

MAY 1984

The Good News

OF THE WORLD TOMORROW



The Seeding of
GOD'S
KINGDOM

The Good News

OF THE WORLD TOMORROW

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16



**Principles of
Healthful Living**
See page 9

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COVER: These golden, ripe kernels of wheat represent the most important work God is doing today — preparing Christians, now seeds, to be the firstfruits of His coming Kingdom. See article on page 3. Photo by Ray Atkeson, First Vision.

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Why Did God Raise Up the Nation Israel— and Deny Them Spiritual Salvation?

By Herbert W. Armstrong

Did anyone ever think to ask WHY God raised up the ancient nation Israel, denying them His Holy Spirit and eternal salvation — except their prophets *only*?

Why “chosen people”?

WHY were Old Testament Israelites called God’s “chosen people” — and still denied the Holy Spirit to beget them into eternal life?

“Chosen” — for *what*? To be teacher’s pet? For special favors above other nations? Was God a respecter of nations?

To understand, we need to start with Adam and Eve. It is an intriguing story, and I have never seen it put together in this manner before. The true reason for ancient Israel is an integral part of God’s supreme master plan.

And did you ever realize that the Holy Bible is the book of and concerning that one nation ISRAEL? And that the Bible mentions other nations only if and as they came into contact with Israel?

The truly amazing truth about Israel is totally unrealized by any religion — by any denomination

in traditional Christianity — or even by Judaism.

And here’s another shocker for you — also unrealized by any, including Judaism — the kingdom of Israel *was not Jewish!* The first place in the Bible that the word *Jews* is used is II Kings 16:6, where Israel is at war against the Jews!

It is indeed true that the nation Israel was God’s chosen people. But understand this: They were not chosen as teacher’s pet or for special favors. They were chosen for a special purpose preparatory to the Kingdom of God — a purpose they on their part refused to comply with.

It is an intriguing story. And it has great significance in God’s overall PURPOSE for all peoples!

First humans perfect physically

God is REPRODUCING HIMSELF in and through MAN! God’s ultimate purpose is breathtaking — the seemingly incredible transcendent potential of man.

The establishment of the ancient nation of Israel is an integral part of God’s supreme master plan.

So now, to understand, and bring into mind the background, we go back a bit briefly.

God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, as perfect specimens physically and mentally. Yet they were but *unfinished* pieces of God’s workmanship. Spiritual character was yet to be built into them and their offspring. In this humans are required to perform their own vital part.

Physically this perfectly created pair had no chronic ailments or tendencies toward physical illness or disease. That is testified in part by the fact that Adam lived to be 930 years of age. And for nearly 2,000 years the life span averaged close to 900 years!

Think of it! The first created man lived more than one sixth of all the time from his creation until now! Adam and Eve had a number of sons and daughters, but only three sons are named in the record.

Bear this in mind: Adam and Eve had rejected God as revealer of basic knowledge — rejected His government. They had chosen the “GET” way of life — the self-centered way of vanity, covetousness, envy and jealousy, competition leading to strife, violence and destruction and rebellion against authority.

Their first son, Cain, became a

murderer and a liar. Although his murdered brother Abel was called "righteous Abel" by Jesus, humanity, descending at a rapid birthrate, became more and more violent.

Actually, from the time of Adam until Noah — some 1,500 or more years — only one man, Enoch, "walked with God."

By the time of Noah, a population explosion was taking place on earth — even as it is again today. It is recorded: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth" — human thought and interests were "only evil continually. . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. . . . for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Genesis 6:5, 11-12).

This lawless universal corruption and violence was inflicting pain, suffering, anguish, frustration upon an evil humanity. It seems humanity never realizes the GET way — transgression of God's law — inflicts increasing suffering on its perpetrators — and on others.

This corruption and violence had become so universal that God determined to spare humanity from suffering longer in the mounting misery and anguish.

God took away their miserable lives by the earthwide flood, to be resurrected in the next second of their consciousness in the Great White Throne resurrection of the book of Revelation, chapter 20, verses 11-12. They will be brought back to life in a time when Christ is ruling the earth in righteousness, peace and happiness. Satan will be gone. Their minds then will be opened to God's TRUTH, and eternal salvation opened to them.

But God intended to preserve human life — and, as it were, to give humanity a new and fresh start.

Races mixed

One man only, Noah, was perfect in his "generations." That is, his heredity, ancestry.

It is amply evident that by the time of Noah there were at least

the three major racial strains on earth — the white, yellow and black. All others in our 20th century have come from interracial breeding.

God does not reveal in the Bible the precise origin of the different races. It is evident that Adam and Eve were created white. God's chosen nation Israel was white. Jesus was white. But it is a fair conjecture that in mother Eve were created ovaries containing the yellow and black genes, as well as white, so that some of the children of Adam and Eve were black and some yellow, as well as some white.

At least, by the time of Noah, men "took them wives of all which *they* chose" (Genesis 6:2). The very fact of the insertion of the words *which they chose* implies they chose wives God did not intend for them to marry. There was every kind of evil and violence at the time. Jesus, some 2,000 years later, said, looking into this END time of the late 20th century, just before His coming to establish the KINGDOM OF GOD and restore the GOVERNMENT of God, that conditions would be as in the days of Noah — "they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Matthew 24:38).

In *what way* did eating and drinking and marrying have to do with the extreme evils that caused God to blot out the lives of all earth's people, except the eight of Noah's family? To eat wholesome food and drink pure water is necessary to sustain life and is GOOD. God Himself established the institution of marriage and made it holy matrimony.

But there was something contrary to GOD'S WAY in the *manner* in which they were eating, drinking and marrying, in Noah's time. Like today, "eating and drinking" evidently had become a custom of the type of revelings listed as "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21 and I Peter 4:3. In the latter passage, Peter speaks of "when we walked in licentiousness [lawlessness and crime], lusts [violations of the Tenth Commandment], drunkenness,

revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries." Verse 4 terms these as a "flood of dissipation."

Now Jesus drank wine — but in proper moderation. I frequently have attended banquets at which were present royalty and men high in government — at which only proper food and a minimum of wine have been served — and all were completely sober, discussing vital questions for the general good. Like marriage, none of these is WRONG — in moderation. God teaches moderation and temperance — not drunkenness, rioting, senseless drunken reveling like some do on New Year's Eve today.

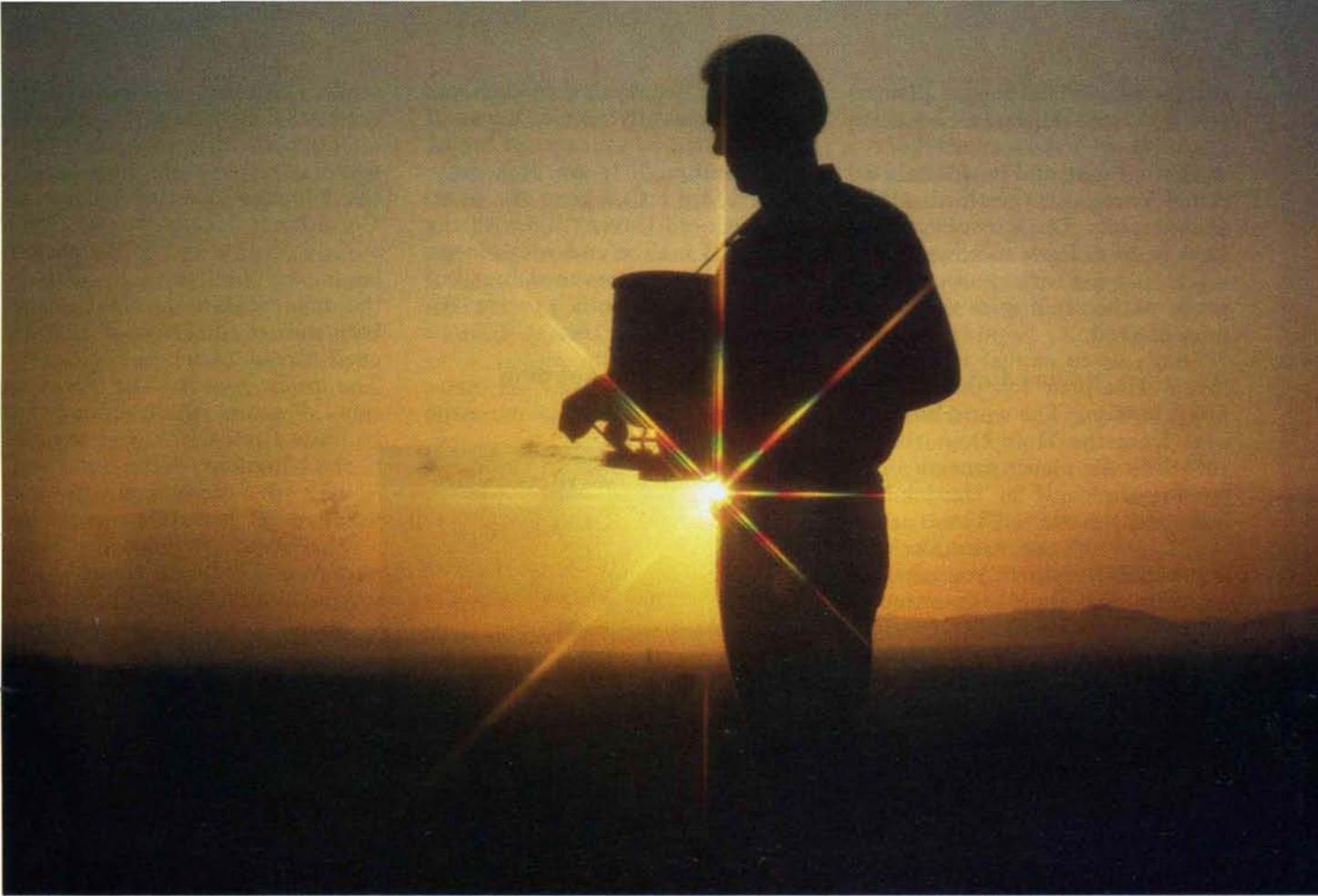
Marriage is not wrong in itself. Yet, according to Jesus, one of the things evil and wrong in Noah's day was "marrying and giving in marriage." Genesis 6:2 reveals HOW and WHY! They were marrying wives "of all whom *they* chose." They were choosing the wrong wives. HOW? God had intended NO MONGRELIZATION in human reproduction.

The one man God chose to PRESERVE the human race alive was perfect in his *generations* — all his ancestry back to Adam was of the one strain, and undoubtedly that happened to be white — *not* that white is in any sense superior.

If you are a livestock breeder, planning to enter your prize animals in a livestock show — perhaps at a state fair — you will be sure to enter only thoroughbred or pedigreed stock! Mixing the breed tends toward degeneration.

God originally *set the bounds* of national borders, intending nations to be SEPARATED and prevent interracial marriage. Notice: "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations [speaking of land or geographical boundaries], when he *separated* [notice — He *separated*] the sons of Adam, he set the boundaries of the peoples" (Deuteronomy 32:8).

But people wanted to intermarry — until there would be only
(Continued on page 23)



Now Under Way **The Seeding of God's Kingdom**

*It's happening now, all over this earth.
Do you know what God is doing?*

By Earl H. Williams

What on earth is God doing?

The many facets of God's Church, including the *Good News* magazine you are now reading, work together to proclaim to all the world the wonderful announcement of God's coming Kingdom (Matthew 24:14).

But what is God doing today, in a practical way, to make His Kingdom come? How few professing Christians understand this basic knowledge!

Today, almighty God is planting the seeds of His Kingdom, and the embryo of that Kingdom is growing all over this world. Surprised? Unlike this blinded world, you can know God's mas-

ter plan for the future, if you are willing to accept and use the keys that unlock the truth.

The apostle Paul, like God's work today, proclaimed the truth about "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints" (Colossians 1:26).

How does God reveal this vital

knowledge of His master plan to His servants? Through His Holy Days!

God's Feast of Firstfruits, also called Pentecost, the third of His annual Holy Days, reveals what God is doing now to change this world. The Feast of Firstfruits pictures the seeding of the Kingdom of God.

God's seven annual Holy Days reveal His plan for establishing His Kingdom. The world hides its eyes from the Holy Days that reveal God's plan, ignoring or passing them off as "Jewish." But God thunders, "These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times" (Leviticus 23:4).

Your Creator divides His plan into three phases, each phase revolving, in symbolism, around a particular season of the year in Palestine. And like the seasons, each phase sets the stage for the fulfillment of the next.

Here are the three phases of His plan: "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles" (Deuteronomy 16:16).

Phase one: The redemption

Phase one, symbolized by the spring season, could be called the redemptive phase. From the cold death of winter, spring bursts forth with the start of life.

God, the great planner, begins the year and His plan in spring (Exodus 12:2). In the spring, God logically placed the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. These two events picture the hope of redemption from sin, which produces death (Romans 6:23).

