

FEBRUARY 1984

The Good News

OF THE WORLD TOMORROW



God's Plan for
**WIDOWS AND
ORPHANS**

The Good News

OF THE WORLD TOMORROW

FEBRUARY 1984

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You Are Free!
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COVER: God's Word reveals a special plan for providing for the physical needs of less fortunate people such as widows and orphans. The article beginning on page 2 explains how that plan is being administered in God's Church today. Photo by Hal Finch.

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What DO Churchgoers Believe— And WHY?

The plain truth is a little shocking — and illuminating!

By Herbert W. Armstrong

Nothing is so astonishing as the truth! It is often stranger than fiction.

Most people who attend church regularly, or even occasionally, would be really surprised if they should probe into their own minds far enough to ask WHY they go, and just WHAT is their religious belief — and WHY.

Do you KNOW?

As a baby, I was taken to church. As a child, I was taken to Sunday school and church. It was a Quaker church. I attended church until I was 18. Then I began attending the theater, the athletic contests or the dance.

When we were married, my wife and I felt we ought to attend church. We looked over the churches in the general area of our home, selected one that was convenient, respectable, with a reasonably modern building, a friendly and personable pastor and members we liked socially.

But WHY did we join? WHY did we attend church?

Well, we just felt we ought to — that's about all. Did we stop to reason *why* we ought to attend church? Well, no. But all people *should* attend church, should they not? We supposed so. *Why?* We probably didn't think much

about *why!* But hasn't everybody always *heard* that one should go to church?

Of course! And so we simply assume, take for granted and accept without question what we've always heard. Usually we don't know WHY.

What did we believe?

Did we have a definite religion? Reflecting back, my answer would have to be "No" — how about you?

What did we believe? Well, we had no deep-rooted convictions. We believed, of course, those things we had most often *heard* in church. We believed in heaven and hell — an ever-burning hell. We believed in the immortality of the soul. We believed in Sunday and Christmas and New Year's and Easter, and from boyhood I had heard the pastor talk about a few weird things, or names, or something that had absolutely no meaning to me — "Pentecost," "grace," "Antioch," "sanctification," "justification," "dead in trespasses and sins."

Of course I knew all those things came out of the Bible — but then, I always said, "I just can't understand the Bible."

And, speaking of the Bible, what *does* the average churchgoer think about the Bible? I think that in those years I was typical of many. It was "the *good* Book." I did, in a way, regard it with a

certain superstitious awe. It was beyond my comprehension.

Of course I assumed our church got its beliefs out of the Bible. The preacher could understand it. But then, too, I grew up looking on the minister as a person *different* from the rest of us. He was a sort of holy man, not tempted to sin or to enjoy the worldly pleasures like the rest of us. He was like a man from another world.

But the Bible was the book men laid their hands on when taking the oath of office. And it was the one book I should have been too embarrassed to carry down the street.

Did I look on it as "the Word of God"? Well, yes, I suppose so. But then I never thought of it in *specific* terms as the message, the instruction of God, to give man the explanation of what he is, and why he is here, and where he is going, and how he ought to live, and how he can be happy, and prosperous, and enjoy life more.

Somehow "religion" was for Sunday morning — except that I had been taught that its prohibitions lasted all day Sunday. It was sin to go to the theater on Sunday and it was a sin to dance or smoke or swear or drink at any time — and even theater going was "worldly" and probably a sin. Playing cards was a sin, too.

Religion? Well, vaguely I had
(Continued on page 24)



Do You Understand God's Plan for Widows and Orphans?

Almost 3,500 years ago, God made provisions for the support of widows and orphans. Here is how this ancient plan is being administered in a modern world.

By L. Leroy Neff

The poor. The sick. Widows and orphans. The unemployed. Elderly people who can't support themselves. It seems every society has its less fortunate people, and ours is no exception.

Jesus Himself said it would always be so (Mark 14:7)!

How these people are helped and the extent to which they are helped varies from place to place.

In the United States, for example, the government provides Social Security, welfare, the Food Stamp program, unemployment insurance and Aid to Dependent Children. In the private sector, there is the Red Cross, the United Fund and the Salvation

Army, to name only a few. There has even been another revival of "soup kitchens" to assist those in dire need.

Each country has its own ways of assisting the needy. The numbers of these people and the variety and costs of benefits available seem to be increasing.

In most areas of the world, though, the difficulties do not seem to be solved. Instead, the

Photo by Four By Five

problem grows more complex and the various systems grow further from really providing properly for those in genuine need.

God's plan — the overview

God, too, has a plan for caring for people in need. Let me quote from a comprehensive article entitled "Never More Urgently Needed — God's Plan to Help the Poor," which appeared in *The Plain Truth*:

"Situations may arise where someone in need has no relatives to help or resources to draw upon. God's program also provides for such eventualities. Every third year that the land was cultivated and harvested (which is the same as saying every third and sixth year out of a seven-year cycle, for the land was to rest on the seventh year — Lev. 25:1-7), a special tithe was to be collected. Its purpose was to provide for whoever 'has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow . . . [that they] may come and eat and be satisfied . . . ' (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-15). Those who observe this law even today can testify how liberally God renders his blessings in return."

Let's focus on that statement and explain in more detail exactly what God has instructed and how it is being carried out today in His Church. This special tithe is sometimes called the *poor tithe*. However, it is not specifically designated in Scripture as a tithe for the poor as a class of people; rather, it is for people who are in certain specified categories.

Sometimes it is called the *third tithe*, though this designation is confusing to some people. It is called by this name to distinguish it from the *first tithe*, which is for the direct support of the Work of God (Mal. 3:8-12), and the *second tithe*, which is for each person's own use in keeping God's festivals (Deut. 14:22-27).

One of the two places where this tithe or tenth is mentioned is Deuteronomy 14:28-29:

"At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of

thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest" (Authorized Version).

The third year tithe

Notice that this tithe is to be paid the *third* year, not every year. This means during the third and sixth years of a seven-year cycle, as mentioned in the next verse, Deuteronomy 15:1.

The stated purpose of this tithe is to provide food for four classes of people. The spirit and intent of this law obviously includes not only food but other needs of sustenance. These people would not be "satisfied" with food alone, if they were not also provided clothing, shelter and other needs.

Notice the four categories of people mentioned. The first had "no part nor inheritance." The second might be called an itinerant stranger or guest who was not a part of the local community, possibly unemployed and looking for work. He might have needed assistance until he found employment; for him the assistance would have been a sort of "pump priming" until he could help himself. The third, the widow, might not have been able to be gainfully employed if she had minor children or was elderly. The fourth, the fatherless, were minor children who had no father. They may or may not have had a mother, and could not support themselves as minors.

There seems to be a common denominator in these categories: The people were not necessarily poor, but they all might either temporarily or permanently have been unable to help themselves.

Another important point is mentioned in the last part of verse 29: God would bless the tither in all that he did. See also Deuteronomy 26:12-15.

Obedience to God's law brings

blessings. From a purely physical point of view, giving an additional tenth of one's income every three years would seem to be a curse, not a blessing. But there is an added dimension here — God! A little later in this article we will read of living proof that God does bless people who obey this little-understood law.

Should apostles serve tables?

In the New Testament there are two passages that have a bearing on this Old Testament law. The first is found in Acts 6:1: "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution."

The newly established Church of God had its growing pains. The apostles did not have time to take care of the physical assistance to widows that was required. These physical duties would have kept them from taking care of important spiritual duties.

The solution was to ordain seven specially chosen men to the office we call *deacon* today. The Church took care of the need by appointing and ordaining these men to administer the distribution of food and other necessities for these widows.

The second text is I Timothy 5:3-16. Paul stressed that the responsibility for widows' support is primarily on children and grandchildren (verse 4) or other relatives. Those widows who had no converted relatives to rely on had to rely on the Church.

Some have become confused over verse 9, thinking it refers to qualifications for support by the Church.

On close examination, though, it should be evident that this verse is referring to a class of widows who apparently performed some kind of special service to the Church at that time.

This passage concludes with verse 16: "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the

church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.” The last phrase in this verse reads as follows in the New English Bible: “so that it [the Church] may be free to support those who are widows in the full sense of the term.” The Church, was applying the instructions of Deuteronomy 14 and 26 in the spirit and intent of the law by providing for widows who had no support from their own physical families.

New conditions

The administration of this law must obviously be slightly different now from when Moses wrote it down almost 3,500 years ago. At that time it applied to the physical nation or congregation of Israel, but the administration was handled locally in each town or city — that is, “within thy gates.”

Today, instead of a physical nation, we are a spiritual body of believers — the Church. These funds are administered and accounted for by the headquarters or by regional offices around the world, but the local ministers of God’s Church evaluate all local needs or requests and then request checks for the appropriate amount each month for each qualifying person. Headquarters or regional accounting offices prepare and mail the checks. For temporary or immediate need, the minister may issue checks locally. Details, including the name of the recipient and amount, are then reported to the accounting office.

In ancient Israel need was handled mainly by contributions of foodstuffs from an agricultural community. Today assistance is through monetary contributions.

The Church under this program is assisting those who cannot help themselves. For those who are neither widows nor fatherless, assistance is usually offered on a temporary basis. In such cases it is usually the “pump priming” application, or temporary help until the person can

support himself again. When the amount received by the Church exceeds the needs of the “widow, fatherless and stranger,” the remaining funds are used for salaries or expenses of the “spiritual Levites,” or the ministry of the Church, as provided for in Deuteronomy 14:29 and 26:12.

Here are examples of the blessings!

And now, here are actual quotes from those who have been



Third tithe assists those who can't help themselves. Both contributors and recipients have learned that God keeps His promises!

the contributors as well as the recipients of this third tithe. The experiences of these people prove that God keeps His promises!

First, let's look at excerpts of letters from contributors. Here is one from a family blessed with pay bonuses, low heating bills, a new baby and more:

It is our third tithe year, and we have been blessed for trusting God to take up the slack. My place of employment has had much business

— in fact, it has been booming, which meant excellent bonuses this past winter. Also, in spite of a bitterly cold January that witnessed midnight deliveries of LP [liquid petroleum] gas to two of our neighbors, our bills were incredibly low.

Now, with the coming of spring and the end of the heating season, the financial outlook is brightening. We are out of debt, with money in the bank, and are considering the purchase of a second car. God has also blessed us with the expected arrival of a new family member by the year's end. We have truly been blessed in the Church of the living God.

Minnesota

The employment outlook in many countries is indeed bleak. Many are out of work or only working part time. Does contributing third tithe make sense in such a situation?

I just finished my third tithe year. I must admit that since I didn't have much work, I had to learn to have faith in God to provide for my needs. But it is true that God does provide for everything we need if we seek His Kingdom and righteousness above all else. Recently I received a rather large sum of money, totally unexpected, and a full-time job. Our Creator is certainly very generous and merciful.

Minnesota

God has blessed the entire family of this tither:

This has been my third tithe year and God has blessed me abundantly. I started a new job a year ago and have missed only two and a half hours due to sickness. So He has blessed me with good health. My daughter got married two months ago to a very nice, clean-cut man. Also my son and his wife were baptized just a few days ago,

Photo by Hal Finch

which was a very happy occasion. I could go on and on — my cup runneth over. I give God thanks for blessing me so abundantly.

Oklahoma

If you have not previously contributed third tithe, doing so for the first time may seem strange or even difficult. Here are some comments from people paying third tithe for the first time:

We have been in our new home for just a week now, so we thought we'd write and let you know about our third tithe year. It's the first one we've ever had and it has been an exciting learning experience. We approached it with anticipation but also with some wondering of how we were going to make ends meet.

To begin with, we were able to buy very cheaply enough good quality carpet to cover the floor of most of the rooms of the flat we were living in, and also our little vegetable garden yielded exceedingly well. My husband received a healthy pay rise and also was allocated a new office which just happens to be in an area away from all the cigarette smoke that used to be a part and parcel of his other office.

Then we sold our flat and were able to buy this house. The house was the only one on the market that was really in our price range, and it has almost every feature we requested in our prayers, so we're thrilled. As well as all this, there have been more than the usual number of invitations to share meals with others. We have been given material and clothing, blankets for all the family and groceries and food.

New Zealand

We have just completed our first third tithe year and would like to tell you how very much God has blessed us throughout this year.

