

Aspects

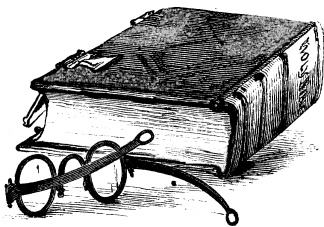
a monthly devotional journal

for eight years encouraging believers to know God and His ways, and to enjoy a more intimate communion with Him

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." Matthew 1:21-23

"Never again are we to look at the stars, as we did when we were children, and wonder how far it is to God. A being outside our world would be a spectator, looking on but taking no part in this life, where we try to be brave despite all the bafflement. A God who created, and withdrew, could be mighty, but he could not be love. Who could love a God remote, when suffering is our lot?

Our God is closer than our problems, for they are out there, to be faced; He is here, beside us, Immanuel."
Joseph E. McCabe



No.97 • December 1998

God With Us

Paradise

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness . . ." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:26a,27 NASB

At his creation, man began in fellowship with God. Through no mechanical process of their own, the first man and woman began their existence in harmony with their creator. It was not the result of a choice made; they had no part in the decision, but were simply made that way.

Man and woman were beautiful, inside and out. They remained naked, as they had been made, for there was nothing to hide. Their spirits were at one with God; it was His habit to come down to walk with them, to fellowship with them. They enjoyed His company, and He theirs.

From the beginning God had built into man a "God space"—a place in his heart perfectly shaped to hold the Spirit of his Maker. Here God would come in and make Himself at home, to commune and fellowship with His creation, to listen and whisper words of guiding wisdom. Man's God space identified his ownership; no other god would fit there. So man entertained no other spirit as a replacement.

Paradise Lost

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6

Then the man and woman gave in to temptation and sinned. Though their world was perfect, needing nothing to be added or changed, the serpent touched a nerve and tickled their vanity. He held out the honey of their becoming God-like, and the first couple believed the lie. They chose, not another god, but themselves and their own desires over fellowship with the one true God.

And suddenly their God space went empty. That place in their hearts fashioned and shaped to fit the Spirit of God remained, but now there would be no tenant. They did gain some new wisdom in the bargain, however: they now knew they were naked, and that they were ashamed. And alone.

Now all their children, from the world's second generation until world's end, would enter the world alone—separated from the God who had given them breath.

Paradise Offered

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Galatians 4:4-5

After many centuries of men and women being left on their own to struggle back up to fellowship with their Maker, after many centuries of empty discipline and vain imaginings meant to replace the sweet communion they had once enjoyed, God looked down upon His people and expressed hope in the form of a tiny child.

He sent down to them, not a new creation, but a very ancient part of Himself in the shape of man. He who dwells outside of time and space, He who holds eternity in His hand came down to dwell, for awhile, among those who carried around inside them an empty space into which His Spirit would fit.

And once again man could know fellowship with his Maker. He could walk with Him, listen to His quiet counsel, commune with Him. Once again man's God space could be filled with its intended occupant.

Prophecies and Decrees

Bethlehem was a small, inconspicuous town lying just short of a day's journey south of the city of Jerusalem. It was a sleepy little village, tucked away and forgotten by most; nothing flashy, a bit disheveled.

Few people ever visited by choice. Time and trends had passed it by, disregarded and even held in contempt by some—until one day the mighty despot called for a census to be taken of all the people in all his conquered lands.

In the village was a small inn, unimpressive and tattered, worn down by time, home for the village innkeeper and his wife and son. From the small room facing the street they conducted their business. This room more than any other was home for the innkeeper as he welcomed new guests and dispensed with the old.

The mighty despot was Caesar Augustus, and the village innkeeper was called Simon.

"Where *is* that boy? I sent him off more than an hour ago."

Simon bustled into his establishment, carrying with him clouds of dust from the street outside. His nervous neck muscles twitched, jerking his head from side to side, scanning the room.

Joanna, his faithful yet bedraggled wife, caught off guard by her husband's explosive entrance, felt his anxiety invading her like the damp of a cold morning. "Should I go look for him?"

