From Uplook, 2002

J. B. Nicholson Jr.

© Uplook Ministries. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

No End in Sight (February-March 2002)

From Uplook, February-March 2002. Editorial.

Our lives stretch from birth to eternity

How many days in your life are truly memorable? A landmark anniversary here; a special birthday there; a graduation or retirement. Hopefully for the believer there are days of significant dealings with God—our Peniels and Elims and Bethels and Hebrons, our times of wrestling and refreshing and revelation. God help us to raise up cairns to remember them.

Most often under the name on a gravestone are listed two dates—the day of birth and of death. In between there is a little horizontal line, sometimes called a “short dash”—appropriately so, because that is what our lives seem to be: a short dash from our first wail to our last gasp.

Christians often add another date to their memorial stone, the day they were born again. They rightly feel that the true beginning of their life was not when they became a child of Adam’s race, but the day they became a child of God. But let me suggest that the other date (the day of a believer’s death) is somewhat suspect as well, and could do with emendation in our minds if not on our gravestones. The day of a Christian’s death is not a terminus but a transition, not the end of life but its true beginning. The Lord Jesus preferred the word “sleep” to “death” when He spoke of His own. It was not mere semantics. Sleep is only partial and temporary separation. A person sleeping is there and not there at

the same time. So believers who “sleep” are no longer physically with us, yet we both are “in Christ.” We are all members of “the whole family in heaven and earth.” We share a common life and worship the same Lord. Just a shout and we shall be “caught up together with them” to be forever with the Lord. Now there is a memorable day, the day of the rapture of the people of God. Perhaps it would quicken our pulse and lift our chins if we would remind ourselves of the most breathtaking wonders of that day of all days for us.

1. WE SHALL SEE HIM. Whatever broad vistas that day will reveal, surely this will be heaven’s headland. Earth’s beauties will vanish, heaven’s other glories will recede in “the light of…the face of Jesus Christ.” “…In my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:26-27). “Thine eyes shall see the king in His beauty” (Isa. 33:17). We will not be squinting from the back of a crowd but enraptured face to face, reverent yet unafraid for “perfect love casteth out fear.” “They shall see His face” (Rev. 22:4). And we will never lose sight of Him again.

2. WE SHALL KNOW HIM. Robert Browning wrote: “…it shall be a face like My face that receives thee; a Man like to Me thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever; a hand like this hand shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!” It will indeed. No stranger but a well-known Friend shall greet us. And to our utter amazement, in spite of our failing and faltering pathway Home, He will be so glad to have us there. “Rejoice with Me,” He will say, for “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

3. WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM. I don't know all that means, but it does not mean that we shall be unlike Him! We shall at last love what He loves, see things the way He sees them, live as He does for the pleasure of God. And what will accomplish this? Well, what causes us to be more like Him now? "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image…" (2 Cor. 3:18). Are we changed so little because we see Him so little? But then "…we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He [really] is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

The place God has prepared for us is to be with Him; and the purpose God has predestined is to be like Him.

I have an old book of stories that includes the conversion of someone listed simply as "M. C." When the Lord saved him, from a grateful heart he said, "Jesus, Thou shalt never hear the end of this!"

Amen to that.

Reports from Around the World (February-March 2002)

From Uplook, February-March 2002. Article.

Just a taste.

At the conference banquet a brief report was given of some encouraging happenings around the world.

Often, if we don't hear of good things that the Lord is doing, we assume that nothing is happening. We can get the Elijah Syndrome—"I only I am left"—because we don't know about the seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. And that number did not include the woman of Shunem or Elisha at Meholah, or the sons of the prophets at Jericho, or the widow in Lebanon, or who knows how many else. God is on schedule. His work will all get done. The gates of hell shall not prevail. Here are just a few samples of His work in some countries of the Far and Middle East.

The Far East

JAPAN: At a recent conference of assembly believers near Osaka, one thousand gathered in the tallest hotel in Western Japan. Of the 126 million people in Japan only 0.3% are estimated to be evangelical Christians. The assemblies may be few in number and small in size but the believers are very serious. While visiting there, I was humbled at their zeal and appetite for the Word.

Please pray for the radio ministry with the gospel blanketing Western Japan, for extensive tract distribution, and for two assembly camps, each about one hundred miles from Tokyo. This camp work has seen

rich blessing in the lives of Japanese young people since its beginnings in 1959.

Prayer is also appreciated for two Japanese sisters commended to Pakistan, where a good work goes on with missionaries from the UK, Germany, India and elsewhere.

KOREA: It would be wonderful to see a sweeping gospel response in Japan like the work the Lord is doing in Korea. There are about 230 assemblies in South Korea (about twice as many as Japan). The statistics say that 25% of Koreans are Christian; the Lord knows how many are truly born again.

There are a few missionaries (from Germany, Canada and the US) in Korea but the exciting news is that Korea is becoming a significant sending country. The Korean assemblies have sent missionaries to China, Kampuchea (Cambodia), Mongolia, Nepal, Viet Nam, India, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. Many of these lands would be difficult for Westerners to even gain entrance.

It was wonderful to see a dozen Korean brethren at the Japanese conference. Because Korea has historically suffered much at the hands of the Japanese (since the 1500s!) it is an evidence of God's abounding grace to see them break bread together. The late Gifford Beckon carried this burden for more than a decade—to see a bridge between the Japanese and Korean brethren. "Blessed are the peacemakers."

