

A STUDY OF GOD'S CREATION

AND ITS SPIRITUAL VALUES

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1. MOTHER NATURE'S FATHER Based on Gen. 1:6-8

The Bible consistently represents God as male. This is true for all 3 Persons of the Trinity. When the Son became flesh He became a man. The Holy Spirit is always called He. The male was also the first to be created. All of this in no way means that the Bible depreciates the female, for we will see that woman was the crown of creation. She put the finishing touch on it all, and history reveals that the Bible has done more to advance the status of women than any other force. The Bible is not anti-female, but it is anti-goddess. All through the ages men have worshipped mother goddesses. Archaeologists are constantly digging up figures of these goddesses from ancient civilizations. It even crept into Christianity when Mary was proclaimed the Mother of God, and many in ignorance began to worship her. Many worship Mother Nature, and for all practical purposes they consider nature as God.

Goethe in his Hymn To Nature says, "She placed me in it; she will also lead me forth. I trust myself to her." The advantages of this commitment to Mother Nature are that you can be extremely religious, for your goddess is everywhere. At the same time you have no obligation to do anything but what comes naturally. In other words, you combine pantheism, which says all is God, and atheism, which says nothing is God. You get, as a result, religious atheism. This permits you to have a sensible explanation of the world, for all that happens is according to the laws of Mother Nature.

The Bible, however, says that the laws of nature are not eternal, but that they began in time, and they were put into operation by the Word of God. God is the Father of all nature, and He is the Father of all the wisdom and order that men attribute to nature. Those who think they can explain anything by reference to the laws of nature fail because they can find no source for the energy of these laws. None would be so foolish as to think that it is the laws of architecture that builds buildings, or that the laws of navigation sail our ships. They recognize that these laws must be put into operation by persons. Persons must supply the energy. You can have a law on the books that will find you for breaking a parking meter, but a man can break one and drive away with nothing happening. The law is powerless without persons to enforce it. Laws do not punish or protect anyone. It is only as persons give them energy that they operate.

The Bible says that this is true also of the laws of nature. It is not the laws that keep order, but it is the energy behind them, and that energy has its source in God. The laws of nature are the impersonal means put into operation by a personal God to accomplish His goals. We who believe this reserve our praise for the wonders of the universe for God, and not for impersonal laws. With Alfred Tennyson we say, "Hallowed be thy name-Hallelujah, Infinite Identity, Immeasurable Reality, Infinite Personality! Hallowed be thy name-Hallelujah!"

As we continue our study of creation we see how God gives birth to all that men attribute to the wisdom of Mother Nature. God began with the raw materials of land and water, and on the first day He called forth light. This, of course, is another basic factor needed to produce and sustain life. But as we continue into the second day we see that God has much to do yet to prepare this planet for life. Walking into your attic and turning on the light does not change the mess. It is only as you exert energy that you can put it in order. So God by His Word begins on the second day to bring order into the chaos. In verses 6 through 8 we have the creation of the atmosphere.

In verse 6 God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters to separate them." The word firmament comes from the Latin word, which carries the idea of firmness. A better word might be expanse since firmament has led critics of the Bible to say that the Hebrews thought that heaven was hard and had holes in it through which the rain came down. This is completely unfair to judge Moses by the meaning of a Latin word when the original Hebrew doesn't mean any such thing. Critics also say that they probably thought the sky was blue because there was an ocean up there. All of the ignorance that men try to impose on the Bible is the result of their own ignorance. The Hebrews were not so foolish as to believe what the critics try and make them appear to believe. Critics twist the poetic language and try and make them literal statements.

Dr. Albertus Pieters says that by this same method you can make the modern American look ignorant and gullible. You would be offended if a Russian publication described us as so scientifically immature that we think the sky is solid, and only a few hundred feet high. Yet what else are they to think if we persist in calling our tallest building skyscrapers? Wooden literalism gives the critics much to mock at in the Bible, but it is completely dishonest. God's inspiration did not reveal to the Hebrews any modern science, but it kept them from all the false science and speculation of the heathen, which would have discredited

the Bible.

It is important to keep in mind that it is just as dishonest for us to claim that the Bible teaches modern science as it is for the critics to impose ignorance on the Bible writers. Both arise from the same source, which is an over zealous search to find evidence for a pre-conceived idea without trying to see what the Bible is really saying. In other words, the Bible does not predict cars, airplanes, radio, TV, and the atom bomb. To say this leaves you just as guilty as perversion of God's Word as the critic who reads ignorance into it.

Getting back to the firmament, we see that Moses says God created it to separate two bodies of water. That sounds like it would support the critic who says the Hebrews thought there was an ocean in the sky. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what they did believe, and so do we. Delitzsch says, "The upper waters are the mists and clouds which move above us." It is estimated that the average quantity of vapor in the air is 54,460,000, 000,000 tons. In other words, it is scientifically accurate to believe there is a ocean in the sky. If all of the water in the atmosphere fell at once it would be as it was in the day of Noah. There would be a universal flood.

God on the second day established the atmosphere, which would be essential for the whole program of maintaining life on all levels through the power of evaporation and rainfall. We see the logical order of God's plan. First there is the provision for life, and then the plants for food, and then animals, and finally man. Science and Scripture agree on this order. The Bible only states the fact of what God did on each day. It does not go into detail except on the creation of man. Chapter two goes back and gives a more detail account of what was just briefly stated about man in chapter one. The details of these other days we can learn from science. The Christian says that science can be used to glorify God in that it spells out for us just what God did when He set in motion the laws of nature.

Water, for example, is 773 times heavier than air, yet through the process of evaporation tons of it are silently lifted into the sky. God was the author of automation that makes man's machines very small in comparison. The whole world is watered by this process. The rivers carry the water back to the ocean, and the cycle begins again. The unbeliever can say what luck that it all worked out like this, for life would perish without this process. The believer, however, says this is my Father's world, and he has made it livable. The unbeliever is not so ignorant as to look at a water tower and say, "What luck that there is such provision of water." But they can look at the reservoirs in the sky and call it chance, or they call it the work of Mother Nature, but those who have seen the light of God's Word say with Jer. 10:12-13, "It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding stretched out the heavens. When He utters His voice there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightening for the rain, and He brings forth the wind from His storehouses." Personally is behind all the wonders we see in the universe.

Someone might say that it seems strange that God would take a whole day just to make the atmosphere. It is essential, but it is only air, and air is nothing. According to Roy Laurin there is in the space the size of a small pinhead 31 quadrillion molecules of nitrogen, 8 quadrillion molecules of oxygen, 16 trillion molecules of carbon dioxide, 400 trillion

molecules of argon, 400 billion molecules of neon, and 2 to 40 billion molecules of helium. I know there are those who believe nothing but what they can see. They must reject the truth of science as well as Scripture then. For it is the unseen that makes life on every level possible. If the balance of these unseen molecules were not maintained, there would be universal death. We see here the marvelous wisdom of God again. Plants were made not only for food, but also because they set oxygen free for animals to breathe oxygen, and in turn the animals set carbon dioxide for use by plants. It was on this second day that God made the environment for life.

The reality of the unseen is basis to science and faith. God made us with 5 senses that we might be aware of far more than what we could be by sight alone. If you put sugar in water it disappears from sight, but none argue from this fact that it is gone, for their taste buds tell them it is still there. All of us have known the presence of a skunk without ever seeing it, and so everyone believes in the unseen to some degree. Science devises ways to go deeper and find much more in the unseen world that our senses can detect, but faith goes even beyond this. Faith is not ignorance, but it is the greatest intelligence, for it rises to the awareness of the highest and ultimate unseen reality, which is the reality of God. So we read in Heb. 11:3, "By faith we understand that the world was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear."

The Bible makes it clear that not only is the visible a product of God's creative power, but also the invisible, which still does not appear. Col. 1:16 says, "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by Him and for Him." God forbid then that we praise Mother Nature for the marvels which science reveals. All of our praise belongs to Christ, or more comprehensively to the Triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We reject those poets who put Mother Nature in the place of God, and who write like Spenser in this poem:

Through knowledge we behold the world's creation,
How in His cradle first He fostered was,
And judge of Nature's cunning operation
How things she formed of a formless mass.

He agrees with a Genesis account of how by wisdom the formless mass of chaos became an ordered cosmos, but refuses to accept God as its author. Though science and the Bible agree as to the basic pattern, yet many scientists refuse to accept the revelation that a personal God is the source of all the energy needed to produce this pattern. They are like a group of men who find a complex instrument in the desert. They begin a study to figure out where it came from and what it is. As they speculate and offer up their learned guesses, a man comes along and says I made that to measure the intensity of the light during an eclipse. Now this has spoiled the whole thing, for he has shattered all their speculation and research in an instant. They wanted to discover the origin and purpose of it. They didn't want anyone to tell them right out, for that ends the search. Many happy debates are cut short and ruined by someone who comes along with the answer. This is the basic reason why many do not want to listen to the Bible. If they admit that God was the cause of all, and is the sustaining power of all, it stifles the whole search for the answer.

The believer, however, says we are satisfied to accept the answer, and to pursue other problems far more crucial to man's well being. Believing scientists also recognize there is much for science to do after accepting the answer of revelation. Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest of early scientists, said, "He must be blind who from the most wise and excellent contrivances of things cannot see the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of their Almighty Creator, and he must be mad and senseless who refuses to acknowledge them." The believer sees both the glory of the world and the God it glorifies, and they accept the poetry of men like Addison who wrote,

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame
Their great Original proclaim.
Forever singing as they shine,
The hand that made us is divine.

A pastor in England once preached a sermon on astronomy. Someone came up after and asked, "What practical value is there in such a sermon?" He answered, "None at all, but it greatly enlarges my concept of God." I would go even further and say that nothing is more practical than that which enlarges your concept of God. It is a fallacy to think that the study of creation, and of the great wonders of what God has made is not spiritual, and of no food for the spirit for everyday living. What can be more encouraging than to know that the order, beauty, and marvelous mystery of all about you is the handiwork of one you can know and pray to as your heavenly Father?

2. THE WONDER OF WATER Based on Gen. 1:1-2

The Bible begins and ends with God in the midst of water. It is the physical substance that is nearest to the spiritual. It is the physical source of all life. There is no known life on earth that can survive without water. God gave birth to the world out of a mass of water as the Holy Spirit hovered over the deep. The earth was immersed in water before it came to life. And so it is with us. From conception to birth we are immersed in water. When the water breaks we are born into a world totally dependent on water. Seven eighths of our body and OF all animal life is water. Nine tenths of all plant life is water. 75% of the worlds surface is water.

The clouds above us are floating lakes of water. They are tiny droplets so small that one hundred billion of them would not fill a tea cup. They form the clouds that make rain possible, which keeps the world alive. Water is the blood of the world that gives life to all that God has created. The blood in our veins that keeps us alive is 90% water. Water supply is not just vital for farmers, it is vital to the life of each one of us.

When everything is working normally there are about 16 billion tons of rain that fall on

U.S. soil every day. We take water for granted, but have no idea just how much of it is needed to keep life going. Ten to twenty tons of water are needed for every bushel of corn that is harvested. 15 to 20 tons are needed for every pound of beef, and 120 gallons for every egg. If it was not for all the irrigation in this country we could be going through a drought like they often do in Africa. Water is the blood of our nation just as it is all the nations of the world.

Water is also the key factor in industry. All that man makes is just as dependent on water as all that God has made. The production of one car requires 60 thousand gallons of water. For every gallon of gas you put in that car, it takes 10 gallons of water to produce it. Water is the life line of nature, and also of industry. Nothing significant happens in this world without water.

Therefore, it is not surprising that water plays a major role in the Bible. It would take hours just to read all of the verses in the Bible that deal with water. Some of the highlights would be-

- 1. The creation.**
- 2. The flood, where Noah and his family were saved by water, and where the most universal symbol God ever created, the rainbow, is dependent upon water.**
- 3. The great exodus of Israel out of Egypt by crossing the Red Sea.**
- 4. The striking of the rock that gave water to Israel, and which the New Testament says was Christ.**
- 5. The crossing of Jordan into the Promise Land.**
- 6. The 23rd Psalm where he leads us beside the still waters.**
- 7. Jesus is the water of life, and He walked on water, and He stilled the stormy waters, and He turned the water into wine, and He made water basic to the ordinance He gave to the church to go into all the world and baptize. The Lord's Supper has two elements Bread and wine, and both are products of water. Some would add His washing of feet, another water event.**

There is no escaping the importance of water for both the physical and spiritual life. We cannot live without water, and we cannot live a life of obedience to Christ without water. All three persons of the Godhead are identified with water. God the Father says in Jer. 2:13, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4:10, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." Later in John 7:37-39 this living water is identified with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believe in Him were to receive,"

It is through faith in Christ that we receive the Spirit of Christ-the living water, and for all eternity Jesus will lead us to springs of living water, says Rev. 7:17. Water is not only essential for life in time, it is basic even to life in eternity. Water is forever because God made it the key to life. In Rev. 21:6 there is a fountain of the water of life in heaven, and in

Rev. 22 there is the river of the water of life that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, and produces the fruit of heaven. For all eternity nature and man will still depend upon the water of life. There will be no more thirst in heaven. This may not seem relevant to us, but for many of God's people in Bible lands this was a precious promise that meant paradise to them.

Geoffrey Moorhouse in *The Fearful Void* tells of running out of water while crossing the Sahara Desert. He almost died of dehydration, and he writes, "Almost unconscious even of my mind, I was aware of trees somewhere ahead, somewhere beyond Ibrahim and the Camels, who seem to be a great distance ahead. Then there was a tent. Ibrahim was squatting by it, drinking from his brass bowl. Then a small boy was running towards me trying not to spill what was in the bowl. The water in it was the color of diluted blood. This was the most beautiful thing in the world, more beautiful by far than the stained glass of Chartres, than a fugue by Bach, then the moment after ecstasy with the one woman you love, or the moment when your son scrambled to squeeze the breath out of you and say, I think you're smashing dad. There was nothing in the world as beautiful as this bowl full of water." You may never have this emotional experience with water, for you would have to pay too high of a price to have it, but we should be able to have an intellectual appreciation of this experience.

Like the oceans, the revelation of God about water is too vast to cover. So we will specialize on one aspect of water, which is the water of baptism. It is all a wonder, but the water of baptism has additional wonders. It takes a lot of water to obey Christ and be baptized. The Ethiopian Eunuch went down into the water, and Lydia was baptized in the river, and the early church stressed the importance of being baptized in living water, that is, in natural flowing water, like the Jordan, where Jesus was baptized. There were no churches and baptisteries, and so this was not an option open to them, as it is to us. It was several centuries before baptism inside was accepted as the norm.

Baptism for the early Christians was an experience with nature, as well as with God. This is still true for Christians on many of the missions fields of the world. Rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds are used all over the world to immerse people in. Creation is used to worship the God of creation. Baptism is a spiritual use of nature to glorify God. There's no way to separate the spiritual and the natural in baptism, for they are one. We cannot do it in the Lord's Supper either, for you cannot have bread and juice without nature and the power of water.

Literal, physical water is not only essential to physical life, but to a life of obedience to God, or spiritual life. The person who attempts to be spiritual without the physical is forgetting just who it is that created the physical, and that He rejoices in it, and expects that we will also, and use it to glorify Him. The point is, baptism links the Christian with nature. We cannot obey God without nature. We can go inside to a man-made baptistery, but we cannot make water. Water is essential to baptism, and so nature is essential to baptism.

Jesus began His own ministry with His baptism in the Jordan. He made baptism in water a symbol of the transition from the old to the new. His ministry was to take the world from the old covenant to the new covenant in his blood. Baptism is the symbol of new beginnings.

Many churches make baptism the transition from being a non-member of the local church to becoming a member. It means new opportunity, new service, and a new voice in the local body.

Water is a transition element. We can't explore it in depth, but water is a key factor in the transition of the seasons. We use it all the time for transition. From work to a night of relaxation, we take a shower in between, for we want to clean up and be refreshed for the evening. Water gives us the feeling of newness. So it is with baptism, for it is like a spiritual bath that cleanses us and makes us ready for a new agenda in the will of God. Every square mile of air has a two and one half million cubic feet of water in it, and this is crucial for the cleansing of the atmosphere. Without this water all life would soon choke on the dust and smoke particles in the air. Water is the cleansing agent of the natural world, and God made it the cleansing agent of the spiritual world as well. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin, and 90% of blood is water. When Christ's side was pierced there came forth blood and water.

The waters of baptism are to be seen as the symbolic cleansing agent of sin. In Acts 22:16 Ananias came to blind Saul in Damascus and said, "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name." It is faith in Christ, and calling on His name that leads to the cleansing of sin, but this is symbolized in baptism. Only God can cleanse from sin, but He gives the symbolic power to the water of baptism, and, thereby, gives a new slant to the old saying that cleanliness is next to godliness.

The old man is buried in baptism, and the new man that rises out of the water is to be a cleansed man, ready to walk a new path on the Rock, which is Christ, and no longer on the dusty road of the world. Paul fell on the road to Damascus, and was likely quite dirty. His baptism could have literally washed away the dirt, but it also cleanse him from his evil attitude toward Christ and the church. Paul was a new man after his baptism because the old was buried, and he came forth from the water to walk in newness of life.

Lydia was not a wild woman on a rampage against Christianity, and so her baptism was not as great a cleansing, for she did not have such dirty feet as Paul. Baptism is to be seen as the symbol of God burying our sins of the past in the deepest sea. We sing,

Let the water and the blood
From thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Cleanliness was next to godliness in the Old Testament. All that was done in the presence of God had to be done with the participants cleansed with water. Everything the priest did had to be preceded by washing, just like a doctor does today before he goes into surgery. The high priest on the day of atonement had to wash himself before he put on the holy garments, and after he came out of the holy of holies he had to wash again in water. Our baptism is very much like the high priest getting ready to enter the service of God. Paul in Gal. 3:27, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Just as the high priest put on the holy garments to enter God's presence, so we, in

baptism, put on the most holy garment of all, for we put on Christ. We clothe ourselves in that which is most acceptable in the presence of God-His Son. We put on Christ and stand before God clean and pure. Here is the wonder of water par excellence.

The fish became the symbol of the early Christians. A creature that lives in water became their primary sign. Like fish, we are to be at home in the environment of the water of life, and have a hard time when we find ourselves cast up on the dry land of the waves of the world. The Christian should feel out of his element, and very uncomfortable in settings displeasing to God. They should be eager to get back into the element of Christlike ideals. Holiness is feeling at home in the realm of the spiritual, and like fish out of water, feeling not at home in the realm of the worldly.

Our baptism is to mark that time in our lives when we begin to focus on the things of Christ more completely, and let the things of the world fade into the background. Baptism is to be that bath of transition. We are wash up and leave the grimy work of the world, and enter into the joy of serving our Lord. Jesus began His public ministry with baptism. Paul was baptized, and after his time in the desert, he began his public ministry. Baptism is to be a turning point where the goal is to be immersed in the things of Christ. Baptism is a commitment to make the Christian life more than a mere part time, and side line religion.

To rise from the water and walk in newness of life is not easy, in fact, it is impossible. Our very failure to be able to be Christians as we ought to be, is to keep us ever conscious of our dependence upon Christ. The wonder of wonders is that He loves us, and will use us for His glory, even after all we have done out of His will. And the wonder of water is that Jesus uses it to symbolize His love for us in forgiving and cleansing us from all sin. Let us now go and worship our Creator and Redeemer by obeying Him with water.

3. THE MOON IN THE BIBLE Based on Gen. 1:14-19

Bruce Barton said, "When you're though changing, you're though." Change is inevitable, and one might just as well refuse to accompany the earth in rotating on its axis as to refuse to accept change. Robert Burns said, "Look abroad thro' Nature's range, Nature's mighty law is change." Longfellow points out, "There are no birds in last year's nest." Change is constant, and Robert Browning feels we should be excited about this fact of reality, for he writes, "Rejoice that man is hurled, from change to change unceasingly, his soul's wings never furled."

Change is essential to progress, and as man's concepts of reality keep changing and expanding, he draws nearer to the Author of reality, and the God who changes not. Truth in any realm points to the Author of truth. When man stopped centering his thoughts on himself alone, and took the whole world into consideration, he became geocentric. When he realized that the earth was not the center of the solar system, but that the sun was, he became heliocentric. Then man learned that the sun is just one of billions of stars in the galaxy, and he became galactocentric. The final stage of growth is when man learns that the one who

made all of the vast universe is a Person, and then they become Christocentric. When we study space and objects like the moon we are studying the handiwork of Jesus our Savior. This changes how we see everything.

There were many who objected to man's going to the moon, and many even said the Bible taught that it was impossible. They said that it was not God's will for man to go into space. But Wernher Von Braun, the Christian who was greatly responsible for man getting to the moon said, "...don't tell me he doesn't belong out there. Man belongs wherever he wants to go." Man is made to be an adventurer and climb every mountain just because God put it there. The Bible does not settle all issues dealing with the moon, even though it refers to the moon 34 times in the Old Testament and 9 times in the New Testament. Our interest in this message is to just learn all we can about what the Bible says about the moon.

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE MOON.

Our text makes it clear that the moon was no mere accident. God created it for a definite purpose. The God of light filled His creation with lights, and He prepared the earth to have a lighting system for both day and night. The creation of the moon was an act of God's love for man, even before man was created. If there was no moon or stars, man would be plunged into total darkness each night. Total darkness, however, is reserved for those who reject completely the light of God, and especially the light of the world-Jesus Christ.

The most simple and obvious purpose of the moon is to give light to the earth at night. It is the secondary of the two great lights. The first reference to the moon in the Bible in verse 16 does not name it, but it simply calls it the lesser light. Lesser is an understatement, for it would take 600 thousand full moons to equal the splendor of the sun. The moon always plays second fiddle to the sun. In Buddhist thought the sun is spirit and the moon is matter. The ancients felt that when man died his spirit went to the sun and his body to the moon. Being inferior to the sun led the ancients to think of the moon as female, and the sun as male. We think of the man in the moon, but the people of the East think of a maiden in the moon. We shall see that the Bible follows the Eastern imagery, and it refers to the moon as the Queen of heaven. Verse 16 says a greater light is to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. It follows then logically that the sun is king and the moon queen. George Croly wrote,

How like a queen comes forth the lovely moon,
From the slow opening curtains of the clouds,
Walking in beauty to her midnight throne!

In Gen. 37:9 Joseph had a dream that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. The sun was his father, the moon was his mother, and the eleven stars were his brothers. We see the moon is associated with the female. Later we shall see that poets always refer to the moon as female. The moon is second to the sun, but it is superior to the stars. In Joseph's dream the stars are the children. Here in Gen. 2 the great lights are stressed and the stars are merely mentioned. Elsewhere the stars are made much of, but in terms of visible and practical light the moon is superior to the stars. Sir Henry Wotton wrote,

**You meaner beauties of the night,
That poorly satisfy our eyes,
More by your number than your light;
You common people of the skies.
What are you when the moon shall rise?**

The stars then are the common people of the skies, and the sun and moon are the royalty. The Bible supports this image, and Milton in Paradise Lost gives a beautiful picture of it.

