...

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

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27



Megiddo Message

The **Megiddo Message** (USPS 338-120) (ISSN 0194-7826) is published quarterly by the Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619. Telephone: 585-436-1614. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, New York and additional offices.

Publication Staff:

Ruth E. Sisson, Editor; Gerald R. Payne, Executive Editor. Art and design by Margaret A. Tremblay; Subscriptions Manager, Donna R. Mathias.

Subscription Rate and Renewals:

One year (four issues) \$12.00. Send to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697. Or e-mail megiddo@megiddo.com. Or call 585-436-1614.

Note: For the protection of our subscribers, we do not sell, rent, lease, publish or distribute our mailing list.

Address Changes?

Be sure to notify promptly of any change in your address. Please include your old mailing label and your new address. Mail or e-mail to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, New York 14619-1697. Postmaster: Send all changes of address to Megiddo Church, 481 Thurston Road, Rochester, NY 14619.

URL: www.megiddochurch.com

E-mail address: megiddo@megiddo.com

Manuscript Policy: Unsolicited manuscripts for publication are not accepted.

The **Megiddo Message** is the official organ of the Megiddo Church, founded in 1880 by L. T. Nichols. Publication was begun in 1915. Maud Hembree, Editor-in-Chief (1915-1935); Ella M. Skeels, Executive Editor (1935-1945); Percy J. Thatcher, Editor (1945-1958); Kenneth E. Flowerday, Editor (1958-1985); Newton H. Payne, Editor (1985-1997).

The **Megiddo Message** is available in microfilm from Bell & Howell Information and Learning, Serials Acquisitions, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Publishing Frequency: The Megiddo Message is published with the seasons—Spring (March), Summer (June), Fall (September), and Winter (December).

Bible Quotations: Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version or the New King James Version. Other versions are identified as used.

The following lexicons are abbreviated as:

BDAG—Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; **DBL**—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; **EDNT**—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; **GES**—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; **HAL**—Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; **LSJ**—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; **LN**—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains; **SHG**—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. **THAYER**—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

MEGIDDO MEANS...

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



- EDITORIAL
2 Captured by the Dream *by Gerald R. Payne*

- SPECIAL FEATURE
4 Believers On Tiptoe
Because Jesus is Alive!

- POEM
6 The Day of Resurrection

- ARTICLES
10 Jesus: Excellence in Life

- 11 In Search of Meaning** *by Russell Hamby*

- 12 Don't Be Caught Sleeping**
When life offers you an opportunity

- KNOW YOUR BIBLE
15 Come and Dine • Famous Words—Who Said Them? • Who?

- BIBLE STUDY: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
16 Faith In Action (LESSON FOUR) *by Ruth E. Sisson*
What I Have I Give You • Peter's Next Sermon •
Confusion about the Messiah?

- ARTICLE
22 Keep Out of the Debating Society *by Edward Shayler*

- QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
24 The Bible—Can We Trust Every Passage? *by Gerald R. Payne*

- YOUTH IN CHRIST
28 Why Wally Woodchuck Changed His Tune

- LINES TO LIVE BY
31 The Happiness of Duty

- BACK COVER
32 "He's Coming!"

Believers ON TIPTOE

BECAUSE JESUS IS ALIVE!

On the day after the Roman soldiers had executed Jesus, Pontius Pilate found himself facing the somewhat uneasy chief priests and the Pharisees. *"The Pharisees....said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, After three days I will rise again.' Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can'"* (Matt. 27:62–65, RSV).

Think about that! Just how would you secure anything to restrict the power of God?

The Jewish authorities openly confessed one of their fears: that Jesus' disciples might steal the body and then launch a movement based on the claim that their Leader was risen from the grave. Underneath their expressed fear was another one that the priests and Pharisees found no courage to acknowledge: What if, by the power of God, Jesus were to come forth alive from the grave?

What the Jewish authorities found impossible to express, Pilate had dared to insinuate in his order to those who were responsible for posting the guard at the tomb of Jesus: *"Make it as secure as you know how."* It was as if he was saying, Do everything possible to keep Jesus in the grave!

Religious leaders and unbelievers for centuries have been trying to make the grave as secure as possible, to keep Jesus in the grave. For some strange reason it is easier to believe in a continuation of life after death than to believe in a restoration of life. Somehow the human mind resists openly acknowledging the power of God to renew and restore life.

But a physical, bodily resurrection is the plan of God for every sleeping believer. This plan has been certified to us by the fact of Jesus' resurrection, which rests on such solid evidence:

- 1) the empty tomb;
- 2) the changed attitude of the disciples and the spread of Christianity
- 3) the appearances of Jesus to His disciples

EVIDENCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

The Gospels indicate that Jesus appeared on several occasions, and to a great number of people—even 500 at one time! The evidence is strengthened by the fact that some of these people were incredulous and were not easily convinced.

Some scholars have suggested that the appearances of Christ after the resurrection were merely psychic phenomena. But if that were so, we would expect that the conviction that Jesus was alive



would have become less vivid once the disciples ceased to be "in touch" with the unseen. We would expect also that followers who had not seen the evidence would be as skeptical as third parties usually are when confronted with reports of communications from the dead.

Neither of these expectations, however, corresponds with the facts. The conviction about the resurrection became even more settled once the appearances ceased, and those who had not seen the risen Christ were won to the faith just as those who had seen Him. The evidence was just too convincing to be denied.

Furthermore, the tomb *was empty*. Of this we can be rock sure. If the tomb had not been empty, the Jewish or Roman authorities would most surely have produced the body of Jesus to disprove the rapidly circulating stories of a resurrection and silence forever what was to them a defeat and a disgrace. After all, no one knew better than they where Jesus' body had been laid to rest.

But there is not even a whisper that such was ever done—and for obvious reason: Jesus was alive!

The other possible explanation against the resurrection is that the empty tomb and the series of appearances were a hoax perpetrated by the disciples, as the scribes and Pharisees wanted Pilate to believe.

But are we to believe that people will die for a hoax? This "hoax" deceived several thousand people almost immediately, and was proclaimed until it was believed over a very large part of the civilized world. It seems much easier to believe the testimonies of Peter and John and the rest of the Apostles than to accept either of these explanations.

CHANGED LIVES

One of the most decisive evidences for the resurrection of Jesus lay in its effect on the lives it touched most closely. On the day before the resurrection, Peter was a broken man, overwhelmed with the shame of having denied Jesus in His hour of crisis. Within a few weeks he was standing boldly before Jewish authorities and declaring, under threat of persecution,

"let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10–12). Something powerful happened in that brief interval of time to transform a coward into a hero.

On the day of the resurrection, the disciples had gathered in a locked room for fear of the Jews. Something drastic happened to send them out into the world with a burning zeal that no threat or hardship could quench. That "something" was nothing more or less than the resurrection of Jesus Christ, veritable, visible, true!

Saul, a nonbeliever, a persecutor of the Church, was on his way to Damascus with orders from the high priest to inflict yet greater horrors on the Christian community. Suddenly something happened, and Saul the nonbeliever became Paul the apostle, the great missionary of the Christian Church. What was it? Nothing more or less than a personal appearance to him by the resurrected Christ.

The history of the Church is filled with examples of similar transformations, all of them a result of the resurrection of Christ.

THE IMPACT OF THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus brought about a new gospel, a new expectation, a new joy and a new watchfulness. Quite naturally, the central figure in that Gospel was Jesus Christ, crucified, resurrected, ascended, and who would shortly return. The New Testament writings reveal how intensely and how eagerly the early Christians anticipated the second coming of their Lord—they mention it more than three hundred times. No sooner was He out of sight than they began looking forward to His return.

The spirit of expectancy was high—very high—among the early disciples. There were two reasons: first, they knew

continued on page 7

*The
resurrection of
Jesus brought a
new Gospel, a new
expectation, and a
new joy.*





R THE *DAY* OF *Resurrection*

*Oh, Day of Resurrection! Earth, tell it out abroad;
The Passover of gladness, the triumph of our God.
From death to life eternal,
From earth unto the sky,
Our Christ hath brought us over
With hymns of victory.*

*Our hearts be pure from evil, that we may see aright
The Lord in rays eternal of resurrection light;
And, list'ning to His accents,
May hear, so calm and plain,
His own "All hail!" and, hearing,
May raise the victor strain.*

*Now let the heav'ns be joyful! Let earth her song begin!
The world resound in triumph, and all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen
Their notes of gladness blend;
For Christ the Lord has risen,
Our joy it has no end. AMEN.*

the Old Testament prophecies; with the advent of Christ they saw the beginning of a fulfillment. Logically they expected the remainder to follow. And second, they were very anxious for deliverance from a bad political situation, and saw in the promised Messiah a means for that deliverance. Even on the day of Jesus' ascension, as they talked with Him for the last time, they were asking about it, unaware of the long time that had to intervene. *"Therefore when they had come together, they asked of Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'"* (Acts 1:6). Though their information was lacking, their confidence was solid. They knew what He would do; what they failed to know was *when* He would do it.

Paul in his writings encouraged the high spirit of expectancy. He admonished his brethren to be *"sincere and without offense until the day of Christ"* (Phil. 1:9–10)—as though they might expect to live to see it. He encouraged them to hold out in spite of injustice and oppression because just retribution would be meted out to their enemies when Christ should return in power and glory (2 Thess. 1:7–9).

DID THE APOSTLES KNOW THE TIME?

Why such enthusiasm when the great Day was some twenty centuries in the future? Didn't they understand the plan?

We know from the record that they were told, but they seemed to forget. The Gospel of Luke records how Jesus Himself corrected His disciples when *"they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately,"* explaining that He had first to go away and that He would return only *"after a long time"* (Luke 19:10–27).

Paul discussed the subject at length in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. Apparently some in his churches had been under a misconception that he and the other Apostles were expecting the return of their Lord immediately, and so Paul explained very carefully that the Day of the Lord would not come *"except the apostasy come first,"* an event that was at that time still several hundred years future.

Why, if they understood, did they

speak of it being so immediate? Why such apparent disregard of the long interval of time?


It may be that the issue was not a difference in *meaning* but a difference in *emphasis*. The primary concern of the apostles was not the *time* of Jesus' coming but the *fact* and the *obligation* upon them as individuals. Yes, the event was far in the future. But what difference did that make? Their duty was to prepare, and that had to be done *right then*. Never did any generation have longer to prepare than their lifetime.

Perhaps the misconception of the time was for their benefit. Who can intensely prepare for an event that seems remote, or only vaguely real? If the misconception increased expectancy and pushed the work, we can only say that God wanted it that way. At least, He allowed it. Truly they were expecting Him too soon. But God did not want any languid, halfhearted faith. He wanted believers on tiptoe, eager and vibrant with hope. Only so would they have sufficient incentive to make the all-out effort needed to get ready. Only so would they be able to give themselves totally to the cause.

God had always wanted wholeheartedness, men and women who were willing to believe with all their heart and soul and mind and strength (Mark 12:30–31), and were willing to stake everything on it. As someone has said, True faith doesn't take much of a man. It takes all of him.

And God wants *all of us*, every part. Who could really believe that Jesus was coming back to set up a worldwide government where everyone would live in peace, where everyone could prosper and have everything they needed, where there would be no sickness or pain, no suffering or oppression—who could really believe all this with all his heart and soul—and not give ALL of himself to Christ's cause enthusiastically! What is there in all the world that can even touch such expectation!