CHINA: A brother familiar with the work in this vast land of more than 1 billions souls writes: "There is much more 'freedom' of worship than there was twenty years ago, but there is still a lot of persecution of Christians in

China. The official church has grown a great deal but the house churches have grown even faster…the Lord is working His will in China today. Many thousands are coming to faith in the Lord Jesus."

A brother who makes forays into China says: "Presently a married couple serving…in central China came to Christ only about five years ago. They are bold with the gospel and through a vast networking system provide discipleship materials to others…In the past 18 months, they have printed and distributed nearly 18,000 books… Ten months ago, my friends had over 7500 books in his apartment, 3000 of which were disguised as a 'book bed' on which he slept.

"DVDs, CDs, and VCDs are effective tools for proclaiming the good news in China. This couple has over 200 different CDs; they can copy ten per day. This aids distribution as it is easier to conceal a CD than the many books it contains…This couple is using the leading edge of technology to further the kingdom of God in China. Pray for them as they also live on the edge, hazarding their lives for Christ."

VIET NAM: This country ravaged by war is still officially Communist although it is slowly opening to the Free World. A brother who visits there writes:

"The situation is similar to China, except that there are far fewer 'Protestant' churches officially open. For instance, in Hanoi with about 5 million people, there is only one government-recognized 'Protestant' church. There are many house churches of all persuasions…

"The Vietnamese government has tried to suppress the growth of the church, especially in rural areas where many of the minority peoples live. We have sent aid to a

number of families where the father has been jailed for ‘illegal religious activities.’

“Many of those on the forefront of evangelizing in Viet Nam are brothers and sisters who came to know the Lord as Saviour while in the refugee camps in Hong Kong. When I visit Viet Nam, I am often followed by plainclothes police, and while I have never been arrested, the police often visit Christians after I have been to see them. Sometimes they are taken in for questioning. In spite of this, they seem anxious for me to come to visit as often as possible. I take in Bibles and other literature…”

PHILIPPINES: Do you think the situation with the Burnhams in the Philippines is out of God’s control? Has He lost control on the one island of Mindanao? But how else would you get the gospel to the associates of Al Qaeda? Paul would be convinced that men like that could get saved because that’s the kind of man he had been—he murdered Christians for a living. And he had seen people saved in Caesar’s household. He also knew that one of the elders in the assembly at Antioch was a half-brother of Herod. He knew that God was able to save to the uttermost, and we ought to pray that some of these Abu Saief terrorists would trust the Saviour through their contact with the Burnhams.

There are known to be more than 150 assemblies in the Philippines, but there is much work to be done. These assemblies are located on only 8 of 700 inhabited islands! It should be noted, however, that one sixth of the total population of about 75 million is located in greater Manila where a vigorous Christian work carries

on. Even so, on the island of Luzon where Manila is located, there are still 55 unreached people groups.

INDONESIA: After China and India, Indonesia is the third most populous country in the world. It is officially a Muslim country. In recent months, many Christians have been slaughtered there. Their situation is still very unstable. Missionaries are evacuating or keeping a very low profile. There are more than 300 people groups in Indonesia still unreached by the gospel.

In the last few months the Tembega tribe from Indonesia sent in a request for a Christian missionary. Because these people cannot read or write, they ascribed to the request with their fingerprints.

INDIA: Christian work in India stretches back to the first century. Not only are there many assemblies within the subcontinent itself (about 1988, most in the south) but our Indian brethren are strategically located in many difficult countries where they shine for Christ: Myanmar (Burma), Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, and most countries of the Middle East.

Today many Hindus are turning to the Lord and as a result the persecution of Christians (especially in North India) is on the rise. The brethren there believe this is a good thing since it shows the dramatic difference between Christianity and other religions.

We need to pray for our Indian brethren as they “fill up the sufferings of Christ.” The one billion of India are approximately 83% Hindu, 11% Muslim, and 3.5% Christian (of every type). The need there seems overwhelming—10,000 children starve to death every day in India! Every year the population of India

increases by a number equal to the population of Australia.

Pray for the thrusting out of new laborers, for the protection and provision of those already serving (primarily from southern assemblies), for effective means of sharing the gospel with an increasingly hostile populace. But add a good dose of thanksgiving to your prayers for the great things God is doing.

Also remember to pray for the neighboring island of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon). Peter and Peggy Ferry from Scotland have served there since 1976. There are seven assemblies there. As well, pray for the difficult work in Nepal, “the top of the world,” where, it is reported by a sister who labors there, that at least fourteen assemblies carry on a quiet witness for Christ.

The Middle East

Do not think that lands that have lain so long in the darkness of Islam are an impregnable fortress of Satan. There is Someone stronger than the strong man (Lk. 11:21-22)! God is at work in this part of the world. Many of you know that there are hundreds of assemblies in Egypt, but there are also assemblies in fairly well every country of the Middle East. A score of assemblies ring the Persian Gulf—if you gave one day to each assembly, it would take you a month to get around them all!

