
Pilgrims Journal

“They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.” (Heb 11:13–16)

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Table of Contents

(click on the title to go directly to the article)

The Party's Over

Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin

Is Your Hut Burning

Zion — Glorious Things Are Spoken Of Thee

Various aspects of a father

Heroes Of Faith

The life and work of John Gibson Paton

Encounters With Jesus

Part 1 — The results of meeting with the Lord

The Workmanship Of His Hands

Symbiosis

Human Error

Part 1 — Troubled Trips

The Call Of The Barnyard

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THE PARTY'S OVER

“MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN.” With these words of rebuke to an arrogant king, the Lord Jehovah showed His displeasure with the proud bantering of Belshazzar and his lords, wives, and concubines. Plundered vessels of gold and silver from the temple in Jerusalem were used for serving drinks at the king’s party. “They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” (Dan 5:4). Their irreverent misuse was a desecration of the vessels taken from God’s house; yet they added insult to injury by toasting the gods who were not God. “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psa 115:4-8). It is an interesting thought to consider how we might also trust in gods who are not God. Belshazzar and company were somewhat ignorant in their folly; yet God’s strong treatment of them is a reminder to us of the Lord’s hatred for the sins of arrogance and pride.

Arrogance can be defined as: “making, or having the disposition of making, exorbitant claims of rank or estimation: giving one’s self an undue degree of importance.” In truth, Belshazzar had little to boast of regarding the greatness of the Babylonian empire as he had merely inherited it from those before him. Remember the lament of Solomon: *“all my labour...I should leave unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?”* (Ecc 2:18-19). Solomon might have understood that a great part of his kingdom would be lost under his son Rehoboam. Belshazzar also frittered away what Nebuchadnezzar had built, fought for, and invested his time and efforts in—that marvelous place known as Babylon.

As the king was showing off to his lords, wives, concubines and all others present, there came a hand—writing this cryptic proclamation of judgment on the wall. Suddenly, before that same audience, Belshazzar became fearful and weak-kneed!

Vessels of Honor

This proud foolish king thought it a light thing to use the vessels from God’s house for his own pleasure. We must remember, we are also vessels from that “great house,” and must thus be preserved in holiness (2Tim 2:20-21; 1Th 4:4). We can be holy if we yield our bodies to Him: “...as ye have

yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19). The vessels of God’s temple were to be handled only by the priests, who were holy men of God. Likewise we are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Pet 2:9). Let us learn to preserve our “vessel” holy unto Him.

The Spirit of the Holy Gods

Why would Belshazzar become weak-kneed, if he could not decipher the handwriting on the wall? Deep within, he knew he was not right with a holy God. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth...” (Pro 28:1). His mother recommended that Daniel be called, giving this testimony of him: “There is a man in thy kingdom, *in whom is the spirit of the holy gods*” (Dan 5:11). The queen mother was worshiping gods of silver, gold and stone, but still was able to see that the “spirit of the holy gods” was with Daniel. Neither was she alone in her perception; Nebuchadnezzar had the same understanding as well (Dan 4:9). Holiness was a mark of Daniel’s way of life.

The inner holiness of a man will have outward evidences. Yet it is possible for a man to have received the Holy Spirit and still not have the spirit of holiness worked

into his character. As holiness was manifested in Daniel, he had light. Especially in the darkest times, God was able to break through with His light—for Daniel’s deliverance and for the deliverance of others.

An important responsibility in having light is that we “walk in the light, as He is in the light.” All hidden sins and secret transgressions should be confessed; then He will be “faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn 1:7). Never hide sin. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart” (Psa 97:11). Truly when our life is transparent and open in such a manner we will always be full of light.

Wisdom and Understanding

Belshazzar’s mother also said of Daniel that “**understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him.**” If we have the spirit of holiness working in us, we will know the Word of God. As holy men of God wrote the scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, only holy men are able to correctly interpret or understand the scripture. The more you love holiness the greater your understanding of God’s Word will be—far above peers, ancients, and enemies (Psa 119:98-100).

An excellent spirit was found in Daniel (Dan 5:12). He had no church or ministers to assist or guide him in the path of righteousness. This was a “right” spirit, not angry or

hasty, but as the original Hebrew brings out, “preeminent.” Daniel did not seek for preeminence, but having the right spirit brought it to him. This word “excellent” can also mean steady: not tossed about by trials, great or small, or by every wind of doctrine. Having such an *excellent* spirit helped Daniel to resolve things that were of a doubtful nature to others. As we know our God and His desires, we must stay true to what He has instructed us to do. As we do, our own doubt will dissolve as well as the doubts of those around us.

Humility

Though Daniel had a position of preeminence under Nebuchadnezzar, his humility was such that Belshazzar had forgotten about him. The king had to ask him, “Art thou that Daniel?” Daniel had no less qualifications than the other wise men and magicians; he could have come with them when they were summoned. He desired no part of Belshazzar’s reward, knowing the king would be too proud to repent and humble himself after hearing the interpretation of the handwriting. “Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another” (Dan 5:17).

The Mind Of God

So the interpretation comes as follows: MENE = **numbered**, TEKEL = **weighed**, UPHARSHIN = **divided**. The other sages and magi had the same training in languages that Daniel had. Why then didn’t they interpret the hand-

writing? It is because only a man with the **mind of God** could give the real interpretation—someone who would not care nor worry about politically correct opinions or even offending the king. Daniel simply spoke the mind of God: “God has numbered your kingdom, weighed your unrighteous acts in that kingdom, and divided your kingdom to the Medes and Persians.”

That very night, the Medes broke through, took the city and killed Belshazzar. This was the “invincible” city of Babylon. Scholars are not sure, but this fortress-of-a-city may have had 300-foot-high walls that were 56 miles in circumference, wide enough to race eight chariots abreast, and fortified with a hundred gates of brass. A twenty-year supply of food was kept there, enough to outlast the longest of sieges. Yet all the greatness of that city was forfeited in a night of revelry and drunkenness by an arrogant king.

