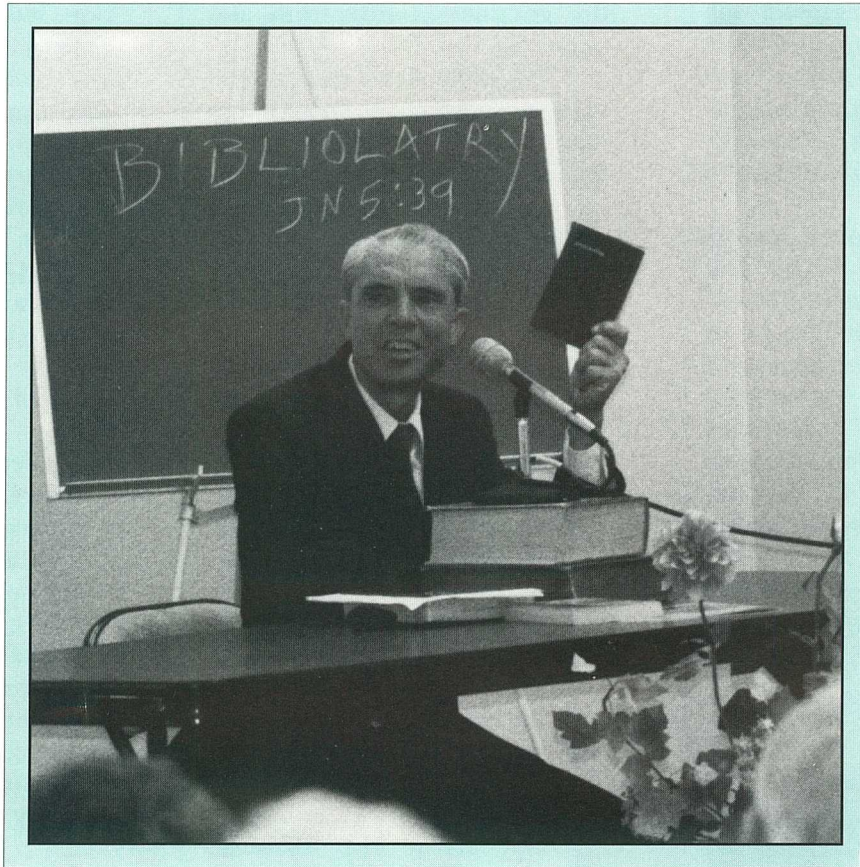


A Beginning of Wisdom: How to Study the Whole Bible

A Report on the First
GNU Bible School
November 6-8, 1992



Teacher: Dr. Desmond Ford

Notes by student Roy Gee

*An intensive weekend Bible School teaches
us that the Bible is fully trustworthy in its
revelation of God, the gospel, and salvation*

FIRST DAY OF BIBLE SCHOOL

There was much "first-day-of-school excitement" as we crowded into GNU's new Seminar Hall on Friday evening, November 6, 1992. Eighty-five students from California, and as far away as Florida, Michigan, Washington State, and Oregon, joined in the spirited singing ten minutes before class time. Promptly at 7:00 p.m., Dr. Desmond Ford opened the first **GNU Bible School**. The topic was **A Beginning of Wisdom: How to study the whole Bible**. Des's first act as principal was to announce—to appreciative applause—that the Seminar Hall is now named Alderson Hall. This is to honor Elder and Mrs. Paul Alderson. Paul has become a regular at the **GNU** office as he has voluntarily supervised the building of the new hall.

Des immediately moved into his opening lecture on "Why the Bible?" Des told the assembled students that the principles found in the Bible are what makes life worth living. He illustrated his lesson from Russia's tragic 70-year ban on the Bible by the Communists. Most of the students knew that Dr. Ford recently spent three weeks preaching

the gospel in cities and villages in southern Russia. They were eager to hear of his adventures. But his lecture was not all stories. He said:

Why the Bible?

... only the values found in the Bible make life worth living. Life can be hard, and there is much darkness and suffering in the world. Without the values taught in the Bible, life is not worth living. Those values are: love, compassion, sympathy, goodness, purity, truth, and hope.

The Bible alone gives a solid basis for such values. Those things that make our lives happiest, we find upheld in the Bible.

... Ideas are mental dynamite. And God is the greatest "Idea." Only devils and beasts want to live in a world without God.

Can you imagine how good this world would be if everyone took seriously only one command from the Bible: "Thou shalt love they neighbor as thyself?" There would be no murders and no thefts and no wars. Lies and greed would disappear. There would be no beaten wives, no abused children...

... Religion without the gospel, religion that is not Bible-centered and Christ-centered and grace-centered, does more harm than good.