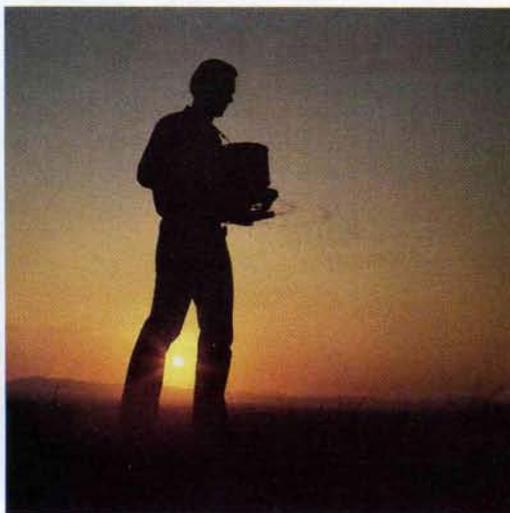
The Passover pictures the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 5:7), which bring redemption and a new lease on life.

Then the Days of Unleavened Bread show us that we must live this new life differently. We must put our old sinful ways and life-

style, typified by leavened bread, out, and start living God's way of life, typified by unleavened bread. Paul summed it up this way: "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (verse 8). Now on to phase two.

Phase two: The seeding

Phase two of God's plan — the



seeding — is most crucial. It is actually the crossroads of God's whole plan. Without seed, there could be no life, and without life, there could be no Kingdom of God!

The Feast of Firstfruits embodies all the facets of phase two. It pictures this moment — now — in God's plan — this moment in your life. At this very moment God is generating His Kingdom by planting the seeds of His firstfruits, which will sprout forth into the glorious Kingdom of God.

Let's take a closer look at God's seeding phase as pictured by the Feast of Firstfruits.

Two harvests were reaped in Israel. In spring through early summer, the Israelites gathered a small seed harvest of barley or other grain. This harvest is called the firstfruits harvest. In the fall, the year's second and biggest harvest was reaped (more on the fall harvest later).

The Church today is pictured by the small firstfruits harvest.

God's Church is made up of the seeds of God's future Kingdom.

Jesus Christ lives as the first of the firstfruits — the first seed of the Kingdom planted by God (I Corinthians 15:20).

God commanded Israel to begin the firstfruits harvest on the morrow after the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:9-11). The priest was to cut the first sheaf of grain, which represented Jesus Christ, the first seed of the Kingdom — the first emissary of a new world government. As Jesus Christ told the Pharisees, "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20, Revised Standard Version).

The great sower, God, planted Jesus Christ, the seed of the Kingdom, in the midst of this world. This seed will, very soon now, rule the world.

The cutting of the grain pictured Jesus' death — He was cut out of the land of the living. The priest waved the grain toward heaven. In this ceremony the priest actually represented the risen Jesus, the High Priest of our salvation (Hebrews 4:14-16). The grain waved toward heaven pictured the resurrected, triumphant Jesus Christ ascending to heaven to the very throne of God. There, as High Priest, Jesus presented His own sacrifice to God (Heb. 10:10).

Jesus Christ, the first of the firstfruits, paved the way and prepared the earth for the seeding of God's Kingdom. The seed, Jesus Christ, gave life to phase two of God's plan.

Firstfruits count

When does the Feast of Firstfruits start? Notice Leviticus 23:15: "And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed." Because seven weeks must be counted, this Holy Day is also known as the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9).

"Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; Then

you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord" (Leviticus 23:16). The Feast of Firstfruits is also known as Pentecost. The word *Pentecost* literally means "count fifty."

In counting Pentecost, we start with the morrow after the Sabbath of the wave sheaf offering. The preposition *from*, which appears in most versions of Leviticus 23:15, is a mistranslation. The original Hebrew word is *min*, which means "starting with" or "inclusively."

Starting to count 50 days beginning with the morrow after the Sabbath (Sunday), we always arrive at a Sunday, seven weeks later. Pentecost falls on the 50th day.

But why does God require us to figure out when the Feast of Firstfruits comes? Why must we count 50 every year? Simply because the rest of God's plan depends on what God does through us, His seed. Just as our counting is crucial, so is our development crucial to the establishment of God's Kingdom (Romans 8:21-23).

God goes on to instruct: "And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations" (Leviticus 23:21).

Yes, the Feast of Firstfruits is commanded today, and is crucially relevant to the future of this world. For further proof, write for our free booklet *Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which?*

Infertile seed

The children of Israel kept the Feast of Firstfruits, but they did not fulfill phase two. They failed to seed the world with God's way.

On the very day of Pentecost, God gave Israel His law (Exodus 20). God showed them the way to live — the way that would produce the physical blessings of His Kingdom. God promised, "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you,

because you obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 28:2).

Almighty God intended Israel to be the physical seed of His Kingdom. The Eternal proclaimed, "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). God wanted Israel to blossom and grow before all the nations on earth. He wanted to use the Israelites as seed to spread His way

At this very moment
God is planting
the seeds of His
firstfruits, which will
sprout forth into the
Kingdom of God.

all over this world. The nations were to see and say: "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:6-7).

Did Israel become the seed of the Kingdom? Did she fulfill God's purpose for the Feast of Firstfruits? No! "They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them" (Psalms 78:10-11).

But why did Israel fail to fulfill its potential? Because God did not fertilize the seed. The Israelites were physically descended from Abraham, but they were not the spiritual seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). They did not have God's Holy Spirit! (Be sure to read Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong's article "Why Did God Raise Up the Nation Israel — and Deny Them Spirit-

tual Salvation?" beginning on page 1 for more information.)

God, in the wisdom of His love, blinded Israel during this phase of His plan (Romans 11:8). Why? "So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things" (Acts 15:17).

Seeding, not saving

Contrary to popular religious opinion, God is not trying to save the world now. But the Feast of Firstfruits shows us that God *is* seeding the whole world now.

Jesus Christ told His disciples that He deliberately hid the truth from the masses. Read the astounding truth for yourself in Matthew 13:10-17.

The small size of the firstfruits harvest teaches us that God's first harvest of individuals, now just ahead, will be small. Jesus Christ called His Church a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). Throughout history God's Church has been small and persecuted.

Jesus Christ explained, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, literally means "called-out ones." God handpicks us, "that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18).

He is not trying to save the whole world now. Rather, He is seeding the whole world now with His firstfruits — the seeds of His Kingdom.

A worldwide seed

The biblical book of Ruth prophesied God's small but worldwide harvest. This touching love story overflows with firstfruits symbolism.

Ruth, a widowed gentile of the land of Moab, typified the New Testament Church. Ruth followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Israel. Naomi could be considered a type of the Holy Spirit, though the Holy Spirit is not a person. When Ruth and Naomi arrived, the firstfruits har-

vest was underway (Ruth 1:22). Ruth and Naomi were poor and destitute, but Naomi pointed Ruth to the rich landowner Boaz, a type of Jesus Christ. Boaz grew to love Ruth and married her. This true story pictures Christ's future marriage to the Church, which is composed of all peoples.

Interestingly enough, the promised Seed, Jesus Christ, came from this marriage between a Jew and a gentile (Ruth 4:18-22). God, the Father of all nations, wants all people to be one spiritually in Jesus Christ.

Through a special miracle, God led the apostle Peter to see that God's seed would consist of all people. Peter declared: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Our eternal Father declares: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they will be called sons of the living God" (Romans 9:25-26).

Yes, God is forming a new Israel — a new seed in Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:29 tells us, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Today, instead of calling only one nation, God calls "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). From Yap to Ypsilanti, from Bonn to Bombay, God is seeding the world.

Why is God calling His seed from all nations? Jesus Christ promises, "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26). God's Kingdom will rule every nation on earth. That's why God calls His seed from all nationalities.

This time God's nation — God's firstfruits — will not fail. Through physical Israel, God showed the creation of a peaceful,

abundant society cannot be accomplished by man alone. It requires God's Holy Spirit — the very power of God. The King of the Kingdom of God declares, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6).

On Sunday, June 17, A.D. 31, as Jesus' disciples kept the Feast of Firstfruits, God begot His Kingdom in embryo (Acts 2). God planted the seed of His Spirit in the minds of His called-out ones. God the Father guarantees the success of His firstfruits through the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). With the supernatural help of God, we can live God's way. With His super power, we will fulfill our destiny.

God's Kingdom grows

Nothing can stop the advance of God's Kingdom now — not even Satan the devil (Luke 12:32). God has planted the seeds of His Kingdom, and those seeds are going to bear abundant fruit.

Every physical seed carries the genetic codes required to produce the type of plant the seed produces. The Creator works the same way with His spiritual seed (I Corinthians 15:37-38). The Master's skillful hand is creating the qualities needed for His Kingdom inside His spiritual firstfruits.

God writes the law or constitution of the Kingdom inside us by means of His Holy Spirit: "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Hebrews 8:10).

And where is the territory of God's coming Kingdom? On the earth, initially (Revelation 5:10). Eventually, of course, God's Kingdom will expand to rule "all things" — this entire universe and untold others (Hebrews 2:8).

Yes, the day approaches when the seeds of God's Kingdom will sprout all over this world with Jesus Christ. They shall establish the Kingdom of God (Daniel 2:44). Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in

his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (Matthew 13:31-32).

Phase three: The Kingdom established

The Feast of Firstfruits, the seeding phase of God's plan, will produce the Kingdom of God. For His elect's sake, the Kingdom will be set up (Matthew 24:22). Phase three, the Kingdom phase, pictured by the great fall harvest, will be ushered in.

As phase three of God's plan begins, Jesus Christ will return in great power and glory to change God's firstfruits into spirit beings (I Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus Christ will conquer the kingdoms of this world and set up His Kingdom with His resurrected saints (Revelation 2:26). The Feast of Trumpets pictures this heralded event.

Next, Satan the devil, the cause of the world's problems, will be put away (Revelation 20:1-3), as pictured by the Day of Atonement.

Then, for a thousand years, peace, prosperity and salvation will engulf the world (Micah 4:2-7). The Feast of Tabernacles reveals this wonderful truth.

But what about all the blinded seed of mankind who lived and died? What will happen to them? After the thousand years they will be resurrected to physical life and given an opportunity to qualify for God's Kingdom (Revelation 20:3, 12, Ezekiel 37:1-14). God's master plan of salvation will finally be completed.

What on earth is God doing? Right now, God is seeding His Kingdom in the lives of His firstfruits. Very soon now, those seeds will burst forth into eternal life to rule this world.

So keep the Feast of Firstfruits, both physically and spiritually. Yield your life to the great sower — God. He will seed your life with His Spirit. Then you, with Jesus Christ, will change this world! □

'America Begins Here'

If you want to see how America ends, you drive south from Miami, Florida, down Highway 1 until you get to Florida City. Stay on Highway 1 down to Key Largo, then over the chain of islands known as "the Keys."

After a hundred miles or so,

That's it — that's how the United States ends. It is a rather depressing spot. Except that someone has painted on the curbstones the words "America Begins Here." For some reason I found that very encouraging.

"America begins here"! You go through downtown Key West and over the Keys to Key Largo and Florida City. Before you know it you're back in Miami.

end of this world from that point of view?

Looking at the end of the world

You and I probably spend a good deal of time thinking about the end of the world. We know it is coming, because we believe Bible prophecy. We know that it is going to be a time of trouble and tribulation.

The world will be plunged into a war so awful that unless God intervenes no one will be left alive! Everything familiar, everything that stands for security in this, the only world we know, teeters on the edge of destruction.

It has long been the responsibility of the people of God to face the fact that the world as we know it is coming to an end.

The first to do so were the prophets that God sent to Israel and Judah. Their work was to carry an unpopular message to an ungrateful and rebellious people. No wonder some of the prophets described their work as a "burden" (Nahum 1:1, Habakkuk 1:1, Malachi 1:1). It was hard and often discouraging, and occasionally their faith and courage broke down under the strain.

Those men were the forerunners of God's servants today, and the true Church is built on the foundation that they laid (Ephesians 2:20). So it is not surprising that the apostle James, writing to encourage the brethren of his day — and us, wrote that we should consider the prophets "as an example of suffering and patience" (James 5:10).

God's great prophet Elijah exposed the priests of Baal as liars and false prophets. You probably



you reach the last island, Key West.

Follow the road into town, and eventually you'll come to Whitehead Street. Keep heading south, past the lighthouse museum and the home where Ernest Hemingway used to live, past a church and the Elk's Lodge. You cross over Catherine Street, Louise Street and United Street, and eventually you reach it — the end of America.

There is a big black, red and yellow marker informing you that you are at the southernmost point of the United States. From the end of the road the Caribbean Sea stretches away to Cuba, 90 miles over the horizon.

From Miami you can take a plane or one of the interstate highways to any of the 50 states. You can go to the great plains of Kansas, the deserts of Arizona or the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. You can visit California's spectacular national parks or the scenic beauty of the Pacific Northwest. You can even go farther, through vast, friendly Canada, until you reach Alaska. Or fly halfway across the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii.

It's all accessible from that point at the end of Whitehead Street on Key West. Looking at it that way, the end of America is an exciting place to be.