"No time. No *time*," he sputtered. "Get back upstairs and see if anyone's ready to leave."

"But what difference does it make?" She said, halting her scrubbing of the table that was the centerpiece of their front room. "If the room's occupied, why look for another tenant?"

Simon scurried to her side. "*Sssshhh!* Lower your voice! Each time one leaves—I raise the rate." He grinned, his eyes twinkled with pecuniary lust. "We're making a *killing* off this census."

"But Simon," Joanna gasped, "that's dishonest!"

He turned on her, glaring angrily, as if she had just threatened his very sanity. "Listen, those filthy Romans have been bleeding us of every denarius. If they hand me a chance to make some of it back, well, I'm going to take it."

"But it's *our* people you're taking it from."

Now here was one of those moments Simon disliked intensely. It wasn't so much that his good wife had just scored a point against him. Healthy competition was good for the soul, after all. No, what really irritated was that she was *right*. He stared at her, blank-faced. "Where *is* that boy?" He said, quickly turning away.

Joanna rewarded herself with a quiet smile and returned to the job of cleaning the surface of her work table. "Oh, he may have stopped to see one of his friends. You've been working him awfully hard these last few days."

"Much to do," Simon muttered, staring out the latticed window that looked out onto the town's central street.

"You worry me, Simon. I've never seen you like this."

Wishing she would just leave him to his business, he snapped, "Must I do *everything* around here?"

Joanna threw down her rag with a wet slap. "Now you just sit down here and take a break. The world won't fly away if you rest for a moment."

Reluctantly Simon turned away from the window and dropped down into the chair. He wouldn't admit it, of course, but even at this early hour he was bone-tired. Yet he was convinced his actions were right. "Why do you fight me so? It's all for the family."

"But this isn't my husband," she said in her most soothing tone, "running around, squeezing every drop of profit from his neighbors—"

"They're *not* our neighbors," he slapped the table. "These people are coming all the way down from Galilee. *We* aren't the ones forcing them to stay in our town."

"But we don't have to cheat them."

"And where's the difference? When the harvest is poor, the price of wheat is high. When the harvest is good, the price is lower. Simple economics, Joanna. The law of the marketplace."

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. Luke 2:1-3

“So tell me, my husband the banker,” she answered confidently, “why is it your harvest is good—but your prices remain high?”

Well now, there she had done it again—and twice in the same day. She had scored another point against him, and pretty soon there would be no living with her. “Where *is* that boy?” Simon blustered, rising to leave while at least some of his manhood remained intact. He reached for the door, but before his hand could grasp the handle it swung in toward him. Nathanael, their young son, was carrying a basket heaped with fresh bread, and behind him came their neighbor, Eliezer.

“I simply *had* to return with Nathanael,” the older man said, beaming, “to compliment his father on his son’s bargaining skills. Quite amazing in one so young, I must say.” He clutched the diminutive Simon by the shoulder, his eyes twinkling. “I wonder where he learned them.”

Nathanael presented the basket of bread to his mother. Grinning proudly, he said to Simon, “I did good, Papa.”

“And what did Eliezer’s fine bread cost us today?”

“Only three shekels.”

“Three shekels!” Simon exploded. “Why, that’s robbery! I would have paid no more than *two*.” He rose on his toes to get his face as close to Eliezer’s as he could. “Why such a high price to your neighbor?”

Eliezer’s grizzled face took on a look of wounded innocence. “Many new customers in town,” he explained. “My poor wife is kept busy with the orders.”

“So with all the orders, you can afford to lower the price,” Simon said, landing tiny drops of spittle onto Eliezer’s white beard.

“This census won’t last forever,” he shrugged.

“No, but your *greed* probably will,” Simon edged closer.

“Stop it you two!” Joanna cried, coming between them. “Simon,” she said to her husband, her voice dripping with sarcasm, “what is one shekel when the harvest is good? It’s the law of the marketplace—simple economics.”

As the confrontation between his elders escalated, Nathanael had backed away, into a corner of the room. From there he said, quietly pleading, “It’s good bread, Papa.”