I have dependable reports that Christians serve (like Joseph and Daniel) in Sadaam Hussein’s palace. A missionary from the Philippines told me about two Filipina nannies hired by one of the Middle East’s royal families. Because they taught Bible stories to the children, they were sent packing. But the children went

on strike, refusing to eat until their nannies returned. So the prince buckled; the Christian nannies are back at work.

Christians meeting in Saudi Arabia and Morocco must be very discreet but that does not keep them from meeting. They shift places and times of meeting, arrive in ones and twos, and must only whisper their hymns. One brother who lived in Saudi Arabia told me an assembly met in his home in an insulated room. But as an Egyptian brother said (who met with 350 underground at an oil base in the Middle East), "Wherever there is a chink, the light gets through."

An Arab brother writes from Nazareth, "The situation here is deteriorating, violence increasing, and distrust growing on both sides…The tension affects everyone but it forces believers to depend on the Lord and trust Him for protection. We have a greater mission: to be peacemakers and to witness as to how the Lord can bring true peace and freedom from fear…."

These should be our heroes. God has raised up men and women, dauntless in the face of discouragement, courageous in spite of fear. They work largely unknown, with limited resources in often hostile surroundings. They may live in the midst of grinding poverty, unsanitary condition, dangerous roads, unstable governments, food shortages, shifting populations—not to mention language, culture and ethnic barriers, or the rabid opposition of the enemy. And they do all for the love of souls for Christ's sake and for His present smile and future joy in a job done for Him.

This is a little sample of what's happening in the world. Forget the evening news. They have no idea what's

going on in the world. This is the real war. This is the real battle.

We should not think of those laboring in the work of God as charity cases. These are blue-chip stock, the best investments you can make. I trust the Lord will encourage us to pray more and give more and to be more exercised to send more of our good young people overseas into the work of God. Let’s pray the Lord of the harvest that He will raise up laborers into His vineyard. Who knows—maybe He’ll send you!

My Faithful Friend (April 2002)

From Uplook, April 2002. Editorial.

Little faith in a great God is better than great faith anywhere else.

Where I grew up, faith in God was a well-stocked commodity. Doubting the Lord was like doubting the sun. It was so obvious, even a blind man could feel its warmth. At family gatherings we prayed to the God who provided, we sang of His faithfulness, and sat around hearing and telling stories about "His wonderful works to the children of men." In our heritage there was an unbroken line of those God-fearing, Christ-loving, Bible-believing saints who practiced the divine injunction to "…tell it to the generation following" (Ps. 48:13).

We were also encouraged to read first person accounts of the faithfulness of God. I'll never forget Lydia Buksbazen's They Looked for a City, and Gladys Alward's Little Woman. I avidly read the exploits of David Livingstone (born in my father's hometown) and George Müller and Mary Slessor, "White Queen of the Calabar." I'll never forget Jock Purves' exquisitely written account of the Scottish Covenanters, Fair Sunshine, or Anderson's thrilling Forgotten Heroes of Italy. I even survived the reading of the Glovers' A Thousand Miles of Miracles in China—all 378 pages of it (with really tiny print!).

It's one thing to sing and talk and read about God's faithfulness in others' lives; it's quite another to actually live like that. And of course it isn't only itinerant preachers who "live by faith." The scripture states:

“Now the just shall live by faith” (Heb. 10:38). That seems fairly comprehensive to me, including every believer. I know you know how to trust the Lord, says Paul, because that’s how you were saved. God is to be trusted in the factory and the office, in the hospital and school, in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary events of our lives. In fact, “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6).

How the Lord loves to “show Himself strong” on our behalf. I used to be quite a day-dreamer until I realized what a huge waste of time and brain power it was. God answers prayers, not dreams. In day dreams, we are the heroes (imagine what I would do for the Lord with a million dollars!). In prayers, God is the hero. Faith is that inclination of the spirit towards God that, knowing what a faithful friend He is, expects Him in grace to do for us far better than we ask or even think.

When in life I have welcomed the Lord into the situation, waiting and watching for Him to do a Godlike thing, how He has delighted to surprise me with joy. But how often I have missed such blessing by foolishly acting independently of Him. Do I think He doesn’t care? Or can’t help? Or wants me to fumble on alone?

Let’s remember that we not only receive from the Lord by faith; we also can give to others on His behalf by faith. And to be used by the Lord as agents of His faithfulness in the lives of others does not usually require large resources. But it does require largeness of heart and a soul sensitive to heaven’s directives. Often His work is still forwarded by widows’ mites, by little acts of kindness, a cup of cold water here, a helping hand there. This is not to discourage generous giving;

often the widows' mites are given without the widows' spirit. I recall hearing a radio preacher address the following question: "My husband and I disagree as to whether we should give ten percent of our gross or net income. What do you think?" His sage answer: "I suppose it all depends upon whether you want net blessing or gross blessing."

May the testimonies to His faithful friendship in this issue inspire us all to trust more our trustworthy God.

Known by its Fruits (May 2002)

From Uplook, May 2002. Editorial.

A sweet crop comes by the knife and the Life.

Man-O-War Cay lies like a jewel in an azure sea. One of the Family or Out Islands of the Bahamas, it is little more than two-and-a-half miles long. It is hook shaped, with a well-guarded harbor at its midpoint, coveted by yacht owners. For decades the inhabitants were known by their simple way of life: sail-making, boat-building, and fishing. But in the last fifty or sixty years, wealthy Americans have found their way there, building homes on the extremities of the island, away from the settlement clustered about the harbor.