Daniel disciplined himself to spend time daily with God, and thus learned His mind (Phil 2:3-5). In our quiet times with Him we are able to hear His voice and understand His mind. As we sit at His feet and imbibe His character of humility, we will truly understand His mind.

Redeeming the Time

Just as Belshazzar’s kingdom was numbered, so is our kingdom. Each person’s life is like a kingdom. As the Lord has numbered our days, so also should we (Psa 90:12). Each

one of us is just one breath away from eternity. That is why we should redeem the time we have in this life by occupying ourselves with the work of God (Eph 5:16).

During his long life of over 87 years, John Wesley traveled over 250,00 miles on horseback (an average of 20 miles per day), preaching over 40,000 sermons. He wrote 400 books, and knew 10 languages. For 60 years he woke up daily at 6 AM, and even into his 80's he was able to write for 12 hours a day. What a blessing this man became to the Christian church of his day. Many still receive blessings because of the life he poured out. He was one who knew how to redeem his time. How much more should we—who live in this age of time-saving special gadgets, modern machines and computers—be utilizing every minute God gives us.

Living Balanced Lives

Just as Belshazzar's kingdom was weighed, our lives are being weighed before our God. We are placed on one side of the balancing scale and the revelation He has given us is placed on the other side. All that pertains to us will be called into account: "...by Him actions are weighed" (1Sam 2:3). The secrets of men will be judged according to the gospel (Rom 2:16). The Word of God is "...quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and

intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). Let us examine our lives in the light of His Word.

The Lord is also interested in us having a balanced spiritual life. Some people pray much, but neglect reading the Word of God, and vice versa with others. Many pray much, but spend little time praising God. "In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1Th 5:18). When we purchase new tires for our car they must be balanced to the rim of the wheel or they will pull to one side or the other making the car hard to control. May God help us to live a balanced life. "A just weight and balance are the Lord's" (Pro 16:11).

The Time for Judgment

Just as Belshazzar's kingdom was judged, likewise our kingdom—if not rendered to God—is due for swift and sure destruction. Belshazzar, instead of repenting for his debauchery, went on with business as usual after he had bestowed his honors upon Daniel. That very night Darius and his troops entered the city. They diverted the river to a lake, and marched under the wall. This city was supposed to be an invincible fortress, but trusting in the arm of flesh will always end in shame. In the last days they will say "peace, peace," but then comes sudden destruction.

Consider the opposite nature displayed by the king of Nineveh. He also was warned by a man of God, and his

reaction was to call both man and beast for three days of fasting and prayer. Because of his repentance, God's righteous judgment and wrath upon that city was delayed (Jon 3-4). Dear child of God, are you watching over your life, or are you guilty of being careless like Belshazzar? In these last days "he that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev 22:11).

Call to Humility

Let us now consider the lesson to be learned by Belshazzar's example. We are to be holy vessels unto our God, living humbly before Him. The high and lofty One Who inhabits eternity dwells "...in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57:15). Our God, whose very character is humility cannot stand arrogance. Belshazzar's father Nebuchadnezzar was punished for his pride. He had never heard of any king being punished by God for pride, so he continued on until he was humbled by God (Dan 4). But after he was humbled, he acknowledged God's dealings in his life and gave praise to Him. His previous pride had been one of ignorance. But Belshazzar? "...and thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou

knewest all this" (Dan 5:22). His pride was very high! He would not humble himself.

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1Pet 5:6). If we will humble ourselves, then He will put us in the place He has chosen for us. Pride is the very character of the devil. It is what caused his ejection from the high position God had placed him. All other sins in our lives are linked closely to our human frailty and weakness; not so with pride. It is connected with a wrong spirit. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to **walk humbly** with thy God" (Mal 6:8).

*Humble thyself
and the Lord will draw near thee
Humble thyself
and His presence will cheer thee
He will not walk
with the proud nor the scornful
Humble thyself to walk with God.*

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)

IS YOUR HUT BURNING?

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but no help was in sight.

Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger. “God, how could You do this to me!” he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. “How did you know I was here?” asked the weary man of his rescuers. “We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn't lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering. Remember, next time your little hut is burning to the ground—it just may be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)



“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads” (Rev 14:1).

In previous installments of our study of Mount Zion, we have seen that Zion is the eternal dwelling place of God, and the throne of His heavenly kingdom. We are now seeking to answer the age-old question as to *who* are the 144,000 that will be eternally with God in Zion (Psa 15:1; 24:3). We have considered that their possessing the Father’s name written in their foreheads speaks to us of how the 144,000 are a *special possession* of the Father. We were able to also understand how this elite group, in addition to being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, were also *“redeemed from the earth”* and also *“redeemed from among men.”* These 144,000 servants of God are servants to all of humanity and love all of mankind equally. This is a nature found in God Himself, and a nature that we should endeavor to emulate in this prejudicial and divided world in which we live. True servants of God give their first, fullest, and highest devotion to God alone before

giving it to any man in this world. This applies even to their closest family members and friends. It can therefore be seen that they are redeemed from among men.

Jesus—The Everlasting Father

As was noted in Revelation 14:1, it was the **Father’s name** that was written in their foreheads. This also speaks to us of the godly and noble **qualities and nature of a Father** that are seen in the lives of the 144,000. God is known as a Father (Jer 3:19; 31:9; Mat 6:9). This is due in part to His being the Creator of all things, and the ultimate Giver of life to all (Acts 17:28-29). His fatherhood reflects His love and care for His creation. Although the expression “God the Father” refers to the first person of the Trinity (Mat 28:19), this nature of being a father is evident in Christ as well, as He said, *“If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also...He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father”* (Jn 14:7,9). Isaiah prophesied of Jesus, calling Him, “the Everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6). Like a father, Jesus was burdened with love and care for all of humanity. He was moved with compassion for the multitudes that were *“as sheep having no shepherd”* (Mat 9:36-38). Jesus was motivated only by a selfless concern for the well-being of others; this, of course, ultimately led Him to a cruel cross, in order to personally deal with mankind’s greatest needs and problems.

