

# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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### Difficult Decisions

Decision Making • Jacob • Was Moses Right or Wrong?  
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# In the Beginning

## Difficult Decisions

**Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.—James 4:15**

Life is full of decisions, big and small. Most of us find the process of decision-making a difficult one. We are not alone. The Bible abounds in holy people of God facing the challenge of difficult decisions in their lives. Some of these, and the decisions they faced, are profiled in this issue of The Herald.

The opening article, appropriately enough, is entitled *Decision Making* and deals with the principles of making choices and the need in the Christian life for a decisive attitude.

The article on *Jacob* and the deceptiveness with which he obtained the birthright from his father Isaac explores whether any circumstance in life justifies such an approach.

Another challenge that faces every Christian is how to react to those incidents when we are surrounded by what we consider an unholy environment. It is such an enigma that is discussed in *Was Moses Right or Wrong?*

Is there such a thing as a little “white” lie? Do extenuating circumstances justify lying in some cases? The treatise on *Rahab* takes a closer look at this question.

*Gideon* examines the appropriateness of “putting out the fleece” to be sure of making a decision God would approve.

Yet a different question that many face is whether or not to relocate when economic conditions turn bad. *To Moab and Back* shows how Elimelech and his wife faced this problem.

*“One Thing is Needful”* investigates the respective decisions Mary and her sister Martha made when Jesus was a guest in their home.

The last three articles deal with decisions the apostle Paul faced on his last journey to Jerusalem. The apostle’s determination to proceed on this mission, even when a prophet of the Lord warned against it, is the subject of *The Prophecy of Agabus. A Question of Motive* delves into Paul’s decision to go through temple rites with four others. The final article, *Standing Before Caesar*, explores the wisdom of the apostle claiming Roman citizenship in his legal defense.

We hope and trust that the examination of the decisions made by these heroes of faith will be of help as we face the challenging decisions in our own lives.

## A Difficult Task

# Decision Making

### How long halt ye between two opinions?—1 Kings 18:21

Some people are impetuous and quick to make decisions. As a result, they often make incorrect ones. Others are cautious and more calculating and slow to arrive at a choice. As a result, they frequently miss opportunities and stand forever at the crossroads.

On the one hand, Joshua challenged the nation of Israel with the words, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15); on the other hand, Jesus cautioned his disciples with the admonition, “Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:28).

Ruth was instantly decisive when she told Naomi, “Whither thou goest, I will go” (Ruth 1:16). Gideon was more analytical when he twice put forth the fleece to determine the Lord’s will (Judges 6:37-40). Some decisions are easy to make; others are more difficult. How do we determine the Lord’s will for us?

When asked this question, George Muller of the Plymouth Brethren (1805-1898) wrote, “I seek in the beginning to set my heart in such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord’s will, whatever it may be. Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If I do so, I make myself liable to a great delusion. I seek the will or spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone, without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the holy spirit guides us at all, he will do it according to the Scriptures, and never contrary to them. Next, I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God’s will, in connection with his Word and his Spirit. I ask God in prayer to reveal his will to me aright. Thus by the prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to deliberate judgment according to the best of my knowledge and opportunity, and if my mind is thus at peace, I proceed accordingly” (*Reprints*, p. 4468).

While this is an excellent suggestion, such an approach often competes with spontaneous decisiveness that has been a hallmark of many other Christian lives. The apostle Paul was quick in many of his decisions. The Ethiopian eunuch was instant in his decision when, traveling with Phillip and crossing a stream, he said, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Caleb was equally resolute to enter the Promised Land despite the formidable foes the nation would have to face (Numbers 13:30), and again when, at the age of 85, he requested Joshua’s permission to conquer Hebron, the strongest Canaanite fortress (Joshua 14:12). It was the impetuous Peter who was rewarded for his quick acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah by being given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:16-19).

While some of life's most serious decisions, such as the resolve to give one's life to the Lord, and the choice of a spouse, may require due consideration, they cannot be continually deferred lest the opportunities pass. Such decisions may well be made using George Muller's advice. Other decisions, perhaps momentous as well, should be made more quickly, sometimes instantly.

### **The Key to Decision Making**

The key to making these decisions properly is instilling the principles of righteousness into one's mind and quickly applying them to the choice one must make. "What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose" (Psalm 25:12). Thus, a Christian who knows he has committed himself to the service of God, need not ponder long about accepting such services divine providence proffers. Nor are decisions between right and wrong in moral matters to be submitted to continuous analysis, but made resolutely.

This is not to say that all such decisions are easy, or even that they will always be made correctly. It is a true adage that "a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again" (Proverbs 24:16). It is not a mortal sin to take the wrong path at a crossroads in life; but it can become so if, after discovering it is the wrong road, to lack the humility to admit the course is wrong and reverse one's steps. A seven-fold rising again must follow the seven-fold falling of the just man.

### **Butter and Honey**

An interesting text is found in Isaiah: "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good" (Isaiah 7:15). The Septuagint translates "that" as "before," which agrees with Darby's "until." In other words, the eating of butter and honey precedes the knowledge of the distinction between good and evil. J. C. Sunderlin suggests that the butter and honey are put for evil and good respectively (see *Reprints*, p. 443). Thus the thought seems to be that experience with good and evil precedes the ability to discern between the two.

This calls to mind the anecdote of the wise man who was approached by one of his disciples with the question, "Master, how did you get to be so wise?" "By making good decisions," responded the sage. "But how did you learn to know which were good decisions?" the disciple persisted. "By experience," he answered. "And how did you get experience?" "By making bad decisions," the old man replied.

Decisiveness is a strong asset in character-building. When decisions are made correctly, they produce a sense of well-being. When the wrong decisions are made, they provide opportunities to learn valuable lessons. King David provides a classic example of someone who made a wrong decision. His sin with Bathsheba was of the greatest magnitude, involving as it did adultery, lying, and murder. It was a sin that cost him dearly when the child conceived with Bathsheba died. Yet he remained "a man after [God's] own heart" (Acts 13:22).

## Accepting Consequences

God's permission of evil is not only a valuable way to teach mankind the benefits of serving truth and righteousness rather than error and wickedness, it is also an instrument to teach the consequences of wrong decisions. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7) is a succinct statement of the moral law that every action has an equal reaction. It is a true adage that the mark of maturity is the willingness to accept the consequences of one's own actions. Once the price for an error has been paid, much profit is gained if the lesson learned is applied to future decisions.

Well did the young man Elihu say to Job, "Let us choose unto us judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good" (Job 34:4). Adam Clarke catches the thought with these words: "Let us not seek the applause of victory. Let our aim be to obtain correct views and notions of all things; and let us labor to find out what is good."

May every Christian base his decisions in an endeavor to obtain a correct view. And let each labor to make the right decisions in life, finding out that which is good.

## A Blessing by Deception

### Jacob

**Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac;  
and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law,  
and to Israel for an everlasting covenant.—Psalm 105:9,10**

The complicated life of Jacob, patriarch of the Jewish nation, has been studied and commented upon for centuries. The Abrahamic promise, so essential to the ultimate future of the entire human race, rested on Jacob; yet the means by which he secured this promise included cunning, deception, and an outright lie to his father Isaac. What lessons can be drawn from the story of Jacob concerning the manner with which God deals with his human creation? What lessons can we as Christians learn from the life of Jacob?

Genesis chapters 25 to 35 are devoted to the life of Jacob. God's promise to bless his human creation had been given to Abraham many years before, passed on to Isaac, and would next rest on Jacob. In God's providence, Jacob would become Israel and his twelve sons would form the foundation of "God's chosen people," the nation of Israel.

### A Study in Contrasts

Conflict and struggle were associated with Jacob even before he was born. His mother, Rebekah, was told that she was carrying twins and that they represented two nations destined to struggle with each other. She was told that the elder would serve the younger. As Jacob and Esau grew, it was easy to see why they were destined to struggle. The fraternal twins differed in every way. Esau was rugged, sensual, an outdoors man and hunter. Jacob was "plain," preferring to remain at home. Rebekah favored Jacob while Isaac loved Esau. A notable flaw in this ancient family seems to be the obvious favoritism each parent had for one of the twins.

Rebekah was a woman of faith. God had answered her prayer to become the mother of Esau and Jacob. God had given her the weighty prophecy concerning the two nations of which her two sons would be the progenitors. God had told her that the promised blessing would rest on the younger son, Jacob.

We are not told why Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau, but it is not unreasonable to assume that it was because of God's promise (Genesis 25:23). Isaac was certainly mindful of the great promise and the wonderful direct experiences he had with God during his life. Yet Isaac seemed to be enamored of his "manly" son, Esau. Perhaps he was thinking in terms of that son being more able to provide for the day-to-day needs of the family (Genesis 25:28).

As the twins grew, their contrasting natures also matured. Jacob was preoccupied with obtaining the birthright blessing and waited for an opportunity to present itself (Genesis 25:29-33). We are all familiar with the story that recounts Esau selling his birthright for a

simple meal of lentil soup. This event illustrates the lack of respect Esau had for his firstborn status and the weighty blessing associated with it. The Scripture says that he “despised” his birthright (Genesis 25:34). Esau further despised his heritage by marrying two Canaanite wives from “the daughters of Heth” (Genesis 27:46); they were daughters of Hittites (Genesis 26:34). When the time came for Isaac to confer his final blessings on his sons before what he erroneously thought was his imminent death, Rebekah determined that she must force the circumstances for God’s will to be done. She devises the deception and told Jacob that if there were to be any negative consequences, they would fall upon her (Genesis 27:12,13).

### **The Failure of Rebekah**

The Old Testament scholar, Daniel Elazar, states: “If Rebekah, when she heard Isaac promise the blessing to Esau, had gone to him, and with humility and seriousness put him in remembrance of that which God had said concerning their sons, if she had further showed him how Esau had forfeited the blessing, both by selling his birthright, and by marrying strange wives, it is probable Isaac would have been prevailed with to confer the blessing upon Jacob, and needed not thus to have been cheated into it. This had been honorable and laudable, and would have looked well in history; but God left her to herself to take this indirect course, that he might have the glory of bringing good out of evil.”

Rebekah paid a high price for her scheming. After Esau discovered that he had lost the blessing and been left with a much inferior one, he determined to murder Jacob. Rebekah convinced Isaac to send Jacob away to find a wife from her relatives, thus preserving the heritage of the promised blessing. Her beloved son Jacob was sent away for more than twenty years. Rebekah suffered the mother’s pain of never seeing him again.

She is not the only one to pay because of this deception. Jacob himself is deceived seven years later when Rebekah’s brother Laban switches Leah for Rachel on Jacob’s wedding night (Genesis 29:25). Years later it is Laban who is deceived by Rachel after she steals his images and lies about it (Genesis 31:34,35). Standing before Pharaoh after being brought to Egypt by Joseph, Rachel’s firstborn son, Jacob sums up his life in these words: “Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained the days of the years of my fathers in their days of sojourning” (Genesis 47:9, Alter translation).

Isaac restates the blessing promised to Jacob **only** when he sends him away to find a wife in Haran, from Rebekah’s family (Genesis 28:1-5). This reveals that Isaac accepted God’s choice and understood that this important blessing would now rest with the descendants of Jacob. But Isaac also shows his personal displeasure by sending Jacob away without giving him any material possessions with which he can “purchase” his bride. Jacob must make his own way, and he does so without complaint. God himself confirms his choice of Jacob in the form of a dream on the way to Haran (Genesis 28:10-15).

Struggle, conflict, and deception follow Jacob throughout his long life. His experiences with Laban, Rachel, and Leah as well as the many adventures and heartaches associated with raising his large family all developed his character and increased his faith in God.