Simon was as angry at himself as anyone else. He *was* proud of his son. He had brought him up to be careful with every coin that passed through his fingers, and the boy was learning the ways of commerce at an early age. And he had no quarrel with Eliezer. His neighbor was an honest man trying to make a living for his family—just like Simon. But the pressures of dealing with this recent influx of people in their small town had frayed his nerves, and lately he had found himself on edge with everyone.

Embarrassed, Simon knelt before his son. Expressing his awkward affection through his strong grip, he clutched Nathanael’s narrow shoulders. “You made a good bargain, son. I couldn’t have done better myself.” He reassured the boy with a thin smile. “Now go help your mother put the bread away.”

Nathanael smiled, knowing that his father would prefer that to any more demonstrative display of affection, then gathered the basket of bread in his arms. And the two men were left in the room.

“He’s a good boy, Simon,” Eliezer volunteered.

“The God of Abraham has been generous,” Simon answered. But quickly his face darkened, and the edge crept back into his voice. “Now, if He would just see to those filthy Romans. They stain this land with the blood of our own people! They count our heads like sheep, so they can gouge us for more taxes.”

“*And* make you rich in the bargain,” Eliezer reminded him.

“If the Lord will turn His back on our sorrow, then we’ll have to survive on our own.”

“You have no patience, Simon.”

“Patience will get us killed.”

“No one is getting killed,” the old man chided.

“Maybe not—but the Roman taxes bleed us dry.”

“Messiah,” Eliezer said, gazing out the window to the cloud-dappled

*Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
He will judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
He will defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
he will crush the oppressor.*

*He will endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
He will be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
In his days the righteous will flourish;
prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.*

*He will rule from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
The desert tribes will bow before him
and his enemies will lick the dust.
The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
will bring tribute to him;
the kings of Sheba and Seba
will present him gifts.
All kings will bow down to him
and all nations will serve him.*

*For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.*

Psalms 72:1-14

sky. “Messiah will come.”

Simon made a rude snorting sound. “Sure. Here we go with all the old prophecies. How many years, Eliezer? How long must we wait for Messiah?”

The old man turned to his neighbor and friend, alarmed. “There’s no peace for one so angry with God.”

“The Romans are systematically taking everything from us—

“Everything but our *faith*, Simon.” Eliezer sighed heavily. “But I see, my friend, that they have taken even that away from you.”

“What good is a prophet’s story of a Savior,” Simon persisted, “when people are in chains? What do we tell our children when they ask about Messiah? How do we explain the reality of today?”

“The Lord heard our fathers in Egypt,” Eliezer insisted. “He hears us as well. Today’s reality leads us *to* our God—not away from Him.”

“The Romans have weakened you,” Simon said with a measure of contempt.

“No,” Eliezer said firmly, “they’ve *strengthened* my faith. The Lord will choose the day of Messiah. It won’t be the Romans—and it won’t be us who choose. Simon, it’s *your* faith that has been weakened by a Caesar. Our God *is* God! He’s the God who led our fathers out of Egyptian slavery—and He’s the God who will deliver us from *our* bondage.”

The Visitors

That night, after the light evening meal, two road-weary travelers knocked at the closed door of the Bethlehem inn. Joanna rose to answer, but Simon instructed her, “Tell them we’re full up—and that they’ve got a lot of nerve even trying at this late hour.”

“I’m sorry,” she told the man and woman seeking lodging, “but we have no more room.” Her heart went out to them, however, and she asked them to wait a moment. Joanna eased the door closed, and turned to her husband. “Simon, she’s pregnant. We must find a room for them.”

“There’s not one left.”

She opened the door again. “I’m very sorry. Maybe there’ll be something tomorrow.” The man pleaded with Joanna while the woman with him sat silently atop their beast. She was quite young, Joanna noticed, and very close to her time. She could see that that baby could come at any moment. “Excuse me,” she said, smiling through clenched teeth.

Closing the door again, she turned on Simon. “Where is your heart? Surely we have *something* for them.”