Fatherly Interaction

Some may think that, in order to be devoted entirely to God and attain Mount Zion, one would require nothing short of a complete separation from mankind. There are religious groups known for monastic lifestyles where they seek solitude, remain reclusive, and hedge themselves away from the problems and people of this world. They believe that through such separations they will come closer to God. However, this was **not** the manner of Jesus' earthly life, and this is **not** the way of a true father. Otherwise Jesus would have stayed in heaven—far from this sinful world! After entering into His ministry, at around 30 years of age, the majority of Jesus' time was spent ministering to the multitudes of people that came to Him (Mk 1:32-39; 6:30-34; Lk 12:1; Mat 15:30-32). This reflects the heart of a true father, who cares more for his children than his own rest and comfort. There were certainly times when Jesus was alone with the Father (Mat 4:1; Mk 6:31; Lk 6:12)—and each one needs such renewing and inspirational experiences. But, no doubt most of His time was spent going about and “doing good” (Acts 10:38).

Biblical Fatherhood

It is understood by all that a man becomes a “natural” father by the act of procreation. But, there are also “spiritual” fathers, who manifest the very divine characteristics

of God the Father. A man can be a natural father without being a spiritual father and vice versa. A man can also be **both** a natural and spiritual father, and a man could be **neither**. Jesus was not a natural father, but very clearly was a spiritual Father. Prior to His baptism, Jesus grew up as the eldest in a family of at least seven children (Mk 6:3). Like most firstborn, very likely He would have been required to assist in the care of His younger siblings. So, in consequence, He would have been like a “second” father to His brethren. Jesus had no earthly children, but referred to the apostles as His “children” (Jn 21:5). Later during His busy ministry we see how Jesus was approachable by even the smallest children (Mk 10:13-16). Similarly, the Apostle Paul was apparently not a natural father, but indeed was a spiritual father to many. Paul affectionately referred to Timothy and other servants of God as his “sons” (Phil 2:22; 1Tim 1:2,18; Tit 1:4; Philemon 10), and to entire churches as his “children” (Gal 4:19).

One notable truth about Biblical spiritual fatherhood, is that it is apparently a **very rare quality**, as the Apostle Paul indicated when he said, “*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye **not many fathers...***” (1Cor 4:15). It is very natural for man to be self-seeking and selfish with his time, his labors, and his material things. “*This know also, that in the last days...men shall be **lovers of their own selves...***” (2Tim 3:1-2). “*For **all seek their own, not***

the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil 2:21). Contrariwise, it is the divine nature to be concerned for the betterment of others, and this is the heart of a father (Phil 1:21-24; 2Cor 11:28).

Avoiding Fatherhood

It is evident in today's society, that there is an **aversion** in many men to be true fathers. The failure of men to be proper fathers is perhaps the single most tragic failure in society today. Nowadays many men want the sexual relationship which produces children, but **not** the paternal relationship to love and care for them. It is to be noted that in some married couples, even Christian families, there is a determination to *avoid fatherhood (and motherhood)* through the means of contraceptives. However, this attitude of avoiding children is against the spirit and counsel of the Word of God. (For your consideration of this statement, please refer to the following scriptures: Gen 1:27-28; 9:1; Psa 127:3-5; 113:9; 128:1-4; Gen 30:1-2; 38:8-10.) In the Bible we see that it was considered a blessing to have children and to have large families. Is the Bible outdated because we live in the 21st century? Has the mind of God changed? Who is to decide what is the correct number of children for a family? Apart from the use of contraceptives, abortion is also another means of *avoiding fatherhood (and motherhood)*. As to the question of when human life begins,

please consider the following verses: Psa 139:13-16; Jer 1:5; Gen 25:21-22; 2Ki 19:3; Lk 1:41,44; Exo 21:22-23. By these scriptures, we understand that human life begins at conception, **not** at birth. As such, it is clear that no one has the Biblical right to kill an unborn child by means of abortion; but it is done, and in appalling numbers (1,300,000 annually in the USA, perhaps 46,000,000 annually worldwide).

The Father's Nature

We have said that the "Father's name written in their foreheads" implies that the 144,000 have the **nature of the Father**. What does it mean to have the nature of the Father? From the Bible we see many similarities between being a natural father and being a spiritual father. As natural fathers give life to their children through procreation, so spiritual fathers also give to others the true and eternal words of God—that like seeds, they have the capacity to bring souls a new life in Christ (1Pet 1:23-25; 1Cor 4:15). The fundamental characteristic of a father is that of love (Gen 22:2; 44:20-30; Jn 3:35; 5:20). Fatherhood embodies being an example and a leader to the children in all manner of conduct (Gen 18:19; Jn 13:15; 1Cor 11:1; 1Tim 4:12). As a natural father protects his children from dangers and harm, so spiritual fathers protect other souls from various enemies as well (Jn 10:10-15; Acts 20:28-32). A natural father should provide for the material needs

of his children; similarly, Biblical spiritual fathers are also concerned for the material needs of the souls in the church (1Tim 5:8; Mat 15:32-39; Jn 21:4-13; Jam 2:14-16). True fatherhood also embodies caring for the inner emotional needs and problems of the children (Eph 6:4; 1Thes 2:7-12). Fatherhood embodies teaching the children how to live their lives in this world and afterwards in eternity (Deut 6:6-9; Pro 4:1-13; 22:6). True fatherhood also means correcting one's children wisely and in love when they do wrong (Pro 29:17; Heb 12:5-11). It also means forgiving them for their failures and faults (Lk 15:18-24; Psa 103:8-14; Eph 4:32). Biblical fatherhood also includes planning, working toward the child's future, their growth, development to maturity, and helping them to fulfill their God-given destiny (2Cor 12:14-15; Gal 4:19; Col 1:24-29; Heb 2:9-10). As the Apostle Paul lovingly said of his "children": *"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing: are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy"* (1Th 2:19-20).