What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of Jacob concerning how God deals with his human creation? Certainly one of the outstanding claims of the Bible's authenticity as the word of God is the fact that its characters are presented true to life. Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau are flawed human beings with strained family relationships. God overlooked this imperfection to accomplish his will.

The players in this drama do suffer the natural consequences of their behavior. God's principles outlined in Proverbs 12:22 are not violated: "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are his delight" (NAS). But God does not alter his intention to pass the blessing along the line of Abraham because of the absence of a more suitable family: "The gifts and callings of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29, NAS).

The conflict between the nation of Israel and the children of Esau, also known as Edom, fills much of the history of the Old Testament and continues into the conflict between Jews and Arabs today.

### **Lessons for the Christian**

What lessons can Christians learn from the life of Jacob? It is important for all God's children to refrain from condemning that which God does not condemn. While we can certainly agree that the actions of Rebekah and Jacob were wrong regarding the deception of Isaac, we also note the "goodness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22) by allowing only the natural course of life to provide the needed chastisements and lessons without direct condemnation. By applying this principle in our own lives where appropriate, valuable Christian development will result.

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world in order to shame its wise men: and God has chosen the weak things of the world in order to shame what is strong: and the mean and despised things of the world—things that are nothing—God has chosen in order to bring to nothing things that are; to prevent any mortal man from boasting before God. But thanks to Him you are in Christ Jesus: he has become our wisdom from God, which is righteousness and sanctification and redemption that it may be as Scripture says, He who boasts, let his boast be in the LORD."—1 Corinthians 1:27-31, Weymouth translation.



## Declining God's Invitation

### **Was Moses Right or Wrong?**

*Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.—Exodus 32:10*

*Carl Hagensick*

The authors of the Old Testament are careful that their history “as impartially records and reproves their weaknesses and shortcomings as it commends their virtues and faithfulness. ... There is a straightforwardness about the Bible that stamps it as truth” (*Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 1, p. 41). It is, however, the task of the student to determine if an action is right or wrong. A case in point is found in Exodus.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”—Exodus 32:7-14

Fearful and chagrined when Moses did not return from Mt. Sinai as quickly as they expected, the discouraged Israelites prevailed upon Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship. When Moses saw this infidelity, his anger against the people was kindled. More importantly, the anger of Jehovah was also kindled. This led to God’s proposal to destroy all the faithless Hebrews and bring forth a new nation from the loins of Moses.

### **God Asks Man’s Permission**

God does not summarily carry out his judgment against Israel. He first asks Moses for permission to do so with the words: “Let me alone!” Similarly, when Joshua defended the Gibeonites from the attack of the Amorites, we read, “The LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man” (Joshua 10:14).

Having established Moses as a mediator in his relationship with Israel, God recognized that position and sought Moses' permission to carry out his punishment of the wayward tribes. This approach speaks volumes about the character of the Almighty who not only cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), but who also acknowledges and works through the agencies which he sets up. God is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33,40).

What was true in his relationship with Moses as mediator will also be true in his relationship with Christ, the greater mediator, in the thousand-year reign of his kingdom. The prophet metaphorically expresses it thus: "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens [the new heavens of Jesus and his church], and they shall hear the earth [the new earth of restored mankind]" (Hosea 2:21).

### **The Audacity of Moses and the Repentance of God**

Moses' response appears to be as audacious as it was bold. He argued with God. He interceded for the faithless mob and asked Jehovah to reconsider. His plea is based on the glory of God. If Israel is destroyed, he reasons, the Gentile nations may well claim that while Jehovah had the power to bring the Israelites forth from Egyptian bondage, he lacked the ability to bring them into the promised land.

The intensity of his prayer is suggested by the fact that in the parallel account in Deuteronomy 9:18 it appears to have been accompanied by forty days of complete fasting. His prayer proved to be effectual because God hearkened to it: "And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Exodus 32:14). The Hebrew *nacham* (Strong's 5162) translated "repented," while frequently meaning precisely that, in the niphil conjugation used here has the sense of "to have compassion" (*Brown, Driver, and Briggs Lexicon*). Thus it corresponds with the Greek *metanoeo* (Strong's #3340), "to change the mind" and not *metamellomai* (#3338), signifying regret, an attitude that never refers to God as is evident from its usage in Hebrews 7:21. The Septuagint uses *hilasthee*, meaning "was propitiated" or "was appeased."

In other words, God's compassion on Israel was elicited by the plea of Moses. The change of action was not dictated by sorrow, but by a sympathetic ear to the argument of Moses. However, the mere fact that God gave Moses a positive answer to his prayer does not necessarily prove that the request was proper.

In addition to his prayer on behalf of the recalcitrant Hebrews, the great lawgiver returns to Mt. Sinai hoping that perhaps ("peradventure") he can make an atonement for their sins (Exodus 32:30-35). God sends a plague on the people rather than blotting them out.

### **An Analysis of Moses' Decision**

In analyzing the question as to whether Moses' decision to challenge God's proposition was right or wrong, we need to investigate the arguments. In considering the wisdom and correctness of the choice made by Moses, several points indicate the propriety of what he did:

**1. God answered Moses' prayer.**

The acquiescence of Jehovah to the plea of Moses might well indicate the propriety of his position and suggest the legitimacy of his action.

**2. The glory of God.**

The prayer, being based on that which would render the greatest glory to the Almighty, also implies that the course chosen was the correct one.

**3. The idealism of unselfishness.**

Turning down the offer of personal glory and the exaltation of his family and bloodline showed an unselfish goal of idealism that is worthy of emulation.

**4. God's Timetable.**

If Moses had made the other decision, the entrance to the promised land would have had, of necessity, to be delayed because it would take time to create a new nation from the loins of Moses, causing many changes in God's chronological timetable for the accomplishment of his plans.

On the other hand, there are several points that indicate his decision was not the best:

**1. The wisdom of the Almighty.**

Surely God knows the best course of action in every circumstance.

Therefore if he suggested the removal of the backsliding nation of Israel and the advancement of Moses' house, he must have had a wise reason for it.

**2. The truthfulness of God.**

If Jehovah promised to bless the acceptance of his invitation and make a new nation to fulfill his promises, surely he would have kept that promise had that offer been implemented.

**3. The principle of repentance.**

In Jeremiah 18:8, the principle of what produced a change of mind on the part of God is spelled out: "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."

**4. Moses' destiny.**

Debatably, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of this decision. It can well be argued that the reason he was forbidden that privilege was because he struck the rock twice instead of speaking to it as God commanded (Numbers 20:8-11). However, had he accepted God's invitation to abandon Israel, he would not have been tempted to anger by the people's intransigence.

## **The Conclusion**

Was Moses right or wrong when he rejected the invitation from God to let the Israelites perish in the wilderness and a new, stronger, and better race produced from his own

progeny? Only God, who has not revealed the answer, knows which would have been the best decision.

Some may claim that the words of the Lord were not meant to be an invitation, but were made to test the character of Moses. But God promised he would make a new nation of Moses, and, since God cannot lie, he most certainly would have done so had Moses acceded to Jehovah's request. Nor can it be said that Moses was being tempted to see how he would react for we read, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13).

Thus this cannot be considered as a choice between a right or a wrong decision, but between two acceptable choices, neither being better than the other, both being alike good.

### **A Lesson for Us**

From time to time we find ourselves in similar situations. We may feel that we are in a poor religious situation. We may feel that we are called to leave our local ecclesia or church. We may feel that the Lord is requesting, "Come out of her my people that ye be not partakers of her sins" (Revelation 18:4). What should we do? Should we follow our interpretation of divine providence and depart? Should we anticipate that the Lord is saying to us, "I will make a new religious environment from [or at least, for] you?"

Or should we react as Moses reacted and plead the Lord's glory to forgive those who have transgressed divine law? Should we say, in effect, "Lord, if you abandon these people, others will say you were sufficiently powerful to bring them into your truth but you were not able to bring them to their Promised Land." Should we, as Moses did, continue to use our influence to try to prevent their further backsliding?

Our personal answer rests in part on whether we think Moses was right or wrong to do what he did.

In the kingdom, The Christ will have full authority as a part of the greater than Moses, the Mediator, without any intervention by God. Of course under our Head, Christ Jesus, it will not be possible for the Mediator to make any unwise decisions. Then we will know when to plead for man's forgiveness and when not to do so. May we each learn to appreciate and understand the immense privilege and responsibility we will have, if faithful, to bring mankind back into harmony with God.

## Rahab

*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

—*Hebrews 11:6, NIV*

*Michael Nekora*

The second chapter of Joshua describes the experience of two spies who had been sent to Jericho to learn what they could before the Israelites crossed Jordan and engaged the city's inhabitants in battle. Here is the account:

“Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. ‘Go, look over the land,’ he said, ‘especially Jericho.’ So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. The king of Jericho was told, ‘Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.’ So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: ‘Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.’ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, ‘Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.’ (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) ... Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, ‘I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family.’ ”—Joshua 2:1-6, 8-12, NIV

Jericho is in the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea, about 800 feet below sea level and five miles west of the Jordan River. It is one of the world’s oldest known settlements and one of the lowest cities in the world.

The king of Jericho was more like a mayor or city manager. Apparently the cities in Canaan were somewhat independent of each other because this king did not ask for help from other kings to resist this formidable adversary coming against him from out of the wilderness.

When Joshua became Israel’s leader at the death of Moses, God said to him: “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5).

With this kind of promise ringing in his ears, why did Joshua send out spies? He knew victory was certain. But he also knew one more thing: if he did not use the counsel,

prudence, and strength that he had received from God, he would not succeed. Although he was depending on divine direction and power, he also knew it would be prudent to embark on an “intelligence gathering” expedition. His approach contains a lesson for us: We cannot expect success, either in things spiritual or temporal, unless we also exercise prudence. Although God is in charge of our experiences, we are workers together with God (2 Corinthians 6:1). Let us do everything as though success actually depended upon our own efforts knowing that any success achieved will be because of God’s overruling providence.

Because the Jordan was relatively easy to cross at this point, Jericho was a popular rest stop for the many trade caravans that traveled between Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Phoenicia. Foreigners and strangers were frequently within the city; that may be why the spies felt bold enough to walk right in. But where would they spend the night? The logical place would be where strangers were welcome: a “bed and breakfast” operated by a woman named Rahab. Those who stayed there would bring the news of the day and would tell the woman what had happened to Israel over the last forty years. The reaction of almost everyone in the city was fear and dread. But Rahab came to the correct conclusion that Israel was serving the true God and that all other gods were false. When the spies came to her house, they found the only person in Jericho who was friendly to their nation. Rahab **believed**. Soon she showed she had more than belief. Rahab had **faith**.

Undoubtedly the spies were not the only ones at her house that afternoon. Their manner of speech and accent probably betrayed their nationality; so a message soon got to the king that spies from Israel had entered the city. Rahab guessed what was happening so she hid the spies on her flat roof.

It might seem strange that the king’s messengers did not just enter the house and search it. But in those days a woman’s living quarters were private and her privacy was not to be violated (Judges 4:17-21). Rahab hid the spies so there would be no obvious evidence of their presence to anyone who came to the door. Then she lied: “Yes, they were here, but they are gone now.”

### **Lying**

Are there circumstances that justify lying? It’s one thing to say we should always tell the truth, but when we and others dependent upon us might suffer imprisonment or even death, might this be an exception to the general rule? How do we decide?

We know how Rahab decided. She lied, and she did it convincingly. The king’s messengers went off toward Jordan hoping to catch the spies. Later that night she lowered the spies over the city wall using a rope and told them to flee in the opposite direction and hide several days in one of the many mountain caves.

