

Brazil News



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Editorial

The Priest, The Levite and the Samaritan— Twenty Centuries Later

Where did we ever get the idea that the priest and the Levite were sullen, arrogant fellows? And that the Samaritan was a poor, second-class citizen? True, he was from a despised race, but that didn't keep him from being as rich or insolent as anyone else. Today, twenty centuries later, we're going to look at these three men, plus the victim, and see what we can learn from them. Time has changed even their names, so we introduce: Presley, Levy, Sam—and Vick.

Our story begins with Vick.

Vick and his wife have lived in the community for several years. They moved in from another congregation a number of states away. They're a middle-aged couple that never had any children. They don't mingle freely with the congregation. No, they're not unfriendly, just withdrawn, reticent. They're loners. He does garden farming and sells his produce to a local market. People feel like they don't really know Vick and his wife.

One day Vick gets up early—well before sunup—drives out to the field and begins filling his old pickup with produce. He must deliver his good no later than 9:00 o'clock, preferably by 8:00.

At exactly seven thirty he finishes loading his pickup with produce. He smiles to himself (actually he smiles more when he is by himself than when around others), gets in the pickup, turns the key...and nothing happens. Not even a click.

Vick isn't mechanically minded. He knows how to open the hood and tap on the alternator. That's about it. He fiddles around with wires in the vain hope he may accidentally do something to get the pickup working.

Even though he is in a real tight, Vick isn't the type to walk the one hundred yards to the highway that goes by his field and see if someone will help. In fact, it doesn't even occur to him to try. His mind is in a turmoil. He is known for his punctuality and the

possibility of not keeping his end of the deal with his customers is almost more than he can take.

Enter Presley. Presley is a local church leader. He is married, has a nice family and makes his living building houses. He has done well. When people want to build a house and want a really good job, they hire Presley, even if it means waiting six months or more.

Presley takes his job very seriously. So seriously, in fact, that when he drives down the highway, right past where Vick is having his problem, at exactly 7:45, he doesn't even slow down. He thinks, "Huh! It looks like Vick is having trouble with his pickup. But he has the hood up, so he probably is getting it fixed."

True, one Sunday Presley's wife invited Vick and his wife over for dinner (the people who were supposed to come couldn't make it). During the afternoon conversation, Presley got Vick to tell a bit about his business. One of the things he mentioned was that he had never been late in delivering his produce. Presley complimented him on his good business principle, but inwardly wasn't all that impressed. After all, he never got to work late either...and he was working on 150 thousand dollar houses. Vick was only delivering 50 dollars worth of produce.

The difference between 50 dollars and 150 thousand dollars is enormous, so it never really occurred to Presley that he should stop and see if he could help. He hadn't driven a quarter of a mile before Vick was totally out of his mind and he was thinking what a mess it would be if the plumber didn't show up the first thing this morning.

Enter Levy. Levy's church roots can be traced way, way back. He likes to testify about what a blessing it is to have had Christian forefathers. There is hardly a Thanksgiving service that goes by without Levy getting up and ticking off the blessings received during the past year, and how unworthy he feels.

Levy has some solid feelings ("convictions," he calls them) on what brings down God's blessings. He firmly believes that if man does his best, God will do the rest. So when someone struggles to keep afloat, he has no difficulty in putting his finger on the problem. He patiently awaits his chance to "lend a helping hand," as he puts it, to the needy one. This "lending a helping hand," he makes plain, can best be done with advise. He has no doubt but what if people struggling to make a living would listen to advise, they would soon pull out of their problems.

One Sunday Vick and his wife had dinner with Levy and his family (also because the earlier invited guests couldn't come). Levy saw the hand of God in this and in the afternoon kindly gave Vick some pointers on how he could get onto a better financial foundation. His listener's seeming lack of enthusiasm to his suggestions confirmed Levy's "conviction" that things wouldn't get better until Vick began doing his best. Without this God wouldn't do the rest.

So when Levy drove by Vick's field at 7:50, he said to himself, "It's past time Vick be in town unloading his produce and there he sits. He's probably known for the last month that his battery was shot and didn't do anything about it. Poor men have poor ways..."

And he too drove on past.

