

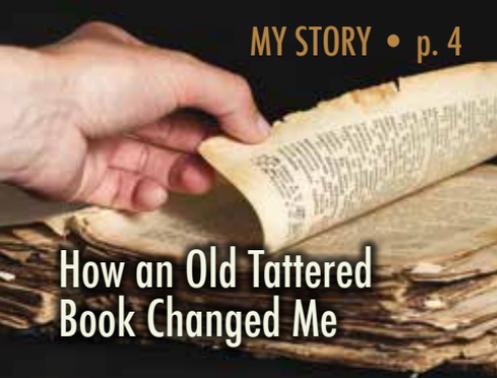
Youth messenger

Vol. XXXVII, No. 4



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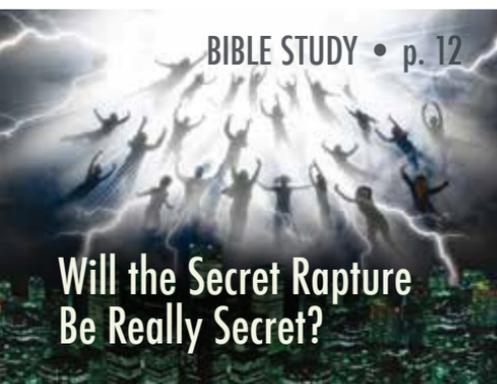
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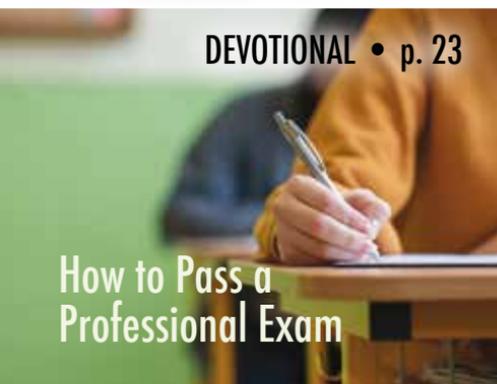
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Who Said It?

IF CHRIST SHOULD COME TODAY?

If you knew that Christ was coming in a few years, how would you live? You probably would say, "I would live very differently. I would pray often each day. I'd study my Bible daily and tell all my friends that Jesus' coming is around the corner. I would urge them to get ready and go to church. I would spend more time helping others and less time pleasing myself."

The good news is that we can be ready to meet Jesus every day if we follow His counsel, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

Here are some simple steps how we can watch and be ready for Christ's coming each day.

PREPARE ONE DAY AT A TIME:

1. "Today we must be faithful to our trust.
2. "Today we must love God with all the heart and our neighbor as ourselves.
3. "Today we must RESIST the temptations of the enemy, and through the grace of Christ GAIN the victory.
4. "Each day we should live as if we knew that this would be our last day on this earth."
5. "If we knew that Christ would come tomorrow, would we not **crowd into today all the kind words, all the unselfish deeds,** that we could?"
6. "We should **be patient and gentle,** and intensely in earnest, **doing all in our power to win souls** to Christ."—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 355. [Emphasis added.]

In this issue of the *Youth Messenger*, you will discover practical ways to prepare for Christ's return. You will learn about the true manner of His coming vs. the counterfeit. During this holiday season, you will know without a doubt, "Who's coming to town," and you'll be able to share it with others. You'll be encouraged to read how a fifth grader met God. If you're college student, you'll discover how to pass a professional exam. Maranatha!

—Liliane Balbach

HOW AN
Old Tattered Book
CHANGED ME



How I Met God

PART I

BY GORAN ANDELIC, CROATIA



When I was in fifth grade, I had many questions about life which were bothering me. I had difficulty falling asleep at night thinking what would happen in my life in the future. I was constantly perturbed thinking about the past, the present, and the future. "Does it make sense to live on this earth?" I wondered. I was troubled as I thought at what lay ahead of me. I thought, "I am going to school now. When I finish school, I will have to go to the army. Afterwards I will get a job, get married, and have children. Then I will work for the rest of my life until finally I will retire. Then I will die . . . and then what?"

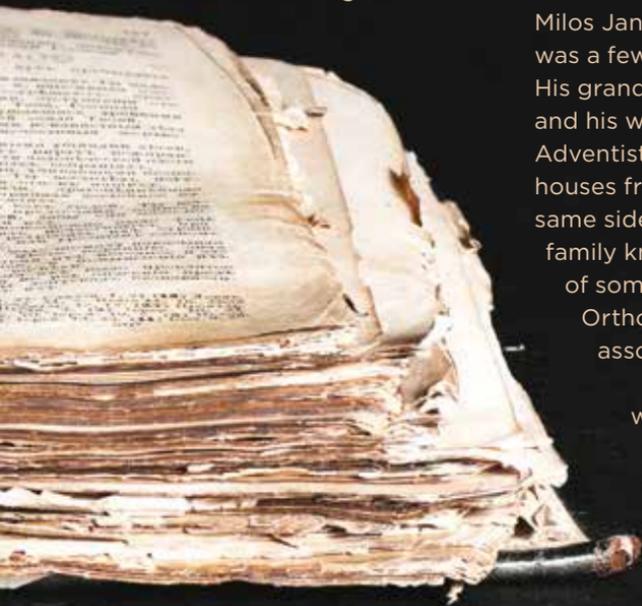
At the time, this type of life was totally absurd to me. I didn't want to live such a meaningless life. As

I thought about it, I became so sad and cried myself to sleep. It was hard for me to live without a purpose in life, knowing it makes no sense to work hard toward a meaningless goal and then to die.

The following year in 1992, while attending middle school in Krcedin, Serbia, I heard that my school would start offering religion classes. For me, that was a big shock as I already had learning difficulties and didn't like school. I thought, "Are you kidding? Now besides all my other subjects I will need to read that thick book—the Bible? Oh no!!" Two years later, in the spring of 1994, I became acquainted with that mysterious book—the Bible.