Have you ever looked at the

have read this story in I Kings 18. But did you realize that after this great event Elijah became very discouraged?

Elijah's actions had brought upon him the wrath of Queen Jezebel, and he had to flee for his life. Alone and frightened in the wilderness, he asked God to let him die. Everyone, it seemed, was against him, and everything looked like it was coming to an end. Life just wasn't worth living anymore, he reasoned.

God had to encourage him. How? By focusing his mind on the positive.

For a start, God reminded Elijah that he wasn't the only one left in the kingdom who was faithful. There were still 7,000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal. And things weren't coming to an end — there was still work to do (I Kings 19).

Elijah, encouraged, got going again.

Stay positive

Satan, the great discourager, would like us to give in to a feeling of helplessness and foreboding. We can see this from an example in the life of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's work was particularly difficult. He was the last prophet to be sent to his nation before its end came. Jeremiah became depressed at the somber message and the constant lack of appreciation. He complained to God that he had been deceived (Jeremiah 20:7), and he even threatened to quit announcing God's message (verse 9).

But God brought him back to his senses. Even though Jeremiah was called to prophesy of the end time for his people, he could not permit himself to get into a "what's the use" frame of mind. He still had work to do — important work.

For even as his old world tumbled down around him, Jeremiah had to accomplish the task of carrying a princess and a stone of destiny to a new world, so that life could begin again. (Readers who do not know this story can find the details in our free book

The United States and Britain in Prophecy.)

Or take Ezekiel. He was also called at a difficult time. He and much of his nation had already been taken into captivity. In those trying circumstances, he had to continue to warn and correct, for he was used to reveal prophecies that were to be fulfilled many years in the future. God had to encourage him to keep going, and not let the trying circumstances wear him down (see, for example, Ezekiel 2:6-7, 3:7, 9, 19-21).

If those men who had to prophesy of the "end of the world" occasionally became discouraged and overwhelmed, we can expect that those of us who are called to fulfill God's great commission in that very end time will have the same problem.

Jesus knew this. He encouraged us to stay positive and look ahead even if things become really rough:

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets" (Luke 6:22-23).

So, like the prophets, we must maintain a positive and constructive approach about what we know is soon to come on the world.

What will end — and begin

Really, when you stop and think about it, what *is it* that is coming to an end?

Life is not ending. Life is going to continue, and will flourish even better than before. The "end" of this world is also the time of "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). *All things!* Think what that means.

Everything that is good and right will be either preserved or restored to this earth. We will see the creation as God intended it to be.

The nature of savage creatures will be changed. There will be no more pollution. Nature will have

a chance, instead of having to fight for its survival in a world dominated by man's greed and ignorance. Never again will we have to struggle to preserve an endangered species. Maybe even species that have been lost through our stupidity and mismanagement will be restored.

But most of all — and best of all — life will eventually be restored to all people who have lived.

The wonderful prophecies of the Kingdom of God will begin to be put into effect. Cripples will know what it is to be whole, the blind will see and the deaf hear. There will be no more political prisoners, orphans or refugees. Human beings can begin to be taught the truth in a world free at last of religious confusion.

Jesus Christ has been preparing for this for 6,000 years. Satan's world is ending. The preparation period is over — it is the end of the beginning.

Reason to rejoice

So how should we be thinking about the end of the world? It is a somber, worrying, perilous time. It is a time of great difficulty for those who are trying to stay faithful to God.

It will, of course, be far harder for those who are disobeying, but that is nothing to rejoice over — we don't want to see people suffer or get hurt.

The last days of Satan's system will be a time of sustained horror. Knowing about it in advance is, indeed, sobering and discouraging. Unless you look at it another way.

When Jesus Christ returns, "All the tribes of the earth will mourn," says the Bible (Matthew 24:30). Poor people! They won't know who He is. Some will have been taught that He is the Antichrist, and will turn to fight Him.

But a very few will not be mourning. They will be rejoicing with all of their being.

It is the end of the world.

The Kingdom of God begins here! □



Principles of Healthful Living

Part Two

Millions suffer sickness and infirmities because they fail to apply natural laws! You need to know and use these valuable principles of good health.

The health of the average citizen of one of our industrialized Western countries is in a sorry state!

And more and more are continually adding themselves to the ranks of the "walking wounded" of our modern society.

Yet there is a cause for every effect.

Health and happiness result from cooperating with natural health laws, while disharmony with those laws produces sickness.

Last month we examined the poor state of health in the affluent Western nations. We discovered that the vast sums of money annually spent for medical purposes have not resulted in better health for people in general. We explored the areas of diet and



exercise as they relate to good health.

In addition to diet and exercise, your health is affected by your emotional condition, your mental attitude and psychological stress. Let's take a closer look at these important areas.

Emotions and your health

Psychosomatic illness — the term conjures up visions of fleet-

ing aches and pains the doctor can't diagnose.

But contrary to this popular image, psychosomatic illness is *not* "all in your head." In fact, you can die from a psychosomatic illness as well as from any other kind. And, as research shows, in reality, the "other kind" of illness may actually be rare.

Psychosomatic (or, as one author termed it, "emotionally induced") illness probably accounts for more than 50 percent of all cases doctors see — and some estimate that as much as 90 percent of all illness is precipitated by unhealthy emotions.

So, far from being a figment of some hypochondriac's imagination, emotionally induced illness is something we all suffer from at one time or another.

Photos by G.A. Belluche, Jr. and Barry Stahl

Thousands of years ago, King Solomon wrote, "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). The Bible recognizes the link between what goes on in our heads and the condition of our bodies.

Stress and health

But how can what we think make us sick or healthy? Doesn't a person get sick because he comes into contact with a germ when he is injured or fatigued or his resistance is low?

Yes, in part. But what makes a person's resistance low? What weakens his body to such an extent that germs can mount a successful attack?

Research scientists have discovered that *stress*, defined as wear and tear on the body produced by any activity, can be produced by strong feelings and emotions.

How does this happen? Experiments have shown that every emotion automatically produces certain physical changes in our bodies.

One dramatic example of this was a man who, following an accident, had a surgical opening made in his stomach. This made it possible for doctors to observe the changes that occurred under different circumstances. Mortimer Feinberg writes that when this man was upset, "His stomach became red and engorged, and soon the folds were thick and turgid. Acid production accelerated sharply and vigorous contractions began."

How do such dramatic changes come about? Here is how scientists explain it, according to Mr. Feinberg: "Whenever you are in a situation of threat, your body prepares to flee or to fight. In moments of peril everything gets into the act.

"First, messages from your eyes or ears get carried to the pituitary gland located at the base of the brain. [It] secretes a substance known as ACTH into the bloodstream. ACTH triggers the adrenal glands, located above the

Proverbs and Psychosomatics

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about the connection between emotions and health. Below are excerpts from Proverbs on this subject, quoted from the Revised Standard Version.

"Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones" (3:7, 8).

"A man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself [Authorized Version: "troubleth his own flesh"]" (11:17).

"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (12:18).

"Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad" (12:25).

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (13:12).

kidneys, which further secrete . . . cortisone.

"Then everything within the body pops. The heart beats rapidly. Muscles of the stomach and intestines contract, forcing the blood to circulate faster. Breathing speeds up. You are ready for the enemy."

After being battered by enough negative emotions, the body breaks down at its weakest point and illness results.

The list of diseases directly brought on by emotions is seemingly endless. Everything from colds to cancer has been attributed to mentally induced stress. And in between in seriousness are such maladies as arthritis, asthma, fatigue, hay fever, headaches, high cholesterol, heart attacks and circulatory disorders, hypertension, hives, insomnia and ulcers.

Your mind can make you ill. But the reverse is also true. As Solomon wrote, "A merry heart does good, like medicine" (Proverbs 17:22). And, "A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh" (Proverbs 14:30, Revised Standard Version).

Just as negative emotions can wear the body down, positive feelings can build it up.

Life, liberty and longevity

How can we translate this knowledge into practical ways to prolong life and avoid illness?

The book of Proverbs shows that a positive mental attitude can go a long way toward making one's life long and pleasant (see the box above).

Dr. Hans Selye, one of the world's foremost authorities on stress, states: "There exists a close relationship between work, stress and aging. Aging results from the sum of all the stresses to which the body has been exposed during a lifetime.

"Each period of stress — especially if it derives from frustrating, unsuccessful struggles — leaves some irreversible chemical scars, which accumulate to constitute the signs of tissue aging. But successful activity, no matter how intense, leaves you with comparatively few such scars. On the contrary, it provides you with the exhilarating feeling of youthful strength, even at a very advanced age."

"Work wears you out mainly through the frustration of failure. Many of the eminent among the hard workers in almost any field have lived a long life . . . well into their 70s, 80s or even late 90s. They lived . . . always doing what they like to do."

Notice how Dr. Selye's words parallel the command in the book of Ecclesiastes: "Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart. . . . Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil. Live

"A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion [AV: "envy"] makes the bones rot" (14:30).

"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it" (15:17).

"The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones" (15:30).

"Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body" (16:24).

"Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife" (17:1).

"A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones" (17:22).

"A man's spirit will endure sickness; but a broken spirit who can bear?" (18:14).

"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (25:28).

joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life . . . for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10).

But few of us, it seems, find ourselves doing something we really enjoy "with our might." Dr. Selye agrees and adds "Few people belong to this group of the creative elite; admittedly, their success in meeting the challenge of stress cannot serve as a basis for a general code of behavior. But you can live long and happily by working hard along more modest lines if you have found the proper job and are reasonably successful at it."

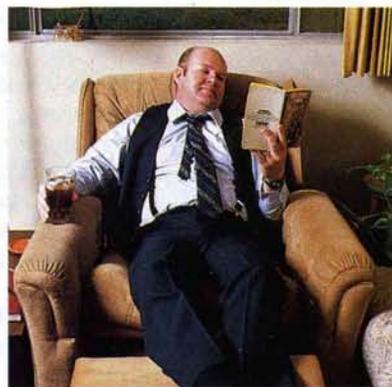
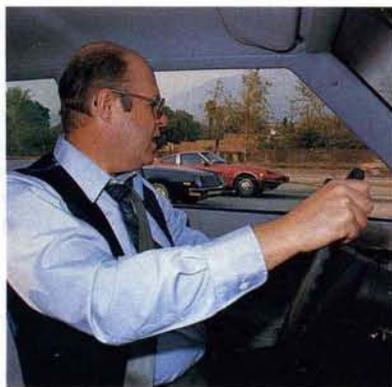
Health and hope

Occupying one's life with enjoyable activities is important, but in order to do so one has to be in control of his life. If he isn't, trouble is ahead in the form of depression and resulting disease.

Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman stated: "I believe that depression, the common cold of psychopathology, is really the belief in one's own helplessness.

In psychological postmortems of 26 sudden, unexpected deaths among Eastman Kodak employees, depression was the dominant state of mind. When these depressed persons became anxious or angry, they had heart attacks."

Here is where belief — faith and hope — enters the picture. If a person can make scriptures like Romans 8:28-31 ("We know that all things work together for good to those who love God. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us?") a part of his life, he will be



If battered by negative emotions, the body can break down and illness can result. But, just as negative emotions can wear the body down, positive feelings can build it up. (Photos by G.A. Belluche Jr. and Hal Finch)

much less likely to become depressed or ill, or to die from the effects of hopelessness.

The Bible is filled with information on how to develop and maintain a hopeful, happy, tranquil state of mind. But one of the best summaries is found in Paul's encouraging letter to the Philippians:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! . . . Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:4-8).

Biblical health laws — still ahead of their time

There is a Creator God. He made the human race. And He wrote an instruction book that goes along with His product, telling how the human body and mind best function.

Just as an automobile manufacturer sends an instruction book along with each new automobile, so God gave us an instruction book — the Bible — which tells us how to live, and even gives guidelines on how to have robust health and vitality.

The Bible is the foundation of all knowledge, and includes many commonsense principles of good health. Here are some of them:

Sanitation and hygiene

The Old Testament contains many injunctions relating to health. If these laws had been put into practice, the world's disease

toll would have been drastically cut. Until the close of the 17th century, however, hygienic conditions in cities were generally deplorable. Excrement and filth were often dumped into the streets. Flies and other vermin, breeding in the filth, spread and carried disease to millions.

The principle of burying excrement and filth was given by the Scriptures more than 1,400 years before Christ (Deuteronomy 23:12-13).

Says medical historian Arturo Castiglioni: "The regulations in Deuteronomy as to how soldiers should prevent the danger of infection . . . from . . . excrement by covering it with earth constitute a most important document of sanitary legislation."

Mr. Castiglioni continues: "Study of biblical texts appears to have demonstrated that the ancient Semitic peoples, in agreement with the most modern tenets of epidemiology, attributed more importance to . . . transmitters of disease like the rat and the fly, than to the contagious individual."

Three thousand years later, when the bubonic plague devastated Europe, this knowledge had generally been lost. Some blamed noxious fumes in the air; some thought it was caused by a conjunction of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; yet others blamed the Jews; many blamed God.