Just think how different would be the account left on record for us if those early believers had been unconcerned because the Day of Christ was so far in the future. Just think how we would feel if Paul had written, "Looking for that



*It is not
shame to be weak
in faith; it is shame
to stay weak,
especially when
God has given
us so much
evidence.*

*A physical,
bodily resurrection
is the plan of God
for every sleeping
believer.*

blessed hope, and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. But don't be anxious, because He won't be coming for a long, long time. None of us will live to see it..." How would we feel? Or suppose we read, "Unto a very few who are looking for Him, many, many centuries in the future, He will appear the second time...." Would not such an attitude dishonor the God who had given them this great revelation? (see Titus 2:11-13 and Heb. 9:28).

A feeling of urgency is vital in stimulating action. Have we ever noticed how something in us will put off a task—particularly a difficult task—just as long as possible? (Can we think that they were any different than we are?) By obscuring the length of time God was fostering a spirit of urgency. And can we not see the value of it—when for everyone the great event is as near as the close of one's life?

Our founder, L. T. Nichols, needed this same spirit of urgency, and God made a way for him to have it. When he discovered the Bible teaching of the coming of Jesus and the great events that would follow, by his best calculations he decided that Jesus was coming soon. And when he realized the magnitude of the work to be done, he preached with all the zeal and fervor of an apostle of Christ. He felt deeply the pressure of time. Like the apostles, he grossly underestimated the time, but who has suffered for the mistake? Has it not proved the greatest benefit? Could he and his brethren possibly have accomplished the work without this sense of urgency? Who would make the titanic effort to replace the old nature with the new—unless given a maximum incentive (the reward of eternal life) coupled with the feeling that he had hardly time enough to do it?

And so our founder joined the ranks of believers on tiptoe—with a far different spirit than he could have had he known that we, more than 100 years later, would still have opportunity to prepare.

How we should thank God for His great mercy! And how very, very near the great Day must be for us! Because it IS coming. Time as we know it will not

always continue. What super-urgency we should feel as we find ourselves so far down the stream of time!

The Gospel of Luke records Jesus' last conversation with His disciples, as *"He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven."* So suddenly it was all over. But there was no disappointment, only a new expectation, for we read that *"They worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God"* (Luke 24:49-53). They were believers on tiptoe.

STILL FIRED BY HOPE

When the Apostles first went out to preach to the pagan world, they were fired by hope. Christ was coming to right earth's wrongs, to overcome the last enemy death, to remove all injustice and oppression, and bring in a kingdom of everlasting righteousness. Add to all this their personal expectation of eternal salvation, and it was enough to put any real believer on tiptoe!

But something special was needed to sustain this lively expectation as years lengthened into decades and decades into centuries. Then, too, there came very soon the added trial of walking by faith. As long as there was open vision, the expectation was renewed. It climaxed with the revelation of Jesus Christ to the beloved John on lonely Patmos. Who could witness all that glory, and all that power, and all that prophecy, and not walk the rest of his days, so to speak, on tiptoe! Even if everyone wanted to disbelieve it, the facts remained—all true, all sure, all certain. *"These words are true and faithful,"* said the heavenly voice (Rev. 21:5).

Within the echo of such a message, faith reached unto heaven. At the same time, they realized that soon, very soon, they would have to go on believing *without seeing*, and future generations would have no direct contact with those who had seen. It would be a new challenge, for which they must prepare.

We today must still believe without seeing, but not for long. These are not ordinary days, these days just before the great consummation. These are days full of lively expectation. These are days tense with opportunity. This is no time to be all absorbed with the affairs of this world. This is no time to be taking our ease, enjoying the pleasures of life, oblivious to what is just ahead. This is the time to be taking to heart all that has been written for our learning, to glean every word we can from the sacred page, every message God has intended for us, to give us faith and hope and courage. This is the time to be watching every step we take, to be sure that we are making maximum use of all that God has entrusted to us; to be sure that we are making no missteps in our walk toward the Kingdom.

When Jesus spoke about the future, either in parable or in plain words, He often ended His lesson with an admonition to watch. After He told the Parable of the Fig Tree, which would be putting forth leaves, showing that summer was nigh at hand, He said solemnly, *"Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."* In other words, You won't be told the date that it will come. But you must be watching, on tiptoe.

When Jesus compared the time of His coming to the time of Noah and to the time of Lot, when destruction came upon a world oblivious to danger; when He told the parable of the women in the field, or grinding at the mill, and *"The one will be taken and the other left,"* what were His next words? *"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your lord is coming."* In other words, be watching, alert—on tiptoe.

For, *"If the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"* (Matt. 24:42–44).

Jesus spoke also of the fate of the servant who should say in his heart, *"My lord delayeth his coming,"* as if telling the Lord that He did not know, that the time was not right—when it was. Then

followed the fact: that *"The lord of that servant" shall come in "a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,...there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matt. 24:48–51).

When Jesus told the Parable of the Ten Virgins, and the need to be watching, to arise and trim our lamps, living every moment in readiness, He again closed with the solemn admonition: *"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming"* (Matt. 25:13). Here was another admonition to watch, to get ready, to be believers on tiptoe.

This is no time to be dallying, to be thinking we will take our faith more seriously another day, or another week, or another year. The time to obey is right here and now. The time to improve is now. The time to break our old habits and our old nature is right now.

This is no time to be seeking the common pleasure of life, the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eye, or the pride of life (1 John 2:15–16). This is the time to cut loose from everything around us, to let the world go by and all its vain pursuits, and to give ourselves heart and soul to the things we know are true, to the hope which will soon be visible reality right here among us.

This is the time to be believers on tiptoe! For one of these days, the great Day will be here, and all the great and wonderful things for which we have waited will become glorious reality. It is all true, it is all sure—because it is all of God.

When that Day arrives, the unbelievers will still be unbelieving. The scoffers will still be scoffing. The world will still be pursuing its pleasures, its business, its short- and long-term goals. They will be unaware, until—suddenly, dramatically, the great Day will arrive, shaking the earth from pole to pole. Not a single living person anywhere will be unaware of the event. Not a single living person anywhere will be unaffected, or oblivious, or be able to avoid the consequences of that Day. For *"Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye will see Him"* (Rev. 1:7)—every eye, no exceptions.

Jesus is coming. And it may be sooner than we think. ■

*Are we
planning what
we shall do and
be when Jesus
returns?*

Jesus

EXCELLENCE IN LIFE

Jesus' entire career on earth was a striving for excellence, first in Himself and then in those who followed Him. No teacher ever required more of His students than did this Master. Nor would He tolerate any mediocrity, in His own life or in the standard He set for His followers. Everything about Him and His had to be the best. It was all excellence.

First He was concerned with **excellence in knowledge**, that is, excellence of the mind, that proper knowledge which forms the basis of right living. How frequently He challenged His audience with: *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."* Or, in other words, If you want to hear what I am about to say, you will need your minds as well as your ears. If you think you can hear Me with your ears open and your mind closed, you may as well go home.

Following close upon this **excellence in knowledge** was His concern for **moral excellence**, i.e., **excellence of the life and character**. Well He knew that knowledge without application could never win the recognition of God.

We know that Jesus called and used *"unlearned"* men (Acts 4:13). But this does not suggest any lack of intelligence, or any deficiency of general knowledge, or even any carelessness in the use of opportunity. It merely describes their status as it was judged by certain members of the Jewish hierarchy who considered themselves the ultimate in intellectual attainment during their day. So far as these high-up professors of religion were concerned, the Apostles were ignorant nobodies.

But their being *"unlearned"* in the eyes of their contemporaries was absolutely no discredit to them so far as God was concerned. *"For the Lord seeth not as man seeth"*—in the days of Samuel, in the days of the Apostles, or even now in our own day. God's call is always to excellence—excellence by His standards, excellence of heart—which, incidentally, represents the very highest in human attainment. Even the apostle Paul, already a high achiever according to Jewish traditions, put it all behind him when Christ called, counting it *"mere refuse"* in his quest for greater excellence.

In the eyes of God, excellent knowledge is first of all, true knowledge, or knowledge of that which is true. It is knowledge that speaks to the heart, that speaks of the realities of life and death and salvation. It is knowledge that communicates a true estimate of one's worth, and a sense of total dependence upon God.

How easily in the midst of the struggle we lose this vital sense of dependence. At such times the words of our great Teacher come to rebuke us: *"Without me, ye can do nothing."*

Jesus' quest for excellence included also an **excellence in life and attitude**. What man or woman seeking the heights of Christian achievement would stop with excellence in knowledge? Right knowledge must issue in obedience, an obedience that reaches into every aspect of one's life. In coming or going,

in working, in watching, in speaking, in thinking, in praying, we must be like Christ. We must share His aspirations, His desires, His purity, His aspiration to excellence. Nothing ordinary will do.

This was Paul's thought as he admonished each candidate for the crown: Ordinary running is not enough. *"Run in such a way as to get the prize"* (1 Cor. 9:24 NIV).

The apostle Paul set the standard in masterful language when he wrote in his letter to the Philippians: *"This is my prayer, that your love may grow ever richer and richer in knowledge and insight of every kind, and may thus bring you the gift of true discrimination. Then on the Day of Christ you will be flawless and without blame, reaping the full harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"* (Phil. 1:9–11, NEB).

Have we this consistent striving for **excellence in all the varied details of everyday**? Is our primary concern to excel in obedience, in doing right and being right, wherever we are and whomever we are with? Is our first thought always to be and do the very best of which we are capable?

The temptation to compromise is always with us, to put off the serious confronting of ourselves as we know—and God knows—we are.

How often at the end of the day we look back upon a record of which we must humbly say, *"this is not my best."*

But the standard is fixed, and we must reach it. God will have excellence. His very nature decrees it—His name is *"excellent"* (Psalm 8:1); His work is *"honourable and glorious"* (Ps. 111:3), His will is *"good and acceptable and perfect"* (Rom. 12:2). *"Great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee"* (Isa. 12:6).

Hasn't He every right to ask our best? The Old Testament sacrifices were to be always and only the best the worshiper could give. Offerings were to be the finest of the flock, without defect (Lev. 1:10), the finest grain, the first fruits, the best sheep—always the best belonged to God.

And still today He wants the best. He wants our best—in return for which He will give us His best.

Are we ready for this? Have we the steadiness to continue this quest through all the mundane tasks of every day? Do we keep ourselves wholly and thoroughly Christian in all our associations with others? Do we excel in patience, humility, kindness, and long-suffering in the hundred details of every day?

Are we continuing our quest for excellence with an attitude that is thoroughly Christ-like as we face the pressures of the home, the office, the shop, or the job?

It is not easy, but it must be done. Our quest for excellence must be the consuming desire of our hearts. In praying, in working, in watching, we must excel.

We cannot afford to risk a single unguarded hour. *"Therefore you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."* (Matt 24:44) ■



In Search of MEANING

by RUSSELL HAMBY

*The “teacher” was
looking for fulfillment in
all the wrong places.*

Boredom. Restlessness. Fatigue. No meaning. We hear these phrases often these days. They are phrases that could pretty well describe the way many feel about their lives. Ecclesiastes 1:1–14 serves as a good foundation to study this subject.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is referred to as *Qoheleth* in Hebrew. Though various translations refer to *Qoheleth* as teacher or preacher, the word is still somewhat difficult to translate. Its meaning implies one who addresses an assembly as a speaker or teacher. Though the writer’s identity is not actually given, it is clear that the author was a king and someone with great wealth, intelligence, and power—plus an overpowering drive for the things of this world. The name most often associated is Solomon, and who is more likely?

