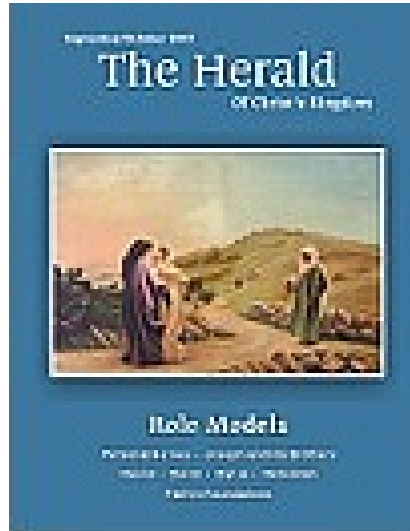


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In the Beginning Role Models

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.—2 Timothy 1:5

As Timothy's mother and grandmother provided the examples of unfeigned faith to the young protégé of the apostle Paul, so each of us have patterned our lives to some extent after various individuals who were our personal heroes. We all need role models. We often base our lives more on the observation of others than from what we read in books.

The highest role model of course is God himself, but our knowledge of him is only founded in part on what we absorb of him through that which is written about him. Of equal or greater importance is the example of Jesus who was "God manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). Thus he says of himself, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

While we are surrounded in our daily lives by others whose conduct we not only admire, but also seek to emulate, some of our most helpful role models come from the pages of the Old Testament.

In this issue we will consider the examples provided by a few of these. The experiences of Joseph, Naomi, David, Cyrus, and Nehemiah are probed in individual articles. In addition, an extensive catalog of “heroes of faith” is examined in a verse-by-verse study of the impressive list of examples provided in Hebrews 11.

The lives of all of these faithful men and women provide wonderful examples for us. In these brief sketches we see respective patterns of forgiveness, love, repentance, and leadership, as well as a typical portrayal of the work of Jesus by a Gentile monarch.

As our lives progress, we find that we not only continue to learn from role models but our lives in turn provide ideals for others to follow. As one has well said, “We are the only Bible that many will ever read.” Another has observed, “I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day.”

May we each benefit from those around us who serve the function of role models and from the biographies of those who have gone before. And may we each also strive to serve in this capacity to others.

The Function of Role Models

Our Personal Heroes

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.—James 5:10

Carl Hagensick

We all have personal heroes or role models. They have helped shape our lives. We have used their examples to assist in defining who we are. Their role may have shifted from person to person over time, but they served as ideals and their lives provided goals for ours.

The late president John Kennedy wrote *Profiles of Courage* to provide examples of valor in the political spectrum. The Bible contains a vast compendium of role models in the spiritual sphere—individuals of faith, of patience, of spiritual dedication, of constancy, of prayer, of all the virtues that go into the make-up of a righteous life.

Even role models have role models. The apostle Paul, perhaps giving us the highest standard of selfless devotion in his tireless spread of the gospel, refers to an unknown sister as his spiritual “mother.” “Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine” (Romans 16:13).

We may well speculate that she was the wife of Simon, the Cyrenian who carried Jesus’ cross (Mark 15:21) and that at some point in Paul’s earlier days she had left an indelible impression on his mind. Are there not those that each of us have met in the first days of our Christian walk who have turned our feet in the right direction on the paths of righteousness?

Ezekiel’s Role Models

The cryptic prophet of the Babylonian captivity had his heroes as well. He mentions three of these in Ezekiel 14:14,20: Noah, Daniel, and Job. Each of these was an example to him of a faithfulness that was accompanied by the courage to stand alone for God and his commands.

Noah had the faith to not only build an ark before the times when rains had ever threatened the earth with overflowing rivers, but to continue preaching righteousness for 120 years despite the fact that no one but his own family heeded his message (2 Peter 2:5).

Daniel, still a young man at the time of Ezekiel’s prophecies, maintained fidelity to - Jehovah despite his meteoric rise to the highest positions of power in the pagan Babylonian empire. His later courage in proclaiming the fall of that empire to the

invading Medo-Persians directly to king Belshazzar demonstrated the accuracy of Ezekiel's evaluation of this paragon of piety.

Job, despite undergoing the greatest tribulations at the hand of the strongest of adversaries, not only refused to "curse God and die," but also withstood the fallacious arguments of the three well-meaning friends who had come to comfort him and failed so miserably with their misconceptions of God.

Earliest Role Models

Usually our first role models are our parents. We look to them for guidance and often view their lives as the pattern for our own behavior. The parent's relationship to each other and their actions as parents often form the template for our own behavior in those same roles in later life.

The apostle Paul saw these influences in Timothy, a young Christian he mentored, when he wrote of the youth's faithfulness: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1:5). We know little of these two women but they will live in lasting memory for the salutary effect their lives had on Timothy.

A mother's loving interest in her child has a profound influence on his future life. Even when unheeded in early life, it is frequently called to memory in life's declining years. Bathsheba, as the mother of Solomon, may furnish an example of such loving concern for a somewhat wayward son.

The last chapter of Proverbs is ascribed to one King Lemuel, a name that Professor Strong and others consider a pen-name for Solomon (see Strong's 3927). It is a "prophecy that his mother taught him" (Proverbs 31:1). The burden of this prophecy is a mother's concern for two temptations which would face her son (wine, verses 4-7; and the choice of a wife, verses 10-31). It may also be that the first six chapters of Proverbs were written by his mother for they are proverbs addressed **to** Solomon by one who calls him "my son" (Proverbs 2:1). It is in these passages that he is given the advice to pursue true wisdom and value it as "silver" and "hid treasures" (Proverbs 2:4). It may well have been his mother who sought the services of Nathan, the prophet who denounced the illicit union of David and Bathsheba, to be his tutor (see *Reprints* p. 4286).

This position of parents as role models is encouraged by Paul: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4).

The attached promise that they should "live long on the earth" implies that it was through this strong parent-child bond that the commandments of the Lord should be passed from

generation to generation and that it would be by the keeping of these that the hearer could enjoy extended life.

Fathers are admonished that, in administering this mentoring role, they are not to do it in such a way as to raise resentment and anger by the child, but are to serve as teachers and nurturers of those thus put in their charge.

Later Role Models

As life progresses beyond early childhood, the function of role models often falls to older siblings, friends among a peer group, or stars in the athletic or entertainment worlds. These are generally less trustworthy examples than parents. If they live exemplary lives, they provide proper goals to which a young person may aspire. If, however, their lives do not show virtuous traits, they often lead others astray.

The Bible provides illustrations of each. Jonathan, a noted warrior in his own right, undoubtedly was one of the role models for the young David. His valor in battle as well as his unselfish friendship provided high standards for the young shepherd of Bethlehem. The young Nehemiah had undoubtedly heard of Daniel, who provided a role model for maintaining faithfulness to God and an interest in Jerusalem while serving in the court of an occupying empire.

On the other hand, the ambitious Adonijah perhaps was led astray by his older brother Absalom's duplicitous tactics. The apostle Paul warned of ambitious leaders who sought, by example as well as by word, to "draw away disciples" after themselves (Acts 20:30). He also admonishes older sisters to act as role models for the younger sisters: "The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-5).

Role models are useful to a youth only to the extent that they represent the principles of Christian behavior. Paul lays down the principle concerning himself: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Role Models for Young Adults

The utilization of role models does not stop with the adolescent years. Such examples are profitably used by Christians throughout their lives, but only as they provide proper illustrations of godly conduct.

These should ideally be found among the elders of the flock. The apostle Peter admonishes the elders with these words: "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). In a similar vein we find Paul admonishing his young protégé, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the

believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

While Paul does not say to be an example **to** the believer, but **of** the believer, the two go hand in hand. He delineates some five or six areas of behavior in which an elder should be exemplary:

In word: Not only in the study of the word and preaching thereof, but even more importantly in the control of the tongue that all one’s expressions be to the glory of God and neither self-exalting nor demeaning of others.

In conversation: The Greek word here signifies behavior. A wise man has well noted, “You are the only Bible the world may ever read.” Our conduct speaks louder than any well-spoken words we may utter.

In charity: Not only in the charity of generosity, but in all matters of life love must rule the actions. It is only as life is lived for others that its meaning is manifest to either our self or the beholder.

In spirit: While these words are missing in all the better manuscripts, they nevertheless contain a proper thought that a proper role model will be one who controls his temperament and manifests a mild, meek, and forgiving disposition.

In faith: Faith, in a noble life, will demonstrate a reciprocating faithfulness and will also develop an implicit trust in the total overruling of one’s affairs by a wise and caring heavenly Father.

In purity: The life that would best influence others must conduct itself according to the highest ethical and moral standards.

The Best Role Model

While there are many worthy lives to emulate, there is one that stands out above all others. That is the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

He was the example of humility in the washing of his disciple’s feet: “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15).

He was the example of how to bear suffering and affliction for others: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

His actions were the manifestation of God’s own character (1 Timothy 3:16). He himself testified that the works he did were not his own, but the works of God: “Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of

himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

A Witness to Others

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews contains a litany of faithful witnesses from Old Testament times (see the article “Faith’s Foundations,” p. 27). These form a primary list of role models for a Christian. In chapter twelve the roles are reversed: “Wherefore seeing we **also** are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

The word “also” suggests that as those who witnessed their actions surrounded the worthies of ancient times, so a Christian is surrounded by a great “cloud of witnesses.” It is mandatory, then, that a worthy standard be displayed. The example is that of defeating besetting temptations and running zealously the Christian race course.

Christian lives serve not only as examples to others at the present time, but they will set the standard for the future kingdom age when the lessons of applied obedience in this present evil world will furnish examples for the behavior of resurrected mankind. Then it can be truly said that the most oft-repeated prayer has found its answer: “Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

A Model of Forgiveness

Joseph, a Type of Christ

And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.—Genesis 50:16,17

Robert S. Seklemian
Excerpted from *Joseph and His Brethren*,
Discourses of Robert S. Seklemian.

Joseph typified Jesus. As Joseph was the favorite son and constant companion of Jacob, Jesus was God's beloved son. Of him it is said that he was one brought up with God and daily his delight (Proverbs 8:30). As Jacob sent Joseph to his brethren in Dothan, the heavenly father sent his beloved son to the nation of Israel. As Jesus himself said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). As Joseph's brethren hated him without justification, Jesus said of himself: "They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25). As Joseph's mission to his brethren was not well received but was rejected, so Jesus came unto his own but his own received him not." Also, "He was despised and rejected of men." (Isaiah 53:3)

As Joseph's brethren were cruelly envious of him, we also read in Matthew 27:18 and Mark 15:10 that Jesus was delivered for envy. Joseph's brethren said of Joseph: "Come now, therefore, and let us slay him." In like manner the Jews plotted to kill Jesus, and shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" As Joseph was figuratively killed when cast into the pit by his brethren, Jesus was actually put to death by the Jews. As Joseph was sold in slavery at Judah's suggestion, so was Jesus sold by Judas for silver, thirty pieces of silver being the price of a slave. Faithful Joseph spent three years in prison; our Lord Jesus, notwithstanding his faithfulness, was three days in the prison-house of death. As Pharaoh raised Joseph up from prison to be next to him the ruler of Egypt, Jesus was on the third day delivered from death and raised up to power and great glory, next to Jehovah God on the throne of the universe. Our Lord Jesus said of himself after his resurrection: "All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). As Pharaoh decreed that all should bow down to Joseph and do him honor, so God decreed, "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:23).

In the case of Joseph, disaster, treachery, and shame prepared the way for glory and honor as ruler of Egypt. So with Jesus: his trying experiences proved him loyal to God and led to his exaltation. "[He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Joseph gave bread to all, purchasing for Pharaoh the land and the people. Jesus purchased mankind; during the Millennial age Christ will give life (himself—his merit) to all who desire it. As there was no life for the people except through Joseph as the representative

of Pharaoh, there is no life for anyone in the world except in and through Christ representing the heavenly father. As Joseph's brethren who originally rejected Joseph finally recognized him, the Jewish nation who rejected Jesus and crucified him will, after many humbling experiences and ordeals including "Jacob's Trouble," finally recognize and accept Jesus. Joseph's brethren wept when Joseph revealed himself to them. So also we read: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him" (Zechariah 12:10). As Joseph judged his brethren not according to what they had done to him in the past nor their sins of the past but according to their attitude of heart at the time, so the future judgment of the world will be according to the condition of men's minds and hearts at the time.