Generally, the world did not wake up to the importance of hygiene and cleanliness until about the end of the 18th century. Yet vital principles of sanitation and cleanliness were expounded by God to Moses almost 3,500 years ago.

The biblical laws of cleanliness, washings and purification were not all merely customs or rituals. They protected the camp of Israel from the dangers of contagious diseases and deadly plagues.

States Dr. D.T. Atkinson: "In the Bible greater stress was placed upon *prevention* of disease than was given to the treatment of bodily ailments, and in this no race of people, before or since,

has left us such a wealth of laws relative to hygiene and sanitation as the Hebrews: These important laws, coming down through the ages, are still used to a marked degree in every country in the world sufficiently enlightened to observe them.

"One has but to read the book of Leviticus carefully and thoughtfully to conclude that the admonitions of Moses contained therein are, in fact, the groundwork of most of today's sanitary laws. As one closes the book, he must, regardless of his spiritual leanings, feel that the wisdom therein expressed regarding the rules to protect health are superior to any which then existed in the world and that to this day they have been little improved upon."

Unfortunately, even in our modern world we sometimes ignore the vital importance of sanitation and hygiene in combating and preventing illness and contagion. Our modern cities are becoming increasingly congested, polluted, filthy and dirty. Garbage strikes pose serious health problems. Our air is becoming unfit to breathe because of pollution, and our water is becoming increasingly contaminated.

Bible dietary laws

Proper diet is important in the prevention of disease. Leviticus 11 enumerates dietary laws God gave ancient Israel. Among other things, He forbade them to eat the flesh of pigs (swine), rabbits or shellfish (Leviticus 11:6-12).

Dr. Louis Lasagna writes: "Many of these make good medical sense. . . . The prohibition of hare and swine as sources of food certainly must have diminished the incidence of disease, in view of the capacity of these animals to transmit tularemia and trichinosis, respectively.

"The transmission of gastrointestinal infections (including typhoid fever) via polluted shellfish or water also testifies to the apparent wisdom of the Hebrews in warning against such seafood and impure water."

Another Old Testament law forbids the eating of animal fat. This also has proven a valuable health practice.

Dr. Paul Dudley White, a heart specialist who treated U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, once quoted Leviticus 7:23: "You shall not eat any fat, of ox or sheep or goat."

Animal fats are high in cholesterol, a fatty, waxy material that the body needs in limited amounts. The body's inability to properly metabolize cholesterol in some cases, however, may be a contributing factor in some forms of heart disease.

Therefore, Dr. White asserts: "It is conceivable that a few years from now we medical men may repeat to the citizens of the United States of America the advice that Moses was asked by God to present to the children of Israel 3,000 years ago."

If you would like more information on this subject, write for our free article "Is All Animal Flesh Good Food?" It explores the application of these dietary laws to our present generation.

The Bible vs. sexual diseases

Among the fastest-spreading contagious diseases in the Western world today are sexual diseases. In the United States, for instance, someone contracts venereal disease every 15 seconds. Herpes grabs headlines and causes suffering for thousands. Among homosexuals, especially, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is rampant.

Medical authorities know that sexual diseases are spread through sexual contact. As long as there is promiscuity and free sex, there is bound to be venereal disease.

But the solution to this terrible worldwide curse is as simple as it is ancient: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (I Corinthians 6:18).

The growing incidence of sexual diseases speaks eloquently of

the need for prevention. Thousands of years ago, biblical standards of morality safeguarded against this plague that can blight the lives of yet unborn generations. There is no safe, reliable cure for sexual disease except prevention.

When God created mankind, He said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). If this one basic scriptural principle of faithful heterosexual monogamy were followed today, the world would see the end of sexual diseases.

Laws of quarantine

During the 14th century, bubonic plague struck Asia and spread to Russia, Persia, Turkey, North Africa and Europe. Perhaps one third of the population of Europe died in those tragic years.

Relentlessly, the plague invaded every city, hamlet or village. Millions lost their lives to the "grim reaper." Panic and confusion were rampant. Death was everywhere. The toll was so great that bodies were thrown into huge pits, mass graves.

The Jewish physician Balavignus lived in those times and saw that miserable sanitation was a major factor in the spread of the disease. He instituted a cleanup movement among the Jews.

The rats, consequently, left the Jewish ghettos and moved into the gentile sectors of the city. As a result the Jews' mortality rate from the plague was only 5 percent of what it was among their non-Jewish neighbors.

The general population soon saw the difference, but instead of emulating the Jewish hygienic measures, the people began accusing the Jews of causing the plague and poisoning wells!

A general massacre was launched. Balavignus himself, persecuted and tortured, was finally compelled to say that he and others were responsible for the disease.

Another plague that prevailed in medieval Europe was leprosy. England, Sweden, Iceland and Norway showed alarming gains in the numbers of leprosy cases in the 15th and 16th centuries. But when the authorities began to institute the segregation of leprosy cases, the plague was again brought under control.

In Norway, rigid national quarantine was introduced in 1856 because of the widespread severity of leprosy. "Ninety years later the health authorities were able to report that Norway had only five percent of the number of lepers that were there before segregation. Similarly favorable reports come to us from Finland and Sweden, where enforced segregation of lepers had also been instituted," writes Dr. Atkinson.

Where did these quarantine laws come from?

This same author tells us: "It is most singular that a description of leprosy, as found in the 13th chapter of Leviticus, could have been written so long before our

modern sanitary science. Moses ordered that cases of leprosy should be segregated, that dwellings from which infected Jews had gone should be inspected before again being occupied and that persons recovering from contagious disease were not to be allowed to go abroad until examined. The modern quarantine harks back to these sanitary regulations of the Old Testament."

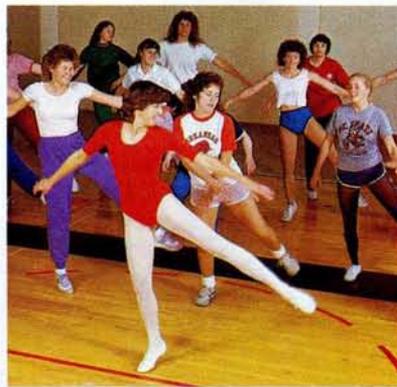
Similarly, Arturo Castiglioni tells us, "The laws against leprosy in Leviticus 13 may be regarded as the first model of a sanitary legislation."

These examples show the effectiveness of the principles God gave millennia ago.

Strictly speaking, of course, the Bible is not a health textbook or medical manual. But it does reveal many health laws that mankind has required thousands of years to rediscover.

Study these laws! Search your Bible and apply the laws of God as revealed. These laws are the basis of a happy, healthy life.

The Worldwide Church of God publishes an abundance of free literature on personal living and biblical topics. For more information on health-related subjects, request our free booklets *The*



Occupying one's life with enjoyable activities is important, but to do so one has to be in control of his or her life. If not, trouble is ahead in the form of depression and resulting disease. (Photos by Hal Finch)

time. It is to be noticed that such an accurate description of this dread malady as it appears in the biblical narrative is not to be found in the literature of any nation for the next 1,700 years."

Speaking of the biblical laws regarding leprosy, Dr. Atkinson states: "The laws of health laid down in Leviticus are the basis of

Seven Laws of Success and The Plain Truth About Healing, and our free reprints "Is Drinking a Sin?" and "The Western World's Growing Tragedy — Growing Old Before Our Time." □

This two-part article was researched and compiled by the Editorial Services Department.

True Friendship

Laying Down Your Life

A young girl's compelling example poignantly illuminates God's definition of friendship.

By Philip P. Stevens

Rachel de Beers was a young girl who lived in South Africa during the 19th century.

Her family was poor, and Rachel and her younger brother Jamie worked as shepherds tending the family's cattle.

One day Rachel and Jamie noticed that a calf was missing, and they began to look for it. In the course of search-

ing they wandered farther and farther away from their home pastures. It soon got dark, and they realized they were lost. It was winter and it began to snow. The snowstorm reached a height during the night and then blew itself out the next morning.

Nothing in return

It didn't take long for a search party to find 12-year-old Rachel and her 6-year-old brother.

During the night, Rachel had found and hollowed out a large anthill. She had removed her clothes, wrapped them around her brother and made him crawl into the hollow anthill. Then she laid her naked body over the entrance to keep him warm.

The next day the search party found Jamie alive in the anthill, while Rachel was still lying over the entrance.

She had died in the snow.



Rachel de Beers gave of herself without expecting anything in return. And she gave everything she had!

Rachel's inspiring example calls to mind the type of love that the New Testament Greek word *agape* ascribes to God Himself (I Corinthians 13:13). *Agape*, God's own love, is characterized by unconditional, unselfish giving. It is a conscious commitment to *give* without trying to *get* anything back.

It is this type of godly love that true Christians are to radiate!

The people who tend to inspire us most in our everyday lives are those whose actions are motivated by this type of outgoing concern. When we think about people we have considered our true friends, we usually think of people who have served us in times when we have had no means to repay them.

When people are truly motivated by a spirit of *give* rather than a spirit of *get*, they serve others regardless of whether they will be repayed.

God's own love

From a physical point of view, it is easy to give to those who give to us. The real test of our Christianity is whether we can give to our enemies. Serving our enemies is the pinnacle of Christian love, as it involves total unselfishness.

Of course, godly love is not something we are born with or have by nature. We therefore have to continually ask God for His Spirit of love — we have to ask Him to replace our *human* nature with *His* nature (II Corinthians 10:5).

And think: When we resolve, with the help of God's Spirit, to love our enemies, it becomes much easier to love everyone else!

By making

a specific commitment to indiscriminately love others without expecting anything in return, we are building the very character and nature of God Himself (Romans 12:9-13).

Love, after all, is a quality that lasts — forever. Our physical lives don't (James 4:14). When this life is over, we will be left only with the spiritual character we have developed by serving others, rather than with any physical possessions we may seek to get in this life (I Timothy 6:17-19). That godly attitude and nature ingrained into us is what will fit us for eternal life in God's Kingdom!

God never gets tired of loving, and neither should we. When we lock ourselves into God's way of *give*, we can feel real stability in this changing world, because God's way of giving is the only thing that is permanent (I John 2:17).

When we unselfishly give to others, we are happy, because we are living the way that God lives (Acts 20:35). Therefore we are sharing the spiritual fruits of God's nature (Galatians 5:22-23), and we experience the deep-down joy of unselfishly loving and being loved.

An eternity of giving

At the resurrection, we will be born as literal children of God (I Corinthians 15:52). We will then be graduates in the way of *give*, and we will have qualified to live forever on the same plane as God — we will live exciting, new lives in the very Family of God, serving on an even grander scale (Revelation 3:21, 5:10, Matthew 25:21). We will then *be* love, just as God is love (I John 4:16).

When we unconditionally give to others, we are acting out our destiny (I Thessalonians 3:12-13).

This is why God says that "pure religion" is "to visit

orphans and widows in their trouble" (James 1:27), as they cannot repay us. God also says that when we "give a feast," we should invite people less fortunate than us, and not just those who are able to invite us back (Luke 14:13-14).

We become like God when we see the needs of others and supply them (I John 3:17). We grow the most spiritually when our hearts are dedicated to fulfilling God's great commission of giving a warning and also a message of hope to this dying world (Ezekiel 33:6, Matthew 24:14).

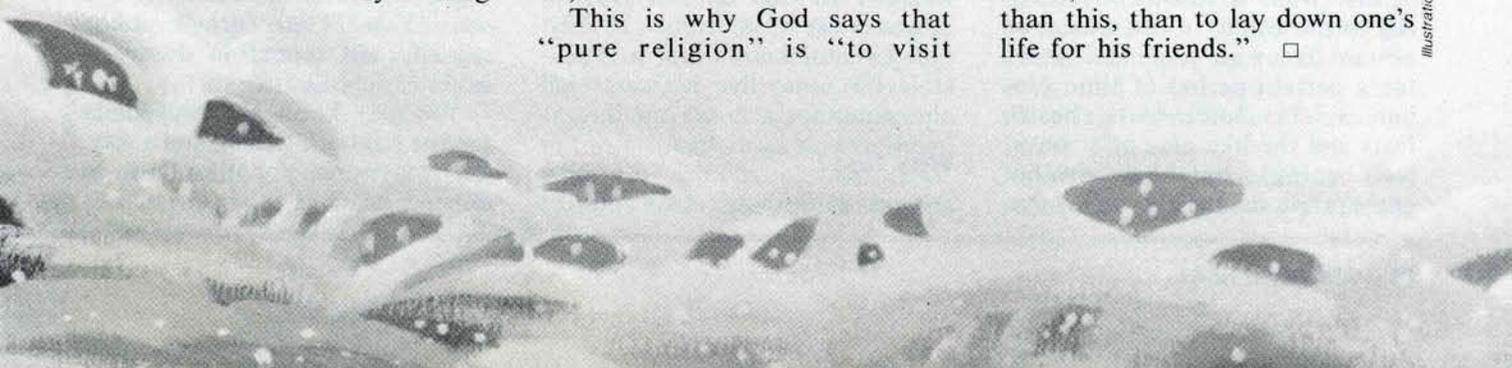
"Greater love has no one"

Our relationship with the world is one of true friendship when we totally devote our lives to giving to others. It is not the type of "friendship" that accepts and follows this world's evil ways, to be sure. It is the type of true friendship and love that God displayed when He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus, so that the world might be saved (John 3:16).