Just after our third tithe

year began, finance for our first home was made available to us. Previous inquiries in this area, made a few months prior to the start of our third tithe year, had met with no success. In August of last year, God provided us with a fine, comfortable home complete with a beautiful, established garden. Then the government announced that first-home owners would qualify for a special tax rebate of up to \$1,000 a year for five years. What a bonus!

We had several pieces of furniture for our home given to us and managed to acquire others at very reasonable prices. Just after we moved into our new home, I was given a promotion in my job, and a few weeks later, my husband was also given a raise in income.

Our budget on paper just did not seem to work out, but we found that we always had enough finance to pay any bills and to buy the things we required. We even had enough for a week and a half's holiday in the South Island.

New Zealand

Does it sound like paying third tithe would cause undue hardships? Contributing in this way is an act of faith, which God will abundantly reward! Notice these next experiences:

God is blessing me this third tithe year with warmth, a job, a ride to work, food, clothes, good health, peace of mind, etc. — where do I stop with all my blessings? I strive daily to really thank God for all He gives. We've been having cold, icy weather, but I am still able to get to work. I really like my work and have the opportunity to set a good example every day.

Oklahoma

My third tithe year will soon end, so I wanted to take the time to let you know about the many blessings my family and I have received. I am self-

employed and for the first few months of the third tithe year, my business began to drop. I lost several important accounts and became very concerned about being able to provide for my family. However, I decided to trust God and continue to tithe.

Since that slow start, God has worked overtime to get in all the blessings. Not only has my business picked up the loss, but it has increased by almost 50 percent. I have been able to take my oldest son into business with me as well as purchase expensive, needed equipment and a new business van. I have also seen my son and daughter baptized into God's Church and a second son accepted to Ambassador College in Pasadena.

North Carolina

My third tithe year has just been filled with blessings. I found an apartment just 10 minutes from my work, and for a very reasonable price. I also had unexpected income and received a raise in my work. I am certainly very thankful to God.

France

I just want to tell you that I have recently finished my third tithe year. When I started it I received an inheritance. During my third tithe year I retired, being 65 years old, and soon after I completed my third tithe year my husband gave me a completely new kitchen. I am indeed well blessed.

Canada

Once again I'm enclosing a check for third tithe. It's a wonderful feeling experiencing third tithe. Instead of being burdened by more bills and less money we are being blessed with just the opposite. We've just paid off our major credit card that we haven't been able to pay off in three years, leaving us with more money than if we hadn't gone into the third tithe. Also

I'm getting a raise and a possible promotion. Not only that, but in this time of economical gloominess I've even got a part-time job doing something I've always wanted to do. To top it off, when we come out of our third tithe year our car loan will be completely paid off.

We just thank the eternal, loving God for a wonderful truth and third tithe because it works — it really works.

Canada

Since commencing my third tithe year I have been truly blessed in many ways. Three outstanding examples are:

1) Compensation for damage caused in a car accident.

2) A pay raise and five months' back pay from the beginning of the year.

3) A new interest of my wife in sewing clothes for the family, giving us better quality clothes at much lower cost.

Praise and thanks to the almighty God who has devised and ordained the tithing system! It really is a blessing to be under God's government.

Australia

Our family went to the Feast this past year with the realization that it was the beginning of a third tithe year for us. While we were gone to the Feast a representative of an oil company that has had a capped well on our land since we purchased the land six years ago left papers at our house regarding piping the gas out. The oil company offered us a substantial amount per acre of the land they would use for the pipeline. Four weeks later the man was back with the papers for us to sign, but the amount of the original offer had doubled. We knew it was God fulfilling His promise of Malachi 3:10. We were giving double to God and He gave double right back.

God's laws truly are living laws. How wonderful it is to

know that the third tithe is going to help people in need.

Canada

It just doesn't seem to make sense, at least on paper, does it, that you could pay an extra 10 percent of your income and yet end up with more than you started with? Well, read these examples:

This year is my third tithe year and I've been blessed more than ever. Not only has God blessed me with my everyday necessities but also with things I thought I could never obtain — or at least would have to wait until I "strike it rich." He even healed me from a sickness I had for about eight years. Spiritually, I'm learning, understanding more and growing. I feel good these days and I have peace of mind, joy, contentment and a craving for God's inspired Word.

I've never in my life felt so blessed! Yet, I don't deserve one bit of it. It's the result of the love of God for striving to keep His commandments.

This time last year, I was struggling along trying to make ends meet. This year, I have enough money to pay my debts and even to give to those in need. The strangest thing in a third tithe year is that no matter how hard you try to figure it out on paper, it never works — you always come up short. But when you do what you have to, it always works out. God has not failed me yet and I don't think He ever will.

Washington, D.C.

It never ceases to amaze me how a third tithe year is always full of surprises. Each month I make up a budget to let me know where I stand money-wise. Many times when the budget is made up I find that I am way into debt. But at the end of the money, when the real figures are put down, I learn that I am either breaking even or that I am saving

\$5. I still have roughly six more months to go before my third tithe year is over, but I am looking forward to see what other surprises God has in store for me.

Canada

My wife and I would like to share with you some of the incredible blessings we received during this third tithe year. At the beginning of the year it just didn't seem possible to be able to make it through the year, paying three tithes on the income I was receiving. But we both decided to step out and obey God regardless. It certainly paid big dividends. Our mighty Creator certainly backs up His promises in wonderful and mysterious ways. During this year our every need was supplied in abundance, enabling us to give and share many of our blessings with others.

These were some of our blessings, with estimated value: new car (\$4,000), clothing and outings to restaurants (hundreds of dollars), new Bible (\$30), free car repairs (\$500), car insurance paid (\$120), anonymous money sent in mail (\$120), food — meat, honey, eggs, etc. — supplied every week (hundreds of dollars).

And the list goes on — blessings too numerous to record in this letter. God's way of giving certainly pays off, as this year has proved to my wife and me.

New Zealand

This next writer actually regrets that the third tithe year is ending!

I must say I am in no hurry to see my third tithe year end. The benefits have been obvious, and I would like to share them with you:

1) Three substantial pay raises in the first six months.

2) Full-time use of a company vehicle.

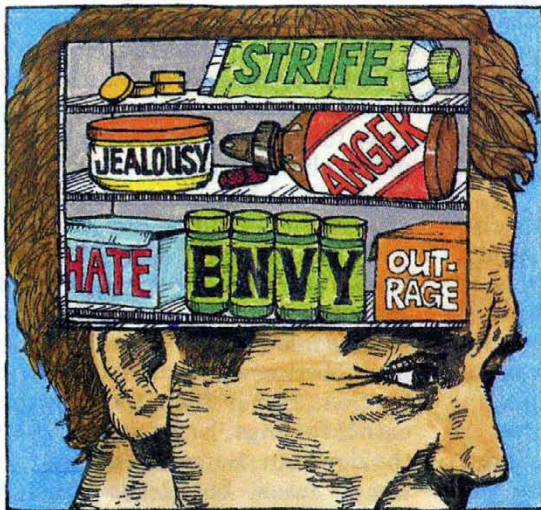
3) The ability to save far

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A Place for the Devil

Some years ago I was invited to visit the home of a young member of the Worldwide Church of God in Asia. He was a student, and lived with his parents. His parents, however, belonged to one of the Oriental religions.

This made it difficult for



him to live a Christian life, and he had several questions he wanted to ask me.

“What should I do about that thing?” he asked, pointing to a small altar hanging on the wall.

Such altars are a common sight in Asia. Many people put them up to provide a place for the household gods. There is usually an idol, some flowers and a few incense sticks.

“Each night, before he goes to bed, my father puts some rice or other food up there on the shelf as an offering to the idol,” the young man explained. “In the morning the food is gone. Of course, probably rats eat it, but

even so, I don’t like it. It is as if we have made a place for the devil in our house.”

I explained that he should not worry, since an idol is nothing (I Cor. 8:4), and that at the same time he should respect his parents’ right to practice their religion. But I could see his point. Nobody in his right mind would deliberately go out of the way to provide a place for the devil, would he?

Or would he?

A place in your mind

Satan is looking for a place. He doesn’t really want a place on the wall of poor, confused people whom he has already deceived with a false religion. He knows too much about the truth. What Satan really wants is a place in the hearts and minds of those God has called *out of* religious confusion to be in His true Church.

But God’s chosen people would not make a place for the devil, would they? Would you? Don’t be too sure.

Satan and his demons do not need a physical place. They are spirits — evil spirits — and they are on the lookout for a spiritual place to do their mischief. That place could be your mind.

Up until the time you are converted, your mind is carnal and you cannot do the will of God (Rom. 8:7). But after conversion you begin, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to make that mind think differently.

The apostle Paul explained this in his letter to the people of ancient Ephesus. It seems that

they had many of the same problems as we do today. So Paul wrote: “Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind . . . put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24).

Paul then explained that with God’s help, the old ways of lying and trying to take advantage of others can be overcome: “Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (verse 25).

Anger, bad temper, resentment — they all have to be brought under control. “‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (verse 26). Another translation says, “Never go to bed angry.”

That is excellent advice — to be taken literally, if possible. Don’t go to bed smoldering with pent-up rage over things that have happened during the day. If that anger is directed against a member of your family, resolve the problem before retiring. If it is a friend, a quick phone call might help.

“Never go to bed angry” is not just a little platitude that Paul put in to fill up space. It should be followed. It is good advice. You will sleep better.

But there is a far more important reason why you shouldn’t allow yourself to smolder with anger. Notice the next verse: “Nor give place to the devil” (verse 27). An angry mind, full of resentment and plans for revenge, makes a much better place for Satan the devil than a shelf on the

wall. Satan, like a vulture, is constantly watching your mind, looking for a way to get in. Anger and resentment are sentiments he understands. If you give him a chance, he will work on those feelings to try to develop a root of bitterness.

Devilish attitudes

Nearly two thousand years ago Satan noticed that Judas Iscariot was building an attitude of resentment toward Jesus. Satan waited patiently and then, when the time was right, he was able to enter into Judas and use him to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3-4).

If Judas never had gone to bed angry, his wretched attitude could have been nipped in the bud, and he probably would have still become one of the original apostles. Instead, he allowed his angry mind to become a good "place for the devil."

Anger is not the only emotion that provides a shelf for the devil. Look at James 3:14-15: "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic."

James is explaining that emotions such as envy and jealousy and the desire for revenge are never a product of the mind of God. They come from the mind of man, earthly and sensual (that just means "natural").

But, James points out, these thoughts are also "demonic" or devilish. This is the way the devil thinks. So when Satan finds a mind that is consumed with envy, twisted by feelings of outrage and injustice and bent on revenge, he finds a kindred spirit. It will be easy for him to find a place in that mind. Then, when he has settled in comfortably, he can help feed the envy and strife with his own special brand of troublemaking.

If you allow it, Satan fans the flames of hatred and strife and makes them worse than ever.

Have you ever thought what a wretched, competitive and utterly miserable place the seat of

Satan's government must be? How can Satan have any spirit of unity and harmony and love among the demons he rules? Their character, like his, is set on rebellion. They feel resentment toward God, who always thwarts their plans. They have nothing but hatred for the men and women who are made in His image. The demons know they will be defeated, for Jesus already has qualified to replace Satan as world ruler. Satan has nothing to offer them now, except an eternity of frustration and thwarted evil intent. There can be no real love among demons — no loyalty, no sharing, giving or cooperation.

Their only "success" can come from seeing how many of God's people they can trick out of eternal life. Satan and his demons have no other purpose except to "steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10).

Continuing with what the apostle James said: "Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there" (Jas. 3:16).

The spirit of envy and strife between people, especially God's people, attracts Satan as surely as dirt attracts cockroaches. And as the roaches breed, and bring with them disease, so the devilish mind will fan envy and strife into confusion and every evil work. Never forget what happened to Judas when he made a place for the devil.

Guard your mind

The Bible shows us that such emotions as anger, envy, resentment and revenge must be controlled quickly, before they become nesting boxes for the thoughts of Satan. We cannot allow him to get even a small handhold.

You *can* keep Satan out of your mind. He can find no place in a mind that is quick to forgive mistakes and that refuses to harbor grudges. He is repelled by a mind that is humble and refuses to become discontented and envious when others attain achievement and success. He will

never be able to entice and lead away a person who is totally involved in performing God's great commission and is preparing for an eternity of service in God's Kingdom.