Personal Lessons for Us

The story of Joseph was one of the stories my mother used to read to me from her Armenian Bible when I was a small child. I remember vividly how I used to be carried away by its high adventure. As the story unfolded, I imagined myself in every situation of Joseph. I cried when Joseph was cast into the pit and sold as a slave. I wept when his coat was dipped in blood and taken to his father. I alternated between joy and despair as Joseph was in turn favored and degraded. The supreme thrill for me came when Joseph was raised from the dungeon to the rulership of Egypt.

When the story was finished and mother closed her Bible, I sat and mused. I would say to myself: Why couldn't a thing wonderful like that happen to me? Why couldn't God pick me for such care and such an exaltation? I didn't say this complainingly, but wistfully, yearningly; wishing with all my heart that I could be Joseph. Years later when the Lord drew me, the wonderful realization came to me that what happened to Joseph did happen to me. God had indeed selected me and as with Joseph, every incident of my life was noted by God and overruled for my good. I realized that I shall, finally, receive an exaltation to a rulership far greater than that of Egypt.

This is true of each who are consecrated and running for the prize of the high calling. The story of Joseph is the story of your life. As a member of the body of Christ Joseph's experiences represent your experiences.

As Jacob loved Joseph, God loved Jesus. So also it is written of you: "The Father himself loveth you" (John 16:27). As Joseph was hated of his brethren and as the Jews hated - Jesus, Jesus said of you: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

As Joseph was raised up from the dungeon to the throne of Egypt, so was Jesus raised from death to the throne of God. It is written of us: "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Timothy 2:11,12). As the Lord was with Joseph, supervising all his affairs, making everything come out all right, and as the heavenly father was with his son Jesus throughout his earthly ministry and finally glorified him, so we have the assurance "that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). As Joseph's experiences of adversity rightly

exercised him, developing beauty of character, and as Jesus demonstrated his obedience by the things which he suffered, it is written of us: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—1 Peter 4:12,13

As Joseph distributed food to save lives and as Christ will in his kingdom administer the bread of life to all, we as members of his body will share with him in restoring life to all humanity.

There are some intimate and heart searching lessons to be learned also. The first, and one of the principal lessons, is the effect of envy. We should never be envious. It is extremely disruptive and destructive. Under the evil influence of envy, normal people are led to do and say the most outrageous things. As James expresses it: “Where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16). This being true, you may be sure Satan fosters and encourages envy, seeking to disrupt and destroy the church. It is a sad fact that the brethren who are the most widely and effectively used by the Lord arouse the most envy. Let us shun this evil thing. At the slightest sign of it in our hearts, let us earnestly pray for its eradication. Allowed to grow, envy can destroy the new creature.

A Lesson About Pride

Joseph provides a valuable lesson on pride. We read in the account that “the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor” (Genesis 39:21). This fact is expressed several times in the story. Even under adverse conditions he was favored in many ways. Joseph could have permitted these experiences to develop a great deal of personal pride. He might have reasoned to himself that he was merely lucky, or that he was naturally bright, attractive and smart—that this was the secret of his success, that this was the reason his father loved him so much. He might have thought this was the reason that when he was sold as a slave he was bought by a good master, that it was his personal brilliance that caused him to rise to eminence in Potiphar’s house. He could have thought that it was his superior abilities that gave him the authority in prison, that it was his keenness of intellect that enabled him to interpret dreams. He might have thought that all these things made him stand head and shoulders above other men and hence he had earned and deserved his success as a matter of right.

Joseph could have reasoned this way. It would have been quite human to do so. But he reflected the attitude of Jesus whom he prefigured. Jesus gave all the credit to God, saying: “I can of mine own self do nothing” (John 5:30). If Joseph had not taken this attitude, he would not have been exalted, but would have fallen instead. We read, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). So let us ascribe to the Lord every good thing we receive remembering: “Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). Also: “For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge; he putteth down one and setteth up another” (Psalm 75:6,7).

Then there is the lesson of patient endurance. Sometimes when we are serving the Lord and the brethren to the best of our ability and when apparently we have the Lord's blessings and favor upon our affairs in a most marked degree, suddenly trouble may arise and adversities come upon us. The powers of darkness seem to triumph. We seem to be forsaken by divine providence. The Lord seems to have abandoned us. These are Joseph's experiences; Jesus too had such an experience when he cried: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Anyone can have them. When this happens, let us react as did Joseph, with a quiet, persevering faith, doing the best we can from day to day not only waiting, but working and waiting. Remember that Joseph did his best to effect his own deliverance from prison by asking the butler to mention his case to Pharaoh.

But one of the most outstanding and heart-warming lessons of this story is the graciousness with which Joseph forgave his brethren. Seeing his brethren ill at ease when he revealed himself to them, his first and instant reaction was of pity and mercy. He was gracious in his forgiveness. He almost made them believe that they had done him a favor to sell him as a slave to Egypt! Listen to his loving words: "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you, to preserve life ... to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God" (Genesis 45:5,7,8).

Such gracious words! His brethren knew they had been guilty of a great sin, a sin equivalent to murder. Joseph knew it too. But he also knew that the Lord had overruled it for the highest good. So that is the part he mentioned, and only that part. As he talked, the guilty terror left their hearts and for the first time in 23 years their minds were at ease concerning Joseph. Let us, like Joseph, be merciful toward those who sin against us. Let us study to always give the gracious answer using loving words.

Had Joseph been a saint of this Gospel age, begotten of the holy spirit and running for the prize of the high calling with all the revelations and admonitions of the Bible available to him, with a knowledge of the divine plan of the ages revealing the character and purpose of God, his conduct would still be compatible with the very highest type of Christian development. But when we think of the circumstances and conditions under which his character was developed in that heathen land and with but a small revelation of God's character and plan (the Bible not yet written, the law and ordinances not yet given), we are amazed. When we think of this, what manner of persons ought we to be considering our great advantages every way? With all our advantages, would we have proven as noble and generous and gracious as Joseph under the same circumstances and conditions? These are things to ponder.

Does your heart glow when you consider the story of Joseph? Do you live the story? Are you able to identify yourself with Joseph's experiences, sympathizing with him in his difficulties and rejoicing with him in his successes?

Do you think that what Joseph did was good, and right, and Godlike? Does it make you love and praise God the more? If so, this is the finest evidence that you are of the “Joseph” class whom the Lord loves and will exalt.

We thank the heavenly father for the example of Joseph and of our Lord Jesus Christ whom he typified. May we be helped to copy the traits and characteristics illustrated so we too may be worthy of exaltation in due time.

A Story of Love

Naomi, a Loving Mother-in-Law

Naomi said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?—Ruth 3:1

Aaron Marten

When considering the account of Ruth and Naomi, one often looks to Ruth as an example of love and high moral character. Ruth is, after all, the one in the account who leaves behind her homeland, her faith, and everything that she has ever known in the land of Moab so she can become a Jew and journey with Naomi to Judah. Yet with a more careful searching of the Scriptures and looking into the things which God has revealed through his holy word, we can draw lessons from the actions and intents of Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, as well.

The Land of Moab

The account of Naomi begins in the first chapter of Ruth. Famine has come over the land so Naomi, along with her husband, Elimelech and their two sons, flees to Moab seeking relief. The requirement to leave God's people must have been a burden on their hearts. One can only infer that Elimelech and Naomi had the natural interests of their sons in mind. Although this demonstrated love and concern on the part of Naomi for her children, it was not to be in the best spiritual interests of the sons. Naomi's two sons married Moabite women. The Moabites were descendants of Lot; Israel was specifically told to not consider them as children of Abraham and not to intermarry with them.

Even though she was not among her fellow Israelites and her sons did not marry Jewish women, we can infer several things about Naomi's behavior in Moab.

First, we can suppose Naomi did her best to live according to the Jewish Law. That she desired to live among the Jewish people is evidenced by her longing to return to Judah when the famine ended (Ruth 1:6). Her flaw was that she did not trust the Lord to provide, and she failed to endure the just punishments that were brought upon the Israelites for their disobedience and lack of faith.

Second, we can infer how she must have interacted with her family. She must have been extremely close with her sons and daughters-in-law. There was a ten-year period between the death of her husband and the deaths of her two sons when she desired to return to Judah (Ruth 1:5). During this time she must have grown very close to her daughters-in-law as they were the only family with whom she could interact. It is likely that they provided her with comfort in her grief and loving assistance when any was needed.

It was likely during this time that Naomi instructed her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, and witnessed to them of the wonders of the God of Israel. This would explain why both Ruth and Orpah set out with Naomi at the beginning of her journey back to Judah. They must have had a certain fondness both for Naomi and for Jehovah because of what Naomi said. Even if she did not directly witness to her daughters-in-law, certainly her actions and her character must have been apparent. As a good Jew, Naomi would have been careful to cook according to Jewish laws and customs and expect her daughters-in-law to do likewise.

The closeness between Orpah, Ruth, and Naomi can be seen in the emotional pleadings of Naomi that they go back to the land of Moab. Naomi knew that the desire of Ruth and Orpah to find new husbands would be best served in Moab and she wanted them to be happy even at the expense of her own needs. The love between Ruth and Naomi was so strong that Ruth was willing to forsake her land, her beliefs, and her natural family. She pleaded with Naomi saying, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:16,17, NASB).

In Bethlehem

When she returned to her hometown of Bethlehem, Naomi was ashamed of having left - Judah. Realizing that the Lord had punished her for abandoning her people, she desired to change her name from Naomi (derived from “Lovable, pleasant”) to Mara (meaning “bitter”) (Ruth 1:20,21). The sorrow and regret that she felt must have been overwhelming. The flight to Moab eventually resulted in the death of both her husband and her sons.

Even though at that moment Naomi may have felt the Lord had dealt harshly with her, we can be certain she also realized that his apparently harsh dealings had been for her overall benefit. In this we see a beautiful lesson to help us in our walk along the narrow way. We know that we can trust in our loving father to work out all things for our greatest good: “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28, NASB). We can also be assured that his chastisements are permitted and overruled because he loves us and will do everything he can to see that we develop the necessary character to be “more than overcomers” (Romans 8:37).

Naomi and Ruth had returned to Bethlehem at the start of the barley harvest. Just as a natural daughter would do, Ruth asked Naomi for permission to glean in the barley fields. If God had not provided Ruth, Naomi would have been in dire straits. Ruth was willing to stoop down and do laborious work and be maltreated by reapers so she could bring home a little barley to feed Naomi in her old age. Certainly it must have been a humbling experience for Naomi to accept this most generous offer by Ruth. The bonds of love between them must have been incredibly tight. Ruth was laboring out of love for her

mother-in-law, and Naomi was experiencing an overwhelming appreciation and fondness for Ruth because of her daily sacrifices on her behalf.

There is a lesson we can draw from this. We should be humble and willing to let our brethren serve us, especially when we are in need. If there is some assistance that can be provided to us, and the Lord provides a cheerful, willing servant to fulfill this role, we should not deny them this privilege of service. To have the chance to be a servant, there must also be someone who is willing to be served. If we are unable to perform a certain task due to a physical handicap, an ailment, old age, or any other impediment we may face, we should graciously and humbly accept whatever relief is provided to us through the Lord's grace.

Ruth and Boaz

During the time of her labor in the barley fields, Ruth had been working in a field owned by a relative of Naomi whose name was Boaz. Word comes to Boaz of all the things that Ruth has done for Naomi. Ruth's faithfulness to and sacrifice for her mother-in-law are traits favorably looked upon by Boaz. Boaz even invited Ruth to eat with the reapers and instructs them to specifically set aside some barley for Ruth to glean. When Naomi heard of these events from Ruth, she hoped that perhaps something more might come of her daughter-in-law's relationship with Boaz.

Naomi, seeing an opportunity, instructed Ruth to go to Boaz to attract his attention further: "Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, My daughter, shall I not seek security for you that it may be well with you? Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking" (Ruth 3:1-4, NASB).