Some may think that because she lied, she became a great hero of faith: “By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were

disobedient” (Hebrews 11:31, NIV). “Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?” (James 2:25, NIV).

Nothing in either text praises Rahab because she lied. To say that she is listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11 because she lied would be to say that Abraham is listed because he lied about Sarah’s relationship to him, or that David is listed because he murdered the husband of a woman he wanted for himself.

Lying is so easy. Cain was the son of parents who were created perfect. When God asked, “Where is your brother Abel?” he replied: “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9, NIV). So how can we know under what circumstances it is justifiable to lie?

In fact it is never justifiable! We have given up our own will to do the will of the heavenly Father. How do we know what that is? One way is to follow the pattern of Jesus who always did the will of his Father. If we do what he did, we may be sure we’re doing the Father’s will. And there is not one single instance where Jesus lied. Not one. This should not be surprising. His Father cannot lie: “That by two immutable things, in which it was **impossible for God to lie**, we might have a strong consolation” (Hebrews 6:18).

Lying is part of the old man. The world thinks there are times when lying is appropriate, but it is never appropriate for the footstep followers of Christ. Even in the world, it is hardly the best policy. Who would want to live in a world where people lie as easily as they speak truth?

Could Rahab have saved the spies without telling a lie? Based on the customs of her time, it would never have occurred to her to try. Within her culture she certainly had **not** been taught the value of speaking only the truth: “Strict truth, either in Jew or heathen, was a virtue so utterly unknown before the promulgation of the Gospel that, so far as Rahab is concerned, the discussion is quite superfluous.”—*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, McClintock & Strong, vol. 8, p. 881.

Adam Clarke writes: “There is a lax morality in the world that recommends a lie rather than the truth when the purposes of religion and humanity can be served by it. But when can this be? The religion of Christ is one eternal system of truth, and can neither be served by a lie, nor admit one.” He goes on to say that the next [false] step is to say: “Let us do evil that good may come of it”—which was an accusation leveled against the apostle Paul by his critics in Romans 3:8.

The dictionary defines a lie as a false statement deliberately presented as being true, or something meant to deceive or give a wrong impression. If lying is evil, then it is evil no matter what the eventual result may be.

## The Scarlet Thread

Rahab and the spies discussed what she was to do to identify her house so the soldiers would know how to save her and her family: “Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet **thread** in the window which thou didst let us down by. ... And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet **line** in the window” (Joshua 2:18,21).

Although the NIV says it was a scarlet cord, it is more likely that it was a cloth woven with scarlet thread, a kind of red flag. Rahab hid the spies among stalks of flax drying on the roof. Flax is used to make linen, and Rahab probably made cloth. One of the spies might have seen some red cloth in her home and realized it could be used as an identifying flag. The “red” was a sign or pledge of safety to all within that house.

Marking the outside of a home with red is similar to what happened at the Exodus. Israelites marked their doorposts and lintels with red blood so the death angel would pass over their houses during the night. A family showed faith to think splashing blood would do any good at all. Rahab also had faith that this red flag would save her.

And it did save her. She and her family became the first proselytes of Judaism after Israel entered Canaan. She was fully accepted by the Israelites. Her past stayed in the past. In fact she married a prince of Judah: “Salmon the father of Boaz, **whose mother was Rahab**, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David” (Matthew 1:5,6, NIV).

Salmon’s father was Nahshon. When he died in the wilderness, Salmon would have succeeded him. What could have possessed Salmon to marry a heathen prostitute?

In fact when he married her she was neither heathen nor a prostitute. That was in the past. Although the account does not say it directly, it is likely Salmon was one of the two spies that fateful night. He saw Rahab’s faith firsthand and fell in love with her. Although initially she was outside God’s covenant nation, Rahab was fully accepted and became part of the genealogical chain extending from Adam to Jesus Christ. How like our loving God to do the unexpected, to take one here and one there who may be considered undesirable by those who think they know better: “The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matthew 21:31, NIV).

What does God think of prostitutes? He loves them. And if they accept his love, they can become transformed: “Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers ... will inherit the kingdom of God. And **that is what some of you were**. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, NIV).



## Summary

The experience of Rahab and the spies contains interesting lessons for us:

1. Let us, like Joshua, use wisdom in undertaking the work of the Lord and try to do everything carefully, even though we know the results are from the Lord.
2. “Without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Hebrews 11:6). Rahab says, “The LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Joshua 2:11). She was determined to serve **that** God, not something less. She survived because of her faith. We know so much more than she did about this God. Let us never lose our faith in him.
3. Lying is wrong. It is sad to see anyone lie. Learn to say, “I’d rather not answer that question,” or “I don’t know.” Speak the truth, or don’t speak at all. The “ends” never justify the means. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44); the God whom we serve is the father of truth (John 15:26).
4. God may sometimes reach outside his “chosen” people, those with whom he works more than others, to find one here and one there to bless.

“Don’t tell lies to each other; it was your old life with all its wickedness that did that sort of thing: now it is dead and gone. You are living a brand new kind of life that is continually learning more and more of what is right and trying constantly to be more and more like Christ who created this new life within you.” —Colossians 3:9,10, *Living Bible*.

## Things Most Desirable

### Gideon

*One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.—Psalm 27:4*

*Michael Brann*

Some have reasoned that David wrote these words just prior to his second anointing while King Saul was harassing him and suffering distress from the Amalekites. He was cut off from public worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem and severely felt the loss of “enquiring in the temple” for the Lord’s direction at such a critical time in his life. Others have reasoned that the psalm was written to express the sorrow, loss, and hope of the Jews while they were held captive in Babylon. What a great loss to endure, to not be able to worship the Lord in their beautiful temple and to have their priesthood help determine the will of the Lord for them as a nation!

Regardless of the circumstances that led to these words being written, one thing is clear: The Lord is well pleased to be called upon in prayer so we might know his will. It is a privilege and honor he has extended to those who seek him. There are scores of Scriptures encouraging prayer including:

“As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me.”—Psalm 55:16

“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.”—Psalm 55:17

“O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”—Psalm 65:2

“He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.”—Psalm 102:17

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”—Luke 18:1

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” —Philippians 4:6, NIV

The high priest used the Urim and Thummim to determine the Lord’s will when questions of national importance needed specific answers. Prior to this, the Lord let his will be made known to various individuals as circumstances required, probably as an answer to their prayers. Abraham and Moses are examples (see Genesis 15:1-5 and Exodus 3:11-15).

## **Gideon (Judges 6)**

Later in Israel's history, the Lord spoke to the nation through judges and prophets especially raised up for the purpose. Gideon was one of these. He lived in a turbulent period of Israel's history. The nation and its priesthood had fallen into idolatry and were not enjoying the fruit of their covenant relationship with God. For many years neighboring enemy nations had plagued Israel, especially in the time of harvest. They would steal the harvested crops leaving the Israelites hungry and fearful. The Midianites were particularly detestable. Israel was forced to improvise their winepresses as threshing machines and to build underground storage receptacles to conceal their food supplies.

Gideon apparently took to heart the words of a nameless prophet who had spoken in the name of the Lord in answer to Israel's cries (prayers). Perhaps Gideon mused in his heart as to who would stand up for the Lord's cause and put an end to this oppression. Perhaps he wondered if he had the courage and faith to help out. Then an angel appeared and told him that he, Gideon, would indeed "save Israel from the hand of the Midianites."

Gideon—young, inexperienced, and deeply humble—begged a sign as evidence that the angel was really an angel of the Lord. The sign was granted and Gideon began by tearing down the altars of Baal. Shortly thereafter, an army of Midianites, Amalekites and others of the east, 135,000 strong, gathered themselves against Israel. Again, Gideon asked for a sign. This time he laid out a fleece of sheepskin asking that it be wet with dew while the ground around it remained dry; the next evening he asked for the opposite to occur.

Why Gideon used this kind of test is not stated, but perhaps he reasoned that Israel was the sheep of the Lord's special care and dew was a sign of favor (Psalm 100:3; Genesis 27:28,39). Israel was supposed to have the Lord's favor while the enemies surrounding them, idol worshipers and wicked, were obviously displeasing and out of favor with the Lord. The signs requested were granted and Gideon led a small band of three hundred men armed with only trumpets and lamps hidden in pitchers to a stunning and marvelous victory over the enemy armies. Gideon became one of the most loved and honored deliverers in Israel's history. He is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as one of the "heroes of faith."

### **Is Gideon's Fleece a Model to Follow?**

It is not uncommon to hear Christians use the phrase "laying out the fleece" when trying to determine the Lord's will, especially when something seems especially important or urgent. Gideon's example is cited when faced with perplexing decisions. Like him, we may want to ask for signs indicating clearly the will of the Lord. As good as this sounds, it is not the way Christians should determine the Lord's will.

First, Gideon had already been told twice (Judges 6:14,16) what the will of the Lord was by the one who appeared unto him. There was no reason to ask for another sign. Apparently this desire was shaped partly by his deep humility and partly by his lack of faith.

Second, Gideon himself realized he was coming dangerously close to testing God. He wanted “something more,” some further proof of God’s commission and blessing. He introduced the second request by saying, “Do not let thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more” (Judges 6:39, NAS).

Third, this was not a common practice of believers in either the Old or New Testament. Had this been an example to follow, there undoubtedly would be other instances of it occurring in the Scriptures. We should expect to find direct statements suggesting this practice if it were pleasing to the Lord. Instead we find warnings and admonitions discouraging it.

The Lord on other occasions did honor requests confirming his will. Abraham’s servant “laid out the fleece,” so to speak, when searching for a bride for Isaac (Genesis 24:14). Good King Hezekiah asked for a sign of his healing by requesting the sun’s shadow to return backward ten degrees (2 Kings 20:10, 11). Hezekiah’s father, wicked king Ahaz, was asked by God to request a sign in regard to placing his trust in an Assyrian alliance, or to depend solely on the Lord. He answered correctly, yet by pretense: “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.” In this case, Ahaz did not really want to know the Lord’s will. His mind was already set to forge an alliance with Assyria (Isaiah 7:10-12).

These instances serve to prove that such requests indicate a lack of faith, or at least a weakened faith, as well as immaturity. Anyone can follow signs; it is much more difficult to study the word of God and determine his will based on divine principles. Perhaps legitimate reasons can be found for those in ancient times who felt they needed additional signs. They did not have the Bible set down in such a convenient and readily available form as we have it today. Christians are asked to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11).

Our Lord gave warnings about “sign seekers” on at least two occasions. “But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas” (Matthew 12:39). “The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven” (Matthew 16:1). See also Exodus 17:1-7 and Deuteronomy 6:16.

### **Conclusions about “Laying out the Fleece”**

1. We are called to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).
2. If we come to a crossroads and are not sure what to do, we should “wait on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14). Study, meditation, prayer, and asking advice from mature Christians, will usually make the way of the Lord plain. Even if a wrong choice is made after doing these things, it will still work out for good to those called of the Lord (1 Timothy 4:13-17; Romans 8:28).
3. Often the will of the Lord is clear: we may either be ignorant of it or we may want to do our own will in the matter; we should not confuse the two. For instance, a young

Christian may wonder whether to marry a non-Christian when the Lord has clearly stated through the apostle that we are not to be unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14).

4. The Lord is the Supreme Ruler of the universe! We must not attempt to manipulate him by trying to make him do what we want him to do (Matthew 4:5-7).

5. God is pleased to reveal his will to those who seek to know it and it will be revealed through his holy word (Amos 3:7; Romans 15:4).

6. God does not circumvent our new creature minds when it comes to determining his will (Ephesians 5:17, Rotherham).

7. God is pleased we want to do his will. Inquiring in his temple is one of the greatest blessings afforded to his people (Psalm 27:4).