Spiritual Fatherhood

How does one come to be a spiritual father? Spiritual fatherhood is imparted most especially through our relationship with the heavenly Father. The more we consider, know, and imitate Him, the more we may become like Him in our individual lives and in our relationships with others.

"I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning" (1Jn 2:13-14). As we love the heavenly Father, and yield ourselves unto His will for our lives, we grow in His image. It costs a lot to be a true father, but these 144,000 paid the price in order "to follow the Lamb." They will be found with Him eternally on that glorious mountain of the Lord. The words of the prophet will be fulfilled in them, *"Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord"* (Isa 54:1-10). In them is perfected the beautiful nature of a father, and that, in part, is why Mount Zion is called "the perfection of beauty," the most wonderful place in all of heaven. There, throughout eternity, His servants will serve Him and see His face, and continue their fatherly ministry among the redeemed in the everlasting glory and joyful presence of God (Rev 22:3-4). □

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)



In 1839, two missionaries, John Williams and James Harris from London traveled to the primitive islands known as New Hebrides with a vision of bringing the gospel to the native people. Minutes after going ashore they were killed and eaten by cannibals. Knowing the potential peril ahead, another missionary, John Gibson Paton, ventured to these same islands in 1858. His courage and devotion to bring the truth of Jesus Christ to this savage people remains a testimony for us all.

John Paton was born and raised in a poor yet godly home in 1824, in Dumfries, Scotland. During these years, John was greatly influenced by the devoutness of his father: he was known to go three times a day to his “prayer closet” and conducted regular family prayers twice a day. He went on to attend college in Glasgow and thereafter became a missionary to the poor in a degraded section of the city. He faithfully labored in that work for ten years winning many souls to the Lord—some of whom went on to be ministers.

Responding to a call for missionaries to the New Hebrides Islands, John Paton and his new wife set sail for the South Pacific

with a vision to bring the gospel to cannibals, only two weeks after they were married! One man warned Paton, “*You will be eaten by cannibals!*” to which Paton boldly responded: “*I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.*” Paton realized that a life spent in the service of the Lord was a life well spent.

Shortly after arriving in New Hebrides, the Patons faced many trials. They could see and hear the cannibalistic celebrations from their home and continually faced threats against their lives. They had guns pointed at them, axes raised against them, stones hurled at them—but through it all their confidence and hope was in the Lord. Within a year the Patons had a son; but in less than two months both mother and son contracted fevers and died. On her deathbed, John’s wife said “*I do not regret leaving home and friends. If I had to do it over, I would do it with more pleasure, yes, with all my heart!*”

John continued his work for the Lord. He learned the language and started translating the scriptures for the natives. He traveled from village to village with the gospel in the midst of constant hardships and dangers. After all his supplies were stolen and while living in starvation, he managed to travel across the island to the home of another missionary. There the natives surrounded

the home and set another building on fire. The missionaries were close to being burned to death, however, a tornado came across the island, put out the fire and scared the natives away. The missionaries were able to escape from the island the next day. After four years of seemingly fruitless labor—in addition to the loss of his wife and son, and the island natives turning against him—one would assume that John Paton would walk away from that life. Yet with a steadfast courage, vision, and the Lord by his side, Paton determined to return to New Hebrides with the gospel. He remarked, *“Nothing so clears the vision and lifts up the life as a decision to move forward in what you know to be entirely the will of the Lord.”*

For the next four years, John Paton traveled to various countries to share the burden of the work in New Hebrides and the need for missionaries. He remarried and returned to the New Hebrides Islands, specifically to the island of Aniwa. Again, in the midst of threats against their lives, diseases, and various other hardships, the Patons continued to labor faithfully for the Lord. The Lord rewarded them for their sacrifice as many souls were converted and the Patons started to see the fruit of their labor. Paton admitted that there were times when his heart wavered as he *“wondered whether these people could be brought to the point of weaving Christian ideas into the spiritual consciousness of their lives.”* Yet he trusted in the power of the gospel and the fact that thousands had given their hearts to the Lord.

One of the greatest hardships was the continual threats against their lives. Paton said, *“My enemies seldom slackened their hateful designs against my life, however calmed or baffled for the moment....A wild chief followed me around for four hours with his loaded musket, and, though often directed towards me, God restrained his hand. I spoke kindly to him, and attended to my work as if he had not been there, fully persuaded that my God had placed me there, and would protect me till my allotted task was finished. Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in His hands, and felt immortal till my work was done. Trials and hairbreadth escapes strengthened my faith, and seemed only to nerve me for more to follow; and they did tread swiftly upon each other’s heels. Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my Lord and Savior, nothing in the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. His words, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end,’ became to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. It is the sober truth that I had my nearest and most intimate glimpses of the presence of my Lord in those dread moments when musket, club or spear was being leveled at my life.”*

Billy Graham relates a story about the Patons in his book *God’s Secret Angels*. One night they were surrounded by hostile natives who wanted to kill them. They prayed throughout the night that the Lord would protect them, and in the morning they saw their attackers leaving. A year later, the chief of the tribe

became a Christian and Paton asked him about that night and why they did not attack them. He replied that it was because of all the men that were protecting them: there were hundreds in shining garments with drawn swords.

After many years of patient labor they were able to see the entire island converted to Christ! He said, *“I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God, Aniwa now worships at the Savior’s feet.”* They built and ran a mission house, two orphanages, a church and a schoolhouse. By 1899 he saw his translation of the New Testament into Aniwa distributed to the natives and missionaries on 25 of the 30 islands of New Hebrides. Today, about 100 years since the death of John Paton, about 85% of the population of Vanuatu (modern day New Hebrides) identifies itself as Christian. The labor and sacrifice of many missionaries spanning many years has produced a beautiful harvest of souls. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for Us?’ Then said I, ‘Here am I; send me’” (Rom 10:13-14; Isa 6:8). □

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)



Encounters
WITH *Jesus*

Imagine all the golden opportunities that were available for people when Jesus walked upon the earth. Men and women of all ages and even children had a chance to see Jesus. They could listen to His words of eternal life directly from His mouth. They could have even touched Him! There were those, the common people, who heard Him gladly. And of course, there were those, especially the religious leaders, who despised and rejected Him. The end result of every personal encounter with the Lord Jesus depended largely on the individual's response. Many received healing and eternal life while others hardened their hearts and went away empty.