Yet again Naomi demonstrated her love and concern for Ruth, but she does not take the wisest course of action. Ruth approaching Boaz and lying down at his feet as he slept would have made her appear as having a questionable character. However, by the Lord's overruling providence, everything works out best in the end. Ruth was nervous about following Naomi's instructions, yet she knew that Naomi loved her and would instruct her to do things that would be in Ruth's best interest.

Naomi's Inheritance

Another unnamed relative was closer in natural relation to Naomi than Boaz. To obtain the inheritance for Naomi and marry Ruth, Boaz offers this "nearer kinsman" the opportunity to purchase all that belonged to Elimelech and Naomi. The man declines, probably because he does not want to marry Ruth and "raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (Ruth 4:10).

So Naomi sells the land to Boaz and along with it, the right to marry Ruth. Naomi gave up her right to the land she had once owned with her husband, but by selling it to Boaz, Boaz was able to become the husband of Ruth.

David's "Grandfather"

The account of Naomi and Ruth concludes with the birth of a son to Boaz and Ruth named Obed. He becomes the "father of Jesse, the father of David" (Ruth 4:17) The phrase "father of Jesse" probably means Obed was a direct ancestor of Jesse (see Matthew 3:9 where the Pharisees said Abraham was their father; see also the *Companion Bible* p. 365). Thus we see that this family is blessed with the great privilege of providing a link in the genealogy of David, and thus the genealogy of our Lord Jesus.

The joy that came to Naomi as a result of the birth of Obed must have been overwhelming. The love she displayed for this baby was so great her neighbors referred to it as her own son (Ruth 4:17). Naomi so loved this child and her daughter-in-law Ruth, that even in her old age, she served as Obed's nurse. This was one of the ways she could thank Ruth for being so faithful and loving to her.

Naomi's love and character was manifest to those around her throughout her life. Her love for God touched the hearts of Ruth and Orpah through her actions and sentiments while living as a Jew in Moab. Her love for her two daughters-in-law was so strong that she urged them to stay behind in Moab where they were more likely to find husbands. She continually provided motherly advice and guidance to Ruth. The strong character of Naomi led to her continued blessing from God and the opportunity for her to be a "mother" to one in our Lord's lineage. "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him" (Ruth 4:14,15). As with Naomi, the Lord will bless us and keep us in his loving care if we demonstrate our love and remain faithful to his word.

Repentance

David's Sorrowing Heart

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.—2 Corinthians 7:10

David Stein

An essential part of growing a relationship with God is, first of all, acknowledging our need of redemption from sin and then accepting the forgiveness God proffers through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Put another way, we must get “cleaned up.” The apostle Paul describes this as the “washing of water of the word” (Ephesians 5:26). We study to become familiar with God’s moral requirements and then strive to conform our lives to these principles of righteousness.

Integrated in this process of “cleaning up” from sin is something called **repentance**. - Repentance means ceasing from a sinful activity and completely turning away from the - sequence of thinking and doing what led to sin. It means implementing a redirection in one’s life with respect to the transgression. But dealing with sin in one’s life can be a difficult proposition, especially repentance from deeply engrained habits of sin. God’s promise to help us guarantees victory if we submit to his leading, but it does not take away the battle! Providentially, we have examples in the Scriptures of those who dealt with sin and repented from it. A primary example is King David.

The Sin of King David

There is no question about God's love for David. God said this about him: “If thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked **in integrity of heart and in uprightness**, to do according to all that I have commanded thee ...” (1 Kings 9:4).

At David’s core was a love for God and a desire to do his will. Having said that, it is instructive to see how even a man such as David could become enmeshed in deadly sin. Sin acts in subtle and deceptive ways. It disarms defenses before one fully realizes one’s position. This was exactly the situation with David.

We are told that sin entered David’s life at an unexpected moment. While on his roof one night he chanced to see a neighbor woman bathing. It was Bathsheba, and the sight of her prompted David to have her brought to his palace. This was the start of a series of sins that included adultery, lies, and murder. The whole sordid account may be found in 2 Samuel 11 the last verse of which reads, “The thing David had done displeased the LORD.”

God loved David, so it was important that David be recovered from this terrible sin that had ensnared him. Consequently God used the prophet Nathan to awaken David to his sinful condition. In 2 Samuel 12 we read how Nathan artfully paints a picture for David

using a parable of a man that does wrong. David sees the injustice and immediately judges the matter righteously. Then Nathan strikes at David's heart by telling him, "Thou art the man!"

Nathan delivers the full judgment of God. David is told that God would have given him anything he asked, but since David acted so sinfully, now the "sword shall never depart from thine house." Furthermore God says that the things David did in secret would be done to him in public.

David quickly grasps how far into sin he had fallen and is overcome with grief. He confesses, "**I have sinned against the LORD.**" There are multiple occasions in Scripture where individuals say "I have sinned" as an act of confession, but it does not always reflect a true and sincere confession of the heart. Using words alone is not sufficient. As a result of that admission David was told that Jehovah had put away David's sin and he would not die then because of it. But the child born of adultery would die. The innocent child who was dying because of David's sin will, of course, be raised in the kingdom. But this would appear to be yet another picture of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. He who was innocent paid the price for the sin of Adam, thus redeeming the whole world. David recognized that this child is bearing his judgment and he was driven to humble himself before God. God desires to forgive the sins of those who ask. We can always receive forgiveness from the father because of the sacrifice of Jesus. However, while God forgives our sins, he seldom takes away the consequences of sin. Actions have consequences which we must bear even though the sin itself is forgiven. Studying this entire experience of David reveals several distinct steps which are part of repentance.

Step One: Recognizing and Confessing the Sin

We cannot turn from sin in our lives unless we know what that sin is. David had been heaping sins on top of one another and had lost sight of the fact that these really were sins. He probably told himself that as king of Israel, he had powers and privileges above anyone else. Although that was true, this rationalization blinded him to the deceitfulness of sin and caused him to justify a terrible injustice he was perpetrating upon Uriah and his family. David needed to be brought to the point of recognizing the terrible sins for what they were.

The lesson for us is the need to strive for moral clarity in our lives, to be able to see the "sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1). It should be a daily subject of prayer and study to more clearly see God's will for us, and whether we are conforming to his laws and principles in every activity (2 Corinthians 13:5). If we do this daily, then it may not be necessary for God to draw our attention to a specific sin as he did with David. But if that should happen, if some dear brother or sister brings to our attention some sin in our lives, we should be sure to see it as God's mercy toward us and not direct anger against the messenger.

Only when we recognize the sin, can we begin to deal with it. This requires confession. Confession to God is an absolute requirement. And it may be to our benefit to share a

confession with another! The general subject of confession is rarely discussed. The idea of sharing one's sins with another generates fear in most. Yet God's word suggests that the confession of our sins can be a good thing in our effort to repent. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The essential point of this first step is to see the sin, acknowledge that it is sin, and confess it to God. David certainly did this. Psalm 51 is a prayer of David after his sin with Bathsheba which he put to music. The superscription of Psalm 51 clearly identifies this psalm in connection with David's sin. It says, "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." How many of us would put our confession of sin to music? Verse 3 is worthy of special consideration: "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." This is confession, pure and simple. There is no attempt to whitewash it or diminish it in any way. David knows he stands before the God of the universe who knows everything.

Step Two: Penitence

Penitence is regret and sorrow for what was done, accompanied with a desire to atone for the sin, to set things straight, to undo what was done. Penitence is not a show for others to see. It is a serious manifestation of a grieving heart over the sin. David realized that his sin would have significant outward effects, the most immediate of which was the sickness of his new-born son. The birth of the child reminds us that this judgment of God has come about nine months after the initial sin! God's patience is considerable, but there is no escape from the consequences of sin, even if they take time to come. David's actions now were penitent: "David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted and went in, and lay all night upon the earth" (2 Samuel 12:16).

This is an act of penitence. It is a sincere show of regret for his sin. David hoped that by afflicting himself in this manner, he might find mercy from God for the life of the child. As he said in verse 22, "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?"

We also see David's penitence in Psalm 51. Here is a short list of the things David requested:

"Wash me thoroughly", "cleanse me"—v. 2

"Purge me," "wash me"—v. 7

"Create in me a new heart ... renew a right spirit"—v. 10

These and other expressions indicate David was truly sorry for what he had done. He wanted the sin to be put away from him and be restored to a righteous state. Notice his expression in verse 17: "The sacrifices of God are a **broken spirit**: a **broken and a contrite heart**, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Likewise in our lives, after we have acknowledged the sin and confessed it, we must have godly sorrow. When the apostle Paul wrote a strong, judgmental letter to the church in Corinth regarding sin in their ecclesia, there was great anguish among the brethren over it. Titus later informed Paul of the penitence of the church over the evil done there. Paul mentions it in his second letter: “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, **but that ye sorrowed to repentance**: for ye were made **sorry after a godly manner**, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For **godly sorrow worketh repentance** to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:9,10).

This “godly sorrow” that Paul speaks of is penitence. False sorrow works death, but true sorrow, godly sorrow, leads to salvation.

Step Three: Replacement

We want to replace sinful behaviors with the opposite behaviors. For example, a repentant thief must now practice generosity, the opposite behavior of stealing. A liar must now practice telling the truth. The impure must strive for purity. Wrong thinking and wrong doing in our lives must be specifically noted and replaced with the correct, opposite behavior. If we fail to replace the sinful behavior, it will deceive us and ensnare us again.

David did this. The replacement action that David wants to practice is described in Psalm 51: “Then **will I teach** transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and **my tongue shall sing** aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, **open thou my lips**; and **my mouth shall shew** forth thy praise” (Psalm 51:13-15).

David did his terrible sins in secret. But it is in public where he says the behaviors he wants in his life from now on are activities of praise. Instead of lies he wants praise to come out of his mouth. He wants to teach other transgressors and sinners, of which he was one, to be converted. These are all positive behaviors he would use to replace the sinful behaviors.

Such activities work true repentance. When we find sin in our life, we must acknowledge it, confess it, be truly sorrowful about it, and finally replace it with its opposite and righteous action.

King David's Second Sin

Having laid out the sequence of steps and their place in the process of repentance, let's look at another sin committed by David. In 1 Chronicles 21 Satan provoked David to sin against God by taking a census in Israel. We surmise that the nature of this sin was that of trusting in numbers rather than trusting in God. God was displeased with David and showed it by smiting Israel (verse 7). Once again, David regained his senses and fully realized what he had done.

What was his first reaction? He acknowledged and confessed his sin: “And David said unto God, **I have sinned** greatly, because **I have done this thing**: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for **I have done very foolishly**” (verse 8). God accepted this, but indicated there must be punishment for the sin. Three alternatives are offered, all of them bad. But David made a faithful choice. He chose the alternative of punishment directly from God. The result was a pestilence that took the lives of 70,000 men. In the midst of this, David did acts of penitence. We read: “David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, **who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces**. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even **I it is that have sinned** and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? **let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father’s house**; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued” (verses 16,17).

David’s penitence is clear. He had already donned sackcloth and fell upon the earth. Then David, seeing the avenging angel of Jehovah, pleaded for the life of the innocent people and asked that God’s hand be upon him instead of them. This action of penitence stayed the hand of the angel. David was then told to set up an altar on the threshing floor of Ornan. He asked Ornan for permission to do so and Ornan told him to take it along with sacrifices, firewood, and a meal offering. David showed his nobility by refusing to take these things and instead paid him 600 shekels of gold for everything.

David’s sin was numbering Israel, a covetous act to establish the greatness of his own kingship and military might. So an appropriate replacement behavior would be to establish the greatness of God no matter what it cost him. The pestilence ended with God’s request for an altar. It appears that David’s choice of action was to provide the most praise-worthy altar imaginable, namely a complete temple, a house for God. In the next chapter of 1 Chronicles, chapter 22, David begins the building project by gathering all the material that would eventually be necessary. God had already told David he would not be permitted to build the temple, but his son would. But David participated in the start of the project and glorified God in the doing.

Summary

King David showed in his own life the steps necessary to repent of sin:

- ◆ Acknowledging the sin and confessing it.
- ◆ Showing penitence (godly sorrow and regret).
- ◆ Replacing the evil behavior with righteous behavior.