**Now glow'd the firmament
With living sapphires; Hesperus, that led
The strong host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen, unveil'd her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.**

The sun, the moon, the stars, in that order is there glory, for in that order God made them for the purpose of giving light to the earth.

In verse 14 we see another purpose of the moon, and that is to be a sign. God expected man to be an astronomer. No one puts signs where they will never be read. God put the sun, moon and stars in the sky for signs, and He expected man to read these signs and learn how they regulate the days, months and seasons. Man got the point of God's purpose almost universally. The Chaldeans, Persians, Hindus, Chinese and Egyptians all named the 7 days of the week after the sun, moon and the planets, just as we do. We begin with sun-day, then moon-day, and then Tuesday from the name for Mars, Wednesday from Woden, which is the same as Mercury, then Thursday for Thor, who was also Jupiter, then Friday for Friga, who was also Venus, and finally Saturday from Saturn. There are two females out of the seven, and they are the queen moon and Venus Friday.

The moon is God's calendar in the sky. Psalms 104:19 says, "The moon marks off the seasons..." The movements of the moon determined all of the holy days of the Jews. Their whole ritual and ceremonial life was guided by the moon. Marking the seasons made the moon the sign by which men judged seed time and harvest. Many of us are old enough to remember the song, Shine On Harvest Moon. The moon played such an important role as a sign of change that it became the weather-woman. Weather-man sounds more normal to us, but the moon played the role first as female. Virgil, the ancient Latin writer, said, "If unheard cheeks you see the maiden's blush, the ruddy moon foreshadows that winds will rush." The people of the old world took weather reports based on the moon very seriously. It could be a matter of life and death for those on the sea. Aratus wrote,

**Pale moon doth rain, red moon doth blow.
White moon doth neither rain nor snow.
If with deep blush her maiden cheek be red,
Then boisterous wind the cautious sailors dread.**

Farmers the world over have considered the moon a sign by which they regulate their activities. The moon's influence on the tides connects it with water.

In Egypt the moon means moisture. In Peru at the time of the full moon they have a festival to the deities of water. The moon's connection with water naturally makes it important to farmers since they depend on moisture for their livelihood. You can get too much of a good thing however. In Scotland they have this advice in poetry:

If the moon shows like a silver shield,
You need not be afraid to reap your field;
But if she rises haloed round,
Soon we'll tread on deluged ground.

I don't know if the weather reports of the past were anymore unreliable than they are today, but then all they had to go by were God's signs in the sky. No doubt they were misread often, and false ideas were imposed on the meaning of these signs, but the fact is, God intended the moon to be for the purpose of giving men a sign for helping him to regulate his life and activities in an orderly fashion.

Another purpose of the moon in God's plan is to be a sign of stability and security. This sounds strange to us because it is the most changeable body in the sky. Juliet wanted no part of the moon in her romance. Romeo said,
"Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops." She replies,
"O! Swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Less that thy love prove likewise variable."

She missed the point of the moon completely. She failed to see that in all its changes it is ever the same. It changes in a fixed order that is sure and reliable. It never fails, for it is ever the same in its constant change. Speaking of the line of David God assures him in Psa. 89:37, "Like the moon it shall endure forever; it shall stand firm while the skies endure." In Psa. 72:5,7 there is a reference to a righteous king, and it says, "May he live...as long as the moon, throughout all generations." "In his days may righteousness flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more." In Jer. 31:35 God assures Israel she shall endure as long as the fixed order of the moon. Because of such promises we read this in the Jewish Encyclopedia: "The moon, on account of its monthly reappearance, is considered the emblem of Israel: The latter, like the moon, undergoing several phases through persecution without being destroyed." One of the purposes of the moon is to give the believer a sign in the heavens of God's unchanging faithfulness in the midst of constant change.

In contrast to this the moon is also God's primary sign for expressing His judgment. We cannot take time now to look at all the passages in the prophets where God warns of blotting out the sun, moon and stars in anger against Israel. The moon plays a unique role as a sign, for it is associated with blood. In Joel 2:31 we read, "The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." The moon as a sign of judgment is dominant in the New Testament. Six out of the nine references are to its use as a sign of wrath. In Acts and Revelation the moon is like blood, and the Gospel

refer to it as ceasing to give light after the tribulation. Luke does not mention loss of light or likeness to blood, but adds some interesting detail. In Luke 21:25 we read, "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves." Great tidal waves will result from God's use of the moon in judgment.

At the time of judgment the friendly moon, which causes the beneficial tides will suddenly become an enemy with power to flood the world. The believer can look at the moon as a sign of security, but the unbeliever who does not repent before the day of the Lord will be destroyed by its power. The moon is a faithful friend, but also a fearful foe. The moon has determined the outcome of more than one battle. The most famous is that in Joshua 10:12-13 where Joshua prays, "Sun, stand thou still at Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Aijalon. And the sun stood still and the moon stayed, and Israel defeated the Amorites." Fascinating books are written on this event. Marvelous has been the influence of the moon on this earth physically, historically, and even spiritually.

The final sign we want to consider is the one, which is most popular. The moon is a symbol of beauty. In the romantic context of the love song of Solomon the beautiful maiden is referred to in 6:10 as being fair as the moon. After bouncing around in its dust maybe the men who walked on the moon could no longer say this to their wives. The beauty and romantic value of the moon depends upon distance. It would be a barren and desolate place for a honeymoon. God's art in the sky is like great art on earth; it looks better at a distance. The moon has stimulated more poetry on love than any other heavenly body. It moves men's hearts as it moves the sea. Keats asks,

What is there in thee, moon that thou
Shouldst move my heart so potently.

The Hebrews used a special word for the moon when they spoke of the moon in poetry. They used a word, which means whiteness rather than the usual word that means wonderer. The moon has a special place in poetry because men can gaze on its beauty, but they cannot gaze at the sun. It will remain a symbol of beauty and romance in spite of space travel and man's growing technical knowledge of it. The skeptical poet wrote, "

O sing no more of the moon, poets, no more of the moon,
We have measured her round and through the middle,
We have weighed her mass, and spectroscopical evidence
Points to the absence of gas.

None of this will prevent men from continuing to have the experience God intended them to have, and which Emerson describes when he writes, "The man who has seen the rising moon break out of the clouds at midnight, has been present like an archangel at the creation of light and of the world." God made the moon for many purposes, and though both the Old and New Testaments refer to eternity where the moon will be absent, for Christ will be the light and center of all things, yet till then the moon will faithfully fulfill these purposes we have considered. Just briefly now we will look at-

II. THE PERILS OF THE MOON.

The lack of air and water are perils for men who go there, but long before men ever thought of meeting the moon face to face, the moon presented a serious problem. It was the peril of idolatry. Worship of the moon is probably the oldest idolatry. It was worship before the sun in the ancient near East. In those lands where the intense sun scorched the earth nothing was more pleasant and beautiful than the cool light of the moon at night. Add this to its connection with water and crops, and you can see why it became an object of worship.

In Israel the moon became a competitor with Jehovah for the loyalty of the people. Job 31:26-27 refers to the kissing of the hand on seeing the moon as an act of adoration. In Jer. 7:18 God in anger refers to the Jewish women making cakes for the Queen of heaven, which was the moon. In Jer. 44:15-23 there is a debate over burning incense to the Queen of heaven, and pouring out libations to her. Some argue that this leads to plenty and prosperity, but Jeremiah says not so, for it leads to the wrath of God. If we had time we could trace moon worship all around the world, even to the American Indians. The Egyptians even worshipped the cat because its eyes are like the moon, and they can change from slim crescents to round balls.

A more modern form of idolatry of the moon is expressed by the poet, who feels he has found the secret of success in living by the moon. It is really the same old idolatry of getting a deity who will serve you.

Go plant the bean when the moon is light,
And you will find that this is right;
Plant the potatoes when the moon is dark,
And to this line you always hark;
But if you vary from this rule,
You will find you are a fool;
If you always follow this rule to the end,
You will always have money to spend.

The Jews believed this for a while, and God had to bring them to poverty to get them away from idolatrous loyalty to the moon. Fred Allen had a more realistic view of the economic status of the moon. He said the sky is poor tonight, for the moon is down to its last quarter. God intended the moon to be a benefit to man, and learning to read its signs can bring economic benefit, but like all good things, the moon too becomes a curse when we seek the gift and forget the giver. Idolatry is taking a good thing and forgetting to thank the one who gave it. All of the heavenly bodies are a part of God's handiwork, and they declare His glory. We read them wrong if our awe and wonder does not go beyond them to their maker.

Psa. 148:3 says, "Praise Him, sun and moon, praise Him, all you shining stars!" If we see this as the greatest purpose of the moon, we will avoid the peril of the moon, which is the peril of idolatry. Like the astronauts we have only touched down on this subject, and we have only picked up pebbles of truth, but if we use them right we can glorify Christ by using the heavens to witness of Him for many moons.

4. THE BIRDS OF THE BIBLE Based on Gen. 1:20-23

Edwin Markham the great poet one day told his five year old boy Virgil that there is poetry in everything--a tree, a board, a stone, a cliff; in food and drink or day and dark--in everything. Virgil stood looking out the window, and he saw a birds nest. He urged his father to come and look, and said defiantly, "there's a bird's nest, father! Let's see you write a poet about it!" Markham accepted the challenge. He sat down and wrote one of the most beautiful poems of his career.

There are three green eggs in a small brown pocket,
And the breeze will swing and the gale will rock it,
Till three little birds on the thin edge teeter,
And our God be glad and the world be sweeter!

This poem is biblical in content for the Bible supports that broad statement that the birth of birds makes God glad and the world sweeter. When God created the birds He saw that it was good, and he blessed them and commanded them to multiply on the earth. They obeyed, and there are now between 8 and 9 thousand different kinds of birds on the earth. God is a lover of beauty and variety.

The value of birds is not limited to being objects of beauty to inspire poetry, however. In Gen. 1:26 God made man to have dominion over the birds of the air. Man has done this, and has used birds for a variety of practical values. All through history birds have been a great help to man, and they have saved many lives. In the ancient world of the East they were so important for clearing the land of dead animals and insects that laws were passed authorizing the death penalty for anyone to who killed them. They were man's original garbage disposals. Today they play a health role by being used for experiments.

There military value has been known for centuries. Few people realize that birds helped the allies defeat Germany. England had between 50 and 75 thousand birds in military service. Every bomber carried one or two pigeons to race back with and SOS in case of trouble. Dived bombing hawks were trained to knock German carrier pigeons out of the sky. Others were trained to help and see rescue work, and are credited with saving many British and American lives.

We are all aware of the increase use of birds as pets, and of trained birds for entertainment in the circus. The question for us, however, is not, do birds have a variety of poetic and practical values, but do they have theological values? That is, do they play an important enough role in God's word to justify the use of pulpit time for their consideration? Can a sermon on the birds be Biblical and valuable in fulfilling a Biblical purpose? The answer is, not only is a Biblical sermon on birds possible, it is essential if one is to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Birds play a role in Scripture that is beyond the imagination of the average Christian. There are three hundred references to birds in the Bible, and many of them with significant messages. If we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, then we must give some time to the study of birds. Many

of the great Bible characters were bird lovers and much of the finest bird poetry has been written by Christians.

Jesus was a bird lover, and bird watcher, and used these feathered friends often in His teaching. In fact, He used them more than any other creature. Alice Parmelee, in her book, **ALL THE BIRDS OF THE BIBLE**, writes, "The Bible is rich in its appreciation of nature, but it contains nothing to equal Jesus' awareness of the wonder and beauty and meaning of creation. All nature was to him a finger pointing to God." It is by His authority and command that we are studying the birds. In Matt. 6:26 as Jesus sat on the hillside teaching He pointed to the birds overhead and said, "Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Jesus points our eyes to the birds as illustrations of God's care. He also said not a sparrow falls without God's knowledge. When he sought for an illustration of what he wanted His disciples to be, He urged them to be wise as serpents but harmless as doves. He used birds in His parables of the sower and the mustard seed, and on other occasions, which we shall see later.

The key text is Matt. 23:37 where Jesus compares His love and compassion for Israel to the love of a mother hen. He said, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not." In this verse Jesus takes on Himself the image of God in the Old Testament where wings are constantly referred to as the believers place of protection.

Psalm 17:8 "Hide me in the shadow of your wings" cries David as he seeks a refuge.

Psalm 36:7 "The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings."

Psalm 61:4 "O to be safe under the shelter of your wings."

Psalm 63:7 "In the shadow of your wings I sing for joy." And there are many others.

Bird life and theology are linked together all through the Bible. The Third Person of the Trinity-the Holy Spirit, is symbolized as a dove. He took upon Himself the form of a dove at the baptism of Jesus. The very first image we have of God in the Bible is in Gen. 1:2 where we see the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. The image is of a bird without spread wings fluttering over its nest protectively. The Hebrew word here is the very same word used in Deut. 32:11 where we read of God's care for Israel. "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young." This image has found its way into numerous hymns. Under His Wings is the best known, but we sing of God's wings often. Here are a few examples.

1. "Praise ye the Lord who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
Shelters thee under His wings, Yea, so gently sustainth.
2. "How oft in grief hath he not brought relief,
Spreading His wings for to shade thee."
3. "Be not dismayed what'er betide, God will take care of you.
Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you."

We see that not only the Bible, but our hymnology also is filled with bird imagery. People in Bible lands, in Bible times were more conscious of birds than we are. They were closer to

nature, and their way of life led them to observe the birds. In what use to be Canaan, and then Palestine, and which is now Israel, there are 360 to 400 species of birds. The land is only 140 miles long, and so a high-flying eagle can actually see the whole length of the land from Dan to Beersheba. The Bible has 50 different Hebrew and Greek names for birds of that land.

God gave laws to His people concerning birds. In Deut. 22:6-7 we read, "If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life." God takes birds so seriously that obedience to His concern about them leads to the same blessing as respect for one's parents. Motherhood is sacred not just in human life, but in bird life as well. The ideas of animal sanctuaries, game preserves, and humane societies all grow out of God's love for, and compassion for birds and animals. God even made His temple a bird sanctuary. In Psalm 84:3-4 we read, "Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." Here we see birds and believers together in the temple praising their creator.

We cannot begin to cover all that the Bible says about birds, but we want to start at the beginning and go as far as we can. This first chapter of Genesis tells us that God created birds before man, and so birds are older than man, and lived on earth before man, and this fits the facts of science. They have seniority in time, but man was made to have dominion over them—to raise them, kill them, eat them, train them, enjoy them, for they are for man.

In Gen. 2:19-20 we come upon the father of bird watchers and ornithology. This passage says Adam gave names to all the birds of the air. Adam had to observe and study the birds to give them fitting names. God expected man to study all of nature for this was the only way he could have dominion over it. As we move on the drama of the fall of man we do not see birds playing any role. Birds cannot choose to defy God. They remain loyal to God, and when man is put out of the Garden of Eden, the birds continue to enjoy its beauty and fruit.

God in Jer. 8:7 contrasts the obedience of birds with the disobedience of men. "Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the Lord." God is the greatest bird watcher of all, for He gets delight from them even when men are a great disappointment. God glories in His creation, and in Psalm 50:10-11 God says with a sense of honest pride that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and then adds, "I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine." Don't knock the birds, for they give God pleasure, for they did not fall as man did.

When God's cup of wrath was filled, and He destroyed man in the flood, all living creatures had to suffer and die with man, but birds were preserved in the Ark along with man and all other creatures. When the Ark came to rest, the roll of birds is magnified. They became the stars of the drama, and Noah was dependent on them. Only a bird could find land and be a messenger in those unique conditions of a flooded world. All human and

animal life was helpless. Only a bird could be of any use. The bird, therefore, has the honor of being the first valuable servant of man after the world was destroyed. The bird to have this honor, plus the honor of being the first mentioned in the Bible is the raven. In Gen. 8:6-7 we read, "After 40 days Noah opened the window he had made in the Ark and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up on the earth."

Noah had become a bird watcher in the Ark, if he was not one before, for he knew the nature of the raven and decided it was the bird most likely to succeed. It is the bird that uses its brain the most. It can be taught to say a few words. It can fly long distances without stopping and has no fear of storms. It was also the bird most likely to return with something it found. They loved to pick up things and they are very attached to their mates and remain united for life. But the raven apparently perched on top of the Ark, going to and fro until the water dried up and never came back inside. Some have concluded that the raven failed Noah, and even deserted him. Stories have developed saying that the raven was once white, but was turned black as punishment for deserting Noah. Bird lovers, however, know that the raven's sin is only in the imagination of the critic, for the Bible reveals admiration for the raven as well as the dove. In the Song of Songs 5:11-12 we read the description of a handsome lover. "His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the waters streams," Black like a raven is a compliment like tall, dark and handsome.

The proof that Noah's choice was wise and that the raven did not fail is found in the fact that when God wanted a feathered servant to do a job, he also selected the raven. In I Kings 17 we read of God telling Elijah to hide by the brook Cherith, and in verse four He says, "You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." The obedience of the ravens was swift, and verse 6 says, "The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook." The tradition of the ravens being helpful passed down even through pagan sources. And ancient Babylonian tablet has this inscription--"A raven, the bird that helps the Gods." Shakespeare picked up this on this idea in THE WINTER TALE. He has a character say as he is forced to expose an infant to death, "Come on poor babe: Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens to be thy nurses."

The raven is a symbol of God's care, and it is singled out as the bird that God makes sure to get fed. In Job 38:41 we read, "Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food." Psalm 147:9 says, "He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call." Most interesting of all is the fact that Jesus singles them out also, and in Luke 12:24 says, "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no store room or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!"

Jesus tells us to consider the raven--look at them--study them, and seek God's care for them, and learn that He cares more for you. This makes it clear that it is right, and even a part of God's will, that ravens find food according to their habits as God made them. It is not evil that raven eat dead and rotting animals. Their association with death has lead to them becoming known as birds of doom. We could spend an hour just looking at the superstitions connected with ravens. The only negative thing in the Bible is that they are on

the list of birds not to be eaten in Lev. 11:13-19. There are 20 birds in that list which are an abomination. This simply means they were unfit for human consumption. They were the fish and flesh eaters, and their meat was just not good.

The ravens habit of eating the eyes of its victims first has led to numerous references in literature. The proverb is, "Nourish a raven and he will scratch out thine eyes." Children were warned to obey their parents or the raven would get their eyes. The origin of this is Proverbs 30:17. "The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley...." This is equivalent to the saying of our day, be good or the ghost will get you. The raven is associated with ghosts all through history. In Swedish folklore ravens are the ghosts of murdered people who have not had Christian burial. In Russia, a witch's spirit takes the form of a raven. Pagan folklore uses the raven for an evil symbol. In some cases they are lucky, but are usually symbols of bad luck. Swainson writes,

To see one raven is lucky, tis true,
But its certain misfortune to light upon two,
And meeting with three is the devil!

The Bible should keep Christians from having any of many foolish superstitions of the pagan world in connection with ravens. The raven is a faithful servant of God, and the first pioneer to fly into the new world from Noah's ark. Let us use this knowledge to stir up interest in the word of God. Time does not allow us to study the second bird Noah let loose from the ark. There are at least 46 references to this most famous Bible bird, the dove.

The Bible is a literal aviary filled with feathered friends and fascinating facts to give the Christian a foundation for speaking of God's glory at the sight of any bird. Every wing in the sky is a flying witness to the care and providence of God. William Cullen Bryant, as a young man, was discouraged about his future as he walked across the hills. His eye caught a solitary bird winging its way over the horizon. This sight inspired him and he wrote his famous poem, "To a Waterfowl." It is long, but one stanza goes like this-

He who from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

A bird spoke to him of God's providential guidance, and he was encouraged, and his faith was uplifted. This was no accident, for God intends for birds to be His messengers. The saying, "A little birdie told me," comes from the Bible. In Eccles. 10:20 we are warned to be aware of evil thoughts and words, "...because a bird of the air may carry your words and a bird on the wing may report what you say." There is just no getting around the importance of the role of birds. God loves birds and birds love God. There are thousands of bird lovers who could be led to love their creator if Christians would learn more about what the Bible says about them and share it with people. Jesus said, "Behold the birds of the air, "with the idea in mind that we would learn from them the values he intends to convey through them. Let us be aware that the study of birds is not for the birds, but is for the glory of God.

5. TALKING TREES based on Judges 9:7-15

One of the questions most often debated among amateur philosophers is whether or not a tree falling in the woods makes any noise if no one is around to hear it? From a biblical perspective there is never a time when the trees are not being heard, for if we take seriously the Lordship of Christ over all creation, then we know he hears not only the music of the spheres, but the songs of the forests as well. They are perpetually making sound, even when they are not falling.

Trees are very musical in the Bible. In I Chron. 16:33 we read, "then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord." In Ps. 96:12 we read again, "Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord." Isaiah mentions the trees getting excited several times. In 44:23 they break forth in singing, and in 55:12 all the trees of the field clap their hands. All of this is figurative and poetic language, but trees do literally make a variety of noises. Bark peels off some with noise; bamboo grows so fast it whines. The cannon-ball and shotgun trees actually have fruit that explodes and send seed flying up to 200 ft. There are crying trees on Pacific Ocean islands. The flowers make a peculiar crying sound when they open. The tropical Asian tree called the woman's tongue rattles like mad from the seeds in a foot long pod as the wind blows.

We seldom think about it, but trees do have more than a poetic connection with music. Many of the musical instruments of the Old Testament were made of wood, just as they are today. Man in his dominion over the trees has used them to produce music for the praise of God. We have modified trees in our piano and organ. Trees have other connections as well, for they have inspired men to write great music. One of the greatest examples is Beethoven. Listen to his prayer to God in the woods. "Almighty One, in the woods I am blessed...Every tree speaks through Thee, O God! What glory is in the woodland! On the heights is peace, peace to serve Him."

Bernard of Clairvoux wrote a number of hymns. The best known is Jesus The Very Thought Of Thee. He wrote this in the 12th century. "What I know of the divine sciences and Holy Scriptures, I learned in the woods and the fields. I have had no other masters than the beeches and the oaks." Many true lovers claim to learn much from the trees. This should not be surprising to the Bible student, for the first reference to knowledge in the Bible is connected with a tree. God filled the Garden of Eden with trees of beautiful and delicious fruit, and one of them was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Another unique tree that was there was the tree of life. All who love Jesus Christ will one day eat of this tree in heaven. It is the most unique tree ever, for Rev. 22:2 says it has 12 kinds of fruit, and yields its fruit each month. It will be a perpetual fruit of the month club to have access to this tree in heaven.

There is so much in Scripture about trees that we can only survey the subject in one message. There are over 500 reference to trees, and they play a major role in God's revelation. The text we are looking at in Judges 9 is not the most important, but it is the most

conspicuous. There are only two fables in all of the Bible, and both of them are fables of talking trees. Here and the other one is in II Kings 14:9. The one here has a powerful political message. Gideon, the great judge of Israel had 70 sons, and when he died one of his sons by the name of Abimelech decided to eliminate all the competition. He killed all of the sons of Gideon except Jotham. He was the youngest, and he hid. The people then made Abimelech their king by a great oak tree.

Jotham heard of this, and he came and stood on the side of the mountain overlooking them. He spoke this fable as a political speech. It has many valuable implications we cannot get into now, but the gist of it is this: The highest places in the state should be given only to the best of men. The tragedy, however, is that the best men are often content to let someone else do the job. The result is the greedy and unscrupulous get into places of leadership and everyone suffers. Bad men become leaders because good men would rather not get involved. The end result is they are involved in a fire that consumes good and bad alike.