If we read the entire book of Ecclesiastes, we find that the teacher embarked on an expedition in search of meaning and purpose in life. His words are not the result of idle speculation, but rather of his actual life experience and observation. He tried pleasure, work, knowledge, folly, and all that riches could buy. The very first verses in the book are actually a commentary on that search. Here is the journey of someone who sets out to find what is worthwhile and what gives lasting meaning “*under the sun*.” But note that he will only believe what he can see and experience for himself.

Is there also a sense in which he was right? Maybe he was more than just a bored, rich king with a bad headache. For can we not read the stories of people

living two thousand or more years ago and see ways in which their joys, problems, doubts, and faith are similar to our own?

Human nature has not changed very much over time. There are new cultures, new languages, new ways of living, and new knowledge for sure. But we have the same desires, hopes, fears, sins, joys—and most importantly, the same God. So, in a sense, there are new things under the sun. At the same time “*nothing is new under the sun*.”

The teacher in our text is more honest than many of us would like to admit. He borders on cynicism as he strips off all the masks of human pretension to find meaning, purpose, and lasting enjoyment. His message leaves us with a choice: to resign in despair, perhaps seeking what temporal pleasures may be found, or to seek meaning and hope through faith in God, a God the existence of whom the teacher never questions.

We may not find satisfying meaning and purpose in our jobs, our families, our leisure. But there is hope if we go further. There is hope if we heed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who spent His ministry proclaiming the coming of God’s complete Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

In Christ, the promises of God give hope that can break into the day-to-day grind—the routines of work, school, leisure, family. This hope is expressed by Paul in his prayer: “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, that...your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope*” (Rom. 15:13 Phillips). ■

When life offers you an opportunity

DON'T BE Caught Sleeping

Let us go back some nineteen hundred years to a garden called Gethsemane. Jesus has come there with His disciples on this night, the same night in which He was betrayed, for prayer. Judas has already left on his dastardly mission to betray his Master. Jesus invites the Eleven to join Him in a kind of inner fellowship. Eight of the disciples remain near the gate of the garden, and three (those closest to Him: Peter, James, and John) follow Him silently along the winding path that leads up the hill through the garden. Jesus stops and urges them to pray with Him.

Then He goes apart, throws Himself out flat, and prays that the cup might not be His to drink. It is a moment of intense struggle and tremendous agony of spirit.

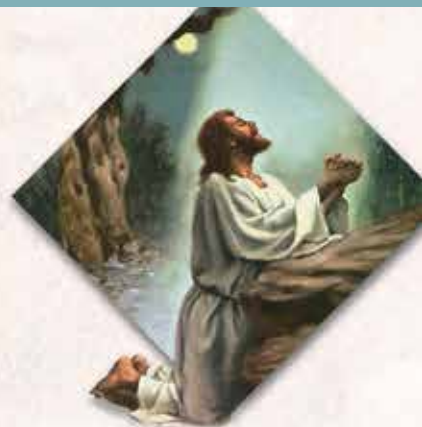
Having so prayed, He goes back to the disciples hoping for some word of encouragement, some warmth of love, some comfort in this hour of supreme agony of spirit—and finds them sleeping. Our hearts are pierced by the sinking disappointment in His words. *“Couldn’t you watch with Me,”* He asks, *“even for an hour? Watch and pray, lest you yourselves enter into temptation; your spirit is willing but your flesh is weak.”*

Again He goes apart to pray. This time, the Scriptures say, His prayer was so intense that His sweat came as it were like great drops of blood.

Once again He goes back to the disciples seeking some word of support, but once again He finds them asleep.

A second time He leaves them to pray. This time it is a prayer of submission. *“O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.”*

He returns a third time to His disciples, and they are still asleep. But this time the need is not critical; it has passed. And so He lets them sleep. It does not matter now (this is a very significant detail in the account) because the opportunity has passed. His battle has been fought. And won. *“Sleep on,”* He says, *“and take your rest,”* and He goes back to pray alone.



Only moments later He sees torches flickering through the branches of the olive trees. The soldiers of the high priest have come. He goes back to His disciples and says, *“Arise. My betrayer is at hand.”* He is led off to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, and the disciples are left hiding among Gethsemane’s bushes. They are left in the shallows and they are left in miseries, because they have missed the tide.

THE POWER OF TIDES

During the troubled years of the Second World War the Italian forces were driven out of Eritrea in North Africa. In an effort to make the harbor unusable to the Allies, the Italians filled great barges with concrete, and then sank them across the entrance to the harbor. When the Allies entered, their problem was to remove the barges to make use of the harbor.

They did this in a very ingenious way. They sealed great empty gas tanks of the sort oil refineries use in storing fuel, and then they floated them in the sea above the sunken barges. When the tide was out, they chained the floating tanks to the barges. When the tide came in, the empty tanks exerted their tremendous buoyancy to tug the barges free from the bay’s sucking sand. It was then relatively easy to clear the harbor for Allied shipping.

Think of the power in that! The barges were chained to the tanks. The tanks were dependent upon the tides. The tides were pulled by the gravitational attraction of the moon, and the moon was moving in accord with the whole cosmos.

The tides exercise tremendous, unimaginable, dynamic power, a power not unlike that which opportunity brings into the life of each of us. But we must recognize the fleeting nature of this tremendous tide-power, as the famous poet has so vividly pointed out in these words:

*There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures.*

Not only should we recognize the power of these tides, but we should realize, too, that they cannot be stopped or retrieved. Their lifting strength comes for but a few hours and then is gone. And if we miss the flood, then we will be left in shallows and in miseries, having lost our ventures.

GROWTH IN CHARACTER

Those disciples in Gethsemane missed the opportunity to grow in character.

Why is it that most people today give so little thought to growing in character? Probably there are several factors: one concerns the popular idea which says that character is nothing more than the influence of our environment. Another is the teaching of many churches that the good life is the automatic result of accepting Christ and His power in your life. Then, too, moral relativism has settled across the land like a thick, stinking fog so that nothing is recognized as absolutely "right" or "wrong." So it should not surprise us that there is so little serious talk of character, let alone focus on its growth.

But we all need to grow in character. We need also to recognize that such growth cannot occur at just any moment and under any circumstance. There are tides in the development of character. Opportunities come, and opportunities depart. Catch them and growth is yours; miss them and you are left in shallows and in miseries.

A small city in Pennsylvania was at one time famous for having the world's largest steel tube-rolling mills. These people had designed a seamless tube that was unparalleled in the steel industry. An observer tells of standing with the machine operator in the command module of one of the great machines that made the tube steel. "I would see a great serpent of molten metal come slithering down into the machine," he says, "where it would be chopped off. Then the machine would grasp it by its ends and begin to spin it; by centrifugal force that bar of molten metal would open from the inside out, forming a perfect tube of steel, without seam or blemish."

"What is the most important ingredient in the process?" he asked the operator of the machine. The answer was simply this: "It's the temperature of the metal. If it is too hot, it will fly apart. If it is too cold, it will not open as it ought. Unless you catch the molten moment, you cannot make the perfect tube."

"Unless you catch the molten moment"—there is the point. Just so with us. Unless we catch those molten moments when character can develop, we miss our opportunity. The disciples missed such an opportunity in Gethsemane. They could have seen how Jesus handled suffering,

fear and faltering. How much they could have learned as they watched Him confront ugliness straight on—not run away from it, or attempt to deny it, but confront it head-on and defeat it. What immortal lessons they could have learned firsthand that night, lessons about courage, and patience, and hope, and endurance, and mercy, and forgiveness, and fortitude. But they slept, and so missed the tide.

I do not know what will constitute the next molten moment for you. It might be your own suffering, or the death of someone you love very much. It might be an inner urge or impression you cannot explain. Or a sacrifice you feel impelled to make. Perhaps just a word—or even a look—from one you love; a bit of heroism in someone you admire; a Scripture; a letter; the words of a sermon. It is whatever suddenly causes within you a desire to expand your character beyond what you have known before. Claim that moment. Don't sleep through it.

GROWTH AS CHILDREN OF GOD

The disciples in Gethsemane also missed the opportunity to grow as children of God. Any one of us can strike a match. Any one of us can light a candle. Any one of us can ignite a bonfire. But no one of us and no group of us, not all of us together can command the circumstances that produce the perfect opportunity for inner growth.

But it will come, just as it came for those disciples that night in Gethsemane. It will come.

And it will pass. Notice that while Jesus awakened the disciples the first time, He did not awaken them the second time. In Matthew 26:44 we are told that, finding them sleeping again, He went away. In other words, one cannot depend on God to interrupt in such dramatic fashion each and every time. If we turn away from the kindling opportunity, there will come a time when that opportunity is gone, and gone forever.

Think of this in terms of that great space shot when, a number of years ago, we sent a sophisticated space vehicle out to take pictures of the planet Saturn. For more than two years it moved toward its objective. Then came the time when it was closest to the planet it was sent to photograph. In those moments the cameras on board the vehicle took and sent back to us remarkable pictures of Saturn. Then, the time of its proximity spent, the vehicle continued on out into space, and it continues so until this very minute. Never again will it come close to Saturn.

Just so in our lives, there are situations and events that bring unparalleled opportunities to grow in character, to expand in insight, to draw near to God and feel the pull of the higher life. At these times of closest approximation, let

*Unless we
grasp those molten
moments when character
can develop, we miss
our opportunity.*

us take the step, make the sacrifice, claim the opportunity, seize the molten moment; for if we miss that moment, it may never come for us again.

Our church, in which we congregate every week, is now more than a century old. This sanctuary has heard tens of thousands of prayers and admonitions from the Word of God. If these walls and rafters could chorus together, they might well speak to us of scores of well-intentioned comers who sat here and were impressed by the truth they heard. They recognized a call to be answered, a duty to be fulfilled, a work to be done, a promise to be claimed, a goal to be attained. But for most of them, that is all there was to it. They did not claim the molten moment. They missed the tide of opportunity, and it will never come for them again.

We have all heard the story of how Satan once called together the emissaries of hell, and told them he wanted to send one to earth to aid women and men in the ruination of their souls. He asked who would volunteer. One creature came forward and said, "I will go."

And Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?"

He said, "I will tell the children of men that there is no heaven."

And Satan said, "They will not believe you, for everyone knows that there is a heaven, and that right and good must have the victory. You may not go."

Then another came forward, darker and more foul than the first. And Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?"

And he said, "I will tell them that there is no hell."

And Satan looked at him and said, "Oh, no; they will not believe you. For in every human heart is a conscience—an inner voice that testifies that not only will good be triumphant, but that evil will be defeated. You may not go."

Then one last creature came forward, this one from the darkest place of all. And Satan said to him, "And if I send you, what will you say to women and men to aid them in the destruction of their souls?"

And he said, "I will tell them that there is no hurry."

And Satan said, "Go!"

That spirit is still abroad on the face of the earth. "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." Missed, and we are left "in shallows and in miseries." The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Awake, because the tides may be running for you at this very moment. Don't miss those tides.

GROWTH IN SERVICE

Those disciples in Gethsemane also missed the opportunity to grow in friendship with Jesus. It is wonderful to have friends, especially in time of trouble. When we are battered by the

hammer of hardship, we need our loved ones close. That is the reason Jesus, who is most often recorded in the Scriptures as going off to pray alone, on this occasion took His disciples with Him. If ever He needed their help and encouragement, it was now. He knew the deep agony of spirit that was going to be His, and He wanted their comfort close; He wanted to feel their shoulders beside His own. But they slept.