If we follow these steps in our lives as we wrestle with sin, we will ultimately be victorious over the flesh. As Paul so wonderfully said of the brethren in the church at Corinth: “For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation,

yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! **In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter**" (2 Corinthians 7:11).

Cyrus and Christ

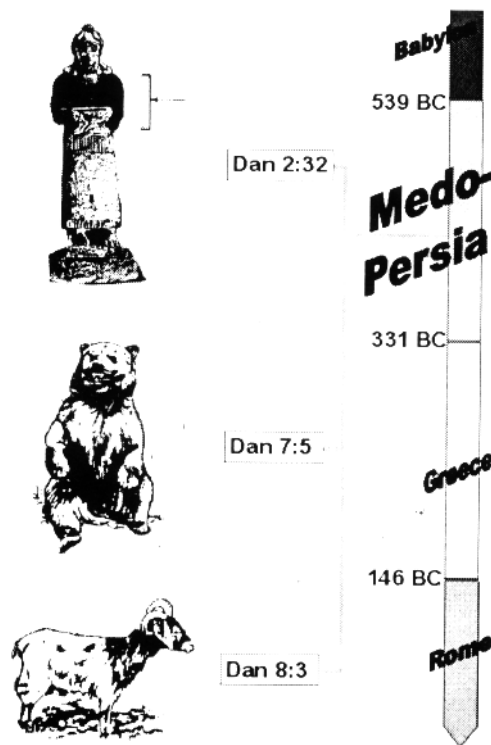
Cyrus, the Lord's Anointed

Part 1

describing the exceptional life of Cyrus, a pagan king who was worthy to be called “the Lord’s anointed,” appeared in the May-June 2003 issue of The Herald.

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor.—Isaiah 45:1, NIV

Régis Liberda



In a study of Cyrus, his Achemeneed dynasty and the Medo-Persian empire in history, it is useful to consider the four empires described in Daniel: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Cyrus and the Medo-Persian empire was the second in this series of universal empires. The Medo-Persian empire reigned from 539 to 331 B.C., a little more than two centuries - before it was vanquished under the assault of Alexander the Great.

The Medo-Persian empire is described in several visions of Daniel:

- ◆ In Daniel 2:32 it is **the chest and arms** of the statue of Nebuchadnezzar.
- ◆ In Daniel 7:5 among the four beasts representing these empires, it is **the bear** holding in its mouth three ribs which represent the kingdoms it conquered.
- ◆ In Daniel 8:3 it is the terrifying **ram** with the two unequal horns: Media, the inferior, and Persia, the triumphant state.

Because God gave such information, we know that Medo-Persia, starting with Cyrus, plays an important part in the Plan of God. It is only from the time of Cyrus that we have historical dates in which we may have confidence.

The Goodness of the Almighty

Although Cyrus fascinates us by his life, he becomes even more interesting when we see how God regards him. Obviously he was a king who wanted those he ruled to be happy. Although a pagan, he had a profound sense of justice that few Israelite kings possessed. His willingness to forgive his enemies did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. In many ways he was a good man. He was also an instrument God used to achieve an important part of his plan to end the captivity of his people and to rebuild the temple.

Did Cyrus recognize the God of Israel as the only true God, instead of the one he had worshipped since his childhood, the Persian god Ahura-Mazda? We do not know for sure, although we do have his words: “God hath charged me to build him a house.”

Cyrus’ noble character is a type of someone much higher. That Cyrus is a type of Christ has not escaped many of the biblical commentators. So let us look at the different prophecies relating to Cyrus, his character, and his work, to see the interesting parallels which exist between Cyrus and Christ.

1. The Anointing

“Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus” (Isaiah 45:1). We saw the exceptional character of Cyrus and the unique title that the Lord bestowed upon this pagan king. Was Christ an anointed? Definitely yes. The Greek word *Kristos* means “Anointed.” The apostle in Acts 4:27 tells us the supreme anointed is Christ. The apostle Peter speaks to Cornelius and says, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy spirit and power” (Acts 10:38, NIV).

Christ was indeed anointed at his baptism and received the holy spirit, not literal oil. A study of Israel’s Tabernacle arrangement shows us the fundamental character of the anointing of Christ. Anointing was the first step required to confirm the high priest who is, in antitype, our Lord. As the Anointed, God chooses him. Jesus Christ is given a very specific and glorious mission, as was Cyrus.

2. A Glorious Title

“I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me” (Isaiah 45:4). God guided Cyrus a long time before Cyrus came to know him. These words can also be applied to Christ.

Christ was the first creation of God as *Logos* [Word]. All things were made by him. What is the glory of this title “Logos”? “All things were made by him [the Word]; and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” (John 1:3,14).

God, in his prescience, had foreseen the foundation of the universe and the very special mission of our Lord Jesus long before he came to earth. The glorious title of Logos is one of many other titles, such as Wonderful and Prince of Peace which all have their importance (John 1:1; Isaiah 9:6). The name of Christ is glorious.

3. The Shepherd

“[I] saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure” (Isaiah 44:28). In addition to the glorious title of Anointed, God calls Cyrus his shepherd. Cyrus, as we saw, was indeed the shepherd of a great number of people which he pacified, and whose lives he improved in his immense empire.

Christ is also called the good Shepherd (John 10:11). As a shepherd, he will do two slightly contradictory things. First, he will rule the nations with a rod of iron at the time of the restitution of all things (Revelation 2:27). This shows us that his authority must be accepted by all. Those who will not obey will not receive everlasting life. Second, Christ, as a good shepherd, will lead mankind to the sources of life (Revelation 22:17). He will feed the nations so they might receive life. What a splendid prospect this is!

4. Forgiveness

Let us notice the exceptional lesson found in the behavior of Cyrus who showed forgiveness toward his defeated enemies, something not generally done at the time. He knew one exercised better control over a vanquished country by making it an ally rather than a slave.

In the same way Christ will forgive mankind’s sins and iniquities, for all power to forgive was given to him (Matthew 9:6). The best illustration of the forgiveness exercised by Christ is found on the cross, where in great suffering he had the courage to say: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

5. Riches

“I will give you ... riches stored in secret places” (Isaiah 45:3, NIV). Cyrus literally seized hidden riches in Sardis which helped make his empire extraordinarily powerful.

Will Christ receive hidden riches? Yes. We read, “Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

What are riches for a spiritual being like Christ? First there is the richness for which Christ gave his life: the dominion of mankind and earth during his glorious reign of 1,000 years. But there is another richness, hidden until the due time for the mystery to be revealed, a richness that Christ obtained from his Father. It is the church, his bride, with whom he shares his glorious divine mission.

May we be sufficiently aware of this promise that we aspire to be a part of this “richness.”

6. The submission of people to him:

The conquered Egyptians and all people prostrated and subjected themselves to Cyrus and they did it willingly; they were **relieved** by the new and generous administration that Cyrus granted to them. In the same way the nations will subject themselves willingly to Christ, according to the word of Isaiah: “all flesh shall come to worship before me” (Isaiah 66:23) These are God’s words but they concern his son Christ to whom all authority will be given in the thousand-year kingdom.

7. The One from the East

Cyrus was called a “man come from the East” who invaded Babylon using the bed of the dried up Euphrates because he had diverted its course. In fact we find these words a second time in Revelation and there it concerns Christ: “And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared” (Revelation 16:12).

It is Christ, the chief of the kings of the east, who will drain the Euphrates. He will drain the richness of “Babylon” at the end of this age to prepare his kingdom of justice.

8. Release of the prisoners

“He shall let go my captives ... saith the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 45:13).

According to the Plan of God, Cyrus released the Israelites after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Christ will release humanity from the slavery of more than 6,000 years of sin and death. The Babylonians released by Cyrus welcomed him with palms. All the released prisoners in Christ’s greater release in the kingdom will welcome Christ as well.

This release reminds us of another one, the one we recall once each year at the time of Passover. It is the exodus from Egypt. Both the exodus and the defeat of Babylon picture the great release which will occur under Christ in the age to come.

9. The Benefits Will Not Cost Anything

“Not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 45:13).

Just as Cyrus gave freedom to the people of Israel without requiring a payment, Christ, who paid the ransom once and for all when he died on the cross, will liberally give life to those who seek him: “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely” (Revelation 21:6).

10. The Rebuilding

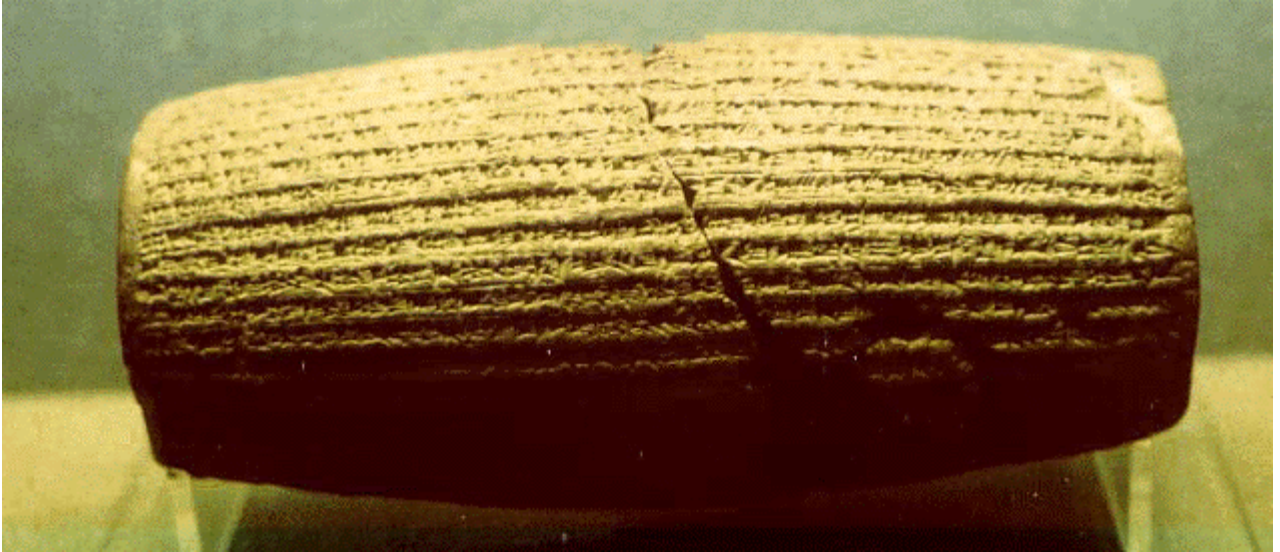
“Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to - Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel” (Ezra 1:3).

Cyrus allowed the Jews to **rebuild Jerusalem** and especially **its temple**. In the same way, mankind under the reign of Christ, will have the chance to **rebuild a new world** where there will be neither tears, crying, nor pain, for these former things will have disappeared.

This hope is described by the words of the prophet Isaiah who speaks of those who will come to Christ to receive life. He says that they “come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads” (Isaiah 35:10). What a wonderful hope these words contain.

This hope, in which the historical king Cyrus has played a part, is sublime for it is mankind’s only hope for life. But we also know that Christ will not act alone. His Church, the body of Christ, will be associated with this wonderful and glorious work. If we want to have a part in this work, let us also have the noble-heartedness displayed by this “pagan” king Cyrus, so that one day we will, with Christ, be able to bring freedom to all.

The Cyrus Scroll



It is perhaps more appropriate to call this the “cylinder of Cyrus” instead of “scroll.” This cylinder of adobe was found in Persia. It is written in cuneiform scripture and the “old persian” language. It says in part:

“I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of Summer and Akkad, king of the four parts of the world, son of the great king Cambyses, king of the city of Anzan, grandson of the great king Cyrus, king of the city of Anzan ...

“When I entered peacefully into Babylon and put with majesty the throne in the prince’s home, then Marduk opened to me the heart of Babylonians.

“In Babylon and in other cities I took care of the happiness of inhabitants whose ...

“I let freedom to all men to worship their own gods and not allowed to maltreat them or this ...

“I command that no house would be destroyed and no inhabitant would be stolen ...”