Enter Sam. Sam is a plumber. He's a good one. By no means is he what you would

call happy-go-lucky or foolhardy, but he can take most anything with a bounce. His wife really gets on to his case now and then. Sam takes on a plumbing job and when it comes time to settle up, if he sees the customer is hard up, he'll say, "Aw, give me a hundred bucks," when actually it cost him a hundred and fifty in materials. When the wife finds out the bank account has run dry, she acts like Job's wife. Sam gives her a big hug and says, "Aw, Susie we've made it so far...and I happen to know that the Burkes are in a real tight." Unlike Job's wife, Susie soon quiets down and grudgingly respects her husband for his tender heart.

At 7:55 Sam comes driving down the highway where Vick is stopped. He takes one look at the uplifted hood, and at forlorn Vick, drives right through the ditch and up to where the pickup is stalled. "Hey, man! What's going on? That thing won't start for you?"

Before Vick can answer, Sam has his head under the hood and is checking things out. Soon he yells, "Vick, I think you're battery just went shot on you."

Once again, not giving Vick time to respond, he says, "Hey! You should be in town with this produce, shouldn't you? I'll tell you what, let's dump some of my plumbing supplies here and put those boxes on my pickup. We'll still make it on time, won't we old buddy?"

They do.

(And the plumber shows up late on Presley's job. And yes, Presley sternly admonishes Sam for his irresponsibility.)

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that couldn't get his pickup started?

As we have said, Presley and Levy were nice enough fellows. Good church members. So was Sam. When the collection plate was passed, all three were good givers. When a work day was set, all three usually showed up. When it came to hospitality, all three had a lot of company.

So why then did only Sam stop and see what Vick's problem was?

It's amazing how most virtues have a twin. Faith and hope are twins. Patience and long suffering are twins. Compassion and gratitude are twins.

And that's what this article is all about.

In our circles it's a sign of humility to admit we are proud. We dejectedly confess our impatience. But it definitely isn't popular to admit we are plagued with ingratitude. Like Presley and Levy, we can come up with so many solid pieces of evidence that prove our gratitude.

True gratitude is a deep feeling of unworthiness for something good we received, but know we didn't deserve. True gratitude is a feeling of indebtedness.

True compassion is remembering that we are debtors and feeling a deep desire to make small payments on this debt whenever possible.

Compassion, the kind Jesus talks about when He says, "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me," is something we seldom practice premeditatedly. Do you know why?

For the same reason the priest and the Levite scooted over to the far side of the road when they came to the man who had been beaten up and robbed. That man wasn't a pretty sight. He was all bloodied. He may have had a bone or two sticking out. Yet the Samaritan probably didn't think twice when he saw the victim. He matter-of-factly said to himself, "Hey! This man needs help." And he loaded him on his donkey. Very likely there were no spectators to see what a great heart he had.

True compassion is helping those who don't deserve help. (That's an awful way to say it.) When it is announced in church that people are starving in Bosnia, it's not hard to be compassionate and put 50 dollars in the collection. When it is announced in sewing that people in Ethiopia are so poor that the children go around naked, it isn't hard to feel a surge of compassion and floorboard the pedal on the sewing machine to make clothes for them. When we are told that a brother in a neighboring congregation has been diagnosed with a rare disease and that it will cost at least a hundred thousand dollars to even give him a chance to live, we are stirred to compassion and gladly write out a check for a hundred, or even five hundred dollars.

All this is good. God blesses such giving. But folks, don't ever think that is all it takes. The story of the good Samaritan would probably have never been included in the Holy Writ if he would have spurred his donkey and galloped up to the inn and shouted to everyone within hearing distance, "There's a fellow down the road who is in terrible shape. Let's all give fifty bucks so that someone can go get him and put him up here in the inn."

No, the Samaritan got his hands bloody. Since he had to go very slowly, he may have gotten to the inn in the middle of the night. It's possible only the inn keeper knew the whole story.

The priest and the Levite were very likely nice, friendly people. They might have fit into our society without a ripple. In fact, we might even admire them for their good management.

But they couldn't stand the sight of the bloodied victim on the road.

How often can't we stand the sight of the poor in our midst? We have a hundred and one reasons why it would be unwise, almost unscriptural, to help them. We say that somehow they are going to have to learn a lesson. Besides that, there are a lot better ways to spend our money than on someone who has no management.

But he is our brother.

To help this brother often doesn't require money. But it takes getting our hands bloodied. It takes pouring oil and wine into his gapping wounds and then binding them up.

