

Chapter 1

Our Father



“O GOD, PLEASE LET her live! O God, please let her live! O God, please let her live!”
My infant daughter had drowned! Her limp, gray body lay sprawled on the bathroom vanity. Her dull eyes, wide open, stared expressionless into space.

“O God, please let her live!” My spirit shrieked from within me like a siren, ripping my chest apart as on and on I screamed, “O God, please let her live!”

How well I remember that cool spring morning and the events that led to my carelessness. Busy doing laundry, I had forgotten to watch the clock and had found myself running late for an appointment. *Where has the morning gone?* I had fretted glancing in the mirror, trying to fluff my limp red hair. *Oh dear, I'll have to roll it up. I still have to put on my makeup and dress, and get the kids ready. How can I ever make it on time?*

I always bathed my son—not quite four years old—and my seven-month-old daughter separately. However, hoping to save a few minutes, I decided to put them in the tub together while I got ready in the bathroom. After switching on a wall heater and starting the water, I rounded up their clothes to avoid redressing them in a cooler room. Meanwhile

the tub filled fuller than I had intended.

Whatever was I thinking? Instead of draining some water out, I foolishly reasoned, *They'll just have more fun in deeper water.* I never dreamed of leaving them alone.

Although I was barely twenty-three, I prided myself on being thorough in my role of motherhood. Like many wives in the mid-sixties I didn't work outside the home, and I had no desire to do so. I centered almost every waking moment around the needs of my husband and our precious blonde-haired, blue-eyed children. They were my life. And yes, I loved it.

As the children splashed joyfully in their bath that morning it dawned on me that I had forgotten to grab a diaper along with their clothes. With the nursery directly across the hall, I dashed to get one and then realized that all the diapers lay on top of the clothes dryer, where I had folded them.

Laughter came from the bathroom. *They're fine*, I told myself, as I raced to the utility room and back.

But they weren't fine! I opened the door to find my son with face dripping, happily laughing at his tiny sister who had slipped beneath the water. He thought she was playing! In panic I gasped as I saw her eyes, dull and faded, staring blankly through the water where she floated.

Terror whipped through my heart like a tornado. *I had meant to be gone for only an instant! How could I have been so stupid?* Swooping her up, I stretched a lifeless baby on the vanity.

"O God, please let her live!" I screamed while I frantically administered mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Between each breath I continued crying, "O God, please let her live!"

No vital signs appeared. Again and again I tried. Nothing. I finally stopped. It was no use. I had done all I physically knew to do.

Still, over and over I prayed at the top of my lungs, "O God, please let her live! O God, please let her live!"

Suddenly she whimpered! Pink color flooded into her body. She moved. She cried. My child had come to life! Hugging her against my chest I flew down the hallway to the bedroom and dialed the pediatrician.

"What's she doing now?" he asked.

"Crawling on the bed," I answered, gripping her leg as she circled around me. From the questions that followed, I now realize in retrospect that he was concerned about brain damage.

"Sounds like she's OK," he finally said, "but she has to have water in her lungs. Is she coughing at all?"

"No."

"Well, I won't have you come in now, but at the first sign of anything

abnormal—coughing, wheezing, vomiting, *anything*—bring her in. *Immediately.*”

Praises go to an almighty God who acts in perfection. My daughter never showed a symptom of any kind. Not only did God raise her up, but He also completely healed her.

A CHRISTIAN SINCE childhood, my mind was programmed to call on God in crisis moments. Yet my limited knowledge of all-powerful supernatural Deity left me puzzled. Years slipped by before I became aware of the certainty of His hand in this miracle, years before I gave Him the credit He deserved for answering my cry and freeing my daughter from death’s grip.

Though study, prayer, and fellowship with my heavenly Father—I now know Him as a mighty, living God. Many unexplainable things are now explainable, mysteries unveiled. I invite you to meet the glorious One I found, One whose promises never fail. He is a God who, when we call, replies, “Yes, yes, I say, yes!”

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not.

—JEREMIAH 33:3

Do you ever wonder, *How do I call on God? How should I pray?* Do you long to see great and mighty works of God happen in your life? If your heart cries *yes*, grab your Bible and come along. You’re in for a dynamic journey into supernatural wonders of the Almighty. Although this adventure is open for “whosoever will,” receiving your utmost requires two important decisions:

1. Leave your traditions behind. You may never wish to pick them up again.

Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition.

—MARK 7:13

2. Bring your empty cup to be filled to overflowing.

... that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

—COLOSSIANS 1:9

So get ready! Brace yourself for an explosion of immense excitement, joy, and awareness. Come expecting to be thrilled and amazed as the spectacular power of God unfolds. Prepare for an inner awakening of overwhelming love, compassion, and forgiveness as the majesty of His glory ushers you through doors of new revelation in perception, faith, and understanding.

Using scripture paraphrased for drama and imagining visual concepts, we'll see life emerging from the pages of the Bible. We'll journey through Jewish roots to Christianity, exploring allegories and hidden shadows, discovering metaphoric parallels and previews, unraveling prophetic events and long-lost secrets hidden in His Word.

How will we find our way? We'll use a glorious treasure map to guide us. After a quick look at it we'll be equipped to strike out on our expedition.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

—MATTHEW 6:9–13

This is the map—so familiar, so simple to follow—that will steer us on our trip. It is “the Lord’s Prayer.” Why, it seems that everybody knows it! In the church where I grew up the congregation recited it in unison every Sunday.

What did Jesus intend when He gave us the Lord’s Prayer? Did He mean for us to only repeat it repetitiously over and over or maybe just sing it at weddings? Shortly before teaching this prayer Jesus said, “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathens do . . .” (v. 7).

Let’s inspect it closely. Perhaps it’s not so simple after all. Like Christ’s parables, many underlying jewels glimmer beneath its surface. By following it we’ll dig up countless nuggets.

As our travels progress we’ll grow to appreciate the never-ending virtues of our heavenly guide. Yet first we come to know Him as “our Father.”

OUR FATHER

“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,” says the LORD Almighty.

—2 CORINTHIANS 6:18, NKJV

How could One so great, adorned with majesty and possessing all power, desire us as His children? What a supreme privilege to call Him Father!

Yet not everyone always felt this way. Many years ago calling God “Father” triggered shock and anger.

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him [Jesus], because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

—JOHN 5:18

This creates a whirlwind of questions. What made these Jews so distraught? As God’s chosen people, why didn’t they know Him as their Father? If He wasn’t a Father to them, how and when did you and I become His children and He our Father?

For complete answers to these questions, we must turn many stones and explore many sites. The first leg of our excursion into the revelation of Father God will whisk us down a long and winding road of Jewish history. We’ll emerge shaking our heads, overwhelmed by the Jewish perception of God in ancient times, but we’ll gain an understanding of why their view was so alien from the personal Father of grace and mercy Jesus preached. And best of all, at the end we’ll understand with thanksgiving how God became our Father.

Are you ready for the journey? Let’s begin by changing our first question. Rather than asking why the Jews became so distraught and reacted with such animosity to Jesus’ proclamation of God as Father, a more appropriate approach would be to inquire how they—with their background—could even begin to identify with such intimate thinking about God.

Although the Old Testament speaks of God as Israel’s Father, this role—to their way of thinking—involved God as founder and overseer of their nation, giver of the Law, and judge. It did not mean He was their personal Father. After all, in Jesus’ day, who—except for Jesus and John the Baptist—had ever greeted them with claims of having an inner relationship with the great Jehovah?

No one!

Actually, in comparison to their vast populations, only a handful had been recorded as sharing intimate fellowship with God. Yes, they read of people such as Abraham, Moses, Samson, David, and the prophets hearing directly from Jehovah and sharing personal bonds with Him. Yet it was so long ago!

For four hundred years no God-inspired person had spoken to Israel, until John the Baptist arrived and proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God.