For the complete text see *The Cambridge Ancient History*, p. 421. The cylinder is now in the British Museum in London

A Story of Leadership

Nehemiah, Builder of a City

And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.—Nehemiah 2:5

Wade Austen

Great leaders are made, not born. Great men and women are forged in the crucible of events and circumstances that create a sense of mission in their hearts. We learn valuable lessons when we study how men and women have responded to the burdens in their lives. We learn still greater lessons when we study men and women of God who have responded to God's call revealed to them through a burden that he has cultivated in their hearts. The story of Nehemiah invites such a study.

Nehemiah's story teaches many lessons in leadership that apply not only to great leaders, but to every person of God intent upon serving him in whatever way he may direct. God often uses the heaviness of our hearts as a call to action. Through prayer, the study of God's word, and fellowship with God's people, a vision of the will of God emerges. This creates opportunity for leadership. Nehemiah's story teaches us valuable lessons about how we can respond to the opportunities that God creates in our lives.

Nehemiah's vision of God's will for him began when his brother and a small group of Jews from Jerusalem visited him in Persia at the palace of King Artaxerxes in Shushan. Nehemiah asked the group about the condition of his people in Jerusalem. Nehemiah describes his reaction to the sad news that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and that the people were living in disgrace: "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4, NIV).

From his own words we can feel the intensity of the sadness in Nehemiah's heart and the urgency of his desire to rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah's character is revealed both by what he did and did not do as a result of the duty that he felt. Nehemiah did not take it upon himself to devise a plan to restore Jerusalem apart from consulting God. He prayed to God fervently about the plight of his people in Jerusalem and he sought God's direction in the matter. His prayer contains the three elements of adoration, supplication and confession, and it lacks only the element of thanksgiving to be considered among the complete model prayers recorded in the Scriptures.

Great leaders have no shortage of worthwhile activities to consume their time and talent. Which ones are those that God would have them pursue? His "fire in the belly" helps a leader to know the purpose for which God is calling him. It powerfully stirs the emotions of a leader, and a leader responds in ways ordinary people do not. Out of his sense of duty a leader envisions what can be and what ought to be. A leader sees farther than others see, more than others see, and before others see. His burden purifies his motives,

cultivates his persistence and cements his conviction. As a result, a leader with a mission in life growing out of God's revelation of his will can accomplish miracles.

Nehemiah certainly demonstrated his ability to see farther, more, and before others when he conceived a plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. A true leader not only knows where he is going, he takes others with him. He intuitively understands the wisdom of Solomon's words, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Nehemiah accomplished a miracle when he led the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in a scant fifty-two days amid relentless opposition. This miracle resulted from a series of smaller miracles that included God's interventions on behalf of Nehemiah and courageous actions by Nehemiah because he trusted in God. Nehemiah's trust in God was demonstrated by his prayerful communication with God.

Nehemiah's prayer—"grant him [me] mercy in the sight of this man"—was answered when the king inquired about Nehemiah's sad countenance. Nehemiah courageously answered the king with a bold request to journey to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Then Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah about how long the journey would take and when he would return. Nehemiah again prayed to God for the right words and answered the king. We are not told the specifics of the king's response, but it seems unbelievable that Nehemiah would have asked for the years that he did spend in Jerusalem. It was a miracle that the king permitted Nehemiah to go at all, but when the king provided Nehemiah with the materials to build the wall and an armed escort to travel to Jerusalem the miracle becomes awesome. It also testified to the respect Nehemiah had earned as the king's trusted servant.

It took Ezra four months to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:8,9). Assuming that it would have taken Nehemiah at least as long, we can assume that by the time the lumber was harvested and shipped to Jerusalem in preparation for the rebuilding of the wall and the gates that it would have been well into the second year since leaving the palace before Nehemiah began to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Prior to commencing work on the wall Nehemiah demonstrated more skills and character traits of a great leader. Once work on the walls began the miracle of completing the work in only fifty-two days was performed.

Not all miracles are supernatural. Certainly God's overruling providence on behalf of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem pervade this story, but the natural miracle resulted from the leadership skills of a great man who trusted in God, who planned thoroughly, who captivated the hearts of his people with a simple yet heroic vision, and who employed extraordinary people skills.

Let us now examine more details of his planning and evidences of his interpersonal skills that enabled him to navigate to a successful accomplishment of his vision.

Nehemiah's Planning Skills

Great leaders rely on key influencers and Nehemiah was no exception. After taking his burden to God in prayer Nehemiah approached the king, his key source of assistance.

Nehemiah writes: “Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it” (Nehemiah 2:4,5). Of course, the key influencer here is God followed by King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah most certainly selected and took other key people with him on the journey.

Once he arrived in Jerusalem, Nehemiah quietly and under cover of night took stock of the challenge that lay ahead. He took personal charge of assessing the damage and planning the project. Next he met with the people and shared with them his vision for rebuilding the wall and its spiritual benefits to them. He encouraged them by recounting the support he had already received from the king. Two inspiring sentences describe the buy-in he received from the people: “And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work” (Nehemiah 2:18). Finally, he organized the people and set them to work. He organized them by family because he recognized the importance of meeting the people’s own personal need for safety that would motivate them to complete the portions of the wall nearest their own homes. He also got them to work according to planned priorities, beginning with the city gates.

Nehemiah’s People Principles

Great leaders follow basic principles when working with people; Nehemiah was no exception. First, he stated his vision in the simplest terms possible. The people’s goal was to rebuild the wall. Next he tried to include as many people as possible and he organized them by natural family groupings to increase working harmony. He delegated work as necessary, especially when it came time to protect the laborers and some were needed to hold spears and swords while others built the wall, and still others lead the people (Nehemiah 4:16). He kept the people motivated with the words, “Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses” (Nehemiah 4:14). He prepared for the worst and he let the people know what he had done so they would feel more secure: “I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us” (Nehemiah 4:19, 20). He created a culture of cooperation among the people. He stopped the practice of usury and encouraged unity between the wealthy rulers and the people who felt oppressed. He set a personal example by bringing people together and feeding them at his own expense. Finally, Nehemiah recognized the value of celebration. When the wall was finished he arranged for music, a great feast and for the Book of the Law to be read. He then sent them on their way to share their blessings with the less fortunate.

Leaders Pay A Price

Nehemiah’s leadership did not end once the wall was rebuilt. The enemies of Israel remained and were determined to subjugate the people once more. Nehemiah recognized

that the people needed to rebuild their relationship with God and he set about to reestablish the practices enumerated in the Book of the Law. This took much longer than the practical yet highly symbolic accomplishment of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. At some point, after the celebration, Nehemiah returned to King Artaxerxes. It was twelve years from the time Nehemiah had set out to build the wall until he returned again. What an incredible personal sacrifice this must have been for him, and what a great disappointment it was to find his former enemies polluting the sanctuary and the people again reverting back to sinful practices. Nevertheless, he again arose to the challenge of restoring the hearts of the people to God by cleansing the “strangers” from the city and establishing honorable priests instead of those who had polluted the temple. Nehemiah concludes his story with the remarkable words, “Remember me, O my God, for good” (Nehemiah 13:31).

Nehemiah devoted his life to the burden of his heart. The slavery of the Jews to the surrounding peoples and their degradation weighed heavy on him and he envisioned not only rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem that was fallen down, but restoring the relationship between the people and God of which the broken-down wall was but a daily visible symbol. He responded to this vision with the passion and skill of a great leader. He left all of God’s people a great example of how God works in our lives “to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13, NIV).

Inspection Precedes Reformation

Nehemiah did not begin his work by chiding his brethren with unfaithfulness to God or lack of enterprise, etc.; such a course would have further discouraged them, and would have made them feel antagonistic, and perhaps to say, “You will see how it is yourself when you are here a few years,” and some would then have taken pleasure in his failure to do more than they had accomplished. Neither did he begin by boastfully saying, “I have come here to do such a work, and within an incredibly short time you will see it accomplished; I will accomplish in days what you have failed to accomplish in as many years.” To have taken such a course would have been to arouse the opposition of the very ones without whose aid his mission, humanly speaking, would be sure to fail.

Many Christian people can learn a valuable lesson here: whoever desires to be a co-worker with God should work in the Lord’s way and be guided by the spirit of love—for love does not think unkindly or ungenerously or slighly of the efforts of others, nor is it boastful. On the contrary, its trust is in the Lord, and its boast therefore must be in him. This lesson is valuable to us also in respect to individual efforts in our own hearts—to build up good characters acceptable in God’s sight through Christ Jesus. We are to remember that nothing is gained, but much to be lost, by thinking or feeling boastfully of what we hope to attain in self-control and character-likeness to the Lord: nor is much to be gained by mourning and weeping over misspent opportunities of the past. The proper course is to begin work afresh with confidence, not in ourselves, but in him who called us and who has given such exceeding great and precious promises. This is our way to success in individual development, and also in our labors upon the walls of Zion, as it was Nehemiah’s successful method for the building of the natural, typical Jerusalem.

—“Teaching the Law of God,” *The Herald*, August 1922

Heroes of Faith

Faith's Foundations

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.—1 John 5:4

A verse-by-verse study in Hebrews 11

Holy men of old were noted for their strong faith. Their faith was not built on wishful thinking or hearsay evidence, but on deep-rooted convictions based on solid evidence. There is no place in holy writ where these foundations for faith are more observable than in the catalog of Old Testament heroes in Hebrews 11.

Faith Defined—Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is a confident assurance of that for which we hope, a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see. (Weymouth)

The Greek word *hupostasis*, aptly translated “well-grounded assurance,” literally means a foundation, that which stands below. The second definition, “a conviction of reality” is from the Greek *elegcho*. One lexicographer, commenting on this word, says it “means to rebuke with sufficient cause, and also effectually, so as to bring the one rebuked to a confession or at least a conviction of sin. In other words, it means **to convince**.”

Thus faith differs from mere belief in that it is well-grounded and has sufficient reason to be thoroughly convinced of that which cannot be perceived by the human senses. While true faith seeks substantiation for what it holds to be true, it does need irreversible proof, basing its conclusions on the bulk of the evidence.

A Good Report—Hebrews 11:2

For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Faith was the one common denominator that bound the champions of old together. They were imperfect men. They made mistakes. But they believed—and it was this intense personal belief, this faith, which justified them in the sight of Jehovah God. While the term “ancient worthies,” a phrase used often in Bible Student vocabulary, does not appear in the Bible, this expression comes very close. The “elders” were “ancient” and their faith made them “worthy” in the eyes of their Creator.

With these two introductory verses, the writer of Hebrews begins a litany of such heroes. The sixteen specific names, along with others who appear grouped by their deeds, do not represent all whose faith shone out on the pages of history. There may well have been

thousands of such faithful ones. Paul implies as much when he speaks of 7,000 such chosen ones “according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:4,5).

Faith Grasps the Invisible—Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand the ages to have been prepared by a saying of God, in regard to the things seen not having come out of things appearing. (Young’s Literal Translation)

Although it is true that the literal earth was formed by the commandment of God, the allusion in this verse is not to the act of creation but to the structuring of great dispensational ages (Greek, *aiōns*) in the carrying forward of the plans and purposes of the Almighty. The earth itself was not made of invisible ingredients, but the grand progression of ages and dispensations is comprehended, not by human sight, but by the inner eye of faith.

The apostle Peter styles the three major time divisions as “the world that then was,” the “heavens and the earth, which are now,” and a “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:6, 7,13). Each of these dispensations has different rulership—angels, Satan, and Christ, respectively. Within the present dispensation are three ages where God deals with different groups of people—the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and the Christian church. When faith grasps this outline, the human mind begins to comprehend the “stately steppings of our God” (*Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 1, p. 75).

Abel—Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

The phrase “God testifying of his gifts” suggests a possible base for the faith Abel manifested. It is certainly suggestive that the manner of God’s accepting Abel’s offering rather than Cain’s was in a visible manner, possibly by the fire which consumed the offering being miraculously lit by God himself.

Both Abel and Cain offered logical sacrifices. Both gave of the fruitage of their labors. Abel, being a shepherd, offered an animal, while Cain, a tiller of the ground, offered an oblation of his tillage. It might be well to inspect an ambiguous verse concerning these two offerings.