We, like Levy, have developed some solid "convictions" about this matter. We may put thousands in the collection plate to spread the gospel to all nations, but if there are those in our midst who are hungering, thirsting, in need of clothes, or bound up, and we close our bowels of mercy, will we someday hear those dreadful words: "I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me"?

True gratitude is realizing we don't deserve what we have, and then in compassion sharing with those whom we feel deserve more than they have. ▲

Lessons from the Past

by Wilmer Unruh

(Continued)

Life in C.P.S. Camp

Since we were 12 young men here in this party, that gave us six teams and going out in different parts of the woods each day, we always had something to talk about at the end of the day. One of the things that was real to us was getting lost in the woods, and it did happen to people. The boss had told us in training that if you really get lost and become completely disoriented, first don't lose your head, but try to conserve your energy. Start walking downhill until you hit a stream; follow that until you hit a bigger stream, and so on, until you hit a river. Follow it and you'll soon be in civilization. That is simple enough, but it may take you a long ways from where you started and our nature is such that we want to get back to where we started.

Joe and I had a little experience one day that I won't soon forget. Joe was older than the rest of us and he didn't seem to work out with any of the guys, so the boss decided to put our names in the hat and each draw his partner. The leader of each party was the estimator and his helper was the compass man. So he picked all the estimators and then put the rest in the hat and then I drew Joe's name.

Well Joe was not the average Joe. He was either way below or far above others, depending how you looked at him. He had a lot of problems. Working alone with him in the woods for about 6 months we got to know each other. Sometimes during lunch hour he'd talk about his problems in the youth in his church and how he was rejected. He told how once he even had a girlfriend and how she jilted him. This kind of turned him against the world and he began to have a fatalistic view of life. And then this hard labor we were doing without pay made life hard for him. One evening he was sitting on his cot with his head in his hands and bemoaning his fate. What were we doing here anyway in this forsaken place? What ever brought him here? We had another young man there by the name of John, about the exact opposite of Joe, always full of youthful energy, idealism and optimism. He would raise his hand toward Joe and say, "Why Joe this is our witness, this is our service for our country."

"Oh humbug!" Joe would say. "What do you mean witness? We're stuck away so far here in the back woods nobody in all the world even knows we're here."

"Yeah but Joe..." the other would say.

"Oh humbug!" Joe would interrupt, and that's about as far as one could get. I didn't care to get involved because I knew that the following day I'd go and spend all day in the woods with him.

One day the boss assigned us a quarter section far down off the road, at least a 30 minute hike. Going in was easy, always downhill. Coming out in the evening was all uphill, and that could be trying after a hard days work. During training our teacher had

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warned us that when we worked that far off the road, that the first night out we should turn around every once in a while and take note of the terrain, paying attention to any prominent signs, like a dead tree or a rock outcropping because that would be the way it would look when going back in the morning.

I took these things seriously, because as the leader of the party I felt responsible for our safety. On the way out the first evening, Joe was concerned about the hard climb out of there and didn't pay much attention to the terrain. Well, on the way in, we were probably about half way when Joe wanted to veer off to the left of a big dead snag. I said, "No Joe, we passed on this side."

"Nope," he said, "we passed on that side." So we argued about it. I saw I'd never change his mind, so we would each go our own way. But I told him, "Joe I'm not doing it unless you give me your compass." And sure enough he did! He was so sure he was right. I took some shots with the compass and in about 15 minutes I came into a clearing and there was our stake with a red flag on it that we always left in the evening.

I sat down and waited a while and was beginning to get worried, when I heard a terrible scream way down and off to the left. At first I thought there must be some wild animals around, and then I heard it again and it dawned on me it was Joe and he'd panicked. By yelling back and forth I finally heard him coming closer.

During this time I thought of all kinds of things I was going to say to him, but when he broke through the undergrowth and I saw the look of utter disgust on his face, something said, "Be quite. Don't say a thing." So I made myself look busy, getting my log book in order. I handed him his compass without looking at him and we went to work without saying a word. Joe didn't hardly say a word all day, but I noticed a change started coming over him. He became more docile and easier to get along with, and he even became friendly toward me.

I have probably pondered more on Joe's life than any relationship I've ever had with anyone. Why was he the only one that lost his life in that gruesome accident we had? This was a question that didn't seem to have an answer. Fifty years later we had a reunion and we were all there except one. We'd all gotten married and raised families and had children and grandchildren. Our wives were all living yet and were there. We began to reminisce about this and we all felt we had survived through divine protection. But what about Joe? Pretty soon one of the men said, "You know," he said, "of all of us boys there, Joe was the only one that didn't have a future." Maybe that's the answer. I still wonder about it.