What a long stretch to be without any witness from the One who chose them! To compare, consider how distant the issue of the United States Declaration of Independence in 1776 seems today. Not even two hundred fifty years have passed, and yet it seems so long ago.

Realizing all this not only sheds light on reasons the Jews were defiant toward Jesus, but it also shows why multitudes broke with tradition to follow Him. Many were starved for a touch from their Creator, burning in their desire to truly know Him.

Since the ancient Jews lacked personal association with God, what kept them worshiping Him for so many centuries? Answers await as we veer onto a trail often missed by Christians today. It's an extensive walk off the beaten path, and it leads deeper into Hebrew customs, legends, and beliefs to help us understand how God was viewed in Jesus' day.

First, they knew a God of precise plan and purpose. An amazing strategy unfolds as we trace the footsteps of a people set aside in divine destiny. It's an honor no other nation can ever possess, a masterful design unmatched in human history.

God Himself singled them out, promising that from their descendants a Redeemer would be born. From early childhood this knowledge churned inside every Jewish soul. By keeping flawless genealogy records they studied the direct avenue of their bloodline. Knowing its supreme arrangement, their hearts throbbed with awareness that God had established their nation through a man named Abraham, and—down through the ages—had preserved a perfect lineage for the coming Messiah.

Oh, what strategy directed by His unseen hand! And such a wondrous heritage! We travel now into its drama, which begins with Abraham two thousand years before the birth of the Promised Seed in Bethlehem.

BY DIVINE PROMISE Abraham fathered his son Isaac. From this one son an entire Jewish nation developed. Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob, renamed Israel, produced twelve sons whose descendants became known as the twelve tribes of Israel. Millions came from them.

The eleventh son of Israel was Joseph, who, sold by ten of his jealous brothers to slave traders at age seventeen, served as an invaluable player in God's perfect plan. In the hands of the Egyptians, Joseph—by miraculous means—overcame the hardships of slavery, false accusation, and imprisonment to win favor with the pharaoh.

By molding a prestigious Joseph in Egypt, God saved His people from

great famine in their homeland. Reuniting the household of Israel in Egypt, He uprooted the entire family to live in this region of the Nile. This established them as a unit unto themselves. Now with the necessary separation of His divinely ordained nation from other peoples, God continued to reveal His plan by circumstances only He could direct, thus protecting the line for His Perfect Seed.

As the descendants of Israel increased in this foreign land, a new pharaoh rose to power and made them slaves. Why did this happen to the elect of God? Maybe their faithfulness had dwindled, but we don't know. However, looking at the overall picture we can discern one underlying reason: God's Perfect Seed.

Slavery segregated Israel from the pagan Egyptian culture and protected its people from intermarriage. Throughout centuries in a foreign land their overseeing Lord kept them strong and their lineage pure.

After 430 years in Egypt, when His chosen cried out to Him, God maintained His divine course by raising up Moses as their deliverer. On through the ages of judges and kings, generation after generation, through times of devotion as well as in times of rebellion, God continued to orchestrate a pure bloodline through His appointed Israel.

Yes, the Jews certainly knew the One of precise plan and purpose. Yet they also knew an avenging God of judgment and wrath whose power easily and instantly snuffed out entire wicked populations. Their inspired writings, which we know as the Old Testament, detail His sentence of the great flood on the world in Noah's day and the abrupt doom of Sodom and Gomorrah during Abraham's time. Even so, probably most dramatically stirring in Hebrew minds were the scenes of God's rage when the malicious king of Egypt defied His divine orders—given through Moses—to let the children of Israel go free.

Oh, just look upon the scenes! With hardened heart Pharaoh stood fast in his refusal, causing plagues of terror to wreak havoc on Egyptian life. Their water turned to blood, and there was none left to drink, no way to bathe. Stinging bugs, frogs, and wild beasts descended on them in droves. Boils erupted with unbearable agony. Hailstorms devastated crops, and locusts devoured anything that was left in the field. Total darkness enveloped the land for days. Still, in his rebellious craze, Pharaoh stood firm, prompting the most ghastly plague of all—death. It claimed every firstborn male belonging to an Egyptian—child or beast, young or old. Weeping, sobbing, and screaming exploded from every household. At last their ruler let God's people leave.

Oh, what retribution there was in this final torment! Eighty years earlier

under Pharaoh's orders his men brutally murdered male Israelite babies. But no evil act can ever thwart God's plans. Baby Moses was saved.

Have you ever considered the double grief Egyptian women suffered when their heartless leader changed his mind soon after seeing his workforce depart? While mothers still mourned over the loss of their firstborn sons, the Red Sea crashed angrily upon their husbands and other sons, drowning the whole Egyptian army as they pursued the fleeing slaves. Not one survived. It was, no doubt, justice deserved, but anguish surged like hot lava from every soul left in the land of Egypt.

Seeing the precise plan and purpose of their nation transpiring and bearing witness to His wrath, the Jews rightly claimed an awesome God of miracles. They recognized Him as a Mastermind who used mortal men to save them by supernatural means.

He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen. They performed His signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham.

—PSALM 105:26–27, NKJV

They knew a miraculous Provider who freed them from bondage in wealth and in perfect health.

He also brought them out with silver and gold, and there was none feeble among His tribes.

—PSALM 105:37, NKJV

As we peer further into the amazing scene of their escape from Egypt, a vivid picture unfolds. Look at the procession! Somewhere around six hundred thousand men, plus wives and children, departed, herding multitudes of livestock along with them. We can't count them all, but very likely more than two million and possibly as many as six million people make up this caravan. If we listen closely we can hear their shouting and rejoicing. How they praise Moses as their leader who reintroduced their nation to such a wonder-working God after so many years in slavery!

Yet no one preconceived the phenomenon to occur just ahead in their journey. What an indescribable event when the Red Sea split, allowing such massive numbers to pass on dry ground to the other side! Even with the gigantic divide of the waters, several days must have elapsed while so many crossed. But at the instant the last Israelite foot stepped on shore, the sea slammed together, washing their enemies away for good.

Still even greater astonishment unfolded. For forty years God provided extraordinary protection and provision for this immense body in a desolate

wilderness. Who can even imagine the amount of manna He showered daily just to feed them all?

Oh, what an undefeatable, insurmountable God the Jew alone could boast! After Israel made it across the Red Sea, Moses sang with his people:

The LORD is a man of war . . .

—EXODUS 15:3

Now feel the excitement of Joshua. After enduring forty years in the wilderness, he and the new generation of Israelites marched into the Promised Land with God as their captain. Time after time by the hand of the Lord they conquered powerful enemies in their path.

Centuries later David declared the Lord was a mighty warrior (Ps. 24:8). In a special song of deliverance his lyrics ring:

The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. He sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning bolts, and He vanquished them.

—2 SAMUEL 22:14–15, NKJV

YES, WHAT A mighty God the Jews knew, worshiping Him for His greatness, sovereignty, and holiness! Yet they knew Him only from a distance. By their own doing they made Him their untouchable, unreachable God. God didn't want it this way. He desired a close relationship.

Come as we venture into the pages of Exodus 19 and 20 to view this for ourselves. We join the people as they set up camp on desert sand at the base of Mount Sinai.

Looming like a monstrous barren rock, the famous mountain protrudes out of stark wasteland, exposing its gray peaks against a hazy sky. With no stirring breeze, the desert air stifles us like an oven. We labor for every breath.

Less than two months have passed since the slaves escaped Egyptian torture, yet we hear grumbling all around. Now concerned only by their weariness of travel and the scorching heat, they seem to have forgotten the miracles God performed to free them.

But not Moses! We catch a blurry glimpse of him high upon a rugged slope as he eagerly scales Mount Sinai to meet with God.

Hurry! Let's scramble after him.

Among the rocks and cliffs Moses waits in silence. We halt nearby. After

a while the Lord's voice gently calls: "Moses, remind the people of Israel that they have seen what I did to the Egyptians. Remind them of how I bore them on eagles' wings and brought them unto Myself."