When we seek only to give to others, then we don't worry about others not giving to us, and we don't fear losing anything (Mark 8:35-36). "Perfect love casts out fear," says I John 4:18. When we are motivated by godly love, there is no fear even in laying down our lives, symbolically or literally, even for our enemies.

Rachel de Beers gave of herself without expecting anything in return. She was a true friend. We can also look forward, even more, to the resurrection when we will meet Jesus Christ, *our* Elder Brother, who laid down His life on the cross and did it totally out of godly love, expecting nothing in return. He is our truest, most loyal friend.

As Jesus Himself said in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." □



The Way to Spiritual Growth— *Fast*

Fasting is an often-neglected key to drawing closer to God. Here's how you can effectively use fasting as a powerful spiritual tool.

By Robert J. Millman

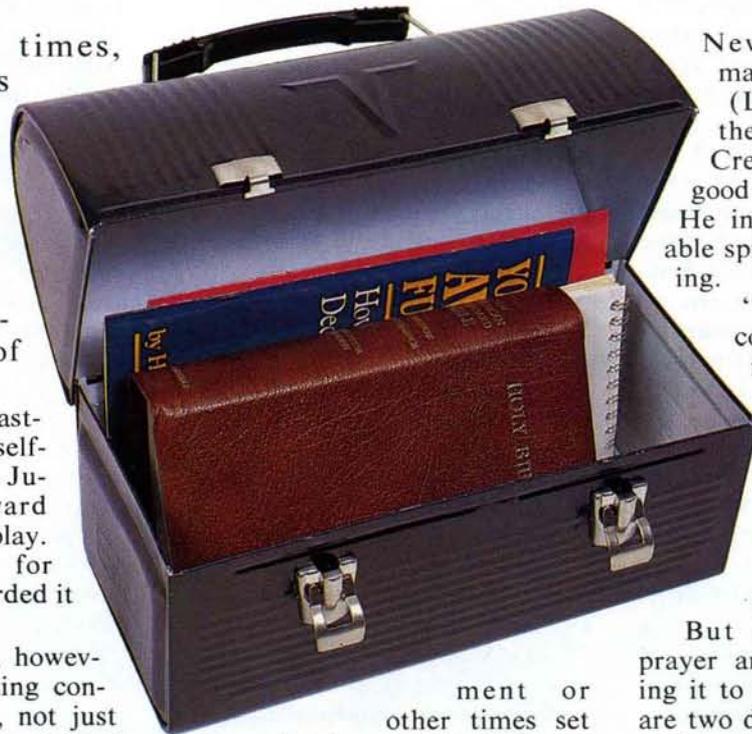
Since ancient times, fasting has been an integral part of worshipping God!

Humanity, however, has been misled and confused about the true meaning and purpose of fasting.

Pagans associated fasting with penance and self-denial. First-century Judaism turned it toward ritual and public display. Modern Christianity, for the most part, has discarded it as unnecessary.

The Church of God, however, recognizes that fasting continues to be important, not just on the Day of Atonement, but throughout the year.

Just what is fasting? According to the Bible, to fast means to abstain from all food and water for a certain period of time (Jonah 3:5-7). Juice fasts, health fasts and the like may offer physical benefits, but they are not appropriate for the Day of Atonement or



ment or other times set aside for a spiritual fast.

Notice that everyone is commanded to fast on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:29). Our Creator knows that it is possible for us to live without food and water for at least one day.

Why fast?

God, in both the Old and the

New Testaments, commanded His people to fast (Leviticus 23:29, Matthew 6:16-18). He, as our Creator, says that fasting is good for us. He should know! He intends us to learn valuable spiritual lessons from fasting.

“What spiritual good could missing three or more meals possibly do anyone?” you may be asking.

Intellectually, we may confess to God that we are weak, sinful and desperately in need of His strength, guidance and correction.

But saying something in prayer and actually understanding it to the depths of our being are two different things.

Job testified after his long trial: “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” (Job 42:5-6).

We may kneel and pray daily for the strength to live God's way. We may pray for the faith to depend on God to work out our

Photo by Hal Finch

problems, and for help in conducting ourselves in total harmony with His law. Yet we rise from prayer, go our way and tackle the day in a manner not quite that ideal.

Why do we fall short?

Our minds are constantly struggling against God's guidance (Romans 8:7). Even after the Spirit of God enters to enlighten us and allow understanding to flood into our minds, a battle still rages within us, as Paul so eloquently explained in Romans 7:16-18.

Jeremiah understood the human capacity for self-justification and self-deception when God inspired him to write, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

God understands us. And, if we will draw closer to Him through fasting, as He directs, He can help us to understand ourselves more fully.

When we fast, our hunger is a sharp reminder that we are just human — desperately dependent on God's good earth, with its soil and rain, to sustain our existence. Denied these necessities, we would soon die and degenerate into mere dust.

How unimpressive we are, feeling light-headed and suffering from bad breath and fatigue after just one day of fasting! How humbling to realize that without nourishment from the soil beneath our feet, our minds quickly become disoriented.

Deprived of nourishment for any substantial length of time, our minds would become incapable of rational thought. Yes, we may admit to God in prayer that we're not really very impressive, but when we fast, we feel it.

Getting the right perspective

Just how may we keep a godly perspective on life? How can we avoid the pitfalls of self-reliance, self-confidence and self-righteousness?

David said, "I humbled myself with fasting" (Psalm 35:13). Could you profit by following the

example of a man whom God said was "after His own heart" (I Samuel 13:14)?

The situation is urgent! James warns and exhorts that "'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:6-8).

How do we draw near to God? James continues: "Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (verses 9-10).

James prescribes fasting.

Compare the use of the words *afflict* (Leviticus 23:27), *mourn* (Matthew 9:14-15), *weep* (Zechariah 7:1-5) and *humbled* (Psalm 35:13). They all indicate fasting.

Read the fourth chapter of James and note how James links the process of drawing closer to God with the need to fast.

The right attitude in fasting

Although people have fasted for many reasons, there is only one purpose God accepts. That is to "rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God" (Joel 2:13). Our motive in fasting must be to humble and submit ourselves more fully to God.

God respects those who set their hearts to seek His will and direction in their lives. He respects those who want to bring themselves more fully in line with His way of thinking and living (Isaiah 66:2).

However, fasting to get God to side with us or take our part in an argument just won't work. Fasting just to get His attention is also futile (Isaiah 58:3-4).

Jesus explained the great purpose for fasting. We read in Matthew 9:14-15: "Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the

bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'"

While He was on earth, Jesus' disciples enjoyed close daily communication with Him. His teaching, inspiration and encouragement were readily at hand.

But once He returned to heaven, it became more difficult for them to be in harmony with His thinking and clearly understand His will for their daily lives. That is why Jesus foretold their need for diligent fasting. Fasting provided the closeness and understanding they had achieved when He had been with them in person.

We should be fasting for that same reason. It is appropriate that we are directed to fast on the Day of Atonement, which pictures the time when Jesus and all His disciples will finally be brought together in complete harmony (at-one-ment).

God responds when we fast

Make no mistake — fasting is something God notices and takes seriously. He does respond!

God hears all our prayers, but He takes particular notice of our fastings. Daniel fasted for 21 days before he received an answer, but God assured him that his petition had been considered from the very beginning of his fast (Daniel 9:23). Ours can be, too, because our fasting shows God we are sincere about seeking Him.

Consider the story of Ahab. The prophet Elijah spent many years witnessing to Ahab and the kingdom of Israel. Ahab didn't respond. In fact: "There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord" (I Kings 21:25).

Elijah's final warning about what was to happen to Ahab's household, though, did produce some results. Ahab "tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning" (verse 27).

When he began fasting, God saw that Ahab was sincerely

repentant. The promised punishment was postponed until after Ahab's death. If God had mercy on Ahab, He will certainly respond to our coming before Him in heartfelt, contrite fasting and prayer.

Ahab's contemporary in the southern kingdom of Judah was King Jehoshaphat. When faced with an invasion, Jehoshaphat tried something unique in the annals of military strategy: "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord" (II Chronicles 20:3-4).

Men, women, children — everyone fasted. God's answer came quickly. They were told to

go out to meet the invaders, trusting in God to settle the matter for them (verses 16-17).

When Jehoshaphat led his people out the next day, they came upon a strange sight. The invaders had turned against each other, and the entire army lay dead before them. The citizens of Judah gathered up the spoils and returned home. What a spectacular answer to their fast!

Fasting shows God that we, like Jehoshaphat, are willing to rely on His strength and not our own physical resources, because we understand that our own resources will quickly fail us.

Dedicated to God

Fasting is a powerful testimony to God that we want to turn from our own sinful, vain ways and give our lives to Him for His use

(Romans 12:1). Fasting shows that we urgently want to be dedicated to God, and not to the things of this world.

Paul speaks of a fast as a time to "give yourselves to fasting and prayer," even breaking off normal marital relations (I Corinthians 7:5), thereby showing our intent to turn from everything physical to all that is spiritual.

God responds to attitudes like this! Notice God's promise of spiritual blessings: "Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you. . . . The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" (Isaiah 58:8, 11). □

Guidelines for Effective Fasting

• *Fast often.* When using any tool, physical or spiritual, practice makes perfect.

The apostle Paul fasted often (II Corinthians 11:27), and we should, too. That doesn't mean we should become pharisaical and set a rigid schedule for ourselves (Luke 18:9-14). Our attitude as we fast, and not the number of times or when we fast, is what is important. When we fast often, our bodies get more accustomed to going without food for a period of time.

• *Avoid "desperation" fasting.* Fasting is certainly important in times of trial and distress, but if we only resort to fasting in times of emergency, we are telling God that we are more interested in getting what we want than in drawing closer to Him.

• *Fast a day at a time.* One day is an acceptable length for a spiritual fast, although more time, such as two or three days, may be appropriate on occasion.

Some equate the length of a fast with spirituality. They cite the examples of Moses, Elijah and Jesus Christ, all of whom fasted 40 days. But these were exceptional individuals in exceptional circumstances. You should not attempt extremely long fasts such as these men did, and you should seek competent advice about

anything longer than a three-day fast.

God is interested in our attitudes — he is not impressed by feats of physical endurance. It is a good idea to fast from evening to evening, if possible, as this is the manner prescribed for keeping the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:32), but fasts may begin and end at other times, depending on the situation.

• *Keep the time in focus.* The time we choose for a fast could be set apart solely for fasting, but more often will be combined with daily duties.

Sometimes it will be necessary to work during a fast, but we should try to keep the time as free as possible. A Sabbath should not be the primary time for a fast; the Sabbath is technically a feast day and is to be considered a delight (verse 13). However, the Sabbath may occasionally be the only day available or have to be included in a two- or three-day fast.

• *Use the time profitably.* Don't just fill the time with everything else but study, meditation and prayer. Remember why you decided to set the time aside — for God to use in teaching you and for you to use in drawing closer to Him. A fast is not a form of penance or an endurance test. It is a time for spiritual renewal.

Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong writes in his autobiography of

dividing time spent fasting into three segments — study, meditation and prayer. Following this pattern — of first letting God talk to us through His Word, then thinking about how what we have read applies in our lives, then talking to God in prayer about the circumstances of the fast — will help us draw closer to God and open up our spiritual insight and understanding (verse 8).

• *Expect physical discomfort.* Hunger you might expect, but the body also uses a time of fasting to eliminate poisons and wastes. This can cause bad breath, light-headedness and even a headache.

Severe headaches during a fast can come from withdrawal from the stimulants we all too often overuse on a daily basis — coffee, tea, soft drinks and the like. The day before a fast, cut out all such beverages.

Drinking adequate quantities of liquids the day before will help in cleansing the body during a fast. Do not eat heavily immediately before or after a fast.

• *Appearance is important.* Jesus commanded that we not make it known publicly when we fast (Matthew 6:16-18). Because of the physical effects of fasting, it is a good idea to brush the teeth. To rinse the mouth after brushing is within the law of fasting. □

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What is the "synagogue of Satan" mentioned in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9?

The word *synagogue* comes from a Greek word meaning "assembly" or "church." The "synagogue of Satan," then, is an assembly or church made up of individuals who "say they are Jews and are not." The term *Jew* is used here in a spiritual sense.

Romans 2:29 tells us, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." It is not one's physical race that counts, but his spiritual condition (Galatians 3:27-29). True Christians are spiritual Jews.

Those in the "synagogue of Satan" say they are Jews — pretend to be real Christians — but are not. This false church was already developing in the days of the apostle John. It masqueraded as God's true Church and had congregations in the cities of Smyrna and Philadelphia even at that early time. It and its daughter churches are further described in Revelation 17.