As one islander told me, “When the Americans came to the Bahamas, they brought with them their money, their gold watches and big boats, and they built their fancy homes. They had a message. We didn’t have much money then, or any of the fine things they had. But we had the Lord; we had the gospel. We had a message and they had a message. But they were the better missionaries. We didn’t convert them; they converted us.” Those words cut to my heart. I fear I have often been more a convert to the world’s values than a missionary with a far better message for money-rich, soul-bankrupt sinners.

I was walking the length of the island one sun-drenched afternoon and came upon a brother who was a gardener for some of the American home owners. I always enjoyed the old fellow’s company. He had a native wisdom you can’t find in textbooks. He was happy to take me on a

little tour of the estate's garden, especially the citrus trees he had carefully cultivated so the visitors would have fresh fruit for their table when they arrived. He pointed to one. "That," he said, "is a sour orange tree."

Then, plucking a ripe fruit from its laden branches, he deftly peeled it with his gnarled fingers and handed it to me. I did not relish eating a sour orange.

What was my delight to find it one of the sweetest, juiciest, most succulent oranges I had ever tasted!

The old fellow laughed, then explained. The soil on the island is shallow and beneath it is a bed of coral. When it rains, the water tends to lie just under the surface until it can percolate through the rock. This makes it difficult on tree roots which tend to rot in the underground water. But it has been discovered that the roots of the sour orange are hardy enough to survive in those conditions. No one, however, wants sour oranges.

Once a sour orange tree takes good root, a sweet orange branch is grafted in. The sour orange continues to grow, constantly attempting to dominate the life of the tree. But the gardener patiently prunes back the old life until a bountiful tree stands in the garden, providing shade, fragrance, and a fruitful harvest for its owner.

Sour root. Sweet fruit. So is it a sour orange tree or a sweet orange tree? Let our Lord answer the question. "Every good tree produces good fruits, but the worthless tree produces bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a worthless tree produce good fruits…By their fruits then surely ye shall know them" (Mt. 7:17-20, Darby). The tree is known not by its root but by its fruit. Call it a sweet orange tree.

We also grow in a difficult environment. And what is more, we grow from a sour stock, of ourselves incapable of growing anything but sour fruit. But because we have received “with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:21), a new kind of fruit is possible in the lives of those who still give evidence of the old sour life sprouting up here and there. If we yield such sour evidence of the flesh to the knife (the written Word) wielded in the hands of the gracious Gardener, we will soon bear by His life (the Living Word) “the fruit of the Spirit [which] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22). Such a life will be sweet indeed.

What Can One Person Do? (June 2002)

From Uplook, June 2002. Editorial.

Good question. Better answer.

I remember seeing a cartoon. Crowds of people stretched to the horizon. From each mouth was coming the same question: What can one person do? This issue of UPLOOK is dedicated to inspire your own answer to that question.

A few years ago, a book entitled The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell made a stir. Its subtitle was, “How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference.” The author makes some startling suggestions about the way major changes in society can happen suddenly and without warning. Ideas, he says, can spread the way a virus spreads an infectious disease. The moment when they “break out” is the Tipping Point. He describes the three rules of such social epidemics. The first is contagiousness; a property not only of viruses but of ideas as well. He writes:

Have you ever thought about yawning, for instance? Yawning is a surprisingly powerful act. Just because you read the word “yawning” in the previous two sentences —and the two additional “yawns” in this sentence—a good number of you will probably yawn…If you’re reading this in a public place, and you’ve just yawned, chances are that a good proportion of everyone who saw you yawn is now yawning too, and a good proportion of the people watching the people who watched you yawn are now yawning as well, and on and on, in an ever-widening, yawning circle.

The author's point is well taken, and can be easily applied to words. Although the Bible uses the healthier picture of seeds being sown rather than germs being spread, the principle is the same. When I speak a verse of Scripture to someone, I actually plant it in that person's mind. When that individual went out into the day, he or she had no idea that the Word of God would "spread" into their mind any more than they would know that a flu virus would invade their body. Of course every person has a choice as to whether the seed will be received into the ground of their hearts or not (see Lk. 8). But if I am faithful in proclaiming the Word, I know some of it will germinate. So it was with the early church: "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts 8:4). "The Word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24). "And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region" (Acts 13:49). This Word, like a seed, has a life of its own; as Paul would later write: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Gladwell's second rule is that little changes can somehow have big effects. He says we are prone to always expect a direct relationship between cause and effect. But, he says, "when a virus spreads through a population, it doubles and doubles again…As human beings we have a hard time with this kind of [geometric] progression, because the end result—the effect—seems far out of proportion to the cause." It was this principle that allowed eleven men to not only survive the onslaught of the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman Empire and the Gates of Hell, but to storm their ramparts and win the field. It is this principle behind the

line, “If every one won one, and every ‘won one’ won one…” When a virus goes out into a population, it isn’t discouraged by the odds. It has a secret, the secret of reproduction, the secret of the Word-bearing church as well.