As God continues speaking, it's evident that He desires personal contact with His people. What great reward awaits if they only choose His way! Oh, listen:

"Tell them, Moses, 'Now if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you will be My special people upon the earth. You will be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'"

What music to our ears! With dancing hearts we hurry down with Moses to hear him present these wonderful conditions to the elders.

Excitement blooms. Without hesitation everyone vows in unison, "All God has spoken we will do!"

Caught up in their enthusiasm, we rejoice to follow Moses back up the mountain. We beam when he reports to God the people's instant response and hear with joy their Lord declare, "I will appear in a thick cloud so every person will be able to hear Me when I speak to you. Once they witness My presence, they will always believe you."

With ardent ears we absorb every word as God instructs Moses to set boundaries around Mount Sinai. "Warn the people not to go up the mountain or even touch the boundaries. When the trumpet sounds with one long blast, then they may come to the mountain's edge."

For the next three days zeal fills the campsite. Everyone prepares for God's arrival—bathing themselves, washing their clothes. On the third day each person is bursting with eagerness. Knowing the time of His appearance may happen any moment, their eyes are glued on Mount Sinai.

Oh, look! Here He comes. With lightning the skies erupt. Bolting from the height of heaven, countless streaks set the mountaintop aglow. Ear-shattering thunder rattles the earth. Gigantic clouds swirl with churning force, blanketing the quivering peaks so high above us.

Above it all the trumpet blares, announcing arrival of Jehovah. That's our cue to hurry and gather around the base of Mount Sinai. But we must be extra careful not to cross the designated boundaries. Death marks the penalty for disobedience

In a floodlight of fire the Almighty descends. How His magnificence dazzles our eyes even with the rolling clouds offsetting His radiance. Like an enormous furnace the mountain billows smoke far into the air, rumbling as if it might explode. Beneath our feet the desert reels.

Time and time again the trumpet shrieks. Brighter than a noonday sun, the fire of God lights up the world around us.

Oh, hear Moses! Immersed in praise he calls out with all his mortal strength to his divine Commander.

With stupendous vocal power God responds, “Moses, ascend into My presence!”

Shimmering in the splendor of God’s *Shekinah* glory, the human deliverer of Israel walks up into the heights to encounter the Divine. Oh, what a sight!

Like electricity surging through our ears Jehovah vibrates forth the Ten Commandments: “Thou shall have no other gods before Me! Thou shall not make unto yourselves any graven images! Thou shall not use the name of the LORD your God in vain! Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy! Honor thy father and thy mother! Thou shall not kill! Thou shall not commit adultery! Thou shall not steal! Thou shall not lie! Thou shall not covet!”

His tremendous exhortation echoes down the slopes and sweeps across the plains. What privilege just to witness such awesomeness. We bask in the glory of His majesty until, to our surprise, the crowd around us turns in panic.

With flapping robes they stampede like cattle, running from the scene that glimmers in holy radiance, screaming as they race toward their tents. A long distance from the boundaries set by God, they stop. Cowering, their eyes ablaze with fear, they turn to stare at the revelation of God’s glory.

Come back, our spirits cry. How can you bear to leave the wonder of His presence?

But they wail, “Moses, you tell us God’s instructions and we’ll obey. We don’t want Him speaking directly to us because it will kill us!”

With supernatural volume Moses pleads, “Don’t be afraid! God has appeared in His awesomeness so you can behold His power. It will instill reverent fear for Him in you, and knowing the greatness of His presence will guard you from sinning.”

Despite Moses’ appeal everyone backs farther away, still overtaken by terror, muttering in a frenzy.

With heavy hearts we leave Mount Sinai as Moses disappears into its slopes. God’s brilliance, now withdrawn because of the people’s rejection, is covered in raging smoke. He and His obedient servant meet in solitude. Honoring the people’s wishes, the Lord speaks only to Moses as He orders a new concept of Jewish living—the covenant of Law.

HOW SOON THE Israelites forgot their fright of God and their unified pledge of dedication! Only a few weeks after His glorious appearance, as Moses continued conversing with Him high upon the mountain, they molded a pagan calf from the very gold God Himself provided for them from the Egyptians. Turning their backs on their miraculous Redeemer, the children of Israel used their gift of freedom for idol worship and adultery.

From this time forward Jews professed the God of Law—a strict Enforcer of uncompromising regulations. Now unable to approach Him on their own, they had designated priests who interceded with prayers and sacrifices on their behalf.

God never again appeared to the Jewish nation in all His glory. Instead He concealed His splendor in the innermost court of the tabernacle, a large room in the shape of a cube. It was a very secluded holy sanctuary closed to all but the high priest. Never could any other enter into His presence in the most hallowed chamber of all, which they called the holy of holies.

As a tangible concept for His dwelling in the holy of holies God ordered a unique chest built according to the exact specifications He had given to Moses. A beautiful work of art, it was made from special wood and adorned by an overlay of gold. From its golden brilliance rose a throne that was made of gold. It was called the mercy seat, where God Himself manifested His presence. And like heavenly guards two golden statues of cherubim, a special type of magnificent angels, towered in elegance above it all.

God promised, “And I will meet with you there and talk with you from above the place of mercy between the cherubim; and the Ark will contain the laws of my covenant” (Exod. 25:22, TLB).

The ark of the covenant was very precious to the Jews. How they treasured it! Yet under normal circumstances it stayed hidden from the common eye. When it was stationary in the tabernacle, it rested behind an immense veil that blocked entrance into the innermost holy of holies. When the ark was in desert transit this same veil concealed it. The people surely yearned to look upon its glory. But they couldn’t.

Did God really dwell there? Being omnipresent He can never be confined to any single place. Without a doubt, however, His majesty abided with the ark because it, being more than a mere item of beauty, proved to be of supernatural function.

In the wilderness the wandering tribes depended on it to go before them, to search out a resting place (Num. 10:33). It radiated with His glory (1 Sam. 4:21–22). It revealed His strength (Ps. 132:8).

Yes, what unimaginable force this superhuman design of God emitted! No human power could control it.

AFTER THE DAYS of the tabernacle of Moses, but before Solomon built a temple, the ark led Israeli troops in battle. Once it wound up in the hands of the enemy, the Philistines.

Oh, what a story!

It was such victory to possess this treasured chest. Or so the Philistines thought until its almighty power showed them wrong.

In their pride they placed it in their temple beside their prized idol Dagon. During the first night Dagon fell flat on his face before the holy ark. Puzzled, the Philistines lifted their pagan god back up to his original position.

Imagine their shock the next morning. Their idol wasn't just sprawled on the floor—his head and both hands were severed. “Only the stump of Dagon was left to him” (1 Sam. 5:4).

This was only the start of a shocking situation. Because of the ark's presence in this unholy land, horrible tumors began killing off the population. Wherever they took the ark these tumors broke out.

Understandably the Philistines soon wanted no part of this powerful structure of the God of Israel. After seven months, unable to bear its presence any longer, they decided they must give the ark back to its rightful owners.

How should they do it?

“Send it back with a guilt offering,” the priests and diviners cried, “so the plague will end and we'll be healed!”

God must surely have a sense of humor. From gold the Philistines molded images of their tumors that the Jewish NJPS version of the Bible, *TANAKH*, *The Holy Scriptures*, calls “hemorrhoids.” They also molded golden mice (of all things!) to represent their leaders. These items—mice and hemorrhoids—accompanied the ark on its journey home. Oh, can you picture such a thing!

How did they send it back? They loaded it on a cart drawn by two cows! And from there the unseen hand of God took over and guided it back to its rightful owners.

What a surprise it must have been when out of the blue the ark wobbled into Israeli territory. So elated by its return, the Jewish priests ignored its sacredness and strength and displayed it uncovered upon a large rock. With its beauty exposed for all eyes to see, they offered burnt sacrifices before it.