During that spring break, I spent more time with my friends, Dragan, Daniel, and Goran. Across the street from our house lived Milos Jankic, a young man who was a few years older than me. His grandfather Velemir Jankic and his wife were Seventh-day Adventists. They lived a dozen houses from our house, on the same side of the street. Our family knew that they were of some other religion than Orthodox, so we did not associate much with them.

Around that time, they were broadcasting Bible films on television. I watched the story of Samson, Joseph and others. I enjoyed



these movies so much. One night when we were in town, I told my friends Milos and Mika, the story of one Bible movie.

“That’s a story from the Bible,” Mika told me.

“Which Bible? What is written in the Bible?” I asked.

“Yes, it is a story from the Bible,” said Mika.

Mika told me more stories from the Bible about Abraham, about Moses and the burning bush. All these stories were very interesting to me. Mika who was a little drunk at the time, said to me, “If you want to read more about these things, come to my house tomorrow, and I will give you a Bible.” It was interesting to me that he only talked about the Bible when he was drunk.

I could hardly wait for the next morning to get the Bible and read it for myself. Just a few years ago, I could not have imagined that I’d want to read the Bible. From time to time, I would walk Mika home from the town center because he was drunk. I realized he felt he owed me something for walking him home. So, when he saw I had an interest in reading the Bible, he felt happy to share with me what he knew.

The next day I went to Mika’s house around noon to pick up the Bible, but he was still sleeping. After waiting for him for some time, I finally woke him up.

I said, “Mika, remember you promised to give me the Bible today.”

Mika finally got up from bed and disappeared to another part of the house. After a few minutes, he returned holding an old Bible in his hand. The Bible had no front or back covers and was missing about forty pages from the front. But this tattered old book was the Holy Bible and I was very excited to have it in my hands. As I turned its pages, I saw it was well used and underlined.

For me this was the first contact with God’s word. My heart was filled with joy and I could hardly wait to read the stories that Mika had been telling me about. While I was still at his house, I asked him, “What I should read first as the Bible is such a thick book?”

Mika told me “Begin reading the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes which were written by the wise king Solomon. After you finish reading these books, come to me and I will show you what to read next.”

When I came home, I was leafing through the Bible and reading some of the underlined verses. Although I did not understand much of what I read, I felt I was holding in my hands a holy book that would teach me many wonderful things. From that time on, I read my Bible often. As



I was reading the book written by king Solomon, I realized that many questions that bothered me are answered in that book. I also discovered that I would be able to solve my personal problems by following the advice from wise Solomon.

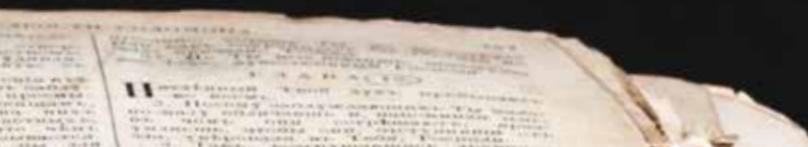
After that spring break, my relationship with my parents began to improve in amazing ways. I started listening to them; I began respecting my mother Alexia and my stepfather Radovan. They noticed that as I was reading the Bible, I had made positive changes in my life. I was a more obedient son than before. That year I started high school in Ingia where I was able to study much better and school became easier for me.

In elementary school my grade point average was a C, while in the second year of middle school I had a B average, and the third year an A minus average. Such a great improvement in my academics was a direct result of my reading and studying the Bible. I also could say with David, “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalm 119:130). “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation” (Psalm 119:99). Although I wasn’t smarter than my teachers, I had a tremendous improvement in

comprehension, memory, and application of the knowledge I had learned. I thank the Lord that He had opened my understanding for my studies and helped me become a good student.

My parents were so proud of my academic achievements. My final grade in middle school that year was an A. This accomplishment gave my parents such joy and satisfaction that they threw a little party for me and invited all our relatives and neighbors to celebrate with us. My parents did not stop me from reading the Bible for they did not think that book would lead me in the wrong path. In fact, they said, “It is better for you to read something than nothing.”

I thank God for the path on which He was leading me when I was just a teenager. Before I met Jesus, I was traveling on a dark path of hopelessness and despair, but when He found me, He gave me His book—the Bible—and showed me the path of light and life. “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18). Have you been daily reading that precious book? Have you been finding the solutions to your problems in the Holy Bible which was the book inspired by God? Are you reading it daily before you go to school or work? 



Are you a P or Cedar Tree

BY ROLLY DUMAGUIT

I was in Santiago, Chile, to conduct a missionary seminar for Bible workers, ministers and church leaders. Brother Mateus Sousa was with us also to facilitate the program. We completed the seminar on Friday afternoon. Before sunset, the brethren from the neighboring churches came to worship with us and to spend the Sabbath together.

While I was sleeping, about 3:30 a.m. early Sabbath morning, I felt a sudden jolt in my bed. At first, it didn't bother me, but became stronger until it reached a magnitude of an 8.8 earthquake on the Richter scale. Suddenly, the lights were cut off and my computer fell to the floor. My roommate, Brother Sousa called, "Quick, run outside. It is dangerous to stay here." He reminded me that our room was in the basement. We walked through the pitch-dark hallway and came outside trembling, looking for a safe place to pray. Brother Sousa asked me to pray, but in my panic, I started praying in my Filipino dialect, which he couldn't understand.

He touched me and said, "Pray in Spanish," as suddenly roof tiles and other debris came flying beside us. I was speechless and couldn't pray anymore, so he prayed. After about three minutes, the quake stopped, and we began looking for other brethren who were trapped in the basement. Thankfully no one was hurt. At dawn, we began checking out the church property and found the front wall had caved out and the wall on the right side was broken down from the front to the back. There were several aftershocks during the day which caused more damage to the front wall of the church.

At sunset, I immediately called the airline to check the status of my scheduled flight for home the next morning. I was told that the airport was destroyed, the runway was torn down, and most of the computers were not in operation. The airline transferred my flight to Lima, Peru, which meant I would have to travel four days by bus from Santiago, Chile. I said farewell to the brethren and boarded the bus on my way to Lima.