The olive, the fig, and the vine represented the finest trees of the society. The bramble was good for nothing but fuel. The bramble represented Abimelech. He was the worst possible choice, but they chose him, and if you read on, you see the fable fulfilled. He became a treacherous tyrant, and he set fire to over a thousand men and women in the tower of Schechem. Many feel this is probably the oldest fable in history. It is different than most of the references to trees in the Bible in that it is quite negative. This is due to them being used to illustrate human nature. They are made to be complacent, foolish, gullible, and dangerous. Literal trees can have some negative aspects too. One little boy complained,

I've one complaint against the trees,
It doesn't seem just right,
The way they stand with outstretched arms
To catch a fellow's kite.

We have little to complain about, however, compared to David's son Absalom. He got his hair caught in an oak tree, and as he hung there he was killed. A tree helped get him murdered. On the other hand, it was the sycamore tree that aided little Zaccheus to see Jesus, and Jesus him, and so a tree helped him to salvation and getting into the kingdom of God. The positive values of trees outweigh any negatives. "Cursed in every man who is hung on a tree." That is the negative side of the cross. But that tree split time in half and opened the door to eternity for all who put their trust in the Christ of the cross. He bore our sins there, and makes it possible for us to be reconciled to God.

The tree has always been associated with man's salvation. God commanded Noah to make an ark of gopher wood, for only trees could save man in the flood. We are being saved every day by the trees, for they keep our atmosphere so it is breathable for us. Without them we would soon perish. In Isa. 11:1 we read, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." This is a tree being used to illustrate the coming of the Messiah. You have, no doubt, seen a stump of a tree that looks dead, and yet out of it will come shoots with new life. We have just such a tree in the back of our house. It was cut off, and yet out of the stump has come an entire new tree with many branches. Zech. 3:8 also refers to the Messiah as The Branch.

Jesus said he was the vine and we are the branches. Paul devotes almost the whole of chapter 11 of his letter to the Romans in describing the Church and Israel as branches being cut off and grafted into the olive tree. Tree imagery is everywhere in Scripture. Why is it that the tree is so prominent in biblical imagery? It is because the tree is the source of life in so many ways. The more you study their role in keeping life going in creation, the more you can understand Joyce Kilmer's poem-

**I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.**

The breath of life comes from trees. They take in carbon dioxide and give off the oxygen necessary for man to breathe. When you look at a tree, remember it is your friend providing you with the breath of life. So the tree of Calvary makes it possible for us to receive the Spirit of God, or the breath of God, that gives life to our spirit. All that the Holy Spirit does in our life is called the fruit of the Spirit, and again we see the tree image with its fruit. A tree is known by its fruit, and so is the believer.

In the Song of Solomon 2:3 Jesus Christ is described as fruitful tree among the trees of the woods. Jesus stands out from all the others in his value and usefulness to mankind. Like a fruit bearing tree in the midst of trees with nothing but leaves, is our Lord. As trees are the source of so much medicine for the health of man, so Jesus is the Great Physician. Trees play a role in healing, and are symbolic of Jesus.

Jonathan Edwards is most known for his hell fire preaching, but he also used trees in much of his teaching. He refers to the balm in Gilead, the chief medicine for healing wounds in the land of Israel. It is procured by piercing the balsam tree and the tree bleeds this healing balm. So the piercing of Christ and the flowing of his blood provides the healing stream for our souls. Moses cast a tree into the bitter water and they became sweet waters, and so Jesus when taken into the bitter waters of our life makes them sweeter, and we become like Ps. 1 says, "trees planted by the rivers of water, that bring forth their fruit in their season, and their leaf does not wither, and in all that he does he prospers."

Ps. 92:12-14 says, "The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green,..." God delights in fruit trees that bear much fruit. They are one of the marvels of his genius, and he loves them. He was concerned lest men in the heat of war be destructive of fruit trees and so in Deut 20:19 he commands his people, "When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down." God was concerned about ecology long before it became an issue with man.

Fruit trees that bore not fruit could be cut down. Jesus cursed a fig tree in a parabolic act to symbolize that Israel was a fruitless tree, and so the axe was to be wielded against it. But if Israel would repent she would become a fruitful tree, and the remnant who became the

church did just that. God spoke the same language in the Old Testament. God says this if his people will repent and return to him in Hos. 14:5-6, "I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon."

God even identifies himself with the evergreen in Hos. 14:8 where he says, "I am like a green pine; your fruitfulness comes from me." All through the Bible the tree plays a major role in imagery to illustrate the Persons of the Godhead. Trees also play a major role in the spread of the Gospel, and all of God's revelation in that the Bible is made from trees in most cases.

Tree illustrations do not always convey a message that gets across, however. A teacher was telling her class of how Sir Isaac Newton sat under an apple tree and watched an apple fall, and it led him to the discovery of gravitation. She said, "Isn't that wonderful?" "Yeah," said one guy in the back of the room. "But if he would have been sitting in school like we are now it never would have happened."

God is a great tree lover and planter. Just a few of the many verses will give you the picture. In Gen. 2:8-9 we read that God planted a garden in Eden, and out of the ground he made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. God created many trees just for their beauty. They serve no other purpose than that of pleasing the eye. God loves order and beauty. In Num. 24:5-6 Balaam in blessing Israel describes her beauty. "How fair are your tents, of Jacob.....like valleys that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the Lord planted, like cedar trees beside the waters." God's creation, and especially his trees, become a standard for testing the beauty of man made things. When man conforms to the order of God he achieves true beauty in his planning. When man plans a beautiful setting in the home or business, or office, he plant trees of some kind to enhance the beauty of the man made with the Creator made images.

When man becomes careless with trees and destroys them with no thought of their importance, he brings judgment on himself. So much sorrow and famine have been caused by the willful destruction of trees. But so many blessings have come to man by the preservation of trees. Arbor day used to be a popular holiday in America. It was a day for planting trees, and it had an impact on schools and churches, and it transformed the state of Nebraska.

God is the great tree planter. In Ps. 104:16 we read, "The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted." Jesus also speaks of the green thumb of his heavenly Father in Matt. 15:13. "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up." All of nature is the garden of God. Trees are the oldest living things on this planet. Some are four and five thousand years old, and so they have survived through almost all of the known history of man. They are marvels of God's handiwork.

Martin Luther loved his apple tree. It was a time of great turmoil and trial, but he said, "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree." The planting of a tree is a symbol of hope for the future. We had a tree in the back of our house in South Dakota that bore delicious apples. It was planted by a pastor of the

church I was serving over 20 years before I came. I was so grateful for a man who looked ahead and planted a tree that would be a blessing to other in the future.

The Bible implies that a man of wisdom will have a love of, and a knowledge of trees. Solomon was the wisest man of his time by God's grace. I Kings 4:29 says, "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand on the seashore." How did he use his wisdom, and how did he express it so as to draw kings and queens of all the nation to hear him? Verse 33 tells us: "He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall."

The Bible refers to 37 specific trees, and many of them with practical and symbolic value. The little we have considered of this forest of beauty and wealth is just enough to stimulate your awareness of God's love for trees, and the vast resource they are for growth in spiritual wisdom. One prominent educator said, "Any teacher who has not taste for trees, shrubs or flowers is unfit to be placed in charge of children." This may be extreme, but there is no doubt one would be a better teacher if they had a taste for trees. One would also be a more effective Christian witness if they had a taste for trees. Southey, the poet, wrote,

O Reader! Hast thou ever stood to see
The Holly tree?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives its glossy leaves
Order'd by an intelligence so wise'
As might confound the atheist's sophistries.

There are over 20 references to leaves alone in Scripture. Many of the most sacred objects in Israel's worship were made from trees. You have the Ark of the Covenant, and the cherubim. It was no accident that the Son of God incarnate was a worker with wood as a carpenter, and no mere accident that he was not stoned, but instead, nailed to a tree. God deliberately made the tree the most prominent symbol in his plan from paradise lost to paradise regained. The carpenter of Nazareth built a bridge to God on the tree of Calvary.

If we want to be deeply rooted in God's will; if we want the stability of Cedar of Lebanon, and the fruit of a tree planted by the river of water; if we long to be as pleasant and helpful as the palm in the desert, and if we want to be a tree of righteousness and one day eat of the fruit of the tree of life, then we must come to the Master of trees who died on a tree to set us free from the power and penalty of sin. We are not talking poetry, but plain fact. If we do not receive Jesus as Savior, and walk in the light of his love, we will have no right to eat from that tree of life. The cross is the greatest talking tree, for it is saying to all, "Come and taste of the fruit of salvation. Come and find rest, and receive from Christ God's very best."

6. THE TREASURES OF THE SNOW Based on Job 37:1-14 and 38:22

It was one of the strangest funerals on record. Nobody was being buried, but things were being buried in a lot of little graves, and in one, the Bible was being buried. Shackleton and his men were exploring the Antarctic when they were over whelmed by the forces of nature. Their ship, Endurance, unfortunately, could not endure the pressure of the ice, and it was crushed into splinters. Shackleton and his men were adrift on an island of ice. He was convinced their only hope was to move across the ice to the other side of the floe.

He ordered his men to sift through their belongings and reduce their luggage to two pounds each. It was a sad sight to watch as they each went apart, dug a hole in the snow, and began to dispose of their possessions. Bundles of letters they had from their wives were placed in their miniature mausoleums. Little gifts that they had received before leaving from England, and all of the sentimental things had to go, except the lightweight pictures of their wives and sweethearts.

Meanwhile, Shackleton had to make a decision as he sorted through things. What should he do with the ships Bible. It was a gift from the Queen Alexandra. It was too heavy to carry along, but could it be abandoned? Shackleton decided to compromise. He tore out the fly leaf burying the Queens inscription in her own handwriting, and he tore out one page of the Bible. Which page would you choose to save if you could only save one? It would not likely be the one which he choose, but you would not likely be in his situation either. He selected the leaf containing the 37th and 38th chapters of Job.

They were marooned on an island of snow and ice, and these chapters reminded them that God was the author and creator of snow and ice. It seemed like a God forsaken place, but these chapters kept them aware that they were never out of the hand of God, for His hand is in all of nature. God, in these chapters, is challenging Job and all men to look at nature and learn from it why they need to stand in awe before their Creator.

That part of nature we want to focus on is--snow. There are 25 references to snow in the Bible, and we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, and so snow is to be a part of creation that teaches us something about God. Doctor Talmage, that great preacher of nature sermons, tells of two rough wood cuts he saw as a boy. They hung side by side, and one portrayed a lad warmly clothed, looking out of the door of his farm house upon the first flurry of snow. Hearing the jingling sleigh bells and the frolic of his play fellows in the deep banks, he is clapping his hands and shouting: "It snows! It snows!"

The other sketch was of a boy, haggard and hollow-eyed with hunger, looking for the broken door of a wretched home. Seeing the falling flakes is to him a sign of more cold, less bread, and greater privation. Wringing his hands, and with tears rolling down his cheeks he cries: "It snows! It snows!" Two boys seeing the same thing, but with totally different emotions. What we have here is not just a matter of different strokes for different folks. Snow means different things to different people, but it also means different things to the same people at different times. Snow is one of those aspects of reality that is both a potential burden, and a potential blessing, and which it becomes depends a great deal upon your perspective.

Snow is a great deal like its creator. God is love, and the warmth of His grace is the source of all our comforts and joys. But God is also a consuming fire, and His judgment can be the source of great sorrow. Snow, like God, can be a blessing or a burden; a joy or a judgment. It has been both in my life as I am sure it has been in yours. You have no doubt been awed by its beauty, but also made to feel awful by its brutality.

Snow has been a major force that has determined the destiny of many people. Such was the case with Napoleon. In the winter of 1812 Napoleon marched away from Moscow with 200,000 men on a bright and beautiful October 19 morning. As the day wore on, the sky darkened, and soon the snow began to fly. Harmless little missiles, but in sufficient quantities one of nature's most deadly weapons. Multiplied billions of these insignificant flakes fell until the horses could not pull the supply wagons. The men began to fall from fatigue. Here was the army that brought Emperors to their knees, and made all men tremble. Now they do battle with the silent and gentle snowflake, and before it is over, 132,000 men perished. Such is the awesome power of snow.

Snow is one of God's object lessons on the power of unity. Get enough weak people together who could do nothing alone, and they can change the course of history by being united. It is a lesson Christians have a hard time learning. Christianity is constantly weakened by division and disunity. Christians are often as ineffective in blocking the road of evil as a hand full of snowflakes are in blocking a road. Snow is only powerful in quantity. When you get enough of these helpless flakes together there is no power on earth can stop them. They cave in roofs, bring down wires, and stop armies. If Christians could unite in their efforts there is no force of evil that could hold them back. Jesus said the very gates of hell could not prevail against them.

It is the combination of masses of little influences that change history. It is not just great leaders, but the persistent impact of millions of Christians letting their light shine, and being the salt of the earth, that is the key to Christianity's power in the world. Forgetting this lesson of the snow has led many Christians into defeat. They weak and helpless to make a difference, and because they cannot be an avalanche, they refuse to be a snowflake, and the result is the army of evil keeps marching, and is undefeated.

If only we could enter into the treasure of the snow as Job is advised to do by God. Snow is used often in the Word of God as a tool for teaching. Job 37 and 38 are two of the great nature chapters of the Bible. In them snow, hail, ice, and frost, all of the different forms of solid or frozen H₂O, are used to illustrate God's power. Let's look at snow and see what we can learn from its power. The first and most obvious power of snow is its-

I. POWER TO PURIFY. Isa. 1:18 is the best known text about snow. "Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow." Winter would be so ugly without snow. The landscape becomes so dead and dark, and the dirt and grime make everything ugly. But then the gentle snow falls from heaven and all is transformed. These billions of artists of the air reach down and paint this drab world bright. God never paints more beautiful than when he paints in white.

It is all done with as little noise as a cat on a carpet. The winter scarred landscape is clothed in sparkling splendor, and all of this is nature's illustration of the grace of God. Jesus shed His blood to do for us what snow does for the world. By His death Jesus made it possible for us to cover our sin scarred nature with the glorious garment of His snow white righteousness. It too is all done in such gentle silence. Noise is not needed for power. God's power, by which He cleanses, forgives, and beautifies our lives, is a gentle power.

If you go to a factory where lace is made, you will doubtless hear the whirl of many machines, but God makes His lace in silence. Let us learn this lesson from the snow. Great and powerful things do not need to be accompanied by external noise. Powerful things can and do happen in our lives in complete silence with no noise or fanfare. We deal with God whose grace falls like snow from heaven, and our guilt is covered, our sin forgiven, and our garment of righteousness is restored to splendor before God. And all of this power takes place in our inner being with no sound whatever.

Shelley, in Prometheus Unbound, compares the silent power of snow to the silent power of thought, which can build up until, like snow, it can produce an avalanche.

Hark! The rushing snow!
The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,
Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now.

As Jesus entered history so quietly, and yet made the biggest change in history, so the snowy blanket of heaven is let down in gentle quietness, and changes everything. David prayed, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Snow is the symbol of God's silent but powerful grace which covers a multitude of sins. R. E. Neighbor wrote,

The snow! The snow!
To men below
It brings a sparkling white;
It fills the earth
With joy and mirth
With music and delight.

So, Christ came down
My life to crown,
To make my black heart white;
To make me whole,
And fill my soul
With rapturous delight.

Snow is used in both testaments to describe God the Father and the Son. In Dan. 7:9 the

Ancient of Days had raiment as white as snow. On the Mount of Transfiguration, and when John saw Jesus in heaven, he had garments and hair as white as snow. Snow is like Jesus, not only in that it comes down from above to cover over the ugliness of winter, as Jesus covers over the ugliness of sin, but snow, like Jesus, comes to give life and life abundant. Snow has saved the lives of many people. David Lloyd George, one of England's great prime ministers, was called the snow baby. His mother was caught in a snow storm in south Wales when he was just a baby. She became lost in the hills, and a search party was sent out. She was found dead, but she had wrapped the baby in her outer garment and placed him under the snow. To everyone's surprise he was still alive. It was one of paradox's of snow, that as cold as it was, it was the source of preserving heat that gives life.

The snow cover one the ground prevents the heat that radiates from the earth from escaping. This warm air that is kept in the earth by the snow keeps the roots of plants and trees from freezing. The earth under the snow can be as much as forty degrees warmer than on the surface. The snow is God's blanket for the earth. It also provides shelter for rabbits and squirrels, and many other creatures who need to escape from the cold winter air. Not only is there life in snow from that perspective, but many have had the experience of the couple who crashed in a plane in the Canadian wilderness, and survived for six weeks on melted snow. The water of life is in snow, and gives us another parallel between it and Christ.

I never realize how important snow is to farmers until I lived in the country for a few years. Then I saw with my own eyes what snow does for bringing forth the fruits of the earth. Where the snow is deepest you can see the crops grow taller. There is a direct correlation between the depth of the snow and the height of the crops. Snow is a very literal treasure to the farmer. When snow falls it washes out the air, and what it washes out it brings down to the ground as fertilizer. Four major chemicals like ammonia and nitrates are brought to the earth by the snow. It would cost a farmer thousands of dollars to purchase these fertilizers that snow provides free. Everything that we eat is better and cheaper because of snow. Snow is a protector and promoter of life.

Milk-white down from the swans of the Lord,
Fleece from the Lamb of God,
Flung to the winds by the cherubs
A quilt for the sleeping sod.

We need to see the positive side of snow so we can be grateful in spite of the nuisance it is. It is part of winter, but it is also part of the defense against winter. We need to see snow flakes as guardian angels which protect the seeds from frost. They come not just to make life miserable, but to make it more fruitful and abundant. A total perspective on snow will give us a balance view, and help us be grateful even when we complain about the problems it causes.

John Greenleaf Whittier could see snow flakes as the winter flowers that help bring forth the flowers of spring. He writes,

Fill soft and deep, oh winter snow,

The sweet azalea's oken dells,
And hide the banks where roses blow,
And swing the azure bells!
O'erlay the amber violet's leaves
The purple aster's broad side home,
Guard all the flowers her pencil gives
A life beyond their bloom.

Paul said if there is anything lovely think on these things, and snow is one of the most lovely things in all of creation. It is so because it comes from the mind of Christ, the original of all the artistry of all creation. D. J. Burrell wrote, "Out of the mint of God up yonder falls this glorious wealth all stamped with His image and superscription." God told Job to consider the snow, for He ranks it with the stars and the seas among nature's wonders.

There are men who devote their life to the study of snow flakes. Wilson Bentley was a photographer of snow flakes, and he tells of their infinite variety. When he finds a special beauty he is full of anxiety, for if he fails to capture that beauty it will be gone forever. His job is so exciting because every flake is a new discovery. In 40 years he has never found two alike. Along with the thrill comes the despair that so few of these countless works of art can be preserved. He has photographed thousands of these exquisite beauties, but when he reflexes, he realizes that all of them together would only make one snowball. He says the study of snow forces you to think of the infinite. That is exactly why God told Job to consider the snow. It leaves you full of awe at what you can know, and even more awed at what you cannot know, because the finite cannot grasp the infinite. All of mankind together have never seen a fraction of God's master pieces of art in the snow. Julian Janus wrote,

Snow flakes falling, twisting, swishing,
There upon my window sill.
Who of heaven's great designers
Traced your lace with such great skill?
Soft and fragile web of mystery
Falling on my window sill.
I shall wonder, ever wonder
Whose hand held that magic quill.

One of the treasure's of the snow is that, the more you study it, the more you must acknowledge the Lordship of its Creator. Prescott said, "I think better of snow storms sense I find that though they keep a man's body indoors, they bring the mind out." Scientists, for example, tell us that about 15 tons of snow and rain fall on the earth every second the year around. The energy involved is mind boggling. To cover one square mile with ten inches of snow is equal to twice the energy in two of the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima. The power and the beauty of a snow storm is awesome. It is designed by God to keep us aware of our finiteness and weakness so that we might in wisdom worship Him who has all power. Snow is the source of abundant life also in that it provides man with so many enjoyable activities. There's no fun like snow fun. Millions enjoy winter sports, and children enjoy the fun of snow as one of the great fringe benefits of God's winter carpet.

F. W. Boreham, the great preacher of Australia, tells of the time when the paper reported that snow had fallen on the hills outside the city. Friends stopped to pick him up to go see it. It was so rare that close to the equator that the road was swarming with people wanting to see it. The experience did for him what God wanted it to do for Job. Boreham wrote, "I confess with shame that, in the days of my darkness and ignorance, I thought that prophets were few and far between. I fancied that God send one prophet to every million people. The snow flakes taught me that God sends a million prophets to every one of us. For the snow flakes are themselves prophets. They are a great and white-robed throng; a goodly fellowship; a multitude that no man can number. They are vocal with inspired speech."..... "Catch a snow flake on a sheet of glass; examine under a microscope, and what a triumph of architecture you have here! Not among the palaces of the Pharaohs nor among the temples of the Athenians could you find anything to rival this in daintiness, in symmetry, in splendor!" Many designers have admitted they get their ideas from the study of the Master's designer's work as they see it in the snow flake.

Yes, the heavens do declare the glory of God, but not just in the stars, but in the snow flake as well. We see there the love of God for the minute also. It is a vast universe, yet God designs every snow flake with a unique beauty of its own. It is clear that God cares for the small as well as the great. No man can study the snow and have any doubt that God cares for him as an individual. God desires every person to develop all their potential for beauty and uniqueness.

There is no aspect of life so small and insignificant that God is indifferent to it, for He is a God of minute detail. You say, what possible difference can it make to God that I have a minor problem or need? But then ask, what possible difference could it make to God that billions of snow flakes will melt unseen, yet each is made unique? Why bother with the insignificant individual snow flake? No person is lost in the crowd with God. He cares about every life, and every detail of every life. Every one is someone special to God. George Cooper wrote,

Brave your storm with firm endeavor,
Let your vain repining go!
Hopeful hearts will find forever
Roses underneath the snow.

Let every snowfall remind you of the treasure's of the snow, and let every flake remind you of the rose of God's love for every individual.

7. GOD'S AQUARIUM PSALM 104:24-35

Off the coast of the Italian Riviera a large bronze statue of Christ has been installed down in the depths of the sea as a symbol that Christ is Lord of the deep. Jesus is the only man in history who demonstrated He was also God by controlling this great force in creation-the sea. The disciples were amazed that He could say, "Peace be still," and the raging waves

were calmed. He controlled the fish so that when He told the disciples to cast their nets on the other side, they were filled to over-flowing. He sent Peter to catch a fish, and in it was found a coin by which to pay the temple tax. Jesus could even walk on the top the water demonstrating again that He was Lord of the sea. Not Neptune, not Posidon, the Greek and Roman gods of the sea, but the Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of all, including the sea.

God made a big deal of Lordship over the sea when He spoke to Job. In Job 38:8-11 God makes it clear He had to set limits to this great force, and say to the sea, "This far you may come and no further." We cannot imagine the awesome power involved in establishing the seas of the world, but we have the testimony of one who was there as an eye witness. Wisdom is personified in Prov. 8 and says in verse 24, "When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water." Then in verse 29 she adds, "When He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not over step His command and when He marked out the foundations of the earth."