Perhaps they meant well. But the ark proved too strong for the view of sinful mortal eyes. Thousands died that day because they looked at it. (See 1 Samuel 6.)

The ark was so holy and alive with God's glory that no man could touch

its surface. It was to be carried by two poles that were held by rings fastened to the four corners of the ark. When it began to totter from a cart in the course of moving, one single contact of a human hand caused instant death (2 Sam. 6:7).

Following this fatal incident David stored the ark with a righteous man for three months. When the man received great blessings from its presence David retrieved it.

What a glorious homecoming! Such a sight to behold! Leaping and dancing before the Lord with all his being, David—in company with all the house of Israel as it rejoiced and blew trumpets—ushered the ark into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:10–15). Eventually this magnificent item found its honorable place once more within the holy of holies inside the fabulous temple built by King Solomon.

WHAT BECAME OF the ark? Where is it today?

Following the destruction of Solomon's temple by the Babylonians, we find no more mention of this object of God's dwelling. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says of the second temple rebuilt in Zerubbabel's day, "According to Josephus, the Holy of Holies was empty. Evidently the ark had been destroyed in 587 (B.C.) and was never replaced."¹

With no pat answers giving positive location or proof of dismantling, legend continues to build around the ark's disappearance. Fictitious accounts like the movie *Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark* keep intrigue alive.² Research and speculation seems endless.

One often-told story asserts that King Solomon gave the ark as a gift to the queen of Sheba and states that, to this day, it remains in hiding in Ethiopia. We can tell from Scripture that Solomon and this queen acquired a fascination for each other when she visited him in Jerusalem. "And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty" (1 Kings 10:13).

A related conjecture, yet with decided differences, also places the lost ark in Ethiopia. It says that the relationship between King Solomon and the queen of Sheba grew to more than simple mutual admiration and produced a son who as a young man brought the ark to his homeland for worship to Jehovah. Solomon is said to have replaced it with a replica. Wow! This could give birth to a whole set of new questions. For starters, what became of the replica?

Another theory, ignoring Josephus' claim of a missing ark, insists that at the completion of Zerubbabel's temple in 538 B.C. the ark remained intact.

It wasn't lost until after 63 B.C. when the Romans took possession of Jerusalem and, as verified by history, confiscated the temple's gold. Is it possible that they took the ark for its gold also?

Even with the Jews suppressed under Roman rule, Herod the Great had enlarged and beautified the temple complex. It stood as the worship center at the time of Jesus. Could it be that neither Zerubbabel's temple nor Herod's remodeled temple ever housed the sacred ark?

With facts uncertain, some prefer to believe the ark did remain in Herod's temple until it was destroyed in A.D. 70. The ark, they say, lies buried in the rubble. Who can prove otherwise? As long as a Muslim mosque sits on the Jewish temple site, excavation seems impossible.

So, with the varied theories about its vanishing and unceasing guesswork about its condition, the mystery of the ark's whereabouts remains unsolved. How heartrending to have the place of God's presence under the Law cease to function! Where did the wondrous glory with its amazing power and redeeming mercy seat go? Oh, how Jewish hearts must still grieve over such a great loss today!

BEFORE IT WAS lost, the ark of the covenant demanded great reverence. When it was set up in the temple, hidden away in the holy of holies, only one person—the high priest—could enter its sanctuary. No other human being could ever step inside. And even the high priest's admittance into the holy of holies was restricted to one day each year—the Day of Atonement.

This day was a very special occasion. Demanding perfect holiness for the Jew, it is still observed by many today, with no ark or temple and without sacrifices. With unwavering commands to be obeyed to the letter while their temple remained, the Day of Atonement entailed an astoundingly strict and solemn performance.

It lasted from sundown to sundown, a full twenty-four-hour period when all of Israel confessed all the sins committed during the past year. Every thought, word, and action centered around repentance, vowing over and over to do better. No food, no bath, and no work or heavy lifting were permitted. Rules for limited walking forbade the wearing of leather shoes. No sleep was allowed, not even a catnap. There was only nonstop acknowledgment of sin.

Anyone who defaulted even slightly faced banishment from his people for the rest of his life. There was no opportunity for repentance, no second chance.

Indeed, any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin; and whoever does any work throughout that day, I will cause that person to perish from among his people.

—LEVITICUS 23:29–30, NJPS

What were the high priest's duties on the Day of Atonement? In solitude he entered the holy of holies to atone for his own sins, his family's sins, and the sins of the nation. With special incense in one hand and fresh blood from unblemished animal sacrifices in the other, he approached the presence of Almighty Jehovah at the ark of the covenant to sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat.

What apprehension had to engulf the high priest on this day! If he harbored even one unconfessed sin his mortal body possessed no strength to withstand the immensity of glory abounding from the ark. He would fall dead on the spot.

A popular story asserts that bells dangled from the high priest's robe to signal his movements while he presided in the holy of holies. It says that a rope was tied around the high priest's ankle and stretched into the adjacent inner holy court. If he died and the bells quit jingling, other priests could pull his body from the holy of holies.

Is this really true? No scriptures can be found to support it. The high priest's elaborate ceremonial garment, a blue tunic adorned with alternating bells and pomegranates at its hem, was never worn on the Day of Atonement. For this grave occasion he wore simple white linen, a symbol of holiness and purity.

Why would bells and ropes be needed? If death occurred, the next in line for position of high priest would receive immediate authority to go into the holy of holies, remove the body, and carry on the vital rituals of the day.³

THE DAY OF Atonement appears very stern to the Christian. Even though it was just a twenty-four-hour period, upholding its every precept and abiding by all the restrictions without default seem to have been next to impossible.

But pause for a deep breath. We've just begun. As we go on to learn about other uncompromising stipulations and unremitting duties set forth by the covenant of Law, Jewish life becomes staggering to say the least. Yet God saw its necessity. The apostle Paul, a Jew educated to the utmost in every point of the Law, explains:

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.

—GALATIANS 3:19, NKJV

God was fed up with defiance and disobedience. As we witnessed at Mount Sinai, there was continual ungratefulness, murmuring, and rebellion. The Law set the Jew apart until the Messiah would come.

What other good did the Law accomplish? With its relentless demands it established a sense of devotion to God. Like a grueling schoolmaster it drilled into the mind a profound awareness and knowledge of sin. By showing the incapability of mortals to keep the Law to perfection, it proved the necessity for a divine Redeemer.

Yes, easily broken and distracted, vulnerable and inadequate within their fleshly limits—no matter how hard the people tried, they continuously fell short in their efforts to obey the Law. Everybody failed!

At this point we ask, couldn't even one person keep the Law? A quick investigation reveals the answer.

The Law lists 613 basic commands. However, adding all the regulations required in each made a total of more than 2,700 nonstop and unwavering ordinances that dictated all facets of Hebrew living. Holiness. Worship. Repentance. Dedication. Wars. Justice. Vows. Social and domestic relations. Treatment of servants and strangers. Lending to the poor, and more.

Swift punishment (sometimes severe beatings, more often death by stoning) accompanied moral issues like murder, theft, adultery, lust, idolatry, blasphemy—even lying and jealousy. Constant and rigorous rituals compelled exactness in food preparation, dietary restrictions, personal hygiene, purification, and sanitation. Specific unconditional statutes governed hundreds of religious rites, confessions, various tithes, alms, daily offerings, and sacrifices. Mandatory guidelines directed feasts and celebrations.

Unrelenting and unbreakable restrictions ruled the Sabbath and its “no work” policy. One man received the death penalty for gathering sticks (Num. 15:32–36).

Although the Day of Atonement issued the most rigid laws for any single day, other areas of disobedience could also cause a person to be cut off from his people: eating flesh or fat from certain sacrificial offerings (Lev. 7:21, 25). Failing to bring a sacrifice to the entrance door of the tabernacle (Lev. 17:9). Partaking of blood (Lev. 17:10). Indulging in sex during a woman's period (Lev. 20:18). And except for certain exemptions, a man refraining from offering a Passover sacrifice (Num. 9:13).