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THE SECRET OF THE PALM TREE

As we were traveling along, we passed the Atacama Desert, one of the driest deserts in the world. Looking out of my window, I could see how dry the place was; not even grass or trees could grow there.

During our travel, we passed by a valley where most of the vehicles, including our bus, made a stop. It was interesting to see the landscape. All the surroundings were covered with burnished brown sand while some green, towering palm trees were growing in the area.

I wondered how these palm trees could survive in the desert while the other trees could not. What was the secret of the palm tree? Most palm trees have many short roots which spread across the upper level of the soil.

These roots can secure a big quantity of soil around the root ball. As long as the soil is moderately dry, this makes a large, heavy anchor for the palm tree. Palm trees absorb water through their roots. If you dig down and search for the roots of the palm tree, you will find out that they reach down to the water table. I thank the Lord that I arrived safely in Peru where I boarded a plane that took me home.

THE STRENGTH OF THE CEDAR OF LEBANON

A few weeks later, while I was traveling to New York, I was sitting next to a man who seemed to be from the Middle East. He was very friendly and asked me where I came from and where I was going. He also asked what was my occupation. After some friendly introductions, I asked him a question, "Sir, you seem to be from the Middle East, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said, "I'm from Lebanon."

"Tell me, Sir, about your national tree, the famous cedar of Lebanon," I added.

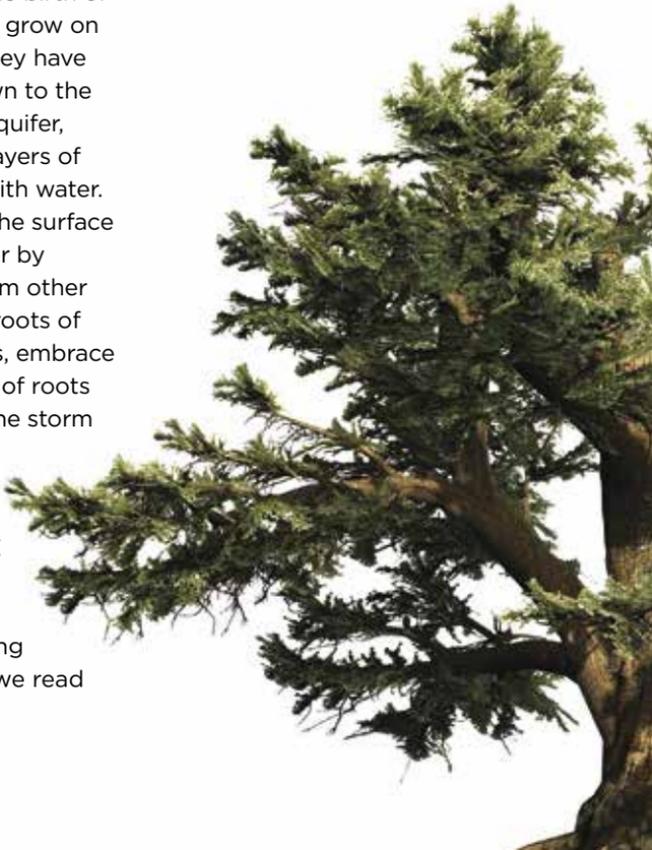
"You know," he said, "Our cedar trees are so special that some of them date back before the birth of Christ. These trees like to grow on hilly and rocky terrain. They have special roots that go down to the deep level of the water aquifer, which are underground layers of rock that are saturated with water. They can be brought to the surface through natural springs or by pumping. While roots from other trees are superficial, the roots of cedar trees look for rocks, embrace them and form networks of roots over the rocks so when the storm or hurricane comes, they will never be uprooted."

ARE YOU A PALM TREE OR A CEDAR TREE?

When I arrived home, my wife and I had morning worship and amazingly, we read from Psalm 92:12, 13:

"The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God."

Then, I understood why the righteous are compared to a palm tree. We live in this evil world which resembles the dry desert of Atacama. Here we may expect to have trials, temptations, sickness, sadness, poverty, and every type of suffering which resembles the burnished, brown and hot sand of the desert. The palm tree cannot avoid these surroundings because this area is its habitat. Similarly, we can't avoid these trying situations and difficult



circumstances in our lives because we live in this wicked world. Despite its climate, the palm tree maintains its green foliage because it takes in water deep down from the water table.

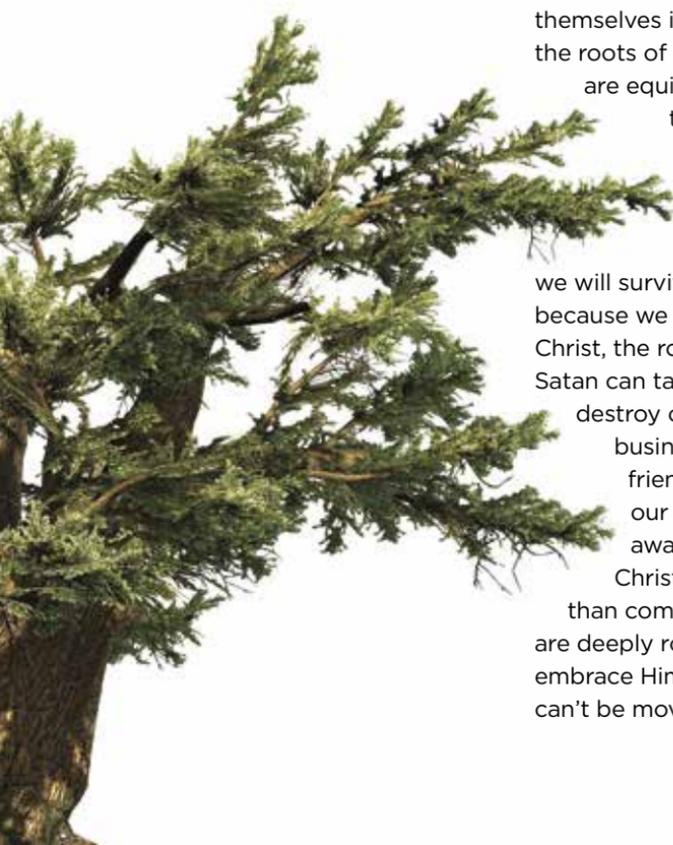
How can we be like the palm tree? We can't allow ourselves to be discouraged by the negative circumstances in which we may find ourselves. Our life is rooted in Christ, who is the Source of living water.