Rotherham’s translation of Genesis 4:7 reads, “Shall it not, if thou do right, be lifted up? But if thou do not right, at the entrance a sin-bearer is lying, Unto thee, moreover, shall be his longing, though, thou, rule over him.” While most translations suggest that it was sin crouching at the door, Rotherham rightly notes that the Hebrew *chattah*, translated sin, can with equal ease be translated “sin offering” or “sin bearer.” In fact the Authorized Version so translates it that way in 116 of the 296 places it appears in the Old Testament.

The suggestion is that if Cain had observed God's acceptance of Abel's offering, there was another animal, a "sin-offering," crouching at the tent door and it was available to Cain for the taking.

One of faith's strong foundations comes from the observance of God's favorable dealings with others of his servants and the meek acceptance of the lesson to improve one's own service. Frequently, however, the temptation with us is toward jealousy, as it was with Cain.

Enoch—Hebrews 11:5

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

The Scriptural account of Enoch is too sketchy to draw a strong conclusion as to his specific act of faith. The two clues we are given are that he "was translated that he should not see death" and that prior to that act God had manifested acceptance of Enoch's faithfulness.

Since the writer of Hebrews summarizes his first group of faith warriors by saying "these all died in faith," it seems highly unlikely that Enoch escaped the death sentence. More likely, dying at 365 years of age, roughly one-third of a normal life span at that time, his death may have been in the vigor of his relative youth, without experiencing the decaying effects of the death process in his body.

It was before this that God had given testimony to his faithfulness. The only specific act of Enoch of which we know is furnished in the New Testament: "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14,15).

Here Enoch is classified as a prophet predicting a time of judgment. While this undoubtedly has reference to the time of the Lord's second advent, it likely had a more - direct application to the end of "the world that was."

That prophecy must have been greatly disturbing to this righteous man. His faith in it evoked an emotion common to any parent who loves his child: "May my child escape that judgment." That prayer seems echoed in the naming of Enoch's son. He called his name Methuselah, meaning "after he dies may it happen." Perhaps God manifested his appreciation of Enoch's faith by assuring Enoch that this prayer would be answered. And so it was: Methuselah died the year of the flood, before the judgment Enoch had predicted.

The Necessity of Faith—Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

To believe in the existence of God is not sufficient. Many scientists and philosophers, with but little faith, grasp that tenet by applying reasoning and empirical evidence. James notes that “the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). So strong is the evidence that the psalmist claims that it is the fool that says in his heart, “there is no God” (Psalm 53:1).

It is not the reality of a supreme creator, but the confidence that this being is one who is not only all-powerful but also all-caring—a personal God. It is faith that goes beyond the rationalist view of a creator who abandoned his masterpiece to its own devices, but who maintains enough personal interest in its minutiae to be “a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” This is the quality of faith which mark the individuals in this catalog of holy men of old.

Noah—Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Rain was an uncommon phenomenon before the flood. Irrigation in antediluvian times was generally accomplished by a mist that went up from the earth and watered the ground (Genesis 2:5,6). If there had been any rainfall, it certainly was not of such massive proportions as to inundate the ground. Therefore the announcement by God of such an impending catastrophe must have sounded incredible. A world-wide flood appears equally incredible to many skeptics today. Yet it is attested to in writings of most major civilizations. Among similar accounts of a deluge in which a single family is saved are accounts by Berosus of Chaldea, Hieronymus of Egypt, Mnaseas the Phoenician, Nicolaus of Damascus, Abydenus the Assyrian and the famous Roman, Ovid, in his "Metamorphosis". (See Gill's Commentary for still other references to Noah.) Yet, he not only believed but demonstrated his conviction by two outstanding actions.

First, he set upon the unprecedented task of building an ark of sufficient size to accommodate every species of land animal. Second, he boldly proclaimed the message of the coming deluge as a warning to the populace around him (2 Peter 2:5). The massive boat which he and his sons built became the instrument of condemnation to the unbelief of the surrounding peoples.

Abraham—Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

While Abram was still in Ur of the Chaldees, God had offered to make of him a great nation if he would relocate to a land God would show him. “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing”(Genesis 12:1,2). There is no record, however, of God informing him where the land was. How was he to know?

At age seventy-five he made a fateful decision to relocate to the land of Canaan, afterwards to be known as “the promised land” (Genesis 12:4,5). Was there a basis for this choice of location on the part of Abram? We suggest there was, and that it is found in a promise given by Noah shortly after the flood. “And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant” (Genesis 9:25-27). A contemplation of this prophecy may well have revealed to Abram that, as a patriarch of the house of Shem, Canaan was to be his servant, and therefore the land of Canaan was the land to which God had sent him.

It takes faith to claim such a promise on such tenuous evidence. But if it took faith to so claim the land, it required additional faith to refuse to claim that promise when seemingly proffered. At the death of his wife, Sarah, the patriarch sought a burial place for her. Ephron, a Hittite, owned a fitting spot—the cave of Macphelah —and offered it free of charge to Abraham. The bereaved old man refused to take it for free and purchased the land for 400 pieces of silver (Genesis 23:7-20).

Why would Abraham refuse a free offer of land within the country promised him by God? The answer lies in Genesis 15 where God affirmed his covenant to give the land to Abraham and his seed after him. There he was informed that this gift would only come after four generations had passed (Genesis 15:16). Thus, in sharp contrast, the patriarch moved to the promised land by the exercise of faith, and with that same faith refused to claim it for himself in his own lifetime, choosing rather to dwell in it as a sojourner and migrating itinerant.

Sara—Hebrews 11:11,12

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

Sara is seldom honored for her response to the news that she was to bear a child in her old age. She is depicted as laughing at the news and then denying the laugh when she was accused (Genesis 18:12-15). The writer of Hebrews suggests a different scenario. He states, “she judged him faithful who had promised.” Such an evaluation indicates that her laughter was not one of unbelief, but of belief. It was not a scornful laugh but the sudden outburst of a heart filled with joy by the astounding news of the impending birth.

Not only is her faith credited with being causative of the miraculous birth, but as overruling the effects of age on Abraham’s body—“as good as dead.” To this agrees the words of Paul: “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb” (Romans 4:19).

The Prospect of Faith—Hebrew 11:13-16

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

In summary of the examples of faith treated so far, the writer of Hebrews suggests their motivation. They sought “a better country, that is, an heavenly.” The most direct interpretation of these words is that they held a hope for a heavenly salvation. Such a suggestion was put forward by Pastor Russell: “What is more reasonable than to suppose that at the close of the Millennial age when their service upon the earthly plane shall have ended, the latter class [the ancient worthies] also will be received to the heavenly plane?” (*Reprints*, p. 4389).

On the other hand, it may be that the heavenly city they looked for is the “New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2, NASB). This city represents the spiritual government of Messiah’s kingdom reigning on earth.

In any case, the motivation for these faithful men of old was a solid grasp of the prospects of a better life beyond their current existence.

Abraham Again—Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Perhaps the greatest act of faith in this incredible catalog is that of the willingness of Abraham to offer his beloved Isaac on the altar of sacrifice. Surely he knew of the tragic use of human sacrifices of surrounding nations and the fact that God considered these as abominations.

It takes faith to believe an unbelievable request. It takes greater faith to believe and obey when it involves the sacrifice of something as dear as your beloved son. But the greatest faith believes and obeys even when the command seems contrary to all that nature and one's understanding of what God's moral law has always been.

Upon what did Abraham base such faith? It would require implicit and unwavering belief in the promise that God had made of producing a great nation through his son. Only such a faith could grasp the concept that if he were to be slain the God who had ordered such an act could make it turn out for good. Such an outcome could only logically come about through a resurrection. Jesus testified on him that he saw "my day, and was glad" (John 8:56). It was undoubtedly beyond his greatest expectations to discover how God would work it out by staying his hand in the process of the sacrifice and providing a ram in substitute.

Isaac—Hebrews 11:20

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

It did not require faith for Isaac to bless one of his children. That was normal. But the act of faith was in the blessing of **both** of them. The two blessings, found respectively in Genesis 27:28,29 and Genesis 27:39,40, are almost identical but with significant differences. Jacob's was obviously the superior, but Esau was promised a time when he would come into his own special favor.

Since Isaac had a preference for Esau, the fact that Jacob had claimed the blessing by -deception, though he had legally purchased it, must have offended him. Nevertheless, the writer of Hebrews says that the bestowal of the second blessing was not out of favoritism, but as an act of faith.

Most probably Isaac based his faith on a similar circumstance in connection with his own blessing by Abraham. When God had given his promise to Abraham to have a son through Sarah, that patriarch had one fear. What would happen to Ishmael, whom he had come to love? In Genesis 17:18 we heard him cry out, "And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might [also] live before thee!" And God responded favorably to that request, "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him

fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation” (Genesis 17:20).

Therefore the precedent was set and Isaac based his faith for blessing both on a solid basis.

Jacob—Hebrews 11:21

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

Jacob’s choice of Joseph, the blessings of both of his sons indicating the two-fold blessing of the first-born, is the next described act of faith (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). That same law also prohibited counting the son of a beloved wife as the firstborn over the older children of a less loved spouse. While Jacob mentions specific reasons for not choosing his three oldest children (Genesis 49:2-5), there still remained eight other children older than Joseph.

E. W. Bullinger in his *Companion Bible* suggests the following meaning to the Hebrew text: “By faith, Jacob, on his death bed, blessed the two sons of Joseph, basing that decision on the height of his (Joseph’s) staff.” Noting, when his sons gathered for their final blessings, that Joseph had the staff of the grand vizier of all Egypt, he concluded that if God had so blessed this son, then he should act in harmony with that blessing by making him the firstborn of his children.

Joseph—Hebrews 11:22

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

Much of the force of this verse is lost in translation. The Hebrew verb translated “make mention” is used 22 times in the Old Testament and on every occasion except two is more properly translated “remembered.”

Joseph’s act of faith in commanding that his bones be carried back to Canaan (Genesis 50:25) was based on an act of memory. It is probable that he remembered the promise made to his great-grandfather Abraham in Genesis 15:16, that in the fourth generation of captivity they would return to Canaan, the land of their inheritance.

As with Joseph, so with the Christian: faith has a firm foundation in searching out and frequently calling to mind the exceedingly precious promises of our God.

Amram and Jochebed—Hebrews 11:23

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

It is natural to assume from the Old Testament record that Jochebed hid Moses because she feared he would be killed if discovered. The author of Hebrews makes a different assumption. He writes, “They were not afraid of the king's commandment.”

The Hebrews account also attributes the plans for the child to his physical beauty. We are not to understand that they would have had less love for a less attractive baby. Rather, the implication was that his good looks lay at the base of their ultimate plan to place the child in a basket in the river Nile. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that they realized that the area of the Nile where they deposited their human treasure would cause him to pass by the spot where Pharaoh's daughter was accustomed to go and that his good looks would appeal to her innate sense of motherhood. It may well have been a good use of the old rule that, if you want to hide something, hide it in plain sight. Likewise Christians do well to be ever on the alert to detect the providences of God in the exercise of their faith. Such faith, properly exercised, may yield similar outstanding results.

Moses—Hebrews 11:24-28

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

The Hebrews account of Moses' heroism leaves quite a different impression than that found in the book of Exodus. Three particular acts in Moses' life are singled out as emblematic of his faith:

1. Refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. In fact Hebrews suggests that he identified with his people well before the incident of the Egyptian taskmaster.
2. Fleeing Egypt, stating this was because of his faith and not for fear of reprisal. The stated reason for his faith on this occasion was that he saw “him who is invisible.” The suggestion is strong that he saw that it was God's plan for him not to come to the aid of his Hebrew brethren at that point in time. Then, when the time did come, he was at first reluctant to answer the call, claiming his own unworthiness (Exodus 3:11; 4:10).
3. Keeping the Passover.

The Nation of Israel—Hebrews 11:29,30

By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

Again, it is surprising that God credits the crossing of the Red Sea to the nation of Israel rather than to Moses. The Exodus account indicates that the people were fearful of the approaching Egyptian army and did not expect the waters to part. Nor, indeed, does the Hebrew account dispute this fact. It was not in either the expectation nor cause of such a miracle that the Israelites were credited with faith, but in the utilization of that miracle by going forward into the breach caused by the parting sea. While they saw a path before them, the distance across was considerable and it required faith to progress despite the possibility that the receding waters might again come together.