When Jesus began His ministry in Galilee, He was chased out of town after reading just a few verses from the Bible. Their hearts were hard. In the end, Jesus was

brought to tears as He looked at the city of Jerusalem, for they had missed the day of their visitation. Although God had come to them in the flesh, they did not have eyes to see nor a heart to understand.

Yet this was nothing new. When Elijah was among them there were many needy widows in Israel, but the one who was blessed through Elijah's ministry was in the country next door. There were many lepers in Israel who wanted to be healed during Elisha's ministry but the only one to receive healing was from an enemy nation—the commander of the armies that oppressed Israel! All these things happened as examples for us so that we will not miss out on God's great plan for our lives. This is certain: if we don't want what God offers us, there is someone else waiting to receive it.

The Spirit of God spoke to the church in Philadelphia: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev 3:11). Although God has a great plan for each one of us, if we are negligent someone else will receive the inheritance which was intended for us.

Queen Vashti's crown was given to someone else when she was unwilling to come before the king. King Ahasuerus found someone else who was worthy—Esther,

who found favor in his eyes. No doubt this was due to the character of submission to the will of God that she had developed from her childhood. She had cultivated a life of obedience to her guardian, Mordecai. Obedience to God is seen in our obedience to those He places over us. As we meet Jesus daily, let us practice a life of submission to His Lordship and bow our knees and hearts before Him. This will enable Him to exalt us in due time.

When Peter met Jesus in his fishing boat, all he could do was fall down before the Lord, confessing that he was a sinner, desperately unclean before this holy Man Who had gotten into his boat. This divinely appointed meeting with the Son of God was truly life changing for Simon Peter. Goodbye to fishing—a new life began. Probably without fully understanding what was happening to him, he now found himself following the Master. Peter became one of Christ's most devoted followers. We find him accompanying Jesus on several occasions with only one or two of the other disciples. In spite of his many failures, he turned out to be the spokesman on the Day of Pentecost. Even his denial of Jesus brought him eye to eye with the Lord. Conviction swept over his soul; he went out and wept bitterly. He grew to love the Lord so much that when he was to be martyred for his testimony of Christ, he asked to be

crucified upside down, saying he was not worthy to die as his Lord had.

A paralyzed man who was let down through the roof to be put in front of Jesus, left the scene carrying his own bed. What an encounter! His sins were forgiven and his body healed. Jesus changes the life of anyone who comes in contact with Him. This paralyzed man had been brought for healing. He received that and much more! First Jesus had said to him, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee" (Lk 5:20). Then he said, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, I say unto you, arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house" (Lk 5:24). From this man's experience we can learn that healing begins in our heart and spirit. When the inner man is healed by Christ, the outer man follows suit. Multitudes—beyond count—have been healed when they have come to Jesus and been reconciled to God through faith in His blood. In Psalms 147:3, we read, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." So healing begins in the heart. Psalm 103:3 speaks of the God "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases." We can see the connection between forgiveness of sins and healing for the body: forgiveness of sins opens the door for God to heal the body. When the burden of sin is lifted, the power of sickness is also broken.

Think about the sinful woman who came to Jesus while He was a guest at a Pharisee's house. She stood behind Him weeping. Initially she was perhaps ashamed to stand in front of Him, yet she went on to wash His feet with her tears. Where did those tears come from? They must have come from a broken heart. When conviction of sin came upon her she truly repented, giving herself totally to God. She wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the very costly ointment from her alabaster box. She was forgiven much and she loved much. Jesus said to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace" (Lk 7:50). What a peace she received that day—sins forgiven, life changed!

A happy group of people soon formed about Jesus as He went around spreading the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. Some of them had been healed from evil spirits and diseases. Some ministered to Jesus from out of their own means. These were all a changed group of people. They all had this in common: an encounter with Jesus. Now they were all committed to being with Him all the time, wherever He went.

Even a demon-possessed man whom Jesus healed wanted to be with Him. This was no ordinary case—there were thousands of demons inside him! He lived in tombs,

and was beyond being fierce. Nobody could pass by his dwelling, out of fear for their lives. They tried to keep him bound up with chains but he would break them and run back to the tombs. He was so mad—possessed beyond control—that he would cut himself with stones, and was always crying night and day. But when Jesus cast out the legion of demons, immediately he was found to be in his right mind, clothed and sitting at the feet of Jesus. His life became a testimony for his entire city.

Then there was the centurion whose servant was sick and ready to die. He felt so unworthy that he sent a message to Jesus that He need not come to his house but just speak the word and his servant would be healed. And so it was. The centurion's faith impressed Jesus. Here was a man from another nation but his faith was greater than anyone in Israel. Through that faith he was able to see his faithful servant raised from his deathbed. Faith is a marvelous thing and we know in Whom we have believed—Jesus of Nazareth. When we meet with Jesus, faith is the essential ingredient which causes our fellowship to blossom and bring forth fruit.

What about the woman with the issue of blood? How many years did she suffer? Could anyone help her? What had happened to all her money? Did she get better or did

she get worse? Then she heard about Jesus. She pressed through the crowd managing somehow to reach out and touch the hem of His garment. Immediately virtue went out of Jesus and she felt in her body that she was healed. What a change! How good she must have felt after having suffered for so long. How sweet to hear those words from Jesus, “Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (Lk 8:48). Again, we see the result of faith. Mixing faith with our communion with Jesus brings heaven down to our hearts. Actually, Jesus was on His way somewhere else. Yet this woman still seized the opportunity and met with the living God that day. She prepared her heart to receive from the Lord. We should say with the songwriter, “While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by.”