"The palm tree well represents the life of a Christian. It stands upright amid the burning desert sand, and dies not; for it draws its sustenance from the springs of life beneath the surface."—*The Review and Herald*, September 1, 1885.

"As the palm tree, drawing nourishment from fountains of living water, is green and flourishing in the midst of the desert, so the Christian may draw rich supplies of grace from the fountain of God's love, and may guide weary souls, that are full of unrest and ready to perish in the desert of sin, to those waters of which they may drink, and live."—*The Signs of the Times*, June 26, 1884.

Why is the righteous man or woman compared to the cedar of Lebanon? The cedar trees will survive in the drought because although their twigs, branches and leaves may be shaken off by strong winds, they remain firm and steadfast. They are not uprooted because they embrace or imbed themselves in the rock. The tip of the roots of the cedar of Lebanon

are equipped with a substance that allows them to drill through the rock and continue the deep-rootedness of the tree. Similarly, we will survive the storms of life because we are rooted on Jesus Christ, the rock of ages. Yes, Satan can take away our property, destroy our health, our business, and alienate our friends. He may even take our life, but he can't take away our faith in Jesus Christ. We would rather die than commit one sin. Why? We are deeply rooted in Christ and we embrace Him by faith, therefore we can't be moved. 🌱



Will the SECRET RAPTURE Be Really Secret?

BY HUDSON GESSNER



Imagine the scene in a busy mall with people going in and out of different stores and restaurants. Children are running around with their parents, couples are having their first date, and young people are hanging out with their friends. Suddenly, something supernatural happens. Some people disappear, leaving their clothes behind. Parents are crying as they see their kids suddenly vanish in front of their eyes. Everyone is frantically running for shelter as they wonder, “What is the meaning of this horrifying scene?” The understanding that this scenario is how Christ’s second coming will

be is accepted by many Christian churches, and even books and movies portray this belief.

Does the Bible support the theory of the secret rapture? And if not, how can it be proven? These were some of the questions I had when first encountered this idea, and perhaps you have also had similar questions. So, let’s look at how this doctrine has started.

WHY THE SECRET RAPTURE?

The secret rapture doctrine was first popularized by John N. Darby in the 1830’s, and was later spread in the United States by Cyrus I. Scofield through his sermons. He was also the author

of the references in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. As a result, most Protestant evangelicals have accepted this doctrine as Bible truth. The secret rapture theory consists of the idea that Christ's coming will take place in two separate events. The first time, Christ will come secretly to take the faithful Christians to heaven. Life on earth will continue for a seven-year tribulation. During that time, many people will be converted and be saved. Then Christ will come visibly, the second time, and take a second group of Christians to heaven. Let's put this theory to the most reliable test—the Word of God.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE SECOND COMING

To support the idea of the secret rapture, its proponents quote Matthew 24:40, 41: *"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left."*

When these verses are taken out of context, it may seem that a secret rapture is a possibility. But let's read the previous verses, 37 to 39, to have a better understanding: *"But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and*

took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

Now that we have read the entire passage, we see that Jesus is clearly drawing a parallel between conditions of the world in the days of Noah to that at His Second Coming. The verses state that some people will be saved, and some will be lost (verse 41). The words "taken" and "took" are mentioned, but what do they imply? Noah and his family entered the ark and were saved, while those who didn't want to enter in were left outside. Did those who refused to enter have another chance to be saved? No, they were destroyed by the flood. So, the same will happen when Christ comes at the end of the world. One person will be taken to heaven and the other will be left to be destroyed. *"And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 24:51).

We notice that a few Bible verses when taken out of context can cause some to believe that Christ's Second Coming will be a secret event. However, after carefully reading and understanding the entire passage, we can confidently say that this is not a biblical doctrine. Since the faithful Christians will not be secretly raptured, how will God take them to their heavenly home? The Bible clearly explains how Christ's Second Coming will take place.



CHRIST'S COMING WILL BE VISIBLE

The coming of our Lord will be more visible and unmistakable than any could imagine. Everyone on the earth will see Him coming in the clouds with power and glory, and with Him thousands upon thousands of angels.

“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.” (Revelation 1:7).

“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:27).

“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” (Matthew 24:30).



CHRIST'S COMING WILL BE LIKE HIS ASCENSION

Christ will come again in the same manner as He ascended to heaven over 2,000 years ago. This means that His coming will not be symbolic but a literal, visible event.

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11).



CHRIST'S COMING WILL BE AUDIBLE

Christ's voice will be heard throughout the earth; it will even raise the dead in Christ.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him" (Psalm 50:3).



CHRIST'S COMING WILL OPEN GRAVES

How do we know that Christ's coming will open graves? God's word tells us, *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28, 29).*

We see that only two types of people will resurrect—the wicked who chose not to accept Christ and those Christians who are saved. This resurrection must take place so that all the saints may be taken to heaven. The verses clearly state that the dead in Christ will be raised by His power and will meet the living saints in the air.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 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" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).



CHRIST'S COMING WILL DESTROY THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH

The coming of Christ will be so powerful that even mountains and islands will not stand before His presence. The earth will shake and break down. The Lord will come to destroy the earth and remove sin.

“And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (Revelation 6:14).

“The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again” (Isaiah 24:19, 20).



CHRIST'S COMING WILL BRING FINAL JUDGMENT

Finally, Christ's coming will bring the final judgment and the reward to every person. Each one will already have made his/her decision; there will be no second chance to be converted. Today is our opportunity to hear Christ's voice and to follow Him.

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27).

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SECOND COMING?

As we see from the biblical evidence, Jesus wants us not only to know that He is coming again, but He also wants us to know the manner of His coming. Why is that so important? Christ warned us to watch out for impostors who will try to impersonate His coming. *“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many”* (Matthew 24:4, 5).