His best efforts to break in and enter will fail against a mind that is always striving to look at things the way God does, and is willing to bring every thought under control (II Cor. 10:5).

Jesus proved that it is possible for a human being, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to keep Satan out: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread'" (Matt. 4:1-3).

Jesus could have thought, There's nothing wrong with that! I have every right to eat bread after fasting 40 days — just as we might think, I have every right to hold a grudge against that person after what he did to me.

But Jesus didn't give in. He knew that, however appealing and satisfying it may seem, giving a place to the devil is always fatal. And He knew that staying close to God, rather than focusing on carnal feelings, is the way to keep the devil out. Satan did his best to tempt Jesus, but Jesus resisted him, and Satan eventually was forced to admit defeat and slunk away (Matt. 4:1-11). But the tragic example of Judas shows us just what can happen when a person — any of us — lets vanity, anger, pride and resentment get the better of him.

Some hours after he betrayed Jesus, Judas apparently came to his senses, at least in a carnal way. He realized what he had done and felt human remorse and regret. Judas tried to undo the damage, but it was too late (Matt. 27:3-5). He had made a place for the devil, and Satan moved right in and used him.

Satan would like to do the same to you. □

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

I Peter 2:21 says, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." If Jesus were not teaching celibacy by His example, why didn't He marry?

In Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus confirmed the sanctity of marriage in the eyes of God by quoting from the creation account (Gen. 1:27, 2:24). He further sanctified marriage in verses 8 and 9, by strictly teaching against divorce.

But Jesus had valid reasons for not marrying. The harsh physical circumstances surrounding His ministry, prophesied in Isaiah 53, would have prevented Him from being the parent and husband He would have wanted to be to set us an example. And Jesus knew He would die an early, agonizing death that would have left His young wife a widow.

It would have been easier for Jesus to go off, get married and live a "normal" life, forsaking His mission on earth. But His desire to do the will of His Father (Matt. 26:39) made Him willing to forsake physical marriage, a "good thing" (Prov. 18:22), for a better thing. And so He said:

"All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: for there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it" (Matt. 19:11-12).

Those who are "able to accept it" are those called to a harsh, difficult life-style for the greater good. Like Jesus. And like the apostle Paul, who endured shipwrecks, scourgings, imprisonments and constant travel for the Gospel's sake.

But married life is not inconsistent with the life-style of the

average minister serving in a local church. Even Peter, the chief apostle, was married (Matt. 8:14), and among the desirable characteristics of a deacon (I Tim. 3:12), an elder (Tit. 1:6) or a "bishop" or minister (I Tim. 3:2) is that he be a married man, (I Tim. 3:5). So we can say with the apostle Paul, on whose writings some claim to base a doctrine of priestly celibacy, that "marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:4). Paul even classified commanded celibacy with doctrines of demons (I Tim. 4:1-3)!

But, physical reasons aside, the Bible shows that Jesus was not free to marry in the flesh, because he was bound until death by a previous marriage.

The Bible shows that Jesus was the Creator, the God of the Old Testament (John 1:1-3, 14, Eph. 3:9, Heb. 1:2), and the Old Testament relationship between God (Jesus Christ) and the nation Israel was a marriage covenant (Isa. 54:5, Jer. 3:14).

Thus, when Jesus Christ was made flesh, He was still bound by marriage to Israel, and was not free to marry. If He had married in the flesh, He would have committed adultery.

Christ's death terminated the marriage covenant with Israel, making Him free to marry His New Testament Church, which is referred to as the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-27, 32, II Cor. 11:2), to be married to Christ at His Second Coming (Rev. 19:7-9).

Far from condemning marriage, Jesus was preparing Himself, and is now preparing His Church, for the most joyous marriage to ever take place.

Should Christian brethren close personal letters to one another with the phrase "in Jesus' name"?

To almighty God a name has a great deal of meaning.

God's name is so important

that one of the Ten Commandments warns, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Ex. 20:7).

Jesus Christ's name identifies Him as our Savior. It conveys to our minds His reputation and responsibilities.

Yes, a name is important in God's sight!

But just what does the phrase "in Jesus' name" signify?

God's ministers, when performing the duties of their offices, close their letters with this phrase. Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong closes his letters to co-workers and members of God's Church this way.

The phrase "in Jesus' name" is just another way of saying "by Jesus Christ's authority" or "as the direct representative of Jesus Christ."

When closing a letter, God's ministers use this phrase to signify that they are acting as representatives of Jesus Christ, doing the work of Christ and His true Church as His called and chosen ministers. It also shows that Jesus Christ, the living Head of God's Church, backs up what they have written in the body of the letter.

Since, when you are writing a personal letter to someone else in God's Church, you are not acting as Christ's representative, it would be wrong to sign your letter "in Jesus Christ's name." Doing so could actually be taking Christ's name in vain, for the phrase "in vain" (Ex. 20:7) means "to no useful purpose."

However, it would not be wrong to close a letter to a friend with a phrase such as "in Christian fellowship" or "in Christian love." Using this type of closing to a personal letter is perfectly acceptable in God's sight. It conveys that close, truly deep relationship we have together in and through Jesus Christ, as members of His Church. □

Jesus Died for You— Can You Live for Him?

Jesus Christ died an agonizing death so you could be reconciled to God. How should Jesus' incredible sacrifice affect you?

By George M. Kackos

On a hot, stifling day in July, 1941, a prisoner escaped from his labor detail at Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp in Poland.

The camp commander warned that 10 men from the escaped prisoner's 600-man cell block would die in reprisal if he were not found.

He was not.

All the next day, the remaining prisoners from the cell block stood at attention. At 6 p.m. the camp commander, Col. Fritsch, announced that the fugitive had not been caught. The selection process began. Ten times he stopped, pointed and spoke a single word: "You!" The condemned men were shoved forward by the guards.

One man, a Polish soldier, pleadingly cried out: "My wife! My poor children!"

As the 10 men were standing in formation, ready to be marched off to an underground cell to die by starvation, an 11th man, Maximilian Kolbe, came forward and unselfishly asked to take the place of the Polish soldier who had cried out.

The camp commander was astonished but, apparently satisfied by Kolbe's offer, accepted

the request. Maximilian Kolbe died as a martyr.

A remarkable story, isn't it — a touching account of one man's love for another. It stirs the depths of human emotion.

How much more remarkable is the death of Jesus Christ!

What kind of feelings are stirred within you when you contemplate Jesus' sufferings on *your* behalf? Are you deeply aware of the One who volunteered to die for you? What does His death mean to you personally? How much do you appreciate what He endured on your behalf?

Just as those soldiers were assigned to die, we, too, face certain death without Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:23, 6:23).

And just as one of those soldiers was given a reprieve by Maximilian Kolbe's heroic sacrifice, all humanity — not just one person — has hope of eternal life through Jesus who offered Himself (Rom. 5:9-11).

Yet how often do we fail to deeply comprehend and think about the death of Jesus Christ? The hectic, mind-dulling pace of everyday life overwhelms us. We're kept busy, often selfishly pursuing our own interests. Jesus does not take a central place in our thinking — He is forgotten along with other past events. It

seems our primary focus is on ourselves.

That is one reason we need the Passover. It is a memorial — a reminder — of Jesus' sacrifice, a time to deeply ponder our Savior, the relationship we should have toward Him and the life we must live as true Christians.

Determined from creation

Turn your thoughts to the time of the foundation of this world nearly 6,000 years ago, the very time of humanity's creation. Adam and Eve, the first humans, chose to sin — rebel against God's way of life — almost immediately. It was then that Jesus Christ chose to die for humanity — He was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

Think about what this means: Jesus lived with the thought of His impending death for thousands of years. We can only attempt to identify with some of His thoughts as He waited for the time to begin His mission.

It must have been difficult thinking about becoming human — facing hostile people, being tempted by Satan and then suffering crucifixion, one of the most hideous forms of death. Yet, Jesus bore those thoughts for you!

What was it like to become

human? For us, it is a blessing — we go from being nothing to being something. But Jesus had to give up His existence as a member of the God Family, give up His glory and power, divest Himself of being spirit and run the risk of failing.

Don't think for a moment it was easy:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men.

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Saying farewell to the One who would become His Father must have been hard. A bond of closeness that had existed for eons had to be broken. For the Father, it meant giving up the only other member of the God Family and allowing Him to live a life of hardship and trial until He died in agony. This act itself was a deep expression of God the Father's love for us (John 3:16).

What a humbling experience — the Creator being part of the creation! He had to become a fetus in His mother's womb and be born in a stable.

From this abased beginning, Jesus grew to manhood. All the while, He obeyed the Father, preaching the Gospel, healing the sick and casting out demons. Through Him, disciples were called and trained for their important mission.

Finally, everything required of Jesus during His human life was fulfilled. From His preaching to living a sinless life, Jesus had done the job perfectly.

At age 33, after a three-and-one-half-year ministry, He was now ready for the most grueling experience of His life — an experience He surely didn't deserve. But He willingly accepted death for you, looking to the future joy He would experience when you are in His Family enjoying the

benefits of eternal life (Heb. 12:2).

Jesus knew that God would have no spiritual progeny unless His blood were shed first. Now Jesus was prepared to do what no mortal human could.

What were the events of that final day in Jesus Christ's life like? Let's look backward nearly 2,000 years and relive, hour by hour, one of the most momentous days in history.

The fateful evening

God reckons days from sunset to sunset (Lev. 23:32). Jesus began the last day of His human life at sundown the end of Tuesday, April 24, A.D. 31.

It was the time of the celebration of the Passover, when the people killed the Passover lamb in remembrance of the first Passover kept in Egypt, when the firstborn children of Israel were spared from death.

After the meal, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, leaving them an example of humility and picturing that His sacrifice would wash them of their sins.

Then He introduced bread and wine as new symbols to the Passover. Taking some bread, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Taking a cup of wine, He said: “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:26-28). These symbols signify the meaning of Jesus' death.

After talking awhile with His disciples, giving them final instruction and encouragement, Jesus went to pray. His impending death began to weigh heavily on Him and cause great mental anguish. Thoughts of suffering tormented His mind. Could He endure the humiliation and pain? Was the manner of His death really necessary?

His prayers to His Father reveal how He really felt at that moment:

“He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He

said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will’ ” (Mark 14:35-36).

“And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

Jesus' intense communication with God the Father ultimately bridled His human emotion and left Him prepared for His forthcoming ordeal.

Arrest and trial

Near midnight the opportunity for privacy vanished. In the distance Jesus heard shuffling footsteps and muffled voices break the still of the night air.

Soon the light from many torches cast a flickering glow on the face of Judas the betrayer as he arrived from the chief priests and Pharisees with soldiers and officers.

Seizing Jesus, they bound Him and took Him to the home of Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year, and then to Caiaphas himself (John 18:13, 24). There testimony was brought against Jesus, but it was both false and contradictory — outright lies. Finally, two false witnesses proclaimed that Jesus said He was able to destroy the Temple of God and build it in three days.

Caiaphas, arising in anger, questioned Jesus: “Well, what about it? Did you say that or didn't you?”

Jesus kept silence.

“Answer the question! Are you the Christ?”

Still no answer.

“I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus replied: “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Furiously ripping his clothes, Caiaphas yelled loudly: “Blasphemy! Blasphemy! Why do we need any further witnesses? You have

heard His blasphemy! What is your verdict?"

The chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin, now further incited by Caiaphas, agreed that Christ must be put to death.

What a travesty of justice! Christ, the perfect human being, sinless and filled with love, sentenced to die for being the Son of God! Yet such was the rage of men who, professing to know God, became the instruments of Satan.

Exploding in anger, a priest slapped Jesus on the head, then spit in His face. Others joined him, casting verbal insults and striking Jesus' body and spitting in His face.

One ruggedly built officer doubled up his fist and sent it mercilessly into Jesus' stomach. Jesus collapsed to His knees in pain, but someone else jerked Him upright. Blood began to mix with spittle and run down Jesus' face and body.

The group decided to taunt Jesus further. They blindfolded Him and then took turns striking Him, asking: "Who hit you, prophet? Tell us!"

Jesus' punishment continued for hours. As dawn neared, the chief priests and elders discussed putting Jesus to death (Matt. 26:59-68, 27:1).