When He came back the first time from His prayer, He wanted comfort, assurance, support. But there was no one to give Him any words of love or encouragement. To all His other burdens was added this pain of loneliness.

Yet He was not alone—far from it. He was not forsaken or forgotten. His Father was watching; the angels were watching; and after His second agonizing prayer we read that God Himself intervened and sent His angel from heaven, *"strengthening him."*

Jesus triumphed, but the disciples had missed that opportunity for service. And never would it come again. Never again did those disciples have such an opportunity.

Don't miss the tide that gives you the opportunity to serve others.

On this same date next year, if it be granted us, some whom we know will no longer be with us. Perhaps there is on your mind right now someone to whom you ought to speak; a word of encouragement, a word of reproof, a word of witness, a word of apology. Don't miss the opportunity when it is yours. Don't forsake the tide that might be flowing in your heart of hearts at this very moment. Claim this day, with all the growth that it can give you; for in very truth, there will never be another like it again.

We have been considering a message that addresses the human soul. We have looked at growth in character, growth as a child of God, and growth in service and love.

Don't respond by thinking about what you can do about it tomorrow. *"Now is the accepted time."* *"Now is the day of salvation."* *"Today, if you will, harden not your hearts and hear my voice."* Don't say tomorrow!

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.*

Yes, the word from God is today. Now, while the tides are still rising. Now, while the day is still extended. Now is the time to live and love and serve and give—our best, our all.

It is now or never. ■

*Claim
today, with all
the growth that it can
give you—there may
never be another
like it.*



COME AND DINE

1. On what occasion did Jesus prepare bread and fish for His disciples and said "Come and dine"?
2. This man was invited to the feast of King Belshazzar to explain an incident which had alarmed the king.
3. This man surprised the Pharisees by not performing the ritual washing before eating.
4. These people were given places at the feast after those who were originally invited made excuses for not coming.
5. He was served bread and lentil stew by his brother as pay for his birthright.
6. Jesus was Guest of Honor at a supper in the home of these three friends.
7. Ahimelech gave him (and his companions) holy bread to eat.
8. These were fed with five barley loaves and two small fish.
9. A wealthy landowner invited a poor foreigner to eat with them.
10. This guest, having received a piece of bread, left the meal early and went out into the night.
3. *"Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men abuse me."*
4. *"Let me die with the Philistines!"*
5. *"I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."*
6. *"I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."*
7. *"My punishment is greater than I can bear!"*
8. *"Lord, do not charge them with this sin."*
9. *"My Lord and my God!"*

Who?

1. Who said to Christ, *"If You are willing, You can make me clean"*?
2. Who called herself *"the maidservant of the Lord"*?
3. Who was Og?
4. Who was killed in spite of the fact that he clung to the horns of the altar?
5. Who is called *"the dayspring from on high,"* and by whom?
6. Who asked, *"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"*
7. Who captured Jerusalem and made it his capital?
8. Who was Haman?

FAMOUS WORDS—WHO SAID THEM?

1. *"You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how."*
2. *"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."*

ANSWERS ON PAGE 21

FAITH *in Action*



by RUTH E. SISSON

Bible Text: Acts 3:1–11 NIV

- 1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.
- 2 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.
- 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.
- 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!”
- 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.
- 6 Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”
- 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong.
- 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.
- 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God,
- 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.
- 11 While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.

“WHAT I HAVE I GIVE YOU”

 READ ACTS 3:1–11

The Healing of the Lame Man

After Pentecost the disciples continued preaching in the Jewish synagogues and temples. Why did they go there? Because that was where serious-minded people who believed in God assembled. Someone has said that the first rule for successful fishing is to let down your line where the fish are. Those who already believed in God and knew of the coming Messiah should be most ready to hear the message of the Apostles.

So we find Peter and John going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the “ninth hour,” or 3 o’clock in the afternoon. At the gate called Beautiful—probably facing the east side of the temple area—they found a lame beggar.

Luke tells us a bit of the tragedy of this man’s life. He had been lame from birth. Think what this had meant to his family. His parents looked at their little child, and saw that his legs were not right. As months passed the defect became increasingly evident. He could not stand, he could not learn to walk. Think what that meant to the child. He could never run or romp, he could never do anything “normal” like his friends. Everywhere he went he had to be carried. There had never been a day in this man’s forty-plus years when he had not been a burden to somebody. He could not walk, he could not work. All he could do was sit there and beg, and hope that his plight would provoke pity.

If one had to beg, the temple was probably as desirable a spot as any. A beautiful place, many people passed as they went in to worship. And one would hope that they would be people who had some heart. If they missed seeing the beggar on their way in, they just might see him on their way out.

As Peter and John went by, all the man asked was a coin or two to help him buy a crust of bread.

No doubt the beggar had heard about these two men and the excitement that they had created in the city. But the beggar had no interest in anyone’s preaching. All he knew was that he was hungry, and that he needed to beg if he was to eat. His life had been reduced to that—an outstretched palm, a pitiful look, a wailing plea.

The Jewish religion had nothing more than this to offer him. They found him a beggar, and left him a beggar.

But Peter's approach was different. "Look at us," he said. The lame man looked up in surprise at the strange request. The speaker looked ordinary, not a man of means, yet —perhaps, he dared hope these two men would take pity on him and be generous.

Then Peter said, "*Silver and gold I do not have.*"

Did hope in the beggar's eyes disappear for an instant? Did the too familiar despair well up again? He needed money, and when there were no alms, there was hunger and despair.

But Peter continued. "*What I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk*" (3:5-6). The lame man was uncomprehending. Walk? He was stunned. How was he to do it? He *couldn't* walk! Had never walked!

Peter, reading his near disbelief, held out his hand to show that he was serious. The stunned beggar took it. As Peter lifted him to his feet, the beggar felt his feet and ankle bones receive strength. "*He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.*"

1. How was the healing of the lame beggar different from many healings that are claimed today? _____
2. Where did the healed man go immediately after being healed? _____
3. Whom did he thank and praise? _____
4. Why was this lame beggar an outstanding candidate for healing? _____

What was the purpose of the Apostles' healings? _____

The healed cripple went with the believers into the temple, and praised God with them.

The multitudes were astonished.

Peter and John and the other Apostles did not do miracles in secret. The multitudes saw and were amazed "*and were filled with wonder and amazement.*" This beggar was a striking confirmation of the power of God. Everybody knew him, knew his wretched life, knew exactly where he sat and begged day in and day out. He was almost as much a part of the temple as was the gate Beautiful. Now he was able to show the world the miracle he had received. Now people met him where they had never seen him before, where they never expected him to be—inside the temple praising God.

It was great evidence for the Apostles' cause. There was just no question about the fact that God was behind their preaching—no human hand could perform such a dramatic and instant cure!

PETER'S NEXT SERMON



READ ACTS 3:12-16

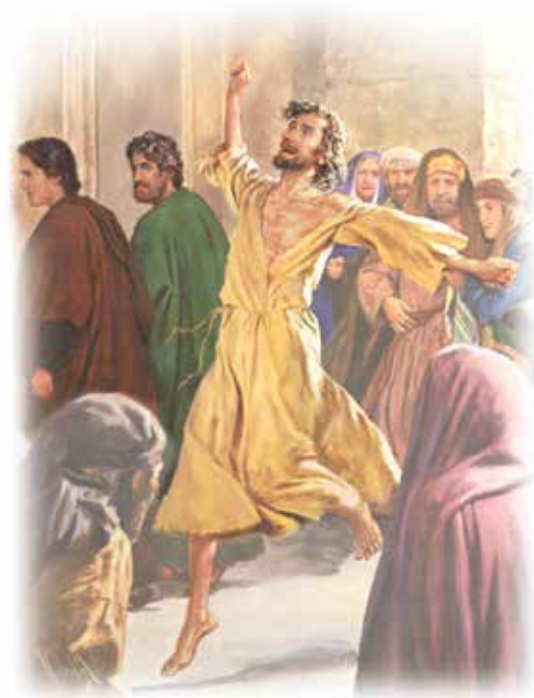
The lame man who had been healed quickly became a conversation piece. What had happened? Why had the Apostles chosen him to be healed rather than one of another hundred cripples in the city? Was he more holy than they? And how did they do it? Did Peter and John have some special power of their own to make this man walk?



Take heed

How Quickly Cured?

Notice that the lame man's cure was not gradual, it was instantaneous. Peter and John did not send the man home to gradually gain strength. The man immediately rose to his feet, and went jumping and leaping. He was free! Suddenly, the world was his. He could run home, he could go wherever he wished.



Bible Text: Acts 3:12-16 NIV

12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.

15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.



A closer look

Sacrifice or Murder?

Many people today look upon Jesus' death as a voluntary sacrifice for the sins of the world. Peter said bluntly, "you killed the author of life." It was murder, and they were guilty.

“Repent...and be converted, so that your sins may be blotted out.” — Acts 3:19

★ **Why repent? Because Jesus is coming!**

Bible Text: Acts 3:17–26 NIV

17 “Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.

18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

21 He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

22 For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.

23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.’

24 “Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.

25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’

26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

It was a subject worthy of a sermon, and a crowd gathered to hear what Peter would say. But Peter surprised—and probably disappointed—them. He did not talk about the healing—everyone could see that. Rather, he turned the attention of the crowd toward Jesus.

First, he told them plainly that he and John were only ordinary men, who had nothing to do with the healing of the lame man. In one trenchant statement Peter demolished all the claims of so-called healers who claim to work miracles and accumulate merit and money for their abilities.

What Peter wanted to talk about was not the healing but the responsibility of those who had condemned and crucified Jesus. Swiftly he zeroed in on their wrong. *“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you”* (3:13–14 NIV).

What made the crime so dastardly? Jesus was the Holy One, the sinless One, the Son of God. Never before had anyone lived a life so pure and upright as had He. Who else could say, *“I always do those things that please him [the Father]”*? (John 8:29). Of who else could it be said, *“He committed no sin”*? (1 Pet. 2:22 NIV).

Peter took them back to the scene of the trial only a few months earlier, the mob scene in which some of them had played a part. They had had their choice: the Holy One, or Barabbas. They had chosen the murderer. Could a crime be greater?

“You killed the author of life” (3:15 NIV). The enormity of their sin had to be brought home to them.

Then Peter went on immediately to say how God undid their wrong. *“But God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this”* (3:15 NIV).

5. What was the core of Peter’s sermon? _____

Why do you think he spoke with so much conviction and power? _____

6. Why did the Jews resist and oppose Peter’s message? _____

7. In what way had they (the Jews) fulfilled the Scriptures? _____

The more Peter said, the more uncomfortable was his message. No doubt some among his audience had personally known the soldiers who had been guarding Jesus’ tomb, who had been paid handsomely to keep quiet. The officials hadn’t wanted to know the facts—then or now. If only they could silence these Apostles, who were determined to bring the whole issue back to life again!

Peter went on: *“Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer”* (3:17–18 NIV).

They had fulfilled the Scriptures without even knowing it! The Jewish people always prided themselves on their knowledge of Scripture. But they were as ignorant of its truths as those whom Jesus charged as *“blind leaders of the blind”* (Matt. 15:14).

Confusion about the Messiah?