This accident happened as follows:

We had been fighting a fire for several days across the summit, on the west side. When coming back we stopped at a ranger station for a drink and a little rest. There we got word that we should report to another fire. Our boss refused and told them, "We have to get these guys back to camp to clean up and get a fresh change of clothes." So that's what we did. It was another 10 miles or so down the east side. Of course this made us all tensed up and in a hurry. When we were cleaned up we felt some better, but soon the boss yelled for us to get aboard, so we all ran for the truck. We didn't realize it

but right there was a crucial time in each of our fates. Across the front of the truck was a tool chest and this was a choice seat. There was kind of a good natured scuffle started to see who would get that seat, and those of us who weren't so determined retreated to the back seats where the ride was rougher.

Our camp was situated in a deep cove, so to get out on the ridge again there were a series of steep switchbacks. We were on our way on one of these hairpin turns, when the driver had trouble shifting gears and looked down momentarily and there we went over the edge. Sitting on the outside rear corner, it gave me a tremendous pitch. I went sailing through the air and landed about 25 feet downhill on my feet and slid on down a ways on the pine needles. When I picked myself up and looked back, I saw a sight I will never forget. We were 13 men on the back and two in the cab. About half of us were thrown free and the others pinned under the plank seats. Then I noticed poor Joe, the man I worked with all summer. He was pinned under the cab with head and shoulders sticking out. His life was being squeezed out of him.

Our truck driver simply lost it. He went kind of wild to think that he could have caused this. He plead with us to come and lift this truck off of Joe. But we all saw it was no use. Then we got some axes out, chopped some holes in the stake sides to free the rest of the guys. No one was badly injured. There were a few broken bones and some cuts, but poor Joe, he was gone. We spent some time digging him out.

In the meantime one of the boys ran back to camp and called for an ambulance, but it took about 3 hours to get there. Our leader and those that needed treatment all rode back with the ambulance. That night for me is one to remember. The trauma of the accident and then losing my partner, I guess I went into shock. This was already the latter part of September and very cool at night. We slept in unheated tents and I started to shiver uncontrollably. I piled on all my blankets, but I just couldn't stop it.

When morning finally came, I was glad. Those of us that were left got together and decided we must write Joe's family a letter of condolence. They chose me since I worked with him. You know I think that pulled me out of my shock. I wrote them a letter, then I wrote Evadean one, and also my parents. That was such a job that by then I had forgotten about my physical condition.

One thing I learned from this experience is that our teaching and our training can decide our fate. My fellow camper testified to me, the one who retreated with me to the back seat and we were both thrown clear of the wreckage. "If I wouldn't have been taught not to strive and fight for my own rights, I could have very well been sitting on that front seat where Joe was." That could have been true for me too.

In the early spring of 1946 I transferred back to Malcolm, Nebraska so I could be closer to home and maybe get to come home once in a while. That didn't work out too well. There were too few cars and too many guys that wanted to go home all the time, especially if there was a wedding or something important like that. I didn't get discharged till the latter part of September, but there was one weekend I'll always remember. More and more boys were being discharged, so the cars going home would be loaded but coming back there would be room.

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One weekend there was a wedding or something and I wanted to go home real bad. During the time in service I'd heard many interesting stories guys told about their hitchhiking experiences and so I decided to try it too. One weekend I had a way back, but not home. Our work truck always ended up in Lincoln so I told the driver to drop me off at a rest stop on the edge of town. This was about 5:00 on Friday evening. I caught a ride almost right away to York and a little town south of there, and then my luck ran out. Skies were overcast and it started to sprinkle so I walked about a quarter mile into town but the bus depot was closed. I decided to walk back to the highway and soon a truck came along pulling a refer van. He stopped and picked me up.

As soon as we were down the road a little ways, he started talking and couldn't stop. He had just recently gotten out of the army and was extremely nervous and distraught; he had a problem he just couldn't handle. I believe that is why he picked me up. He just had to have somebody to talk to. He told me he'd been shipped to England early in the war to train for the D-Day invasion. While he was training he got acquainted with an English girl and married her. In the invasion he was critically wounded, so they shipped him back to the States to recover. Of course his wife came along.