John Warwick Montgomery wrote in *Damned Through the Church* that the church throughout history has been a force for evil as well as for good. Such evil is usually revealed by what Kierkegaard called barren, or dead, orthodoxy. Such evil has condemned progress and truth because of its preoccupation with majoring in minors.

Such evil has even shed the blood of its own prophetic voices in the name of Christ! It has encouraged its



members to believe that salvation is found by being linked to an institution, rather than being linked to Christ.

Gandhi was correct when he said that much of the western world contains a Christianity without Christ. Only close study of Scripture can save us from such tragedy.

... Life cannot be lived to the full without faith. If we are going to believe in a future with possibilities, we must have faith. A poet wrote of faith:

She sees the best that glimmers
through the worst.
She feels the sun is hid but for a
night.
She spies the summer through
the winter's bud.
She tastes the fruit before the
blossom falls.
She hears the lark within the
songless egg.
She finds the fountain, where
they wailed, "Mirage!"

If we have no convictions about the future, we stop living a full, active, vigorous life, because life is a continuous venture into a dangerous unknown. Courage is a necessity for living well.

Courage is the fruit of faith. Faith comes from "hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17 NIV).

The word of Christ is heard today through the preaching and teaching of the Bible and the gospel it contains.



SECOND DAY OF BIBLE SCHOOL

Many students gathered at Alderson Hall long before first class on Sabbath, November 7. In all my educational experience, this is unusual. Students usually wait until the last minute before entering class. By 10:00 a.m., 103 students were present to hear Dr. Ford's lecture on why we can trust the Bible. Des led us in a study of the doctrines of inspiration, revelation, and the preservation of the Scriptures down through the ages.

How We Got Our Bible

... Immanuel Kant said it is impossible for anyone to know anything about the real world. He said all our thinking is determined by the categories of our brain, and the brain has no real connection with reality beyond this world.

It is true that a bird cannot fly out of the earth's atmosphere. It's just as true that the One who made the bird and the atmosphere can reach down his loving hand and caress that bird. Just so, our Creator and Maker has condescended to talk to his earthbound children and explain the mysteries of existence.

Is the universe friendly or unfriendly? What is the meaning of life? What am I doing here? Where am I going? How can I understand myself? Is there a God? If so, does God love me, and what should I do to please him? If there is a loving God, how is it this world is full of trouble and sorrow?

These are some of the ques-

tions that everybody asks, but many people, like Pilate, are content with the asking, and do not seek answers.

Only the holy Scripture has answers that are true. Without Scripture, life becomes "a dusty scuffle across a parched terrain," "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (*Macbeth*, V, v, 26).

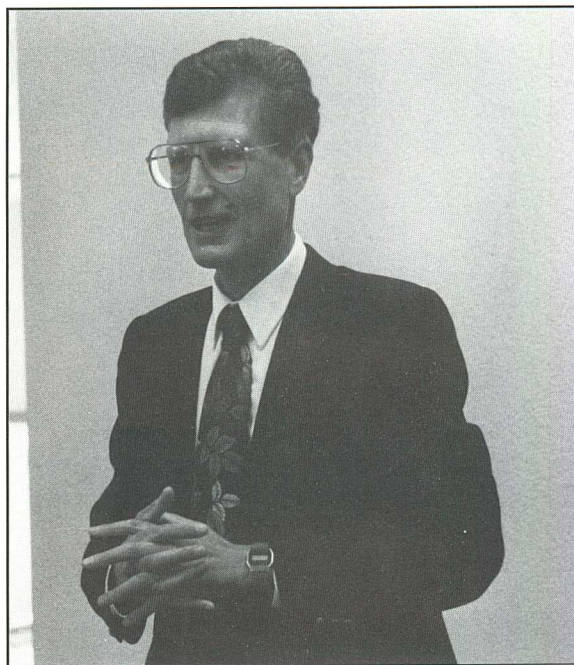
... The Bible is inerrant and infallible for its purpose. Its purpose is, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31).

... As the Bible has no parallel among other sacred books, so Christ stands without peer among history's religious leaders. No other founder of a worldwide religion claimed to be God incarnate. No other claimed to be without sin.

It is true of Jesus alone that after he died, "he rose again," and "appeared unto many." God was not content with telling his children to be kind, good, and true. Instead, God sent his Son, who is truth, goodness, and love incarnate, to show us the way we ought to live. It was the Spirit of Christ who inspired the prophetic writers of Scripture.

Last Class of Morning

Throughout California, education budgets are being cut. Teachers are being laid off. Many students cannot get into college. What a privilege to have a brand-new Bible School! At 11:00 a.m., every Bible School student was present as Dr. Ford lectured on the importance of the Bible's divisions (or arrangements). We learned about the relationships of the various sections of the Bible, and



the Bible's supernatural unity.