What must it have been like to be there watching God hand-crafting the world as we know it? Maybe God videoed the whole thing and one of the wonders of heaven will be to watch this marvel of marvels. But wisdom was there, and she tells us her reaction as she labored at God's side in creation. In verses 30-31, she says, "Then I was the craftsman at His side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind."

Here is the Biblical basis for enjoying all that God has made. Wisdom was there when God made it, and she emphasizes that her primary emotion was that of rejoicing and delight. The Bible would support the judgment that something is spiritually wrong with the person who cannot see in God's works that which leads to joy and the worship of God as Creator. Not only does wisdom rejoice in all that God created, but all God created rejoices in God as its Creator. Psalm 96:11-12 makes it all inclusive. "Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them, then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy." In Psalm 98:7-8 we read, "Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy." Does the sea really sing, and does everything in it join the song?

Obviously we are into poetic language here, and we cannot take it literally that the seas sing or that rivers have hands to clap, or that mountains form a choir. Yet we must not dismiss poetry as if it has no relationship to reality. Every child has held a sea shell to its ear to hear the song of the sea. The sounds of the sea have inspired a lot of music. Anton Rubenstein called his second symphony, "The Ocean." An English composer wrote a series, "Sea Slumber Song" "Sabbath Morning At Sea" "Where Corals Lie" "The Swimmer." Ralph Vaughn's "Sea Symphony" first performed in 1910. But the most famous of all is "La Mer" by Claude Debussy, who spent three years writing it. He grew up with deep impressions of the Mediterranean, and in his music you could hear the crash of the waves and the gurgling of the backwash. Jacques Cousteau wrote that it "is surely the greatest calling forth of nature in a work for orchestra."

The fact is, the sea does sing and everything in it. We may prefer the songs of birds, but

God loves to be praised with any voice. Marie Poland Fish is appropriately named, for she is the director of the world's largest under water bioacoustic library. In other words, she is the world's authority on the sounds of fish. The U.S. Navy requested that she keep a file of biological sounds. Since 1954 she has accumulated hundreds of miles of audio tape of sounds from all over the world. Her conclusion is, every fish makes a noise. With hydrophones in the sea they pick up clicks, moans, squeaks, whistles, hissing, grunts, and other sounds from the sea. One fish makes a sound like running fingers along the teeth of a comb. Mrs. Fish is convinced that fish talk. If they talk, then they may also sing, and thus, literally join the universal praise to the Creator. Is it only poetry, or was Emerson seeing reality when he wrote,

Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in cups of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreasts mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers.
But in the mud and scum of things
There always, always, something sings.

According to Mrs. Fish, the shrimp and the crabs also make sounds. The point is, science does support the poetic and spiritual view of nature. There is more truth to it than we realize when we sing, "This is my father's world and to my listening ears all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres." There is music everywhere in God's creation if we listen. The Psalmist did listen, and that is why he commits himself to be a part of the universal choir and says in verse 33, "I will sing to the Lord all my life, I will sing praise to my God as long as I live." This song is a part of heavenly music, for we read in Rev. 5:13, "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them singing: To Him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

The Mediterranean sea gave us the great drama of Jonah and the whale, and all of the adventures of Paul and the sea, including his great shipwreck on the way to Rome. When the Psalmist in verse 25 raves about the sea being so vast and spacious, teeming with life, he was likely referring to this sea, and did not know that his words would be even more meaningful to those of us who live between the Atlantic and Pacific.

All of the oceans are connected, and so in a sense it is all one vast body of water that covers almost three fourths of the earth surface. No wonder some call this the ocean planet. If the Psalmist was amazed at the vastness of what he saw, how much more should we praise God for the massive work He has done with water? The Pacific is almost twice the size of the Atlantic, and has almost half the water of the world in it. It covers 63 million square miles, and goes from one pole to the other, and is larger than all the land of the world combined. It has the deepest place on earth. It goes down almost seven miles in the Mariana trench near the Philippines. This is one mile deeper than the tallest mountain, Mt. Everest is high.

The ocean is a wonder of the world that is to lead us to worship, for as the Psalmist says in verse 25, it is teeming with creatures both large and small. And the point is, these creatures, by their very being witness to a Creator that deserves our praise. Every cubic foot of sea

water has twenty thousand plants and one hundred and twenty animals. I don't know how many of these creatures the Psalmist saw, but he says they are without number, and modern man is still saying this.

The creatures of the sea are uncountable, and some that man has counted out are still there. The Coelacanth is a fish about five foot long with two tails, and the experts said it has been extinct for 70 million years. That was until 1938 when two fishermen off South Africa caught a live one. It is embarrassing trying to be an expert on the infinite works of God. Your chances of being wrong are excellent. The Neopilina snail was said to be extinct for 300 million years, but in 1958 four were found three miles down off of Peru.

The Psalmist is impressed both by the large and small creatures of the sea. He was, no doubt, thinking of the whale in the large category, for the blue whale is the largest living thing God ever made to live on this planet. All of the estimates of the largest dinosaurs that ever existed are around 50 tons. But the blue whale makes this a light weight contender, for they weigh in at 150 tons. The sea is the biggest place in the world, and is the home of the biggest creatures of the world. These biggest whales only eat small creatures like krill, for they have small throats, but they eat a ton at a time. They have tongues that weigh 4 ton, and one thousand pound hearts that pump eight tons of blood through their vast system. This whale could not swallow Jonah, but other types of whales could easily do so. Jonah would have only been an appetizer for the whale caught in the Azores that had a giant squid in its stomach that measured 35 feet five inches long. Jonah could have taken Goliath along for the ride in this kind of whale and had room left over.

But you may say, why horse around with all this whale blubber. Who cares about whales? Why don't we get more spiritual and deal with what is relevant to the Christian life? The answer is in verse 26 which is a surprising revelation that makes whales one of the marvels of life, and very relevant to our understanding of God's nature. The Psalmist says the ships go to and fro on the sea, but also that leviathan goes there, which God formed to frolic there. The Bible teaches here that God made whales for the fun of it. He made them just to play in the ocean. The idea of having a gold fish, or some other pet, just to watch them play and have fun in their environment is not mans idea. It was God's idea in creation. God enjoys the largest living creatures as they leap and splash and frolic in the depths of the sea. The Hebrew word for frolic is the same word used in Zech. 8:5 for boys and girls playing in the streets.

Do you realize what this verse is saying? It is telling us that God is a pet lover, and that the worlds largest living creature is God's pet, created just to add some fun to creation. God enjoys the animal kingdom for the same reasons we do. We go to zoos and enjoy the antics of the monkeys, or look out our window and enjoy the squirrels as they chase each other and play. Do they really play? God confirms that they do by telling Job in Job 40:20, "and all the wild animals play near by." God uses the same Hebrew word for the whale frolicking in the sea. The Bible gives us a picture of a Creator who can set back and enjoy the entertainment of the animal kingdom in all its playfulness.

Earnest Hemmingway has the old man of the sea say as he watched two porpoises frolicking, "They are good. They play and make jokes and love one another." The Porpoise

is one of the whale family, and they are the entertainers of the sea. Sailors marvel at the shows that they put on as they play follow the leader, and leap in unison, and race the ships. They can only swim at the speed of 11 knots, yet they can keep up with a destroyer going 20 knots because they have the ability to use the waves coming off the ship and hitchhike like a kid on roller skates holding on the bumper of a truck. They are a lot of fun, and they are also very smart. They can learn some things as fast as humans. The higher the form of life the more efficient any creature is in getting food, and thus, they have more time for fun. Lesser creatures spend most of their life just finding enough to eat. Porpoises spend most of their life in play.

Oceanographers call porpoises man's best friend. They are the equivalent of St. Bernard's in the Alps to men in the sea. They rescue men who are lost at sea, and they keep the sharks away. They can even kill sharks with their nose as a ram rod. They are even used to carry messages and tools for those who labor under the sea. If any man has a problem they have a signal that calls for the porpoise, and it will come immediately with a life line. They have saved many lives. Man also trains them to play water polo, basket ball, and even bowling. But they have their own favorite game. They are called the cowboys of the sea because they go out as a group and round up a school of fish. Then they surround it and one by one they leave the circle and dash in to get a fish, and then get back in formation while the next one goes. We could go on for hours about this amazing creature of the sea, but the point is this: The vast ocean is like God's aquarium, and He gets enjoyment out of the whales, and other creatures, as they frolic there.

In Job 41, God goes on and on for 34 verses describing one of His sea creatures, which is likely the whale. If you think it is a waste of time to study the details of sea creatures, you will have to take your complaint to God, for He loves nature and rejoices in every detail of His works and expects man to do the same, for it leads to worship. The study of every form of life is to lead us to worship its Creator. When it does, the study of any aspect of nature becomes a spiritual exercise. The study of nature is a part of human playfulness as we enjoy what God has made. Jesus said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of God. Children love to play. Could it be that at least part of what Jesus is saying is that we must enter into the enjoyment of God's creation, and learn to enjoy its playfulness to really know God?

Can you really be one with a man who loves nature if you hate it? Can you really be close to a woman who loves her pets if you can't stand them? So also, can we really be as close to God as we want to be, and as He wants us to be, if we do not have the same attitude about His creation as He does? This does not mean we have to enjoy all that God enjoys. God has an infinite capacity for enjoyment, and he does not have our fears and limitations. But the fact is, we need to be lovers of nature, and we need to enjoy some aspects of nature to be one with our Creator.

Everything that man learns about the mystery of the sea keeps confirming the wisdom of God as Creator. For decades man has concluded that life could not exist on the bottom of the ocean. The darkness could not support life, and the cold and the pressure would make life impossible. Then in 1960 Jacques Piccard sank to the bottom of the deepest trench in the world-seven miles down in the Pacific. It took four hours just to drop. When he looked

out on the deepest spot on the earth, where man nor light had ever been, the first thing he saw was a one foot long flat fish, and six foot above the bottom was a shrimp and a jellyfish. The facts wiped out all the theories, and men were forced to wonder how anything could survive at that depth. God had made the sea a playground, not just for whales, but for man as well, for some of the most fun man has on this planet is in exploring the wonders of the sea.

In verse 26 we read, "There the ships go to and fro." Because it has ever been so, the sea is not only the best place to study the creativity of God, but also of man. Dr. George F. Boss, and underwater archaeologist from the University of Penn. has written, "Virtually everything made by man, from tiny obsidian blades to huge temple columns, was carried at one time or another in ships, and much was lost at sea." Whole cities have been found under the sea, making it a fascinating place to study the civilization of man. But nothing can compare with the wonders of God that are found in the sea.

The Psalmist is impressed with both the large and the small creatures that God has made. We have referred to the blue whale, the largest of them all, but there are other huge creatures. The whale-shark can weigh up to 26,600 lbs., and a number of other sea creatures can weigh between 2 and 5 thousand lbs. But in contrast there are the smallest creatures. The goby fish near the Philippines are only a quarter to a half an inch long. They are the smallest vertebrate on the planet. The ocean has the largest and the smallest creatures on earth. The sea also has the creature that makes the greatest change from birth to adulthood. The ocean sunfish starts at one tenth of an inch long and grows to 8 foot, and weighs 1200 lbs.

The largest and most stupendous structure created by living creatures is the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. It is 1,242 miles long and 93 miles wide. It is 8 million times greater than the Great Pyramid, and 100,000 times greater than the Great Wall of China. All the sea is a wonderland, but here God pulled out all the stops. The tiny polyps no bigger than a pin head have united by the countless trillions to create this wonder of the sea. Everything about it is beautiful and immense. There are great varieties of coral with heart tugging beauty, and everything is on a massive scale. Sea creatures that are small elsewhere are large here. Star fish are a foot across and clams are five to six feet long. Even butterflies have wings that span eight inches, and fire flies are several inches long.

The Reef itself is a living, growing thing of beauty, and all of it calls out to man to worship the Creator of such a marvel. Many people go to see this exotic extravaganza and drift over the coral garden in a glass bottom boat. Most of us will never see this handiwork of God, just as the Psalmist did not see all that he was aware of in his day. But he knew the world and sea were filled with creatures both large and small who were a part of the universal choir that rejoiced in their Creator.

The Psalmist says that God is the one who organized the whole process by which the teaming masses of the sea are fed. Jacques Cousteau has made films about this wonder. It is beyond our comprehension how so many multiplied billions of creatures can be fed daily, but God does it, and the story of how He does it is one wonder after another. Eighty per cent of the world's animal life is in the sea, and everyday God feeds them all, and the Psalmist is

impressed. Then, on top of that, man takes millions of tons of creatures out of the sea to feed himself. The sea is a source of life and blessings beyond description. God loves the sea and all the creatures of the sea, and in some way they all obey the words of Psalm 148:7 which says, "Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depth."

The value of studying any part of God's creation is that it will lead you to appreciate His wisdom and join the rest of creation in praising the Creator. Let me conclude with the testimony of two famous men. Jonathan Edwards is considered by many to be the greatest mind America has ever produced. He was the preacher that started The Great Awakening, one of America's greatest revivals. He is most famous for his sermon, Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God. He could be quite severe, but he was also one of history's greatest nature lovers.

He said, "Immediately after my conversion God's excellency began to appear to me in everything: In the sun, in the moon, in the stars, in the waters, and in all nature. The Son of God created this world for this very end, to communicate to us through it a certain image of his own excellency, so that when we are delighted with flowery meadows, and gentle breezes, we may see in all that only the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ. When we behold the fragrant rose and the snow-white lily, we are to see His love and His purity, even so the green trees, and the song of birds, what are they but the emanation of His infinite joy and benignity?

The crystal rivers, and the murmuring streams, what are they but the foot steps of His favor and grace and beauty. When we behold the brightness of the sun, and the golden edges of the evening cloud, and beauteous rainbow spanning the whole heaven, we but behold some adumbration of His goodness and His glory. And without any doubt this is the reason that Christ is called the Son Of Righteousness, The Morning Star, The Rose Of Sharon, The Lily Of The Valley, The Apple Tree Among The Trees Of The Wood, A Bundle Of Myrrh, A Doe, and a Young Hart."

Nathaniel Hawthorn felt nature spoke of immortality. He wrote, "I recline upon the still unwithered grass, and whisper to myself: -oh, beneficent God! And it is the promise of a blessed eternity; for our Creator would never have made such lovely days, and have given us the deep hearts to enjoy them, above and beyond all thought, unless we were meant to be immortal."

We haven't begun to study all that the Bible says about nature, but what we have studied should make it clear, God expects His people to love what He has made and join the voices of all creatures in praise to Him as Creator.

8. ROCK OF AGES Based on Psalms 61

1776 was the year the United States of America was born. It was also the year one of the favorite hymns of all time was born, and that was Rock Of Ages. The author was an

Englishman named Augustus Montague Toplady. He wrote 133 poems and hymns, but they were all forgotten. This one, however, lives on, for it gives an image of Jesus that people need. We need to know that all else can crumble and collapse, but Jesus is that Rock of Ages, that solid rock on which we can stand when all other ground is sinking sand.

Toplady died at the early age of 38, but he was secure in Jesus, and his hymn has been a favorite at funerals ever since, for it reminds us that though life is insecure, Jesus is not. He is the Rock of Ages. Toplady's last words were, "My prayers are all converted into praises." He felt secure because he had built his life on the solid rock. His hymn has been translated into almost every known language. What is surprising is that people know this hymn more than they know the Bible reference that gave Toplady the idea. It is really rather shocking how often God and Jesus are called the Rock in the Bible. It is one of the major names of God.

Paul in I Cor. 10:3-4 tells us Jesus was with the people of God in the Old Testament disguised as a rock. The rock from which water poured out to keep them alive in the desert was Jesus. He wrote, "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them and that rock was Christ." Jesus has always been the source of the water of life, and has always been the Rock of Ages. He was the source of life and security for God's Old Testament people just as He is for God's New Testament people. They just did not know it was Jesus as we do. But they knew their God was a Rock, and they sang of it often. In Psa. 18:31 we read, "For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God." In Psa. 31:2-3, "Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue, be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me."

England made the Rock of Gibraltar the strongest fort in the world, for it is cut right into the rock and defended with canons. A certain insurance company has capitalized on this strong image, and the Rock of Gibraltar is their trademark. God's Old Testament people had this image long before, and God was their Rock. They didn't just have a piece of the rock, they had the whole Rock. Psa. 71:3 stresses it again: "Be my rock refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress."

There are so many references to God as the Rock that we cannot read them all, but let me give you just phrases that give you a clear impression.

Psa. 28:1, "To you I call, O Lord my Rock."

Psa. 42:9, "I say to God my Rock."

Psa. 78:35, "They remembered that God was their Rock."

Psa. 89:26, "You are my Father, my God, the Rock, my Savior."

Psa. 92:15, "The Lord is upright, He is my Rock."

Psa. 95:1, "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation."

There are many others, but these ought to be sufficient to impress us that the Rock was a favorite image of God in the Old Testament, and of Jesus in the New Testament. Bible lands were rock filled lands where rocks were a part of their way of life. This fact motivated me to

study rocks, and what I learned was amazing. Rocks are one of the most valuable resources in the world, and our lives are more dependent upon rocks than we realize. Let me give you some examples, for the more we see the value of rocks, the more we will treasure what we have in the Rock of Ages.

Many of the wonders of the world were made of huge rocks, and because of this they have survived in part to this day. You have for example:

The Great Wall of China.
The Great Pyramid of Egypt.
The Parthenon of Greece.
The Aztec Temple of the Sun.
The Stonehenge in England.

The rock is the symbol of stability, and that is why when men build something to last they use rock, or stone if you prefer. The two terms are used as synonyms in the New Testament. Peter in I Pet. 2:6-8 calls Jesus the Stone, the Cornerstone, the Precious Stone, the Stone the builders rejected, the Capstone, a Stone that causes men to stumble, and a Rock that makes them fall. Jesus is the Rock and the Stone.

There are endless parallels between men's use of rocks and stones, and who Jesus is. Jesus is the Rock, and Jesus is the Way. If you study the history of roads, you will discover that those that have lasted are made of rock. The old Roman roads of New Testament days are still being used where they were made of stones. The old cobblestone roads of early America are still being used in places, and the modern superhighways are built with a foundation of various size rocks, and so is the bed for railroad tracks. If you want to make a way to anywhere be lasting, you make it with rocks. Jesus is the permanent way to God and eternal life, for He is the Rock of Ages. On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. Man knows that anything that lasts has to be built on a solid rock foundation. That is why there are over three thousand commercial crushed rock plants in the United States. They play a major role in the construction of our nation.

If you go to the Capital of our country-Washington D.C., you will discover that it conveys an image of strength and endurance, for all of its major buildings and monuments are made of quarried sandstone, limestone, or marble. The White House, the Capital, the Supreme Court, the Smithsonian Institution, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Monument, and the Jefferson Memorial, plus many of the lesser known buildings are all made of this material.

When God reveals the eternal city where we will dwell forever, it is a city of such strength and endurance. The temple is Jesus-the Rock of Ages, and the walls, according to Rev. 21:17, are around 200 feet thick. There has never been such a city for security. And for beauty its vast walls are all decorated with the most precious stones God has ever created on this planet. The study of precious stones in the Bible is a subject in itself that we can only mention at this time. Rocks are the source of great riches. Almost all the treasures of this world are hidden in rocks, which are the many jewels of history.

Rocks were a part of the everyday environment of Bible people. They were everywhere, and they were used constantly for building, grinding, and for weapons. Not only did man use rocks to build altars to God, but God used rocks to give His laws to man, for Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments on two slabs of rock. When something was written in stone it was meant to be permanent. When God chooses a man to build His kingdom He chooses a rock-like man. The Rabbi's said this of Abraham: "When God looked on Abraham, who is to arise, He said, "Low, I have found a rock on which I can build and found the world. For this reason He called Abraham a rock."

It is of interest that Jesus chose Peter to be the leader of the 12, and they were the foundation of his church. Petra is the Greek word for rock, and Jesus said, "On this Petra I will build my church." Peter, who is often more like quicksand, was made a rock that Jesus could build on. Petrology is the science of rocks. A specialist is called a Petrologist. All Christians need to be Petrologists who specialize in the study of the Rock of Ages. Jesus said the foolish man builds on the sand and the wise man builds on the rock, and so He labored with Peter until he was a solid rock on which He could depend. We call certain people pillars of the church, because they can be counted on. They are the rocks on which any church stands. Without such rocks the foundation of any church will crumble. All that lasts depends upon rocks. The rock is-

**Firm and not fickle.
Stable and not sinking.
Permanent and not passing.
Fixed and not fluctuating.
Established and not erratic.
Constant and not changing.**

These are the characteristics of a Christian who is Christlike. They are rock like in their stability, solidarity, strength, and security. When somebody says of another that he or she is a rock, you know they are people who are dependable. Most of God's people are like David. They have their solid side and their weak side. That is why David very wisely calls out to God for a greater stability than he has in himself. In Psa. 61:1-2 we hear his prayer: "Here my cry, O God listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I." He is the king and you can't go any higher in rank than the king. Yet, he knows there is a rock higher than him, and he wants to stand on that exalted rock. We have this rock in Jesus. This theme is one that is common as we march upward to Zion pressing on to higher ground.

**"Lord lift me up and let me stand
By faith on heaven's table-land.
A higher plain than I have found,
Lord plant my feet on higher ground."**

The greatest adventure of life is the adventure of ascending the rock that is higher than I. I have only climbed one mountain in my life, and that was in the Black Hill of South Dakota, and it was more work than pleasure. But I remember the great pleasure I had as a youth

climbing the rocks around the Sioux Falls, and when Lavonne and I dated, one of our favorite places was the Palisades of Garretson, South Dakota. These solid rock formations were plenty high, and climbing them was sheer pleasure. There is a feeling of achievement to climb up a rock cliff, and to leap from rock to rock over rushing water. Much of my youthful adventure was around rocks. Now I see that the adventure of the Christian life is also one that revolves around the rock that is higher than I-the rock of my salvation-the Lord Jesus.

There are risks in rock climbing, and the number of people killed trying to scale the mountain heights is staggering. Mt. Mitchell in North Carolina is considered the highest peak in the United States East of the Rockies. It is 6,711 feet above sea level. It is named after Professor Elisha Mitchell of the University of North Carolina. In 1857 on his fourth climb up the mountain, he fell to his death. Later his ashes were taken to the top and buried there. He loved to get to the top of that rock that was higher than he. It was not a goal that most of us would consider worth the risk, but in the spiritual realm this same desire is to be the motivation of our life. We are to long to be led to that Rock that is higher than us, and be ever climbing to a higher level of stability in Christ. If we are not so climbing, we will be sliding downward to that sand that is lower. You can't stand still in the Christian life. We are always climbing higher or slipping lower.

A popular hymn that grew out of the great Moody-Sankey revivals captured this message of David:

"Oh, safe to the rock that is higher than I,
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly;
So sinful, so weary, Thine, Thine would I be
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I am hiding in Thee.

In the calm of the noontide, in sorrow's lone hour,
In times when temptation casts o'er me its power;
In the tempests of life, on its wide, heaving sea,
Thou blest Rock of Ages, I'm hiding in Thee."