The generation of Israelites which entered the promised land was not the same as had left Egypt some 40 years earlier. These appear to have readily marched under Joshua's command in the encirclement of Jericho on seven successive days, culminating in the seven-fold march on the seventh day when the blowing of trumpets coincided with the collapse of the walled fortifications of that mighty city.

Rahab—Hebrews 11:31

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

Rahab is the only Gentile listed among these faith heroes. Hers was not a faith based on the promises made to Israel. Her faith was based on a conclusion drawn from the history of the Jewish people over the previous forty years: "And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:9-11).

Evidently traveling caravans had brought the news of the Jewish conquests to Jericho. Therefore many knew these facts, but it was Rahab alone who grasped their significance! The God of Israel was the true God and he had given the land of Canaan to the Israelites.

Her faith not only provided salvation for her entire household, but gave her the privilege of becoming the first Gentile proselyte to Judaism in the promised land and eventually resulted in her marriage to Salmon, the head of the tribe of Judah.

Other Named and Unnamed Heroes—Hebrews 11:32-38

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

The faithfulness of some of the listed names, such as Gideon, Jephthae, David, and Samuel, seems obvious. However questions may arise concerning Barak and Samson. In the Old Testament account of the battle of Deborah and Barak against Sisera (Judges 4) it would appear that Deborah, not Barak, was the real hero of faith. The Hebrew list, however, suggests that while Deborah had great faith in the Lord, she enkindled that same kind of faith in Barak. She inspired the faith, but it was Barak who had to face the enemy in battle.

Samson is more often known for his weaknesses than his faith. There is reason to believe that, even in some of his weaknesses, the Lord had commanded him to act the way he did. For example, in the case of his first intended wife, of whom his parents strongly disapproved because she was not Jewish, we read, “But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel” (Judges 14:4).

In any event, we have the assurance of the author of Hebrews that all of these named individuals were indeed heroes of faith and most probably among the group affectionately known as “ancient worthies.”

From The Herald of September/October 1993, p. 26, we read: “The three pairs given [in the first entries in the list below] are each in reverse chronological order which suggests that pairs are intended. In the first pair, Barak needed reassurance but then acted with full assurance of faith to subdue kingdoms. It was likely only a few weeks later when Gideon did likewise, probably strengthened also by Barak’s successful step of faith.”

subdued kingdoms

Gideon—Judges 7:1-25

Barak— Judges 4:4-23

wrought righteousness

Samson—Judges 14-16

Jephthah—Judges 11:11-33

obtained promises

David—1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Samuel 7:25-29

Samuel—1 Samuel 3:19-21; 7:3-15

stopped the mouths of lions

Daniel—Daniel 6:(1-)16-24

quenched the power of fire

Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego—
Daniel 3:(1-)16-27

escaped the edge of the sword

Elisha —2 Kings 6:8-19

from weakness was made strong

Elijah—1 Kings 18:20-40; 19:1-8

waxed mighty in war

Abijah—2 Chronicles 13:3-21

turned to flight the armies of the alien

Asa—2 Chronicles 14:9-13

**women received their dead by a -
resurrection**

widow of Zarephath—1 Kings 17:17-24

woman of Shunem—2 Kings 4:32-37

others were tortured

Jeremiah—Jeremiah 20:2-9; 37:15-21;
38:3-6

Summation—Hebrews 11:39, 40

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Summarizing the outstanding faith of these men of old, we are told that even such great faith did not qualify them for the promise of being the primary, the heavenly, seed of Abraham. This was reserved for the saints who lived after Jesus opened up the “new and living way” through the sacrifice of his flesh (Hebrews 10:20).

Jesus makes much the same point concerning John the Baptist: “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11).

Even the resurrection of these holy men cannot occur until the resurrection of the church, for it is the church which shall make them perfect. The apostle Peter noted this fact concerning David, one of these heroes: “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day” (Acts 2:29).

This privilege of the church is spoken of in symbolic language in Psalm 45:16, “Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.”

Therefore, as these holy ones demonstrated their faith in the presence of many witnesses, we are encouraged to do the same: “Wherefore seeing we **also** are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

ON THE OTHER HAND

The wording of Hebrews 11:29,30 contains some ambiguity. It might be inferred that the crossing of the Red Sea was credited either to the faith of Israel or of Moses. Exodus 14:11-14 indicates it was Moses rather than the nation of Israel that had faith God would deliver them from the Egyptians, although it is true that the Israelites proceeded into the water after Moses stretched out his hand and the waters parted (Exodus 14:21,22). Israel’s baptism into Moses in the cloud and the sea suggests Moses’ long-demonstrated faith was the reason for this deliverance.

According to the definition of faith, it would not imply a momentary decision or action at the last minute, but a deeply rooted conviction that had been evidenced well before being put to the test. Israel’s constant murmuring and rebellion after crossing the Red Sea is well documented in Scripture. It does not appear plausible Israel could be included in Hebrews 11:29 as having a good report through faith when, with few exceptions, the adults wandered in the wilderness and died, failing to enter the promised land.

In Hebrews 11:30, Joshua, who was the chosen successor to Moses, would appear to be the one whose faith had long been manifest throughout the wilderness wanderings and was credited with the triumph over Jericho. In obedience to God’s instructions, he utilized a unique battle strategy that caused the walls of Jericho to fall, thereby gaining the victory over Israel’s enemies. Thus it is written, “So the LORD was with Joshua and his fame was noised throughout all the country” (Joshua 6:27).

—Homer Montague

Pastoral Bible Institute News

New Booklet

We are pleased to announce the availability of the small book *Creation Triumphs Over Evolution*, produced by our Bible Student friends in New Brunswick, New Jersey. In addition to a description of the generally-accepted theory of evolution within the scientific community in spite of the lack of proof, the presentation correctly shows that a belief in evolution automatically means a belief that there is no life after death, there is no meaning to life because it is an accident, and there is no such thing as ethics or morals because these inhibit your ability to triumph over your competitors. Order it by filling out the form on the back of the insert found in each issue of this magazine sent to subscribers.

World News

Religious

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Bible Society workers across the globe, the Bible—in full or partial form—is now available in 2,303 languages, an increase of 16 from a year ago. The complete Bible can now be read in 405 languages worldwide, compared with 392 last year.

—American Bible Society, Spring 2003 Newsletter

An international conference in Paris on intolerance opened with a stern warning that acts of hatred against Jews, particularly in Europe, have reached their highest level since World War II. “A new generation of haters has been brought up and are ready to act,” said Rabbi Marvin Hier, head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. In a statement, the center said it recorded 1,300 anti-Semitic acts in France since 2001—the highest level since World War II.

—Associated Press, 5/13/2003

Israeli geologists have examined a sandstone tablet detailing repair plans for the Jewish Temple of King Solomon. The tablet bears an ancient Hebrew inscription attributed to Jehoash (also known as Joash), king of Judea in the late ninth century B.C. The inscription describes the renovations carried out by Jehoash in the first Temple in Jerusalem. The find is about the size of a legal pad, and its text is similar to the biblical description found in 2 Kings 11-12. If authenticated, it would be a rare piece of physical evidence confirming biblical narrative. It could also strengthen Jewish claims to a disputed holy site in Jerusalem’s Old City that is now home to two major mosques. Muslim clerics insist, despite overwhelming archaeological evidence, that no Jewish shrine ever stood on the site. The origin of the stone tablet is unclear, making it difficult to establish authenticity.

—Haaretz, April 2003 (specific date unknown)

Social

Industrial fishing fleets have systematically stripped 90% of the giant tuna, swordfish, marlin and other big fish from the world’s oceans, according to a new study that suggests the virtual collapse

of these stocks—such as happened to the cod off New England—is a distinct possibility. Fishing fleets are now competing for the remnants of the biggest fish in the oceans, concludes a 10-year research project reported in today’s issue of the science journal *Nature*. If the current level of overfishing continues, fish populations will soon become too small to be sustainable, causing fisheries to disappear. That, in turn, could have a serious impact on human food supplies and cause long-term damage to the ocean environment.

—Los Angeles Times, 5/15/2003

1,260,000 Number of traffic-accident deaths worldwide each year.

310,000 Number of deaths caused by wars and conflicts each year.

—TIME, 5/26/2003

Monsoon rains arrived in India’s northeast bringing hope for relief from a grueling heat wave that has killed nearly 1,400 people nationwide in the past three weeks. Most of the deaths have been in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh where sunstroke and dehydration have killed at least 1,281 people. Thousands have been hospitalized. Temperatures have eased from a peak of 120 degrees to daily highs of 111.

—Los Angeles Times, 6/7/2003

A Nigerian oil pipeline tapped by thieves exploded, killing more than 100 villagers scavenging for fuel, witnesses said. Nigeria is the world’s eighth largest exporter of crude oil, but it suffers chronic fuel shortages because of extensive corruption and technical problems with its four domestic refineries. Witnesses said villagers using buckets had been scooping kerosene from the pipeline since it was deliberately punctured about two months before the accident. A thriving black market is a major incentive for thieves to tap into the 3,125-mile network of pipelines that transports refined products across the country.

—Reuters, 6/21/2003

Five million people will lose their jobs this year in the worldwide tourism industry because of the SARS epidemic and the economic slump, with Asia by far the hardest hit region, the United Nations said in a report. The industry, which employs about 80 million people, has lost 11.5 million jobs since late 2001, according to the UN. Travel and tourism employment in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam, the countries most affected by SARS, will decrease by as much as 30%, the report said.

—Bloomberg News, 5/14/2003

The changing demographic picture in Europe is beginning to change some of the fundamentals of both social and political life. Governments there are reacting to a shift from youth to the aged and are moving to reduce social services, including the pensions that millions have been counting on for their golden years. Many experts see it as a harbinger of things to come, a sign of a demographic shift with important implications not only for the welfare of retirees but also for the European societies as a whole. The crucial factor is age. In Europe, the median age in 2050 is expected to rise to 52.3 from 37.7 today. The likely meaning of this “stunning difference,” as the British weekly *The Economist* called the growing demographic disparity is that American

power—economic and military—will continue to grow relative to Europe's, which will also decline in comparison with other parts of the world like China, India and Latin America.

—New York Times, 6/29/2003

Five million people in South Africa are infected with the AIDS virus, health officials estimate. It is one of the largest H.I.V.-positive populations in the world. These masses have been rendered “nameless and faceless” by a government that perpetuates confusion about the origins and magnitude of their disease, while refusing to follow the example of other African countries and make life-prolonging antiretroviral drugs publicly available as a treatment. With a death toll of at least 600 people a day, the struggle by AIDS patients for recognition and public medical care is a major problem that refuses to go away and struggles for recognition.

—New York Times, 5/10/2003

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicted that one in three Americans born in 2000 will develop diabetes during his or her lifetime—a forecast that envisions 29 million Americans will be diagnosed, and a further 10 million undiagnosed cases will develop, by 2050. While lifetime risk for American males born in 2000 is 33%, women and Hispanic-Americans face grimmer odds, with some equaling the 50% risk of diabetes faced by the Pima Indians in the Southwest, said Judith Fradkin of the National Institute of Health's diabetes institute.

—Wall Street Journal, 6/16/2003

Civil

Thousands of tons of chemical weapons dating back to the Second World War have been rusting away at the bottom of the Baltic Sea and are beginning to leak, scientists and environmentalists have warned. A poisonous legacy of Nazi Germany, more than 300,000 tons of weapons confiscated by the Allies were dumped between 1945 and 1947. Under the terms of a pact drawn up in 1945, the allies agreed that the weapons would be disposed of at sea. Regional governments have downplayed risks but a scientific mission based in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad has joined Green groups in warning that the impact of a simultaneous release into the ecosystem could be devastating.

—The Independent, 6/3/2003

Embattled President Charles Taylor of Liberia appealed to the United States for help in rescuing his country from civil war. Mr. Taylor, an American-educated former rebel leader who won the presidential election in 1997, declared that he wouldn't give up power before the end of his term. Rebel groups responded by vowing to fight until they had achieved their ultimate goal of seizing the capital and toppling the government of Mr. Taylor. Liberia, which was founded by freed American slaves in the 19th century, has been wracked by 14 years of violence that, in the 1990s alone, killed some 200,000. In the past three years of conflict, 300,000 Liberian refugees have fled to Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone. The war has displaced nearly half of its 2.7 million citizens.