The third rule is the Tipping Point, that the difference between little happening and a great deal happening is often a little thing. It is one degree difference between rainfall and a snowstorm. A sentence can encourage or discourage depending simply on the tone of voice. What difference does a Hitler make, or a Ghandi, a Churchill or a Paul? What difference do you make? For the believer, the Tipping Point is often an encounter with the Lord, a prayer of consecration, a personal crisis, or perhaps hearing of another believer whose zeal is contagious, provoking us “unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). May these stories be used for the Lord’s glory to start something in us that will spread like wildfire.

Muddled Middle East: Who Has Rights to the Land of Israel/Palestine? (June 2002)

From Uplook, June 2002. Article.

The name “Palestine,” like much of the Middle East, is misleading. In fact it was originally intended to be so. The Romans, who had been caught off guard by one too many Jewish rebellions, decided to wipe the whole idea of a Jewish state right off the map. They renamed Israel Palestina after the Philistines, the inveterate enemies of the Jews. Jerusalem they renamed Aelia Capitolina, although a name like that hardly had a chance of surviving! Jews were banned from the city.

The Palestinians (we’ll answer who they really are in another column) have no claim to the land. Even when the British considered a homeland for the Jews in “Palestine” (during their occupation, 1917-1948) there was no thought of any Arab claims outside of Syria. In fact the original land considered for the Jews included all of the present country of Jordan as well! It isn’t a matter of “returning” occupied lands to the Palestinians—they never had it as their sovereign state. Before the Israelis were there, the Egyptians were in the Gaza Strip, the Syrians in the Golan, and the Jordanians in the West Bank. They were there from 1948-1967; if they had wanted the Palestinians to have a homeland there, they could have granted it. But it was these Arab occupiers who put the Palestinians in camps and kept them there for almost 20 years.

What about the Jews? The irony is that most Zionists who hold up a Bible and say that God gave this land to Abraham don't believe in the Bible, God, or Abraham! And the fact is that they don't have a claim to the land, either. This land belongs to God (as He proved by removing the Jews from it when they abandoned Him). Their only hope now is to receive God's Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Christ was the one God had in mind when He said to Abraham: "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12:7). "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

The true remnant will yet be driven from the land, but Messiah will bring them home (Isa. 63:1). And then there will also be a great awakening in the Moslem world: "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria (Iraq), even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance" (Isa. 19:24-25). What a day!

Sweet and Simple (July-August 2002)

From Uplook, July-August 2002. Editorial.

Life! Functional complexity, practical simplicity.

There are two things I know for sure: 1) life is simple, and 2) life is definitely not simple. The one statement is as fundamentally true as the other. Let me explain.

Physical life is sustained in the following way: you get up in the morning, perform your necessary ablutions, have a good breakfast, and head off into the day. It helps to keep good posture and get some exercise—basic things your mother told you as a child. Generally speaking, a healthy lifestyle is a relatively simple matter for the average individual to pursue.

But what is actually happening in your body as you get out of bed and head to the breakfast table? The most brilliant biochemists stand agape at the intricacies of the chemical reactions occurring in the cell. The human body is composed of hundreds of trillions of cells. Each cell contains an average of 13 trillion bits of information —enough to fill 500,000 pages in a library. These cells are highly specialized, providing us with such services as the ability to see, smell, and taste our food, the muscular movement of our hands, jaws, heart and diaphragm, and the wonders of our immune system, the blood clotting mechanism and digestion. In order to accomplish even one step in any of these actions, a whole series of events must take place in the right order at the right time. Protein, for example, when utilized in a cell, travels only about one ten-thousandths of an inch from the cytoplasm where it is synthesized to the

lysosome where it will conclude its task, yet it requires dozens of other proteins to make this journey successfully. These mind-boggling processes occur in our bodies billions of times every day. And as long as the machinery of life works as God designed it, we rarely—if ever—think about it.

In a similar way, the world around us carries on. Neither I nor the scientists who study light really understand it. Is light comprised of waves or particles? Sometimes it acts like one, sometimes like the other. Yet I do not need to understand light or photosynthesis to enjoy their benefits. I use a simple ON-OFF switch to illuminate my life. And, just as surely, munching on lettuce unlocks the energy of the sun in my body.

I have heard many messages preached on Romans 6–8 and often wonder if even the preacher understands "how it all works," let alone his hearers. And while I am even more curious about how justification and sanctification work than I am about life at work in my body, the complexities of the doctrines should not keep me from enjoying the Christian life any more than struggling with how polysaccharides store energy should keep me from enjoying the first peach of summer.

When I have engaged my mind to its limits in seeking to understand how the Christian life "works" and still fail to understand these ministries of the Spirit described in such marvellous detail in the Word of God, it comes down to this: my soul needs hygiene (we are sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the Word," Eph. 5:26) and food ("Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life," Jn. 6:27, NKJV), exercise ("For bodily exercise

profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things," 1 Tim. 4:8) and good posture (see Rom. 5:2; 1 Cor. 2:5; Gal. 5:1) as much as my body does. How can I expect to be healthy in spirit if I neglect these daily essentials?

But the Christian life is simpler yet. Paul writes: "I fear, lest…your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). We need a return to first principles, first love, first works. If Christ is first in my day, thoughts, plans, and desires, I will have found the uncomplicated secret of the simple side of life: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24-25). Christianity is not rules and regulations, formulas or equations. "The truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). Christianity is Christ, a loving relationship with the One who is Life itself.