It is Satan's plan to deceive God's people, and prepare them to accept his final deception when he will try to impersonate Christ. (Matthew 24:4, 5). For this reason, Christ warns us:

“Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:26, 27).

Friend, who are you preparing to meet—Jesus, the Saviour of the world or Satan, the impostor? Are you daily submitting your will and life to Jesus Christ, or are you only making a half surrender? Are you studying the Bible to know what is truth and are you following it? Jesus said, “To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” (Hebrews 3:15). 





WHO'S COMING TO TOWN?

BY LILIANE BALBACH

Christmas lights! Decorated Christmas trees! The Christmas spirit is in the air. Little children are lining up in the malls dressed in their best holiday clothes waiting to take pictures with Santa Claus and tell him what they want for Christmas. People are bustling in the stores buying gifts for family and friends. Everyone is happy for “’Tis the season to be merry.”

Christians and non-Christians alike love Santa Claus. He is loved by families. He can be found in local malls, on the back of fire trucks. He’s even part of church celebrations. Many people feel that Santa personalizes the ideals of love, peace, and joy. But does the Bible have anything to say about Santa Claus?



In Exodus 20:4-6, the second commandment forbids idolatry. Christ also cautions us, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24). Could Santa Claus be a fraud that is designed to deceive Christians, and steal the spotlight away from Christ? You may say, “That is ridiculous. Santa is an innocent, mythical character who makes Christmas fun for children and even adults.” But unfortunately for many today, Santa holds a much larger place in the holiday season than does Jesus. Let us consider some of the ways that this character attempts to impersonate Christ.

CHRIST vs. SANTA CLAUS

CHARACTERISTIC	SANTA CLAUS	CHRIST
APPEARANCE	Santa has curly white hair and twinkling eyes.	Christ has curly white hair and eyes like fire. <i>"His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire" (Revelation 1:14).</i>
CLOTHING	Santa wears a red suit.	Christ wears a robe dipped in blood. <i>"He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God" (Revelation 19:13).</i>
ADDRESS	Santa comes from the north.	Christ resides in the north. <i>"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Psalm 48:2).</i>
RESIDENCE	Santa lives in a sparkling palace where he is served by elves.	Christ lives in mount Zion where thousands upon thousands of angels serve Him. <i>"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels" (Hebrews 12:22).</i>
OMNIPOTENCE	Santa is omnipotent. He defies natural laws. He carries a seemingly infinite load of presents for all children of the world in the finite space of his sleigh. Although he is quite wide, he slides down narrow chimneys, through smoke and flames without so much as a smudge.	The Bible states that Christ is the only omnipotent One. <i>"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27).</i> <i>"For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).</i>
OMNISCIENCE	Santa claims to know everything. <i>"He sees when you're sleeping; he knows when you're awake; he knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake."</i>	The Bible tells us that only God is omniscient. <i>"O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off" (Psalm 139:1, 2).</i>

<p>OMNIPRESENCE</p>	<p>Santa appears in every house around the world on the same night.</p>	<p>Christ is omnipresent through His Holy Spirit. <i>"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee"</i> (1 Kings 8:27).</p>
<p>CHARACTER</p>	<p>Santa does no wrong! Have you ever heard anyone talking about Santa's character faults? Tradition has painted him as faultless.</p>	<p>Christ is the only righteous One, <i>"but we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags"</i> (Isaiah 64:6). <i>"For the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth"</i> (Daniel 9:14).</p>
<p>JUDGE</p>	<p>Santa acts as a judge. <i>"He knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake."</i></p>	<p>God alone is our Judge. <i>"For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"</i> (Romans 14:10).</p>
<p>MISSION</p>	<p>Santa gives gifts based on good actions. <i>"He's making a list, and checking it twice; gonna find out who's naughty and nice. Santa Claus is coming to town."</i></p>	<p>Christ gives us salvation by faith. <i>"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"</i> (Ephesians 2:8). This faith works by love which motivates us to keep His commandments.</p>
<p>CHILDREN</p>	<p>Santa puts the children on his lap.</p>	<p>Christ invites children to come to Him. <i>"But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven"</i> (Matthew 19:14).</p>
<p>CONFESSION</p>	<p>Santa asks the children to confess to him their wrongs.</p>	<p>Christ is the only one to whom we should confess our sins. <i>"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"</i> (1 Timothy 2:5).</p>
<p>OBEDIENCE</p>	<p>Santa tells children to obey their parents. <i>"You better watch out, you better not cry, better not pout, I'm telling you why, Santa Claus is comin' to town."</i></p>	<p>Christ says to the children, <i>"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee"</i> (Exodus 20:12).</p>
<p>ASK FOR ANYTHING</p>	<p>Children go to Santa and ask him for anything they want. They write him letters telling him the toys they want.</p>	<p>We are to pray to Jesus and tell Him all our needs. <i>"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"</i> (Philippians 4:6).</p>



The number of similarities between Jesus Christ and Santa are striking! Is that a pure coincidence or is there a darker design in this?

Lucifer, the mightiest angel who stood next to Christ, was thrown out of heaven because he wanted to be like God. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, **in the sides of the north**: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13, 14, emphasis added). In fact, the Bible defines blasphemy as trying to be God (John 10:33).