 READ ACTS 3:17-26

Probably what caused the greatest confusion among the Jews was their inability to distinguish prophecies regarding Christ's first coming from those of His second coming. So Peter's next message is about Jesus' second coming, which he calls *"the times of refreshing."* His focus is on what they must do: *"Repent."* *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

Peter knew that as a nation there would be no repentance, but he was speaking also to individuals, both then and later, who would read and take heed.

8. Why did Peter preach repentance? _____

Who before Peter had preached repentance? _____

We today still need to repent and *"be converted"* that our *"sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come."*

Repentance does not change the past, but God has promised that our sins will be wiped out if we repent and turn from them. This is the high point of Peter's message: *"Repent...that your sins may be blotted out."* We need to repent so that *our* sins can be blotted out.

When Jesus returns, He will come with power to put down iniquity and exalt righteousness.

Why repent? Because *"He shall send Jesus Christ,"*—the Judge, the Conqueror, the King—just as all the prophets have foretold (Acts 3:20-21).

Why is the second coming so important? That second coming will mean a time of a) restitution of all things and b) a time of retribution (vs. 22-24). Christ is coming to restore and to repay. He will restore the power of the Holy Spirit, He will subdue all the forces of evil, and set up His eternal Kingdom worldwide.

To reinforce his message Peter appealed to Moses as unimpeachable authority: *"For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people'"* (Acts 3:22-23 NIV). The quotation is from Deuteronomy 18:15 and 19, a passage well known to his hearers. Peter was saying that prophet had come! Jesus was that prophet, and they had heard Him.

But in hearing they had not heard, *"For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes"* (Matt. 13:15 NLT).

Peter appealed to other prophets also, even *"all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days"* (3:24 NIV).

9. In rejecting Jesus, why were they also rejecting Moses? _____

10. What other prophets foretold the coming of Jesus—His birth, ministry, death, resurrection and coming Kingdom? _____



Take heed "Repent!"

Repent may mean simply to change one's mind, but in the context of Scripture it usually includes changing one's life.

Far easier is it just to change one's mind. But a change of mind must result in a change of life or it is not repentance.



Insight

Sins "Blotted Out!"

The ancient art of writing on papyrus used an ink that did not bite into the papyrus, it simply lay on top of it. To erase the writing one could take a wet sponge and wipe it away. So God promises to "wipe off" the record of our sins when we truly repent and turn from them.

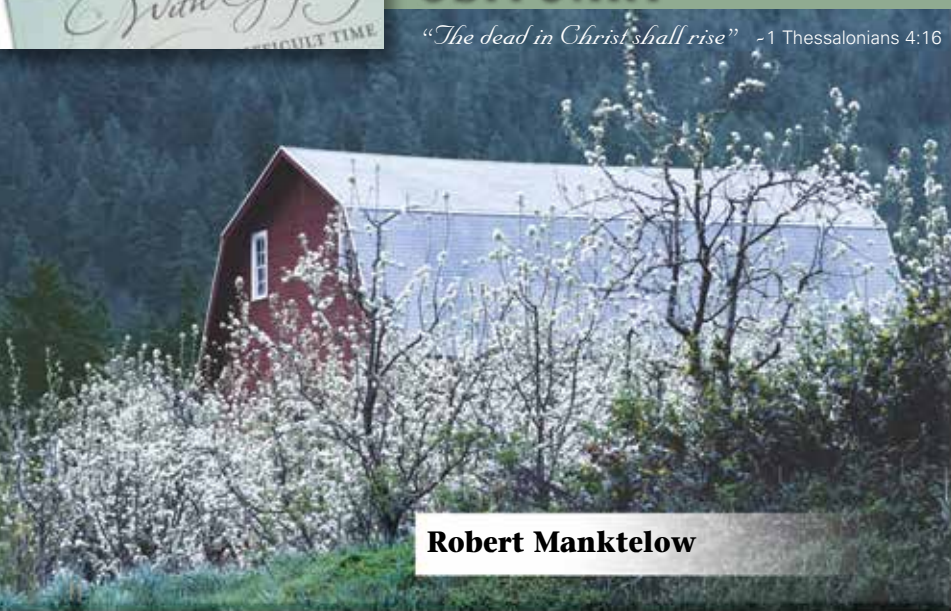


Did you know...

"From Samuel"

The prophet Samuel lived during the transition between the judges and the kings of Israel, and he was seen as the first in a succession of prophets. He anointed David king, founding David's royal line, from which the Messiah eventually came. All the prophets pointed to a future Messiah.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27



Robert Manktelow

On February 2, 2018, we met to pay our last respects to our long-time Friend and Brother, Robert Manktelow, known among us as Brother Robert.

Brother Robert was known among our church people from early childhood, his parents having become acquainted with the church during the early 1930's.

Brother Robert was born August 17, 1923 in Williamson, New York to Percy Manktelow and Anna Cornelia Moll. He was married in February 11, 1964, to Miriam Eloise Buzzell. Brother Robert is survived by his loving and devoted wife Eloise, and by his sister Joyce Manktelow, both of Rochester, New York.

Brother Robert and his sister Joyce were young children when their father first became acquainted with the Megiddo Church. Their father, Percy Manktelow, was employed at that time by General Railway Signal, where a member of the church, Delbert Hauenstein, was also employed. One day as they were working together, their conversation fell into a discussion of religion. Brother Percy asked Brother Delbert some questions about the Bible, and to the amazement of Brother Percy, Brother Delbert had answers, solid biblical answers. Brother Manktelow soon gave up his former religious affiliation and with his family joined the Megiddo Church. This was the beginning of a lifelong association with the church.

Brother Robert and his wife were blessed to be able to enjoy life together for almost 54 years. They were even privileged to be able to spend their most recent years together in an exceptionally pleasant and commodious assisted living home.

Brother Robert was of an amiable disposition, always pleasant, always kind. And does anyone want to learn the meaning of contentment? They would have benefited from knowing Brother Robert. The Bible tells us to be content with the things we have, and I believe his wife would testify that such was his attitude toward life. He did his part to make their lives happy. And can you even imagine how much happier our world would be if more people today could acquire

that outlook on life? Imagine what it would do for the frustrations of the rat race in which so many are caught.

Of a quiet and calm nature, Brother Robert was peace-loving, and was blest with the loving devotion and helpfulness of his wife. For their support he was self-employed as a carpenter, in which his skills and experience kept him consistently employed.

Brother Robert had an active knowledge of the Word of God and could readily distinguish truth from error. Brother Robert was a firm and life-long believer in the Bible hope of life beyond death through the Resurrection. Again and again the Bible calls death a sleep. In a sound sleep, we are unaware of what is around us. Death is a state of total unconsciousness, it is a release from all pain and suffering. The

heart does not beat. The brain does not function. The eyes do not see, the ears do not hear. The Bible says that in death our *"thoughts perish"* (Ps. 146:4). *"The dead do not know anything"* (Ecc. 9:5). *"There is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going"* (Ecc. 9:10).

But there is life beyond death. The resurrection was Isaiah's hope. *"Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise... The earth shall cast out the dead"* (Isa. 26:19-20).

The resurrection was Daniel's hope. *"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake"* (Dan. 12:2).

Without the resurrection, says the apostle Paul, our faith is vain, and those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (1 Cor. 15:18). But embracing that bright hope, we can look ahead with joy, because *"The dead in Christ shall rise!"* (1 Thess. 4:15).

Through the years Brother Robert took part in many church functions. In more recent times he designed and printed colorful placards for the dinner table on church holidays.

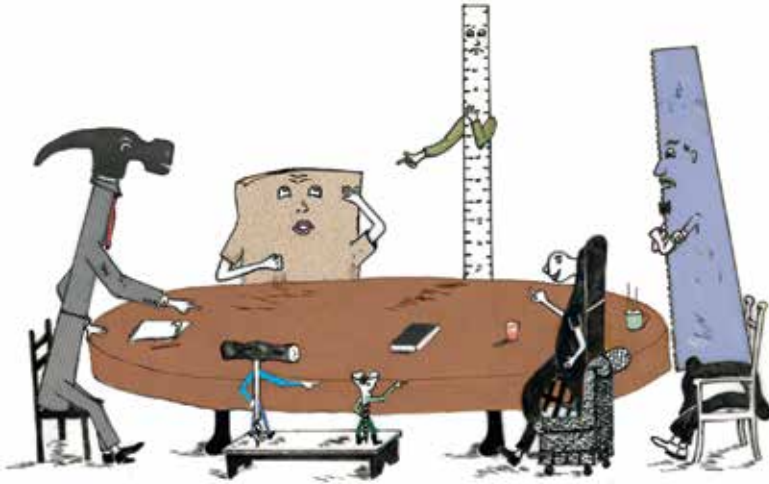
Gifted with words, he used his talent for the benefit of his church, and for many years took a turn writing the Maranatha Musings which was published monthly. I would like to share an article of his that was published a number of years ago in the Maranatha Musings. The subject fits well with his skill as a carpenter and cabinet maker. He titled his composition, *"Workers Together With God."* The scene he created is especially meaningful, considering his skill, and also illustrate in a practical way his philosophy of life—to be uncomplaining, peace-loving and content, not critical or fault-finding.

As the story goes, the Carpenter's tools held a conference.

Brother Hammer took the chair. In a previous meeting, the tools had voted that he, Brother Hammer, should leave because he was too noisy. Now Brother Hammer

protested: "If I am to leave this carpenter shop, then Brother Gimlet must go too. He is so insignificant and makes very little impression."

Little Brother Gimlet then rose up. "All right," he said, "but if I go, Brother Screw must go also. You have to turn



him around and around again and again to get him to go anywhere."

At this, Brother Screw could not keep silent. "If you wish, I will go; but Brother Plane must leave also. My work goes deep, but all his work is on the surface, there is just no depth to anything he does."

To this Brother Plane replied, "Well, Brother Rule will also have to withdraw if I do, because he is always measuring folks—as though he were the last word and the *only* one who is *right*!"

Brother Rule then pointed to Brother Sandpaper. "What about him? He is rougher than he ought to be. He is always rubbing people the wrong way!"

In the midst of the discussion, the carpenter walked in.

The dispute was quickly ended, and every tool retired into silence.

The carpenter had come to perform his day's work. He put on his apron, then went to his bench to make a wheel. He used the screw, the gimlet, the sandpaper, the saw, the hammer, the plane, and all the others.

After the day's work was over and the carpenter had gone home, the tools met again. This time Brother Saw arose and spoke first, "My brothers," he said, "I perceive that all of us have been too quick to criticize. The carpenter today has used all of us. We are all laborers together, each doing the particular task he is designed to do. Why should we fuss at one another because our brother doesn't do things just the way *we* think he should? I perceive that the carpenter needs ALL of us!"

All the tools knew Brother Saw was right. There was not an accusation made that day that was not absolutely true; yet the carpenter had used each one of them. He used each one where none of the others would have done any good at all.

Then Brother Robert added this comment: "Isn't this the way we need to be workers together with God? Why should any complain about another just because he isn't just the way *we* think he should be? Why not let the Carpenter judge each tool and use each tool where he needs it? How careful each of us should be, doing our best to labor together with God to accomplish the task He has assigned us. Why should any of us hinder God's work by finding fault with others of God's tools?"

"*We are workers together with God,*" wrote the apostle Paul, who was a master tool in God's carpenter shop for many years.