Leaving It Behind (July-August 2002)

From Uplook, July-August 2002. Bible study.

“We brought nothing into this world; it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

Nothing focuses the soul on what is truly important as much as the thought of leaving this world behind. Sometimes the more things we have, the harder it is to die. But what exactly will we be leaving here?

1. MATERIAL THINGS: The subtitle verse, found in 1 Timothy 6, is a warning passage about living for the wrong world. It includes the following red flags:

a) confusing gain with godliness (v. 5)

b) wanting to be rich sets traps for the soul (v. 9)

c) loving money grows into other evils (v. 10)

d) being rich tends to pride and false trust (v. 17)

But Paul tells Timothy he is to remind the rich “That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:18-19). See also 2 Pet. 3:11-12.

2. OUR HUMILIATION IN THESE BODIES: “…We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body…” (Phil. 3:20-21). Our bodies:

a) were created by God for His glory (Gen. 1:27)

b) were damaged by the Fall and subsequent sin

c) are presently indwelt by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19)

d) have been redeemed by Christ (1 Cor. 6:20)

e) will be changed at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:42-54)

3. OUR SINFUL NATURE: There are some things only the Rapture will fix. BUT IT WILL FIX THEM. The world's glitter will look like carnival prizes the morning after, compared with heaven's glories. He will not be ashamed to be called our God! (see Heb. 11:16). We shall be like Him (1 Jn. 3:2). What does it mean?

a) we will be removed from sinful influences

b) we will see things from God's perspective

c) we will see the horrific consequences of sin

d) we will see our Saviour—His eyes, His wounds

4. OPPORTUNITIES TO WITNESS: Who will you witness to in heaven? "He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). The Lord Jesus will be "…preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world," (1 Tim. 3:16) or not at all. If you wait to witness until: a) you feel like witnessing; or b) you think you have all the answers; or c) you know just the right way to do it, there will be nobody then to tell! There are only believers in heaven.

5. THE ABILITY TO MAKE SACRIFICES FOR CHRIST: What will you be able to sacrifice in a land where you own everything? We are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). There is a day coming called "the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). All things promised to us now will then be our possessions. At present, we should be learning to give like the princes we are. We should give:

a) ourselves first (2 Cor. 8:5)

b) cheerfully—spontaneously (2 Cor. 9:7)

c) generously (2 Cor. 8:7; 9:6)

d) proportionately (2 Cor. 8:12; 9:15)

6. SUFFERING FOR THE SAVIOUR'S SAKE: The Rapture will herald an end to the long and bloody history of Christendom on earth—although there will yet be suffering saints during the Tribulation. The persecution of the Church will be over. First the suffering, then the glory is a principle throughout Scripture. That means, of course, that our time is limited to identify with our Lord Jesus in the day of His rejection. There are no baptistries in heaven, no pillories, no prisons, no cruel jokes or ostracizing. As Amy Carmichael wrote: "We have all eternity to celebrate our victories, but only a few short years to win them."

7. ALL HARMFUL EFFECTS OF THE FALL: "…for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

a) no more disease, pain or death, sorrow or crying

b) end of loneliness, weakness, failure and sin

c) end of war, famine, natural disasters

d) no more night, darkness, wasted time

e) end of separation from fellow believers

f) no more disappointment or unfulfilled desires

g) no more regrets, fears or doubts

h) no satanic temptation or worldly allurements

What is in heaven will be wonderful, of course. But thank the Lord for what isn’t there as well.

Muddled Middle East: Will the Real Palestinians Please Stand Up? (July-August 2002)

From Uplook, July-August 2002. Article.

Who are the Palestinians? At a personal level, they are some of my good friends, brothers and sisters in Christ. Many of the believers in the Middle East are Palestinians. Living between the proverbial “rock and a hard place,” they are ostracized by the majority of Israeli Jews and spurned by Palestinian Moslems. Their lot is not easy.

Now back to the question. As mentioned in a previous column, these people are not Philistines (“Palestine” comes from the old Roman name for Israel, calling it after the Philistines to seek to eradicate Jewish claims to the land). They are Arabs, similar to other Arabs across the Middle East. In fact, when the British drew the border between Palestine and Jordan, brothers living on opposite sides of the line became Jordanians or Palestinians depending on their hometown.

Then who are the Arabs? The land of Arabia is a large desert peninsula south and east of Israel. Almost one-third the size of the U.S., it nonetheless was able to sustain (before the discovery of petroleum in modern times) only the barest of nomadic life. Such desert dwellers paid little attention to national borders, living not only in Arabia proper but also in the desert regions of both what is now southern Jordan (biblical Edom) and in southern Israel.

It seems that it was to this region that Abraham sent the sons of Keturah and of his concubines, “eastward, unto the east country” (Gen. 25:6). Also the descendants of Ishmael and Esau wandered the trade routes from oasis to oasis. Many of these became “princes” much like the desert sheiks, ruling over an extended family or tribe.

We read of Solomon receiving tribute from the kings of Arabia (1 Ki. 10:15) as did good King Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:11); however in Jehoram’s time they plundered his house and carried away some of his family (21:17). Uzziah later drove them back (26:7).