8. Trusting faith is better than trusting in a “fleece” (Proverbs 3:5).

9. Don't set a fleece on the ground; set your knees on the ground and pray (Matthew 6:33).

To Go or Not to Go

## To Moab and Back

*Verse-by-verse study of Ruth 1*

A Bethlehemite family faced a dilemma. There was a famine in Judah. All the inhabitants of the land had to decide whether to stay, endure the hardships, and trust in God, or whether to move to the nearby land of Moab where food was plentiful. The family of Elimelech decided to move. The book of Ruth chronicles their experiences.

### **Elimelech's Decision—Ruth 1:1-5**

*Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.*

According to the *Jerusalem Targum*, this was one of ten famines (or calamities) from God to chastise his people: “God has decreed ten grievous famines to take place in the world, to punish the inhabitants of the earth, before the coming of Messiah the king. The first in the days of Adam; the second in the days of Lamech; the third in the days of Abraham; the fourth in the days of Isaac; the fifth in the days of Jacob; the sixth in the days of Boaz, who is called Abstan (Ibzan) the just, of Bethlehem-judah; the seventh in the days of David, king of Israel; the eighth in the days of Elijah the prophet; the ninth in the days of Elisha, in Samaria; the tenth is yet to come, and it is not a famine of bread or of water but of hearing the word of prophecy from the mouth of the Lord; and even now this famine is grievous in the land of Israel.”

The fact that Elimelech died shortly after the move to Moab as well as the names of their two children—Mahlon, meaning sickly, and Chilion, meaning pining—imply that poor health may have been part of the motivation for their decision. However, as Matthew Henry has so well said, “Changing our place seldom is mending it.” The move was disastrous and all three males of the family died in Moab.

It had never been their intent to move permanently to Moab, but to “sojourn” there until the food shortage in Bethlehem was over. Ironically, Elimelech, whose name means “God is my king,” was the one who voluntarily left Israel’s God-given country for that of a frequent enemy and oppressor of Judah. He failed to live up to the promise to God which spouses make to each other at their nuptials with the words “for better or for worse.”

Similar decisions face God's people even today. Hardships come upon Christians, and are even predicted for them. These test their faith in the pledge of God to "never leave nor forsake" them (Hebrews 13:5). If he will never leave us, why are we prone to leave him when the going gets rough? He never promised "days without rain," but merely the assurance to be with us in our spiritual droughts as well as in times of prosperity.

Then again, it may be out of concern for the temporal welfare of our children that we are tempted to remove them for a time, to "sojourn" so to speak, from where God's promises are centered. We never intend such separations to be permanent, but now often, as was the case with Mahlon and Chilion, they die in that foreign land of estrangement from God.

After the three male members of the family die, Naomi is left alone with two foreign daughters-in-law and she has a difficult decision: remain in Moab with the only two members of her immediate family whom she dearly loves, or return to her homeland she left so long ago.

### **Naomi's Decision—Ruth 1:6,7**

*Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.*

Since the famine in Judah had ended, there appears to be little hesitation in Naomi's determination to return. Both Orpah and Ruth, the Moabite girls who had married her two sons, apparently accompanied her as far as the border, the river Jordan just south of Jericho.

### **A Suggestion to Return to Moab—Ruth 1:8-10**

*And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.*

Great unselfish love is shown here. The bond between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law was apparently very strong. The Moabitish girls had evidently been faithful and loving wives to Mahlon and Chilion, as well as a comfort to Naomi herself. This strong love between women of such diverse cultures and religions speaks volumes of the tact and wisdom of an ideal mother-in-law. She would have kept a kosher kitchen; they would not have been so naturally inclined. She never stopped worshipping Jehovah; they would have been more used to their god, Chemish. Yet, their differences did not appear to weaken their relationship. In fact, Naomi's conduct was so admirable, that both girls greatly desired to go to Judah with her.

Unselfishness is also shown in the suggestion that the girls remarry and find “rest” in the home of new husbands. The word rest is a translation of the Hebrew *menuchah*. Commenting on this word in his *Notes*, John Meggison writes: “There is great beauty in the Hebrew word rendered ‘rest’ here. The position of a single woman in those days was an unhappy one. The youthful widow married again. There she found an asylum of protection, safety and honor. That is the idea of the word *menuchah*, resting place, which Naomi urged them to find in their own land, in the house of another husband which Jehovah would grant them. It is a beautiful expression. Deuteronomy 12:9 [reads], Hitherto ye have not come into the rest and inheritance which Jehovah your God giveth you.”

Thus the contrast is shown in the difficult decision the two young women had to make: whether to find their rest, their *menuchah* of protection, in new husbands from their native land or in an unknown God and a strange land with an uncertain future.

Both of them initially demur from the suggestion to return to Moab and assure Naomi of their desire to accompany her to Judea. It appears that the life Naomi lived proved to be a good witness to her daughters-in-law. While they did not make a commitment to convert to the God of Israel, they did show a willingness to live according to the customs of the Hebrews.

### **The Suggestion Reiterated—Ruth 1:11-13**

*And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.*

Naomi persists in her suggestion they not accompany her to Judea. She recognizes that they would have little prospect for marriage in Israel since the Mosaic law forbade such unions. This indicates that although they loved Naomi, they had not yet converted to Judaism. Their only hopes for a remarriage would be if Naomi had more sons, highly improbable because of her age and the time it would take for them to grow to adulthood.

Naomi’s answer also implies that while she had remained faithful to her religion for the ten years she had been in Moab, her love for her daughters-in-law was so strong that she would not object to any future children marrying these foreign wives.

### **Ruth and Orpah’s Decisions—Ruth 1:14-18**

*And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more*



*also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.*

There is a strong contrast in the decision of the two women. Orpah, though loving her mother-in-law, reluctantly departs and returns to Moab. Ruth determines to go onward and to accept the implied conditions as well. She will adapt, not only to the new customs of a strange land, but to convert to its God as well. She resolves to never look back, to keep her new people and new God as long as she shall live.

Well has Ruth's beautiful response been repeated in countless weddings. There exist few more beautiful statements of the nuptial commitment than this. By making such a promise, Ruth was unconditionally embracing her new land and its God.

While Orpah can hardly be faulted for her decision, Ruth chose the better part. And such is the decision often faced by the Christian. Whether to return to the customs of one's native home of planet earth or to proceed to a spiritual Canaan with all that implies of whole-hearted acceptance of its terms and conditions is the big question. If like Orpah one does not cross the Jordan, one's life goes on as before, but the heart has not been affected by such a decision. If like Ruth the Jordan is crossed, there will be an entirely new relationship with both God and man and the heart finds its peace in such a determined choice.

Seeing such a resolute desire in Ruth, Naomi desists in further discouraging it but, we can be sure, it was with a heart full of joy that she proceeds onward with her beloved Ruth.

### **Back to Bethlehem—Ruth 1:19-22**

*So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.*

Calling herself Mara, meaning bitterness, shows not only an attitude of sadness, but also connotes repentance for the bad decision she and her husband had made a decade earlier. Perhaps she was not only bitter over the loss of her husband and two sons, but also remorseful for the family's manifest lack of faith for forsaking Judah for the greener pastures of Moab.

How often a Christian is tempted in times of trial, like Elimelech, to seek a situation promising greater prosperity. Or perhaps as Lot had earlier chosen the fertility of the Sodom valley, a Christian looks for that which brings the most temporal gain. Whatever the reason, placing the transitory things of this earth above the permanent riches of a brighter tomorrow based on the promises of God is always a poor decision: "Seek ye first

the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

The women returned at the beginning of the barley harvest. That harvest was celebrated with the waving of the first barley sheaf two days after the Passover. As the Passover marked the onset of the Jewish religious year, so a Christian’s return to his promised inheritance marks a new beginning. May we each make those decisions to return from our wayward paths to a closer walk with God and thus experience a new beginning in our Christian lives.

To Serve or to Listen

## Mary and Martha

*But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part,  
which shall not be taken from her.—Luke 10:42*

*Robert Brand*

In Luke 10:38-42 we find the account of our Lord's visit to the home of Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. A quick overview indicates that when Jesus came to their home he encountered an objection by Martha. Martha professed to be concerned about her sister Mary's lack of assistance to Martha's domestic duties in order to spend time in fellowship with the Master. Our Lord's response to Martha was brief, direct, and, as expected, insightful.

Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus (John 11:5, 36). Mary and Martha were the fleshly sisters of Lazarus, and we find two other passages in the gospels involving Mary, Martha, and Jesus. One account is the raising of Lazarus, and the other is the anointing of Jesus by Mary. Examining these two other accounts provides some insight into the passage under consideration here.

John 11 contains the only gospel account of the wondrous raising of Lazarus. In this passage we find Mary in the house, and Martha running to meet Jesus upon his arrival (vs. 20). Rather than welcoming him, Martha's first words to Jesus might be taken as somewhat of a rebuke: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died" (vs. 21, NIV). Her subsequent statement, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world," indicated a level of faith that seems wanting in her almost absurd concern over the foul odor of death in the face of the most powerful of miracles (vs. 39). (This is reminiscent of our Lord's response to the Sadducees' concern over a seeming dilemma concerning the resurrection—"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" Matthew 22:29).

Here we see an interesting side to Martha; while unquestionably a believer, she was deficient in recognizing her Lord's wisdom and methods. Though her sister Mary does repeat Martha's initial objection in verse 32, the context is different. Mary "fell down at his feet" and wept. We thus see Mary's statement as more of an inquiry than a rebuke. Paraphrasing, perhaps Martha was charging, "It is your fault that my brother died since you delayed your arrival here," whereas Mary was questioning, "Is it possible that Lazarus would not have died if you had been here?" Mary's weeping, along with that of fellow mourners, was followed by the Master's tears at this scene of the death of a dear friend. Martha's earthly objections are contrasted with Mary's sense of spirituality and devotion.

John 12:1-8 provides a narrative of Jesus' visit to Bethany. At supper, we read in verse 2 that "Martha served" the meal, while Mary was engaged in another form of service to

Jesus: a literal anointing. She used a very expensive oil from which emanated a sweet perfume that filled the house. An objection to the costly service was raised; our Lord met the objection with a brief reproof: "Let her alone." In this scene, we once again observe the sisters in different roles of service: Martha providing the essential temporal service and Mary providing a loving act of humble kindness to Jesus. Both roles were important and necessary.

This brings us to Luke 10:38-42. There is no question that the spirit and custom of hospitality required that a meal be prepared for Jesus, their guest. The account notes, however, that Martha was "distracted by all the preparations" (NIV). We get an initial glimpse of the problem at hand—not Martha's service, but rather her attitude toward her service. She virtually accuses Jesus saying, "Don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?" (NIV). As if that was not enough, she further demands that the Master request Mary to help her with the temporal provisions. We thus once again see, in just a few words, a lack of trust in the Lord's ability to handle the situation at hand.

As we note that Mary did not speak a word in this account, Jesus then counseled Martha tenderly, yet in a poignant way: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (NIV). Jesus did not rebuke Martha for preparing a meal; that was a worthy service. He rather identified an attitude problem, one of being "worried and upset." Freedom from anxiety is offered to believers with the precious promise of "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:34). Accordingly, the apostle Paul admonishes us, "In nothing be anxious" (Philippians 4:6, ASV). Precious promises are ours for the taking.

Jesus further contrasted Martha's service with Mary's, noting that Mary had "chosen the good part" or a higher level of service. In the consecrated walk, the spiritual often depends on the temporal, but only as a means to an end. For example, in order to study or witness, we must have temporal nourishment. Both aspects of life are important. The New Creature, however, has an obligation to make every effort to decrease, when possible, earthly responsibilities, so that the spiritual may flourish and grow. It is a matter of balance and priorities; how we spend our time reveals much about where we are in our walk with the Lord.