For additional information, send for our new booklet *Where Is the True Church?* It's absolutely free.

Is there a scripture that tells us to "cry at a birth and rejoice at a death"?

There is no such scripture. Perhaps you are thinking of Ecclesiastes 7:1, which reads, "A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth."

Notice the strong parallel in this verse: The day of one's birth is compared with precious ointment. There is certainly nothing wrong with precious ointment; Jesus even commended its proper use (Matthew 26:6-13). The point is that the day of one's death is of far greater importance

to God, assuming that our lives have been used properly.

Near the end of his life, the apostle Paul realized that he had "fought the good fight" and "kept the faith." Therefore he had a crown of righteousness awaiting him (II Timothy 4:6-8).

If we as Christians run the Christian race successfully, as Paul did, we, too, will be able to say at the end of our lives that we have obtained an incorruptible crown (I Corinthians 9:24-27). The day of our death, then, will certainly be a greater joy to God than the day of our birth.

I hope very much that one day I can marry and have children. But with world events obviously leading to the end of this age soon, I'm wondering if I will have the chance for marriage and family.

Marriage is very good. God created it to teach us about His own eternal Family, into which we are destined to be born as immortal spirit beings. Marriage and family help us develop the character of God, and it is God's plan that most people will have the opportunity for marriage and the experiences it offers.

When Jesus Christ returns in glory to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, He will change those who have qualified from mortal to immortal (I Corinthians 15:50-52, I Thessalonians 4:13-17). Immortal children of God do not marry (Matthew 22:30), but God has reserved even higher joys and pleasures for that ultimate level of existence (Psalm 16:11). Even the greatest joy possible in this physical life, whatever that would be, cannot compare with the joys we will experience in God's Kingdom.

Most people who survive the crisis at the close of this age will live on into the new world still mortal. They will continue marrying and having families,

and learning the lessons these relationships teach.

Thus, no one should worry that he or she will miss out on anything. Most people have the opportunity for marriage in the flesh. But something incomparably better awaits us in the Kingdom of God!

Please explain Genesis 3:15 about the promised seed.

This scripture is the Bible's first recorded prophecy about the coming Messiah, and the prophecy has a dual application.

The first and primary meaning is that Jesus Christ, born of a woman, would nullify Satan's power over mankind. Satan (symbolized as a serpent) bruised Jesus Christ's heel (caused Him to be put to death to fulfill God's purpose). However, through the resurrection Jesus Christ conquered sin and death and rendered the devil's work of no effect (symbolized by bruising the serpent's head, its most vulnerable place).

Hebrews 2:14-15 says: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy [or "bruise his head"] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Genesis 3:15 also reveals the "woman" as the Church from whom Jesus Christ was born. A woman is symbolic of a church (Ephesians 5:31-32). Romans 16:20 tells us, "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your [the Church's] feet shortly."

Thus the Church (the body of true believers), as well as Jesus Christ, has overcome Satan. Even so, there is enmity between Satan's seed (non-Christians) and true Christians — the seed of the woman — just as prophesied in Genesis 3:15.

How Well Do You Know God?

*God is no meaningless word or abstract "First Cause."
He is a real Being with a magnificent personality!*

By Francis J. Bergin

If I were to ask you whether you know God, what would be your answer? Probably, yes.

Suppose I asked you a second question: Do you know God *well*? Then what would your answer be?

Jesus Christ, praying to God the Father, said: "Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:1-3).

Did you grasp that? Knowing God is of supreme importance. It is life eternal!

That's the purpose of this article — to offer some specific steps all of us can take to get to know God, and get to know Him *well*.

God is predictable

If God is truly working with you — if He has directly intervened in your personal life — you'll find that God is easy to get to know.

You'll find that God is predictable. The better you get to know God, the better you'll understand His attitude and actions in every circumstance.

In Paul's epistle to Titus, we read of "God, who cannot lie," (Titus 1:1-2).

Now there's a major characteristic of God: When you deal with Him, you know He will always

tell you the truth. He is totally predictable.

Jesus said, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30). This is a clear indication of just how well God knows every one of us. He knows us down to the finest detail!

God's people know Him

The great men and women of the Bible all knew God, and they knew Him well.

Notice what David told Solomon: "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts" (I Chronicles 28:9).

David realized the importance of knowing God, and wisely advised his son to build a strong relationship with that great Being.

Paul often talked about his relationship with God. His desire toward God was "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). Paul cast everything else aside — everything else was worthless in comparison to knowing God.

Moses, too, like David and Paul, realized the importance of drawing close to God in a personal way. Moses beseeched his Creator: "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You" (Exodus 33:13).

Of course, Moses already knew

God, but he wanted to know Him better. Continue with verse 18: "And he said, 'Please, show me Your glory.'" Moses was, in effect, saying, "I want to get to know you in a fuller and more complete sense." God responded by allowing Moses a glimpse of His incredibly radiant and magnificent body.

God's unique characteristics

How can you increase your awareness of God? One way is to consider some of His unique characteristics. Although there are dozens we could discuss, let's concentrate on just three basic elements.

The words describing these three basic characteristics of God all begin with the Latin root *omni*, which means "all" or "fulfillment of." *Omni* indicates the completeness or perfection of God's characteristics.

The first one we'll look at is *omnipotence*. God can do anything.

Job had been a righteous man, and he knew God. But he didn't know God as well as he should have. Job had to suffer intensely to learn a vitally important lesson. Job finally told God, "I know that You can do everything" (Job 42:2).

However difficult circumstances may be, we must remember that God can do everything, and that He is working out everything for our good (Romans 8:28).

The second characteristic of God we'll consider is that God is *omnipresent*.

God said to the prophet Jeremiah: "'Am I a God near at hand,' says the Lord, 'and not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?'" says the Lord; 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?'" (Jeremiah 23:23-24).

Wherever you are, you have the opportunity to talk to God and get to know Him. God is everywhere.

Third, God is *omniscient*. The psalmist wrote: "He counts the number of the stars; he calls them all by name" (Psalm 147:4).

At night, the naked human eye can see some 600 light years into outer space. The world's largest and most powerful telescopes enable us to see up to 7,000 light years away. But isn't it interesting, as scientists look through their telescopes at things they previously didn't know existed, that God already knows exactly where all the stars are? God even knows the stars' names! And God knows much, much more that humans haven't even dreamed about. God knows everything that can be known at this time.

Your relationship with God

Here is the real thrust of our discussion of God's tremendous characteristics: Knowing God should make a tremendous difference in the way we live.

Put more bluntly, if the way you live is not tremendously different from the way of those who don't claim to know God, then maybe you don't know Him! You may want to know Him, but the fact that your life isn't drastically different from the way it was before you came to know God makes a frightening statement. You are responsible for what you know.

A different way of life

Let's reconsider what Job said to God:

"I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know . . . I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:3, 5).

Job thought he knew God well.

He didn't. But when, with God's help, Job realized this, he was moved to change.

Repentance has been defined as turning and going the opposite way from the way one has been traveling. Job said, in effect: "Now that I see the truth, I'm changing. I'm going to be different — I'm going the other way."

Every man and woman in the

Bible who got to know God well had to change — go the opposite way from the way the majority of the world goes. That's the whole purpose of getting to know God — changing — repenting — bringing your life into line with the perfect, abundant, happy way that God lives.

If your life hasn't changed, you don't really know God. How can

Four Ways to Know God Better

1) *Keep His law.* God's law represents God's mind, character and nature. John wrote, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

Do what God tells you to do. It is unreasonable to expect that you can have a close relationship with God if you don't do anything He wants you to do.

God's basic law of love is summed up in the Ten Commandments. For an in-depth study of these overall laws of life, request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

2) *Talk to God.* Talk to God? About what? About everything. Is something worrying you, threatening you, pleasing you, upsetting you, thrilling you, disappointing you, occupying most of your thoughts? Whatever it is, talk to God about it.

Men like Elijah and Jeremiah prayed to God with familiarity and intimacy. And they were quite ready to ask Him, "Why do you do it like this?" Jeremiah, very upset, talked to God about it (Jeremiah 12). Paul told God when he was depressed, cast down, perplexed.

These servants of God talked to Him with intimacy and warmth. They knew Him, and He knew them. And their problems were solved, not always in the way they wanted or expected, but always in the best way.

And that's the way we should be. We're to talk to God about everything. Whatever's on our minds. So that we can become intimate with God. After all, you're talking to a friend, not a stranger.

Romans 12:12 says that we should

be "continuing steadfastly in prayer" — all day long, as situations arise and decisions need to be made. It's an ideal way to build a relationship with God. We also need to be communing daily with our Creator during sufficient time specifically set aside just for prayer, on our knees. If our prayers are heartfelt and sincere — if we boldly approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) — we will be heard.

3) *Study God's Word.* God's Word is His revelation about Himself, and the more you study it, read it and talk about it, the better you'll get to know God.

For instance, it would be a profitable study to consider all the various names God calls Himself in the Bible, because they all illuminate various aspects of what God is and does. God calls Himself Elohim (a family name), God Almighty, the God of all the earth, the Lord, the Provider, our banner, the Lord of peace, our righteousness, our healer, the Ancient of Days and the Lord of Hosts. Studying God's names would reveal God's characteristics.

4) *Meditate on God's law.* David said: "I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of all Your deeds" (Psalm 77:12). David was the king of Israel, yet he often found time to meditate — to think on God's ways, God's law and God's plan and purpose. David developed a deep awareness and understanding of God because he thought and meditated on God's Word and God's work.

And that's what we have to do. It takes time to get to know somebody well. Take time to get to know God well! □

LETTERS

Sobering yet inspiring

I have just read your article "What Lies Ahead Now?" in the January issue, and I felt compelled to write you a special thank-you note for this sobering yet inspiring article. It has reminded me just how very precious having the Holy Spirit truly is.

Also, special thanks to Paul Krautmann and John Siston for the article "How to Overcome Depression and Discouragement." I have reread this article two or three times already. Thank you for bringing this inspiring reminder to me.

Sandra Finch
Woodland, Calif.

I had to thank Paul Krautmann and John Siston for "How to Overcome Depression and Discouragement." As a young Christian, I already knew how to face life's trials.

I am only 15 years old, and I thank God for giving me wisdom to understand His encouraging words and also to understand this full-of-encouragement magazine *The Good News*.

Aileene Lago
Wollongong, Australia

Singles

I want to thank you so much for the truly inspired January issue. Each article was done with such insight.

I especially enjoyed the article "Single Christians and the Abundant Life" by K. Neil Earle. I am not single, but I certainly learned so much pertaining to their trials and tests. I'm sure this article has

done them a tremendous service, and not only the singles but all of us in God's Church.

Regina McCoy
Baltimore, Md.

"Why Doesn't God Do Something?"

The article "Why Doesn't God Do Something?" [January] has been very uplifting to me, for I have been struggling through a trial. I first was faced with health problems, then a layoff from work. Some of my friends have shunned me, and nothing seems to be going right.

Through this article I'm learning that I am not alone in these tribulations — that every Christian faces some kind of hardship and obstacles. I have left all my troubles in God's hands and give Him the thanks for leading me through.

Garland Shepard
Honaker, Va.

Can hardly wait

I enjoy *The Plain Truth* and *The Good News* so much I can hardly wait from month to month. I must read them four or five times. I just can't seem to get enough of the word and works of God.

Opal L. St. John
Corning, Calif.

It's great the way God works through this magazine — how the *Good News* articles give everybody who reads them understanding of God's truth. It has helped me in almost every aspect of Christian growth. Thanks to Herbert W. Armstrong and all the staff members of

The Good News. It's bringing this needed knowledge of God's truth to all of us.

Paul E. Lawson
Pekin, Ill.

"Widows and Orphans"

After reading your article in the February *Good News* ("God's Plan for Widows and Orphans"), I was so inspired by all the good and heart touching examples of those who have been helped by third tithe.

I have decided, even through this is not my third tithe year, to send a check to support this fund.

Timothy Lee Shreve
Madison, Tenn.

I want to thank those who pay their third tithe so that my kids and I can stay in our house. I do housecleaning for a living, working about 30 hours a week. Without God's plan for us, it would be most difficult. Thank you all very much.

Mary Colsen
Duluth, Minn.

It is reassuring that this concern about not having enough money to pay the third tithe has bothered many other people, but that God provided above and beyond the tenth He requested. I'm a bit anxious for our third tithe year to start now to be able to see again how gracious and wonderful God can be to those who follow His commands.

Amy Pamperin
Allenton, Wisc.

we tell if we really know God — know His mind?

Remember that Moses earnestly asked God, "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You" (Exodus 33:13).

God answered Moses: "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (verse 14).

Moses replied, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here" (verse 14).

In other words: "God, if you're not in it, we're not going."

That's what we have to say to ourselves: "God, if you're in this,

I'm in it. But if you're not in it, I don't want any part of it."