With the majority of the Israelites removed forcibly from the land during the captivity, some Arabs moved in and were a grief to Nehemiah when he was seeking to reestablish Jerusalem as Israel’s capital (Neh. 4:7-8). They felt they had a claim to the city where Israel’s “God [had] chosen to place His name” (Deut. 16:11), but Nehemiah told them that they had “no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem” (Neh. 2:20). Sound familiar?

Tow’ring O’er the Wrecks of Time (September 2002)

From Uplook, September 2002. Editorial.

Glory? In a cross? However did it happen?

One of the simplest forms of construction is the fastening of two beams together. Men who have never mastered welding or masonry are able to drive nails through wood. Such was the cross.1

The promontory on which the cross was raised would blush to hear itself called a mountain. Although it is the north end of Mount Moriah, it does not share the dramatic boundaries of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys as does the southern flank. It lends itself to a crucifixion site (if any place does) because it offers sufficient elevation to expose the unfortunate victim to passing view while keeping him close enough to hear the taunts and jeers of the passersby.

The city beyond whose gate the ultimate infamy occurred would hardly have been called a world-class metropolis. It was not even recognized by its overlords as the country’s capital; Caesarea Maritima held that honor. Except for the trouble it caused its occupiers, Jerusalem may have gone unmentioned in Roman history. The city—the hill—the tree—all seemed to portend an unremembered event in the sordid history of man’s cruelty to man. But who could imagine that it would ever be written, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross” (Gal. 6:14)!

How did it happen that the One who claimed to be Israel's long-awaited Messiah was impaled on a tree? If the nation's leaders had found Him guilty of blasphemy, why was He not stoned to death as the law decreed? (Lev. 24:16). On more than one occasion the people had picked up stones to stone Him. And it mustn't be thought that He was not stoned because the Jews no longer had the power to execute criminals. It may have been officially true, but they didn't worry about that with Stephen (Acts 7:58) or Paul, either (Acts 14:19).

Of course David had described the manner of his greater Son's death a thousand years before: "They pierced My hands and My feet" (Ps. 22:16). Zechariah adds: "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced…" (Zech. 12:10). But it is Peter who sees a pattern in Israel's treatment of rejected kings. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Technically they hanged Him on a tree and slew Him, but Peter seems to be making a link with Israel's execution of the Gentile kings they defeated in their conquest of Canaan. Every one they slew and hanged on trees. Only One treated thus was "King of the Jews." No wonder the leaders objected to the wording of the accusation placed over His head.

Were they afraid that if He was stoned they might have a martyr on their hands? Did it dawn on them that the solution was to have the Romans execute Him their way? ("Crucify!" they cried.) What self-respecting Jew would worship someone hanged on a tree? For "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Paul records the happy circumstance. The Jews wanted Jesus made a curse—but so did God! "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us…

that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:13-14). Of all things! The Jews, by having Him hanged on a tree, not only made it possible for God to deal with sin's curse, but to bring Gentiles into the blessing, too!

This month the world pauses to remember the tragedy of last September 11, when one of man's engineering marvels evaporated before our eyes like the morning dew. How our hearts lay claim to the solid ground beneath us at Calvary. When all else that men have built returns to dust, one structure will remain. Of course it is not the wood and nails which last, but the eternal reality of man's rude altar and God's blessed Lamb.

> *In the cross of Christ I glory, tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time;*
> *All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.*

1. To those who think the instrument of the Saviour's crucifixion was merely a stake, I remind them of the carefully selected proof required by Thomas, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails…" (Jn. 20:25). If a stake were used, only one nail would be required to fasten the hands.

Thinking Outside the Box (October 2002)

From Uplook, October 2002. Editorial.

I can’t keep the lid on it any longer.

It has been a favorite project that teachers have given to elementary students—a shoebox diorama. A hole is cut in the top of the box to let in light and another hole in the end for viewing. Then the child is intended to use his creativity (aided usually by those shoebox veterans, Mom and Dad) to create a Lilliputian world in the box. Twigs become trees, pebbles become boulders, and cotton makes do for snow. A few figures—not always in proportion—complete the scene.

One week long ago God did the project Himself.* He also made a little world within the circumscribed walls of time and space, and populated it with creatures. He covered it up with a lid of blue. Here and there in the top the light shone through.

But something happened in God’s box-world that never happened in our little boxes. Even though the creatures were very small, they began to think themselves entirely out of proportion to what they really were. They were convinced that, if only they exerted their independence from the Box Maker, they would be as He was! What madness! Yet today, many tear-stained millennia later, the majority of box-dwellers not only seek to live independent of their Creator, they wish to convince us that there is no one outside the box at all. Not surprisingly, the box and its contents are in terrible shape.

Enter the Box Maker's Son. Full of compassion for the silly creatures, He willingly offered Himself for a mission so radical, so stupendous, that only God would have thought of it (see Rom. 11:33-34). He would enter the box! Enter it, not as the mighty Heir of Everything but as a baby box-dweller! O the wonder of it—that the box could survive His entering it—and then, a greater wonder still—that He would let the box-dwellers hurl Him out of the box, rejecting His claims to the box and His offer to help. However, the wonder of all wonders is this—that He not only forgave us for such defiance, but used it as the basis to provide a way for the box-dwellers to leave the little box some day and live with Him in the Land Beyond the Blue.