Before the Roman authorities

As the rays of the sun filled the morning skies, Jesus was marched off to Pilate for the official Roman verdict (Matt. 27:2). Surely, the religious authorities thought, Pilate would be quick to order His death.

As Jesus stood before the Roman procurator, false accusations were raised against Him. Jesus was ruining the nation, Jesus was encouraging people not to pay taxes — the charges went on and on.

But Pilate was not convinced. He answered, "I find no fault in this man."

Tensions mounted between Jesus' accusers and Pilate. Then Pilate discovered Jesus was from Galilee.

Here was a way out of the situ-

ation, Pilate thought. He ordered: "Send Him to Herod in Jerusalem. He has jurisdiction — let him pass judgment!"

Herod was pleased by the opportunity to see Jesus. He had heard many things about Him and wished to see a miracle. Yet Jesus maintained His silence, unwilling to perform a miracle or answer questions at all.

How could anyone defy Herod? He ordered that Jesus be dressed in a beautiful robe, and then Herod and his soldiers began mocking the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Though he had humiliated Jesus, Herod was not eager to deal further with Him and so sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 23:1-11).

Pilate by now perceived that the chief priests and elders had delivered Jesus to him out of envy (Mark 15:10). Therefore, he was ready to release Jesus from custody. Since it was the custom for a prisoner to be released at this time of year, he felt this could easily be accomplished. But he was wrong!

While Christ was with Herod, the chief priests had not been idle. They had continued their false accusations, inciting the people against Christ. So when Pilate offered to release a prisoner, they chose Barabbas, a convicted murderer.

Surprised by their choice, he asked their desire regarding Jesus. The answer came back loud and clear: "Crucify Him!"

"But what evil has he done?" queried Pilate.

The only answer from the crowd came in frenzied chants that grew louder and louder: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (Mark 15:6-15).

Pilate felt trapped between his feelings that Jesus was innocent and of wanting to placate the people who might undermine his rulership. He asked for a basin of water. Standing before the crowd, he washed his hands, saying: "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it" (Matt. 27:24).

Christ, swollen and beaten,

wearily and humiliated, was now ordered to face scourging and crucifixion, one of the most painful and ignominious forms of death ever devised by the Satan-inspired minds of humans. The awful scenario probably unfolded in the following manner.

The agony of scourging

A burly, well-trained Roman soldier was called to administer the scourging. He had learned to be cold and brutal and was hardened to suffering.

Armed with a whip-like instrument consisting of several leather thongs reinforced with chunks of metal in the tips, he stood by the already pain-wracked body of Christ. Carefully he positioned himself.

The air cracked with the sound of the scourge, then Jesus felt incredible pain when struck. Blow upon blow tore away at His once powerful body, as He cried out in agony.

Soon the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled: "Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isa. 52:14). So savage was this horrible beating that Jesus' very bones began to be torn out of joint and exposed (Ps. 22:14, 17)!

With His tongue thick and dry in His throbbing head, blinded and beaten severely, Jesus awaited the next event in suffering death for you and me. It was soon to come.

Sensing that Christ was nearing death, the soldier stopped the scourging. His tormentors replaced His clothes with a scarlet robe and twisted a crown from thorns and mockingly jammed it upon His head. They placed a reed, a mocking symbol of rulership, in His right hand.

The soldiers began kneeling and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews." Then they wrenched the reed from His hand and used it to strike His head. Spittle again covered His face. The humiliation was nearly complete.

Though Jesus had been badly disfigured, the soldiers led Him

into the street before the people. Many were shocked at the sight.

Weakened, Jesus was unable to carry the stake thrust upon Him. Collapsing under its weight, He struck the dirty stone street. "Get up!" yelled the soldiers. "Kings don't grovel!" they laughed.

Simon of Cyrene, standing nearby, was ordered to carry the stake. Slowly they made their way to Golgotha, "the place of the skull," a hill just outside the city (Matt. 27:26-33).

Jesus was now to experience one of the most horrible forms of death ever devised.

Death by crucifixion

The soldiers nailed Jesus to the stake and raised it into an upright position. The marred body of the Savior of humanity hung limply silhouetted against the blue skies.

The scorching sun beat upon Jesus' body. Infection from the scourging, the beatings and nails in His hands and feet began to fester.

Insects swarmed Him, attracted by the open wounds. Jesus Christ our Lord was wracked with terrible pain.

Yet His tormentors continued jeering, wagging their heads, laughing and shouting epithets. "He can save others," they scoffed, "but not Himself!" (Matt. 27:39-44).

Though His body was torn, Jesus managed to utter words that revealed His perfect character: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Grueling hours of terrible suffering passed. At about 3 o'clock (Matt. 27:45), Wednesday, April 25, A.D. 31, the sky darkened — Jesus' death was near.

At long last Jesus had reached the point He knew thousands of years earlier that He would have to face alone.

Nearly 4,000 years had passed since humanity's sins forced Christ to deny humans access to His Spirit (Gen. 3:24). In His mind He knew He would have to bridge the gap created by the sins of the generations that followed

Adam and the generations that would follow His death. The agony of being cut off from God while bearing our sins (Isa. 59:2, II Cor. 5:21) caused Him to cry out, "'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matt. 27:46).

Crushed and drained, Jesus gasped for breath. His throat parched, He asked for a drink. A sponge filled with vinegar was raised to His lips. Yearning for moisture, He gulped at the sponge only to have His mouth bittered by the vile liquid.

Just after that, a leering soldier savagely thrust a spear into Jesus' side. From the hideous wound poured water and blood.

And then, with a final agonized scream, Jesus Christ died (Matt. 27:50).

He had lived a perfect life. But on this final day of His life He endured ridicule and incredible punishment at the hand of Jews and gentiles for a very special reason: He wants *you* in His Family! He wants *you* to live in eternity. He suffered and was forsaken for *you* — for *your* sins.

How should you react?

How should Jesus Christ's sacrifice affect you? What change should it make in your life? Shouldn't it make a dramatic change in you — a life-altering change?

On the day of Pentecost following Christ's death, the inspired apostle Peter made it clear: We *all* killed Christ.

Realizing this, Peter's listeners were affected both intellectually and emotionally. They asked, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:36-37).

Peter gave the answer: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (verse 38).

Repentance means changing. It means turning from sin. It means living for God's will, not *your* will (I Pet. 4:1-2). This is our reasonable service:

"I beseech you therefore,

brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

As we approach the Passover season, we need to deeply consider the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and our spiritual lives. How much do we appreciate Christ's sacrifice? How much do we live to perform God's will? Do we rely upon His example to resist sin (Heb. 12:3)?

Trials sometimes overwhelm us. Thoughts of injustice ("That's not right!") and self-pity ("Why me?") often arise, resulting in wrong attitudes.

When this happens to you, think about Christ, who suffered far greater injustices and immense physical anguish, and yet kept a right attitude. By doing this you can see your trial in a new light and maintain a Christ-like attitude.

Live for Christ

The death of Maximilian Kolbe had a profound effect on the man he saved, Francis Gajowniczak. At first he wept and refused to eat. Then a friend said: "Take hold of yourself! Is the man to die for nothing?"

In that moment, Gajowniczak made up his mind he must live. He decided that he must not waste the gift of life given him. With newfound determination he survived those grim years in Auschwitz.

What about you? Will the death of Jesus Christ give you newfound determination and drive to live — not for self, but for Him? Will this Passover help you endure the trials and tests of life? Will it enable you to survive — not Auschwitz, but this modern Babylon?

If so, then Christ's death will not be in vain for you. It will be of great value — value that will culminate in your eternal life! □

You Are Free!

*Few people know what real freedom is.
The story of Barabbas reveals the truth.*

By Jerold W. Aust

Are you a “free spirit”? Do you know anyone who likes to consider himself or herself a “free spirit”?

A “free spirit” is usually defined as one unhampered by traditional values and morals — one who does whatever he or she feels is good or exciting, and who is proud of it.

Freedom is one of humanity’s most cherished values.

Even some who consider themselves Christians, especially many who believe they have been “born again,” claim freedom — freedom from sin and its penalties, freedom from any responsibility to keep God’s laws.

But is anyone truly free? Especially, are Christians free from keeping God’s commandments or from carnal pulls? What is real freedom and how can one know he or she is truly free?

The story of Barabbas sheds much light on ultimate freedom and how it is obtained.

Barabbas set free

Barabbas, whose name meant “son of the father” (remember that), was a notorious criminal in first-century Palestine. He had been convicted of both murder and sedition, making him liable to execution under Jewish and Roman law alike. Not a comfort-

able context in which to find oneself! But, according to the gospel accounts in your Bible, Barabbas was set free by the Roman authorities at the expense of Jesus Christ’s life.

The time setting was the Passover: “Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. . . . Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ . . . They said, ‘Barabbas!’ . . . Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified” (Matt. 27:15-26).

Why not release Jesus, who had not sinned — who had broken no law? And why should the people — actually, in this case, a howling mob — have been accounted worthy of judging who should be released? Absurd!

Yet there was a great purpose to this terrible travesty of justice. We’re talking about Jesus, our Passover! Understand: Had it not happened this way, you and I could never be truly free.

Why? Read on. There is much symbolism in what happened to Barabbas.

Barabbas and you

No one likes to admit to being
(Continued on page 17)



Now Carry It!

Simon of Cyrene showed what we must do after we are freed from sin's hold.

By Jerold W. Aust

How many professing Christians do you know who believe that Jesus "did it all" for us on the cross — that His sacrifice did away with God's law and freed us from any responsibility to keep God's commandments?

Millions of Christians believe that this is exactly what happened!

But is that what God's Word really says? Let's see.

If Jesus did it all for us, then why does He require us, on the authority of the New Testament, to repent of our sins and obey the commandments (Acts 2:38, I John 2:3-4)? If there is no law, how could we be guilty of sins of which we must repent?

No, there is much we must do. Jesus' sacrifice was only the beginning of God's plan of salvation. We have a great responsibility to fulfill as a result of that sacrifice.

What we must do is captured for us in the example of Simon of Cyrene.

He carried the cross

Remember that Jesus was required to carry His own cross up the hill of Golgotha, and this after an unbelievably painful and

exhausting nightlong scourging by Roman soldiers. The Greek word for "cross" can mean a straight tree without its branches, or a stake.

At one point along the path, which was lined with gaping spectators, Jesus may have stumbled under the heavy weight of His own crucifixion stake.

Perhaps He dropped to one knee and inhaled deeply, refilling His burning lungs, and attempted to reposition the heavy tree or stake so He could rise again and carry it on.

But the strength Jesus had enjoyed in much better times was sapped, His body critically injured and weakened by the vicious beating He had endured. Jesus no longer even looked like a human being (Isa. 52:14)!

A burly Roman officer standing nearby observed the impossibility of Jesus' continuing with the cross and looked menacingly at the crowd, evaluating who might be able-bodied enough to be drafted to help the exhausted carpenter carry His death instrument.

Out of the hooting crowd the soldiers pulled Simon of Cyrene, probably a large, stocky farmer who had come in from the country to keep the Spring Holy Days. "You — yes, you!" one of the soldiers screamed. "Get over here and carry this stake!"

Simon probably was thinking:



Why do they have to bother me? I don't want anything to do with this business. What if they nail me to the stake instead of Him? Say, this is heavy. Wonder what He did to deserve this?

"Carry it!" the soldier belated. Simon swung it to his shoulders. Step after trudging step, he carried it out of the city gates and up the rounded hill to the top of Golgotha. There he quickly laid it down and melted into the crowd again (Matt. 27:32-33, Mark 15:21-22, Luke 23:26).

This had been a critical time in Simon's life and a critical time for all of humanity. If Jesus had quit in those hours of great anguish and excruciating pain, we would not have a Savior!

By carrying Christ's cross, Simon did, in type, what every one of us must do: become like Jesus Christ.

As Matthew 10:24-25 says: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master."

At first glance we might consider Simon to have been an innocent bystander. But was he? Not when one considers Romans 3:23 and 6:23. Notice what these verses tell us about the position in which all human beings find themselves:

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

All of us, God says, have sinned — broken God's perfect law — and brought on ourselves the penalty of eternal death.

But the death of Jesus Christ — who lived a perfect life as a human, who never committed a single sin and thus did not earn the death penalty for Himself — pays our death penalty for us.