By using Santa Claus as a counterfeit Christ, Satan is attempting to draw our attention from the Son of God to himself so that he can get the worship that he has always coveted. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, the apostle Paul foretells of a great deception before the second advent of Christ:

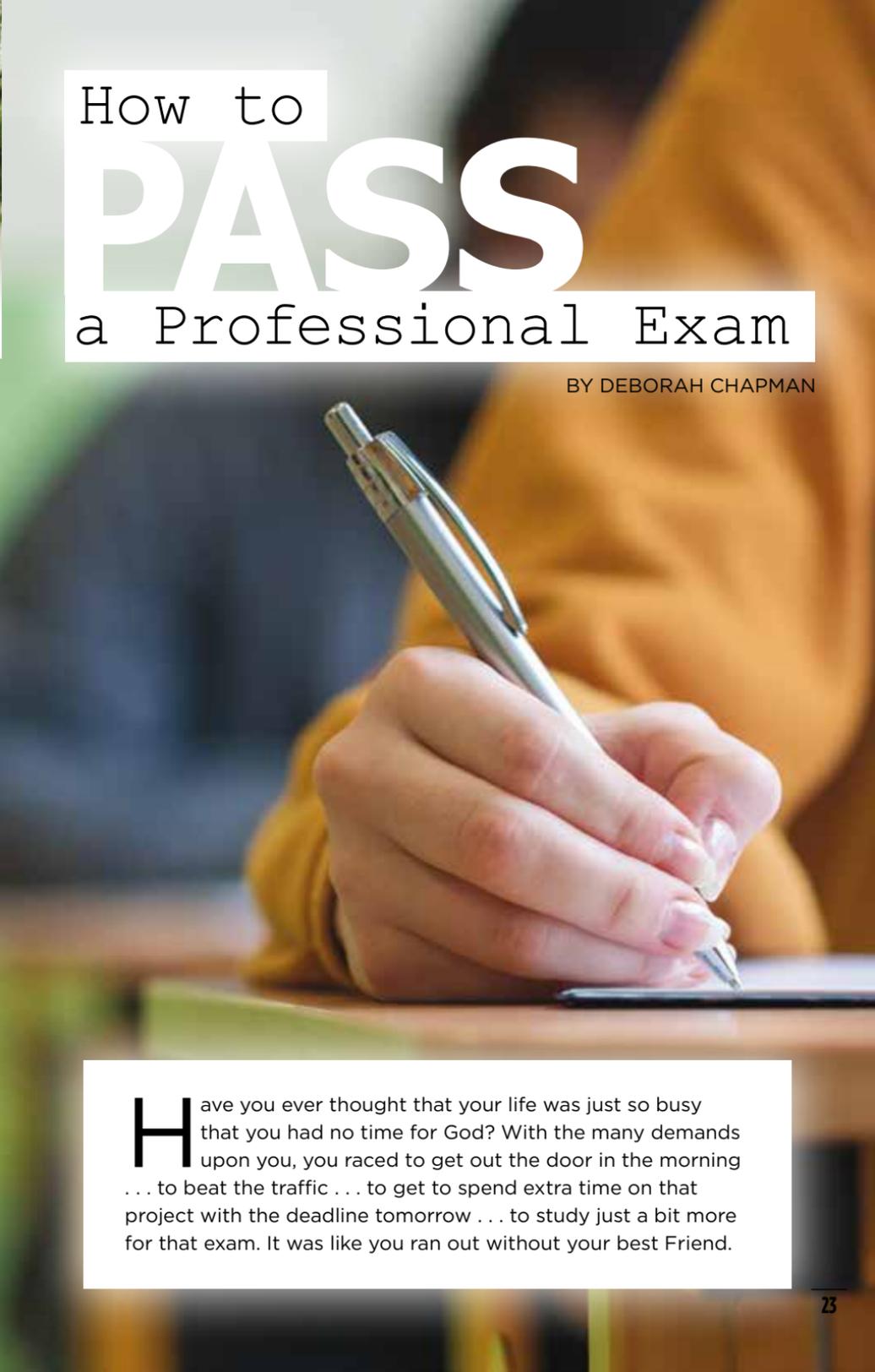
"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that **he as God sitteth in the temple of God,**

showing himself that he is God.

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders. And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; **because they received not the love of the truth**, that they might be saved" (verses 2-4, 9, 10). [Emphasis added.]

The great danger of deception is that it seems so innocent. However, if we know the truth, and if we know it well, we cannot be deceived. Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6). Dear friend, are you willing to learn to love and obey truth that you may not be deceived by the enemy? While Santa laughs and says, "Ho, Ho, Ho, Merry Christmas," Christ warns us, "Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord" (Zechariah 2:6). The land of the north refers to ancient Babylon. There are many around the world who are unconsciously propagating Babylonian religious customs when they celebrate Christmas, while the enemy uses Santa Claus to mock Christ and His work as our Saviour.

What will you do this holiday season? Will you be preparing yourself and your children to meet Santa Claus or Christ, the King of heaven and earth? Will you make Christ your King and Saviour every day of this next year? 

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a silver pen, writing on a piece of paper. The person is wearing a yellow sweater. The background is blurred, showing a desk and some books. The lighting is warm and soft.

How to

PASS

a Professional Exam

BY DEBORAH CHAPMAN

Have you ever thought that your life was just so busy that you had no time for God? With the many demands upon you, you raced to get out the door in the morning . . . to beat the traffic . . . to get to spend extra time on that project with the deadline tomorrow . . . to study just a bit more for that exam. It was like you ran out without your best Friend.

You didn't even think about Him all day. Was He really your Friend? You hadn't spent time with Him in ages. Soon your life began to reflect it. You ran through the day without Him; and at the end of the day, you came up empty. Well, does making time for God really matter anyway? What actually can happen when you do?

again. I was crushed. I had put so much effort into it this time. It definitely wasn't my subject.

As I thought through the experience, I knew I had sacrificed my time with God. I had failed the exam, my job was not going that well, and I felt kind of empty spiritually. Since that plan had obviously not worked, I had six

months now to prepare for the next exam. So, I decided that I would do my personal Bible study first every day. If I had any leftover time, I would study for Business Law. If

I had no time, I wouldn't study for the exam. No pressure on myself. I thought, I'll put God first and leave it all in His hands.

Work became busier. My performance on the job really improved, and I was happy, really at peace. However, I had very little time to study for Business Law. I decided to take the exam at the end of the six months anyway. I knew I was unprepared, so I wasn't stressed out at all. I took the exam, and I knew I had failed this time, but I didn't care. God was so much a part of my life that I gave the whole thing to Him. I didn't even look for my exam results this time because I knew I had failed. When the exam results came back, I was so surprised. Not only had I passed, but it was one of my highest passing marks on the entire exam.