—New York Times, 6/27/2003

Congo aid workers are being terrorized by rampaging militia. Bunia, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a cauldron of brutality, intimidation and abuse. In May, more than 430 civilians were butchered in ethnic massacres in the town where a French-led contingent of 1,400 peace-keepers is due to deploy. Some remains were eaten by packs of stray dogs, others apparently cannibalized. These days a Hema militia is in charge, and Bunia's half-empty streets are rife with looting, rape, death threats and extortion. The culprits are the gunmen who carried out the killing. At least 60 percent of the Huma militiamen are children, the UN estimates.

—The Independent, 6/3/2003

The U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee voted to repeal a 10-year old ban on the development of small nuclear weapons, asserting that the United States must begin looking at new ways of deterring terrorist groups and so-called rogue nuclear powers like North Korea. "This just undermines our whole argument," said Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee. "We're driving recklessly down a road that we're telling other people not to walk down." The law defined a low-yield weapon as having the explosive force of less than five kilotons of TNT. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 was about 15 kilotons.

—New York Times, 5/10/2003

Financial

[A North Korean] defector who testified to the U.S. Senate said "Kim Il Sung told his people to grow opium because he needed cash." In late 1997 the government decreed that all North Korean collective farms must allocate about 25 acres of land to poppy farming, the defector said. The opium is sent to pharmaceutical plants where it is processed into heroin. Farmers [were ordered] to switch their fields to poppy cultivation during the height of the famine that killed an estimated 2 million people. "There were some complaints that during the famine we should be growing grain, not poppies, but the instruction from the central government was that if we grow poppies, we can sell the product for 10 times as much to buy grain."

—Los Angeles Times, 5/21/2003

The full effects of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) have yet to be felt, and are bound to act as a brake on economic growth. Yet China's economy is still likely to grow far more quickly than most this year. Thanks to its membership in the World Trade Organization since the end of 2001, and the increasing contribution to growth made by its own voracious consumers, the economy now depends far less on the state. As a result, it is also exerting an unprecedented degree of influence over world trade. Last year, China's imports and exports had a combined value of about \$620 billion and accounted for 4.7% of world trade—nearly double the country's share of 2.7% as recently as 1995.

—The Economist, 6/27/2003

Rebuilding Iraq will take billions of dollars, and dozens of entrepreneurs are angling for a share of that money. These businesspeople—mostly retired military or diplomatic personnel who spent their careers in the middle East—act as middlemen for hire. They do everything from rounding up local suppliers for construction projects to helping companies set up branch offices in the region.

Middlemen and go-betweens with strong military contacts always appear wherever there's a war and wherever there's money to be made supplying the U.S. armed forces.

—Wall Street Journal, 6/16/2003

Israel

A Weizmann Institute study suggests that rising carbon dioxide levels in the world might help upgrade dry environments to valuable forests. In fact, researchers think the 7 billion tons of unaccounted for carbon dioxide may be the explanation for the expansion of forests into dry areas. A group of scientists, headed by Prof. Dan Yakir of Weizmann Institute's Environmental Sciences and Energy Department, found that the Yatir Forest, planted at the edge of the Negev Desert 35 years ago, is expanding at an unexpected rate. The findings, published in the current issue of *Global Change Biology*, suggest that forests in other parts of the globe could also be expanding into arid lands, absorbing carbon dioxide in the process. Yakir's team says that the reason for the connection between carbon dioxide and forest growth is in the process of photosynthesis. Plants need carbon dioxide for photosynthesis, but to obtain it, they must open pores in their leaves, consequently losing large quantities of water to evaporation. Yakir suggests that the 30% increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide since the start of the industrial revolution eases the plant's dilemma because the plant needs to open its pores only slightly to receive the necessary amount of carbon dioxide, thus causing it to lose less water. This efficient water preservation technique keeps moisture in the ground, allowing forests to grow in areas that previously were too dry.

—Arutz 7, 5/12/2003

The victory for US-led forces in Iraq has given George Bush enormous political capital to change the atmosphere of the Middle East, said one senior White House official. Impetus has been added to a renewed peace process by the dire state of Israel's economy, which Ariel Sharon has linked to the continuing conflict with the Palestinians. Israel has yet to receive \$9 billion in loan guarantees pledged by the US, and this may be one of the prime factors in Sharon's willingness to negotiate at the request of the US president.

—Financial Times, 6/3/2003

Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and British Gas may soon finalize an agreement to drill for natural gas in what are believed to be vast gas fields off Gaza. The deal was put on hold more than two years ago because of Arab-Israeli fighting. The plan calls for Israel to buy much of the gas and for the money to go into an account under the control of Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayad in an effort to keep it from getting into the hands of terrorists. The project will take about three years while British Gas installs a pipeline to pump gas to Israel. The deal will also enable a Palestinian gas-powered electricity plant to begin operating. Palestinians currently receive electricity from Israel.

—Associated Press, 4/22/2003

Over 2,000 Jews from all over France attended the Jewish Agency's mega-Aliyah Fair in Paris. The fair featured 45 stands set up by Israeli industries, mortgage banks, municipalities, educational institutions, the Jewish Agency, and the government. Aliyah from France in 2002—

2,500 Jewish people—was more than double that of the preceding year. The Jewish Agency reports that anti-Semitic incidents in France have risen sharply.

—Arutz 7, 4/13/2003

Naim Dangoor, once a merchant in Baghdad but now operating one of London's largest property companies, is aiming to re-establish the glory that was Iraqi Jewry, starting with the \$20 billion he estimates Iraq's new leaders—whoever they turn out to be—owe his people for the calamity that befell the world's oldest and wealthiest Jewish community when radical Arab nationalists began ruling Iraq after World War II. With the birth of Israel in 1948, anti-Jewish riots swept the Arab world. In Iraq, regulations modeled on Nazi Germany's Nuremberg laws restricted the role of Jews in commerce.

—Wall Street Journal, 6/30/2003

Book Review

Crisis of Conscience (fourth edition), Raymond Franz, Commentary Press, Atlanta, 2002. 438 pages.

Few know how the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society makes decisions. Raymond Franz knows because he became a member of its Governing Body in 1971. For a variety of reasons he was asked to resign from that body in 1980. At the end of 1981 he was formally disfellowshipped during an inquisition-like set of proceedings that strikes an outsider as simply incredible.

Franz describes how this organization grew from a small beginning to a worldwide organization of millions all of whom are expected to render unquestioning obedience to what they are told by the Governing Body. There is no room for individual interpretation of Scripture. If the publications of the Society have spoken, the matter is settled. Or perhaps one should say, settled until the Society itself changes them. Evidently Franz has thrown no scrap of paper away since he makes his points by reproducing the original documents, not just summarizing what they say.

Franz became unpopular because he believed that the Scriptures convey God's word to Christians, organizations do not. He was a principal contributor to *Aid to Bible Understanding*, an excellent reference book, produced over a five-year period just before he was invited to join the Governing Body. He explains that when that project began, the team was told to focus on the Bible, not the Society's publications. This they did with enthusiasm and consequently produced a work of value. It is not likely such direction would be given by the Society today.

It has been said that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Examples are the Nixon White House during the Watergate scandal, Enron, the rise of the Roman Catholic Church and Inquisition during the dark ages, and now this, yet another religious organization that demands loyalty to itself above loyalty to God.

None of us knows how our own dedication to the Lord will be tested in the years ahead. Franz takes us on a fascinating journey through his own "soul" with amazing insights into the secretive Brooklyn organization we have heard about but of which we all know so little.

—Michael Nekora

Poems and Short Features

Ruth and Boaz are to enter into the first-born privileges. At the same time by this walk of faith in the God of Israel and love towards Naomi, she makes it possible for Boaz to find her and fulfill his kinsman's duties. ...

The record tells us Ruth came to the field of Boaz and sought permission to glean. At the end of the day when the other gleaners departed, she “tarried a little in the house” (Ruth 2:7). We might think that she would have been glad to return home to Naomi after a long day’s toil, but not so. This one simple action is the turning point in her life.

Boaz was not in the field that day but came to his house from Bethlehem. If Ruth had gone home and not “tarried a little in the house,” he would not have seen her. Hearing of her kindness to Naomi, the wife of his kinsman, he determines to bless her. This is a crucial point also in our walk before the Lord as we glean in his harvest field. As we study his word and put into practice those covenant principles, what is it that catches his attention and marks us out for his special care?

It is not sacrifice. It is the spirit of sacrifice that carries us beyond its letter. This is not always easy for us to detect, but there are simple tests that we may apply which will reveal to us our true standing in this matter.

Remorse

With aching heart and low hung head,
With eyes of downcast set,
I enter now with humbled tread
Sad portals of regret.

Why did I speak those words so gruff,
And why was I so steeled
Against the admonitions of
My conscience quite concealed?

Why did I gash and wound my friend
With cold indifference
To painful pangs which cruelly rend
A heart so stunned and tense?

Pray tell me, why was I so blind
As not to see, and try
To save from pain, this friend of mine?
Oh, God, I know not why!

I only know I now can kneel
With humble tears and pray:
“From sinful words my lips please seal!
And keep me in Your way.”

—Laura E. Kelsey

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart,
and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”—Psalm 34:18

Inspection Precedes Reformation

Nehemiah did not begin his work by chiding his brethren with unfaithfulness to God or lack of enterprise, etc.; such a course would have further discouraged them, and would have made them feel antagonistic, and perhaps to say, “You will see how it is yourself when you are here a few years,” and some would then have taken pleasure in his failure to do more than they had accomplished. Neither did he begin by boastfully saying, “I have come here to do such a work, and within an incredibly short time you will see it accomplished; I will accomplish in days what you have failed to accomplish in as many years.” To have taken such a course would have been to arouse the opposition of the very ones without whose aid his mission, humanly speaking, would be sure to fail.

Many Christian people can learn a valuable lesson here: whoever desires to be a co-worker with God should work in the Lord’s way and be guided by the spirit of love—for love does not think unkindly or ungenerously or slighting of the efforts of others, nor is it boastful. On the contrary, its trust is in the Lord, and its boast therefore must be in him. This lesson is valuable to us also in respect to individual efforts in our own hearts—to build up good characters acceptable in God’s sight through Christ Jesus. We are to remember that nothing is gained, but much to be lost, by thinking or feeling boastfully of what we hope to attain in self-control and character-likeness to the Lord: nor is much to be gained by mourning and weeping over misspent opportunities of the past. The proper course is to begin work afresh with confidence, not in ourselves, but in him who called us and who has given such exceeding great and precious promises. This is our way to success in individual development, and also in our labors upon the walls of Zion, as it was Nehemiah’s successful method for the building of the natural, typical Jerusalem.

—“Teaching the Law of God,” *The Herald*, August 1922

A Consecrated Home

What makes a consecrated home?
A palace with its lofty dome?
A castle or the catacomb
Where Christians prayed in ancient Rome?
Is that a consecrated home?

Ah no, 'tis not an outer thing
That to your home this name will bring;
Within must rise two hearts that sing
The praises of our Lord and King.
That makes a consecrated home.

If there your child can find a guide
To point him to the heavenly bride;
If there, to you he can confide;
'Tis then you'll know down deep inside
You've found your consecrated home.

If there the harvest workers meet
And seek new ways to find the wheat;
If there they sit at Jesus' feet
And share with you "due season's meat";
You're in your consecrated home.

If friends can open wide your door
To share their joys, or help implore;
And you share with them your little store,
You can be glad for more and more
You have a consecrated home.

If there the truths of God you share,
If there for friends you truly care,
If there you often bow in prayer
And help someone his burden bear,
You're in a consecrated home.

And when convention's joyful fest
Brings to your home its welcome guest
And fellowship is at its best,
'Tis then you'll know that you are blest
Within your consecrated home.

May each of us have such a place,
Where Christian brethren we embrace,
Where Jesus steps we seek to trace
Till someday soon we see his face
In a heavenly consecrated home.

—Carl Hagensick