That is, upon our repentance and turning to go the opposite way — to live God's way instead of the sinful way we have been

following — the way that produces death — God applies the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to our case and considers our penalty paid. We are justified by Jesus' blood, and we shall be saved by Jesus' life (Rom. 5:9).

But Jesus' sacrifice, while it pays our penalty, does not remove all responsibility from us. There is still much God expects us to do. What parallel can we draw between Simon's service and what God expects of us?

Our heavy responsibility

When Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee, many people followed. Some wanted to ask questions. Some wanted to see a spectacle. Some wanted to be fed. And a few were moved to accept Jesus' teachings.

On one occasion, Jesus stopped and placed a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of this last group — the same responsibility He places on your shoulders today. You determine whether you will follow Jesus by these criteria:

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love less by comparison] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).

Can Simon's example be any plainer for us? Jesus bore His cross, the ultimate symbol for Christian persecution, to the death (Phil. 2:8). Simon, in type for us, helped bear the true Christian's burden for and with Christ. Once freed from sin, we are to come out of this world and practice God's way — to take on God's very nature.

Can you do it? Can you bear the cross with Christ? Like Simon, you must. God has called you to do so. It wasn't by your choice.

The life of a true Christian is not an easy one, but the alternative is the way of this Satan-inspired world, which is destined to perish (I John 2:15-17).

The rewards are fantastic —

the gift is life eternal, forever sharing the wonderful challenge of eternity with Christ and God the Father, creating and sustaining throughout this great and, for now, unsearchable universe. It is your home-to-be!

But for now, there is work to be done here on this earth for the benefit of all mankind. And we need to roll up our sleeves and pitch in.

The job now

In Revelation 12:11 we find a three-part summary of what it takes for true Christians to follow Christ and to bear the burden: "And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

We overcome Satan, humanity's destroyer, by:

1) Repenting, believing and obeying Christ's commandments; God the Father then covers our sins with Christ's blood.

2) Praying and providing physical and financial help to support Jesus Christ's Work, through Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God, of proclaiming to the world the Gospel or good news of God's wonderful world to come.

3) Not loving our physical lives even to the point of death, should God require it. Like Jesus!

If you have repented, been baptized and truly have God's Holy Spirit, God has set you free from the power sin had over you. As in the case of Barabbas, Jesus has died in your place.

Now what?

Enter Simon of Cyrene's example. If you are free, you will acknowledge the command from on high: You have an obligation to help carry Christ's cross — the Christian burden. You have been drafted by God. You are to be like your Master.

Now carry it! There are many mockers in this world, but modern "Simons of Cyrene" are scarce (II Tim. 3:1-5, Matt. 9:36-38). □

You Are Free!

(Continued from page 14)

guilty of anything, anytime. But Barabbas surely should have had little difficulty admitting that his reprieve was unwarranted.

How perfect a picture of true freedom as it relates to all of us! For true freedom is freedom from the death penalty that hangs over every human for breaking God's law (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). And God's law *is* in force today (Matt. 5:17, Rom. 7:12, I John 3:4).

Though Barabbas' guilt may have been clear to him, our guilt may not be so clear to us — this responsibility for our personal sins. The fact is that most of Christianity misunderstands!

Our sins and their penalty still remain if we have not yet repented of ourselves, been baptized and received God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) — if God has not judged, through His grace, that our death penalty has been paid by the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 5:8-10, Eph. 2:8).

How can you be truly free? You can be if you earnestly desire to be so.

Your sins warrant your everlasting death. Barabbas was a thief who committed murder during an insurrection in Jerusalem. Like Barabbas, we have stolen from God and man, broken God's laws, rebelled against God and hated our fellowman.

How? Because the law is spiritual, and to truly keep it we must keep it in attitude, by nature, and apply it to every situation in life, whether the Bible specifically covers an area or not.

God's spiritual law is a way of life — the way of giving. This way of life is summed up by the word *love* (Rom. 13:8-10). The opposite way is the way of getting. If you break one of God's commandments, you have broken them all, because you have followed the *get* way rather than the *give* way.

The apostle Paul clarified how God's Ten Commandments were to be spiritually applied — that,

until almighty God revealed this great truth to him, the very law that he was striving to keep physically still held the penalty of spiritual death over him (Rom. 7:5-12).

Paul used the Tenth Commandment to illustrate this spiritual understanding. Read it. The law against coveting must be applied in the mind, spiritually.

Paul, through the help of God's Holy Spirit, came to understand how all of the Ten Commandments must be kept in the spirit as well as in the letter. And where he, after conversion, failed — where we fail — the blood of Christ, our Passover (I Cor. 5:7), covered those sins as he acknowledged and repented of them.

The gospels record how Pontius Pilate attempted to free Jesus rather than Barabbas. But the bloodthirsty mob responded, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:25).

This was a prophecy from the mouths of rebels! Centuries before, their ancestors, the ancient Israelites, had pictured Christ's sacrifice and shed blood when they were about to leave Egypt (Ex. 12). At the institution of the Passover, the Israelites had brushed on their doorposts the blood of a lamb, so the death angel would pass over them, sparing their firstborn.

Now the descendants of those who came out of Egypt (which spiritually, symbolizes sin) were demanding, though they didn't realize it, the blood of the Lamb of God to be held accountable to them and their children. Here was their Passover, Jesus, who would cover their sins with His holy blood (Matt. 26:27-28). Naturally, most of them were ignorant of the seriousness of this demand to murder their Savior.

Are you? Do you recognize that the same Jesus had to shed His blood for you personally (Rom. 5:6-8)? Have you examined yourself and deeply repented of your sins, which cost Jesus Christ His life (John 3:16-17, II Cor. 13:5)?

Jesus is your Passover, too, and

in order for you to live forever, you must change from your sinful ways and believe God and obey Him. Only then will you prove to your Maker that you want His way of life more than the evil ways of this world (Matt. 19:17).

God cannot give you eternal life in His Family, with all its powers, if you don't love Him enough in this physical training ground to resist sin and its destructive results.

Sons of the Father

Barabbas, though freed physically, didn't qualify at that time to be freed from his spiritual sins. In fact, he didn't qualify to be freed from the penalty of his physical lawbreaking. He benefited from grace, or unmerited pardon, that fell his lot without any prior knowledge or action on his part.

That's why the scripture says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The unmerited pardon Barabbas received physically can be paralleled, spiritually, with the grace and unmerited pardon God gives true Christians.

And what of Barabbas' name? Remember that it meant "son of the father." Note Paul's words: "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption [sonship] by which we cry out, 'Abba, [that is] Father'" (Rom. 8:15).

We are to become very sons of our Father! Think of it — it all fits. Barabbas, you and as many as are willing of all who have ever lived are to become, first, begotten sons of God the Father, and then, finally, born as literal sons of God in the God Family (I Cor. 15:23, I John 3:1-3).

Then, when we have achieved the incredible human potential, we will finally know true, ultimate freedom. And God, through His written Word, says to us now, in relation to sin and its penalty, "You are free!" □

Either the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition is a fable, or you have no Savior!

Jesus gave only one sign to prove that He was the Messiah, and that sign was the length of time He would be dead and buried.

Notice Jesus' own words concerning the only sign that would prove His Messiahship: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39-40).

If Jesus did not fulfill that sign, then He was an impostor and you are without a Savior!

Of course, theologians and scholars deny that Jesus fulfilled this sign. They say He was in the heart of the earth only one day and two nights — half as long as He said He would be! And in so doing they deny the only proof Jesus gave that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.


It was prophesied

Did you know that it was prophesied that many would deny this sign — would deny that Jesus actually is the very Christ? Turn to the scriptures:

"But there were also false prophets among the people [in Old Testament times], even as there will be false teachers among you [Christians], who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them . . . and many will follow their destructive ways" (II Pet. 2:1-2).

The many are today denying their Savior by believing a tradition that rejects the only sign Jesus gave to prove He is the Messiah. Did you know that it

Photo by Hal Finch



The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday

Easter Sunday does not commemorate the resurrection! Christ did not die on Good Friday! Here's proof of the true dates of the crucifixion and the resurrection.

was not until after the death of John, the last of the 12 apostles, that the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition began to spread through the churches?

How long dead and buried?

Let's examine Jesus' own words, recorded in the gospels, to find out if He meant what He said about the sign of Jonah. Did Jesus really expect to be buried in the earth for three days and three nights? Notice Mark 8:31: "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again [from the grave]."

Did you grasp that? Jesus did not say "after a day and a half." Jesus said "after three days."

Consider: If Jesus were crucified and buried late on Good Friday, then one day after would be Saturday evening, two days after would be Sunday evening and three days after would be Monday evening. But Jesus rose long before Monday evening. Either Jesus was not crucified on Good Friday, or He did not fulfill His sign and He is therefore an impostor and not the Messiah.

Did Jesus fulfill His sign? Turn to Matthew 28:6. Here is the testimony of the angel: "He [Jesus] is not here; for He is risen, as He said." Jesus did fulfill His sign exactly. He is the Savior. Then He could not have been crucified on Good Friday!

But this is not all. Turn to John 2:19, 21: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' . . . But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

If Jesus were crucified and had died on Friday afternoon and would have been resurrected on Sunday morning, the temple — His body — would have been raised in a day and one half. But Jesus did not say it would occur in a day and one half. Not even in two and one half days, but in three days' time — 72 hours.

In other words, three 24-hour

days after His death, He would be made alive again as immortal spirit by a resurrection. Jesus meant exactly what He said.

But Jesus also declared He would rise the third day. Let us suppose again that Jesus was crucified on Friday. If He were to rise on the first day after His crucifixion, He would be raised on Saturday — if on the second day after His crucifixion, He would rise on Sunday. But if He were to rise on the third day, He would have been raised on Monday.

But Jesus was already resurrected by Sunday morning. Plainly, Friday was not the day of the crucifixion!

How the Bible counts days

Adam Clarke, for example, in his commentary on Matthew 12:40, quotes the Talmud in support of the idea that three days and three nights supposedly mean one day and two nights. The *Seventh-day Adventist Commentary* implies the same.

But the Bible is not interpreted by the Talmud or by a human commentary. Jesus rejected the traditions of the elders.

The Review and Herald, the official publication of the Seventh-day Adventists, listed several texts that, they claim, indicate that three days means no more than a day and one half. Let's look to see if Scripture supports these claims.

Here is the first text they offer as "proof" that "after three days" does not mean after three days!

King Rehoboam told the people who came to meet him, "Come back to me after three days." And the people departed" (II Chron. 10:5). The same event is quoted in I Kings 12:5: "Depart for three days, then come back to me." The story continues with verse 12: "So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king directed, saying, 'Come back to me the third day.'" The people left "for three days" and did not return until "after three days," as the king had appointed.

Let us suppose they had first

met the king sometime on Friday. As they were ordered to return at the end of three days, they would not have returned before the same time of day the following Monday. Now was Monday "the third day" from the day they had originally met with the king? The first day from that Friday was Saturday, the second day from that Friday was Sunday and the third day was Monday — exactly the time the king expected them to return.

Monday, not Sunday, was the third day from Friday.

The next text offered as "proof" that "three days and three nights" means only one day and two nights is Esther 4:16 and 5:1. "Fast for me," said Queen Esther, "neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king." "Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes" and went to the king.

Which day was this? The third day of the fast. Suppose Queen Esther had requested the Jews late Friday evening, shortly before sunset, to fast. The first day of their fast would have been Saturday, the second day would have been Sunday and the third day, Monday, the queen would have entered the king's palace. Isn't that plain? The Jews did not fast parts of three days, but three days, night and day.

Notice that in each of these examples, three days means three days, not parts of three days or only a day and one half.

What day was the crucifixion?

Jesus died some three hours before sunset on the day of the crucifixion (Luke 23:54). Since Jesus said that He would rise the third day after His crucifixion and death, it is obvious that He was made alive by a resurrection precisely at the completion of the third day following His death.

When the women came to the tomb early Sunday morning, Jesus had already risen. The angel said: "He is risen! He is not

EVENTS OF CRUCIFIXION WEEK — A.D.31

JESUS PROMISED:

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40)

Jesus already risen when women came to the tomb

BREAD — —
SUNDAY
NISAN 18/APRIL 29

Jesus institutes New Testament Passover

Jesus arrested, tried and crucified

Jesus on cross

Jesus dies

Joseph buries Jesus

Jesus resurrected from the dead



TRADITIONAL VIEW:

The death of Jesus occurred Friday afternoon and the resurrection Sunday morning — at most two nights and one day, in direct contradiction to Jesus' promise!