Now is our opportunity. Let us use each day as it is granted us to its utmost for our own spiritual growth, that we may one day lay hold on the LIFE THAT IS ETERNAL! (1 Tim. 6:19). ■

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 15

COME AND DINE

1. After Jesus' resurrection by the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1–12)
2. Daniel (Dan. 5:1–13)
3. Jesus (Luke 11:37–39)
4. The poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind in Jesus' parable (Luke 14:16–22)
5. Esau (Gen. 25:29–34)
6. Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 12:1–3)
7. David (1 Sam. 21:1–6)
8. The five thousand fed by Jesus (John 6:8–11)

9. Boaz to Ruth (Ruth 2:1–14)
10. Judas (John 13:29–30)

FAMOUS WORDS—WHO SAID THEM?

1. Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:65)
2. Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:3–4)
3. King Saul (1 Sam. 31:4)
4. Samson (Judg. 16:30)
5. Jesus (Rev. 22:16)
6. Job (Job 42:1, 5–6)
7. Cain (Gen. 4:13–14)
8. Stephen (Acts 7:59–60)
9. "Doubting" Thomas (John 20:28)

WHO

1. The leper of Galilee (Mark 1:39–40)
2. Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:38)
3. The king of Bashan (Deut. 3)
4. Joab (1 Kings 2:28–34)
5. Jesus, in the prophecy of Zacharias (Luke 1)
6. Nathanael (John 1:46)
7. David (2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Kings. 2:10–11)
8. A wicked officer of King Ahasuerus, who plotted against the Jews (Esther 3:6)

KEEP OUT of the DEBATING SOCIETY

by EDWARD SHAYLER

*Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound—
The word of life to me,
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.*

It is so easy to get involved in things that are not God's business, all the while thinking we are helping in some good endeavor.

In recent years I have been helped by group discussions on how to manage my life, and in many ways these discussions offered useful programs, and the final result was a complete reversal of my life, a complete change of my attitude.

The first requirement was to approach someone I felt confidence in and ask if he would be my sponsor. The man accepted and became my new friend. The very first question he asked me was, "Do you believe in God?" When I replied, "Yes!" he said, "Well, you are half way there."

Even my family found him an easy person to love. But he was not always gentle, and at times used methods that pushed my sensitive buttons. Once he made me sit in the back seat of his car because he said that my attitude was not worthy of sitting with him in the same seat! I was too "far from home to use alternatives." Another piece of advice he gave me sounded like a command. "Keep out of the debating society!" I asked, *What is the debating society?* He said the Oxford Dictionary could explain that better than he could. So that became an assignment that we would discuss. I got the dictionary and read:

debate 1. Strife, dissension, quarrelling; (a quarrel)
2. Contention in argument; dispute, controversy;
discussion; a discussion; esp. discussion in Parliament
(It could even mean to fight, or combat)

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
His grace it tells me how to live,
As I His truth receive.*

My friend was a gentle man, the son of a preacher, and had good habits and good language. He encouraged me to find a way to become teachable. He explained that the best way to do this was to empty my mind of my own opinions, and listen to others. He told me that whatever decisions I had made in the past were not useful; in fact, a lot of those opinions were the reason I needed to seek help. He said the formula for a contented mind was to open my mind, keep out of controversies, and live as I expected others to live. That meant I must do many things to change my habits, and to put effort into living one moment at a time. Eventually I would learn how to live one day at a time, and that would be a sufficient accomplishment. For just this moment I was not to lie, or brag, or make promises I could not keep. And I was to give my employer full measure, not take shortcuts. I was to consider how every action would affect others, and I was to begin making amends to anyone I had harmed, first with my family, then with others. And I was not to consider if anyone else needed to make amends to me. I was to be courteous to everyone.

I had a great deal of trouble accepting this last advice. It sounded like something coming from a man who had just climbed down from a tree. But I was desperate, and willing to try almost anything, so I promised to give the advice a determined effort.

My friend began to help me with daily living problems. I began to trust his advice. We spent many hours together, and slowly there was improvement; but often I felt that he had a dull life without excitement. At times the fast lane still looked enticing.

*The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures
If He my shield and portion is
As long as life endures.*

I remember one experience. I had been having a terrible day, and as I was getting ready to close the shop that my employer had given me charge of, I phoned my friend to explain my discouragement.

He was very sympathetic when I told him of all the bad things that happened that day; I explained to him in detail, thoroughly reconstructing the day. He told me he was just having supper, but I should carefully make a list of the incidents as to their importance and phone him back when finished. His intention was to come to my aid. With help like that, how could I not improve?

I carefully listed all the incidents in proper order, then phoned him again. I was very careful to explain how much thought I had put into the list so that he would know it was a serious matter to me. He answered by telling me that he could not come just yet, but while I was waiting would I take the time to consider each item carefully and write down what caused each incident, and who was at fault in each incident.

Now I had something concrete to work with!

I started to rank the items according to their importance. The first three items took some soul searching, but I answered as honestly as I could. I began to realize what he was about to tell me. Thinking I would beat him to the answer, I phoned him immediately and accused him of trying to show how smart he was. I can still hear his answer: "Get out of the debating society." I felt as though I had just had a relapse. Yes,

RIGHT AND WRONG

ARE NOT OPEN TO DEBATE.

IF GOD COMMANDS IT, IT IS RIGHT.

IF GOD FORBIDS IT, IT IS WRONG.

I had been my own worst enemy. I could have easily walked away from all that trouble.

The "debating society" can cause more trouble than just a little disagreement. It can be the culprit that causes sleepless nights and even chronic illnesses. If we let resentments burn within us, they will grow and fester to a point where they become obsessions, and we will become convinced that a reprisal is necessary. This will cause us to want to get even, when all we needed to do was walk away and stay out of the debating society. In fact it is the single, most important reason why I had so much trouble with my life, I had always tried to impose my opinions on others, mostly to let others see how clever I was, all the while building an ego that could not be supported by logic. My sponsor recognized this fault, but how could he convince me that the problem was my own pride?

I well remember how my peers chastised me with statements like "Make your family...(your school, your teacher, your employer) proud of you." Unwittingly, I used the wrong method and made myself proud. God calls this being "stiff necked." There was a powerful lesson for me to learn. Humility was the lesson. It is not easy to change this attitude, but I realized that if I wanted peace in my life, it had to be done.

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

My sponsor gave me a book which contained some very good advice, but advice is useless unless it is accepted and applied. Some of it I still remember. Here are a few thoughts from it:

The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it. Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles, we think we ought not to urge them. We should not talk incessantly to them about spiritual matters. Our behavior will convince them more than our words. We must remember that ten or twenty years of riotous living would make a skeptic out of anyone.

There are some wrongs that we cannot fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. But we do not delay if we can.

We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile.

As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.

"If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom, and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experiences can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

There was great improvement in my life, but...there was still something missing. This philosophy could take me so far but no further. The future was the important part.

Later, with this man's encouragement and my wife's example, I eventually approached my Church, visited them, and was surprised to find the tools to make the new life possible. In fact, they offered so much encouragement and Bible truth that if I fail it is because of my own lack of effort.

I am writing this many years after that visit. My life has become a wonderful experience, full of hope and peace, and a chief desire to "Keep out of the debating society."

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun. ■*



by GERALD R. PAYNE

THE BIBLE—CAN WE TRUST EVERY PASSAGE?

A question that has lingered in my mind since childhood is that the Bible as we now have it was compiled or arranged by ungodly people not having the Holy Spirit guidance. Since it appears to have been arranged many years after the last Apostle died, how can we be sure that all the books they chose to include are God's Word? Would it not make more sense that people closer to God's Truth would be more qualified to choose or cull the inspired books? To be more specific, how can we be sure which parts of the Bible were added to support a false doctrine? For example, how can we be sure the passage about Abraham sacrificing his son belongs to the original text of Scripture?

We have ample evidence that the passage regarding Abraham's sacrifice belongs to the original text of Scripture. This fact is confirmed by the Septuagint (2nd century BC), by Josephus (1st century AD), by the Dead Sea Scrolls (200 BC to 200 AD), and other documents predating the New Testament. If the evidence from any or all of these is true, it was not added to support the teachings of the Apostate Church.

Most confirming is the fact that much of this evidence is from before Christ. About three centuries before the New Testament was written, the writings that make up our Old Testament were translated from Hebrew to Greek to satisfy the needs of Jews* who only spoke Greek. The result was called the LXX, or the Septuagint. This is the form in which the Old Testament was most commonly available during the time of Christ.

The Old Testament in the authorized version has the same books that are in the LXX. Soon after the LXX was finished, the Alexandrian Jews added about 15 books, calling

them the Apocrypha. Though these books were held by some Jews, particularly those of Alexandria, to be authentic, and were widely read, they were generally looked upon as spurious additions. Our common version does not contain them as part of the Canon. (See preface to the LXX, by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton who also translated the LXX to English). It is interesting to note that the "New Testament writers never quote these additional writings to Scripture." —*Preface to the Apocrypha*, Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton.

As a matter of comparison, the Douay-Rheims (Catholic version) has 46 books while our version has the same number as the LXX, or 39 books. The New Catholic Study Bible, a newer version of the Catholic Bible, has adopted the same layout as our versions except that they have 15 books, mostly of the Apocrypha, appended to the end like the LXX. The New American Bible, Saint Joseph Edition, has seven books of the Apocrypha interspersed among the Accepted Books. The Books included in the LXX are the same as the Protestant versions except for the names of two (The LXX has 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Kings, which our version names 1st and 2nd Samuel, followed by 1st and 2nd Kings).

If God allowed one spurious book to enter the Canon, how could we be sure that there are not more?

There is no reason to doubt that the books of the Bible are authentic.

There are a few qualities of all inspired Scripture which may serve as guidelines:

1) If the book or passage contains prophecy that has been fulfilled

Prophecy is a good way to determine if a book or passage should be in the Bible.

Does the book contain prophecies that have been either partially or completely fulfilled?

Does it contain prophecy (unfulfilled) that is parallel with that in another book of the Bible?

2) If the book or passage harmonizes with other inspired books

It is often helpful to compare writings in question with those known to be by a Divinely inspired

*It is also argued that the Jews had not been dispersed long enough to have needed the Scriptures in another language at this time, and that it was likely translated for the king and later used by the Jews.—*Preface to the LXX*, Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, Hendrickson Publishers.

There is ample evidence to believe the books of the Bible are authentic.

author. But we have to be careful that we do not discard what is true. We might consider the following factors as a means of giving the Scriptures opportunity to prove themselves. For example:

◆ *Do the writings of two different authors seem to disagree?* If so, why? Could it be a matter of selecting the correct definition of certain words (translation problem)? Or perhaps we are reading our thoughts into the text because our minds have been preconditioned to an erroneous line of thought? Are we misunderstanding one of the authors, or both?

Genuine, truly inspired Biblical authors will agree on any and every subject they discuss (i.e., the nature of man, the role of Jesus Christ, the state of the dead, the reward of the righteous, the destiny of the wicked, the Kingdom of God, etc.). The authentic Books we have are almost error-free. The most significant area of error seems to have occurred in the process of translation from the Hebrew and Greek languages to English, and the influence of the translator's own views on his translation. But isn't that why we have Lexicons and other language resources available, plus the work of numerous translators, so that in the isolated situations where discrepancies arise we are usually able to search out what the author intended?

◆ *Do the writings in question agree with the general teaching of the Bible on any given topic?* This is a fair rule for any study. If we have studied any secular matters in depth, we have likely come to situations where something does not make sense yet we have solid proof that it is true. Then one day, something is discovered, or something "clicks." We come upon something we did not know, and it all makes perfect sense. Sometimes what we think are discrepancies are resolved by more study.