“How else do you want me to say it? We have no *room!*” But then his eyes flickered nervously side to side. “That is, unless—”

Joanna’s anger rose. “Unless they can pay extra, right?”

“I can be persuaded—”

“Listen,” she moved toward him, struggling to control her disgust, “I can see that the people have no money—and the woman is near her time.”

“Charity!” Simon shrieked. “Always charity. This is a business, Joanna, *not* a charity. People give us money and we give them a room for the night. Do you see how it works?”

“All *I* see is your cold, empty heart!” She grabbed the lamp and threw open the door. “Come with me,” she said to the travelers. “I’ll put you up in the stable tonight. At least you’ll be warm.”

Now there, that was better. Simon leaned back into his chair and smiled, satisfied with himself for finally scoring a point against his wife. When would she ever learn that—just like their neighbor’s bread—they couldn’t afford to be giving away the very thing that put food on the table. It wasn’t personal; he felt no animosity toward the late visitors. It was business—just business. They had to know people wouldn’t give them something for free.

Yes, his sound business sense had put this roof over their heads, had given them a comfortable life, a position of respect in their town. It was a good thing. Yes, a good thing. And if they hadn’t many friends, well, that was just the price one paid sometimes for working hard. Someday his wife would understand that the sacrifice had been worth it.

And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. Luke 2:3-5

Simon glanced around at the sparse furnishings, and the room suddenly seemed quite empty. It was too early for Nathanael to be in bed. Where could he be? Joanna should be back by now. Where *was* everyone?

Proclamation

It wasn't his typical clientele, and the hours they kept were not at all typical. Even at this late hour they kept Simon busy shuttling their demands up and down the stairs. More of this, and more of that, but mostly more wine. "And hold it down up there! You born in a barn?" He shouted up the stairs on his way back down. Nathanael was already there.

"Father, they're asking for more wine—and there isn't any!"

Simon ran a quick mental inventory through his head. Who on this street would have some he could purchase? "Try at Saul's house. They may have some to spare. And hurry; we certainly can't keep our precious guests waiting. And oh yes, if you happen to run into your mother, kindly inform her that I would appreciate her help once in a while."

On his way out the front door, Nathanael passed Eliezer coming in. "Simon," the old man said excitedly, "this is a most curious night—a *most* curious night."

"What's the matter, your wife run out of flour? Don't come crying to me."

"Can't you feel the excitement in the air?"

"The only thing I feel in the air is the stinking breath of two drunken soldiers in one of my rooms."

Eliezer stopped, uneasy. "Soldiers?"

Simon busied himself scrounging more cups from the shelf. "It's not bad enough they push us around in the streets—now they're staying in my own house!"

"I—I thought they were camped outside town," Eliezer said, backing slowly toward the door. "What are they doing here?"

"They've brought more soldiers in because of the census. They ran out of officer billets, so *I'm* stuck with them for the night."

"I'll be leaving then," Eliezer turned quickly to go.

"No, wait a minute," Simon stopped him.

"I'm not hanging around with *them* in here."

"Aw, they're too drunk to bother with us. What did you come here for?"

Eliezer relaxed some, but kept a wary eye on the stairs leading down from the upper floor. "Don't you know what's going on out there?"

"*Somebody* has to stay here and see to business," Simon said. "Joanna took off with two customers more than an hour ago—and never came back!"

"Can't you hear it?" Eliezer exclaimed, forgetting about the Roman soldiers overhead. "Practically the whole town is out in the streets. There's something almost *magical* going on out there."

Simon took his friend's arm. "It's been a rough day," he said with mock solemnity. "You've been working too hard, Eliezer."

"Don't be silly," the older man said dismissively.

"Listen," Simon said, suddenly serious, "I've been thinking about what you said before—about the Messiah—and, you're right." Eliezer's eyes widened with surprise. "No, I mean it. A Jew is just another man without his faith. We *must* be united against our common enemy—and in our hope for the Redeemer."

"Well, this *is* a magical night," the old man murmured in amazement.