There are a lot of famous rocks in the world, but none of them can be relied upon for permanence but the Rock of Ages. I remembered when I looked down on the Plymouth Rock and felt disappointed, for it was just a huge rock in the sand, and not as large as I had imagined. It was famous, but not very impressive. Far more impressive is the rock sculpture of Mt. Rushmore. It is very impressive, but the fact is, it is wearing away all the time, and needs repairing, for the weather is creating decay in this massive rock work of art. When Jesus comes again even the mountains will melt with fervent heat, and so there are no rocks in history anywhere that are safe for all eternity, except the Rock of Ages. He is not only the rock higher than I, but the rock higher than all. He is the ultimate, the absolute, the Alpha and Omega of rocks.

People put their trust in so many rocks that are not the Rock of Ages. Diamonds, which represent the precious stones of the world, captivate many minds and hearts, and people put their trust in these rocks of riches, but they will not stand anyone in good stead when the

judgment comes. In the song of Moses in Deut. 32, Moses calls the gods of the heathen their rocks, with a small r, and he says in verse 31, "Their rock is not like our Rock." The world is full of rocks that people worship, but there is only one Rock you can rely on, and that is the Rock of Ages.

About 180 years ago the Queen of the Hawaiian Islands became a Christian. She desired to lead the people out of their captivity to the pagan gods. She decided to defy the much feared goddess of the volcano-Kilauea. Against the terrorized pleadings of her subjects, she began to walk over the rough lava beds freely eating of the forbidden berries sacred to Pele. She fearlessly ascended to the brink of the crater and began to hurl rock after rock into the great lake of fire challenging the fire goddess to avenge herself. Because of her stand on the solid Rock of Jesus, she could defy the superstitions of her people, and thousands of Hawaiians accepted Jesus as their Savior. She was saying, this rock is not like our Rock. She led them to the Rock that was higher than her, and them, and all other rocks-the Rock of Ages.

This theme is in many hymns and songs:

1. Rock of Ages, which we all know.
2. On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand.
3. Built On The Rock.
4. My Anchor Holds And Grips The Solid Rock.
5. The Lord's Our Rock.
6. Be Our Rock, Our Shield, Our Tower.
7. He Hideth My Soul In The Cleft Of The Rock.

The Bible proclaims it over and over; hymnology sings it over and over-Jesus is our Rock. He is the most precious Rock in the universe for strength, value, and durability. Jesus was put in a rock tomb, and a huge rock was rolled to cover the entrance. The Rock of Ages could not be so confined within that rock.

The Roman rock was the only lock
They had to keep Him in the grave.
It was a real shock when He rolled away that rock,
And came forth in life to save.

You don't have to be a rock collector to be a good Christian, but you do have to be a rock lover-that is a lover of the Rock of our salvation. The Old Testament saints like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were always collecting rocks to build an altar to God, and I thought that went out with the Old Testament, but not so. Even in modern times men of God meet with God around a pile of rocks. Listen to this testimony of Bruce Larson from his book *The Presence*. He is one of the most popular preachers in our day, and so is the other pastor he writes of:

"I once heard God speak in a field near Minocqua, Wisconsin. I was with my long-time friend, Lloyd Ogilvie, and we were at the time just out of seminary and starting our ministries. We built a pile of rocks, like those Ebenezer described so often in

the Old Testament, and made a covenant with the Lord. Our prayers went something like this: "Lord, we want to be your people. We pray you will use us to build your church." I'm sure I could never find that place today. But in my mind, those stones are still remembered and that covenant is genuine. Lloyd and I can only go back in memory to that holy place where God did business with us."

Rocks can always be relevant to the spiritual life if we focus on all the ways they can remind us of the Rock of Ages.

9. THE BIBLE AND ASTRONOMY Based on Psa. 8

When Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father He took a throne that made Him sovereign, not just over the earth, but over the entire universe. Before He ascended He said, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me." Paul tells us that He was exalted above all principalities and powers. There is no power in the universe greater. He is the ruler of the universe. He is the King of Kings, and by His power all things were created, and by His power all things hold together. This means that everything that astronomy is about is the handiwork of Christ. He is the Author, Sustainer, and Lord of outer space and all space. Howard C. Robins asks-

And have the bright immensities
Received our risen Lord,
Where light years frame the Pleiades,
And point Orion's sword?

Do flaming suns his footsteps trace
Through corridors sublime?
The Lord of interstellar space
And conqueror of time?

The Bible answers, yes! That is why the Bible and astronomy agree on the value of setting our affections on things above. Even the physical things above like the Sun, moon, stars, and comets can teach us and lead us to spiritual depth. David says that two things happen to him when he studies the heavens. He becomes small and God becomes great. Astronomy can help fulfill the two important goals of magnifying the majesty of God, and making man humble.

Harris Kirk in *Stars, Atoms, And God* says, "It is not always safe to look at the midnight sky. Those distant points of light we call the stars have more than once burned the sense of nothingness into man and left him desolate amid the baffling mysteries of this mortal life." There can be no doubt that one of the reasons for the vastness of the universe is to compel men to forsake pride, and to fall in awe before their Maker. When God spoke out of the

whirlwind to Job He asked him, "Can you bind the chains of Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?" He asked other questions about the heavens also in order to show Job how small and powerless he was. In the light of what we know of the vastness of creation our whole earth is like one grain of sand on a vast ocean beach.

If you were to view one of the pictures taken of our galactic system by the 200-inch telescope on Mt. Palomar, in order to see the earth the picture would have to be enlarged until it covered the whole continent of Asia, and then it would be visible only under the most powerful microscope. Our earth is ultra-microscopic, and man is infinitesimally small. God wants man to be conscious of this fact of reality for it keeps him humble. The smallness of the earth is stressed in the Bible. In Isa. 66:1 God says, "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool." In Psa. 1:13 God is exalted high and has to look down even to see the heavens. "The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens! Who is like the Lord our God who is seated on high, who looks far down upon the heaven and the earth?" In Isa. 40:15, 17, we read, "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales..." "All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are accounted by Him as less than nothing and emptiness." In other words, all the mighty weapons of man are really just small potato's to God. They are like a gnat on the Sun.

God displays power in the heavens that stagger the imagination. Our Sun radiates in one second more energy than man has used since the beginning of civilization. A solar flare that blocked out radio communication all over the world in 1960 was equal to a force of a billion hydrogen bombs. All of this power magnified billions of times over throughout the universe tells us of the glory of God. Yet even this does not scratch the surface of the omnipotence of God. In verse 3 David calls it all the work of God's fingers. Most of you men have demonstrated your strength by challenging a child to pull with both hands as you pull with just a finger. David says that all the amazing power of the universe is just the display of the strength of God's fingers.

Jesus used the same illustration when He referred to His miracles in Luke 11:20 where He said, "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast our demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." In the might of the universe and the miracles of Christ we have only seen the power of God's fingers. This biblical concept of the almighty and infinite power of God is what keeps a Bible believer from idolatry. The awe and wonder that the universe compels men to feel has often lead them to worship the creation because they do not have an adequate concept of the Creator. If you start right, however with a biblical concept of God, the study of astronomy will lead you to a greater worship of Him.

Let us take note of the fact that God the Father and the Son are given astronomical names in Scripture. Both are identified with the Sun. In Psa. 84:11 we read, "The Lord God is a Sun..." In Mal. 4:2 the Messiah is referred to as, "The Sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings." Hymn writers have picked up this theme and one of them is titled, "Sun of my soul, thou Savior dear." Another goes like this:

Great Sun of righteousness arise;
Bless the dark world with heavenly light.
Thy Gospel makes the simple wise;

Thy laws are pure, thy judgments right.

The Sun is the king of the sky and is an appropriate symbol of the King of Kings and ruler of all creation. Many are the parallels of the work of the Sun and the work of Christ. The Sun is the source of light, life, and health. Jesus is all of this as well for the spirit of man. Jesus is not just the source of light and life for the spirit of man, but is also the source of physical light and life. The energy of the literal Sun is the energy of Christ. This means that every lost person on the earth is being blessed by the cosmic Christ whom we worship. In the physical realm the energy of Christ is distributed to all people. He makes the Sun to shine on the just and the unjust alike. In the spiritual realm the energy of Christ flows into those lives which submit to His Lordship. As Christians we live under the grace and power of Christ that comes both indirectly through nature, and directly through His Word and Spirit. In eternity, where only those who submit to His Lordship will be present, there will be no need of the Sun, for Christ will be our source of light and life directly.

Meanwhile, as we live under the indirect blessing of Christ through His natural creation, we ought to be aware that it is our Lord who give us light and life through the literal Sun.

**In darkest shades if He appear,
My dawning is begun;
He is my soul's Bright Morning Star,
And he my Rising Sun.**

Jesus said, "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." If we walk in the light of Christ our Sun never sets. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of perpetual day, for God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. The Christian can say that where they live there is never a sunset, for they live in Christ who is the perpetual Sun.

Jesus is also connected with the stars in Scripture. A star led the wise men to Him as a child, but before that He was called the star out of Jacob in Num. 24:17, and after that He is called the Morning Star in Rev. 22:16. Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." The morning star is also the evening star, and is a fitting symbol for Christ who is the first and the last. Each order of knighthood had a star connected with it, and when a general returned from battle victorious he would receive a gold and jeweled star. So it will be for those believers who fight the fight of faith to the end. Jesus says in Rev. 2:28 of such a victor, "I will give him the morning star."

Christians should have astronomical aspirations, for both the Old Testament and New Testament refer to such a hope. In Dan. 12:3 we read, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." Wisdom and turning people to righteousness are the same thing. We have sung the song, "Will there be any stars in my crown?" It is a reference to the reward for winning another to Christ. The stars can be reminders to us of our high goal as believers, and of our great reward. We can also let others know how we follow a star that we know in Christ.

He is a Star. He breaks the night,

Piercing the shades with dawning light
I know His glories from afar;
I know the bright and morning star.

As Christians we have a personal interest in the study of the stars, for they are not only symbolic of our Savior and our eternal reward, but they are literally His work of art. The heavens declare the glory of God and they praise Him. Psa. 148:3 says, "Praise Him Sun and moon, praise Him all you shining stars. Praise Him you highest heavens." Men observing the perpetual praise that God receives from His creation have expressed a longing to be a part of it. Henry Vaughn wrote,

I would I were some bird or star,
Fluttering in woods, or lifted far
Above this inn and vale of sin.
There either star or bird shall be,
Shining or singing still to thee.

This, of course, is a subtle form of escapism. In spite of the hindrance of sin we too are to let our light shine before men in such a way that God is glorified. We are to sing songs in the night that compel men to consider the joy that is in Christ. Like all of God's creation we are to declare the glory of God by lives of love, order, and harmony so that men long to know our maker and redeemer.

The biblical perspective assumes that people are aware of the basic facts of astronomy that can be observed by the naked eye. When God spoke to Job in Job 38:31-32 He asked, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children?" In those questions God took for granted that Job knew about the two most conspicuous constellations, as well as the whole of the 12 constellations of the Zodiac. And, of course, he would know of what we call the big dipper. God expected Job to be familiar with these things, and he was. In Job 9:9 Job says of the wonders of God's creation, "Who made the bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the South."

The prophet Amos in 5:8 also refers to what was common knowledge in his day when he refers to God as, "He who made the Pleiades and Orion." These two constellations have played great roles in the history of astronomy, literature, and poetry. Orion is the mighty hunter, and is connected with the Nimrod in the Old Testament. The Greeks pictured the stars in the Pleiades as doves flying away from the great hunter Orion. Tennyson the poet wrote,

Many a night from yonder ivied casement,
Ere I went to rest,
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the west,
Many a night I saw the Pleiades, rising thro' the mellow shade,
Glitter like a swarm of fireflies tangled in a silver braid.

Certainly every Christian should have enough interest in astronomy to get acquainted

with those well-known objects of beauty in the sky so that they can enter into the experience of joy and awe that results from such knowledge. It also opens the door to witness to the majesty of the Creator. There are some astronomical facts in Scripture that have caused problems for the believer. The Sun standing still in Joshua 10 is the greatest. The question is not whether God could do it or not, for nothing demanding power is impossible to God. The question is, would God do it? Would He perform such a colossal miracle for the sake of helping Joshua win a battle?

Bible scholars have looked for ways to interpret that event in such a way that is taken as a literal account of what happened in the experience of Joshua, and yet does not compel us to believe that God stopped the whole solar system. There are several ways to do this. The one that I prefer is to see it as a miracle of the supernatural refraction of the Sun's rays. The Sun would continue to shine in the heavens and provide the necessary light, and it would be following its daily pattern without interruption. This makes more sense, and is no less a marvelous miracle. Robert Wilson writing in Moody Monthly said, "I confess to a feeling of relief, as far as I myself is concerned, that I shall no longer feel myself forced by a strict exegesis to believe that the Scriptures teach that there actually occurred a miracle that involves so tremendous a reversal of all the laws of gravitation."

There is no conflicts between the Bible and astronomy. The Bible encourages the study of the heavens, and astronomy encourages the belief in an almighty designer of the universe. Astronomy also supports the doctrine of creation. The second law of thermodynamics, which involves the running down of the universe, or the loss of energy, indicates that if the universe was eternal it would already have run down. The universe had to have begun at some limited point in the past.

Einstein's theory that space is finite but unbounded also fits the biblical perspective. Just as the earth is finite but unbounded so that you can travel on the earth and never stop, but come back to where you started, so is it if you travel into space at the speed of light. Somewhere between 200 and 500 billion years later you will be back where you started. That is a big circuit, but it is not infinite. It is finite, and that means that astronomy supports the statement of David that all the works of God that man can see are the mere works of His finger. They are His finite works that shall pass away. It is good to study them, but greater yet, and infinitely more important, is the study of the works of God's heart. His fingers gave us the Sun, moon and stars, but His heart gave us the Son of Righteousness, and the star of Jacob, which is spiritual astronomy with infinite values. The most important question is not what do you know of the heavens, but what do you know of Him who made the heavens, and who died for us that we might be in heaven forever? The big question is, is the Lord of heaven the Lord of your life? It is no problem being so small if you know the Lord of all.

Astronomy is useful to us as a means of measuring or illustrating God's nature, for it always deals with that which is most near to the infinite. The Psalmist in Psa. 103:11 writes, "As the heaven is high above the earth so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him." Hear is a comparison of the physical creation and the spiritual reality of God's mercy. Just how merciful is God? The Bible looks to the vocabulary of astronomy to express it. How high is the heaven above the earth? There are different levels of heaven, of course, and you could call the clouds of heaven one level, but the heaven is very close to what is an infinite

distance away from the earth. Just our galaxy is 80 thousand light years in diameter, but it is a drop in the bucket of the universe.

Astronomy helps us conceive of the difference between the finite and the infinite. God uses His creation for a visual illustration. In Isa. 55:9 He says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." A more constant reflection on the facts of astronomy will aid us in keeping away from the petty, and help us aim high. His majesty and loftiness need never to cause us to fear that He has no concern for our little lives, for Psa. 138:6 reminds us, "Though the Lord be high, He has respect unto the lowly." Astronomy keeps us humble, but also helps us maintain a spirit of adoration for the Creator of all the wonders it discovers.

10. THE WINGS OF THE WIND BASED ON PSALM 104:1-12

When Columbus and his crew were being blown West by the Atlantic trade winds, one of the reasons they were so fearful was they did not know how they could get back home against the wind. Fortunately they discovered not only a new world, but new winds that carried them back to Spain. They returned as heroes on the wings of the wind.

The ancient world was almost completely dependent on wind power for travel on the sea, and all of the great adventures that began the modern era depended on wind power. Columbus could not have discovered America without the wind, and Magellan could never have sailed around the world without wind.

Dr. Luke in describing the travels of Paul makes it clear that where you got to, and when, was all up to the wind. In Acts 27:4 he writes, "From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us." In verse 7 he says, "When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete." Then comes the long description of the hurricane force wind that swept them across the sea eventually destroying the ship. The point is, man all through history has been at the mercy of the wind. It is one of nature's greatest forces. It would take thousands of atomic bombs exploding every minute to match the energy of even a modest gale. It is no wonder that man has sought for ways to harness the power of the wind. Hammurabi, back somewhere around 2000BC, planned to use windmills to irrigate, and in the second century BC we have a record of a windmill in Alexandria, Egypt that was used to play an organ.

Prov. 30:4 pictures God holding the winds of the world in His fists, and all through the Bible God is the controller of the winds that produce the music of nature as they go singing through the canyons and the forest.

"God holds in His hands the winds of the East,

**And the West and the South and North:
And He stands in love in the skies above,
And He sends them leaping forth."**

The winds of all four directions are dealt with in the Bible, and each has its own special purpose. This is a study in and of itself.

I have been in a forest when the wind is coming through the trees, and I have heard the music of the trees. It was somewhat scary until I knew what it was, and then it became beautiful. I can now appreciate the words of the unknown poet-

**"God is at the organ-
I can hear
A mighty music
Echoing far and near.**

**God is at the organ
And the keys
Are storm-strewn moorlands
Billows, trees!"**

This image of God creating music with the wind I have had in my mind before, for much of the music of man is made by wind propelled through instruments. But not until I began to study Psalm 104 did I ever imagine God riding on the wings of the wind. God is portrayed as being way ahead of man in His recognition of the value of wind power for travel. This must have been a popular image in Israel for in Psalm 18:10 we read again, "He mounted the cherubim and flew; He soared on the wings of the wind." Then in II Sam. 22:11 David pictures God soaring on the wings of the wind. Three times the Bible tells us God rides the wings of the wind.

The Hebrew mind could look up into the cloud filled sky as the wind pushed them rapidly across the heavens and imagine God using the clouds as His chariot, and wind as His fuel for flying. Our more scientific mind can only conclude that this is poetry, and that God, who is already everywhere in His omnipresence, does not need to travel across the skies. But the Hebrews knew this too, and so we do not need to take it so literally that we imagine God jumping on a cloud and actually riding it anymore than we need to try to picture the wind with actual wings. Of course we are dealing with poetry here, but poetry that is telling us something important about God and His relationship with nature.

We know God does not need wind to travel, but who are we to say that God never enters His creation to enjoy the beauty of what He has made, and actually ride the wings of the wind? God enters earth many times in the Old Testament. God enjoyed eating with Abraham and walking in fellowship with Enoch. He walked in the garden in the cool of the day. Cool, by the way, is the same word for wind. If you study wind in the Bible, you discover that the Hebrew and Greek words for wind are the same words used to describe the Spirit of God. We cannot say that God does not literally enjoy riding the wings of the wind. The Spirit of God is the same as the breath of God or the wind of God. The same words

refer to all of them.

The very first picture of God we have in the Bible is in Gen.1:2, and that is of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. The Hebrew word for spirit is the same word for wind and breath. It was God riding on the wings of the wind that began the process of turning the chaos into a world of order. It all begins with the wind of God, the Spirit of God, the breath of God. All three are the same Hebrew word.

The Spirit and the wind have much in common. They are both invisible, yet very powerful. Wind is air in motion, and the Spirit is God in motion. Jesus linked the Holy Spirit and the wind in His night talk with Nicodemus. He said to him in John 3:8, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

The wind can lift up millions of tons of water into the atmosphere, and yet it is an unseen power. It is doing things of enormous power all the time, but we cannot see it. So the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people doing wonders in changing them and motivating them, but He is unseen. Like the wind, His influence is seen and felt by His effects that are visible. Wind is ever doing mighty things in the realm of the physical and spiritual. We need both the natural and the spiritual wind more than we realize.

Grace N. Crowell expressed our need for the cleansing wind in these prayer lines-

"God keep a clean wind blowing through my heart night and day.
Cleanse it with sunlight, let the silver rain wash away
Cobwebs, and the smoldering dust that years leave, I pray.
God, keep a clean wind blowing through my heart: Wind from far
Green pastures, and from shaded pools where still waters are;
Wind from spaces out beyond the first twilight star.
Bitterness can have no place in me, nor grief stay,
When the winds of God rush through and sweep them away.
God keep a clean wind blowing through my heart night and day."

This is a prayer for the Holy Spirit to cleanse us from the pollution of the world and give us a clean inner atmosphere where the fruit of the Spirit can grow. The Holy Spirit blows out the contaminated air of our soul and gives us fresh air to breathe. The result is a revived interest in the things of Christ. Our affections are set on things above, and not things below. Revival comes when God rides the wings of the wind blowing away the chaff, and giving us clear vision of what really matters.

When the rushing mighty wind came upon the disciples at Pentecost, it was the wind of the Spirit, and they were filled with that Wind and began to declare the wonders of God. The wind and the Holy Spirit are both message carriers. They make sounds, and these sounds convey a message. The Psalmist says, "He makes the wind His messenger." The poets often refer to the winds as messengers. Shakespeare wrote,

"The southern wind doth play the trumpet

**To his purposes; and by his hollow
Whistling in the leaves foretells a
Tempest, and a blistering day."**

**Tennyson wrote, "A wind arose and rushed upon the South and shook the songs, the
whispers, and the shrieks of the wild woods together; and a Voice went with it, follow, follow
thou shalt win." Longfellow wrote,**

**"I hear the wind among the trees,
Playing celestial symphonies.
I see the branches downward bent,
Like keys of some great instrument."**

**At Pentecost, the wind of the Holy Spirit was playing God's song for all nations. The
Gospel melody rung out to the crowd, and the great commission fulfillment began as people
from all over the world responded to the Gospel. The power that propelled the church
forward on this glorious mission was wind power: The heavenly wind power of the Holy
Spirit.**

**Wind power has always been a part of nature, but man has been slow to capture this
power and harness it for his purpose. The Dutch were the first to bring windmills to
America. In 1622 they set one up in New York for grinding grain. By 1900 it was a ten
million dollar a year business. The first successful windmill to generate power commercially
was built in Vermont in 1941. It is on a hill called Grandpa's Knob. It's two bladed
propeller measuring 130 feet from tip to tip generated electricity for nearly 4 years. Then in
1945 a wind so strong came up that it spun one of the eight ton blades right off the tower
sending it two hundred yards. The project was then abandoned. Wind is a dangerous power
that can get out of control.**

**If we apply this to the Holy Spirit we see the similarity. The Holy Spirit is ever present,
but this does not mean we know how to utilize the power of this heavenly wind. When we do
discover ways to be propelled by the wind of the Spirit, we often lose control. The
Corinthians were empowered by the Spirit, but they used the power in abusive ways that did
damage to the church. They were like a windmill coming apart at the seams, because they
did not control the power.**

**I have wind power in my car, and when I turn the blower on I can get wind of varied
degrees of force and temperature. I have to regulate this wind power or I will be too cold or
too hot. Power is available, but it has to be regulated or it becomes a problem. So it is with
the power of the Holy Spirit. People often go to extremes with what is good, and end up with
what is bad. Christians have gotten into all sorts of fanatical displays of power. Power must
always be used wisely or it can do more harm than good.**

**Jesus was telling Nicodemus that he did not need to understand the wind to profit from it.
Nor did he need to understand the new birth to yield to the Holy Spirit and be born anew.
You do not need to understand power to use power wisely. We all use electricity without
understanding it. We do not know how it works, but we make it work for us because we have**

channeled it to wise purposes. If we hold up a golf club in a storm we are inviting a bolt of power that will not be put to good use unless our goal is to be toasted. We understand enough about this power to avoid foolish dangerous practices. So it is with the power of the Spirit. We must use the power wisely and avoid follies that hurt the body.