I had an experience many years ago when I was in my last year of university studying accounting. We were encouraged to sit for the CPA (Certified Public Accountant) exam before we graduated, and while we were still in study mode. So I went along with my classmates to take the three-day exam. I passed everything but Business Law. I had to wait six months to re-sit that part of the exam. By that time, I had a job and had to juggle study and work. I squeezed in my devotions when I had time. I found myself struggling spiritually, which really shouldn't have been surprising, as I was starving for spiritual food. I took the exam again at the end of six months. I felt very confident. After all, I had put in a lot of study time, and now I was sure I had passed this time. I finally got my results: I had failed

Squeezing in my devotions

How to Improve your Mental Powers

This experience really taught me about grace. I didn't deserve to pass. God did that for me, just because I had put Him first. He had fulfilled to me the promise, "them that honour me I will honour" (1 Samuel 2:30). It also reminded me of the promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). I also wondered how this could have happened? Then I remembered this passage, "In searching out the various parts [in the Scriptures] and studying their relationship, the highest faculties of the human mind are called into intense activity. No one can engage in such study without developing mental power."—*Education*, p. 124.

"Those who consecrate themselves to God, and who have the protection of His grace and the quickening influence of His Spirit, will manifest keener intellectual power than the mere worldling. They will be able

to reach the highest, noblest exercise of every faculty."—*That I May Know Him*, p. 8.

The issue really wasn't whether I had achieved something or not, but what I had been forfeiting in trying to get ahead. "It is well and essential to obtain a knowledge of the world in which we live, but **if we leave eternity out of our reckoning, we shall make a failure from which we can never recover. It will be as the knowledge gained by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree.**"—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 137. [Emphasis added.]

How many times have you sacrificed your relationship with God to achieve something in your studies or in this world? If you achieved it, were you satisfied? A friendship with God is worth more than money, fame, or academic achievements. You gain a peace that no man can give or take away. Try putting God first today. He will give you back much more than you give to Him. 🍷





USING OUR TALENTS FOR GOD

The second music camp was hosted by the Northern California Conference in July 2018, and it was held in Moriah Heights, California. Since the first music camp held in 2017 was a great success, many more people were encouraged to come from different parts of the world. There were about 110 participants registered, but when combined with the locals, there were more than 150 persons. A significant number of musicians came from Hungary, Australia, and others from Peru, Brazil, Canada, Bolivia,

as well as from different parts of the United States.

After arriving at Moriah Heights, those who played string instruments had seating auditions. They were then placed in one of the two orchestras: "advanced" or "developing". No matter what level a player was at, he/she could still praise God with his/her instrument. The musicians slept in tents on the premises. Although during the day the temperature was high, at night it was considerably cooler, so it was easier for all to have a good night's rest.

BY BIANCA SIRBU



Our daily schedule was very compact since we needed to cover much material in a short time. Our day started with an exercise class at 6:00 a.m. After that, we had morning worship, and were able to hear many amazing experiences of young people who had seen God working in their lives in miraculous ways. They encouraged us to have our own experience with God.

Breakfast was served right after worship. Since we had such a large group, every tent had their turn of cleaning up after the meals. The 9:00 a.m. practice was for the advanced orchestra and choir separately. The students who were part of the developing orchestra joined the choir. The advanced orchestra was led by the principal conductor, Isaac Terceros, and the choir by Rea Tóth. In the afternoon, we had a practice session, and the combined orchestra and choir practice took place in the evening. After a long day of practice, everyone was tired, but the sound of so many instruments and voices combined was so beautiful that it made us forget

our fatigue. Everyone just had fun praising God.

The last item on our schedule each day was evening worship presented by Brother David Zic. It was such a nice way to end our day!

As the days passed, many special friendships were formed. There were many things to be done around the campground, and whenever the need for help arose, everyone lent a helping hand. We were blessed to have good cooks as part of the kitchen staff, and they prepared delicious food for us everyday. We were especially grateful to have Sister Szabo from Australia, who came to make her delicious vegan creations for us! Feeding so many hungry youths was not an easy task, but the sisters worked diligently, never complaining.

With everyone's participation and united efforts, everything went as planned. Finally, the weekend for the concert arrived, and we were all excited to see the results of our hard work. The Sabbath prior to the concert was a special one as churches from the greater Sacramento



area and other parts of California joined us at the Moriah Heights campground.

During the Sabbath, we discussed wonderful lessons, heard great sermons, experiences, and participated in the youth meeting. Most importantly, as we played and sang the glorious music with so many instruments and voices combined, we forgot all our hard work, and simply enjoyed the heavenly atmosphere. The whole Sabbath day was a real blessing to everyone present!

The next day was the day everyone had been waiting for! For the concert, we were transported to a local high school auditorium. We practiced once more and were amazed at how much better the sound was in a professional auditorium. Before any of us realized, it was time to begin the concert. Many people were present. To our surprise, the

sound was much better compared to our practice session earlier. We were thankful to God because in our hearts we knew that this was possible only because of Him. Many people told us that they were blessed by our music. As for those of us participating, we were all thankful to God for the opportunity to be part of such an experience, where we could share our love for music with other young people from the church.

Throughout the camp, as I heard other young people's testimonies, and as we were able to share our passion for music to glorify God, I felt very encouraged to see how God can use us in our youth to reach others through our talents. I would personally encourage you to attend an event of this kind in the future so we may, "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works" (Psalm 105:2). 🎵



WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT MUSIC CAMP

BY HEIDI ALONSO

Let's not kid ourselves and try to cover up what is as plain as day; truth is that whenever there are church projects for young people and teenagers, many of them just go for the fun and socializing. They really do not much care for the project itself and what they will get out of it.

It's true! I was a teenager once, and that was the case many times.

Now, with that in mind, I will now share with you what I saw among the teenagers and children at the NCC Music camp that took place in July in Moriah Heights, California. Here are three highlights that just surprised me.

The first one happened as I was walking up toward the building where sectionals are held. As I walked past the boy's tents, I caught a glance of this cute little boy sitting at the edge of his mattress reading his Bible. My tracks stopped cold in that moment. I mean, you expect to see little children running around, playing hide and seek or running after a ball; but here he was spending his free time in the most profitable way.