"Aw, I'm just bullheaded," Simon shrugged, glancing up. "He made me that way. He understands."

"Come with me outside."

"No, I have to see to my customers. You could find Joanna for me, though. It's time she were in for the night."

"All right, my friend."

Simon watched Eliezer move back out into the night. He was right, there *was* more activity in the street than normal, and—what was it? There was a peculiar, silvery glow about the scene. Simon peered up into the black sky, searching.

"Is there a full moon tonight?"

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:8-14

The Birth

“Simon! The most marvelous thing has happened!”

Joanna burst into the inn, searching excitedly for her husband. “Simon!” She called again. Then he emerged from the back, his arms straining under the weight of a full amphora of wine.

“I expected you hours ago,” he grumbled.

“He’s here! He’s finally come!”

“I’ve been here all by myself, you know,” Simon pouted, “and with two Roman soldiers overhead.”

“Simon, listen to me!” She took hold of him. “Messiah! Messiah has come!”

“Not you too. Have you been talking to Eliezer?”

“I’ve been at the stable with Joseph and Mary—ugh, that’s their names.”

“Who?”

“Mary and Joseph—the couple I took to the stable because *you* said we had no more room. What soldiers?”

“The two passed out upstairs.”

“Oh! I see how it is. A nice couple about to have a baby, and there’s no room. But two soldiers of the state—and suddenly there’s a vacancy!”

“They had swords, you know.”

“Simon, listen to me. There are *miracles* taking place in our own stable and you’re still worried about business.”

“Fine,” he scowled, “next time *you* can tell the soldiers we have no accommodations. Until Messiah comes and does away with these filthy Romans, we still have to play by their rules.”

“But He *has* come—and in *our* stable!”

“Who?”

“The baby! He’s the one!”

“The Messiah? Come on—”

“If you would ever get your nose out of your accounts receivable,” Joanna sighed, exasperated with her hardheaded husband, “you might notice what’s going on around you. The Redeemer of our people has just been born under your own roof, and all you can feel is the weight of Roman oppression. Come with me,” she took his hand, “and see the future in a baby’s eyes.”

“A *baby*? You’re putting a baby up against the power of Rome?”

“For this baby,” Joanna smiled, “Caesar himself would be no challenge.”

“You’re talking nonsense,” Simon snorted.

“All right,” she answered defiantly. “Be that way. You stay here and continue to live with a past that’s already passed you by. But *I* choose the hope resting in that straw.”

Simon felt the tug of both the comfortable, well-worn past, and the unknown future. What was happening in his old, familiar hometown—a place where change had never been welcome, and had never come easily? All his life Simon had lived by the hard and fast rules of commerce: good sense, pragmatism, and the balance sheet. He had always found comfort in what was known—not the unknown. And, he had to admit to himself, he was more comfortable with the longing for Messiah, than the possibility that He was now here. Could it really be true? And could it really be happening under his own roof?

He no longer knew how to show himself as anything but strong and decisive to Joanna. He had forgotten how to be honest about his doubts. Awkwardly, Simon stuttered, “But, w—what can be so special about a little baby?”

Joanna had not forgotten the true feelings that had lay buried in her husband for so many years. She knew there was deep within him a man crying out for something better than a single-minded pursuit of even more money. She took his hands in hers. “Oh Simon,” she said from a full heart, “only that He was announced by the angels of heaven, and people from all corners are coming to worship Him.” Her eyes released the wonder bursting within her. “Strangers are coming from far and wide to worship this little baby. And for the first time, Simon—for the first time, I can see God smiling on this world.”

Simon hesitated a moment more, but then let Joanna lead him out into the night, toward their small stable.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:6-7

A New Future

The night sky was rising, shifting out of empty black into the lighter hues of another day, and the eastern horizon was just beginning to turn a deep, burning orange when Simon returned to his inn.

It had seemed that for the last few hours the interior of his stable had been the navel of the world—a deep, secret place from which all life began and flowed. It had seemed as if the rest of the universe had come to a halt, that time itself had stood still as a handful of peasants knelt in silent wonder at a baby, fresh and simple, and looking no different than any other baby born that night anywhere else in the world.