Regarding Mary's interaction with the Master, let us also keep in mind that having fellowship with Jesus was hardly an easy refuge from the task of domestic or other chores. Like the Scriptures, Jesus' words were "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Hebrews 4:12). Disciples of the Lord would respond "this is a hard saying; who can hear it?" (John 6:60). Jesus' regal presence, as a result of his human perfection and obedience to the heavenly Father, was likely somewhat uncomfortable for those in his immediate circle of fellowship. In Matthew 8:8, the centurion responded to Jesus by saying, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." We easily assume that those obedient to the standard of righteousness enjoyed the Savior's company more than those living outside of

the will of God. When overcoming in our personal lives, we find Scriptural counsel to be challenging, yet also welcoming and insightful. However, when spiraling downward in the things of the flesh, that same counsel is uncomfortable at best, and resisted at worst. A lesson is that, as we come into harmony with divine will, we find more and more comfort in the high standard of righteousness. It becomes something to strive for and embrace, not something to avoid or ignore.

In our Christian walk, many opportunities for service are available. We thus have a dual obligation when engaged in such sacred service: the actual “mechanics” of the service, and also our attitude toward that privilege. Let us embrace both aspects willingly and cheerfully.

We can also learn from the Lord’s approach in dealing with Martha. In his usual and yet profound manner, he combined gentle reproof with clear counsel. The Savior’s words are remarkable for their simplicity. This is a good example to follow in our interactions with others.

Let us then learn the lesson of Martha and Mary. As we do all “as unto the Lord,” any form of service in the Narrow Way is commendable. We do, however, have an obligation to decrease any unnecessary temporal responsibilities and increase the spiritual pursuits. Let us so order our affairs of life and, with the appropriate attitude, rejoice in every opportunity in the Lord’s great cause.

## Into Harm's Way

### **The Prophecy of Agabus**

*When we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.—Acts 21:12*

As Paul approached the end of his third missionary journey, he stopped at Tyre and Caesarea on his way to Jerusalem. As with his second missionary journey, the completion of his journey was marked by returning to the church at Jerusalem.

The ship that the apostle was aboard sailed from Patara in Asia minor to Paphos on the Isle of Crete before arriving at the Syrian city of Tyre, the port where its cargo was to be unloaded. There fellow-Christians greeted the apostle Paul. Paul resided with the brethren in Tyre for seven days, no doubt having fellowship and praising the Lord. It had been quite some time since he had ventured this way, so doubtless it was a joyful reunion.

Some of the disciples had been warned by the holy spirit that Paul would be in jeopardy should he go to Jerusalem. At this time, there was a faction in Jerusalem seeking to do harm to Paul should he return. Knowing the conditions in Jerusalem, these disciples warned Paul about venturing to the city. But Paul, seemingly ignored their advice and proceeded on his way to Caesarea.

Doubtless it was a touching scene when the men, their wives, and children all followed Paul out of the city to the place where he was to catch the ship to the south. They parted after kneeling down on the beach and praying together and then said their final farewells to Paul and his companions.

From there, the ship sailed a short distance to Ptolemais where Paul was able to meet with the brethren and abode with them for a day. He then boarded the ship and sailed south to Caesarea, his final port of call on this journey.

In Caesarea, Paul went to the house of Philip, an evangelist of that day. Philip had four virgin daughters, all of whom were said to have the gift of prophesying. We are not told specifically how long Paul stayed with Philip and his family, but the Scriptural account says it was for many days. Paul, realizing that he could not possibly make it to Jerusalem in time for Passover, lingered in Caesarea.

### **Agabus Arrives**

After tarrying with Philip's family for many days, a prophet named Agabus journeyed up from Judea to visit Paul and to inform him of a vision he had seen. Agabus was another early church member who had received the gift of prophecy and he came to give Paul a warning. Agabus acted out the vision given him by the holy spirit by taking Paul's belt (girdle) and binding his own hands and feet. Then he said that the holy spirit had said that in like manner the Jews in Jerusalem would have him bound and delivered to the hands of

the Gentiles. This form of illustrating prophecy by acting was common in the early church. Agabus knew that the conditions in Judea were ripe for this scenario to unfold, as the Jewish leaders were keen to squash this new religion which threatened their place of power and prestige.

Hearing of this vision, the brethren in Caesarea advised Paul not to venture to Jerusalem, where this fate awaited him. Surely a change of course seemed a wise decision. After all, why should the apostle expose himself to such a trap? Agabus had been given a vision by the spirit and traveled a long distance to warn Paul of the danger.

Why then did Paul say that he must go? Was Agabus an undependable prophet? Quite the contrary. Though at this end of the age we would be skeptical of one claiming to be a prophet, in the embryonic stage of the early church, members of the church were given special gifts of the spirit. Though we understand that they are not required or given at this end of the age, we also understand that they were necessary for the protection, growth, and development of the early church.

Agabus may possibly have been one of the seventy disciples that Christ sent out two by two (Luke 10:1). Several years earlier he was moved by the spirit to warn of a famine in the land (Acts 11:28). According to the historical record, the following year there was a general famine. His warning helped the Christians in the land prepare for the food shortage. It should be noted that during the fourth year of Suetonius Claudius there was a famine that spread over all Palestine. According to Josephus, Queen Adiabene sent to Egypt to purchase corn for them. Paul was also instrumental in alleviating their poverty by bringing money from the church at Antioch to the brethren in Jerusalem.

### **A Schism in the Church**

During this period, there was a schism developing between the Jewish church in Jerusalem and the Gentile churches in other cities. This was significant because the apostle Paul, trained as a Pharisee, yet understanding the freedom that is in Christ, was to be instrumental in healing this rift and setting an example that stands to this day. The Christians in the church at Jerusalem were also being humbled by a degree of impoverishment that allowed the other churches to provide alms to assist them in their time of need. These were two reasons why Paul knew he must continue his journey to Jerusalem.

The brethren in Caesarea pleaded with Paul not to go, but Paul resolutely responded that he would go. It broke Paul's heart, for he loved the brethren deeply and was touched by their concern for his well-being. Yet, he knew it was the Lord's will that he go to Jerusalem. There was much work to be done, and his course was not yet finished. He responded to the brethren by saying that their weeping was breaking his heart. But while he knew that he might be bound and even die in Jerusalem, for the Lord's sake he was willing and able to do this. Put in this light, the brethren let him go.

Paul was reminding the brethren of the vow which each of them had taken to do whatsoever their hands found to do, regardless of the consequences. This was the vow of sacrifice that they realized was the destiny of each and every footstep follower. What a wonderful example Paul set, being firm but compassionate in his response. Paul's life has continued to be a living epistle to inspire and motivate footstep followers even to our day.

### **Was Paul's Decision Made Rashly?**

Was Paul making a spontaneous and foolish decision? We think not. As evidenced in Acts 19:21,22, the apostle stated that he was bound by the spirit to go to Jerusalem. This was at the time when he was saying farewell to the elders at Ephesus. So why would the holy spirit tell Paul to journey to Jerusalem and at the same time tell Agabus to tell Paul what awaited him in Jerusalem? At first these two seem at odds, but we realize this was permitted so Paul would be an example to the believers. Not only did Agabus warn Paul of what awaited him, it came true as prophesied; yet Paul fulfilled his obligations with joy.

Agabus' prophecy clarified what awaited Paul in Jerusalem. But the apostle knew that his life was in the hands of the Lord and that the matter would be overruled to the good and edification of all involved. Paul had made the transition from faith unto faith. His response should not have been a surprise to those who knew him. The point at which he fully surrendered himself to God occurred many years before on the road to Damascus when he said to Jesus as he appeared to him, "What wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). This was when Paul made the decision to follow the Lord, and from that time on the focus of his life was this one thing. As a result, his decision to go to Jerusalem was irrevocable.

What did Paul have to fear in Jerusalem? The Lord had warned him of his adversaries there so he could be prepared for their trap. Did this protect him from any harm? Hardly. He was beaten, bound, and arrested just as Agabus had warned. Paul knew by experience the concept of being physically and mentally persecuted. After all, he had already been plotted against, imprisoned, run out of town, beaten, stoned, and left for dead. In each case the Lord overruled the affairs for the good and edification of the body of Christ. Paul knew that his life was to be an example for all believers. He knew that although the lessons he was learning were for his good, they were also for the good of others.

### **Why Paul Continued to Jerusalem**

Paul had to go to Jerusalem for a number of reasons. This is why he was so firm and unflinching in his resolve. First, the holy spirit had directed him to Jerusalem. Fully confident and faithful in the guidance of the heavenly Father, he would consider no other choice in the matter. Second, he was on a mission to deliver love and relief to the brethren at Jerusalem from the churches in Asia Minor. This was one of the things he was charged with during his third missionary journey. Third, there was a growing rift occurring between the Christian Jews in Jerusalem and the Christian Gentiles elsewhere. The customs and traditions of the Jewish law were creeping back into the minds of the



church at Jerusalem, and Paul was the one who had the credibility, being trained as a Pharisee, to correct the matter. But he would have to be there to set the record straight. Finally, Paul knew that the Lord had still greater works for him to accomplish. In following the Lord's will, Paul was able to continue his ministry for several more years; in his final journey to Rome, the gospel was spread, and it prospered even more.

Paul served as an example to the early church until they were more firmly rooted and founded in the faith. As a result of events which unfolded after the events in Jerusalem, many more yearning hearts were brought into "The Faith," and many of the most touching books in the New Testament were written. This was all possible because Paul took the leap of faith and journeyed to Jerusalem. Paul continued on his journey to Rome and was eventually exonerated, only to be later arrested once again and executed in an attempt to stamp out the early Christians.

The apostle Paul summed up his mind-set for the elders at Ephesus. He knew that these were to be his farewell thoughts to them: "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:25-27, NASV).

Yes, the apostle Paul did not shrink from his duties or responsibilities. Quite the contrary, he was joyous in his infirmities, and, like Jesus, asked the heavenly Father what he would have him do. His concern was not for himself but for the church. He conveys this concern, that we all might be founded in the whole purpose of God, in his closing thoughts of his second letter to the Corinthians: "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

## A Jew to the Jew

### **A Question of Motive**

*To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.—1 Corinthians 9:20, NIV*

*Homer Montague*

The amazing transformation of the apostle Paul following his conversion on the road to Damascus attested to his extraordinary courage, zeal in proclaiming the gospel, patient endurance of persecution, deep insight into God's plan and purpose, concern for the spiritual growth of the churches, and unflagging determination to be faithful to the Master's cause. It is for these reasons and more that he commended himself as an example worthy of imitation when he exhorted, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Paul's teachings concerning the dispensational change that put Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing for entrance into the body of Christ after the middle wall of partition was broken down (Ephesians 2:11-16), and that following the practices embodied in the Mosaic Law were not necessary for salvation, were viewed by some Jews as heresy.

After Paul completed his third missionary journey and reported to the Jerusalem elders how Gentiles responded to the gospel message, the leaders there proposed that Paul associate himself with four other men in a purification ceremony to demonstrate that he was not opposed to the law. It is likely these brethren were not comfortable with Paul's presence in their midst and, in addition to their concern for his personal safety, they may have thought his teachings might also bring them persecution because of their association with him. Paul acquiesced to this request, a riot ensued, and he was taken into custody by the Roman soldiers because of the disturbance (Acts 21:20-33).