This woman of faith had actually interrupted Jairus’ request for Jesus to see his seriously ill daughter, but perhaps it didn’t matter, because the message came that his daughter was already dead. Jesus insisted on going and who do you think was there to meet Jesus when He arrived? Only unbelievers who laughed at Him. Jesus put them all out of the house—not a very good encounter. Then, to the amazement of those present, the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus was raised from the dead that day. Jesus took

her by the hand and told her to arise. “Good encounter” would be a great understatement! Jairus had a burden for his child and he knew where to turn for help. He knew to invite Jesus into his house and into his family. We could say that he gave the keys of his house to Jesus. We need miracles from God. But more than that, we need to open up our lives entirely to Him and let Him be Lord of all. As the song says, “If You’re not Lord of everything, then You’re not Lord at all.”

The condition of our heart has a lot to do with what kind of an encounter we have with Jesus. If our heart is hard, we may be disappointed and blame our problems or unanswered prayers on Jesus. If our heart is right with God, broken and contrite before Him, we will never be disappointed. Even if we have to wait, the waiting will be rewarding. It will help us to look to the face of Jesus and the end result will be that we become more like Him. □

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)



The workmanship of His hands

SYMBIOSIS

One of the many things which evolution finds difficult to explain is symbiosis. Symbiosis describes an unusually close or mandatory association between two or more unrelated species for their mutual survival. The word was taken from the Latin *sym*, meaning “together,” and *bios*, meaning “life.” Many textbooks often cite lichens as a prime example. These plant-like entities are composed of algae, which makes food from sunlight; and fungi, which provides water and protection. Neither species can survive on their own. How they became so entwined however is unknown. How they even existed (if they did) as single entities beforehand is only a guess.

Symbiosis should not be confused with *commensalism*, which means eating at the same table. For example, there is a worm that rooms with a hermit crab. It even shares the same meals, but as best as scientists can tell, they are merely an odd couple.

The fact that we require oxygen from plants and they require carbon dioxide from us reminds us that most life forms

have, to some degree, a symbiotic relationship. Nature is full of such examples. A certain species of shrimp cleans the dwellings of the gobi fish, which in turn warn the shrimp about approaching predators. A tarantula species in Texas maintains a symbiotic relationship with a frog that is small enough to hop between the arachnid’s legs. Although the tarantula could easily devour the frog, it seems to know somehow that this particular amphibian will protect its eggs from flies and other insects with a flick of the tongue. Meanwhile, the frog’s predators fear the tarantula.

A similar relationship exists between a lizard and a scorpion in the Arabian desert. The scorpion shares the lizard’s home for its comfort while the lizard benefits from the scorpion’s protection.

Even the vanilla flavoring that might be found in your kitchen cupboard is a consequence of symbiosis. The vanilla bean comes from an orchid plant that can only be pollinated by a flea-sized bee that knows how to go under tiny septa and take pollen from plant to plant. For 300 years Europeans repeatedly failed to grow this plant; now they can do it by artificial insemination. Further complicating matters is the fact that there is only a three-hour window when this flower stays open. This special bee and very unique plant must have originated together, otherwise we would have no vanilla today.

Humans depend on certain bacteria in our small intestines for the production of vitamin K. Without their work, our blood would never clot and the smallest of injuries might cause us to bleed to death. Pregnancy and childbirth would be fatal afflictions and perhaps the human race would not have survived. These same micro-organisms, in turn, depend upon our food intake for their own nutrition.

A different set of intestinal bacteria keeps the more dangerous toxin-producing micro organisms at bay. It appears as if *H. pylori* bacteria, often blamed for causing stomach ulcers, may be protective against salmonella and other worrisome bacteria.

Studies suggest that we require certain kinds of bacterial exposure as children to better develop our immune systems. The suggestion is that we may be washing our hands a little too much or use disinfectants too often. Diseases such as asthma and inflammatory bowel disease are clearly on the rise and some professionals believe it is partly because we keep our homes and our kids too sterile. Supposedly, these early childhood exposures prime our immune system and help us fight diseases as an adult. Although no one is telling us to let the dishes pile up or allow flies in our homes, there may be reasons to revise our obsession with cleanliness.

We are all born with a sterile gut, meaning no bacteria can be found in the intestines. That is why a baby's waste doesn't

smell so bad and pregnant women don't succumb to infections from their baby. Imagine a baby without that design, carrying bacteria that could injure the mother. With bacteria on board, a baby would quickly become a deep, life-threatening abscess. These micro-organisms begin to populate our small intestine after the first month and eventually number in the zillions; they come from a variety of sources, but mostly from the mother's body. Somehow, they know where to go and not go, or our bodies know how to direct or control them. The safer and more useful ones are allowed in and the dangerous ones are kept away or under lock and key. We need these "good guys" for survival and they need us.

Interestingly, termites, who eat wood from downed trees for sustenance, cannot actually digest wood. They require a protozoan found in their hindgut to break the cellulose down. Without this symbiotic relationship they would starve to death. Newborn termites pick up these protozoa, called mixotrichs, by eating their parents' anal droppings. One wonders how Darwinists can explain how they learned to do this. Termites will also lose their personal protozoa when moulting and then recapture new ones from the rear ends of friends and relatives. The mixotrich needs another certain bacteria to propel itself around the termites stomach. Again, one wonders what the chances are that this

three-layered symbiotic relationship could have happened by accident.

Another multi-tiered symbiotic relationship exists between certain ants, aphids, and millions of buchnera bacteria. Ants manage aphids like a dairy farmer might care for his cows. In exchange for protection, these domesticated aphids make a nutritious, sugary foodstuff for the ant colony. The buchnera, who live within the aphid intestines, help the aphids manufacture their life-sustaining proteins.

There are many variations on these traditional symbiotic themes and even the simplest defy an evolutionary explanation. One question that readily arises is, how could certain species have ever survived alone or even come about if they needed major help? Or why did they link up with another species in such a way that they could never extricate themselves again without dying? And how did they even find such an extremely compatible partner? Evolution is somewhat silent on these issues.