He tells his story: "My wife was with me and I recovered. By then the invasion was over, but I was still in the army and by now the going was getting hot in the south Pacific where the U.S. was starting to reclaim the island the Japs had captured early in the war. So the army sent me over there."

This is where he really got into it. It was scary. He told me about his hand-to-hand combat with the enemy. Then he started talking about his gun. "I've got a gun here," he said patting his side, "and this gun has saved my life 17 times and I've got 17 notches filed on this handle. That means that 17 times I met up with the enemy face to face and I got him before he got me. Nobody gets between me and my gun."

I think he mainly wanted to tell me how he survived the war, rather than scare me, but I was scared anyway, and I kept listening and asking questions, thinking as long as I kept him talking he wouldn't ask any questions and find out who I was.

About this time there was some fierce lightning coming out of the west and it looked like a real storm blowing in. We were getting close to the port of entry, so he said we'd park there and wait for the storm to blow over. After we got parked, he said, "I'm sleepy, so I think I'll take a nap." Since the truck didn't have a sleeper, he said "If you want to, I'll open the door on the side here and you can crawl up in the van and lay on the floor. I said, "Sure."

When the refer door clicked shut I realized what total darkness was and all kinds of thoughts came to my mind. I was interrupted all at once when the storm struck with a roar and the van began to shudder and shake. I was hoping it wouldn't roll. It was one of those storms that blow over fast. It rained a little and then it was quiet. In about thirty minutes the man opened the door and said, "Lets go. I think the storm is over. I need to get on the road."

As soon as we were rolling he turned to me and said "Hey guy, where you from?" And I thought, "Oh boy, here I go like a lamb to the slaughter." I said, "Well really I work for the soil conservation service back in Lincoln County, Nebraska."

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“I’m going home. My folks live on a farm in central Kansas.”

“How come you’re working over here when you farm in Kansas?”

“Well really I’m in service there.”

“How much do they pay you?”

“Well, really I work without pay.”

“What! I never heard of such a thing. That doesn’t exist in this country. That’s involuntary servitude and that’s unconstitutional.” He let go with as terrible a tirade of cursing and swearing as I’ve ever heard. Pretty soon I realized he wasn’t swearing at me, but he was cursing the government.

He said, “I always thought this was the land of liberty and freedom and that’s what I defended; that’s why I laid my life on the line. When I met the enemy that’s what kept me going, and now you tell me we’ve got concentration camps right here in America. I never in my life would have believed it.” And he cursed and swore.

All this time I was praying for a way to appease this man. “Well,” I said, “as far as we’re concerned, this isn’t involuntary service. We consider it voluntary service. Our church organization has a central committee and they have lobbied the government and made a deal with Selective Service and the U.S. Government that if we could do this service instead of military service and administer our own camps, we would feed and clothe our men and they would work without pay. And when the government saw how short man power was in all the governmental services, like soil conservation, Forestry Service and state hospitals, they said it was just a good deal for everybody and that we were actually going to make a big sacrifice. They took us up on it.”

He said, “Well, I never heard of such a thing.” He calmed down, but still insisted that it was unconstitutional—and technically he was right. I heard this very issue hotly debated in camp. Some of the old-timers were now going on four and a half to five years in camp, and it was now already six months after the war was over and here they were still working without pay. Like most deals made by big shots, it’s the men at the lower end of the totem pole who take the brunt of things. ▲

(To be continued)

Brazilians Write

A Letter...

[One of the fascinating aspects of the literature program is the contact with interested persons through correspondence. The following letter, written by Mileide Celeste, was received by the Brazil tract office. It was given to Paulo David, the chairman of the board, to be answered. Even though the letter is very well written, and respectful, it soon becomes evident that the writer has some very definite ideas concerning religion. Yet we can't help but believe that she is sincere in what she believes. Behind her evident deception, there seems to be a call for help.]

Greetings:

In spite of not knowing to whom I should direct this letter, I greet you in the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, wishing you success and good health.

My name is Mileide Celeste da Silva. I am 21 years old and enjoy studying the Bible. I believe in the truths which the Word of God brings to us today. I believe in and keep the Ten Commandments, as well as in the power of Christ's blood. I study the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, and believe in the mortality of the soul and the return of Jesus. All that I believe is based on the Bible.