### **Was Paul Inconsistent?**

Some biblical commentators argue that Paul, in an attempt to keep the peace by appearing in the temple with the other Jews who took part in the purification activities, was inconsistent with his conduct in other situations, such as when he rebuked Peter for no longer eating with Gentile converts in the presence of Jewish believers who had come from Jerusalem (Galatians 2:11-14). By this reasoning, Paul's beating and capture demonstrated God's disapproval of his behavior. It is asserted the heavenly Father permitted chastisement to be meted out to Paul as a form of censure for his unseemly conduct.

In support of the opposite view that Paul's actions were entirely appropriate, it should be noted that the Scriptural record contains no specific words of rebuke to Paul by the Lord for supporting the purification vows. His being placed in bonds was in fulfillment of

prophetic testimony given before his arrival in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14). Knowing this, Paul courageously proceeded onward, trusting the Lord's overruling providence in all of his experiences. Even after Paul's seizure in the temple by his opponents and his subsequent appearance before the Sanhedrin and appeal to the Pharisees (Acts 23:1-10), he received succor from above, as we read: "The night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11).

### **Paul and the Mosaic Law**

Paul's teaching concerning the relationship of the Mosaic Law to Jewish believers is illustrated by these words: "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:23-25). He therefore repudiated the authority of the law over believers in Christ, as well as the obligation to observe its customs.

Extending this understanding further, he also declared of Jewish Christians, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Colossians 2:11-14). Thus, unlike the Jewish legalists, who affirmed these various customs and features associated with the law were obligatory, Paul's conclusion was that liberty in Christ made these ordinances optional for Jewish believers and not incumbent upon Gentile converts at all.

In a totally separate context, while addressing the relationship of Jewish Christians to the Mosaic law, the apostle Paul deals with such topics as Sabbath keeping, dietary matters, liberty, and the condemnation of brethren who view non-essential matters in a different light (Romans 14:1 to 15:7). He taught that individual liberty in these and similar matters was to be allowed, as long as those who observed dietary restrictions or Sabbath keeping did not consider them to be requirements, as though they still were under the Mosaic law, for to do so would make the sacrifice of Christ ineffectual.

Paul's philosophy was to witness for Christ in the most effective way possible; he adjusted his presentations based upon whether his audience consisted of Jews or Gentiles without sacrificing fundamental principles of truth as they might relate to moral or doctrinal matters (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

## **Paul's Courage**

Returning to the purification incident and the false accusation that Paul had brought Greeks into the temple (Acts 21:28), we see that he was not fearful to testify about Jesus Christ. After the soldiers rescued him from the mob, he proceeded to witness to them, citing his credentials as one who was born a Jew but accepted Christ as his Savior while traveling to Damascus (Acts 21:39). It was not until Paul declared he was commissioned to bring the gospel to the Gentiles that his opponents were again stirred up, declaring he was unfit to live (Acts 22:22). Paul was devoted to speaking the truth, no matter what the circumstances were.

An accurate assessment as to whether Paul erred in associating himself with the other brethren involved in the purification ceremony would require a knowledge of his motives. Since the Scriptures do not specifically state why Paul engaged in this Jewish symbolic rite, nor can we read his heart and mind to determine what prompted him to take the course that he did, it is impossible to know with absolute certainty whether any aspect of his conduct in this matter was improper.

## **Lessons for Believers Today**

In considering the apostle Paul's decision to heed the counsel of the Jerusalem elders respecting the purification rite, believers may also glean lessons from biblical references that can be applied to their own lives as aids to determine an appropriate course of conduct under various circumstances. Here are five:

1. "All things are lawful for me, but ... all things edify not. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:23,31).

Sometimes, in an effort to aid an erring member of the brotherhood, one may say something that causes pain. Conversely, a brother may give an eloquent prayer in public with a desire to receive praise for his expressions. In the first instance, if we unwittingly offend, we may express regret for our insensitivity but still glorify the heavenly Father because our motives were pure. However, the utterance of public prayer for the purpose of receiving adulation from others would be an abomination in the sight of God.

2. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

During ecclesia business meetings, for example, a variety of views may be expressed concerning a particular course of action the class might take concerning an activity. Although strong personal preferences may be expressed, in the spirit of harmony and unity it may be wise to yield to the majority rather than insist something be done in a particular way. Conversely, the propriety of partaking of the bread and the cup, symbolizing the perfect flesh of the Redeemer and his sacrificial course in pouring out his soul unto death, is an example of what believers should do

on the anniversary of the Master's death. It is a matter of obedience to Scriptural teaching and not an optional matter of judgment based upon personal preference.

3. "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

The apostle Paul exemplified the meaning of this text whether the occasion was favorable to him personally or not. Believers should faithfully witness to the glorious plan of salvation whenever possible. Sin and death have reigned on planet earth for more than 6,000 years and conditions across the globe continue to deteriorate. Who but the Lord's people can explain why evil exists and what the future hope for mankind really is?

4. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Like Paul, Christians should rely upon God's precious promises and courageously proceed by faith in the doing of his will, no matter how much opposition is received. Realizing our times are in God's hands, the spirit-begotten are to continue being spent in the service of the Lord until he determines it is enough. "He who preserves his life shall lose it; but he who loses his life, on my account, will preserve it" (Matthew 10:39, *Emphatic Diaglott*).

5. "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" (James 4:12).

Contributing to the riot incited against Paul were not only accusations by some of the Jews from Asia that his teachings were contrary to the law, but also the false charge that he had defiled the temple by bringing Greeks into its inner courts (Acts 21:27-29). Previously Paul had been seen with a Gentile convert, Trophimus, in Jerusalem and his enemies assumed both went into the temple. For new creatures, evil surmising is to be recognized as a work of the flesh and is to be resisted. When the behavior of other brethren seems inconsistent with their profession of consecration, it would be improper to harbor suspicions of wrong doing on their part. It is far better to assume the seeming misconduct is due to a misperception and then ask about it in a non-judgmental manner.

Although Paul's conduct in associating with those who took the purification vow has been questioned, as one of the apostles he is a part of the foundation of the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10,14). This valiant soldier of the cross was faithful unto death. Let us also be faithful as well, by continually and honestly echoing his declaration in our lives: "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

## Claiming Civil Rights

# Standing Before Caesar

*I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged.—Acts 25:10*

*Aaron Marten*

For Christians throughout the Gospel age, perhaps no one has been a more worthy example of a true follower of Christ than the apostle Paul. Paul's persistence in fulfilling the mission set before him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles is a continual theme of the New Testament. An important example of his determination to witness to the name of Jesus Christ despite intense opposition is found in the latter half of the account of Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 21:15 to 28:31).

### The Arrest

Despite the pleadings of the brethren in Tyre (Acts 21:4-5), Caesarea (Acts 21:12-14), and elsewhere, Paul was compelled by the holy spirit to preach in Jerusalem (Acts 19:21). Upon his arrival, the brethren greeted him warmly. Apparently a good number of the Jewish converts in Jerusalem felt it was necessary to obey certain portions of the law; these included some who had taken the Nazarite vow (Acts 21:23-24). Not making an issue of it at the time, Paul went with them to the temple and was noticed by some of the Jews (Acts 21:26-27). The ensuing melee certainly would have killed Paul were it not for the interference of a Roman commander who arrested Paul and broke up the throng (Acts 21:31-36).

The commander, realizing that Paul was not a wanted criminal, allowed him to speak (Acts 21:37 to 22:21) with the hope that this would calm the crowd. When Paul's speech only infuriated the people more, the commander ordered that Paul be scourged to find out the "true" reason for the outcry. It was at this point that Paul invoked his rights as a Roman citizen, and a native-born one at that (Acts 22:22-29).

While Paul was still in Roman custody, the Jews formed a plot to murder him when he was being transported to be tried by a council of the Jews. By the grace of God, Paul's nephew discovered the plot and reported it to the Roman soldiers. This allowed Paul to be secretly transported by Roman guards to the city of Caesarea, the residence of Felix the governor (Acts 23:12-35).

Paul remained in the custody of Felix for two years where he was given liberty to see the brethren and even preach. All the while Felix attempted to receive a bribe from Paul (Acts 24:1-27). Porcius Festus then succeeded Felix. In an attempt to appease the Jewish leadership, Festus asked Paul if he was willing to be transferred back to Jerusalem for trial.

## The Decision

Undoubtedly Paul knew what he would face in Jerusalem assuming he made it there alive. He would be subject to the accusations and rulings of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. Paul likely would have faced a similar situation to what our Lord faced before his crucifixion. The Jewish court and the Jewish leadership was not the appropriate place for Paul to be judged because he was (and possessed all the rights of) a Roman citizen. With this in mind, Paul again asserted his position that there was no need for him to go to Jerusalem: “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. **I appeal unto Caesar**” (Acts 25:10,11). This appeal led directly to Paul’s transport to Rome (Acts 27:1 to 28:31) where tradition holds he was eventually acquitted and journeyed on to Spain where he ministered (Romans 15:24, 28).

In the time leading up to his appeal to Caesar, it is likely Paul was thinking about the Lord. Jesus had faced similar circumstances: false accusations from the Jews, religious charges being handled in a civil court, a potential death sentence, and the like. While wanting to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, Paul also realized he had something our Lord did not: Roman citizenship. Was it just and right for Paul to invoke his rights as a citizen? Perhaps the question should be whether it is always proper for a Christian to claim a right granted by an earthly government.

While pondering his situation, Paul must have also considered that shortly before this he had received a message from the Lord that he would preach in Rome (Acts 23:11). Perhaps Paul concluded that by appealing to Caesar, he would be transported to Rome under guard and fulfill what he knew to be the will of God. This may have even been the deciding factor. While being held prisoner by the Romans in Caesarea for two years, Paul experienced a large degree of freedom in being able to receive visitors and preach to the family and staff of the ruling governor (Acts 24:23-27). The natural conclusion in Paul’s mind would have been that he would be granted the same privileges as a prisoner in Rome. He was right: “Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30,31).

This is often how Christians must determine the will of God. They must seek the Lord’s will through study of the word, by listening to his voice through the brethren in Christ, and by observing personal circumstances. Upon determining where God’s guiding hand would lead, a Christian must not neglect to seize opportunities as they arise.

If Paul had not appealed to Caesar and Festus had transferred him back to Jerusalem, we can only guess as to what would have happened. Nevertheless, we can be sure that God would have provided some way for Paul to witness in Rome because he had revealed his plans to Paul. It is certainly likely, as King Agrippa suggested in Acts 26:32, that Paul

would have been set free shortly thereafter were it not for his appeal. If Paul had traveled to Rome as a free man, he may have been spared the trying experiences he and his fellow passengers faced while sailing across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome (Acts 27:1 to 28:16).

### **Lessons for Christians**

Did Paul act properly as a Christian in claiming his right of appeal under Roman law, or was he presumptuous in making that appeal? Several Scriptures, including some in Paul's own writings, are cited by some to contradict the appropriateness of Paul's appeal since they command full submission to an earthly government. To the church at Philippi, Paul wrote that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20, NIV). To the brethren in Rome he said "let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Romans 13:1). Peter said we should submit "to every authority instituted among men" (1 Peter 2:13, NIV). As our Lord taught, "Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's" (Luke 20:25).

Prospective members of the church continue to live as aliens and strangers under various earthly governments. Does this mean they do not have the same rights as their neighbors? No. If the world grants certain freedoms (such as of speech and assembly), a Christian should be grateful and use them as an opportunity to serve the Lord. Aliens under the Mosaic law were granted many of the same rights as the native Hebrews (Numbers 15:16; Deuteronomy 10:18, 19; 23:7; 24:17; 27:19). Today all democracies grant aliens and immigrants many of the same liberties as full citizens. Simply exercising rights granted by earthly governments is not in conflict with being "subject unto the higher powers." There is, however, a real danger in taking the blessings of liberty to an extreme by invoking rights that are not appropriate, even if allowed by a government.