The Bible on the other hand shows a world that was created in which all life was to be both dependent and also helpful to one another. Largely, the Fall has broken that original unity between all living things and now nature is “red in tooth and claw.” Nevertheless, here and there hints of our Creator’s original design are still seen. Let us learn from these things as Paul

tells us in 1Cor 12:12-21: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, ‘Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body’; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, ‘Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body’; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, ‘I have no need of thee’: nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” □

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)

Human Error

PART 1 — TROUBLED TRIPS



From the start of this series let it be firmly stated that God never fails. His will will always and ever be fulfilled! Yet the Scriptures show that when God lived in this present world, He had to endure many frustrations and failures. From eternity the second Person of the Trinity was always fully God but in the fullness of time He took on flesh and bone and became fully human (Gal 4:4). The title that Jesus most often used to designate Himself with was not “Son of God” but “Son of Man.” Our Lord did not hold on to the glories of heaven but humbled Himself to become incarnate upon the fallen earth below.

This humbling process entailed Jesus making Himself subject to the same limitations, trials and temptations that are common to every man. Throughout His earthly life Jesus demonstrated His willingness to have His will crossed, right up to His death on the cross. Thus He has shown that He comprehends our condition and is willing to be touched by the feelings of our infirmities. In our Lord Jesus Christ there is no failure, but His living among men meant that He had to endure human error.

Danger Ahead: Fallen Man

In the following studies we will explore some of the setbacks, contradictions and frustrations Jesus went through; so that we might better endure, overcome and benefit from our own. Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7). Let us learn from Jesus how to rise above trial, trouble and failure and be made ready through those very things to fly away with Him.

Except for Jesus Christ, everyone born of woman is born fallen under a curse of sin and death. Because of man’s sin and disobedience all of creation has been affected and is now subject to vanity and corruption (Rom 8:20). Therefore, to live on earth among fallen men puts one at risk and makes everyone subject to the consequences of the wrong choices and actions of others. Babies born to mothers who smoke or use drugs have a higher rate of infant mortality or health problems than other children. Many have been injured in vehicle collisions even though they were not the one at fault or even the one driving.

Not So “Bon Voyage”

In Acts 27, we read the story of one of Paul’s shipwrecks. The apostle gave warning to stop the voyage, but the experts and owners ignored his counsel and the trip ended in a catastrophe. You may be the pilot or flying first-class but this does not make you immune from a plane crash.

In most cases, it only means you hit the ground first. Like Paul, we may be right at times but that does not keep us safe from the wrongs of others. We are all in the same boat. Yet when we continue to study the story of Paul's trip to Rome we learn that out of the wreckage came revival (Acts 28:9). Truly all things work together for good for those who love God and are called by Him. It does not say all good things work for us but that *all things work good for us* (Rom 8:28). Some of Jesus' voyages may have seemed like mistakes at the time, but they all came to an expected and desired end (Jer 29:11). In this installment let us look at some troubled trips of the Lord and His disciples in order to help us better travel our own life's journeys.

Turbulence Ahead

Mark chapter four begins with Jesus seated in a boat speaking to a multitude publicly and later explaining things privately to His disciples. After a long day of teaching, Jesus got back into the boat and said to the disciples, "Let us pass over unto the other side." As they voyaged, a great storm lashed the boat and it began to fill with water. In terror the disciples awakened Jesus Who was sleeping behind them, and asked if He even cared that they were about to perish. Their fear must have made them forget the last words their Lord had spoken to them: "let us go to the other side" (Lk 8:22). He did not say let us go halfway or let

us sink down and drown. He said that they were going all the way across.

Through faith in the work and word of Jesus Christ we too can be assured that we are going to make it all the way to heaven. We have no guarantee that there will be no storms and quakes along the way. On the contrary, we are promised much trouble, tribulation and suffering (Jn 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22). At times it may seem to us that our Master is silent, unseen or even asleep, yet we must rest with Him upon His word. After Jesus was unnecessarily awakened, He rebuked the raging storm. Then He rebuked the more dangerous tempest of fear and unbelief that was still going on within His disciples. Like them we too must realize that He that is with us is greater than any evil around us. It may seem at times that Jesus is unconcerned, silent or weak but His weakness is stronger than anything in the world (1Cor 1:25).

Recalculating...

After a terrifying night, the disciples finally arrived at their destination—only to be met by a naked, mutilated wild man, host to an army of demons. Their idea of having had a successful journey must have quickly changed. Similarly, the children of Israel were surprised to find their promised land occupied by giants and enemy armies. Likewise, the New Testament children of God are

often surprised to meet so much conflict while trying to possess the character of Christ. Even when we do all that God commands we still meet resistance. Like Noah after the flood, Moses after the Red Sea, and Jesus up from the river Jordan, we will find that many trials and troubles only seem to begin after water baptism. However, Jesus passed through the heavens and the gates of hell to save us and was willing to go through any tempest or distance for just one soul. The Lord would have known that the storm was sent to stop Him from delivering that wild man.

Deviled Ham...

Having just witnessed Jesus' power over the storm, the twelve now witnessed their Lord's power over the destructive forces that raged within this man. At His word the evil spirits were cast out into unclean pigs and they stampeded into the sea and drowned. The disciples found out that it was not they that were destined to perish in the waters but the devils. We usually see the Gadarene demonic as an extreme case, but in many ways we are just like him: wild men driven by unclean and uncontrollable forces, casting off all restraint, at home among the dead in sin, injuring ourselves and others. Jesus has passed through much more than a stormy sea to reach us. If you are in need of deliverance no storm can stop Him.

...And Delivered Man

When the locals saw the change in the possessed man—and even more importantly to them, the loss of the swine—they prayed for Jesus to leave. So He went back to the boat. Unlike demons that come in uninvited, Jesus enters in when we let Him. He stands at the door and knocks. Let us not be afraid of heaven when it invades our comfortable world like those people of Gadara. Yet Jesus did not leave them without witness. Unlike his countrymen, the man formerly named Legion did not get his prayer answered. He wanted to follow Jesus but was sent home to testify instead. The disciples who followed Jesus back into the boat must have thought it an unprofitable trip to go through so much trouble for only one soul. The testimony of this first preacher of Jesus made men marvel in places that Jesus had not visited and prepared people to receive miracles from Him later (Mk 5:20; 7:21).