But something *had* been different. Because it could not be quantified, because it could not be listed in a tidy column and brought to a total at the end, Simon was helpless to explain what he had experienced. But even he knew it had been real.

Have I seen Messiah? Could this fragile, little child really be the One? He's too small for a king. But they say He is—the shepherds say this little child is really the Savior, the Christ! How can it be? How can one so small solve the problems of such a big world? Forget the world—what about my problems! What can He do for me? Simon pressed his hands against his aching head. And why is He still in my mind?

Joanna slipped silently in the door. She seemed somehow different to Simon, but he couldn't say how. There was something about her that reminded him of that night long ago when she had given birth to *their* son, Nathanael. A gentle peace that enveloped her face.

"You knew all along," he said to her.

"I told you, Simon."

"I guess I had to see it for myself. I guess no one can speak as clearly as the Savior Himself." He snorted, embarrassed that he was already believing. "Listen to me. He's just a baby!"

"No!" Joanna said forcefully. "No, He's so much more. You heard the shepherds, you saw the star yourself, you can *feel* God's presence in that child. Why do you still resist?"

"Because—," Simon blurted out. "because I can't bear the thought that it's going to be that easy!"

"For what?"

"I wanted God to sweep His arm down, to wipe my enemies off the face of the earth! I wanted Him to send a strong, bellowing king to conquer the Romans and lift us back to the power our people once knew. I wanted God to send a comforting wind that would, somehow, *change* my life."

"I think He has," Joanna said softly. "Oh, we don't see it—we can't. We can't see what that baby will become. But Simon," she said, going to him, "there *is* a wind, and it's blowing through

Bethlehem tonight. And you've felt it—you can feel the change already taking place."

"Yes," he said seriously, "and it frightens me."

"It's what you've been looking for all along."

"I can feel the old ways slipping away—and it frightens me."

"Yes," she chuckled knowingly, "we so easily cling to our imperfections. But I think what you're feeling—what we're both feeling—is the redemption of that child entering our hearts."

"Well, if that's what it is," Simon smiled, "there're a lot of layers for it to get through."

"But you *can* feel it."

"In the stable, when I looked down into that bed of straw," Simon said thoughtfully, "I looked into His eyes, and it was the most amazing thing. I remember when Nathanael had just been born, his eyes seemed to be a blank slate, waiting for something to be written there. But when I looked at that child in the straw, He looked right back at me—right into my eyes! It was almost as if He were speaking to me. I know it sounds ridiculous, but, it was like looking into eternity itself. And it was then," his voice went suddenly quiet. "It was then He became a part of me. Suddenly, all the other things in my life became very small—all the pressures, the problems, all the burdens of living became, well, *livable*. Because of Him."

And outside the inn, as the first rays of the morning sun pierced the gray half-light of dawn, the sleepy village slowly awakened to a new day.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist. *Isaiah 11:1-5*

Paradise Restored

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. Romans 16:25-27

And now man and woman had the opportunity to restore fellowship with Their God. Once more man and woman, born with an empty God space within their heart, could fill that space and be returned to sweet communion with their Maker.

Man, from the first generation, had insisted on living with his own depravity. But in the fullness of time the heart of a compassionate God opened to release the way for him to rise out of his sin. The Way was offered—a perfect fit for the God space—but man would have to choose. From the beginning, the Maker had chosen fellowship over simple management; He would make that fellowship again available to man through the Incarnation.

God chose to fellowship with man, reserving a place for him in His heart. Now man would have to choose. Would he once more fill the vacancy in his heart?



The Living Word Offer

We have compiled a selection of narratives from past issues, entitled *The Living Word: Favorite Narratives from the monthly devotional journal Aspects*.

This seventy-two page booklet will be sent—along with our deep appreciation—to those who include a request along with their gift to this work. If you would like to receive a copy of this booklet, fill out the accompanying form and include it with your gift—and be sure to check the box stating that you would like to receive the booklet!

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