I can say that I am tremendously impressed by your way of life. I saw on TV the special report on Rio Verde, and I must say that you live in a beautiful place. Since I am a nature lover, I immediately felt an urge to come and visit you. But what really caught my attention was the fact that you don't have radio or TV. It seems to me that you must be surrounded by a wonderful peace. The world in which we live is so noisy, and I don't like noise. It is when it is quiet that we can reflect.

Last week I was travelling with my dad and we stopped to have lunch in a restaurant in the city of Uberlândia. We noticed there were some different looking people in the restaurant and thought maybe they were Jews. We went to use the restrooms and my dad came back with two tracts, one pink and the other green. I looked for the name of the denomination and saw the word Menonita. I realized then that the people sitting at another table were from Rio Verde.

Seeing what kind of people you are, I became curious, and so I carefully read both tracts.

In the tract, *Teach Us to Pray*, I agreed with everything, except for a sentence in the fourth paragraph which says, "Even the words which we use when we pray *may* come from God." The word *may* gives to understand that our words don't necessarily come from God, but that they may be our own words. In John 15:5 John says, "Without me ye can do nothing," which contradicts what your tract says.

I began reading the pink tract, *Forty-Eight Hours in Hell*, and when I realized it was a story, I left it until I could read it all the way though without interruptions. It is on account of this tract that I am writing this letter.

I understood by what I read that you believe in a literal hell. You go so far as to ask how it is possible to not believe in hell when we have the Word of God at our disposal and a revelation such as the one found in the tract.

Brethren, thanks to God I have always had access to the Word of God and never have I read anything about a literal hell. Yes, I know of a lake of fire that has been prepared for those who don't accept the love of God and reject His salvation, which will become a reality when He returns to judge both the just and the unjust (read Rev. 22:7, 12; 20:10, 14-15). But no place in the Bible do we find anything that would substantiate the existence of a literal and active hell. Beside that, the meaning of the word "hell" is tomb, which makes us believe that the new meaning given to the word is the work of the tradition of men.

I am totally against the way in which you terrify your readers with the concept of a

place that doesn't even exist, when you say, "...lest you experience the reality of not only forty-eight hours, but an eternity in hell. Brethren, how ridiculous! Where is Christ's example? Jesus never spoke of a conditional "love"—*Either* you follow me, *or* you go to hell. Never! Much to the contrary, all He did and said reflected the marvelous things God has prepared for us. Consequently, those who refuse to give ear to His voice will receive the sentence which they themselves have chosen.

Do you brethren actually believe that our God would provide Satan with a kingdom so that he could eternally kill and punish the very creation for which Jesus left the glories of heaven and came to the earth to die in our place, all the while practically letting Satan go free so that he can enjoy eternity punishing the sons and daughters of God? And what do you have to say about the second death if the wicked will be placed in a literal lake of fire and brimstone, as we read in the Word of God (see Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8)?

As to the "revelation" that this certain George Lennox had, the Bible says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). No, I have absolutely no doubt but what this man actually saw all that he describes. But, and I don't want to offend anyone by what I say, as soon as these visions begin to contradict the Word of God, we must conclude they come [from the evil one]. I realize that many today believe in this kind of thing, but these same people worship on Sunday, even though the day set forth in the Ten Commandments, which never have been nullified, clearly set forth Saturday as the day of worship. I'm not interested in the commandments of men. I go by what God commands. The moment that someone can prove to me that I am wrong in what I believe, I will completely change my thinking because of my love for the truth.

I know that you brethren sincerely believe the Bible, and so do I. That would mean that one of us is deceived. I decided to write to make this plain, because you, like I, believe in the second coming of Christ (see Mat. 24:27; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; Heb. 9:28; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 1:7; 22:12). It is my desire that all of us could be—or are—travelling to heaven together, where we will spend all eternity.

May you share this feeling. ▲

Sincerely,
Mileide Celeste

...And the Answer

Christian greetings,

We enjoyed your letter and first of all would like to say that we appreciate your concern to know the truth. Also, you are most welcome anytime you would like to pay us a visit.

It would be real interesting if we could sit down together and share our thoughts about the tract *Forty-Eight Hours in Hell*. But seeing this is impossible, I will try and share some thoughts with you in this letter.

In your letter you state that in no place does the Bible confirm the existence of a

literal and active hell. Mileide, I'm sorry, but I can't agree with you, because in Luke 16:19-31, Jesus tells us the story of the rich man and Lazarus, in which the rich man died and went to hell—and this before the final judgement, for he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house (see verses 27-28), something which would have been impossible if the final judgement had already taken place.