Every iota of the Law, all of its more than 2,700 instructions, demanded full obedience.

What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

—DEUTERONOMY 12:32

Nothing, no matter how small, could be broken or overlooked.

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

—JAMES 2:10

Have you ever thought that the judgment Moses received for his single recorded transgression in the wilderness seemed awfully harsh? When Israel needed water, he disregarded God's command to speak to the rock and struck it in anger instead. As a result, God barred him from entering the Promised Land.

In studying the Law and the exactness it commanded, we find justification in Moses' penalty. As leader of the Israelites, he stood as their prime example. Since their code of living permitted no person even one tiny violation, how would it have looked if Moses, who disobeyed direct orders from God Himself, had escaped severe punishment?

Oh, how hard the laws of God are!

As we close our investigation our question changes. We no longer ask if even one person could keep the Law. Now we ask, How could any mortal being have possibly obeyed its every aspect to the letter?

The obvious answer—they couldn't!

But not only did mankind fail the Law, but also, just as tragically, the Law failed man. "Law brings wrath," says the apostle Paul (Rom. 4:15, NIV). Hebrews 7:18 calls it "weak and useless" (NIV).

Yes, sadly the Law proved to be unable to produce perfection, the state of being without defect or fault. "For the law made nothing perfect" (Heb. 7:19).

It was unable to justify us, clear us of guilt, and make us as if we had never sinned. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law..." (Gal. 2:16).

The Law was unable to bestow righteousness, right standing with God. "Now do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God's laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying them; his laws serve only to

make us see that we are sinners” (Rom. 3:20, TLB).

And it was unable to save souls. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).

Though the Law burdened man with the impossible task of earning his own salvation, the religious Jew never regarded it as a straitjacket. With pride he accepted its obligations and looked on it as a superior way of life, as do many today.

Most certainly the Law yielded many positive aspects. Authored by divine Intellect it discloses a wholesome and healthy lifestyle in diet and sanitation, thereby supplying knowledge far superior to any other culture in ancient times. Later we’ll take a closer look at some of these benefits.

And not all was somber. Even the Sabbath in its strictness brought a happy time for family sharing and supplied needed rest, as well as being a day set aside to truly acknowledge God in worship and thankfulness.

Despite all the rules, festivals and feasts produced celebration with joy and gaiety. These events along with other factors of the Law and Old Testament customs hold a treasure chest of knowledge too long neglected and ignored by the Christian church. Prophetic of Jesus, they gleam with enlightenment for us. In our travels we’ll discover many of their jewels, and we’ll come to realize how the New Testament can never be fully revealed without the Old Testament.

Great promises such as life, well-being, and prolonged days accompanied lawful obedience. The rewards of Deuteronomy 28:1–14 bless the heart of anyone who reads them. But oh, such a list of curses in the remainder of that chapter for anybody who chose to disobey!

Listen to the voice of Moses as he warns of consequences for neglecting God’s commandments:

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes. . . . And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.

—DEUTERONOMY 8:11, 19–20

Yes, the Jewish view of God was so different from Jesus’ teaching about the personal Father of mercy and grace. Now we may understand why, but we see what a hard road the Jewish people chose to travel.

By their denial of Christ as their Messiah, they rejected the idea of an actual Father God who, as a parent, loved each of them individually. Once

more they backed away from the One who longed to bring them into His presence. Instead, they chose to continue living a long distance from Him as they had at Mount Sinai. They chose the Law. Oh, why didn't they choose Jesus and the freedom He offered!

BUT WAIT! WHY pick on them? The Jews didn't cause a distant and broken relationship to develop between man and God. Throughout history men have chosen to tread down a grim and painful road. It started long before the existence of a Hebrew nation, and it still prevails today.

Why? Our quest for answers sweeps us all the way back to the beginning of humanity. Here we'll witness the original separation of man and God. We'll learn His perfect will.

Look! The land of paradise! We're just in time to behold the making of mankind, the most glorious of all creation.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

—GENESIS 1:26–27

Here is the species of man—male and female—fashioned after God's own image. It sounds grand. And it is! Let's leave no stone unturned and gather every tool we can to find out just how grand it is.

For deeper understanding we search the Hebrew language. Since the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, we'll uncover revelation by the Hebrew definition of a word. At times we'll trace the verbal root because Hebrew words stem from verbs and, even in another form, carry verbal meanings.

The word for *image* in the above scripture translates as “phantom, illusion, resemblance.”⁴ Doesn't this show us a glorious spiritual impression? Just think, human beings modeled after the invisible spiritual image of Almighty God!

What a day, that sixth day of creation when God made man! He first gave him a body from the earth, and then from His own breath He gave him life.

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

—GENESIS 2:7

God called him Adam. In Hebrew the name is *Awadawm*, meaning “mankind” or “human being.” Traces to the root verb *awdam* define it as “show blood in the face, flush, turn rosy.”⁵

Such a picture! As God breathed His very own supreme breath into man, divinely inspired crimson blood gushed throughout his veins.

Yes, God formed Adam’s body from dust, but by His own breath He created a soul and spirit in the likeness of Himself. Because of sin the earthy substance of man dies and returns to dust. Yet the invisible parts of man patterned in the image of the Creator never cease to be. Eternal like Him, they exist forever.

What an honor that God, Himself a Spirit Being, uniquely fashioned mankind with His own characteristics—making humans an unequaled race of everlasting spirit, life, and destiny! Empowered with a conscience, reasoning ability, freedom of choice, language, intellect, and emotions, He gave His esteemed human creatures qualities far superior to any other creature of the earth.

Such was the glorious being God had made of Adam. And oh, the Garden of Eden—the breathtaking paradise He placed him in! Let your mind wander over crystal rivers as they wind through vast velvet landscapes glistening with gold and sparkling gems. Breathe in the delightful fragrance of sweeping meadows embroidered with miles of vivid flowers alive with dancing butterflies. Listen to the symphony of birds playing hide and seek among emerald leaves of massive trees rich with every type of fruit imaginable. Pet the enormous lion and delicate lamb snuggled against each other on downy beds of clover. Behold hundreds of other tame creatures, some napping, many frolicking together, all in total harmony.

What an exciting occasion when Adam named all his friendly animals! It bore witness to the superb mind man possessed before sin entered in.

Even with such perfection God saw that Adam needed human companionship. At the close of His six-day extravaganza, as His man slept, God reached down with compassionate hands. In loving care He gently removed a rib, a bone covering the very heart of His most prized creation, and made woman to share man’s life.

Adam and Eve. There they stood together, a reflection of the very Creator Himself. How God loved them! He blessed their union and granted them supreme authority to govern not only the glorious garden but also the entire planet.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living

thing that moveth upon the earth. . . . I have given you every herb bearing seed . . . every tree . . .

—GENESIS 1:28–29

Yes, God relinquished His control of Earth—every animal, every plant—to His beloved mankind. And He blessed them with the opportunity of replenishing the entire surface of the world with their offspring in an atmosphere of love and purity. There was no death, no sorrow, no pain, no hate, no ugliness. At this time it was, and still is today and forever will be—God’s perfect will for humanity.

At the beginning in the excellence of Eden, Adam and Eve knew no sin. They walked in the perfect light of the Lord God, who visited them face-to-face. Some scholars theorize that while they were in sinless perfection they glowed so from the brightness of God’s glory that they needed no clothing. This explains why they didn’t care that they were naked. However, could they really have such brilliance?

After Moses met with the Almighty on Mount Sinai, his face shone so brightly the children of Israel feared to venture near him (Exod. 34:29–30). And how Jesus gleamed from standing in the presence of the Father when Peter, James, and John beheld His transfiguration with Elijah and Moses. “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Matt. 17:2, NKJV).

