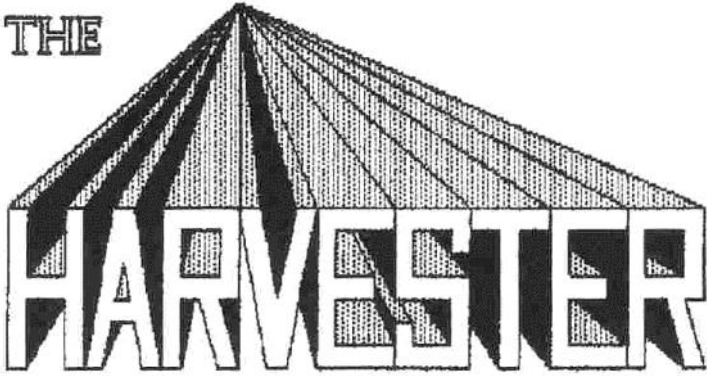


THE



"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

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FRUIT

Any product of plant growth; product or result—so is fruit defined by the dictionary. A plant in nature has as its main function reproduction of more plants of its own likeness. On the third day of creation, God commanded the earth to bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit whose seed is in itself. Christians need this nature of producing

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more Christians both now and planting seed for the future generations.

On a number of occasions, Jesus focused the thoughts of his followers on the necessity of bearing fruit. In the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:8), He stated that seed sown in good ground *"brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirty-fold."* Jesus spoke a parable in Luke 13:6-9 regarding a fig tree planted in a vineyard whose fate was to be cut down if it did not bear after having ample opportunity and care. Another time (Matt. 21:19-20), Jesus saw a fig tree and when He came near found nothing on it but leaves only; and He cursed it so that it withered away.

There is no doubt that Jesus had in mind spiritual things and that He wants His servants to teach others. His words in Matthew 9:37 were,

...The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

He declared in John 15:8, *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."* One measure of discipleship is fruit-bearing. The second verse of the same chapter contains this sobering thought:

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:2)

What type of branch can we honestly say that we are? If you were the gardener, would you retain all of the branches like yourself? Keep in mind, too, that the Lord also said that every branch which did bear fruit would be purged that it may bring forth MORE fruit. Our yield then must be ever-increasing.

The admonition in Mark 16:15-16 was to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Many of us fall far short of this. What might the reasons be for lack of fruit in this area? Perhaps an absence of enough effort. Amos 6:1 declares, "*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.*" Haggai chapter one condemned the people of his day because they had time for their own affairs but not to build the Lord's house. Likewise, Malachi warned the people they had dishonored God by making Him last on their list of priorities.

Maybe we need to be more converted. Jesus said to Peter, "*... when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*" (Luke 22:32). Do we really believe what the Bible says about heaven and hell? Shouldn't we warn others?

Is it that we know few people will respond to the gospel and we do not like rejection? In Acts 17 we read of Paul at Athens, a city wholly given to idolatry. But he preached a stirring sermon to skeptics and philosophers, and apparently also some honest souls. Some mocked, some thought they ought to hear more another time, and some believed. We must keep in mind that there is a wide gate and a broad way which leads to de-

struction and many go in thereat. We can be assured that we do not work alone—Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. Further, he said, “*For we are labourers together with God*” (1 Cor, 3:9). In 2 Corinthians 9:6 he expounded a principle that salesmen today still utilize,

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

While the specific subject under consideration was relief for the poor saints, it certainly applies to all Christian endeavors—especially spreading the word. The power of God’s word is explained in Isaiah 55:11,

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Do you remember who first introduced you to the gospel of Christ? What if that individual had not spoken or not invited you to hear? Can we do less to others? The Bible tells us that Andrew brought Peter, Philip brought Nathanael, Cornelius had his friends and near kinsmen at his home to hear what God wanted him to know and do. Timothy was taught in his home by his mother and grandmother. You are probably someone else’s fruit—who will be your fruit?

While extremely important, it is realized that souls won for Christ is not the only measure of fruitfulness. Acts 9 shows that

the woman Dorcas was full of good works and alms deeds. The Thessalonians "...were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 The. 1:7). Of the Romans, it is said, "...your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8). Peter said that if we add to our

...faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5-8)

If fruit is lacking in our lives, if we are in danger of being removed from Christ (who said He is the vine), surely we should begin to remedy our situation by taking Peter's advice.

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: In 1 Peter 3:18-19, Peter states that Christ preached unto the spirits in prison. Who were these spirits? Where were they when this was done?

ANSWER: Peter writes, "*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by*

the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;" (1 Pet. 3:18-19)

Some believe that these verses teach that Jesus, between his crucifixion and resurrection went into hell and preached the gospel to the spirits found there, thus according to some, giving them a chance to believe on Him.

It is felt that this view is definitely an example of taking liberties with what is recorded and reading into the scriptures ideas which the text does not convey. When one considers verse 20 along with verses 18 and 19, the meaning becomes clear. Verse 20 reads,

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. (1 Pet. 3:20)

When reading this verse in connection with verse 19, we determine that the spirits in prison were the people who lived during the time of Noah's building of the ark. The prison which held them was sin. Christ in the spirit, through Noah, preached unto them of the upcoming judgment of God. In 2

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Peter 2:5, we find that Noah was called a preacher of righteousness. Adding this verse to those under question we begin to understand the meaning of these passages. To summarize, we offer the following interpretation.

Noah, inspired by Christ, preached to the people (spirits) who were enslaved (imprisoned) in sin during the time that he was building the ark. We find that God as always gave the people a chance to repent. He was longsuffering (or patient). He sent a preacher to inform the people of their sins before He brought the flood upon the wicked world. God gave these people their chance. If they had heeded Noah's preaching they would have been spared, but the record shows they did not obey, but rather spurned the preaching. There was no need for another chance, because they had already been given one.

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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Hebrews said that Jesus is a high priest according to the order of what early Old Testament priest?
2. During a famine, Isaac and Rebekah stayed in a place called Gerar. The Philistine king issued a decree that anyone who molested them would be put to death. Can you name this king?

3. How did Agag, the king of the Amalekites who was defeated, die?
4. How did Nehemiah plan to call the people in case of an attack?
5. What instruction was given by Paul regarding health?

...and remember last month's questions?

1. Why did Moses ask God to commission a new leader over the Israelites in Numbers 27? BECAUSE GOD TOLD MOSES HE WOULD BE DYING SOON (Num. 27:12-18)
2. When David fled from Saul, he went to a place called Gath, where David was very much afraid of the king there. What did David do to avoid trouble? PRETENDED TO BE INSANE (1 Sam. 21:13)
3. In the book of Isaiah, when God spoke against Assyria, He said that their king saw himself gathering the earth like what? A PERSON GATHERING EGGS (Isa. 10:14)
4. In his letter to the Romans, Paul said that we should owe no one anything except what? TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER (Rom. 13:8)
5. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, what three things did Paul instruct Timothy to bring when Timothy came to visit Paul? A CLOKE, SOME BOOKS AND PARCHMENTS (2 Tim. 4:13)

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls... (Jer. 6:16)