The scripture just quoted makes it very clear that hell exists, so it isn't a matter of whether the Bible confirms what the tract says, but rather if you are willing to accept it or not. You may argue that this is a parable, but even if it is (and the text makes it clear that it isn't), the parables that Jesus taught were always perfectly possible (the sower, the net, the good Samaritan...). So if we say that Jesus taught an impractical parable, we must conclude it was the untruth, which invalidates any application we would like to make.

In your letter you state: "I am totally against the way in which you terrify your readers with the concept of a place that doesn't even exist, when you say, "...lest you experience the reality of not only forty-eight hours, but an eternity in hell. Brethren, how ridiculous! *Where is Christ's example?* Jesus never spoke of a conditional "love"—*Either you follow me, or you go to hell. Never!* Much to the contrary, all He did and said reflected the marvelous things God has prepared for us."

Yes, where is Christ's example?

In Mark 9:43-48, we find an excellent example. Let's take special note of verses 43 and 44. "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

In the Gospel of Saint Matthew alone we have many other examples: Mat. 13:41-42, 49-50; 18:8-9; 22:13-14; 24:48-51; 25:10-13, 24-30, 41-46.

What was Jesus getting at in these scriptures that speak of the punishment that awaits those who don't do His will?

Why did Jesus warn them about the danger of going to the place "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," if the place doesn't even exist?

If hell is merely a "tomb," as you declare, why the warning, if all of us will go there anyway someday?

No, Mileide, your interpretation doesn't hold water when exposed to the warnings of punishment Jesus gives to the disobedient.

If we read Mark 9:43-48 and Revelation 20:14, we understand that hell is the prison of the souls that are awaiting the final judgement, after which hell itself will be cast into the lake of fire, as we read in Jude verses 5-7.

In your letter you also ask: "Do you brethren actually believe that our God would provide Satan with a kingdom so that he could eternally kill and punish the very creation for which Jesus left the glories of heaven and came to the earth to die in our place...?"

Let's check the Bible on this.

"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

Mileide, please notice that not only the punishment is eternal, but that the lost will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. How could there possibly be a punishment if there was no one in that place to be punished?

In the beginning of your letter, you state you believe in the *mortality* of the soul. I don't know where you find any support in the Bible for this belief—to tell you the truth, I would like to know (write me sometime and tell me about it). As I see it, your belief conflicts with a number of scriptures. One of them is Mark 9:43-48, where Jesus speaks about the possibility of being cast into hell, “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” Now, if the soul at some point ceases to exist, what would be the point of an unquenchable fire, or of a worm not dying? Even stranger would be the soul dying, but not the worm, thus transforming the worm into an immortal being, thus placing it above the soul.

No, Mileide, if the fire isn't quenched and the worm doesn't die in that place that Jesus calls hell, it's because the soul will never cease to exist. If death could extinguish the soul, then death would have the power to free us from sin, from guilt and pain, and God wouldn't have had to send Jesus to this earth to save man through His death. Then God could have discarded this first creation and made another. But because God loves man and knows that his soul is immortal (which means that it came into existence through the breath of life from God and thus is eternal), it must be redeemed. So He sent His Son into the world to die in our place and give us eternal salvation, thus freeing us from eternal torment. It isn't that God wants to torment His creation eternally, but because He made us in His likeness and image, and therefore we have an immortal spiritual nature. Therefore the lost will eternally feel the condemnation of their sins. This torment is the fire that is never quenched and the condemnation is the worm that never dies. The fire would be extinguished and the worm would die for those whose souls ceased to exist. The price paid for sin was too high, it was an eternal price. The death of the soul would have made Christ's sacrifice unnecessary, because that would have been all it would have taken to put an end to sin, guilt and pain.

What about the lake of fire in Revelation 20:14-15? What is it for? When the dead resurrect, will it be a mere place of execution for the soul? If the soul is mortal, death itself will have judged it and the final judgement will no longer be necessary.

We need to accept exactly what the Bible teaches. We must never make New Testament doctrines bend to Old Testament teachings, especially to obscure passages. We interpret the Old Testament in the light of the new, and not vice-versa. The Old Testament contains shadows, the New contains reality. But this is something we'll save for a future letter.

Please continue writing and we will be happy to continue our correspondence with you.

May God continue to lead you into all truth.