Envision His face as bright as the sun. At one time or another haven’t we all attempted to gaze at this ball of fire, only to have its blinding rays overtake our naked eye? This gives us but a concept of the awesome brightness caused by the visible manifestation of God’s holy presence.

Can you conceive a world without any darkness? In the sinless eternal domain of the New Jerusalem at the end of the ages, only the perfect light of God will shine forth. So great is the brilliance of His *Shekinah* glory that it alone will forever illuminate the Holy City and all its righteous residents (Rev. 21:23).

Psalm 104:2 tells us the Lord covers Himself with light as a garment. Visualize sinless Adam and Eve clothed in the excellence of the glory radiating from God’s presence in the Garden of Eden.

Such was the grandeur of man’s original state, most likely far beyond anything ever imagined by mortal minds today. With pleasure God scanned the final results of His majestic design:

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.

—GENESIS 1:31

NOT JUST PART of His creation was very good. *Everything* was very good. It was not just simply good. It was *very* good. Oh, such splendor! Such happiness! The overwhelming satisfaction of the Creator swept throughout His earthly kingdom, which was now ruled by His mankind!

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

—GENESIS 2:1

Although this “host” is commonly taught to mean the stars, planets, sun, and moon, the Hebrew word for *host*—as used in this verse—actually describes a mass of persons or things organized for war, an army awaiting their appointed time.⁶ In His infinite wisdom God realized the need for heavenly warriors to be stationed on Earth. After all, He knew that Lucifer (Satan) roamed about.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

—ISAIAH 14:12

Jesus said in Luke 10:18, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” Yet in spite of all this danger to the earth, the Creator, so pleased with His handiwork, entrusted rulership to the ultimate of all His creation—mankind. And He released an army of angelic hosts to watch over it.

All seemed secure at the conclusion of that sixth day as the eyes of the Almighty surveyed His splendor with all its wonders: the tiniest of beasts to the gigantic whale, bountiful fruit, beautiful flowers and herbs, spacious rivers, complete with human beings—made after His supreme image. He had finished His marvelous creation.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

—GENESIS 2:3

From the original Hebrew word we discover that God’s blessing was “an act of adoration” of the seventh day.⁷ Here the word *sanctified* could be read, “He observed it as clean and consecrated it as holy.”⁸ *Rested* in this verse means “cease” and “celebrate.”⁹ God not only ceased His work of Earth’s creation, but He also celebrated His perfect job. Let’s pause for a moment and try to sense this joyous party. But how can we even begin to identify with the jubilee and excitement that must have taken place? Can you recall the happiest moments of your life?

I remember the first time I nestled each of my newborn children in my arms. A bubbling spring of warm bonding and overwhelming love surged through my veins with bliss too great for words. Other glad occasions—baptisms, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, reunions, recognition, achievements, rewards—leap to mind. At the top of my list I put my decision to follow Jesus. Maybe every event combined might compare in a vague way.

No! How could any human event, no matter how precious, reach the ecstasy of our Maker when He surveyed His supreme masterpiece? What a glorious day—that happy seventh day when He ceased from work and celebrated His creation!

Divine love and tranquility reigned throughout the flawless abode God designed and released to Adam and Eve. Except for only one command concerning a single tree, no rigid rules or regulations burdened them.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

—GENESIS 2:17

From the word *rested* in Genesis 2:3 another Hebrew meaning can apply—“cause (made) to fail.”¹⁰ Yes, God knew what lay ahead, but He didn’t design living souls in His image to be programmed robots or puppets on a string. The instant He blew His breath into their being, they became agents of their own will.

No matter how it hurts Him to watch humans go astray, He has never forced anyone to worship Him. God desires allegiance only by man’s decision. This one tree of commandment gave Adam and Eve the liberty to choose. And God knew their choice ahead of time.

When He handed exclusive control over to them, they held full authority to cast Satan out of their garden and order him to never return, and they could have called on angels to back them up. At the onset, as God blessed them He told them to subdue the earth.

What a different world we would have if they had done just that! God and mankind’s fellowship would never have been challenged. No sin or evil of any kind could ever have taken over. Only perfection and goodness would exist. How could they be so foolish?

But wait! Let’s not judge Adam and Eve too harshly. How can we be so sure that we could have fared any better against the devil’s subtle ways?

When Satan, a master of deception and disguise, approached Eve in the guise of a serpent, “. . . more cunning than any beast of the field which the

LORD God had made . . .” (Gen. 3:1, NKJV), she had never experienced anything other than truth, love, and purity.

With gnawing passion to rule the world, this “father of lies” (John 8:44) descended upon Eve with his con-artist smooth talk. No one had ever lied to her before. Eve stood before Satan as easy prey, and he knew it. How he must have gloated as he watched her press the forbidden fruit against her lips and then sink her teeth into its flesh, dispersing deadly poison through her glowing sinless body.

Even after she swallowed it and stood openly in stark nakedness, Adam still maintained the power and right to conquer this epitome of evil. But if he did, his precious helpmate could be no longer his. She had sinned and would surely die as God had said.

There Adam held the fate of the whole world in his hands with the love of his life clinging helplessly to his side. He took the fruit. Although the serpent had deceived Eve, he didn’t deceive Adam (1 Tim. 2:14). Defying God, Adam opted to tread the path of sin. The crown of all creation chose to die!

And thus man’s broken fellowship with God began. Oh, the hurt, the sorrow endured by man and God from that day forward.

And what terrible agony Adam and Eve suffered. The name *Eve* means “life,” for she became the mother of all living. How sad to give birth in a land of sickness, pain, and death when she and Adam had experienced paradise so pure and free.

How God must have grieved. Though He would never leave or forsake His human race, now He must step aside. The decision of His most treasured of all creation, His precious man and woman creatures, separated them from Him and transferred Earth’s rulership to Satan. Evil triumphed over good, bringing the bondage of sin and death to all.

Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man, and death as the result of sin, so death spread to all men, [no one being able to stop it or to escape its power] because all men sinned.

—ROMANS 5:12, AMP

As the God of perfect righteousness He could never participate in or even look upon their sin.

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.

—HABAKKUK 1:13

As the God of absolute truth, He couldn't go against His Word and reclaim His rule of Earth. Once He gave dominion to man, only a man could take it back from Satan. It must be a man who would refuse all sin. But how could anyone accomplish this?

As the God of all wisdom, He had a plan to redeem the world. From the gates of Eden it spun into motion.

God cursed the serpent, sentencing it to a life of crawling on its belly and eating dust. To Satan He proclaimed war!

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, It shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel.

—GENESIS 3:15

Someday at the appointed time a battle would rage between Satan and this seed of woman. The seed, a sinless Man, would triumph over evil. As the God of amazing grace and mercy, He would redeem mankind by the blood of this perfect Man. The very Son of God would come to Earth, born of a virgin, made of human flesh and blood.

Then sinful man, enlightened by the history of evil's devastation and no longer ignorant of Satan's devices, would be able to regain the authority that was lost in Eden. It would be accomplished by the wonders of the righteous seed, the sacrifice of His sinless flesh, the power of His spotless blood.

As the God of eternal faithfulness, He would forever abide by His human race. Sin may have placed Him outside of His creation looking in. But longing for man's allegiance, He would walk throughout the ages ever present as their guide, as much as man himself allowed.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING ADAM'S and Eve's disobedience, God began weaving His divine plan of redemption, preparing His special people whose bloodline would usher forth the promised Redeemer in mortal flesh. In defiance Satan would sew constant threads of delusion with a blood-thirsty obsession to stop the lineage of this great Messiah and cut a lethal gash in the relationship between man and God.

But as the God of total knowledge, our all-seeing Creator scanned the centuries with eyes of love. Seeing every generation, even you and me, in the fullness of time He honored His redemption promise. He gave His Son for us.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

—JOHN 3:16

Aware of the torture He faced in order to redeem man, this beloved Son still elected to leave His heavenly state to become human and suffer as a man. Entering the world as a baby, born of the virgin Mary in a primitive stable, He grew as all humans do into adulthood, the Man who would recover the creation Satan stole and restore life in full measure to humanity.