When you are making any important decision, whether it's marriage, selling something, starting a business, moving or anything else it's vital to do what Moses did. Make God a part of the decision. Fast and pray about it. Search the Bible for instruction from God. Ask God to intervene directly and give you guidance. Seek wise counsel. Strive to learn exactly what God wants you to do, and then do that.

The more you know God and the better you know Him, the easier it will be for you to be sure of God's will in every situation.

You will be using — and acquiring — the mind of God.

From the time you came to know God, how much change has there been in your life? If it has been some time since then, there should be evident changes.

However, if you have only been aware of God, like Job in his former condition, but have not responded to Him, there won't be that much that has changed in your life. We all need to be like Job in his latter condition — we have to know that we know God, and know Him well.

It will make a vital difference in how we live, now and forever. □

PERSONAL

(Continued from page 2)

ONE RACE!

That desire seems inherent in human nature today!

God scatters humanity

Noah was of a perfect lineage — in his generations. His wife and three sons were of that same pure white strain. But Japheth evidently had married a yellow woman and Ham a black.

Soon after the Flood, the world's small population was all of one language and gathered together building the Tower of Babel. Their purpose? "Lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4).

But God said: "The people are one, and they have all one language, and this is what they *begin* to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be restrained from them" (verse 6). This expresses how great God made the mind of man.

But, just as God created varieties in many species of flowers and of animals — for example, many varieties and colors of roses — for greater beauty, so God created the three races and colors of human skin. God intended to prevent racial intermarriages. But man has always wanted to violate God's laws, intentions and ways.

So God compelled a scattering by mixing their language. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city" (verse 8).

Today the English language is fast becoming the chief international language. Men are entering mixed marriages and starting to get back to one worldwide language.

Shem, the son of Noah who had married a white woman, may have continued for some time in the knowledge and perhaps worship of God. But there is no record of any walking with God until Abraham, whom God specially called to have a function preparatory to the Kingdom of God. But the pure white strain

probably was retained until Abraham.

Abram, as he was originally named, was not seeking God. But God called Abram to leave the land of his father and kindred and go to a land God would show him — the "promised land" of Palestine. Without protest or question, Abram obeyed and went. And through his obedience and faith in God, Abraham became the "father of the faithful." To him God made the promises of both the national Israel birthright and the "scepter" promise of eternal salvation to come through Jesus Christ.

Israel raised up

Four hundred thirty years after Abraham, God raised up His nation Israel — descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel.

To lead these people out of Egyptian slavery and to the promised land, God called Moses. Moses was not seeking God. But

the locale of Goshen — geographically separated from the Egyptians, marrying among themselves.

In this connection, go back momentarily to Abraham. He prevented his son Isaac from intermarrying among the black Canaanites then in Palestine. He sent his chief servant to his own family and racial people to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham said, "You will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (Genesis 24:3).

The next generation, Jacob married Leah and Rachel, daughters of Laban, nephew of Abraham, who lived in the land of Haran, brother of Abraham. The whole community of Haran, where Laban lived, was of the same family ancestry as Abraham.

Jacob had six sons by Leah, two from Rachel — all of the same original racial stock, and two each from the maids of

It is indeed true that the nation Israel was God's chosen people. But understand this: They were not chosen as teacher's pet for special favors. They were chosen for a special purpose preparatory to God's Kingdom — a purpose they on their part refused to comply with.

God had caused Moses to be trained specially for this commission by having him reared as a prince in the palace of the Egyptian pharaoh.

So now again we come to the question, WHY did God raise up this special Hebrew nation as "the chosen people"? WHY, when God never made accessible to them His Holy Spirit?

One point to notice here. The probability is that these people were all — or nearly all — of the white color strain, unchanged since creation.

After Jacob and his sons and families had come into Egypt at Joseph's behest, they were kept in

Rachel and Leah — 12 in all. Even the maids of Leah and Rachel probably were of pure Hebrew stock.

But God specially prepared from birth and called Moses, with Aaron his brother to assist as his spokesman. Moses stuttered.

In the plagues God caused against Egypt, God was turning the Egyptian gods and objects of worship against them to show them that these were *not* gods. Even the plagues were sent in LOVE for the Egyptians.

The final plague occurred on the eve of the 14th day of the sacred month — starting in the spring. The Israelites went out of

Egypt during the night part of the 15th. They reached the Red Sea. But the pharaoh had meanwhile changed his mind, and with his army pursued after them.

The children of Israel had reached the Red Sea, and there they were stopped as if dead. There was no bridge. It was too far to swim, with their women and children. Behind them the pharaoh's army was in hot pursuit. There was nothing they could do. They were stopped — HELPLESS! At that point they had to rely on GOD!

In Egypt God had caused their release from slavery by a series of supernatural plagues. Now God caused the waters of the Red Sea to form a watered WALL on either side, with a wide path on the dry sea bottom between.

The Israelites walked on through. On the opposite side they looked and saw the pharaoh and his army entering the sea-floor path. When they were all within the sea-wall passage, God

nature — not spiritual salvation. They agreed. Thus they became God's chosen nation.

BUT WHY?

This we know: God's purpose for them had a definite relation to preparing for the ultimate KINGDOM OF GOD — when the GOVERNMENT OF GOD would be reestablished over all the earth, and spiritual salvation would be offered to ALL!

Undoubtedly one reason was to preserve the original racial strain. But there was much more.

Nations had developed knowledge. Mankind was limited, after Adam's rebellion, to the acquisition of physical and material knowledge.

But, like educated men and scientists today, they were saying, "Give us sufficient knowledge, and we will solve all problems and eradicate all sickness, diseases and evils — we will create utopia!"

Up to that time, mankind had been denied spiritual knowledge. God now decided to give them knowledge of His law — His kind

heredity of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel).

So God entered into a covenant with them, making them HIS NATION. It also represented a MARRIAGE covenant, with Israel the wife promising obedience to her husband — GOD. It was the physical type of the yet-to-come NEW COVENANT.

And what did it prove?

Here was a people of almost clear racial strain, and the superior heredity of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Two requisites make a human whatever he becomes in life — heredity and environment. Heredity has been inherited by birth in the areas of intelligence and character from parents. Environment includes all external influences and self-determined characteristics — whether good or evil.

Heredity — if of good and high quality — may start one off at a great advantage — but an evil environment and self-motivation may turn one into a failure in life, or an evil nature.

But God started off His chosen nation Israel with all the natural advantages of a superior heredity.

Kingdom being prepared

Now WHY? Why did God prepare and raise up this nation ISRAEL?

Why did God create mankind in the first place? God is reproducing Himself, to create in mankind God's own perfect, righteous and holy character — and that in turn to 1) restore His government over the whole earth — in order, ultimately, to produce, create, billions of God beings to finish the creation of the unfinished vast universe — and 2) to create even more, which God has not chosen as yet to reveal to us!

Everything God has done, since the creation of the first humans, after God's own image and likeness, has been another progressive step in that overall supreme purpose!

The immediate purpose, so far in the history of mankind, is to prepare for THE KINGDOM OF GOD, which will restore the GOVERNMENT OF GOD earthwide!

The Kingdom of God is the

God decided to give them knowledge of His law — His kind of government — *His way of life!* He was going to prove to the world that without the addition of His Holy Spirit their minds were incapable of receiving and utilizing such spiritual knowledge of the things of God.

allowed the waters to flow back, drowning the Egyptian army with its pharaoh.

In due time the Israelites pitched tents at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

God's covenant with Israel

God did not make them His nation, under His theocratic rule, without their consent.

Through Moses, God put to them His proposition. IF they would obey His laws of HIS GOVERNMENT, He would prosper them and make them the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth. Yet all God's PROMISES were of a national and material

of government — *His way of life!* He was going to prove to the world that without His Holy Spirit their minds were incapable of receiving and utilizing such knowledge of the things of God.

He was going to demonstrate to them that the mind of MAN, with its one spirit and without the addition of God's Holy Spirit, could not have spiritual discernment, could not solve human problems, could not cure the evils that were besetting humanity. The nation Israel would be His "guinea pig" to demonstrate that fact. God had chosen a nation of almost perfect original strain in its generations — its ancestry. Also they had the quality

actual begotten and born FAMILY OF GOD, which will first actually appear by a resurrection and instantaneous translation at Christ's Second Coming! And by begotten and BORN sons of God, emphatically I do NOT mean those deceived into the current "born-again" teaching — that anyone who "receives Christ" is already, in this present human life, "born again." THAT IS A PARAMOUNT DECEPTION by which Satan the devil has DECEIVED those (the many in a so-called "Christianity") who have "accepted" a false conversion. They may be well meaning — but nevertheless DECEIVED! And of course a deceived person does not know he is deceived — he may be wholly sincere!

But now THINK! *How* does the Old Testament nation Israel play a part in progressively preparing for the Kingdom of God?

Israel the example

First, Abraham was a man of very outstanding qualifying abilities. Undoubtedly he, with his sons Isaac and Israel, shall, in the resurrection and the Kingdom of God, occupy a position next under Christ Himself. The Kingdom of God will be a spiritual Kingdom including both Church and State — earth-wide. These, as a team, probably will be next in line of authority under CHRIST — and over both Church and State.

Of the nation Israel, Moses, whom God raised up as their leader and lawgiver (though God the Father is the original real Lawgiver), in all probability will be under the Abraham-Isaac-Jacob team, but head over the national governments of the world during the coming Millennium. And probably Joshua, who succeeded Moses, will be Moses' assistant in that office of worldwide national governments.

What of the nation Israel as a whole?

They, despite their favorable heredity, failed utterly to qualify. When God put the proposal of their formation as His nation before them, they replied, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). But they broke their word and rebelled.

They were in a "husband-and-wife" relationship with God. But God said of them, "Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," (Jeremiah 3:20).

But — nevertheless, the old covenant with Israel at Sinai was a type and forerunner of the NEW COVENANT to be made with the New Testament CHURCH, which is the *spiritual* Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 31:31, Hebrews 8:6, 10).

However, a few in Old Testament Israel did obey God and by becoming God's prophets, they became part of the *very foundation* of the New Testament Church of God. The Church is built on the solid foundation of the prophets (Old Testament) and apostles (New Testament), "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20). Among them, Elijah probably will be head, under Christ and Abraham-Isaac-Israel, over

experience that the *best* of humanity, without God's Holy Spirit, CANNOT SOLVE HUMAN PROBLEMS AND EVILS!

Man needs Holy Spirit

I have spoken, during the past 15 years, to many heads of governments over Europe, Asia, Africa, South America. In China, I believe the Communist heads of government believe that communism, once it gains control of the earth, will solve all problems and evils. But many kings, emperors, presidents and prime ministers I have conferred privately with now realize the problems are *beyond* human ability to solve.

The problems and evils are of a *spiritual* nature. And a carnal mind, without God's Holy Spirit, cannot come to grips with spiritual evils.

The many decades and centuries of ancient Israel PROVED THAT! The scholarly think they do not NEED God's Holy Spirit.

The nation Israel was God's "guinea pig" to demonstrate that man's mind, with its one spirit and without the addition of God's Holy Spirit, could not have spiritual discernment, could not solve human problems, could not cure the evils that were besetting humanity.

the Church, worldwide, in the Kingdom of God, with John the Baptist under Elijah. There are indications that the prophet Daniel will be head over all gentile nations, and under Moses and Christ.

But in what manner did the ancient nation Israel play a part in preparation for the Kingdom of God?

I have already mentioned how the intellectuals and scholarly of this world feel that, given sufficient KNOWLEDGE, human carnal MAN could solve all problems.

God let several generations of ancient Israel and Judah PROVE by hundreds of years of human

But, until Israel, God withheld knowledge of the right ways of government from mankind. But to Israel God gave His statutes and judgments, as well as His spiritual law. But these perfect laws did not, sans God's Holy Spirit, solve the problems!

God *could* say: "I am GOD. Take my word for it." But God gave PROOF, through Israel, that WITHOUT the Holy Spirit, MAN IS HELPLESS! They even had GOD to appeal to. But they did not have His Spirit within. Only their prophets had the Holy Spirit!

That lesson PROVED, God has given those in His Church His Holy Spirit! □

It was almost like a carnival.

Several energetic bystanders had climbed nearby trees and were waving enthusiastically. Other watchers had cut branches from the trees and spread them along the road, along with their own cloaks, to form a carpet on which the ass could walk.

And as the excited chorus of the crowds grew louder, even more people came out of their houses to see what the noise was all about.

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” was the chant that echoed around the streets of Jerusalem. Jesus Christ was entering the city for the last few days of His human life (Matthew 21:8-9).

From the shadows of the adjacent buildings, the religious leaders looked on with mounting displeasure. Hatred welled up inside the scribes and Pharisees as they watched this spontaneous show of affection. After all, no crowd had ever greeted them in such a spectacular way.

During the next few days they did little to hide their feelings. Their vehement dislike for Jesus Christ was evident in all their actions. So obvious was their desire to eliminate Him that, later, Pontius Pilate “knew that because of envy they had delivered Him” (Matthew 27:18).