Power is always risky, and so every time there is a discovery of a new power source there is conflict among men to control that power. When the windmill became popular in the 14th century, the issue arose as to who owned the wind. Pope Celestine III laid claim to it and would only let the windmill owners use it at a price. This led to some interesting court cases. But wind power was in, and it changed the course of history. Holland was almost uninhabitable, but by means of the windmill water was pumped off the land, and a whole new civilization was begun. Descartes said, "God made the world, but the Dutch made Holland." What he forgot was the Dutch could have done nothing without the wind, and God holds the winds in His fists.

It took 51 windmills four years to empty a lake, but in 1634 it was dry and Holland's land area was greatly expanded. It was the most startling reclamation project of the age, and all was done by wind power. Over 9 thousand windmills lined the dikes and canals of the land. It was the land the wind built. The kingdom of God on earth is like this as well, for Jesus told the disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they received power from the Holy Spirit-the wind of heaven. When the mighty rushing wind came at Pentecost, the church had the wind power necessary to build a universal kingdom. The church, like Holland, owes its existence to wind power. God rides not only across the sky, but across history on the wings of the wind. The wind is the source of energy that God has used in both creation and redemption.

How did God restore the earth after the flood so that it was fit again for man and animals. Gen. 8:1 says, "But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and He sent a wind over the earth and the waters receded." By wind power God did to the whole world what the Dutch did to Holland. The whole world was reclaimed by the wind.

How did God save the Israelites when they were trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh with his army of chariots. Ex. 14:21 says, "All that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong East wind and turned it into dry land." God is all powerful, and could by His mere word make the river bed dry, but He preferred to use wind power. God uses this great force to do his will in creation. He saved Israel by wind power. He was, that night, riding the wings of the wind, and using this natural power for His purpose. And the message of all this is that God is immanent in His creation. That is, He does get involved, and does in some way really ride the wings of the wind. Some of the reasons why He does He has told us. First of all-

I. TO CREATE.

It was the wind of God, or His breath, that pushed back the water and made the dry land possible. It was His breath breathed into the animal world and man that gave them life, and then we read in Ps. 33:6, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, the starry hosts by the breath of His mouth." The whole universe came from the breath of God. The wind of

His spoken word created all that is. And everything continues as it is by the power of His breath, or wind. Over and over again, the Bible makes it clear that if God withdrew His breath from anything it would cease to be.

The whole process of nature's reproduction is maintained by wind power. If pollen and seeds were not blown by the wind all would soon be dead. But because of the wind every nook and cranny on the planet is a place for potential life, for seeds are blown everywhere. Lyll Watson in *Heaven's Breath* wrote this whole book to show that the wind is the circulatory and nervous system of earth, and that all life is dependent upon the wind. The 5600 million million tons of air that wraps this planet is a key to life. Each of us breaths about 10 million times a year. We begin life with a breath and continue life with breathing. The whole world needs to breathe to continue, and it does so by means of the wind. Have you ever had the wind knocked out of you? It is awful. We need wind going down our windpipe to survive. The wind also evaporates water from the sea and gives the whole world the drink it needs to survive. Without the wind the world would soon be a vast desert. The wind causes one and a half million tons of water to fall on the land of this world every second. Life needs water and wind gets water to all of life.

Man is just beginning to see how the whole planet is kept in balance by the jet stream that tares around the world 30,000 feet above the earth. It travels up to 300 miles per hour and regulates the weather all over the world. It redistributes hot and cold air all over the world to maintain balance. Dr. Harry Wexler of the U. S. Weather Bureau wrote, "In a windless world the tropics would become intolerably hot and the rest of the planet unbearably cold; the parched continents would become dust: Cities would suffocate." But God rides the wings of the wind to create balance. Secondly, God rides the wings of the wind-

II. TO CLEANSE.

The world is filled with corruption and pollution in the air. If the wind did not blow this foul air away all of life would soon perish in the stagnant air. Life depends on the cleansing power of the wind.

"There is ever and ever his boundless blue
And ever and ever his green, green sod,
And ever and ever between the two
Walks the wonderful winds of God."

This was true even in the ideal world of Eden. Even in a perfect world there were certain times better than others. One of them was the cool of the evening. The sun could still be hot in a perfect world, and so Adam and Eve could sweat and even get sun burned, and so it was a refreshing time when the cool of the evening wind would blow. Gen. 3:8 says, "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day." The Hebrew word for cool is *ruach*, which is the same word for wind, breath, and spirit. It was in that time of day that nature was providing the gentle breeze that God walked in the garden. The heat was blown away and it was an ideal time. The wind brings comfort and pleasure to all of us when it is hot. Thirdly, God rides the wings of the

wind-

III. TO COMPEL.

Wind is the driving force of life. The breath of God is what gives all that lives, life, and the ability to move. When we lose the breath of life we are dead and still. It is the wind within us that compels us to think, to act, and to grow. Everything that we do depends upon the movement of air. The Bible says we function by wind power, and when the wind stops we stop too. To be born anew is to born of a new wind. The breath of God's Spirit enters us and we are compelled by this new wind to go a new direction God wants us to go. Myra Scovel in 1969 wrote,

"Where does the wind come from,
Nicodemus?
"Rabbi, I do not know;"
Nor can you tell where it will go.

Put yourself into the path of the wind,
Nicodemus.
You will know the thrill of being borne along
By something greater than yourself.
You are proud of your position,
Of your security,
But you will perish in such stagnant air.

Put yourself into the path of the wind,
Nicodemus.
Bright leaves will dance before you.
You will find yourself in places
That you never dreamed of seeing.
You will be forced into places you have dreaded
And find them like a coming home.

Put yourself into the path of the wind,
Nicodemus.
You will have a power that you never had before.
Nicodemus,
You will be a new man!
Put yourself into the path of the wind."

Dr. Jowett, the great preacher, went for a walk by the sea, and he asked a sailor if he could explain the wind. He said, "No, I can't explain the wind, but I can hoist a sail." Jowett realized then that we don't need to explain the wind, but we need to simply cooperate with it and use the wind to achieve God's purpose. We need to let it blow us in the direction He wants to compel us to go. Fourthly, God rides the wings of the wind-

IV. TO CONQUER.

In II Sam. 22:11 God rode on the wings of the wind in order to deliver David from his foes. By the blast of breath from His nostrils came a conquering wind. All through the Old Testament the breath of God is a force for judgment. Some of the great victories of history were wind victories.

England will never forget the winds of God that saved them from the Spanish Armada. The superb and towering galleons struck terror into the hearts of the English people. They had only small ships in comparison, but Captain Drake went out anyway to do battle with these giants of the sea. The wind became strong and the huge Spanish ships could not maneuver like the smaller English ships. They became helpless and those that were not sunk were carried around the channel and smashed to pieces on the rocks. By the power of the wind England won a decisive battle she could never have won without the wind of God.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon on April 22, 1915. The experts told the German Generals it was the perfect time to let loose the deadly poisonous gas on the Allies. They said the wind would blow in their direction for the next 36 hours. The gas began to kill the allied soldiers, but then the wind shifted and came back upon the Germans and they died by the thousands. If the wind had not shifted the Germans may have conquered the world. Never before was there any record of the wind shifting so suddenly. God again was riding on the wings of the wind to conquer the forces of evil.

We need the wind to win. We need God's judging wind to create storms that bring judgment on evil. Wind is a weapon that no man can resist. It is a frightening power, but we need to pray that God will blow away the foul odor of man's corruption, and let us breathe again the clean air of righteousness. We cannot do this with our puny power. We need the wind of God to conquer.

Captain Ahab in Moby Dick says, "Tis a noble and heroic thing, the wind! Who ever conquered it? In every fight it has the last and bitterest blow.....There's something all glorious and gracious in the wind." This is even more so when we look beyond the wind of nature to the wind of God's Spirit. Let every cooling breeze remind you that God's Spirit is blowing to bring refreshment into your life. Let every storm remind you that the wind of God's judgment will have the final word, and we need to be sheltered in the ark of Christ or be blown away. Shakespeare was right when he said, "Ill blows the wind that profits nobody." Every wind can profit the Christian if they will, like the Psalmist, look for and see God riding on the wings of the wind.

11. THE WONDER OF CLOUDS Psalm 104:1-24

Jean Baptiste Lamarch, the distinguished French naturalist, came from a military family and, at the age of 17 and in keeping with his family's tradition, enlisted in the army. At 21, however, his health failed and he went to Paris for a year of treatment. It was the bleakest time he had ever known. Poor and alone, he lived in a small attic room where he spent days on end, flat on his back. There were no windows in the room. There was only a small

sky-light, through which he could watch the clouds drifting overhead. As time passed, though, Lamarch became more and more intrigued by the different cloud formations. Each type, he noticed, was associated with a particular kind of weather. There was the nimbus which heralds a storm, the cumulus which comes at the end of a fine summer afternoon, the cirrus which, says that good weather is on its way. When the year was over, Lamarch was an expert on clouds. Military life, he decided, had lost its appeal. He switched to science and fundless though he was at first, went on to become one of the outstanding scientists of his generation.

Most of us do not have our lives changed by watching clouds, but the fact is most of us have had times when watching clouds has had some effect on us. My granddaughter Jenny and I just this past summer were sitting out on the front lawn finding different animals in the clouds as they changed formations, and I watched clouds enough so that everytime I see a pretty cloud now I praise the Lord. It has become a habit because I spent enough time dwelling on clouds to make a deep impression on my mind. I can identify with the unknown poet who wrote-

"Oh, it is pleasant, with a heart of ease,
Just after sunset, or by moonlight skies,
To make the shifting clouds be what you please,
Or let the easily-persuaded eyes
Own each quaint likeness issuing from the mould
Of a friend's fancy, or with head bent low
And clear as light, see rivers flow of gold
"Twixt crimson banks; and then, a traveler, go
From mount to mount through cloud and gorgeous land."

Probably the most impressive clouds I have ever experienced was when I was a chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol and was taken up in a small plane. When the pilot got above the clouds I could not believe the brightness as the sun reflected off the masses of billowing clouds. It was the brightest experience I have ever had. Miles and miles of brilliant shining clouds. It was awesome, and again enables me to identify with HIGH FLIGHT by John Gillespie Magee, Jr.

"Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth Of sun-split clouds -- and done a
hundred things You have not dreamed of -- wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long, delirious burning blue
I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew.
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untresspassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God."

I have had some marvelous experiences with clouds, but not until recently did I ever realize how important a place clouds play in the Bible, and in the plan of God. They play a major role in life on this planet, for without clouds there would be no life. They also play a major role in the weather. Man has spent millions of dollars and hours trying to learn all he can about clouds for he knows they hold the secrets to much of what he wants to know. The Bible says much about the role of clouds in weather and this is important to understand, but today we are going to focus on the spiritual values in clouds. Let me just share this one paragraph on the scientific nature of clouds.

What are clouds? Clouds are water. Either small liquid water drops or tiny pieces of ice. Meteorologists rank clouds according to their height and whether or not they are flat or puffy. How are clouds formed? Clouds form when the air rises. As a blob of air rises it expands and gets colder, the colder air cannot hold as much water as warmer air. As the temperature and air pressure continue to drop, tiny water droplets group together into clumps called cloud droplets. At this point, the blob of air becomes a visible cloud. If the cloud keeps going up, the cloud droplets will clump together and form water droplets. These water droplets are too heavy to float in the air and they fall from the sky as either rain or snow.

There are 148 verses in the Bible dealing with clouds, and so it would take most of our time, if not all of it, just to read what the Bible says about them. But I do want to give you a powerful impression of their role, and so I will read a number of verses where clouds are directly connected with God.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN A CLOUD

Nu 11:25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

Nu 12:5 And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

De 31:15 And the LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle.

Mt 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Mr 9:7 And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

Lu 9:34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.

Lu 9:35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST IN THE CLOUDS

Lu 21:27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Mt 24:30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the

tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Mt 26:64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Mr 13:26 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

Mr 14:62 And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

1Th 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Re 1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

CHRIST SETTING ON THE CLOUD AS HIS THRONE

Re 14:14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

Re 14:15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

Re 14:16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE CLOUDS]

Ex 16:10 And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

God used the cloud as a means of conveying His glory. The clouds still do that, for when they are awesome in their beauty and grandeur you cannot help but think of God. Their gigantic size and the beauty of their whiteness convey a glory that is Godlike. There are many texts that convey this idea.

Ex 40:34 Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Ex 40:35 And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Nu 16:42 And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.

1Ki 8:11 So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

2Ch 5:14 So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

Eze 10:4 Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD'S glory.

That was 24 of the 148, but those are enough to give you an impression of the key role

clouds play in the Word of God. Then there is the fascinating text we read in Ps.104 about the clouds being God's chariot. Ps 104:3 "Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind." This is not the only place this idea is conveyed. In Isa. 19:1 we read, "Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it." The ancient Hebrews could look at a beautiful swiftly moving cloud and see it as God's chariot. It was a heavenly chariot, and was more like a space ship to them. They saw God's presence in nature more than we do, and they could see more than just animal shapes in the clouds, they could see God. If you look at a great billowing cloud sometimes you can see huge faces form, and no doubt, they sometimes felt they were looking at the face of God in the clouds.

The Jews of the Old Testament days saw more in clouds than we ever do in our culture. In Jewish legend clouds hovered around Adam and Eve until they sinned and then the clouds left and they were naked. In Job 38:8-11 we see the clouds are the clothing of the sea. "As the child is wrapped in swaddling clothes, so the sea was wrapped in the clouds." In so many ways they saw the presence of God in nature in clouds. They are heavenly things, and so it makes sense that they would associate the clouds with God.

In the Cyclopaedia Of Theological Literature we read, "As in such climates clouds refreshing veil the oppressive glories of the sun, clouds often symbolize the Divine presence, as indicating the splendor, insupportable to man, of that glory which they wholly or partially conceal.... the shelter given, the refreshment of rain promised by clouds, give them their peculiar prominence in Oriental imagery, and the individual cloud in that ordinarily cloudless region becomes well defined, and is dwelt upon like the individual tree in the bare landscape." "Being the least substantial of visible forms, undefined in shape, and unrestrained in position, it is the one among material things which most easily suggests spiritual being."

Randall Otto in his book, Coming In the Clouds writes, "The very nature of a cloud makes it an almost ideal vehicle for the introduction of the super natural appearances or as a veil between things spiritual and invisible and things physical and visible, a symbol of the Divine presence itself. He says, " Among the Jews the Messiah was known as "the cloudy one" or "the son of a cloud."

Otto's whole book is to show that God used the clouds to both reveal Himself, and to conceal Himself. No one could ever see God and live, and so God made His presence known, and His invisibility visible, by means of clouds. If God ever came into our human presence without being clothed in clouds we would be burnt to a crisp instantly, as if we were thrust into the immediate presence of the sun. Clouds then are the clothing God wears so as to keep men from being destroyed by His presence. He writes, " Jesus became the tabernacle of God. God came down to dwell with men and in him was the Shekinah glory of God veiled in flesh. The body of Jesus was what the cloud was in the O.T. It covered the glory of God in Jesus so men could look on him and live. The fullness of God was in him and if it was seen it would destroy all who saw it. Otto's whole theme is no man has ever seen the glory of God unveiled and never can for it is too intense for man to see and live. Even in Jesus it had to be covered by flesh or a cloud when he ascended."

SECOND COMING

One of the last things we will see on earth will be the coming of our Lord in the glory of the clouds. They will be the most brilliant and glorious clouds we have ever seen. The hymn writer wrote,

**LO! He comes with clouds descending, Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending, Swell the triumph of his train:
Hallelujah! God appears on earth to reign.**

**Every eye shall now behold him Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold him, Pierced and nailed him to the tree, Deeply wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see.**

**The dear tokens of his passion Still his dazzling body bears;
Cause of endless exultation To his ransomed worshipers;
With what rapture Gaze we on those glorious scars!**

**Yea, Amen! let all adore thee, High on thy eternal throne;
Savior, take the power and glory, Claim the kingdom for thine own;
Jehovah, Everlasting God, come down!**

Those who have been to Israel and seen the clouds there get a better idea of what the Biblical references to clouds signify. For example, Ps. 139 begins, "If I rise on the wings of the dawn," and James Neil comments on this phrase, "This figure to a Western is not a little obscure. For my part, I cannot doubt that we are to understand certain beautiful light clouds as thus poetically described. I have observed invariably, that in the late spring-time, in summer, and yet more especially in the autumn, white clouds are to be seen in Palestine. They only occur at the earliest hours of morning, just previously to and at the time of sunrise. It is the total absence of clouds at all other parts of the day, except during the short period of winter rains, that lends such striking solemnity and force to those descriptions of the Second Advent where our Lord is represented as coming in the clouds. This feature of His majesty loses all its meaning in lands like ours, in which clouds are of such common occurrence that they are rarely absent from the sky. The morning clouds of summer and autumn are always of a brilliant silvery white, save at such times as they are dyed with the delicate opal tints of dawn. They hang low upon the mountains of Juda, and produce effects of indescribable beauty, as they float far down in the valley's, or to rise to wrap themselves around the summit of the hills. In almost every instance, by about seven o' clock the heat has dissipated these fleecy clouds, and to the vivid Eastern imagination morn has folded her outstretched wings."

Another gives testimony of how the clouds give her aid and comfort in the present. She writes, "From the breezy heights of Beulah Hill we command a lovely and uninterrupted view, not of the fair earth merely, but of the fairer firmament above it; our windows are observatories whence many a longing, loving glance is cast heavenwards, and one of the chief pleasures of restful or contemplative hours is found in silently watching the ever changing

aspect of the sky, and noting the manifold glories of that wonderful cloud-land which divides our earthly home from the promised inheritance on high. I never tire of gazing on the beautiful mysteries of the clouds. I love to watch the grand and solemn rolling of black and rugged masses, when storms are abroad, and the wind is marshaling them to a dread convention of brooding tempests; and equally well I love to see them when, in summer days, the cloudlets float like flakes of driven snow across the deep blue ether, and lose themselves at the feet of mountains that rival the Alpine peaks in beauty and sublimity. Sometimes the watcher will see a cloud of such celestial beauty that to his enamored fancy it looks

"As though an angel, in his upward flight,
Had left his mantle floating in mid-air.
Or anon, with pensive pleasure, he may mark
'Clouds on the western side
Grow grey and greyer, hiding the warm sun.'"

But under all aspects they are enchanting and suggestive; their very movements are restful to my spirit; they always speak to me of the Lord's great power and love, and many a time have burdens of care been lifted from my heart, and carried away, by these celestial chariots, 'as far as the east is from the west.' "

In other words, there can be practical spiritual value in watching clouds if we see what the Bible writers saw in them, the very presence of God, and the visible means of conveying his invisible power and majesty. Every cloud would indeed have a silver lining if we could see the presence of God in it. When I can most see this is when the clouds have large spaces between them and the sun's rays are streaming down through them. The sight makes me feel the presence of God on His throne and I praise Him for His glory and majesty. The silver lining is conspicuous then. But the unknown poet writes,

"The inner side of every cloud
Is bright and shining;
I therefore turn my clouds about,
And always wear them inside out,
To show the lining."

The fact is above the clouds the sun is always shining and so no matter how dark the clouds look from the earth, they are bright on the highest level. The value of studying clouds is that it gives you another way to be made aware of the presence of God in everyday life. As I go about my business, I suddenly look up and see a beautiful cloud and I praise God for His presence, love, and guidance. I never did this until I studied clouds and saw their importance to God and His plan both for the secular world and the sacred goal of eternal life. It may not have this effect on you just hearing a sermon on clouds, but I pray it does, for it adds a positive dimension to your life. I was waiting at Como park this summer for the grandkids to come out of the Conservatory and as I sat looking up into the clouds I decided to pull out a piece of paper and write down my feelings about them. It is not great poetry, but it is great to have poetry in you about clouds because they represent God's presence. I wrote,

OH CLOUDS SO WHITE

**REFLECTING LIGHT
FROM SUN SO BRIGHT
OH WHAT A SIGHT!**

**YOU CHANGE SO FAST
NEW IMAGES CAST
OF PRESENT AND PAST,
BUT NONE CAN LAST.**

**YOU COME AND GO
SWIFT AS SPRING TIME SNOW,
BUT WHAT A SHOW
AS YOU SO QUICKLY FLOW.**

**YOU PAINT THE SKY
AS THROUGH IT YOU FLY,
SOME LOW, SOME HIGH
WHICH MAKES ME CRY!**

**SOFT AS A DOVE
MY HEART YOU SHOVE
TO PRAISE GOD ABOVE
FOR CLOUDS TO LOVE.**

I trust you will come to love clouds too, and be able to see in them the visible symbols of the invisible presence of God, for then you will enter into the wonder of the clouds.

12. THE EAGLE LIFE Based on Isa. 40:27-31

Flight is not only for the birds, it is for the believers as well. Pilots and astronauts do not have exclusive rights on soaring into the heavens. The Negro Spiritual says,

**I got wings, you got wings,
All O God's children got wings.
When I get up to heab'n
I'm going to put on my wings,
I'm going to fly all oveh God's heab'n.**

Man has always envied the birds, and has longed to be able to fly. The history of man's labor to turn this aspiration into a reality is fascinating. Before the story is finished, however, every believer will have a part in it.

The day is coming, says Scripture, when all believers will take part in God's spectacular flight event called the rapture. All believers will be caught up into the sky to meet the Lord.

There will a great migration from this planet into outer space, because this earth will be so contaminated by the disease of sin that God will have to destroy it by fire to purify it. After this there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and believers will be able to make a reentry into this transformed world.

All who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior have a great adventure in flight in the future. God expects us to be preparing now for this adventure in the heights by living and exalted life, or, as our text suggests, and eagle like life. The eagle soars to heights beyond that of any other bird. It lives on the highest level. Its dwelling place is above the snake line. Twelve hundred feet above the sea level is called the snake line, because poisonous snakes do not cross that line and go higher. Settlers in the days when snakes were abundant, and their bites less curable, would always ask of a piece of property, "Is it above the snake line?" That is where the eagle lives; out of range of the deadly serpent.

Its power and grace in flight that take it out of sight has made it a frequently used biblical symbol. In Prov. 30:19 there are four things too wonderful for the author to understand, and the first is the way of an eagle in the sky.

**Bird of the broad and sweeping wing,
Thy home is high in heaven,
Where wide the storms there banners fling,
And tempest clouds are driven.**

It is appropriate that man name his first mechanical bird to reach the moon-the eagle. It is likewise appropriate that God should use the eagle to illustrate the kind of high level living He expects us to attain. Life on a higher plain; mountain top experiences; sitting with Christ in heavenly places, and setting our affections on things above, are all parts of what is meant by the eagle life. It is a life of high ideals and aspirations. It is life in which the perspective is always upward.