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

—JOHN 10:10

What a restoration! Oh, the wonders of redemption and the treasure of knowing Jesus as our Savior. Sin no longer reigns.

The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to be king over all, but all who will take God's gift of forgiveness and acquittal are kings of life because of this one man, Jesus Christ. Yes, Adam's sin brought punishment to all, but Christ's righteousness makes men right with God, so that they can live. Adam caused many to be sinners because he disobeyed God, and Christ caused many to be made acceptable to God because he obeyed.

—ROMANS 5:17–19, TLB

Reach out! Take the gift of His pardon and forgiveness. Become a new creature in Him, transformed into a king of abundant life. It is God's gift to us, free for the asking, made possible only by His sinless perfection as a Man who died for our redemption. What a Savior! Once for all and forever He paid the price for sin with the sacrifice of His spotless human blood.

Oh, the sacrifice of spotless blood! It lifted us from the bondage to sin and into freedom, beyond the rigid covenant of law into a loving covenant of grace.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace.

—ROMANS 6:14

Oh, the sacrifice of spotless blood! It not only set the New Covenant into motion, but it also inscribed it upon our hearts and minds.

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

—HEBREWS 10:16–17

Oh, the sacrifice of spotless blood! It abolished the distant approach to God that the Jews knew—for at the instant of Christ's death, entry into the holy presence of God became available for all. No longer is He in a place where man can never go, hidden behind a veil in the holy of holies.

COME NOW AS we gather among the crowd at the feet of our Savior while He hangs in disgrace, cruelly nailed upon the cross at Calvary.

Three hours of midday darkness envelop the earth. It seems like an eternity as we stand without hope . . . waiting . . . trembling, lost in a despair of utter helplessness.

How can this be happening to the One we love so much? Our hearts blaze with heaving pain like hot lava pumping in our chests. We weep in total anguish . . . and we wait.

Piercing the silence like a thousand jagged swords His voice shrieks out in agony. It stabs into our burning grief as we grasp His final words. "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit!"

"Oh, no!" we scream. "He can't be gone!" With tear-blurred eyes we squint through the uncanny blackness and gape in horror as the last breath of life is sucked from His naked, blood-drenched body.

The earth trembles. Before we have time to absorb the nightmare of His torture and the shock and sorrow of His death, a violent earthquake flings us to the ground. We wail in fright and disbelief. The shaking stops. But we muster no strength, make no effort to lift ourselves out of the dust. Beneath the lifeless, battered form of our Savior on the cross we stay sprawled, wretched in grief, convulsing uncontrollably.

There is sobbing all around! Many have now come to grips with the truth. *Surely this man was the Son of God!*

How quickly news travels. We learn that at the exact instant of the earthquake the temple veil supernaturally ripped from top to bottom.

Yes! This man is the Son of God!

The veil blocking the entrance into the holy of holies has split apart. As we examine this massive curtain, the impact of this miracle leaps to life. So beautifully designed in a radiance of blue, purple, and crimson lavishly

embroidered with angelic cherubim on white fine-spun linen—its dimensions are GIGANTIC.

Ancient records reveal it as a curtain reaching as high as sixty feet. That compares to a six-story building! And its width stretched over thirty feet. Now picture this huge work of art tightly woven into a density as wide as a man's palm—four inches thick! No wonder legend says two teams of oxen attached to the veil and pulling against each other couldn't tear it apart.¹¹

Yet the powerful sacrifice of His spotless blood tore it into shreds for us! Do you realize what this means? With the veil gone—with God no longer isolated from man—He becomes our ever-available Friend. The entrance into His presence is wide open, unrestricted, accessible for all. With an open invitation His welcome extends to everyone. What a privilege and honor to be able to enter with freedom into the innermost sanctum of a most holy God. We have freedom to stand in His presence at any time for any reason. It is a freedom with boldness—not without reverence—but without fright. It's the kind of boldness that grows from intimate friendship, total trust, and confidence.

Yes, with complete freedom and boldness we can come to Him to share all we are, our every thought, need, and desire. And more than any true and faithful friend, He will always be there for us to provide fellowship, comfort, forgiveness, and love. What a privilege for man!

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God...

—HEBREWS 10:19–21, NKJV

Oh, the sacrifice of spotless blood! It established a High Priest for us!

He came as High Priest of this better system which we now have. He went into that greater, perfect tabernacle in heaven, not made by men nor part of this world.

—HEBREWS 9:11, TLB

Jesus Christ is our High Priest. With His perfect and final sacrifice for sins the need no longer exists for an earthly high priest to preside as a mediator between man and God in an earthly tabernacle. Our High Priest in a perfect heavenly tabernacle presides not as a mere man making intercession to God for us, and not as a mere man allowed to enter into God's presence only one day each year. Our High Priest is the victorious Lamb of God who

makes intercession for us, remaining constantly in the Father's presence, eternally at His side.

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

—HEBREWS 10:12

Yes! Our High Priest is “made higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). He sits at “the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1). Yet in spite of such greatness, our High Priest completely understands our pain, our stress, and our temptations. He loved us enough to suffer them Himself.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

—HEBREWS 4:15–16, NKJV

Oh, the sacrifice of spotless blood! Only because of its purity can we find mercy and grace in the presence of a most holy God, for by its cleansing power His blood covers us in His righteousness. And through the righteousness of His perfect blood, God looks upon His less-than-perfect creatures in mercy and grace without seeing their sin.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

—2 CORINTHIANS 5:21, NIV

What a plan of redemption! A design of such wisdom boggles the human mind. Can we ever completely comprehend the magnitude of His spotless blood?

Such power! It not only opened the door of His throne room for all humanity, but it also reopened the door of His entrance into His beloved creation. Because Christ Jesus took on the nature of man in a perishable body of flesh and blood, He became Our kinsman—one with us.

Yes, Jesus is our blood relative, brother to mankind! Therefore fellowship between the Creator and His human creatures has forever been restored for all who believe on Him. Secured by the spotless blood, this long-awaited reunion remains sealed throughout eternity.

What a privilege, what benefits, what joy! Through the wonders of the

blood, our God so holy, sovereign, perfect, and pure adopted us despite our many faults and failures. Joined by the blood of His Son, believers will always be His children. This infinite and almighty God is forever our Father!

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

—GALATIANS 4:4–5

Adoption entitles us to inheritance. “. . . if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Just think of it, we are joint-heirs!

Adoption entitles us to family bonds. We are “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19, NKJV). We’re members! We belong to His household!

Does His adoption include everyone? Yes, yes, God says yes! His adoption is available, not for just a chosen sect, but for every single person who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

Yes, by faith in Christ Jesus we become children of God. Now no distinction exists in the eyes of God between Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, male or female. As Christians we are one and the same. (See Galatians 3:26–28; 1 Corinthians 12:13.)

Adoption entitles us to family rights. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:6–7). We are no longer servants, but sons and daughters with the right to call Him “Abba, Father!” Jesus prayed “Abba, Father” on the night of His betrayal (Mark 14:36). In Romans 8:15 we read, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

ABBA FATHER. SUCH a personal title. Most scholars agree that the word *abba*, although it means “father,” denotes a closer and more intimate fellowship. It is like the word *daddy*.

As a ten-year-old child I shared this kind of fellowship with God, as a daughter shares relationship with her daddy. My “Abba” Father and I met often under the shade of an elm tree behind my home. As I walked

and talked with Him in the nearby meadow, His presence overwhelmed me and I sensed His hand upon my life. Then one day I told someone—a grown-up!

I thank God that today my mind doesn't recall who the person was. It must have been someone I looked up to, someone I trusted, because I remember how crushed I felt when this person said God no longer walks and talks with people the way He did in Bible times.

"It must have been your imagination," this person explained.