An age-old problem

Envy — the painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another — has been around since the beginning of human experience.

The very first murder occurred as a direct result of Cain’s resentment for his brother Abel (Genesis 4:4-8). Years later, Joseph found himself in Egyptian slavery because of his brothers’ envy



Don't Let ENVY Color Your Thoughts

*If you turn “green”
with envy at the success of
others, then here, from
God’s Word, are a few
points you should consider.*

By Philip Stevens

(Genesis 37:28, Acts 7:9). King Saul developed an envious attitude when he realized that David was overtaking him in popularity (I Samuel 18:7-8).

From these few biblical examples we can see that envy is highly destructive in nature. Romans 1:29 lists envy in the same category as murders and fornications, sins that in one way or another destroy both mind and body.

Obviously, therefore, envy is an attitude that must be eliminated from the Christian life (I Peter 2:1).

Envy is, however, an integral

part of the makeup of the natural human mind. It is among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:21), and James was inspired to write, “Do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us tends toward envy?” (James 4:5, New International Version).

It really is, then, a strong test of character to overcome this carnal propensity of our nature.

How does envy start?

Resentment and the subsequent envy often germinate from a feeling of having been slighted in some way. Another person may have received more acclaim than us, or perhaps we were overlooked for a promotion we thought we deserved. Or we may feel that others should not own the wealth of physical possessions that they do.

But whatever the reason, once we allow negative thoughts about the blessings of others to creep into our minds, then we are on the road to becoming envious.

The time to overcome envy, therefore, is before it takes a hold. If another person receives what we see as a blessing — a promotion on the job, a new car, a nicer home, a position in God’s Church or anything else — then God’s command is that we be happy for that individual: “Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Romans 12:15). Our approach should be one of helping the individual toward success.

Consider the example of John the Baptist. He had acquired a sizable following. People came from miles around to hear him preach (Matthew 3:5, Mark 1:5), and some even thought that John may have been the expected Christ (Luke 3:15).

If John had merely been seeking the recognition of people, then he had good reason to be satisfied. But notice what happened as soon as Jesus Christ arrived on the scene. John

Photo by Warren Watkinson

stepped down and left the focus of attention on Christ, telling the crowds, "It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose" (John 1:27).

Later John acknowledged of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

John recognized that while he was preaching alone he had a major role in the work of God. But he also knew that as soon as another person was appointed to fulfill a more important position, then he should gladly submit and offer help to that individual.

Look now at the life of Saul's son Jonathan. Jonathan reacted to David in a manner totally unlike his father did.

Jonathan could have expected to be the next king of Israel, but somehow he must have known that David was to receive that position. And he handed David his robe, sword and bow, almost as symbols of the authority being passed to the already anointed son of Jesse (I Samuel 18:4).

Probably from their first encounter, a great friendship developed between the two young men. Each was willing to serve the other with no thought of personal gain.

Humanly speaking, Jonathan could have become envious of the ex-shepherd. But he didn't. And Jonathan's example of encouragement and help for one who was to receive promotion and honor is something we should emulate.

A carnal reaction

Unfortunately, we are more often inclined to think inwardly — or even say outwardly — something along the lines of "Huh! If only they knew what so and so was really like, they'd have given me the promotion."

But it is well to remember that an opportunity or a higher office may be given to an individual in order to stretch that person's ability. Going through the testing that a new position offers helps someone grow.

Consider this: It might be that you have already grown in that particular aspect of life and com-

pleted that part of the course. However, if you allow envy to enter your mind, then you may lose out altogether on the final reward.

And bear this in mind, too: We are not all equal. While the overall goal of the Kingdom of God is common to all real Christians, our individual potentials within that framework are diverse. To achieve His purpose, God has to deal with us in different ways.

If we remain close to God in prayer and Bible study, then He will work out a way of giving us just what is needed in our lives. God also knows that what we need is not always what we want!

If, in spite of fervent prayer about some need you feel you have, some position you would like to be in or an opportunity you hope will come your way, you are passed over, then remember this: "To whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). Then ask yourself, "Am I certain that I could have seen the assignment through?" Disappointment now could be better than possible failure later.

Having an envious attitude toward another individual is like having a cancerous growth in your body. It will eat away at your mind and give you a distorted view of the attributes of others and yourself. As the author of Proverbs was moved to observe, "Envy is rottenness to the bones" (Proverbs 14:30).

Envyng false wealth

People in this world often feel envious of film stars, business tycoons and the like who live in expensive homes, drive flashy cars and generally seem to have a lot going for them — physically, at least.

Perhaps we in God's Church sometimes feel this way, too. And maybe we think the world has got it easy when we look at the trials that we and other Christians have to endure.

On one occasion, David let similar thoughts get the better of him: "For I was envious of the boastful . . . they have more than

heart could wish. . . . Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence" (Psalms 73:3, 7, 13).

But those thoughts lasted but a short time: "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. . . . For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish" (verses 17, 27).

The people in this world have no possessions that will last, so why be envious of them? And if we are inclined to think their lives are trouble free, then we, too, should consider the soon-coming end result of this world's ways.

The antidote

The antidote for envy is love (I Corinthians 13:4), and that comes from God's Holy Spirit.

If we have trouble acknowledging the success of others, then we need to ask God for help. He will answer a prayer offered in sincerity, for it is His will that we develop concern for others.

As the apostle Paul wrote, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being" (I Corinthians 10:24). And, from the same writer: "Love must be sincere. . . . Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:9-10, NIV).

If an opportunity presents itself for someone else, we as Christians must do whatever we can to make the situation work out well for the other person. The instruction is this: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

Envy will lead to hate. And hate takes the happiness out of life and makes us miserable and embittered. But, more important, hate is an attitude that will keep us out of God's Kingdom.

So the next time you are tempted to envy the blessings of another, remember that we should "walk properly . . . not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:13, 14). □

'Who Shall Separate Us?'

God wants you to succeed!

More than anything else, God wants you to fulfill your incredible human potential and be born into His very Family as an immortal spirit being!

Regular readers of *The Good News* know that the human destiny is tremendously greater than most people realize. Throughout history, God has worked with small groups of people for special purposes. He is doing the same today.

And our Father in heaven has never called a person to failure. He is totally committed to our success.

As true Christians, though, we all know that we must constantly face troubles and difficulties, many of them intense. Could these difficulties cause us to fail? Could problems destroy us?

The apostle Paul asked the same question. Notice Romans 8:35. Paul wrote: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

It's a life-or-death question! Paul lists seven types of severe difficulties that God's people on occasion have to endure. Will such pressures cut you off from God? Will they prevent you from winning your Christian struggle? Let's look at these problems and discover how we can keep them from destroying our relationship with God.

Our Christian trials

Trials are common to all of God's people. The apostle Paul himself endured some severe

trials, and lists *tribulation* as the first type of problem that might separate us from God.

Writing to the Church at Corinth about his own experiences, Paul says, "We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, that we despaired even of life" (II Corinthians 1:8).

Here was the apostle of Jesus Christ suffering such intense trials that he wondered if he and his traveling companions would even survive! But did these problems destroy them? Of course not. The trials strengthened Paul. He tells us these trials taught the group "that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" (verse 9).

So rather than destroy, these afflictions inspired trust in God. Paul was able to put the difficulties he encountered in proper perspective. Are you? Tribulation can and will build our relationship with God, if we react properly to it.

The same can be said for *distress*. The Greek word from which *distress* is translated is *stenochoria*, which literally means "a narrowing."

Perhaps you have been on a road that started out as a paved road, then turned into a gravel road, then into a dirt lane and finally ended up as a track through the brush. The apostle Paul uses this word for "narrowing" to illustrate what happens on occasion in our lives.

Have you ever felt that life was closing in on you? Mental and emotional pressures designed by the archenemy, Satan the devil, can destroy you. But do they have to?

Notice King David's response: "Hear me when I call, O God of

my righteousness! You have relieved me when I was in distress" (Psalm 4:1). David said God gave him breathing room — "You have relieved me." God gave David the strength to cope with pressures and grow as a result of difficulties.

Paul says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Corinthians 12:10). A contradictory statement? No. Paul is saying that at times of vulnerability in your life — at times when, despite your best efforts, you cannot extract yourself from distress — God will come to your assistance, if you rely on Him and strive to obey Him.

What about *persecution*? Paul wrote to Timothy, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12).

This is not a pleasant thought. None of us wish to be persecuted. We want to be liked and accepted by the society around us. Unfortunately, we often face opposition and even personal attacks from employers, fellow workers, school officials, government, even our own relatives who, unconverted, do not understand or agree with what we do.

However, Jesus warned His followers, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). He added, "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Matthew 10:22).

Should we allow persecution to devastate us? No. But that's the only way it can — if we allow it to. If we are obeying God's laws and have done nothing to unnecessarily provoke others against us, persecution serves as a reinforce-

ment that we are on the right track. It builds spiritual muscle — and gets rid of spiritual flabbiness.

Notice what our Savior, Jesus Christ, went on to promise in Matthew 24:13: “But he who endures to the end will be saved.” Nothing, perhaps, shows us more clearly how deeply committed we are to Jesus Christ than persecution.

When persecution comes along, we learn how solid our convictions are. One thing is absolutely sure, though: we can unequivocally depend on Jesus Christ to stand with us during any persecution we may suffer for His sake (Matthew 10:19-20).

So once again, we find that a pressure that could spiritually cripple us can actually strengthen us instead.

In want and danger

We are living in an age of dwindling resources. Severe shortages, which a few years ago were generally restricted to Third- and Fourth-World nations, are now affecting more and more of humanity.

Bible prophecy clearly states that these shortages will continue and intensify. How are God’s people going to fare during trying times to come?

First, let’s consider David’s words: “Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine” (Psalm 33:18-19). For reinforcement, the message is repeated in Psalm 37:25: “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.”

King David enjoyed absolute confidence that God would supply the needs of His people. Of course, David could reflect on history. He knew God miraculously fed the nation of Israel in the wilderness. He no doubt also recalled how God had supplied Israel’s need during his own day.

Jesus Christ reminds us that God will sustain us. Notice Mat-

thew 6:25-33. Jesus tells us not to be overly anxious about what we will eat or drink or what we will wear. After all, the birds of the air are fed even though they don’t plant or harvest.

Then Jesus adds: “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (verses 28-29).

The message is plain: Jesus Christ and God the Father promise that our needs will be met. And not only will our needs for physical sustenance be met, but we’re also promised protection from peril and sword. In Psalm 34:7 David says, “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.”

God assigns His mighty angels, who serve as ministering spirits, to watch over His people. Add to this that God says He will give us peace of mind: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Once again, we are assured that none of these difficulties can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ.

Not called to failure

We have not been called to failure!

Paul understood that and emphasized it repeatedly. Look at I Corinthians 12:18 for instance. Here Paul tells us, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” It pleases God that a person is a part of the body of Christ. Paul told the church at Rome, “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

After God calls someone He doesn’t stop and say: “Oops! What have I done?” Absolutely not. He is thrilled at the calling of a potential son of His. The angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10).

Once God has called someone, He is totally dedicated to his or her success. Paul tells us to look to Jesus Christ, who is the “author and [please note!] finisher” of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). In the same letter to the Hebrews, Paul adds another encouraging note, when He reminds us that God has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

Let’s return now to Paul’s question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

Paul was confident that no external pressure could separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. In Romans 8:38-39 he says: “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

How fantastically reassuring!

A warning

God has given us strong encouragement that, once He begins to work with us, He intends to see us through to success — birth into God’s Family (Philippians 1:6). No external force can stop us. There is one way we can fail, however.

We can stop ourselves!

It would be unrealistic not to focus on a solemn warning Paul gave: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3).

No outside pressures could ever separate us from God — small or great — long or short — even all the power of Satan himself (God certainly won’t stop us — He is doing everything to help us succeed). But even so, we could separate ourselves from God. If we neglect our relationship with God, we can cause ourselves to lose out on the tremendous future that can be ours.

God is totally committed to our success. He wants us to be part of His wonderful Family. It behooves us not to neglect salvation! □

COMING IN THE GOOD NEWS

◆ True Spirituality — What Is It?

“He seems *so spiritual*.” Have you heard this phrase used about someone who emotionally expresses religious-sounding phrases? Is emotion and sanctimoniousness all there is to true spirituality?

◆ Christians Must Have Hope!

We often hear of faith and love, but what about hope? Is hope merely watered-down faith or wishful thinking? Read how you can have a confident hope — and why you need it.

◆ Does Satan Have Your Consent?

Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been subtly manipulating humanity — without our consent. But you can become aware of and check Satan’s influence.

◆ Your Spiritual Olympics!

Worldwide attention will soon be focused on the summer Olympic Games. God’s Word offers many spiritual lessons we can learn from the Olympics.

◆ The Art of Christian Conversation

Your unprepared, spontaneous conversation is important — your words reveal a great deal about your character. Here’s how you can evaluate and refine your conversation.