BIBLE RECORD:

The death of Jesus occurred on the late afternoon of Wednesday and the resurrection from the dead on the late afternoon of Saturday, three days and three nights later!

Note: While there are seven Days of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6), only the first four are highlighted here to show the events of those days.



GARDEN TOMB



GOLGOTHA

here" (Mark 16:6). Of course, Jesus had been resurrected the previous evening.

Jesus arose from the dead late Saturday afternoon — He was not at the sepulcher Sunday morning. Three days before Saturday afternoon would place the crucifixion on Wednesday, the preparation day for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Thursday of that year must have been an annual Sabbath, the first annual Sabbath in the Days of Unleavened Bread.

So that we would know that the Sabbath that followed the crucifixion was not necessarily the weekly Sabbath, John was inspired to call it a "high day" (John 19:31), which, according to Jewish usage, means an annual Sabbath that may occur any day during the week.

Mark picks up John's account by adding that after that Sabbath, which was a high day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the women bought sweet

spices to use in anointing the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1). This purchasing of the spices could not have been on Thursday, the annual Sabbath. It must have been Friday. Having made their purchases, the women prepared these ointments and "rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). This was the seventh-day Sabbath upon which, near its close, Jesus was raised from the dead.

Thus the Bible proves that the resurrection was not on Sunday morning, the crucifixion not on Friday. There were two separate Sabbaths that week, one an annual Sabbath, the other a weekly Sabbath.

Matthew 28:1 proves it

A text indicating that there were two Sabbaths in that week has been obscured by almost every translation into English. Only Ferrar Fenton's version has this point correct.

Turn to Matthew 28:1. In the

common versions it says, "in the end," or, more correctly, "after" the Sabbath.

Notice now the singular *Sabbath*. But in the original Greek the word is in the plural. Fenton renders it correctly by saying, "after the Sabbaths." In a footnote to this text, he says, "The Greek original is in the plural, 'Sabbaths,' which is retained."

Another verse referring to Jesus' departure from the tomb after His resurrection from the dead is Mark 16:9. This verse does not prove the resurrection from the grave was on a Sunday morning. In the original Greek the phrase "early on the first day of the week" refers to the early part of the day — the evening — for a day began at sunset.

Jesus was risen from the tomb early the evening before Sunday morning. That is, He was already risen Saturday night. That was three days and three nights after His burial and the closing of the tomb. We read in the Revised

Illustration by Monte Wolverton

Standard Version, which has the correct translation of Luke 23:54: "It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning." That is, it was very late on the preparation for the Feast, or first annual Sabbath, and the new high day Sabbath had already just begun as Joseph of Arimathea finished the burial.

How it all began

It was the so-called apostolic fathers, steeped in traditions, who first began to teach that the crucifixion occurred on Friday. Yet they admitted that the ancient custom of fasting on Wednesday — the actual day of the crucifixion, as we have seen — was derived from "the day on which Jesus was betrayed" and "on which the Sanhedrin decided to kill him" (*Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, "Fasting")!

These same men soon attempted to change the year of Jesus' birth — the year that He began His ministry — the length of His ministry — the days of His death and His resurrection from the dead.

Astounding proof exists of these attempts to change the days of the resurrection and of the crucifixion. James A. Walther, in an article entitled "The Chronology of Passion Week," in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, mentions that numerous Catholic writers for centuries maintained that Jesus ate the Passover Tuesday night — that early Wednesday morning He was taken by the Jewish mob.

Mr. Walther declares: "References in the *Didascalia*, in Epiphanius, in Victorinus of Pettau . . . support the Tuesday [night] Passover dating and the subsequent arrest of Jesus in the morning hours of Wednesday."

One of the first post-biblical attempts to explain the day of the resurrection from the dead late Saturday to the hours of Sunday morning occurred in the spurious "gospel of Peter," which was probably circulated from Rome about the time of the death of the

apostle John. This "gospel" reads as follows: "And then they drew out the nails from the hands of the Lord, and laid him upon the earth . . . and the Jews rejoiced, and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it. . . . And he took the Lord, and washed him, and rolled him in a linen cloth, and brought him into his own tomb. . . . And I with my companions were grieved; and being wounded in mind we hid ourselves . . . and upon all these things we fasted and sat mourning night and day until the Sabbath.

"But the scribes and Pharisees and elders being gathered together one with another . . . came to Pilate, beseeching him and saying, Give us soldiers, that we may guard his sepulchre for three days, lest his disciples come and steal him away. . . . And with them came elders and scribes to the sepulchre, and having rolled a great stone together with the centurion and the soldiers, they all together who were there set it at the door of the sepulchre; and they affixed seven seals . . . and guarded it. And early in the morning as the sabbath was drawing [dawning], there came a multitude from Jerusalem and the region round about, that they might see the sepulchre that was sealed.

"And in the night in which the Lord's day was drawing on . . . the tomb was opened" — and Jesus was already risen — He was not there (from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 10, pages 7-8).

Notice! Between the crucifixion and the Sabbath, the disciples and Peter are said to have fasted "night and day until the Sabbath." This alone is a candid admission that the crucifixion was not on Good Friday! It was decades later before the idea of a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday morning resurrection was widely believed.

The apostle Paul called Jesus Christ our Passover (I Cor. 5:7). According to the gospel records, Jesus was crucified on the Passover day — Abib (or Nisan) 14

— immediately before the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Which day was the Passover?

On the eve of that 14th of Abib, after sunset, Jesus instituted the New Testament Passover. By custom that day was also a day on which all leaven was finally removed and only unleavened bread was to be seen in the homes (Luke 22:7-8). See also John 18:28 as proof that day was Passover, Nisan 14.

The Jews and Jesus and the apostles agreed as to which day it was. There is no question about the date. But how did the Jews know which day it was? How did Jesus and the apostles know that this was the Passover day as God had appointed it?

By God's calendar, of course! The Passover was the 14th day of the first month according to the sacred calendar used by Jesus and the Jews. By that calendar we can know precisely which day the Passover was in the year of the crucifixion!

Jews kept God's calendar

It is the Jews to whom God committed His revelations or oracles. Paul declared: "What advantage then has the Jew? . . . Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1-2). The oracles of God included the Old Testament Scriptures, the knowledge of the week and of the sacred calendar.

The Jews preserved for the world the knowledge of which day the seventh day of the week is. Without a knowledge of when a week begins and ends, we could never have told from the Bible alone which day the seventh day actually is. No nation preserved the week properly until they learned it from the Jews!

And in the same way the Jews have preserved God's calendar. "But," you ask, "what if some Jews did not believe in the oracles of God — including the sacred calendar — that were committed to them? Did they lose them or corrupt them?" The Bible gives

LETTERS

"Mothers and Homemakers"

A thousand thank-yous to God for inspiring K. Neil Earle to write the article in the October-November issue of *The Good News* entitled "Mothers and Homemakers — Biblical Heroines!"

The world is constantly bombarding women with all sorts of propaganda to make them feel unfulfilled as "just a housewife." There have been times when I've found myself believing that propaganda. Thank you for putting me back on track. I'm going to file this article under "encouragement."

Patty Hanson
St. Petersburg, Fla.

I am a young woman (24) contemplating either having a career or trade and staying single, or being a wife and mother. This has been a very hard thing for me. I read the want ads and requirements for various trades I find interesting. Always, I lack the qualifications.

When I read Mr. Earle's article, however, it was another story! Going through it, I thought: I do that; I could do that; a few more steps and I'll have that! Was I happy? Yes!

This is the first place I have seen a clear, concise, positive (not lukewarm) job description of mother and homemaker. And I can qualify.

Also, thank you for pointing out that it is a birthright. I never looked at it from that angle before.

Wendy Steenman
Nanaimo, B.C.

What an inspiring article! It makes you want to work that much harder to be

a better mother and teacher for our children, who will soon be not only kings but Gods. Just like Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, we, too, are to be mothers and teachers of potential Gods! Thank you for your encouragement on a job that is put down by the world!

Mrs. Lynn Bickel
Brighton, Colo.

Article saved their marriage

Your two-part article "Five Ways to Love Your Mate" (May, June-July) saved our marriage. On a scale of 1 to 10, our marriage was a -2. My husband said he was afraid to come home from work for fear I'd be gone. I assured him I wouldn't leave. I did want very badly to work things out, but how?

Then *The Good News* arrived with Earl Williams' very timely article. I am still thanking God for inspiring that article. It was such a shocking revelation to find that I never knew — never had known — what real love is.

The fact that we are in control and choose to love or not to was such a jolt. The scales fell from my eyes and I saw the truth — clear and beautiful truth. This was the key to the problem. I wasn't accepting my husband as he was. I repented immediately and asked God's help.

It has been a miracle! The change was immediate, and we continue to grow stronger in our love and commitment to each other. Thank you so much for teaching us about *agape*. Not only can we love our mates better, but our children, too — in fact, all people.

Several months later the article was an

excellent teaching tool. Our daughter wanted to read romance novels — the very kind the article mentions about love enslaving and controlling the person. I showed my daughter the article and we discussed it.

Praise and thanks to God for *The Good News*. I am so grateful to you.

A happy wife and mother
Denver, Colo.

Christmas

I enjoyed reading "Christmas — Questions We Are Asked" in the October-November *Good News*, even though I believe the exact opposite of you.

I know it is true that we have no record of the birth of Jesus. Because we have no correct date of His birthday, I see no harm in picking a day to honor the Lord's birth, and what is wrong with Dec. 25?

And, honestly, what is wrong with exchanging gifts on this day? To me this shows sincere love between friends and loved ones. After all, it is an old habit and most people would rather keep it. As for myself, I will not deprive my children and other little ones of this one great joy of life as they look forward to Christmas each year.

As I read the Bible I become aware that gifts were given to baby Jesus at His birth, whenever that was. This gives me the assurance that it is all right to give gifts as long as we remember the true purpose of giving. Without a doubt, my family and I will continue with this celebration of Christmas.

Willard McDonald
Ashland, Ala.

us the answer plainly in verses 3 and 4: "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar."

If the Jews did not believe in what God committed to them — even if they lie about God's truth — they must preserve them or God has failed to be God!

If the Jews have not preserved the sacred calendar since the crucifixion, then Christians would not know when to observe the Passover annually, or any of the other Holy Days of God commanded for New Testament

times (I Cor. 5:8, 16:8, Acts 18:21, 20:6).

For proof that the Passover is to be observed annually, not several times each year, write for our free booklet *How Often Should We Partake of the Lord's Supper?* And for more information on God's other commanded Holy Days, request our free booklet *Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which?*

God has required the Jews to preserve His sacred calendar!

Even the great Jewish calendar expert Maimonides, who lived centuries ago, declared that the Jews preserved the calendar "transmitted by the Sages from

one generation to another on the authority of Moses, our Teacher . . . on the basis of calculation" (from *Sanctification of the New Moon*, chapter 18, 7).

Only two matters are needed to prove when the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred. One is to determine the calendar dates of the Passover during the years of Christ's ministry. The other is to determine the exact year of the crucifixion.

Next month we will see the historical and calendrical proofs that the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition is a fable that denies Jesus to be the Savior! □

(To be continued)

God's Plan

(Continued from page 6)

more than ever before in my life, far out of proportion to the pay raises.

4) A free return trip (at the firm's expense) to my distant hometown, where I spent the most wonderful time ever with my parents.

5) Was given a watch, a calculator and a good jacket, hardly worn, by my employer.

6) On top of this, I have made breakthroughs in overcoming and have a greater sense of direction in life.

I am so thankful to God for blessing one so unworthy.

New Zealand

Would you like to hear another story of third tithe year blessings? Since last fall my husband has received a 15 percent salary increase plus 15 percent of the previous year's salary in a bonus. In our last third tithe year he received a 33 percent increase in salary. However, this year's income, including the bonus, should be approximately 320 percent above our last third tithe year.

Truly, God does bless us, and one cannot ever outgive Him. And of course the spiritual blessings, the peace of mind, the knowledge of where world events are really going, etc., are even more important than the physical.