The sky's the limit? Not anymore. In fact, every believer is treated as a pilgrim just passing through this Land of Little Things, a stranger who doesn't fit in here. The Box Maker's Son declared (just before He left the box), "… the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.…As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:14-18). Not belonging to the box? Sent into the box? Were we not always here? Not according to the Lord Jesus. We were "born from above," the meaning of the Greek word ano-then, and translated "born again" in John 3. That's why our citizenship "is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

So when you're feeling boxed in, remember you're only here temporarily. We're heaven's agents, here on a

mission of everlasting significance. We need to get the job done, the way heaven wants it done. Then we're out of here. Goodbye, little box. The Land Beyond the Blue is waiting.

* This illustration is not entirely without biblical connection. Rather than a shoebox, the Lord calls the earth His footstool (Isa. 66:1). If the stellar heavens are His throne and earth His footstool, what will the palace be like?

The Man with Three Firsts (November 2002)

From Uplook, November 2002. Editorial.

A remarkable prototype of our Champion.

The Old Testament is full of exquisite portraits of our Saviour. He can be observed everywhere to those who have eyes to see. But one of the most remarkable of these divine illustrations is the man named Joshua. Although many connections may be drawn, there are three “firsts” that stand out in striking relief.

THE MAN WHO LIVES BY THE BOOK: When Joshua received his commission after the death of Moses, it was bound to the Book: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (1:8).

As C. H. Waller writes,

Joshua was the first man who received a copy of Holy Scripture to be his guide. The first mention of the Book of books is connected with his name: “Write this for a memorial in the book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua.” What can it mean but this, that all scriptures from first to last were written for Him who is to fulfill them, the true Joshua, the Lord our Saviour Himself! He it was who said, “Mine ears hast Thou opened. Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, to do Thy will, O God”…And when He comes again, He will

finish the fulfilling of it. All the laws that have been given, and never kept; the wonders that have been foretold, and never seen; the temple that has been measured, but never built; the feasts that have been appointed, but never observed; the glory that has been promised; the kingdom that we pray for; the life that is now hid…all these will be delivered to the true Joshua when He comes again…Not till we come to the end of His Kingdom shall we come to the end of His Word.

THE MAN WHO BEARS THE NAME: Originally Moses' minister was named Oshea (meaning "salvation") by his parents (see Num. 13:8). As Moses saw the leadership ability of this young man, did he fear that the people might begin to think of this young man as their salvation? In any case, Moses renamed his understudy Jehoshua (meaning "Jehovah is salvation"), the name later shortened to the more manageable Joshua. But it is this very name, framed by Moses, that was later given by divine edict to the virgin's Child that night in Bethlehem. It is well known that the Greek form of Joshua is Jesus. It is perhaps not so well known that the name was constructed to make a more fitting title for the man who would be the type of our Champion.

THE MAN WHO BRINGS IN THE REST: Among the many challenges Joshua faced in coming into hostile territory was the responsibility to bring the people of God into rest. But, says the sacred record in the Old Testament, "The Lord said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed" (Josh. 13:1). The New Testament commentary is even more pointed: "If Jesus (meaning Joshua) had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day" (Heb. 4:8). But

the measure of Joshua's success should be acknowledged. The generation that died in the wilderness—Joshua's peers—"entered not in because of unbelief." But what of their children, of whom Joshua was leader?

They started brightly, promising Joshua, "All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go" (1:16). But surely they were a disappointment, too. No, listen to the other end of the book: "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua" (24:31). They did it! The life of service, the path of victory, is a real possibility. But it is only for those who follow the Book-Keeper, the Name-Bearer, the Rest-Bringer.

Gilgal: A “Must” for the New Believer (November 2002)

From Uplook, November 2002. Bible study.

Israel’s base camp, whose name means “rolling away,” was intended to be the place of the new beginning. When the Jordan River resumed its flowing, it closed Israel off from their old way of life. They were no longer labor camp slaves, for what was rolled away was “the reproach of Egypt.” They had been called the children of Israel but now they were in Israel; they were home. Joseph’s bones, transported in the longest funeral entourage in history, could now be put to rest. So the new Christian must make a clean break with the old life, and “purge out the old leaven” (1 Cor. 5:7) or its influence will continue its corrupting work. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

At Gilgal the males were circumcised. As Paul points out, in our day “circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:29). It’s good to be done with the applause of the world and desire only to please the Lord who bought us out of Egypt’s slave market.

It was also here that the manna stopped and the people first ate the “old corn of the land,” meaning the crop that had been a full year in getting ready for harvest. And it is helpful for us to know that whether God

provides for us supernaturally by the day, sending us bread directly from heaven, or provides for us naturally through daily toil, it is all from His generous hand.

At Gilgal they first kept the Passover in the land. The first Passover had been “the real thing,” the act of the Lord in passing or hovering over the blood-stained households the night the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt. How far away that must have seemed at Gilgal—just like Calvary might seem to us when we gather to remember that “Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us.” But they never would have been in Canaan without it, and apart from Calvary, we would still be slaves as well, Satan’s “goods,” in the clutches of the “strong man armed.”

© Uplook Ministries. Used by permission. All rights reserved.