Just because a right has been granted or a system has been established by an earthly government does not mean it is operating within the bounds of perfect justice, which is God's standard to which we aspire. As the sound of liberty continues to ring out across the world, people will clamor for their so-called "rights" that often go into the realm of injustice by treading on the true rights of others. For example, many governments provide unemployment compensation for citizens who cannot find employment. Taking advantage of this system when we truly have a need for it is within our rights. But if we are unwilling (yet able) to seek employment to fulfill our earthly obligations and meet our basic needs, preferring instead to live off government assistance, this goes well beyond our rights; it makes us an unnecessary burden on our neighbors (2 Thessalonians 3:10). We must be wary of claiming such "fancied" rights and abusing systems which may be just by human and legal standards, but unjust according to Godly, biblical standards.

Throughout the Gospel age there have been many examples of Christians properly claiming rights allowed by the government. During the last century many in the United States justly invoked their right to claim religious conscientious objector status. Those who fulfill their obligations as citizens to these earthly institutions by "rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" in the form of taxes or other obligations, should not hesitate invoking their rights as long they are within the bounds of God's justice.



Learning about God's justice and the proper exercise thereof is not only a privilege, but also the responsibility of any child of God who aspires to the high calling through Jesus Christ. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2). A firm understanding of justice will be required to rightly judge and instruct the world of mankind in the Millennial age. Only by study and experience can we conceptualize God's perfect justice and determine the appropriateness of invoking a right granted by a government. Would invoking this right violate any of God's principles? Would claiming this right impede any freedoms possessed by others and especially by the brethren? These are the thoughts and questions a Christian must ask if faced with a situation similar to that of the apostle Paul.

What should we do when a worldly neighbor treats us unjustly according to the laws of the land? Is a Christian allowed to stand up for his rights under the law? In general, yes. The appropriateness of what to do must be left to the conscience of each to judge whether or not to pursue the matter. This is actually a closer situation to the one Paul faced. When he discouraged the Corinthian brethren from going to legal courts (1 Corinthians 6:1-8), he was speaking of disputes purely between brethren.

When determining a right course of action, it can sometimes be difficult to perceive the Lord's will. If we find ourselves involved in a legal matter where someone is treating us unjustly, we can and should appeal to the legal protections we have, as did Paul. Above all, we should continue to pray for and continually develop a deeper understanding of God's attribute of justice so we can judge and instruct the world in equity if we prove faithful.

# News and Views

## Pastoral Bible Institute News

### PBI Directors Elected

The members of the Pastoral Bible Institute have elected these seven individuals to serve as directors for the next twelve months:

Todd Alexander

George Tabac

Len Griehs

Tim Thomassen

Carl Hagensick

Dan Wesol

Michael Nekora

### Letters

I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses for 20 years, and now that I've found the Bible Students I feel like I've really heard the "Good News"! Without the Internet I never would have known the Bible Students still existed. As a Witness, I never felt it was very good news to tell people that if they didn't become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, they would die at Armageddon with no possibility of a resurrection. Now that I've learned that the Bible actually teaches that Jesus died as a ransom for ALL, I want to yell it from the roof tops. I'm grateful that I've never stopped looking for the God of love, even when I thought I was "in the truth" as a Witness. Even the New World Translation says ALL! I feel so blessed that Jehovah led me to the Bible Students.

—E-mail communication from Michigan

## World News

### Religious

A study published by the British Economic and Social Research Council found that Britain's big cities were "godless places." While many in Europe still purport to believe in God, studies and polls overwhelmingly show that the proportion of western Europeans who practice their religious beliefs has been on the wane for many years. The survey interviewed more than 21,000 people aged 15 and over in 21 countries. In the UK, 72 percent of people believe in some kind of god. But only 24 percent of them attend a religious service once a week or more; this compares with 61 percent in Poland and 72 percent in Turkey.

—Financial Times, 12/28/2004

Thousands of sobbing relatives struggled to identify the blackened and bruised bodies of loved ones after a stampede during a religious procession to a hilltop temple killed at least 258 people and injured 200 in western India. The chain-reaction tragedy began when several Hindu pilgrims inside the temple fell on a slippery floor and were crushed to death by the crowd. Angered over the deaths, some pilgrims began setting the shops lining the path on fire, sparking a stampede that killed at least 258 people. Police chief Chandrakant Kumbhar said the tragedy began when the temple floor became slippery from a ceremony that involved breaking coconuts in front of a deity. Stampedes are not uncommon at major Hindu religious festivals, which can attract millions of worshipers. In the worst accident, about 800 pilgrims died during a Hindu festival in 1954 in the northern city of Allahabad.

—Associated Press, 1/26/2005

### **Social**

The belief that rotund women are more desirable as wives helps explain why much of the Arab world is experiencing an explosion of obesity. About half of women in the Middle East are overweight or obese, according to the United Nations' World Health Organization. The oil wealth in those areas has dramatically improved living standards, with the resulting urbanization introducing habits such as high consumption of sugar, fat and processed foods and more sedentary lifestyles. In Bahrain, 83% of women are obese or overweight, according to International Obesity Task Force, a London-based think tank. In the United Arab Emirates, the figure is 74%. By comparison about 62% of American women are overweight or obese.

—Wall Street Journal, 12/29/2004

McDonald's now has 600 restaurants in Chinese cities, and Kentucky Fried Chicken has 1,200. Forty-one percent of Chinese people eat in a fast-food restaurant at least once a week, compared to 35 percent of Americans.

—The Washington Post, January 2005

Steve Fossett ... became the first person to fly around the world alone without stopping or refueling, touching down in central Kansas after a 67-hour, 23,000 mile journey that appeared endangered at times by a troubled fuel system. Fossett chose Salina because he needed a long runway for the takeoff and landing. The runway in Salina extends about 12,000 feet.

—Orlando Sentinel, 3/4/2005

A large earthquake flattened dozens of villages in central Iran, killing at least 500 people. Rescue parties were delayed in reaching some areas because heavy rains caused mudslides that blocked or buried roads. The Iranian government, increasingly isolated from the West because of its alleged nuclear weapons program, did not request international aid.

—Associated Press, 2/24/2005

A Santiago, Chile judge approved Chile's first legal divorce. Chile became the last country in the Americas to legalize divorce when it updated its marriage code of 1884 last year, over the objections of the Roman Catholic Church. The new law has been described as "revolutionary" for a society where a married woman can't open a bank account without her husband's signature, and "illegitimate" children are barred from most prominent Catholic schools. The Justice Ministry had been braced for tens of thousands of divorce petitions, but only 1,035 people have filed since the law took effect in November 2004.

—The Boston Globe, 1/23/2005

Americans are living longer than ever before—for an average of 77.6 years. Death rates from conditions such as heart disease and cancer appear to be declining, while those from others, such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, have risen slightly. The report, released by the government's National Center for Health Statistics, is based on more than 2.4 million death certificates issued in 2003, the latest year for which figures are available. The number represents about 93% of all certificates.

—Los Angeles Times, 3/1/2005

Japan continues to close schools at a record pace in what analysts describe as Japan's greatest national problem—a combination baby bust and senior citizen boom. The national child shortage, even as the population ages, is raising fears about Japan's long-term ability to maintain its status as the world's second-largest economy after the United States. With more Japanese choosing to remain single and forgoing parenthood, the population of almost 128 million is expected to decrease next year, then plunge to about 101 million by 2050. As many as 117 hospitals nationwide now have no permanent obstetrician due to lack of demand and a shrinking pool of obstetricians and gynecologists, according to a survey conducted last year by a medical society based in Tokyo.

—Washington Post, 3/3/2005

During weekends, children consume 26 percent of their daily calories while munching in front of the television.

—The New Republic, January 2005

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is preparing for a worldwide outbreak of avian flu as early as 2006, CDC head Dr. Julie Gerberding said. The flu jumped from chickens to humans in Hong Kong in 1997, and since then dozens have been infected, and most have died. "A similar pattern probably occurred prior to 1918," Gerberding said. "This is a very ominous situation for the globe." The 1918 flu, which also began in Asian birds, killed some 30 million people worldwide. The U.S. government is working on a vaccine, but Gerberding said the flu could mutate into a form easily spread among humans before enough doses have been prepared.

—Associated Press, 2/24/2005

After the killings, the rapes, and the expulsion of nearly two million farmers from their land, the people of Darfur are now facing a new threat—the worst food shortage in decades. For two years, marauding militias composed mainly of Arab nomads and cattle herders have attacked Darfur’s African farmers in a battle over arable land. United Nations agencies estimate more than 70,000 people have already died. The current scarcity of food, and the harsh market forces it has unleashed, have become the new agents of the violence that has been labeled “genocide” by the U.S. “All the indicators are there for a famine,” says Marc Bellemans, the Sudan emergency coordinator the U.N.’s Food and Agriculture Organization.

—Wall Street Journal, 2/7/2005

### **Political**

President Hosni Mubarak has ordered that Egypt’s constitution be changed to allow more than one candidate to run in presidential elections. But restrictions remain on who can be a candidate. In the four elections since he came to power in 1981, Mubarak has been the sole nominee approved by parliament and the sole candidate passed by lawmakers for a popular referendum. He has won every referendum with more than 90 percent of the vote.

—Associated Press, 2/27/2005

The Syrian-backed government of Lebanon collapsed Monday under a groundswell of street protests, candlelight vigils and international pressure to end Damascus’ domination of its neighbor. The resignation [of Prime Minister Omar Karami, an ally of Syria] was a triumph for the growing Lebanese opposition, which has been calling for Syria to withdraw its soldiers and disentangle its intelligence services from Lebanon’s institutions. Syria keeps 16,000 soldiers in Lebanon and uses thousands of intelligence agents to maintain control on Lebanese politcs.

—Los Angeles Times, 3/1/2005

U.S. governors are calling for tougher standards at high schools. According to a National Governors Association report, 4 in 10 public school graduates are unprepared for college or jobs beyond entry level. The governors propose higher achievement goals and stiff consequences for failure. “We must restore the value of a high school diploma,” said Gov. Mark Warner of Virginia.

—Associated Press, 2/28/2005

Russian president Vladimir Putin met with his cabinet to seek ways of easing the burden of social benefits changes that have provoked mass protests by pensioners. The reforms have provoked the most widespread popular criticism of the president since he took office five years ago. The changes replaced benefits with cash payments to about 34 million pensioners and war veterans. Many pensioners say compensation for the lost benefits is insufficient, or has not been paid at all.

—Financial Times, 1/18/2005

## Financial

Corporate America's pension headache is getting worse, despite the millions of dollars companies have spent to put it right, according to an analysis that calculates the likely drag on future earnings. Actuaries at independent consultant Towers Perrin estimate the average Fortune 100 company is now storing up more than \$3 billion in deferred pension costs that have yet to show up in published profit and loss figures. In January, US Airways and United Airlines sought court permission to pass on responsibility for their liabilities to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, the US pension insurance body.

—Financial Times, 1/10/2005

Airplane passengers in Europe are now entitled to monetary compensation for canceled flights. Under E.U. rules that took effect in February, if a flight is canceled, passengers must be given a full refund, plus up to \$800 in damages. If a delay lasts more than five hours, passengers may choose to cancel for a full refund, or receive food and accommodations. The rules apply to any flight from a European airport or to any airline based in Europe.