Our third tithe year is now ending, and with the blessings God has given us, it is with a certain amount of regret on our part! We sincerely hope that those who pick up the torch for this next year will be as blessed as we have been.

Oklahoma

The previous writer commented that one cannot ever outgive God. And it's true! Notice these remarks:

We started this, our fourth "third tithe" year, with great anticipation because in times

past we have had it amply proven that you truly can't outgive God! In addition to that, though, is the genuinely great feeling of helping people through this great system God has set up.

This is only the start of our sixth month in this third tithe year and we have had our rent lowered by \$50 per month. In December we received a gift of several hundred dollars from my husband's employer. My husband has received a large increase in his car allowance (when many are losing their car allowances) and he received an increase in salary (when many are out of a job)! Our income tax return appears to be sizable. So by the end of this year, it is entirely possible that God will have returned most, if not all, of the third tithe we have sent in.

We are certain that we receive a miracle at the grocery store each week as well. I carefully make my grocery list, pricing each item, and try to stay within it. These are the same foods we buy every year, and although my grocery money has been decreased, we always seem to have some money left over.

The blessings I have listed above are only financial ones. There is no possible way to evaluate the spiritual blessings and miracles that occur in our lives each day. We hope and pray that all God's people will stand still and look for the blessings God is pouring out upon us. What a sad thing it is to miss a miracle or an answered prayer.

Canada

Truly we cannot outgive God. How He really loves and blesses the cheerful giver! This I have proven when I began to give an additional 10 percent of my income. God's blessings in healing us, giving us peace, protection against our foes, happiness in our home — these are beyond material valuation. Besides,

our income has soared to such a tremendous increase that in one month alone it was equal to my previous one and a half years' income!"

Philippines

Even prior to my third tithe year finishing, God has blessed me greatly. Who says the payment of third tithe does not reap blessings? Most probably those who endeavor to disprove the doctrine or falsely assume they cannot afford to pay it!

Australia

It takes faith to trust and obey God, but when one does walk by faith, God opens the windows of heaven in unexpected ways, just as He promises in Malachi 3:10: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and prove Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.' "

Blessings may not come immediately, but they will come at the proper time to the faithful. And they may not always be financial blessings, but could include many other, even spiritual, ways. Truly, it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Now here are some letters from those who have been the recipients of this generosity. Here is one from a widow who has been assisted for several years:

In this letter I would like to let those who may not fully understand third tithe know what it is used for and who gets the benefit of it.

I know firsthand. I have been a disabled widow for nine years, and have been a recipient of third tithe assistance for a long time. For two and a half years, until I began receiving my widow's pension, God's Church supported me totally. Know of any other church that would do that? I don't, either!

The check I now receive

each month arrives exactly the day it is supposed to and, believe me, it helps!

I've never written about this before. Not many even know about it, but I suddenly began to feel maybe I should write and tell people that even though third tithe years can be hard, the money is a great blessing to people like me! We don't hear about the third tithe too often, so I thought if people understood it from the point of view of a recipient, the sending might be a little easier.

Thank you for obeying our Father and being faithful, and I thank Him for calling me and providing for me.

Ohio

Third tithe helped these widows and their children through times of serious need:

I just had to write in and thank all who have helped to support those of us who have been blessed to receive help from the third tithe fund. Were it not for your continued assistance, the children and I would have had to live at a much lower standard, without a lot of the basic necessities.

After being a widow, I was grateful to be able to stay home and rear my children without having to work full time. That would not have been possible without help.

We are at a point now where we are able to do without the financial assistance from the third tithe fund and ask that you remove our names from the list of third tithe recipients. Thank you from our hearts for the care and generosity that you all have shown to us. We are glad to share in that kindness by sending in our third tithe as our third tithe years come around. Thank God for showing us that His way of giving and sharing really works.

Texas

Thank you for the third tithe assistance that I have been

receiving. Until one is in a position of absolute need, you don't realize why God set this program in operation. I know God will bless those who are faithful with this tithe; one day they will know just how and why it was necessary to pay it, besides the obedience factor. From my three daughters and myself, thank you again.

Australia

God's way — God's government — works! Here's proof:

Here is a money order to be used as first tithe. This is my proof that I do stand by you 100 percent. This money is very special to me. To be able to give it is a miracle. The past two years have been a living hell for my children and myself because of a divorce between my husband and myself. During this time we were brought very low.

Following God's teachings, you have a system which takes care of widows and orphans. Through this I have been able to get Church assistance for one year now. During this year I prayed for God to give me a chance to give instead of take. He has now given me that chance. He has made it possible for me to completely get off of Church assistance. God's government does work! Thank you so much.

West Virginia

There you have it — modern examples of how this law, given to God's people so long ago, is still put into practice by God's Church in the 20th century.

This article is not intended to be comprehensive. Administrative needs vary from country to country. Please write to us if you have questions.

Today this need is still provided by God's Church. Conditions have changed, which makes necessary some changes in how the plan is administered in today's world. Thank God for His plan to take care of this need! □

Churchgoers

(Continued from page 1)

heard that Adam was the first man, and that he sinned and "fell" — whatever that meant. As a result I vaguely conceived that life was like a one-way trip on a train. Because of Adam, the switch in the track at the end of the line is thrown to shoot us all down to hell. So I knew we needed to "get saved," although I had been taught that I had a "birthright membership" in the church, so I guessed I probably was already "saved" — I never worried about it.

When one is "saved," the switch in the track is then thrown so that, when he gets to the end of the line he will be shot instantly up to heaven, "to be with the Lord" in mansions above, "over the river" or "on the other shore," wherever all that was. Anyway, it was "up yonder" and when they called the roll, I was going to be there.

And what was my idea of GOD — and of Christ — and of the devil? Well, God was One to fear and be appeased, in a way — and yet, if we pleased Him, He could make things break our way for us. If we faced a frightful tragedy and possible death, crying out to Him might save us. But generally, I think I rather took it for granted that God didn't want us to be happy or enjoy life — He certainly frowned on all worldly pleasures. Christ, however, was more kind and loving — He was our Savior.

Above all, neither God nor Christ were REAL to me — they were in reality "far off."

Now these were not definite, concrete beliefs or deep-rooted convictions. They were just ethereal, vague assumptions. I never gave them deep or specific thought. I just took them for granted, supposing everybody believed these things. My mind was focused on the material interests of the moment — things closer to hand.

As I said, religion was for Sunday. It had no relation to or con-

nection with the rest of life as a whole — my school, fun, play, hobbies and, as I grew older, business, philosophy and beliefs.

What a “Bible Christian” is like

Years later my wife and I became acquainted with a woman who, in some ways, was rather peculiar.

This woman really *had* a religion. She read and studied the Bible every day. She seemed to *understand* it! She had definite beliefs and convictions, and she said the SOURCE of all of them was *not* anything she had heard at church, but what she read in the Bible. She said the Bible carried *authority*, and was the only source of knowing the TRUTH.

She actually studied the Bible to learn *how to live* — not just on Sunday, but *every day!* Actually, this woman was HAPPY in her religion. She prayed a great deal, and she seemed to really *know* God and to be on personal terms with Him!

She was, judged by customary standards of the general public that attends church but has little conception of what one’s church actually does believe, a peculiar woman. She didn’t believe any of those major beliefs I had always heard in church: being an immortal soul, going to heaven or hell when one dies and, strangely, she did not observe Sunday or Christmas or New Year’s or Easter or Valentine’s Day or Halloween. She said none of these ideas are taught in the Bible.

This woman was a “Bible Christian.” The SOURCE from which she got what she believed was the Bible.

This woman asked my wife, one day before I had met her, to open her Bible and read a certain passage. Then she asked my wife to turn to another passage and read it — then another, and another. After reading several of these passages, my wife, in astonishment, exclaimed: “Why, this is not what I’ve always been taught. I’ve always heard and believed *just the opposite* of what it says here in the Bible!” My wife

thereupon *believed* what she read in the Bible — and that *changed her religious belief*. To me, she had become a religious fanatic. I was angered, furious. Argument did no good. She had all the answers — and right out of the Bible. This was the incident that challenged and angered me into the first real study of the Bible of all my life.

I said: “You can’t tell me that all these churches are wrong. I know they get what they believe out of the Bible!” So I devoted six months to intensive, almost night-and-day research and study to try to find, *in the Bible*, what I had been taught in church.

I, too, was astounded to find just the opposite.

I obtained the literature of churches supporting their beliefs. I searched the commentaries, the lexicons, the Bible encyclopedias. I searched out the arguments of higher criticism on these points. I tried my best to overthrow my wife’s new Bible beliefs — but they definitely were in the Bible.

I studied evolution, almost doubted the existence of God, researched science and philosophy, and *PROVED* that the all-intelligent personal Creator God does exist. Then I put the Bible to the test and, by several infallible proofs, *PROVED* it to be the revelation of God to mankind, carrying final AUTHORITY.

At last, once I swallowed my pride, admitted defeat, was humbled, had repented and accepted the Christ of the Bible — a different Christ than I had previously pictured — I had found the true SOURCE for belief.

What a difference there is between professed “Christians” who are churchgoers and a true BIBLE Christian! I *know* that difference because I have been both!

Regardless of whether one has been *angered* into an honest study of the Bible, as I was, or whether he has never been to church or heard anything else in the first place, or WHY he looks into the Bible for himself, he will find the same thing there that I

found — *if* he is honest. A person who is born and reared on a far-away, uninhabited island in mid-ocean, having never heard *any* religious belief, if he had a Bible and was able to read, would be a total stranger to many of these things I was taught in church — he would see, in the Bible, just what everybody else does who looks into it *honestly*.

What’s wrong, then? When today’s “enlightened” clergy and its theological seminaries where young ministers are educated spend more time trying to determine how much of the Bible they wish to classify as myth and how little as truth — when only 1 percent of theological students, by actual survey, believe in any “Second Coming” of Christ that is stated and affirmed repeatedly in the Bible — when theologians and the clergy “interpret” the Bible to mean the very opposite of what it plainly says, in order to pretend that it supports their pagan teachings — then you may *know* what is wrong.

If you will read Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 13 and 34, which are prophecies of conditions *now*, in our day — and Christ’s statement of Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 24 of the false preachers that would deceive the MANY — and the many statements in the Bible that the whole world would be deceived — you will begin to understand.

It is, indeed, hard for one born, reared and steeped in this world’s education, religion, customs and ways, to realize that this is *not* God’s world, but Satan’s. It comes as a jarring *shock!* I know. I’ve experienced it!

The Bible ought never to be interpreted. It means what it says, and it says what it means. Taken as it *is*, it *makes sense*.

Don’t be a spiritual coward. Look into it *for yourself*. It’s full of surprises — it’s full of TRUTH — it’s full of the way to a positive peace of mind, to happiness, to prosperity, abundant living here and now and to salvation in joyous eternal life — FOREVER!

God’s world is soon coming — the peaceful, happy WORLD TOMORROW! □

A Reader Asks: **‘Which Is My God, Then?’**

Today, scores of different religions revere hundreds of different gods. But who and what is God? How can you know whether you worship the real God?

By Leslie L. McCullough

“Which God do you worship?”

The question sounds absurd. To Western minds, God is the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible.

However, the Judeo-Christian God isn't acknowledged as the Supreme Being by the vast majority of mankind. Much more of humanity don't accept the Judeo-Christian belief than do.

Consider this quote from a letter sent to one of our offices:

I am not a Christian. I have heard about your God and the gods of other religions, but I'm confused. Which is the right one? I couldn't care less for some time.

Recently a friend of mine showed me a booklet of yours. I was very much astonished by its content and it also made me feel the importance of religion in my life. Which is my God, then?

“Which is my God, then?” It's a good question. The writer states plainly, “I am not a Christian.” He does not believe in the Christian God. Consider: Since the writer is Asian, should he be worshipping Buddha, one of the Hindu deities or possibly Allah? Does the Christian God understand or

even care about the peoples of the East or is He only the God of the Occidental peoples?

Non-Christian, non-Jews outnumber Christians and Jews by 3 to 2 in the world today. For some of this huge melange of people, God is a many-armed idol. For others, He is represented by their dead ancestors. To still others, He is a great, fat-bellied Buddha or simply a rock or tree.