In Christ,
Paulo David



Monkeys

Chicão Takes a Ride

Chicão, you will remember, is the gadabout monkey the Wildlife Society brought to our place hoping it would settle down. It sort of did at one of the neighbors upstream from our place, although it didn't give up making an occasional visit to the Monte Alegre School, much to the delight of the students.

Chicão loves getting into trouble (that's why Ibama brought him out) and soon he was getting into trouble at his new adopted home. When no one was at home, he would really cut up. He learned how to open the window from the outside, would get into the house, have a royal party, strewing macaroni all over the floor, opening a margarine can, getting his feet all smeared up with the stuff, and then tracking it all over the house. Even worse, when he found a hen with little chicks, he would send them to their happy hunting ground.

The neighbors were no longer seeing a lot of humor in Chicão's antics, so they locked it in a storeroom and asked that our boys go there and pick it up so that we could return it to Ibama.

Catching a monkey isn't like catching a cat or a chicken. Their agility is three-dimensional. They can climb up most anything but a bare wall, jump to a light fixture or hide under a cupboard. The boys finally caught Chicão and brought him home in an old birdcage. The next morning when Otávio opened the birdcage door a crack to feed it, Chicão saw his chance and in a split second was free again. Soon he was back at the neighbors pestering the living daylights out of them.

The boys went back a second time and recaptured Chicão and jailed him in the birdcage. The next morning, our day to go to town, we loaded him into the back of our hatchback car and head for town. The Ibama office is on the way into town, so it would be a simple matter to stop there and hand over the jailbird.

Not all plans work out. About half way to town we heard a different sort of noise in the back of the car. We looked back and found that Chicão once again had flown the coop. Now he was loose in the car...or, and I think this is more accurate, he was now in a larger cell with two fellow prisoners.

I must give Chicão credit for being a well-behaved jailbird. He started exploring the interior of the car and was soon sitting on Faith's shoulder. But what if he panicked? I tried to prepare myself for any contingency. Good old Chicão, he actually seemed to enjoy the ride to town, at least the last half.

We got to Ibama and stopped in front of their office. I managed to slip out of the car, went inside and told the people that Chicão was at their disposal.

I don't suppose any of you good readers have ever tried to catch a full grown monkey in a car. If you ever do, you'll have a new appreciation for the term *monkey business*. We hit on the idea of putting a ripe mango in an open cage, place it against the window, and then roll it down. The idea—really quite brilliant—was that jailbird Chicão would

be tempted by the forbidden fruit, go after it, and presto, we would drop the door, and he would once again be incarcerated.

It wasn't to be so. Chicão saw the fruit and desired it. He headed right up to the open window and quick as a flash hopped in and out—before the door could be dropped. Now he delightedly was jumping around in the car eating the juicy, overripe mango.

It was obvious that our little game could go on for a long while, and we had an appointment we needed to meet, so I suggested we open the back hatch and extend a blanket that he would jump into. Once again Chicão patiently tried our patience. All of our efforts to lure him into our clever trap didn't work. Until finally Houdini—that would fit him much better than Chicão—saw we had our guard down. And he was free indeed! In a jiffy he was up a nearby tree.

The middle sized monkey Ibama left with us has returned to the wild. We began to turn it loose each day in the same tree with the macaw. The parrot and the monkey were soon close friends. One day towards evening the monkey decided it was time to return to the wild and we haven't see it since.

The two baby monkeys are doing beautifully. They no longer take the bottle and spend their days loose in the trees around the house. Each evening we bring them in for the night.

Keep tuned for more monkey news. ▲

This & That

Here's a note someone handed me after church the other night: "Webster's definition of *scrapper*: 'Fighter, quarreler.' Now just what was it you saw 'a big dual tire tractor pulling?' See BN no. 101, pg 15." I plead guilty. That was some lousy spelling, but the idea wasn't all that bad. If all "scrapers" were dragged through a fish pond behind a big dual tire tractor every time they got into a scrap or a quarrel, man, oh man...

Mark Loewens accompanied Marilyn Hibner on a quick trip to the US to attend the funeral of Mrs. Earl Litwiller, Marilyn's mother.

On Oct 27 Perdigão had a meeting with the Colony in the Monte Alegre social hall.

They are very anxious to get us involved in their project and are offering some special benefits.

Shortly before the meeting started Sebastião Passos's three boys were coming down Broadway and had an accident. Marcelo was thrown from the pickup and suffered several cracked vertebrae. The other two were quite bruised up.

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