Feeling empty and forsaken, I stopped going to my special places to commune with the Father. Yet all was not lost. I knew God heard my prayers.

At age eight I pranced up to my mother with red curls bouncing and excitement in my voice. "Mother, can I have a baby sister?"

Her large brown eyes narrowed. "No," she said, "you have a brother. The two of you with Daddy and me makes our family complete. We don't need more children."

"Well, is it OK if I pray for a baby sister?"

"Yes," she smiled, "you can pray about it."

A year later she gave birth to my baby sister!

As humorous as this sounds, it grounded my faith. After once savoring the delicacy of answered prayer and tasting the sweet nectar of divine fellowship, my spirit never ceased in hungering for more of Him. Following the negative "grown-up" counseling, I hid in my bedroom devouring stories in my Bible. Perhaps in my childlike thinking I feared the joy I'd discovered in God's Word might also be stolen, so I kept it a secret. And I shied away from sharing any deep feelings about my heavenly Father with anyone.

Yet the Holy Bible continued to take root in my heart. In Sunday school we journeyed with Moses and the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan and constructed a replica of the tabernacle. How I yearned to be like the people of that day and witness mighty miracles of God. But the church I attended never taught that anyone in modern times experienced God's power. I didn't know the scriptures that say He never changes:

For I am the LORD, I change not . . .

—MALACHI 3:6

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

—HEBREWS 13:8

In the sixth grade the teacher asked each student to share what they wanted to be when they grew up. My chest pounded and my face burned like fiery coals as my turn drew near. How I wanted to call out, "Missionary!" But

the word choked inside me. I simply couldn't share the union I felt with my heavenly Father. With throbbing heart I dropped my eyes, and as so many of the girls had answered before me I mumbled, "Nurse."

During the next school year a pretty dark-haired girl who was usually quite reserved announced with great enthusiasm to the entire class, "Last night we went to a tent crusade and my daddy got healed!"

I remember how those words just bubbled out of her. My heart froze as I waited for someone to volunteer that God no longer did things the way He did in biblical times. Nothing but dead silence followed. Nobody said a word, not even the teacher. It was as though the girl never said it. But I never forgot it.

Sadly, this tiny episode constituted my first and only hint of any ongoing divine healing until after I reached adulthood. Despite its briefness it deepened my gnawing appetite for intense spiritual knowledge. With this yearning inside me I wandered aimlessly, haunted by the "grown-up" words, blinded by tradition and doctrine, not knowing how or where to soothe my hunger pangs.

WHY, OH WHY, did it take so long to find the truth?

Ignorance is such a flimsy excuse. I owned many Bibles, God's infallible Word that holds the only true answers. Yet soon after my daughter's mysterious drowning event, with eagerness to search out supernatural power I nibbled unknowingly upon forbidden fruit—the occult!

Completely unaware of its abomination to God and its wickedness, I deviated into perilous webs of deceit and tunneled dangerously through darkness. How easily we veer into sin if we don't know God's Word. And dabbling in sin, even in innocence, separates us from God. "We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness" (Isa. 59:9).

Let me warn you now. Before our travels end we'll venture into the slimy crevices of evil—the serpent's den, Satan's world of lies and perverseness—where deceptions hide, poised and waiting like rattlesnakes.

They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; he who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out.

—ISAIAH 59:5, NKJV

But don't panic. When the time comes, we'll march with confidence upon demonic turf possessing full awareness of its deadly venom. With knowledge of God's Word we'll attack, dressed in the whole armor of our

Father. As our guide, He will triumphantly lead our way.

Had I not already known Jesus as my Savior when I toyed with evil powers, I wonder where I would be today. Patiently waiting in the midst of all my wayward turns the Lord stood by, ready to untangle me from the web of darkness and usher me into His sunshine and freedom. When I learned to seek His righteousness through His Word, it fed my flaming passion for His truth, which had never stopped burning within my spirit.

In His sermon on the mount Christ promises, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). Just as He furnished manna for the Israelites, He sent His living bread to me to nourish my famished heart.

In ways I’d never experienced before, words in the Bible spoke life, health, and miracles. The gifts of His Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1–12) emerged, real and alive and for today. While praying one day with a lady minister on Christian television, I received instant healing from nosebleeds, a condition I apparently inherited from my grandmother. New insight and strong faith awakened inside my being.

Yet for some reason the memory of my daughter’s drowning incident stayed tucked away in an unused closet of my brain. Years had passed since the door of that memory opened even a crack.

Then one night after my daughter reached her teen years, she drove off with some friends. Feeling uneasy I paced the floor, praying for her protection. Suddenly I froze in my tracks as a Voice thundered inside my being.

I saved her from drowning, didn’t I?

As I recovered from the shock, my heart burst forth with thanksgiving. The mystery of so long ago had come to light. For the first time I knew beyond any doubt the miracle-working hand of almighty God had truly raised her from death. How sad that I hadn’t known to give Him full honor for this miracle before! From that moment forward I began testifying to everybody how God heard my cries to Him and supernaturally saved my infant daughter. I vowed to never again allow anyone to steal my boldness to speak out in behalf of my heavenly Father.

THE GOD I know today not only still walks and talks with those who seek Him, but He performs miracles, too!

How wonderful that at our adoption into the family of God we didn’t have to forfeit an astounding God of marvels and wonders. How wonderful that when we received open access into His presence we didn’t lose a

sovereign holy God. So gracious is His mercy that, as His children, we no longer need to fear an avenging God of wrath and judgment. We serve a Father of love.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.

—1 JOHN 3:1

How blessed we are. In the great exchange of law for grace we received adoption by a forgiving Father of love, a merciful Father who cares about our every need.

Jesus instructs us not to worry if we'll have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. God feeds the ravens that don't plant, harvest, or have barns to store food.

And you are far more valuable to him than any birds!

—LUKE 12:24, TLB

Our Father clothes the lilies whose beauty is here today and gone tomorrow. He cares for the fields and the grass.

Your heavenly Father knows your needs. He will always give you all you need from day to day if you will make the Kingdom of God your primary concern."

—LUKE 12:30-31, TLB

Can you imagine such a loving God who even cares about every sparrow that falls to the ground, a God who cares so individually for each of us that He numbers every single hair on our head?

So don't worry! You are more valuable to him than many sparrows.

—MATTHEW 10:31, TLB

If a child asks his father for a loaf of bread, will he be given a stone instead? If he asks for a fish, will he be given a poisonous snake? Of course not! And if you hardhearted, sinful men know how to give good gifts to your children, won't your Father in heaven even more certainly give good gifts to those who ask him for them?

—MATTHEW 7:9-11, TLB

God our Father is love. He is a forgiving God, a God of compassion, a gracious God. He is more than able to do immeasurably above what we can

ask or imagine. He is an ever-present help in time of need, our shelter from the storm, our stronghold in trouble. He is our God of glory, hope, peace, truth, and comfort. He is always with us as our provider, our light, our shield, our guide, our rock, our strength, and our healer.

God is unlimited, awesome, powerful, mighty, majestic, forever faithful, and glorious beyond compare. He is the Great I AM, the Judge of all the earth, the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of hosts, the Lord Most High. He is the Creator of heaven and Earth, the only true and living God, the King above all and owner of all kingdoms.

He is all this and more. His vastness reaches higher than our minds can fathom. Yet, even in all His excellent greatness, God is our Father—our Abba Father—who loves us and cares about our every need. Even though we did nothing to earn it and certainly don't deserve it, He gave us the free gift of redemption through the blood of His dear Son.

Yes, what love!

When we pray *Our Father*, it brings us into a personal intimate fellowship with Him. As we realize that we are truly His children and He is truly our Father, a loving respect floods our souls and humbles our hearts.

I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

—EPHESIANS 3:14-15

All who know Jesus as Lord and Savior are part of God's wonderful family. Thank You, God, for adopting us. Thank You for being our Father, our Abba Father.