◆ *Is there no apparent answer to our question?* When a passage seems questionable, one rule-of-thumb could be to resign to the idea that the passage is genuine but we simply do not understand it, unless there is good reason to believe it is spurious. Sooner or later, we will either find clear reason to believe it is spurious, or we find evidence to understand it in relation to the general teaching of the Scriptures.

3) Is the book or passage quoted in another part of Scripture?

We gain valuable insights as New Testament authors understand and quote from the Old

Testament. The New Testament authors, having Holy Spirit power, could quote accurately as well as give the correct meaning. Their quotations can give us confidence that those portions of the Old Testament are accurate and inspired.

DID COPYING CONTAMINATE THE BIBLE?

When studying the Bible, scribes apparently made marginal notes, and in the process of copying, these notes were occasionally inserted by the copyist as part of the text, which adds to our problem of understanding certain portions of Scripture. As best as scholars can determine, these additions were few, and many have been eliminated in the newer versions. (It is interesting to read the passages which some are complaining about having been removed from the Bible which were not part of the original text and should not have been added in.) This is likely because we try to understand various passages in harmony with the general teaching of the Bible, instead of seeking support for a preconceived or established dogma.

Quotations and writings from the early Church Fathers also provide evidence of the writings that were considered Scripture in the early Church. In fact, it is said that they revered the "Scriptures" and quoted so heavily from them that had the Scriptures been entirely destroyed, the entire New Testament could have been reconstructed from the Scripture quoted in their writings.

Also, knowledge gained from archeological digs and the discovery of numerous manuscripts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, has given scholars a broader base of material for comparison. When there are several claims regarding a particular subject, one can usually look at these different sources, comparing one with another, and discover what statements are false, or presumed, and what are fact.

We know how the scribes took great pains copying Biblical texts—another fact not to be overlooked. Scholars have marveled at the accuracy between our texts and those discovered during recent decades.

It is said that the early Church Fathers quoted so heavily from Scripture that if the documents of the New Testament had been totally lost they could have been reconstructed from the quotations in their writings.

God's CHOSEN AUTHORS

The waywardness of a Biblical author (Solomon for example) in no way discredits the Divinely inspired writings of the Bible. No book or passage of sacred Scripture can be laid aside with impunity. More than once God delivered His message to men by means of agents other than faithful stewards. For example, the dumb donkey was used to reprove Balaam (Num. 22:28–30; 2 Pet. 2:16). An unscrupulous Joab spoke the word of truth to David when he had transgressed in numbering Israel (2 Sam. 24:3). Even Paul did not condemn the words of those who preached the Gospel “from envy and strife,...not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains” (Phil. 1:15–16). Always the issue was not the verity of the messenger but the message.

God's USE OF HUMAN INSTRUMENTS

Many times God has used those who had no Holy Spirit power, even those who were against Him or who were unaware that God was using them, to do what He wanted done.

Joseph's brothers did not know they were helping to bring about God's plan to save their lives. They heard no voice, saw no vision. Yet when they sold Joseph into slavery they set in motion Joseph's journey to Egypt, his service, his discipline, in preparation for a great work he was to do. Joseph, after experiencing the heartbreak, humiliation and agonizing trials, was exalted to a position of ruler over all Egypt, in which he was able ultimately to save the lives of his family as well as many Egyptians. “*And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt*” (Gen. 45:7–8).

It may seem cruel and unjust to us that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. For all they knew, he could have spent the rest of his life at the oars of some sea-faring vessel under a ruthless taskmaster. But great men and women

of God must have special training and education that will make them strong and wise servants. The discipline often is difficult. But those who undergo such training must not hold grudges against those whom God may choose to help provide this discipline. We never hear of Joseph holding his brothers in contempt for the terrible deed they did to him. Those who understand that discipline is necessary for their own benefit do not become embittered by it. Rather, like Joseph, they are only grateful they were found worthy material to do the work God arranged for them to do.

Pharaoh, not knowing God was using him, also had a role in this drama. It

*Our personal
commitment is to God,
and to each seeking His
approval, He has promised
to provide a means to
understanding.*

was by the providence of God that Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt which led to the saving of Joseph's father and his kin from a seven-year famine (Gen. 41).

Four hundred years later God used another Pharaoh to make Himself known. “*For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth*” (Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:17).

The Sanhedrin, a lad, the Roman army, Felix the governor, Festus, king Agrippa, the people of Malta, and two ships with crew, were all involved in Paul's first journey to Rome where he wrote most of his Epistles.

Who can say that God was not behind the entire development of free and independent thought which broke the power of the Apostate church and gave

rise to the individualism we see today? Who can say God was not behind the long and slow transition from control by the state to the freedom of religion which we value so dearly today?

Columbus led the way to America where the founders of our Nation coined the Constitution and Bill of Rights, giving liberty and the freedom of worship.

God even uses rulers today to carry out His will, and we are commanded to obey their laws as long as they do not contradict God's laws (Rom. 13:1–7). Many of these rulers do not recognize God or His providence. Neither do they have Holy Spirit power.

Our commitment is to God. And if we are committed to God, He is committed to us for providing us with the material we need for understanding how we must conduct our lives to meet His approval. Where do we go for this information? To science? To some philosopher? To a Bible we cannot trust? It is very evident that none of these will suffice. We must have information we can trust. If God used those who had no Holy Spirit power, and even unknown to themselves that they were being used to accomplish His purposes, could God not have accurately guided those who assembled the Books we now embrace as the Holy Word of God?

Finally, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Aside from the helps we receive from the various resources, the final judgment of whether a particular passage is true or spurious must be from careful, prayerful analysis, harmonizing with what other Divinely inspired Bible authors say on the subject. If they seem to disagree, then further research is needed to determine if the problem may be due to translation. If they agree, then we have to accept it as true and apply it to our lives.

During all our Bible studies we should never forget that God is the Author, we are the student. ■

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19



Take heed Repent, Repent!

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by preaching repentance. The Apostles' message of salvation also included the call to repentance—acknowledging personal sin and turning away from it.

Many people want the benefits of being identified with Christ without admitting their own disobedience and turning from sin. The key to forgiveness is confessing our sin and turning from it (see Acts 2:38).

Peter was speaking to an audience thoroughly familiar with these prophecies. He did not need to rehearse every one. They knew, and they could recall them. Suffice it to say that there was unanimous testimony among the prophets that Jesus would come, that He would be rejected, that He would ascend to heaven, and that He would return.

Of all people, they were the most familiar with the prophets, for, as Peter said, *"And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed'"* (3:25 NIV). They were without excuse. Of all people they should have recognized the Messiah, He who was among them healing their sick, cleansing their lepers, raising their dead. They were the very children of the prophets, they were Abraham's own descendants.

But even though they rejected the Messiah, and crucified Him, God's plan was going forward. He would yet return as King of the earth. Such was Peter's message. ■

TO BE CONTINUED

CAPTURED BY THE DREAM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

I like that phrase, *"reaching forward."* It expresses action, a moving toward one's dream. Paul had his mind's eye fixed on Christ and all that Christ could give him: the crown of life, glory, honor, immortality (Phil. 3:13; 2 Tim. 4:8). And he was reaching forward, reaching for that goal (Rom. 2:7).

At the same time he was forgetting the things behind, the trivia, the worthless things that ought to be forgotten. If we make a habit of dwelling on trivia, trivia is all we will have.

How do we forget it? By the displacement principle. We forget what is worthless by focusing on what lies ahead, that dream in our heart, that vision of the promises of God that can be ours.

What is your dream? What promise of God captures you? What makes your heart beat faster? Look at what inspired King David. Between all the problems and duties of the state, he was dreaming of being in the very presence of God. *"You will show me the path of life,"* he wrote. *"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore"* (Ps. 16:11). Talk about pleasure! What dream can surpass this!

The same is true of all God's promises. Dream as far as your eye can see—the reality will exceed it. Imagine the most beautiful music you have ever heard—you haven't heard anything to compare with the heavenly strains of the angel voices.

Try to feel the joy of the most loving, most delightful, most gracious companions you have ever known—the promises of God will explode that memory!

What promise of God grips you? What are you looking forward to? Write it down. Look at it often. Dream about it! Picture yourself having it! Let it be your incentive, your reason for living and for serving God, a longing only He can satisfy.

The more we learn about what God has for every faithful one, the more that dream will possess us and the more we will be inspired to reach forward. And as we keep reaching, a love for right doing will become our obsession. When it does, we will be on our way to developing the character image that pleases God. We will have captured that spirit which drives us toward God, the only One who can make that dream in our heart come true!

As it is written:

*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for
those who love Him.* —1 Cor. 2:9 ■



It was spring and the forest was a lovely place. The ground was dotted with flowers; pink ones, blue ones—all colors of the rainbow. Birds were singing merrily in the treetops and animals were scurrying around, either playing or working. They were happy because at last the long winter was gone.

Bonnie and Betty Bunny were on their way to Farmer O'Neil's garden. They hoped to find some fresh vegetables just peeking above the ground. They were sure Farmer O'Neil wouldn't mind sharing them with the Bunny family.

But as they came near the creek, they heard the queerest grunting and puffing. It sounded as if someone was in great trouble. Very carefully, Bonnie and Betty peeked around the corner to see where the noise came from. In a few minutes they knew that Wally Woodchuck was responsible for the grunting and puffing. His hole was right there, near the creek bed.

"What's the matter, Wally?" called Bonnie.

The grunting and puffing stopped for just a moment. Wally backed out of his hole to look at the bunnies. But instead of answering Bonnie's question, Wally went back into his hole and started grunting and puffing again.

"May I help you?" offered Bonnie.

"Me, too?" added Betty

Once more the grunting and puffing stopped while Wally backed out of his den. This time he sat back and looked crossly at the bunnies, "It's the old creek," he sputtered. "The water came

so high that it washed my living room full of mud. Now I must dig the whole place out again. It was a good den and there's nothing more provoking than to have it ruined in this way. I worked hard making it just right."

"That's a pity." "Too bad," sympathized the bunnies.

And because they couldn't think of anything else to say, they stood back and watched. They were sorry Wally's home was ruined. Building a home like Wally Woodchuck's is hard work. The creek bed is hard-topped sand full of roots, and Wally had only his feet to dig with.

He started to dig at the sand by his doorway now. The bunnies watched the sand fly for a few minutes.

Finally Bonnie spoke, "We would help you if we could."

"Thanks, Bonnie, I guess it's my job," answered Wally. "Anyway, you couldn't do as well as I can."

Wally went back to work and the bunnies headed toward Farmer O'Neil's garden.

They were only a few hops from Wally's den when Bonnie stopped. She had thought of something so she hopped back. Wally's nose was deep inside the doorway and his hind feet were kicking out the

sand—only his short tail showed—but when he heard Bonnie call—"Wally"—he came out to see why Bonnie was back so soon.

"I just happened to think of something to make your work easier," said Bonnie brightly.

"What do *you* know about woodchuck burrows?" grunted Wally.

"Nothing. But I know something about work," replied Bonnie. "Whenever there's something hard to be done, it goes easier and quicker if done cheerfully."

"Cheerfully?" exploded Wally. "Don't tell me to be cheerful when I've got a job like this to do. I wonder if *you* would be cheerful if *your* house was full of mud?"

"I only meant to help," replied Bonnie a little startled.