**And high above the seas and lands
On peaks just tipped with morning light,
My dauntless spirit mutely stands,
With eagle wings outspread for flight.**

This is the position every Christian should be in: ready as the poet and the prophet says, to mount up with wings like eagles. In order to aid each of us to rise toward this ideal it is our goal to find in our text answers to 3 important questions concerning the eagle life. The first question is-

I. WHAT IS THE RESOURCE FOR THE EAGLE LIFE?

In the spiritual, as in the physical realm, there must be a source of fuel to propel us into the heights. It is clear from the context of Isa. 40 that man left to his own resources will either never get off the ground, or crash soon if he does. The natural man has no desire for flights into the heavenlies with Christ. Life on a higher plain has no appeal. If God transformed a man outwardly, but left the inner man in bondage to the law of sin, he would

be just like the butterfly in Charlotte Gilman's poem in which his transformation was lamented.

I do not want to fly, said he.
I only what to squirm!
And he drooped his wings dejectedly,
But still his voice was firm:
I do not want to be a fly!
I want to be a worm.

The natural man longs only for the mud, and the worm life. His aspiration is to go lower into the darkness of sin and its passing pleasures. Oswald Spengler in his book *Decline Of The West* says, "We have descended from the perspective of the bird to that of the frog." The tragedy is that believers, who should be looking up, are influenced by this low perspective of the majority. Like Peter, they take their eyes off the resource for their power, and they begin to sink. That is just what we find in Isa. 40. The Jews had been flying high at one time. In Ex. 19:4 God reminds them of their flight out of Egypt and, "...how I bore you on eagle wings and brought you to myself."

They took their eyes off from God, however, and lost their wings. They came crashing to the earth in enemy territory. They were oppressed, defeated, and discouraged, and verse 27 reveals that they were convinced that God had given them up. They were convinced He didn't care about their problems. With this worms eye view of things they had no power for flight. They had cut themselves off from the only resource for living the eagle life, and so they were grounded. That resource is, as the next few verses plainly reveal, and adequate concept of God.

The fuel for flying into the firmament is found for men where angels find it. It is in the reality of the presence of God in all His majesty. Only as we see the majesty of God in His power and personality, and only as we feel our souls flooded with adoration and wonder, can we have the power to soar to the heights. The whole context exalts the power of God. Isaiah knows that his people are weak and discouraged, because they have a weak picture of God in their minds.

He calls their attention to the heavens in verse 26. God is pictured as the Great Shepherd of the universe, and the stars are His vast flock scattered over the meadows of heaven. He knows everyone of them by name. There are more stars in the heavens than there are people on the earth, yet God knows everyone of them by name. When you get this kind of vision of God in your head you will know that God knows every man, and even the hairs of his head are numbered. When believers get discouraged and feel God is ignoring them, it is because they have forgotten that God is God, and that His ways are not our ways. Have you not known, and have you not heard asked Isaiah in verse 28? The Lord is the everlasting God.

With our worms eye view of life we tend to think in terms of today, and this year, but the span of God's vision is from eternity to eternity. God does not have to be in a hurry. He does not have to settle all issues today to be successful. It is hard for us to wait, for we do not even have the patience of Job, let alone the patience of God. We need to learn that we

cannot judge God's faithfulness by the moment. He may not meet our need, or solve our problem, but He is working in all things with us for ultimate good. He does not get tired of helping us and go away weary to leave us on our own. Sometimes we feel like God has left us, but our theology must be based, not on feelings, but on the revealed character and promises of God.

Clouds were thy chariots and I knew them not,
They came in solemn thunder to my ear;
I thought that far away Thou hadst forgot,
But Thou wert at my side and Heaven was near.

If we intend to fly high, and live the eagle life, we must have an adequate and exalted concept of God. Eagles do not chase flies, and no one can have his head of trivial ideas of God, and have the resources necessary for high living. No matter how low we feel we must look up and see the majesty of God if we want to fly.

From sin and dust to Thee we cry,
The Great, the Holy, and the High.

God in all His power and splendor as He is revealed in His creation and His Word is the resource for the strength needed to live the eagle life. No man flies high who does not have a high view of God. Now the question we need to answer is-

II. WHAT IS THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE EAGLE LIFE?

Knowing the resource is not enough. Men knew of the resource for the power to propel them into space long before they could apply it. The source of power is one thing, but how to use it is another. God is our resource, but how do let the fuel from His infinite reservoir flow into our finite lives and lift us to the heights of the eagle life? What is required on our part?

The answer is found in verse 31. Our requirement is to wait for God. This may sound strange to us, but it is a word that runs all through the Old Testament. In the Psalms we read it, "Truly my soul waits upon God." In Isa. 30:18 we read, "For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him." Take your concordance and you will find many text that reveal that a basic requirement for the believer is to wait on the Lord. What does this mean? It has 3 interrelated meanings.

1. DEPENDENCE. To wait on the Lord means to put yourself in His hands, and not try to accomplish His will in your own strength. The poet put it,

From God, the overflowing spring,
Our souls shall drink a fresh supply;
While those who trust their native strength
Shall melt away and droop and die.

To wait on the Lord is to believe that His plan will be victorious. When things seem to go so slow, and evil seems to be gaining ground, the wise believer does not forsake the truth and

principles of God's kingdom, but in total dependence goes on living according to God's revealed will. This is waiting on the Lord. It is dependence based on the assurance that the Commander in Chief has a strategy that will bring final victory.

It is an expectant waiting. It is like the young eagles waiting with mouth open in the mountain nest, knowing that the mother or father eagle will soon provide what is needed to give them strength. The believer who waits on the Lord does so with his mouth open in persistent and passionate prayer. Prayer is the greatest attitude of dependence a man can have. In prayer we hold up our emptiness to God for the receiving of His fullness. The Christian who would soar into the heights must not look to the headlines for his daily guidance, but to the Lord. The Christian who has his eye on current events will be shaken with every crisis, but the Christian whose eye is on the Lord will mount up with wings like eagles. The second meaning is,

2. OBEDIENCE. We tend to think of waiting as a contrast to working. When you wait you do nothing, but this is not true even with our English word. If you wait on tables in a cafe, you are a waiter, and a waiter is synonymous with worker in that context. Waiting can mean a form of service and activity. To give a cup of cold water in the name of Christ can be a means of waiting on the Lord. Waiting then is not mere inactivity. Edison said, "Everything comes to him who hustles while he waits." Dependence upon God does not mean we sit back and let God do it, but that we go out and do it knowing that by His strength we can. We keep our eyes fixed on God, and then we do our best. Along with dependence and obedience is the third meaning of waiting, which is,

3. PATIENCE. This is what we mean when we say to just wait. It is hard to wait, but is a key to power and high level living. The degree of our love of God is seen in our willingness to patiently wait to be sure of His will, and to have His guidance. Love is patient. Jacob waited for 7 years to have Rachel as his wife, because he loved her so. Love knows how to wait. Thackeray in his poem, "At The Church Gate," gives us a picture of the eager, but patient, waiting of the lover.

Although I enter not, yet round about the spot
Ofttimes I hover; And near the sacred gate,
With longing eyes I wait, Expectant of her.

Expectancy is a key to the ability to wait. Love expects the loved one to come through, and that gives them the ability to endure waiting. I had a dog named Speed when I was a boy. It followed me everywhere. When I went into a house it did not make any difference if I stayed in that house for an hour or 8 hours. When I came out Speed would be waiting. He loved me and expected loving treatment from me, and this gave him the patience to wait, and wait, and wait. My grandmother used to tell me she saw Speed lying on the sidewalk outside a theatre when I was inside watching a movie. He had no concept of why I was gone so long, but he just waited. If we have that kind of love for God, we will not go off in our own wisdom and strength, but in dependence we will wait on the Lord. Bradford Torrey wrote,

Not so in haste, my heart! Have faith in God and wait,
Although He lingers long, He never comes too late.

**Until He cometh, rest, Nor grudge the hours that roll.
The feet that wait for God Are soonest at the goal.**

God in all His power and majesty is the resource for the eagle life. Waiting on God is the requirement we must fulfill to live the eagle life. Now, the final question is,

III. WHAT IS THE REWARD OF THE EAGLE LIFE?

Why should we strive to follow the path to the eagle life? What does it offer that makes it appealing? The emphasis in v. 31 is on strength. The eagle has fantastic power in its wings. They have been known to pick up sheep, and even children, and carry them up to their mountain nest. They enjoy swooping down into a storm, and flying against the wind. Their strength makes them a symbol of perpetual youth. In Ps. 103:5 we read that God satisfies the redeemed ones so that their youth is renewed like the eagles.

Here in our text in v. 30 Isaiah makes it clear that the strength that comes from waiting on the Lord is not mere natural strength. Even the youth who depends upon his own resources only, will become weary and exhausted. Youth is not the answer to the power shortage of the church. This text destroys the excuse of the Christian who says he is not as young as he used to be. No matter how young you are you will get tired and exhausted, and your strength will run out. But Isaiah says, if you wait on the Lord, even though you may be old, your strength will be renewed. We are dealing here with the theology of the second wind; the tapping of resources beyond the strength of man.

One of our biggest problems in the Christian life is fatigue. We just get tired of doing God's will. Often it moves so slow, and the fruit is so scarce, that we question if it is worth the effort. Many Christians give up the desire to live the eagle life. The sinful nature of man, and the obstacles it presents has worn them out, and they have decided to throw in the towel. What is the use of trying? When we get to this point, we have ceased to wait on the Lord. We have switched over to our own fuel tank, which is empty, and that is why we lose altitude, and begin to nose dive, and eventually crash in discouragement. But the reward for those who keep on waiting on the Lord is renewed strength. They can run and not get weary. They can walk and not faint. They can plod along the dull daily routine of obedience and never give up.

John Wesley at the age of 82 wrote to a friend after a life of activity unmatched by anyone and said, "I am never tired in my work. From the beginning of the day or the week or the year to the end. I do not know what weariness means. I am never weary of writing or preaching to travelling; but am just as fresh at the end as at the beginning." We obviously have to take into consideration his natural gifts of health. Lydia buffum had 14 of her own children, and then took in 8 more to raise for others., She was a unique woman, and Wesley was a unique man. Jesus, himself, had a perfect body, but he got tired and exhausted, and he needed to get away from the crowds to rest and recuperate. But the point is He never got weary of doing the will of God. He never got tired of obedience, and this is the reward of the eagle life. It is perpetual strength to labor for God with enthusiasm.

The Christian life is a joy when one feels the inner power necessary to propel him up to

that high level on which he is to live, but few things are more difficult than trying to live up there in our own strength. It gets to be a drag, and it loses its charm and excitement, and is too much like hard work, when we lose our wings by failing to wait on the Lord. The quality of our Christian experience will depend upon what we do with this information. Let us listen to the prophet, and the poets, who interpret him:

Rise and soar into the sunlit ways,
Using both the wings of prayer and praise;
Mount like eagles-higher in the sky,
And you'll find things look so different when you fly.

13. HARMLESS AS DOVES MATT. 10:16

A small boy sat by the side of a pool fishing. "What are you fishing for," asked a man who passed by. "Sharks," replied the boy. "But there are no sharks in that pool my little man," said the stranger. "There ain't any fish in this pool at all," answered the boy. "So I might as well fish for sharks as anything else."

Children have a vivid imagination, and this is certainly one of the characteristics Jesus had in mind when He said men must become as little children before they can enter the kingdom of heaven. Imagination is the eye of the soul. Without it we are, as Beecher once said, "And observatory without a telescope." You cannot enter into the world of great literature and poetry without imagination. Robert Louis Stevenson discussed every sentence of Treasure Island with his schoolboy step-son before giving it its final form. He knew that if his story was to be great he had to appeal to the imagination of youth. Einstein said that even in science, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Imagination is the key to great discoveries in every realm of life, including the spiritual. John Davidson wrote,

That minister of ministers, Imagination, gathers up--
The undiscovered Universe, Like Jewels in a jasper cup.

No one can begin to understand the teaching of Christ without imagination. Jesus constantly spoke in parables, and used imagery that would leave a man in the dark who did not have the illumination of a childlike imagination. The common people heard Jesus gladly because he did not speak in abstract theological terms, but in common pictures that appealed to the imagination. The kingdom of heaven, he said, was like a man sowing seed, like a woman putting leaven in bread, like a merchant in search of fine pearls. Or else he would say, it is like a mustard seed, or treasure buried in a field, or like a net thrown into the sea gathering fish of every kind.

Jesus took His illustrations from life, and from nature, and appealed to the imagination. He did so because God made nature the greatest resource for material for visual aids in religious education. Jesus also knew what modern psychology has discovered-that the imagination is more powerful than the will. Win a man's imagination and he is your captive.

Great leaders must appeal to the imagination of their followers to hold their allegiance. Napoleon said the human race is governed by its imagination.

On an individual level you can demonstrate this easily. Take a ten inch plank and put it on the ground and walk from one end to the other. It is simple. But put the same plank across two buildings ten stories up and you could no longer do that simple act. Your imagination would fill your head with visions of falling and it would leave you powerless. Modern psychology says that whenever the will and the imagination come into conflict the imagination always wins. This means that a mind filled with visions of tragedy and evil around the corner cannot be set at rest by good news and positive signs. The imagination reigns and makes them pessimistic in spite of all evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, fill the imagination with pictures of glory and victory, and all the storms of hell will not be able to blow you off the pleasant path of optimistic assurance. That is why the book of Revelation is so precious to Christian in persecution. Its vivid scenes of glory around the throne of God, and the victory songs of Christ and all His saints wins the imagination over and makes it a friend rather than an enemy in the battle of life.

This means that a Christian generally lives on a level that corresponds with his imagination. If it is weak, he will be like the man of whom Macaulay said, "His imagination resembled the wings of an ostrich. It enabled him to run, though not to soar." The Christian, however, is never to be content with wings that do not lift him aloft. We are meant to mount up with wings like an eagle. We are to have aspirations like David who wrote in Psalm 55:6, "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." These wings of the dove, that David longed for, are available to all believers who have the imagination to appropriate them. Ever since the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove, theology has been linked to the wings of the dove. Spurgeon pointed out that many astounding sermons have been preached on the dove. All history has been ransacked for facts and fables about doves, and they have been used to teach lessons of Christian truth.

As far back as the second century Tatian began to speak of the fall of man as the loss of his spirit wings. These wings are restored to man when he is filled with the heavenly dove--the Holy Spirit. The wings of the dove came to mean detachment from the world, and from the weight of flesh. To be sanctified and separated from the world was to rise with the wings of the dove. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa developed a whole system of Christian mysticism based on the idea of the wings of the dove. We cannot begin to cover all the references to doves in Christian theology and hymnology, but we want to look at some of the most important Biblical references.

If we use our imagination we can see many parallels between literal birds and the work of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit hovered over the dark world before it burst into life and light, so He hovers over every life in darkness eager to mother it out of the shell of sin into the world of light, and give it wings to soar. Charles Wesley put it in poetry--

**Expand Thy wings celestial Dove,
Brood o'er our nature's night;
On our disordered spirits move,
And let there now be light.**

After we have been hatched by the Heavenly Dove, which is another way of saying after we have been born again by the spirit of God, we are not through with the concept of the dove in the Christian life. There is more to the dove than wings. It has character also, and it is the dove's character that Jesus is interested in, in our text. Jesus is preparing His disciples for the greatest mission of their lives. It is literally a matter of life or death, for they will face opposition and in tense hatred like they never saw before. It is no time for light entertainment and small talk. They need to be given some deep impressions and profound assurances. It is in a context like this that Jesus twice uses birds to get His message across, and into their imagination. Birds have lessons of value for the Christian, not just in the hour of gaiety, but in the most crucial hours of life.

Jesus said to them, "Behold," --that is, pay attention to this; get the full and realistic picture of what you are heading into. "I send you out as sheep in the mist of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent (or harmless) as doves." The disciples had to have knowledge of four different kinds of creatures to be able to understand and obey Jesus. He paints a word picture with animals, serpents, and birds--the crawlers, the walkers, and the flyers, all in one little verse. With imaginative interpretation we could describe how the wolves devoured the sheep in the early centuries. We could show how many were wise as serpents in obedience to Christ. We could consider the fascinating fact of how Jesus selected a quality of the serpent for us to imitate even though the serpent, all through Scripture, is a symbol of Satan. Jesus can find some good for illustration in every creature He has made. This would be an interesting study, but for now we are limiting our attention to the last of these creatures--the dove.

How many Christians face a crisis, and an encounter with the world, with their minds on doves? A Christian who talked about birds at such a serious point in life would probably be looked upon as being crazy as a loon. In reality, he would be seeking to take his Lord seriously. Jesus says the dove has something a Christian needs. It has a character that is harmless, innocent, blameless, and gentle.

The dove is the most Christlike of all the birds. The dove is the first bird to play a role in the life of Christ. When Jesus was just a baby, Mary and Joseph brought Him to Jerusalem, and according to the law of Moses, it says in Luke 2:24, they offered a sacrifice of a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Doves and pigeons are of the same family. The law in the Lev. 12:8 says that for those who cannot afford a lamb for atonement and offering of two turtle doves or two pigeons can be a substitute. This means that Mary and Joseph could not afford a lamb, and so birds were their substitute. What this means is that Jesus the Lamb of God is also the Dove of God, for both were offered in atonement for sin.

The dove became a symbol, not only of the Holy Spirit, but of Christ also. In the middle ages the vessels in which wafers were kept for the Lord's Supper were sometimes made in the form of doves. The dove was the bird of good news from the beginning. It brought back the evidence to Noah that the water had departed and land was uncovered. The ancients carried doves on their ships, for they were often literal saviors of lost men. When a storm would blow a ship off course, they would release their doves and the direction in which they flew would indicate the way to the nearest land. Columbus used doves on his ship. The dove is symbolic of the Saviour in that it is a sacrifice for atonement, and it is a guide to safety.

Someone might object that I am taking birds too seriously, and that I have let my imagination run beyond what the Scripture would authorize. Let us deviate from doves for a few moments, therefore, and see just how seriously God takes the birds. In Gen. 9 God takes birds so seriously that He includes them in His covenant with Noah never to destroy the world again with a flood. In verses 8-11 we read, "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 'I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you--the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those who came out of the ark with you--every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.'"

Samuel Cox, the great Bible expositor once said, "To care for birds, we may even say, is to worship God." That sounds like a radical statement, and you might wonder if Cox is getting close to idolatry, for God clearly forbids the making of an idol of any winged creature. On the other hand, if obeying God's commands is a part of the worship of God, then bird care is clearly included. In Deut. 22:6-7 we read, "If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life." God takes birds so seriously that He makes the same promise and warning in connection with them as He does with the command to honor one's father and mother. To disobey God's concern for mother birds can lead to the same judgment as disrespect for your own mother. Motherhood is sacred in bird life as well as human life.

The idea of conservation and animal sanctuaries, and game laws, as well as human societies are all based on God's love for His own creation. It is God's will that man be wise and humane in his dominion over nature. If his greed leads him to exploit nature, and drain the land of resources, and wipe out certain species of birds and animals, he is not just disobeying a government law, but he is defying the law of God as well. God expects His people to respect game laws. Some birds are no doubt flying in Israel today only because of God's laws to protect them.

God even went further than this law for the birds. He provided a sanctuary where no bird could be molested in any way. God made His temple in Jerusalem a bird sanctuary. In Psalm 84:3-4 we read, "Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young--a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." Birds and believers together in the house of the Lord praising their Maker, Redeemer and Protector.

Now all of this has been relevant to our study of the dove and what Jesus wanted us to understand about being harmless as the dove. If God expects us to be gentle and kind to birds, how much more should we have this attitude toward all people, even to those who approach us like vicious wolves to devour us. They are still men with a worth infinitely greater than that of birds, and we are to like our Lord meet their force with love and gentleness. The Christian has a responsibility to suffer wrong rather than to inflict it. The best is to be like a wise serpent and be able to avoid conflict, but if no amount of wisdom can help you escape your oppressor, you are to face him as a dove. In a showdown where you

must either do wrong or suffer wrong, the Christian who obeys Christ will suffer wrong and be innocent of evil. Jesus is a perfect example of being wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. He outwitted His foes time and time again, but when he could no longer escape the cross without forsaking all men to their fate, He let His enemies kill Him. He went like a lamb, or like a dove, quiet and gentle, though He could have fought and destroyed them all.

It is not easy to combine the wisdom of the serpent and the innocent gentleness of the dove, but Jesus did not say it would be easy to follow Him. He said it would cost plenty. You have to die to self to face a hostile world with the character of a dove. You can only obey Christ, and be harmless as a dove, by the help of the Divine Dove-the Holy Spirit. Our desire must be that of David who cried out, "O that I had the wings of a dove." We should long even more to have the character of the dove, for the dove is the bird of love. The dove has been the emblem of love all through history. In the Song of Solomon the dove is used 6 times as an affectionate word for a lover. Love, perfection, gentleness, innocence, and purity are just some of virtues connected with the dove. The study of the natural dove can teach us these virtues, but only the Heavenly Dove can provide us with the wings necessary to rise to these ideals. Therefore, let us sing the song prayer of George Herbert, the great Christian poet who wrote--

Listen, sweet Dove, unto my song,
And spread Thy golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender heart so long,
Till it get wings and fly away with Thee.

I trust that you have an imagination that is alive, and one that can be motivated by the sight of any bird to realize that God is calling you to fly; to mount up with wings like eagles, and to live on a higher level. Of course, if you do not know the Lord of birds, you can be a lover of birds and still be lost. If you do not have any desire to obey Christ and please Him by your life, you have no reason to believe He is your Lord. If He is not your Lord you can love all the birds, but you will never get off the ground and soar spiritually. The only way to get wings for time and eternity is to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

14. THE REMARKABLE RAINBOW based on Rev. 4:1-11

I never realized how many rainbows there are in the world, until our trip to the West Coast. We would get up early to travel before the Sun came up. When it did come up it was at our back, and it was at just the right angle when we went past the irrigation systems. The light of the Sun hit that spraying water and produced more rainbows than I have ever seen in my life. There were irrigation systems with water spraying everywhere, and we were overwhelmed by the constant series of rainbows we were seeing. When we came back the same way we did not see them. The light has to be at just the right angle or they cannot be seen. I was so impressed by these earthly rainbows that I decided to do some research on the heavenly rainbow around the throne of God.

William Wordsworth was a great lover of the outdoors and especially of the rainbow. He

wrote,

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky;
So was it when my life began
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!

Another great poet, Longfellow, tells us of the Indian boy Hiawatha, who used to gaze in rapt admiration upon the rainbow because Nakomis taught him-

Tis the heaven of flowers you see there
All the wild flowers of the forest,
All the lilies of the prairie,
When on earth they fade and perish
Blossom in that heaven above us!

Here is a beautiful Indian tradition that says none of nature's beauty is lost, but is preserved in the beauty of heaven, as symbolized by the rainbow. This has always been a Christian tradition too, that all the beauty that God made in time will be preserved in eternity. Flowers will, therefore, be a part of heaven. The rainbow has always been linked with flowers. In Greek, the word rainbow is iris. Iris was a Greek goddess, who rode the rainbow. The iris flower is sometimes called the rainbow flower. All over the world the rainbow is admired. In Japan it is called the Floating Bridge of Heaven. In Hawaii it is called the path to the upper world. It is the plaything of children and adults. Many can identify with the humorous poet who wrote,

"I went to set the sprinkler--the sun was shining hard.
I found a little rainbow living in by yard:
loopsy-dasey rainbow, blown and blurred and rounded,
with nether end in no place and tether end ungrounded.
I did not dig the borders round nor for its treasure till.
The pot of gold will soon be found--on my water bill."