Restless Vacation

The next boat trip Jesus and the apostles took were occasioned by a vacation that did not turn out as planned. The Lord had said unto them, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while," because there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat (Mk 6:31). They went by ship privately to the desert but more than 5,000 unexpected guests showed up at their

picnic, and this was only the number of men. After another full day of teaching, Jesus miraculously fed that multitude and sent them away. He also ordered the disciples away by boat to the other side again while He went up a mountain, not to rest but to pray.

Going Nowhere Fast

We can imagine what the disciples were thinking (or maybe muttering) as they toiled on their oars at 3 AM with a strong wind against them. “Some desert place rest this is, rowing all night in a rough sea after a long meeting and having to serve uninvited guests! Jesus isn’t even with us in this struggle. Maybe He is somewhere sleeping again.” Suddenly they were shocked to see the Lord walking past them on the water. This would have taken their minds off their toil but their fear on seeing Him shows how quickly they had forgotten His miraculous power demonstrated in stopping the storm and feeding the five thousand. After being with Jesus, the disciples should have expected the unexpected. The One Who can walk on water will not be worried about storms and sinking.

Have we also forgotten all that the Lord has done in our lives? When they landed we find why Jesus was ready to walk right past those doubting disciples. As soon as He was ashore the whole region was ready and willing to receive miracles from Jesus. We too must learn that as we

travel through life with Jesus every disappointment turns out to be an appointment. At times it may seem we are robbed of leisure and pleasure but when we are willing to spend and be spent for Him we become the ones enriched and blessed.

The last disappointing boat trip we will study at this time is one that the majority of disciples took without Jesus. After the crucifixion the disciples knew they were to wait for the Comforter to come. On the evening of the resurrection, Jesus had met with them and told them to “tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:36-49). Instead of waiting, Peter took those closest to him fishing. When Jesus had first called him, Simon immediately left his nets. Now he immediately went back to them (Mk 1:18; Jn 21:3). Peter could not wait an hour in the garden with Jesus but now he waited all night on the water without Him—catching nothing. If Jesus is not with us, or if we move out of His will, our lives will always end up failed and fruitless.

When the new day came, Jesus was standing on the shore, unrecognized to the disciples. In a repeat of how Peter was first called, when he had originally recognized Jesus as Lord and became aware of his own sin, Jesus gave them another miraculous catch of fish. Then they knew that it was the risen Lord Who was on the shore cooking

breakfast for them. Contrary to what men usually do, Peter put his clothes on and jumped ship into the water, abandoning his friends as he rushed back to Jesus. Let this be a warning to all. Those who lead us out of the will of God or encourage backsliding do not always stay there with us.

Peter was reinstated to his calling to love and follow Jesus, and to feed His sheep. We often go astray, or the wrong way like Peter (and Jonah in the boat), but the Lord calls us back to Himself and His work. All power in heaven and earth is given unto Jesus. He commands us to go with the Gospel. No matter when or where we go, we can be assured that He is always, and in all ways, with us even unto the end (Mat 28:18-20). ◻

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)

The Call of the Barnyard

A flock of wild ducks were flying in formation, heading south for the winter. They formed a beautiful V in the sky, and were admired by everyone who saw them from below.

One day, Wally, one of the wild ducks in the formation, spotted something on the ground that caught his eye. It was a barnyard with a flock of tame ducks who lived on the farm. They were waddling around on the ground, quacking merrily and eating corn that was thrown on the ground for them every day. Wally liked what he saw. “It sure would be nice to have some of that corn,” he thought to himself. “And all this flying is very tiring. I’d like to just waddle around for a while.”

So after thinking it over a while, Wally left the formation of wild ducks, made a sharp dive to the left, and headed for the barnyard. He landed among the tame ducks, and began to waddle around and quack merrily. He also started eating corn. The formation of wild ducks continued their journey south, but Wally didn’t care. “I’ll rejoin them when they come back north in a few months,” he said to himself.

Several months went by and sure enough, Wally looked up and spotted the flock of wild ducks in



formation, heading north. They looked beautiful up there. And Wally was tired of the barnyard. It was muddy and everywhere he waddled was nothing but duck doo. “It’s time to leave,” said Wally.

So Wally flapped his wings furiously and tried to get airborne. But he had gained some weight from all his corn-eating, and he hadn’t exercised his wings much either. He finally got off the ground, but he was flying too low and slammed into the side of the barn. He fell to the ground with a thud and said to himself, “Oh, well, I’ll just wait until they fly south in a few months. Then I’ll rejoin them and become a wild duck again.”

But when the flock flew overhead once more, Wally again tried to lift himself out of the barnyard. He simply didn’t have the strength. Every winter and every spring, he saw his wild duck friends flying overhead, and they would call out to him. But his attempts to leave were all in vain.

Eventually Wally no longer paid any attention to the wild ducks flying overhead. He hardly even noticed them. He had, after all, become a barnyard duck.

Sometimes we get tired of being wild ducks—followers of Jesus Christ. It’s not always easy to be obedient to God and to discipline ourselves to hang in there for the long haul. When we are feeling that way, that’s when Satan tempts us to “fall out of formation” and to join the barnyard ducks—the world.

But look what happened to Wally. He thought he would just “check it out” for awhile and then leave when he wanted to. But he couldn’t do it. Sin is like that. Sin is a trap, and it has a way of changing us into people we don’t even want to become. Eventually we lose touch with who we really are—the sons and daughters of the Most High. We become barnyard ducks.

*Sin will take you farther than you intended to stray
Sin will keep you longer than you intended to stay
Sin will cost you more than you intended to pay*

[Click to return to the Table of Contents](#)