The second incident happened as both the choir and orchestra were gathered at the big building after rehearsal. It is time for worship. But it so happened—as it often does—that almost everyone was late for practice, including little old me. Because of that, the conductor had to end the practice much later in order to make up for the half hour we lost. After practice was over, Brother Zic announced that worship would be skipped since it was way too late and he did not want everyone falling asleep in worship. Then suddenly, a girl next to me just sighed, looked at me with disappointed eyes and said, “Ah man! I was really looking forward to worship.”

And finally, what do teenagers do in the wee hours of the morning? Yeah, you guessed right, they sleep their heads off. And that is basically what one expects to see at 6 a.m. But when I saw a young girl studying her Sabbath School lesson at that hour, I was just overjoyed.

You know something, this music camp was unlike any other. I was really blessed by it and inspired by hearing the experiences and testimonies of other young people who shared during morning worship. As I looked at all these youth, I was convinced that these are the kind of people that will finish the work. Will you be among them? Will I be there? I pray that we all will be there. And like Chris said one morning, “If God did that for me, imagine what he could do with you.”

Yes, imagine what He could do for you and for me if we just allowed Him into our hearts. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). 🍌

WHO SAID IT?

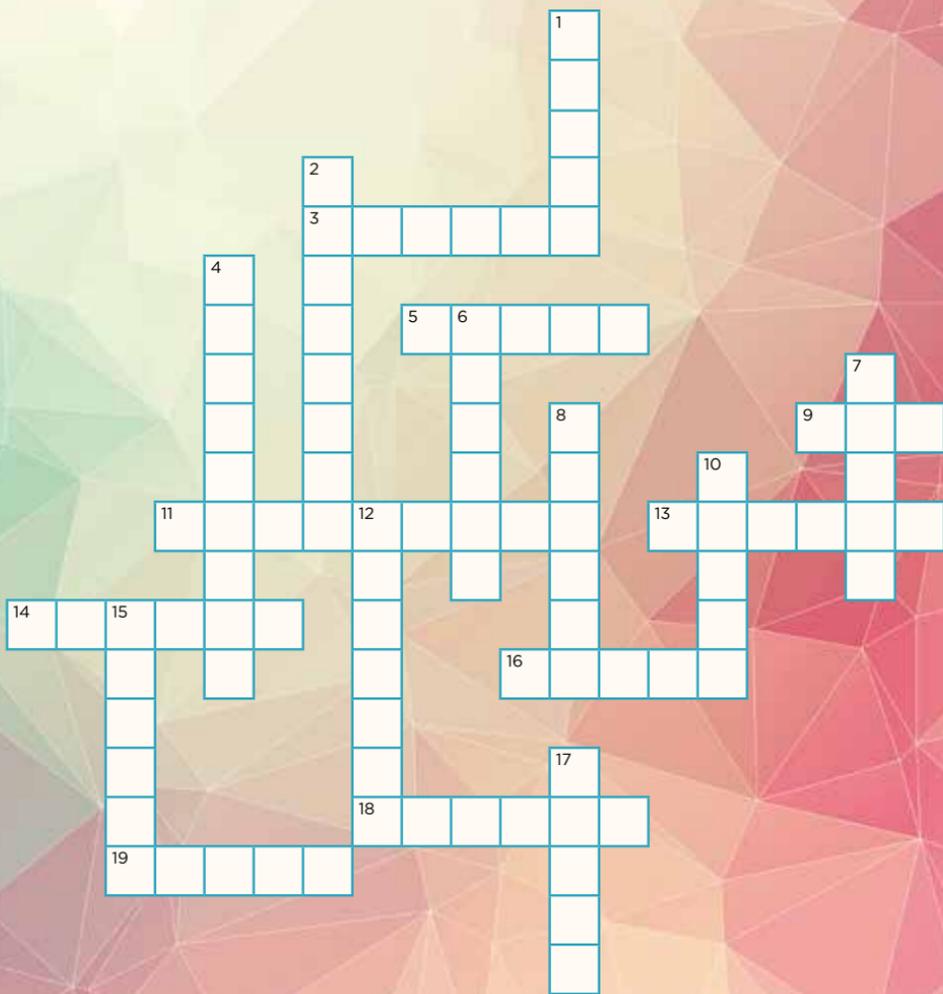
BY YURI GESSNER

ACROSS

3. "Go, gather together all the Jews . . . and fast ye for me . . . and so will I go in unto the king . . . and if I perish, I perish (Esther 4:15, 16).
5. "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).
9. "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26).
11. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).
13. "Speak; for thy servant heareth?" (1 Samuel 3:10).
14. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).
16. "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom" (Mark 6:22, 23).
18. "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" (John 6:8, 9).
19. "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another" (Genesis 31:48, 49).

DOWN

1. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
2. "Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jeremiah 1:6).
4. "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).
6. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).
7. "I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exodus 4:10).
8. "I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man" (Luke 23:13, 14).
10. "O my son . . . my son . . . would God I had died for thee" (2 Samuel 18:33).
12. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28).
15. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).
17. "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25).



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IF *Jesus* CAME TO YOUR HOUSE

by Lois Blanchard

If Jesus came to your house
To spend some time with you,
If He came unexpected,
I wonder what you'd do.

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room
To such an honored guest
And all the food you'd give to Him
Would be the very best.

And you would keep assuring Him
You're glad to have Him there—
That serving Him in your home
Is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming,
Would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome
To your heavenly visitor?

Or would you have to change your clothes
Before you let Him in
Or hide some magazines
And put the Bible where they'd been?

Would you hide your worldly music
and put some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right
in, or would you rush about?

And I wonder—if the Saviour
spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing, the
things you always do?

Would you go right on saying, the
things you always say?
Or would life for you continue
as it does from day to day?

Would you take Jesus with you
everywhere you go?
Or would you maybe change your
plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him
meet your closest friends?
Or would you hope they stay away,
until His visit ends?

Would you be glad to have Him
stay forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great
relief when He at last was gone?

It might be interesting to know,
the things that you would do,
If Jesus came in person, to spend
some time with you.