Elizabeth Henley

There are rainbows everywhere, but the most amazing rainbow on record is the one the Apostle John saw in heaven. Here is the only permanent rainbow that exists. They fade so fast on earth, but this one is part of the furniture of heaven. It is part of the presence of God. It would appear to be a complete circle all the way around the throne of God. We see rainbows cut in half because we cannot see below the horizon where the other half is. But John saw the whole circle in heaven. It had to be one of the most beautiful sights human eyes have ever beheld.

Beauty does not need any other reason for being. It does not have to have a message or some symbolical meaning, for beauty is an end in itself. It feeds the mind and the inner man. Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,

and one of His loveliest words is the word rainbow. Beauty is a paradox. As we travel through the mountains and see all the wonders of the trees, and snow covered peaks, and rapid flowing streams, it is amazing that all you can do with beauty is admire it. The badlands were beautiful, but you could not use them for anything. All you could do is look and stand in awe at their beauty. They serve no other purpose than just being awesome. So much of what God has made has no practical value. It is just beauty for beauty's sake. God is saying by this that beauty is a practical value in itself.

We saw flowers in the state of Washington we had never seen before. We walked a block from our motel to get a picture of the most beautiful flowering bush we had ever seen. It was so beautiful with its huge blue flowers, but it had no other purpose than just being beautiful. All we, or anyone else, could do with it was to admire it. Berghild Dahl in her book, *I Wanted To See*, tells of being blind for nearly half a century. At age 52 she had surgery at Mayo Clinic and could see 40 times more. She found it a thrill to wash dishes after that. Here is her testimony- "I begin to play with the white fluffy suds in the dishpan, I dip my hands into them and I pick up a ball of tiny soap bubbles...I hold them up to the light and in each of them I can see the brilliant colors of a miniature rainbow." She thanks God as she washes dishes for the simple pleasure of seeing rainbows while she washes. That is all a rainbow is good for-to look at and enjoy.

I discovered there are even night time rainbows. Paul Pearsall in his book, *Making Miracles*, tells about the lunar rainbows in the mountains of Maui. Moisture in the clouds migrating across the Pacific pauses over the mountains, and when the moon is near full it produces a rainbow. They are mainly silver with just a hint of the colors of the solar rainbows. Aristotle says he saw them centuries before Christ. The point is there are more rainbows in this world than we can imagine, and the rainbow will be a part of our environment for all eternity. John saw a rainbow around the throne of God. This was beautiful beyond description, no doubt, but it has more than beauty, it also has tremendous meaning, which we want to explore. We want to see that it is a symbol of God's mercy.

When God made a covenant with Noah, and used the rainbow as the symbol of that covenant, He made it crystal clear that it was a covenant with all living creatures. It is not just man that God cares about, but all His creatures, which are symbolized here in Rev.4 by the 4 living creatures. The rainbow is a universal symbol. It is everywhere in creation where there is water and sun. It is a symbol for all creatures great and small. Gen.9:12-16 says, "And God said, this is the sign of the covenant I am making between you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come. I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

Five times God said this covenant was with the whole of His creation. The rainbow goes beyond God's relationship to man to include all creatures. The rainbow is something that man has in common with the animal kingdom. It is the one symbol that links us all together

under the promise of God's mercy. It is, therefore, so appropriate that in this chapter where the theme is nature leading God's people to worship, the rainbow should stand out as the primary symbol surrounding the throne of God. This is the only symbol that I am aware of that is given by God to His whole creation. The rainbow is the only symbol that I am aware of that says to every eye on this planet--I am a God of mercy.

There is a German tradition from the middle ages that says in the 40 years before the end of the world there will be no rainbow. So every time they saw a rainbow it was a comfort, and an assurance that history would last at least another generation. Their saying was--

"So the rainbow appear
The world hath no fear,
Until thereafter 40 year."

The 40 years idea is purely subjective, but the promise of God to be merciful to all His creatures is guaranteed by the sign of the rainbow.

In Heb.4:16 we read, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The throne where we are to find mercy is the throne surrounded with the rainbow, the symbol of mercy. God does not have to look down on earth to find a rainbow to remind Him of His mercy. He dwells in an atmosphere where this symbol is impossible to escape. In a sense, God wears this symbol of mercy like a ring or a necklace. God cannot be unmerciful, for this permanent rainbow around His throne tells us it is of the very essence of God to be merciful.

The rainbow has always been important in Judaism. In Ecclesiasticus 43:11-12, the Son of Sirach writes in the intertestamental period, "Look upon the rainbow and praise Him that made it. Very beautiful it is in the brightness thereof. It compasseth the heaven about with a glorious circle, and the hands of the Most High have bended it." But it was not just for its beauty that the Jews loved the rainbow. It is the symbolism of the rainbow that set Jewish theology apart from the rest of the world's religions. Felix Levy in His Own Torah, gives us in nut shell the whole Jewish theology of the rainbow.

"Whereas in all the other flood stories, the Greek, Hindu, and so on, a dead fatalism, a sense of fall from man's original high estate, pervades their account, in the Hebrew, the climax is hopeful: Noah sees the rainbow in the sky, Nay, through the flood man has found the God that was lost. Think you, this is accidental? No, it is of the very substance of Jewish psychology. The pagans were afraid of the arbitrary will and punishment of their gods; the Jew, even when his God chastised, saw the rainbow beyond. This attitude of mind is something more than optimism, something higher than the thought that all will come out well in the end, more than a hope; it is the profound assurance in the human soul, that this universe which we

inhabit is well ordered. That law and order and love
pervade our whole life, that on the ruins new structures,
more glorious, may be erected!"

The apostle John's vision of the rainbow around God's throne confirms this Jewish conviction, and makes it basic also to Christian theology. The Christian is always to be an incurable optimist. The world is a mess and heading for judgement, but it can never get so bad that God will forget to be merciful. He will save all who trust Him however unworthy they are of His grace. The rainbow says God's mercy is primary, and His judgement is secondary.

This was a message the Christians needed to hear as they faced a hostile world that would persecute and destroy them. The rainbow around the throne is assurance that God will win, for He does not need to ride out the storms of life, He already lives on the victory side of the storms. He lives encircled by the rainbow, the sign of storms end, and those who trust in Him will end up on that bright side by His mercy.

Pastor Richard Wong of Honolulu has written the book, *Prayers From An Island*, and in it he has this prayer about the rainbow--"O God, Thou has a merry way when Thou hangest rainbows in rain. So may we learn that life's secrets are hidden....Joy embedded in pain....Wisdom gleaming through suffering....Strength growing through hardships....And fulfillments beckoning through problems. Teach us always to look through rain to find rainbows glistening. Amen." God looks and remembers His covenant, we need to look and remember as well. The rainbow is to remind us to be optimist, no matter how great the storm.

Brennan Manning writes, "Father, you must've known I was feeling like the day: dull gray dismal with a tendency to thunderstorms.

And so you flung
a rainbow
across the sky
and whispered
coaxingly
in my ear,
"Look at what
I've made--
just for you."

And as I looked
wondered
marveled
what really
took my breath away
wasn't the splendor
of your creation,
but the breathtaking
mind-boggling

heart-stopping
realization
that I am a pampered
petted
cherished
child.
Indulged.
Highly favored.
Given all.

Father, thank you
for the love
that made the rainbow
just for me.

And Father, make me like
your rainbow
Let me
reflect
the spectrum
of your love."

God uses nature to witness to us of His love and mercy, and thus, we see again the truth of this whole chapter, that nature leads the way for God's people in the worship of their creator. God says to Israel in Isaiah 54:10, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed.." God is ever the God of mercy, and that is why we need to keep our eyes on things above and say with the poet,

"I need Thee, blessed Jesus!
And hope to see Thee soon,
Encircled with the rainbow,
And seated on Thy throne:
There with Thy blood-bought children,
My joy shall ever be
To sing Thy praise, Lord Jesus,
To gaze, my Lord, on Thee!"

Louis Albert Banks tells of his little boy, one summer day in the mountains, running up to him with his eyes aglow with wonderment, and he said, "Father, see, there is the rainbow, and yet it has not rained." He looked, and sure enough, there it was spanning the slopes, and not a drop of water had fallen. It had rained somewhere, however, and they were able to share in the enjoyment, even though they had escaped the storm. It made him realize that Jesus took the storm for us on Calvary. The thunder and wrath of God fell on his head, but you and I escaped that storm of judgement. But we get to enjoy the rainbow, the symbol of God's mercy forever.

A Christian man shared this testimony of how he makes his own rainbows. "When I was a boy my mother made me go out and sprinkle the lawn just when I wanted to play ball with the other boys. But I made a game out of the experience. I pointed the nozzle of the hose up at the sun and made my own rainbows. I've never forgotten it. Now when sorrows and disappointments and crosses come, I take them, too, and point them to the Son of Righteousness. He makes rainbows of my tears. Through sorrow I find joy."

The Dyaks in Borneo call the rainbow the King's Son. Their New Testament reads, "And round about the throne there was, as it were, the King's Son in the sky." This is very appropriate that the Son of God and the rainbow be linked as one, for just as Jesus is our intercessor and mediator before God, so the rainbow is ever pleading before His throne for mercy. The rainbow, like Jesus, is a great friend of sinners. Jesus is the one who gives meaning to this beautiful symbol. If we trust in Him as our Savior we will enjoy with Him forever, around the throne of God, this remarkable rainbow.

15. NATURE AND WORSHIP Based on Rev. 4:1-11

In our 5,536 mile trip to Santa Clara and back, we saw the incredible handiwork of God like we never saw it before. The Grand Canyon was so awesome and scary to me with my fear of heights. All of my pictures have the railing in them because I could not get close enough to lean over it. We saw the beauty of the mountains and forests around Lake Tahoe that make it such a popular place. We saw the painted desert and the petrified forests, and the great variety of flowers and palm trees of California plus the vast fields of grapes. We saw the wonders of mans creativity also in the most unusual city we have ever seen-Santa Fe, New Mexico. We saw there the oldest house and church in the USA.

Everywhere we went there were masses of other people trying to see what they have never seen before. That is what traveling is all about, and that is why tourist traps are so prevalent. People want to see something. When we got back we took our grandchildren to the science museum in St. Paul, and it was a mad house as multiplied hundreds of people pushed their way passed each other to see the man made dinosaurs. People long to see the unique and the spectacular. This is what motivates people to travel and go to new places. In Glendale, California people were even flocking to Forest Lawn Cemetery to see the wonder of the Lord's Supper in living color, as well as a host of other examples of great art and sculpture. Eyes are made for seeing, and man has a perpetual desire to see. It is his adventure; his entertainment, and his education.

According to Bernard Shaw, seeing God's handiwork was of the very essence of life to Joan of Arc. When her judges sentenced her to perpetual imprisonment she responds, "Send me to the stake rather than that. To shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again climb the hills-this is worse the furnace 7 times heated. Without these things I cannot live; and by your wanting to take them from me, I know that your counsel is of the devil, and that mine if of God." Her conviction was that God wanted her to see His creation. Seeing is the daily bread of the eyes. God made the

eyes, and He expects us to use them to see what He has made. He even gives us glimpses into what we will see when we leave this world of wonders to enter the world of His presence and even greater wonders.

If prizes were given out for the greatest seer of unique and unusual things, the Apostle John would take first prize. Paul was caught up into heaven also, but he does not tell us what he saw, but John does. He was given the greatest vision of God's throne, and all that surrounds it, of any person who has ever lived. He saw awesome things that makes all other visions trivial by comparison. The thing that caught my attention about John's fabulous vision of heaven is that the key theme of Rev. 4 is the Creator and His creation. In other words, John's trip to heaven was much like the trips we take on earth to see the handiwork of God. He saw from the heavenly perspective, but the dominate theme of this chapter is the seeing of nature and its worship of God as its Creator.

This heavenly vision is amazingly worldly. Look at the worldly symbols:

1. The rainbow around the throne.
2. The glassy sea.
3. The four living creatures with faces of lion, ox, man, and eagle.

In almost sounds like John is in a celestial zoo. The scene around God is so nature oriented, and the songs of 24 elders who represent all of God's people for all time is not a song about redemption, but about nature and God as the Creator of all things. There is no escaping the primary message of this first vision of John. God wants to be worshiped as Creator. God is proud of His roll, and He has made the wonders of the world. All that we see that amazes us is His doing, and He expects us to praise Him for His wisdom, power, and cleverness in making what He has made. If God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, then God's people will be a people who, like the saints in heaven, honor and glorify God as Creator.

A woman who has sewn or knitted, or crochet a thing of beauty is delighted when you acknowledge that it is worthy of praise. People who make things of beauty enjoy their works being enjoyed by others. That is what creativity is all about. If you appreciate a work of art, you should let the creator of it know, for that is the joy of creating. God feels the same as any artist or creator of beauty. He wants to know if other minds can see and appreciate what He has done. A major part of our worship is to honor Him, thank Him, and praise Him for the wonders of nature. The Christian is to be a student of nature, for the reason that when it is known better, you know God better, and you will be in a state of worship.

The Christian has no quarrel with science, for it is but the study of that which God has made. It has a quarrel, however, with that which leads men to worship the creation rather than the Creator, but there is no quarrel with science as such. The songs of heaven are songs of praises for God's creativity. If God made it then it is worthy of study, for all God has made will lead us to praise Him when we see His wisdom in it. Psa. 104:24 says, "How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all."

When we came across the salt flats heading to Salt Lake City we saw what looked like glaciers of salt coming through the mountain passes. God made so much salt in this world.

But what is truly amazing is that every grain of that salt, be it in the ocean, lakes, or under the earth, is a perfect square to the millionth of an inch. How it can possibly be is mind boggling, but that is the way God made salt; it is always square. Sugar on the other hand is never square, but always irregular in shape. Why? Because God made the world with design, and clear signs of His creative mind. There is order and design everywhere so that any who want to see can see and worship the Creator.

There are fifteen largest pages filled with Bible texts that deal with all aspects of nature. I suspect no man could ever live long enough to study in depth all God has said about nature in His word. Everything that science studies is in the Bible. As we traveled, we saw vast fields of crops all in beautiful rows. We knew it was no accident they were so orderly. Miles and miles of grapes in beautifully organized fields didn't just happen. That order was designed by intelligence. We knew it, and when you study the crops themselves, you know they also came from intelligence.

Jesus said the fruitful Christian would reap, some 30 fold, some 60, and some a hundred fold. It was no accident that Jesus used only even numbers to illustrate, for He made all seed bearing plants to have an even number of seeds. If you check a field of poor wheat, you will find the stalks with 28, 30, or 32 grains. If you check a field with a good crop you will find stalks with 58, 60, or 62. If it is a bumper crop you will find 98, 100, or 102. But always you will find an even number of grains. God made all seed bearing crops so they always have an even number of seeds. That is designed and ordered and it is to make us lift our voices in praise to the Creator of such order. If the farmer is to be praised for the order He has created in the planting of the crops, how much more the Creator of the order in the crops He plants?

No matter where you look, in the starry heavens above, or in the deep seas below, and everywhere in between, you see that which makes the honest observer say, "The word chance doesn't fit-there is mind in that." Nature and worship go hand in hand to those who see nature as God intended it to be seen: As a symbol of His power and wisdom. Thomas Edison said, "One thing is certain, the universe is permeated by intelligence. I tell you no person can be brought into contact with the mysteries of nature, or make a study of chemistry, without being convinced that, behind all, there is a Supreme Intelligence. I am convinced of that. I think I can, perhaps I may sometime, demonstrate the existence of such intelligence with the certainty of a demonstration in mathematics."

John's vision is not of any scientific experiment or mathematical proof. He sees four living creatures which are symbols of all nature glorifying and worshiping God. Most commentators will agree that these four living creatures are representative of all nature. The lion is supreme among wild animals; the ox is supreme among tame animals; the eagle is supreme among the birds, and man is supreme among all the creatures of earth. As Swete and Barclay state, "These four beings stand for the noblest, strongest, swiftest, and wisest of God's creatures, and they lead the way in the worship of their Creator." The best of nature are not objects of worship, but are themselves leaders in worship.

When God created all of nature, He said it was very good, and in the new heaven and new earth it will be very good again. Creation is seen here as God intended it to be: A tool that leads His people to worship. What is nature for? Its chief end is to glorify God and lead men

to do the same. Psa. 103:22 says, "Praise the Lord, all His works everywhere in His dominion." All of creation is to praise God, and in so doing be a witness to man of the importance of worship. God wants to be worshiped as our Creator even in heaven. He will be our Creator forever, and His creation will forever praise Him.

Some people ask, will there be animals in heaven? The answer is, if God is going to redeem His creation from the fall, and this is the clear revelation of the Bible, then there will be animals in heaven, and there will be everything else in heaven that is a part of God's creation, and forever they will aid to the worship of God as Creator. Chapter 5 is about the worship of God as redeemer, but before God became redeemer He was Creator, and He wants to be worshiped as such. Even redemption is a second work of creation. It is a plan by which fallen man and nature are recreated to be what God intends.

This revelation is to cause the Christian to be one who looks at all of nature as a guide to worship God as Creator. Our perspective is to be: All that God made is like a choir director leading us to praise its Maker. Sometimes this is easy, as when you are standing gazing out over the Grand Canyon. At other times it takes effort to see how nature glorifies God. Isa. 6:3 says, "The whole earth is full of His glory." But you have to look harder some places to see it. Take the wilderness for example:

THE WILDERNESS.

As I drove for hours seeing nothing but wilderness and desert sage, which amazed me with its ability to survive in such a place, I wondered over and over again what good is all this wasteland? It seemed so worthless, and I wondered why God made so much of it. As we saw a ranch off in the distance from time to time we could not help but feel sorry for the people who have to live in such isolation from the world. Some had their large TV dishes, and so we knew they could lighten up their solitude with the blare and glare of civilization, but many had no TV, and when we turned on the radio we found places with no stations at all, and many with only one. The very thought of living in such isolation was a burden to us.

Then, when I read the Scripture I was reminded that these people had the potential of developing very Christlike qualities by living there. John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said that he was the greatest born of woman, lived in the wilderness. Jesus also often went into desolate places to pray and be alone with His heavenly Father. Luke 5:16 says, "And He withdrew Himself into the wilderness and prayed." Luke 6:12 says, "..He went out into a mountain to pray..." Mark 1:35 says, "..rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place and there prayed."

David Douglas in Christianity Today says he can identify with this, for in Santa Fe, New Mexico he is ever near the wilderness, and he says it motivates one to pray, for the solitude and the wonder of nature dominate the mind. It makes one feel alone with the Creator of it all. He says the vast wilderness makes one feel totally inadequate. Pride vanishing and one is filled with a sense of dependence upon God. I've only sipped at this cup from which he has drunk deeply, but I can, after seeing the wilderness, believe what he says is true. God does not speak to us more clearly in the wilderness, but we are more likely to listen there. That is the problem, that we are too busy, too preoccupied, too distracted by all the realities of life to

listen to the Creator of all that really matters.

Being alone in the wilderness of God's creation makes us listen, and thus, makes us pray, and thus, it is a major aid to worship. Douglas writes, "On hiking trips I have taken alone, often into the desert canyons of the Southwest, prayer has become a virtual companion. I have walked for miles passed cliffs of burgundy sandstone, the walls suspended like five hundred foot-high tapestries embroidered by waterfalls, and come across no one for days. I have found myself praying on scores of occasions in that solitude, prayers of petition for my continued well being, prayers of thanks for my sight and mobility. Normally merely dutiful and absent minded, my prayers in the wilderness have become expressions of impassioned clarity."

In our gardens and our parks we can forget God, for even though He alone can make the flowers, trees, and plants, we are conscience also that we have helped make the order and beauty. But in the vast wide open wilderness we are over whelmed by the reality that we are not the Creator. We are nothing, and He is everything. All the so-called wasteland is not wasted at all, for it is one of the most powerful tools for making man conscience of God. John Muir made the claim, "While God's glory is written all over his work, in the wilderness the letters are capitalized." Anything that helps us worship God is a great value, and in John's vision we see it is the forces of nature that help all of God's people to worship. Therefore, the realm of nature is to be treasured as a friend that leads us to God.

The word of God says listen to the works of God, for day and night; perpetually, and without end, they call us to worship. There is a time and place for everything, and the time for worship is anytime, and the place is anyplace, for nature leads the way, and nature is like God in this respect: It is always present. The heavens declare the glory of God day and night. But so does every animal, every flower, and everything made that only God can make. Sheldon Vanauken wrote of an experience most all of us have had: Of suddenly being surprised by the sight of a cardinal in all of its red brilliance. He wrote,

This is no chance,
This bird of flame
That grips my glance:
I see God's name
In scarlet flight
And know that he
Along the light
Is hailing me.

We get so familiar with our surroundings and the nature in the context of where we live that we do not think of it as a symbol calling us to worship its Maker. This is one of the values of travel. We saw things that God made so radically different that it made me look more closely at the beauty of what we have in our own environment. It made me more thoughtful of creation. I don't know how long I can be influenced by what I saw in the West, or by what John saw in heaven, but the goal of every Christian is to be ever thoughtful of nature so that it might lead to worship. Max Mullen wrote, "The eyes of a thoughtful man forever behold the face of the Creator beaming in love from the midst of his works."

Beauty is a link to God. Some of the beauty of nature is so fleeting it is hard to capture. We were pulling up a hill in the painted desert, and on the ridge of a bare hill to our right was a large deer standing like a statue in the morning sun. I wanted Lavonne to get a picture of it, but we went around a bend and the vision was gone. It was a fleeting scene of impressing beauty we could not capture, and there are so many of these. But each one can cause you to praise God, for He is the author of that beauty. We often got up at 5:00 in the morning to drive, and we saw the sun come up over the mountains. The sun is the source of so much of the beauty of God's handiwork.

Gloria Gaither in Joys and Sorrows tells of how she came close to missing a chance to worship God, and strengthen her relationship to her son. It was a hectic day and she was busy in the kitchen when Benji hollered, "come here mom!" "I can't" she hollered back, "I've got to finish these dishes. You will have to wait." Knowing that sunsets do not wait for busy mothers he said, "okay, but you'll miss it," and he turned and walked out. It dawned on her that this could be an important moment, and so she went out behind him and saw the sky a riot of crimson. It was breathtaking with the light reflecting off the creek where they live, and geese flying across that crimson sky. Her son said, "Mom, I'm glad you came." She was glad as well, and felt bad because she almost missed this gift from God for a sink full of dishes. She still had to do the dishes, but it was easier after she had spent those moments in worship.

Nature is to be a source of constant messages that bring us out of self, work, and even play to worship the One who made it all. Day and night nature worships God as its Creator, and if we are alert, we can by day or night see that which will motivate us to join in on their song of praise. We are not Tazans and Janes. We do not live close to nature every day. The lion and eagle we rarely see, and for most of us even the ox or cow is a rare sight. But remember, man is a part of nature. Man is one of the wonders of God's creation. We can see people every day, and if we see them as God's works of art, we can see enough daily to make us join all nature in the praise and worship of God our common Creator.