—The Week, 3/4/2005

[E-mail offers of millions of dollars for help moving money out of Africa is] one of the boldest and most pervasive scams on the planet—the so-called Nigerian Letter Fraud, also known as a “419 Fraud” (for the section of the Nigerian penal code that covers such scams). For the first time the Nigerian government has begun to go after 419 perpetrators—for good reason. “419 Fraud has ruined the reputation of Nigeria,” says Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, chairman of the country's two-year-old Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. “No one wants to come here and do business. How can we survive?” To date the Nigerians have jailed more than 300 fraudsters perpetrating 419-type scams, including several politicians. More than \$300 million in cash and property has been seized.

—Reader's Digest, March 2005

Annual sales of lottery tickets: **\$44.9 billion.**

—Health, March 2005

## Israel

Jerusalem city engineers will take down the hill jutting out from the Western Wall, replacing it with a bridge. Archaeologists expect to find treasures, such as a tall gate from the Second Temple. The plans are a bonanza for students of Jerusalem history, as the removal of the hill will uncover an eight-meter-high gate leading into the Temple Mount. The gate dates from the period of the Second Temple. The entire area that is currently the Western Wall plaza was filled with low buildings when Israel liberated the area during the Six Day War of June 1967, and was later cleared away—except for the area on which lies the walkway-hill leading to the Mughrabim Gate.

—Arutz 7, 1/13/2005

ApNano Materials of Israel, inventor of NanoLub, has just been selected by the United States investing journal Red Herring as one of the top 100 innovators that will drive global markets in 2005. NanoLub is the world's first synthetic lubricant to be based on spherical inorganic nanoparticles and eliminates the need for oil changes in cars. As with other lubricants, its job is to reduce wear and friction between moving objects (like engine parts), enabling longer operation and higher efficiency. NanoLub dramatically outperforms every known commercial solid lubricant marketed today. The search for a perfect lubricant—that is, one that never requires replacement—is an old one. In the last century, synthetic additives extended the effectiveness of age-old lubricants like oil. ApNano's product is the result of the pioneering research performed ... at the Weizmann Institute of Science.

—MFA, 12/27/2004

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has issued a directive to its members to give serious consideration to divesting from companies that deal with Israel. The directive explains that the initiative stems from Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. The Central Committee of the WCC added that it believes its call for divestment is not anti-Semitic. The US Presbyterian movement decided last summer to consider divestment from companies linked to Israel as well.

—Arutz 7, 2/22/2005

The United States State Department's first report on global anti-Semitism finds increased governmental action in Europe to combat bias against Jews, but an uneven track record among law-enforcement agencies responding to anti-Semitic incidents. The report also found that an increasing number of anti-Semitic incidents around the world, particularly in Europe, are coming from Muslim communities, rather than traditional skinhead nationalist groups.

—JTA, 1/5/2005

## Book Review

*A Durable Peace: Israel and Its Place Among the Nations*, Benjamin Netanyahu. New York: Warner Books, 2000. 463 pp.

I became interested in Netanyahu when he was elected Israel's prime minister. He lived and was educated within a fifteen-minute drive of the Philadelphia suburb where I reside. Local interest in his career was high and there was seldom a week that went by during his administration when there wasn't a feature article in the local newspaper.

Netanyahu wants to educate non-Jews about the realities of Middle East politics. His contention is that the public relations of the Arab world have been very effective in distorting the history and the current reality of life in Israel and the Middle East. He traces the origins, history, and politics of Israel's relation with both Arabs and the West. Bible Students should be especially interested in the discussion of many myths concerning Jews and Israel—the same myths that the Bible Students themselves have tried to dispel.

Netanyahu shows that the Arab concern in the Middle East is not about land—specifically carving out a homeland for the Palestinians within the current configuration of Israel. It is about extracting the Jewish people from Israel itself. The land myth is built on the perception that Israel and its people dominate the area. In fact Israel has a total population of fewer than six million people and occupies roughly eight thousand square miles in the Middle East. The Arab nations surrounding Israel (excluding the Palestinians) have a population of over 200 million (outnumbering Israelis 33 to 1); they occupy 2.1 million square miles (270 times more land than Israel). The Arabs don't need Israel's land!

Netanyahu also emphasizes the unresolved issue of the Palestinian commitment to the destruction of Israel. Despite the peace efforts of the Oslo Accords and Camp David, the PLO Charter, adopted in 1964 and revised in 1968, does not recognize the right of Israel to exist—a problem ignored by both the U.S. and England as they support a homeland for the Palestinians.

Interpreters of prophecy see worldwide armed conflict against Israel as the final phase of events ending this Gospel age and beginning God's kingdom. Many believe Israel will be living in peace and harmony with its neighbors prior to that time. It is hard to read Netanyahu's thesis and conclude that Israel would ever disband its military commitment for self defense. The cry of "Never Again!" (referring to the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews), is the rallying cry of every soldier and politician in Israel. Although it is not easy to see how this might be reversed or even moderated, few predicted the changes that would occur in Europe as a result of the fall of Communism in 1989. Perhaps events in Israel preceding the establishment of God's kingdom will be similarly surprising.

—Len Griehs



## Short Features

### Walk of Faith

In the second Corinthian letter the apostle reminds us that our walk must be by faith. We must not plan to live a life of faith and then expect to do our walking by sight. From time to time we shall meet with difficult conditions, with perplexing circumstances, with a fork in the road, and it will not always be given us to see which is the preferable procedure for us to follow—which turn in the road to take. Of course if one way is sinful and the other is holy, if one follows the spirit of the world and the other the gentle, holy spirit of the Lord, the problem will present no difficulty. With our hearts in tune with the Master, we shall unhesitatingly choose the right. But sometimes matters are not quite so simple. Even the great apostle Paul knew what it was to be in perplexities (see 2 Corinthians 4:8). It will not be strange then if sometimes we find ourselves in circumstances where it is not always so easy to determine the better way. Such experiences may be ours in our individual Christian walk; they may be ours, too, in our Church matters. We know of no Scripture which assures us that we shall always, on every occasion, and at all times, know exactly the right thing to do in every personal problem that may arise.

—“Have Faith in God,” *The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom*, December 1950

### The Reasoning of Faith

Thus it is that faith ever reasons. Faith reasons from God to the difficulties—it begins with **Him**. Unbelief, on the contrary, reasons from the difficulties to God—it begins with **them**. This makes all the difference. It is not that we are to be insensible to the difficulties; neither are we to be reckless. Neither insensibility nor recklessness is faith. Faith looks the difficulties straight in the face; it is fully alive to them. It is not ignorant, not indifferent, not reckless. But it brings in the living God! It looks to Him; it leans on Him; it draws from Him. Here lies the grand secret of its power. It cherishes the calm and deep conviction that there never was a wall too high for the Almighty God—never a city too great—never a giant too strong. In short, faith is the only thing that gives God his proper place; and, as a consequence, is the only thing that lifts the soul completely above the influences of the surrounding circumstances, be they what they may. Of this precious faith, Caleb was an exponent when he said, “Let us go up **at once**, and possess it; for we are **well able** to overcome it.” These are the pure accents of that living faith that glorified God and makes nothing of circumstances.

—The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom, November/December 1984

## Gideon's Fleece

The signs which God to Gideon gave,  
His holy Sovereignty made known;  
That He alone has pow'r to save,  
And claims the glory as his own.

The dew which first the fleece had filled,  
When all the earth was dry around;  
Was from it afterwards withheld,  
And only fell upon the ground.

To Israel thus the heavenly dew  
Of saving truth was long restrained;  
Of which the Gentiles nothing knew,  
But dry and desolate remained.

But now the Gentiles have received  
The balmy dew of gospel peace  
And Israel, who his spirit grieved,  
Is left a dry and empty fleece.

This dew still falls at his command,  
To keep his chosen plants alive;  
They shall, though in a thirsty land,  
Like willows by the waters thrive.

But chiefly when his people meet,  
To hear his word and seek his face;  
The gentle dew, with influence sweet,  
Descends and nourishes their grace.

But ah! what numbers still are dead,  
Though under means of grace they lie!  
The dew still falling round their head,  
And yet their heart untouched and dry.

Dear Savior, hear us when we call,  
To wrestling prayer an answer give;  
Pour down thy dew upon us all,  
That all may feel, and all may live.

—John Newton, 1779.  
From *Olney Hymns*, Vol. 1, Hymn 23

## **Paul's Determination**

There are few such noble characters as Paul's, unmoved by threats or fears, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and ready not only to be bound for Christ's sake, but to die, if such should be the arrangement of the Lord's providence on his behalf. Let us each and all emulate this noble example of one who followed so closely in the footsteps of our Lord and Master. Let us be strong, not only in our consecration, but also in the taking of all the steps that the Lord's providence may lead us to take.

The apostle's argument was successful. He infused new courage into the hearts of his co-laborers, and they apparently resolved that if he were about to die or suffer, they, too, would rejoice if the will of God respecting them eventuated in their death; and if they did not suffer personally, they would, at least, have the honor of being companions of those who were misused for Christ's sake, and thus be to some extent the sharers in the blessing promised (Hebrews 10:32,33). The apostle's companions saw the matter as he did, that it was the Lord's will; and they resolved to bow to it, notwithstanding that the Lord had given them information in advance which would have permitted them to turn back, or seek to save their lives.

—Reprints, p. 3183

## Citizenship

Citizenship carries privileges which we may humbly claim. The apostle Paul himself furnishes us a good example of this during his last visit to Jerusalem. Asian Jews stirred up the people, saying that Paul had polluted the temple, and the captain of the guard intervened to stop the Jews who were beating Paul, and he took him under guard to the castle. Upon Paul asking permission to speak, the captain replied, “Canst thou speak Greek? Art thou not that Egyptian, etc.?” Paul replied that he was a Jew of Tarsus, a citizen of no mean city; and receiving permission to speak to the people, he spoke in the Hebrew tongue. This temporarily silenced the mob (Acts 22:2) and Paul gave a spirited defense of life and Christian mission until the uproar began again. Then the chief captain ordered Paul to be examined by scourging, whereupon Paul immediately claimed that he was a Roman. On learning this, the captain feared to hurt him, and loosed him from his bonds commanding the council to give Paul a hearing. Thus did Paul use his Hebrew speech, his Tarsus citizenship, and also his Roman, to obtain freedom to defend himself.

But citizenship carries responsibilities as well as privileges—the responsibility to uphold the dignity of the country we claim. If the citizen of another country living among us claims special privileges and dignity, we may find that he is also an ambassador to us. He represents the king and country from which he came, and if ever questioned on his actions would claim his rights and the protection of his own country. Another visiting citizen claiming special rights while among us might be the king’s son. Surely we may claim all of these; so that we may read in Philippians 1:27 conversation, behavior, citizenship, ambassadorship, or sonship without destroying the sense of the verse.

—B. J. Drinkwater, “Fervent In Spirit, Serving the Lord”  
The Herald of Christ’s Kingdom, July-August 1982

## Crossroads

As we walk the narrow way,  
How our feet so yearn to stray.  
Help, dear Lord, we seek and pray;  
Guide us now to perfect day.

Oft we look to left and right,  
Trying hard with main and might,  
Lacking still that inner sight,  
Blinded by the mists of night.

Seeking at our path's crossroads,  
Knowing not where each way bodes,  
How we need your hand to hold,  
Leading us to heavenly folds.

Show us, Lord, which path you trod.  
"Which," we ask, "led you to God?"  
Hesitant, we onward plod,  
Looking for your 'proving nod.

Only let us seek thy will,  
Doing not what worketh ill,  
Choosing rightly to fulfill  
Vows we made and want them still.

Decisions are so hard to make,  
Fearing that we would forsake,  
Paths we promised that we'd take.  
This, we pray, for thy name's sake,

—*Carl Hagensick*