Several hours later, bunnies Bonnie and Betty on their way back from Farmer O'Neil's garden stopped to see how Wally was doing. They didn't speak for fear Wally might still be angry. But Wally was not in sight. Very cautiously they crept forward and peaked into Wally Woodchuck's doorway. It was a neat round hole, and the sand Wally had kicked out lay in a neat pile beside it. The bunnies put their noses inside the hole and sniffed. It was pitch dark in there but they could smell Wally. They crept in a little farther and then stood

Why Wally Woodchuck Changed His Tune

Bonnie Bunny:
"When there is a hard job to be done, it gets done easier and more quickly if done cheerfully."



still in surprise. They heard something and it didn't sound one bit like Wally's voice; it was a cheery whistle—a merry tune. And then Bonnie and Betty heard shuffling feet.

The bunnies backed out and stopped at a safe distance. Soon Wally was in the doorway looking very cheerful.

When he saw Bonnie and Betty, he greeted them cheerly, "Well, glad to see you back so soon."

"Was that *you* whistling?" Bonnie asked in surprise.

"Of course, it was!" chuckled Wally. "Most folks don't know that we woodchucks can whistle. We only do it in our own homes. But I want to tell you—I followed your advice and it helped! You should see my burrow now. I'm right proud of it. Won't you come in and see it?"

The bunnies gladly followed Wally through the dark doorway. The tunnel slanted downward for about three feet and just as they were getting used to the slope they found themselves groping upward. Soon they came out into a little room, cozy and snug as could be—just the right size for a woodchuck family.

Shortly the bunnies and Wally came back into the sunshine.

"That is a good place for a den," said Betty.

"And it will stay dry," added Wally.

"What's the idea of going downward

first and then upwards?" asked Bonnie.

"Well, you see, if I put my nest at the bottom of the tunnel, the rain would run down and drown me and my family. Now the water may run down but soon drains away leaving our den safe and dry up on the higher level," explained Wally proudly.

"Of course! How smart," exclaimed Betty.



"That's very wise," agreed Bonnie. "But *where* did you learn that trick?"

"Learn it?" chuckled Wally. "I didn't learn it, really. You know bunnies, that each of us has been given the wisdom we need to do the work we have to do. Our Creator saw to that! After you left me awhile ago, I got thinking about these things and began feeling thankful

and then cheerful and then the work wasn't hard at all."

"Isn't it wonderful," exclaimed Bonnie "how each of us is especially designed! It helps when I feel discouraged to stop and count my blessings. Somehow everything seems so much better."

"That's right," agreed Betty.

"Sure thing!" added Wally emphatically. ■

Cheerfulness makes every job easier.

*"Serve the Lord with gladness."
—Psalm 100:2*



*It doesn't take a NEW YEAR
To begin our lives anew,
God grants us new beginnings
Each day the whole year through—
So never be discouraged
For there comes daily to all men
The chance to make another start
And begin all over again.*

—Helen Steiner Rice

***G**odly sorrow works repentance
 Unto life and blessedness;
 But the world's regret or sorrow
 Worketh death and deep distress.
 For behold, this godly sorrow,
 Of a pure and holy kind,
 How it works unfeigned repentance,
 And from sin refrains the mind.*

-2 Corinthians 7:10

RIGHT OR WRONG?

Right is the solution to the problem; wrong is the problem.

Switching their appearances changes nothing.

Right does not tolerate wrong. Dress it as you please, nothing changes.

*Fools make a mock at sin, will not believe
 It carries such a dagger in its sleeve*

—William Shakespeare



WHAT IS Abib?

Abib (or Nisan) was the first month of the sacred year as God instructed Moses to measure time. In the ancient Hebrew language, Abib meant “month of green ears,” “spring or sprouting month.” God commanded Moses to “*observe the month of Abib*” (Deut 16:1; Ex. 12:2; 13:4) as a reminder of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt during the month Abib.

Abib 1 was, on the ancient Hebrew calendar, the first day of the week, the first day of the month, and the first day of the year. The new moon occurring this year on April 16, Abib 1 begins this year on Monday evening, April 16, and continues through Tuesday, April 17, Bible time being measured from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). History tells us that it was the pattern of the Hebrew people to begin the new year with the first occurrence of the new moon after the Spring Equinox.

The Megiddo Church observes Abib First as the first day of the **sacred New Year**, and also as the **anniversary of Jesus' birth**.

Abib 13 is the anniversary of the night when Jesus met with His disciples and partook of the **Last Supper** with them before He suffered. It falls this year on Saturday evening, April 28.

At this time the members of the Megiddo Church partake of the **Passover** emblems (unleavened bread and grape juice) in obedience to Jesus' command, “*This do in remembrance of me*” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).

The **Passover** is a sacred rite, symbolic of the renewing of our covenant relationship with God. Partaking of the bread symbolizes our acceptance of the knowledge of the law of God, and the juice represents our pledge to apply that knowledge to our daily lives as Jesus did, to offer ourselves in total dedication to do the will of God.

Abib 15 is the anniversary of the **Resurrection of Christ**, occurring this year on the morning of May 1. In ancient Israel, this first-day-of-the-week ceremony was the waving of the first sheaf of the harvest before the Lord (Lev. 23:12–15). In its spiritual parallel, Christ the firstfruits from death rose this morning triumphant over the grave.

On the morning of Abib 15, “*very early in the morning*” (Mark 16:2) certain women went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. Finding it empty, they heard those immortal words that still warm our hearts today: “*He is not here, for he is risen! Come, see the place where the Lord lay*” (Matt. 28:6).

Pentecost, the festival by which the Israelites marked the end of the wheat harvest and the beginning of the barley harvest, came fifty days after the waving of the first sheaf offering. It falls this year on June 19. ■

*Diligently use the talents you have and
you will not feel so keenly your need for more talents.*

*“Your will be done” is the keynote to which every prayer
that reaches the throne of God will be tuned.*

*The person who aspires highly is the one who achieves highly. Make
sure you are aspiring to that which will last.*

*God chooses **what** we go through;
we choose **how** we go through it.*

*The Bible is the **textbook** for life, not merely a **book** of texts.*

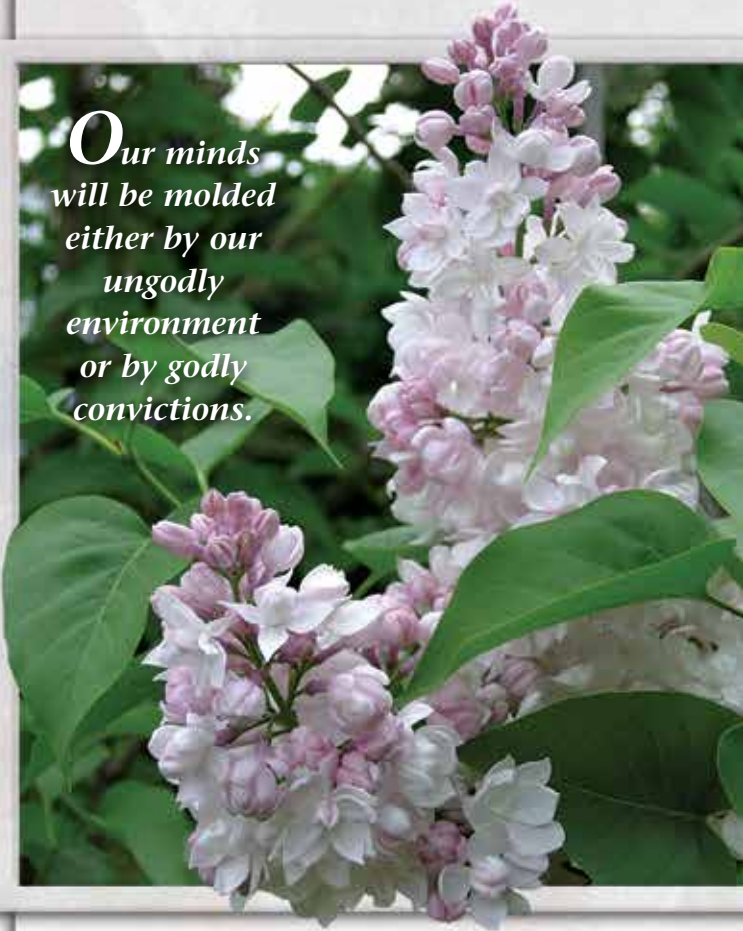
*Put on the God-provided armor and you will be secure against any
assaults of evil.*

- ◆ “Take up the **whole armor of God**, that you may be
able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all,
to stand.
- ◆ Stand therefore, having girded your **waist** with truth,
having put on the **breastplate** of righteousness,
- ◆ And having shod your **feet** with the preparation of the
gospel of peace;
- ◆ Above all, taking the **shield of faith** with which you
will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked
one.
- ◆ And take the **helmet of salvation**, and the **sword of
the Spirit**, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:12–17).

*We are workers together with God (2 Cor. 6:1)—
— God is the leader.*

*A successful person is one who does not let the
disappointments of life turn him bitter.*

*Faithful believers, we watch and we pray.
Soon You will come to bring a new Day.
Then all of the world Your story will tell.
O come, O come, Emmanuel.*



*Our minds
will be molded
either by our
ungodly
environment
or by godly
convictions.*

THE HAPPINESS OF DUTY

*There's a certain narrow, quiet path
of daily thoughts and living,
Of little deeds of sacrifice,
of living and forgiving,
Of patience and obedience,
of gentle speech and action,
Of choosing right and shunning wrong
with godly satisfaction.*

*And if we never leave this path
for what the world calls pleasure,
Someday we'll know a heavenly joy
beyond our power to measure;
For in this narrow, quiet way.
God's angels move forever,
And silent mark in Book of Life
our ev'ry high endeavor,*

*While shedding on this lowly life
The glow of inward beauty:
Not the pursuit of happiness
but the happiness of duty.*



"HE'S COMING!"

*He's coming!" said the Prophets, "and the glory of the Lord
Shall be revealed and all shall see the Christ, the living Lord."
Yes, He will come, Earth's sovereign, our Redeemer, Savior, King
To fill the world with truth and make eternal praises ring.*

*He's coming!" said two angels as He disappeared from sight,
Borne up by holy ministers sent forth from heaven's height;
Yes, two stood by to strengthen those who watched Him go away,
To give the sweet assurance that He would return one day.*

*Meanwhile their comrades flashed through space, to bear Christ to the throne,
The Highest Throne, where in the Father's presence He was crowned!
But what of those who came from heav'n to comfort give that day?
Whence came they? Did they just "drop in" to words of promise say?*

*Or had they camped close by our Lord through all His days of stress,
Unseen, yet lending help and aid in loving tenderness?
We only know that they were there when greatest was the need.
How God provides! nor once forsakes those who are His indeed!*

*He's coming!" taught the faithful ones, disciples of our Lord,
As they proclaimed His kingdom and His vibrant, living Word;
Each pressing, fighting, struggling as they lived from day to day
Reflecting Christ their Lord and King in each and ev'ry way.*

*He's coming!" rings the message still; we sing in glad accord
As we prepare, our spirits long to see our living Lord;
O'er nineteen centuries have passed, His word stands firm and true:
"I'm coming!" echoes back His voice, "I come to make all new."*

*He's coming!" Yes! Lord Jesus, come! With longing hearts we pray,
Bring in the age of Peace and Right and glad eternal Day!
Your chariots gather, Lord, and come! Come quickly! Claim Your throne,
Bring in the glad millennium and make our world Your own!*