Our letter writer may have been taught about Buddha, Confucius or the Hindu deities, all of which are revered in his part of the world. He has obviously heard of the God of the Bible and is confused. His plaintive, “Which is my God, then?” could be echoed by millions. How should it be answered?

The unknown God

To begin, let's step back to the time when Christianity was new. The knowledge of Jesus was a new message to everyone then.

It was not welcome knowledge for most. There were many gods already available to be worshiped. The people of the time were content with their gods. Still, being intelligent and curious, they were willing to hear of other ideas, philosophies and gods.

During one of his journeys, the apostle Paul arrived in Athens,

capital of ancient Greece and the home of many intellectuals and philosophers of the day. Paul's preaching came to the attention of some of the leaders of Greek thought and, being interested in new ideas, they invited him to discuss his with them.

“As I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship,” Paul told them, “I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22-23).

The Authorized Version renders “without knowing” as “ignorantly.” Is it possible for intelligent, broad-minded people to be ignorant when it comes to the worship of God? Those who have not been taught about God are by definition ignorant.

What about those who think they know God, but still don't know Him? They are ignorant even of their ignorance. They don't know what they don't know! Isaiah 44:15-17 contains a message for both types of people — the professing Christian of today and the non-Christian. The prophet paints a picture to show just how foolish the worship of false gods is.

When it is all said and done,

the object worshiped is the product of one's own mind and talents. What a pitiful travesty! To bow down before something of one's own creation while the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God of the universe looks on.

Paul, in his address to the Athenians (Acts 17:24-29), explained that God, the God of the Bible, created all the universe and gave life to man and all things. He is not to be found in a tree, a rock or an idol, but is the Lord of the heaven and earth.

Today, as in Paul's day, most of mankind is totally ignorant of the true God. And, surprisingly enough, even if you grew up in a nation that commonly acknowledges the Judeo-Christian God, you may be more ignorant of God than you would like to admit.

Proving God

One of the proofs of God's existence is that He tells what will happen and then brings it to pass (Isa. 46:9-10). God issues a challenge to all who would call themselves God or profess to know other gods:

“‘Present your case,’ says the Lord, ‘Bring forth your strong reasons,’ says the King of Jacob. ‘Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see it together’” (Isa. 41:21-22).

God is the Creator, the lifegiver and the one who brings to pass those things He has foretold. He establishes a test and offers, as proof of His powers, the ability to foretell an event and then cause it to come about.

In the book of Isaiah, we read of just one example of a prophecy God made and then caused to be fulfilled: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14).

God has met His own test. His-

tory attests to the fulfilling of that prophecy. Jesus Christ of Nazareth was born of a virgin. He lived a perfect, sinless life and was killed without cause, just as prophesied in Isaiah 53. God foretold the manner of both the birth and death of Jesus Christ hundreds of years before the events, and brought it all to pass.

The Father of all humanity

During His ministry, Jesus began to open the minds of all men to the knowledge of their God. Jesus revealed God not just as the God of the Jews, but as the Father of all humanity. He is the God of all nations and races. He understands all mankind because He created mankind and all things through His Son Jesus Christ.

All humanity, including the Jews, were ignorant of the Father until Jesus began to teach and reveal Him. With that in mind, perhaps we can better understand why so few today really know God. It isn't so strange when we realize that the true knowledge of God has been extremely limited down through the history of man. Jesus has to reveal the Father to us or we can't know Him (Luke 10:22). Jesus did reveal the Father to His disciples.

God created, through His Son Jesus, the universe and everything it contains. He is the Father of all humans, regardless of their background or race. He thoroughly understands and deeply loves all human beings to the extent that He allowed His only Son to die the most miserable death known at that time, so that humans could be forgiven their sins and be brought to the Father.

How to know God

A few years before Paul's ministry, another early Christian, Philip, answered a cry similar to the one in the letter quoted above.

In Acts 8:27-31, the treasurer of Ethiopia, a non-Christian, was beginning to make inquiry concerning God. In this case, he happened to be reading one of the

scrolls of the Old Testament, the book of Isaiah. Philip was led to him and said, “‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.”

This man recognized his ignorance and the need for someone to teach him. He was in need of direction, just like the writer of the letter at the beginning of this article. In an effort to learn of God, he was reading the book of Isaiah. Philip began to expound the passage, teaching the Ethiopian about Jesus from the Old Testament. Finally, the Ethiopian asked if he could be baptized:

“Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him” (verses 37-38).

God reveals Himself through the Holy Bible, His written Word. Everyone, in order to know and understand the true God, must be taught about Him.

Just as the apostles Philip and Paul taught non-Christians about the true God, someone needs to teach our letter writer mentioned before and the overwhelming majority of mankind about Him.

To believe, as the Ethiopian did, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God implies an understanding of many things that even the average professing Christian doesn't understand about Jesus. To believe these things, you must come to know Jesus Christ — how He thinks, how He acts, how He worshiped the Father when He Himself was on earth as a human being.

In doing so — in developing an awareness of the mind of God — you will also come to understand the fantastic purpose He had in creating mankind. For more information on God's purpose in your life, write for our free booklets *Does God Exist?* and *Your Awesome Future — How Religion Deceives You*. □

Admit Your Mistakes

“I was wrong.” These could well be the most difficult words you will ever say!

Can you pronounce these words? Do you admit your mistakes? Are you in the habit of acknowledging your errors and correcting them?

Or do you try at all costs to make yourself appear right and make everyone else, perhaps even Jesus Christ Himself, wrong, so that you may maintain your own “rightness”?

This is an important question — your Christian growth depends on it, and so may your very salvation!

God’s people all make mistakes from time to time. They all sin and err in judgment occasionally. By the very fact of their humanness, they are prone to stumble.

But that’s what the process of conversion is all about. Christians are striving to overcome their human nature and bring their lives into harmony with God’s commandments in every way. Spiritual growth results from acknowledging sins and faults, confessing them before God and turning from them.

God’s true servants are distinguished from the false not by being without fault, but because they admit their faults and repent of them. The others refuse to admit mistakes, and in doing so resist the Spirit of God and miss their opportunities for great Christian growth.

In which group are you?

Two kings

The prophet Samuel was called to anoint two notable men as

kings over Israel. Both these men were given every opportunity to succeed. God was with both of them when they were first appointed king.

Yet one ended up rejected, a failure, eventually even stooping to consulting demons about major decisions. The other is called a “man after God’s own heart,” and will rule as king over Israel in the world tomorrow.

Why? What was the difference between these two men? Much could be written about the differences in character between Saul and David. One major factor stands out, however: King Saul did not truly repent. His acknowledgments of errors and sins were shallow and insincere. On the other hand, the Bible records David’s deep, heartrending prayers of genuine repentance as examples for us.

“God is with you,” Saul was told emphatically (I Sam. 10:7). Saul really couldn’t have hoped for a better start, could he? Yet in the matter of Amalek, Saul made a serious mistake.

God’s instructions were explicit enough: “Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (I Sam. 15:3).

Yet Saul compromised with God’s instructions, fulfilling only part of them. Notice: “He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy

them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed” (verses 8-9).

Notice that God’s Word puts the blame on Saul *and* the people, not on the people alone. Yet when confronted by Samuel, Saul declared, “*The people* spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God” (verse 15).

What a classic case of buck-passing! “I didn’t do it — it was the people’s fault!”

Putting the blame on others is a common trait in this world. Yet if Saul had been a “man after God’s own heart,” he would have accepted responsibility for his own sin.

Even when confronted and rebuked by Samuel, Saul’s confession appears flimsy. “I have sinned,” he admitted, “yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God” (verse 30).

Saul’s major concern was not the gravity of his sin, but his image before the elders and the people. What a contrast with David’s deep, yearning, heartrending prayers of repentance, as he acknowledged his sins!

What, then, of David, this “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22)? Was he without sin? No, he sinned and made mistakes, certain of which are recorded in the Bible for us today. In this he didn’t differ from Saul, his predecessor. But David’s willingness to admit his mistakes, deeply and genuinely repent of them and turn from them distinguished him from Saul in a great way.

On one occasion, King David

allowed Satan to influence him to take a census of the people of Israel. What happened? "And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel" (I Chron. 21:7).

This was such a serious sin in God's sight that 70,000 Israelite men died as a result of the pestilence God brought on the land (verse 14)! Immediately after this phase of the punishment, the angel of God stood ready to destroy throughout the land.

Now let's notice David's reaction at this point: "And David said to God, 'Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O Lord my God, be against me and my father's house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued'" (verse 17).

David took the blame squarely on his own shoulders. This showed real character. What would you have done?

A sin repented of

How readily we all call to mind David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba! In all its detail, we recall how David took Bathsheba and committed adultery with her (II Sam. 11:2, 4). To make matters worse, David then engineered the murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, who, by all indications, was a righteous and loyal man, faithful to God and to his king (verses 9-11, 14-15).

The sin of adultery was in itself a direct violation of one of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:14). The murder of a righteous man compounded the sin (verse 13).

But how readily do we remember David's sincere, overwhelming, wholehearted repentance? David wrote, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me" (Ps. 32:3-4).

Maybe you have had this experience — perhaps you are going through it right now. David was aware of his sin, yet for a period

of time failed to take it to God, confess it and truly repent of it.

Finally, however, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (verse 5).

Admitting sin is the first step. We can't expect God to forgive us for sins we haven't confessed. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Then — and only then — can we declare with David: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity" (Ps. 32:1-2).

The beautiful 51st Psalm is eternal witness to what made David a man after God's own heart. It is a fitting outline of how to truly repent before God when we sin and stumble. Try reading it on your knees before the Almighty and making it your personal prayer of repentance.

A false apostle — and a true one

The New Testament tells of a man who tried to purchase an apostleship in God's Church. Simon Magus, who held great sway over the people of Samaria because of his sorceries (Acts 8:9-11), selfishly and ignorantly tried to buy the power to grant the Holy Spirit (verse 19).

Rebuked by God's servants, Simon asked for forgiveness, but showed no sign of admitting his sin: "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me" (verse 24).

When we ask for cheap grace, without admitting our errors, we are simply following in the footsteps of one of the first and most influential heretics of the New Testament!

Unlike this false apostle of the first century, Jesus' true apostle of the 20th century, Herbert W. Armstrong, does not hesitate to admit error and change when wrong is discovered. Mr. Arm-

strong has written: "It seems almost no one will confess it when he sins, let alone repent and turn away from continuing in the particular sin. Even admitting an error or an unintended wrong goes against human nature. Yet a child of God must do it . . . When God brought me to repentance, it was like that. I say to others, 'Come on in — the water's fine!' It has never been so hard, since, to admit wrong, or confess even sins to God. I have had to admit error more than once."

This willingness to admit one's mistakes is not a negative characteristic, but rather a positive qualification absolutely required of those who seek to serve Jesus Christ. We must respect those who admit their mistakes, rather than denigrate them for errors. Would that all of us could fully demonstrate this righteous willingness to confess errors! How many of us still refuse to admit when we are wrong?

Admitting mistakes yields growth

For a child of God, the entire process of admitting errors, turning from them and correcting them yields spiritual growth. None of us will succeed in going through life without making mistakes, for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). When we sin, we must be corrected: "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous" (Heb. 12:11). But notice! "Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Admitting error — accepting correction — is growth!

This is a life-or-death matter! We will never be in the Kingdom of God unless we admit our mistakes, for "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Follow in the footsteps of the men and women after God's own heart. Admit your mistakes, turn from them, grow and qualify for God's Kingdom! □

COMING

IN THE GOOD NEWS

◆ **An Important Reminder —
How Leaven Pictures Sin**

The Days of Unleavened Bread offer vital lessons for Christians. What do these days picture?

◆ **Don't Let Envy Color Your Thoughts!**

Envy has been around since the beginning of human experience. If you turn "green" with envy at the success of others, you should consider these points.

◆ **Principles of Healthful Living**

Natural laws govern the physical world. Health and happiness result from cooperating with those laws, while disharmony with them produces sickness.

◆ **Forgiving Isn't Easy, But It IS Required**

"I'll never forgive nor forget what they did to me." This saying reflects the deep hurts of life. But God requires Christians to forgive evils done to them.

◆ **Make These Your Golden Years!**

God's viewpoint is much different from that of the youth-oriented society in which we live. As an older Christian, you have a special calling.