The Divisions of Scripture

... the Bible has a supernatural unity, but we need to study the building blocks of the temple of truth.

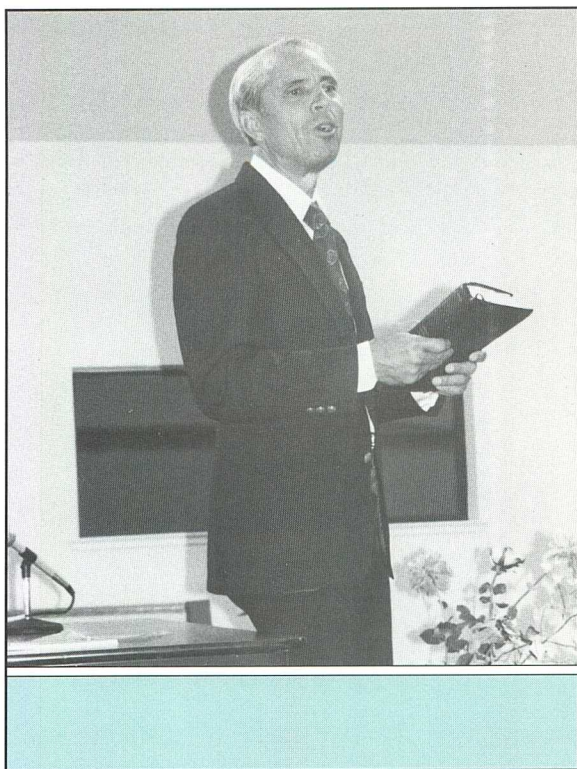
... There is a marvelous unity to be found in both Testaments. They both have books concerning the past, the present, and the future. They both speak of history, doctrine, and prophecy. Each Testament can be divided into four sections: manifestations, experience, application, and outlook. These are four sets of living books, with the New Testament marvelously matching the Old.

... In an early Christian church you would have found a library, or place of safekeeping, containing items we can group into three categories.

First, there would be manuscripts, in Greek and Hebrew, of various books of the Bible.

Second, there would be versions of the Bible (or portions of the Bible), in the language of the local people. Although today there are over 200 versions of the New Testament, this is nothing new. There have always been versions of





the Bible translated into the local languages. We are wise when we use all available versions, while trusting none wholly.

Third, there would be copies of the writings of the Church Fathers, or early church leaders. What is astounding about the Church Fathers is that though they wrote immediately after the apostles and the New Testament, their writings do not contain the gospel! The gospel is completely missing!

Their writings are full of how to live as Christians, and how to be good. What they teach, in effect, is, "Be good, and be saved." But it's too late for that—we've already sinned. It's too late for us to be altogether good. It's too late for us to be acceptable to God because of our own "goodness."

Certainly, we need guidance on how to live the Christian life. But we need the gospel if we are to be saved. We need to understand that the perfect righteousness of Christ, accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection, is imputed to us. His perfect holiness covers us as a seamless robe. That robe is not ours—it is his. But it covers us, so when we appear in the presence of God, we are

clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. This is the only way sinners can be acceptable to God. The early Church Fathers completely neglect this glorious, saving gospel. Their writings are full only of good advice. There is no good news.

After Dinner School

The weekend weather was perfect (sunny, but not too hot). Some students played hooky in the afternoon, but ninety of us were in our seats at 3:00 p.m. to hear a practical Desmond Ford discourse. Des lectured on how to use Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other helps. We were happy students. Thanks to the local **GNU** Fellowship, we did not have to bring our lunch boxes to Bible School. We enjoyed an excellent Fellowship Dinner, featuring both quality and quantity, provided by **GNUF**. (Some visiting students must also be thanked for bringing food.) Well fed physically, we settled in our seats for some spiritual food.

How to Study and Understand the Bible

... It is not enough to ask, "What does the Bible **say**?" We must also ask, "What does the Bible **mean** by these words?"

We must ask questions of every passage of Scripture we read. **Why** was this written? **Where** was it written? **When** was it written? **Who** wrote it? To **whom** was it written? **Who** first read it? **What** is its chief message and what things are merely ancillary? What practical meaning does it have for me today? Have I considered all the parallel passages to this one? What did Jesus say on this topic?

... Nothing can substitute, in our study, for a literary flair that grows out of a feeling for (and close

acquaintance with) literature in general. People unaccustomed to reading widely often make mistakes in interpreting Scripture. God's revelation of truth, as with the Son of God, has taken human form. A Jewish proverb says, "The Torah speaks in the language of men." John Calvin suggested that Scripture is God lisping to us as a tall man might bend down and simplify his vocabulary for the sake of a listening child.

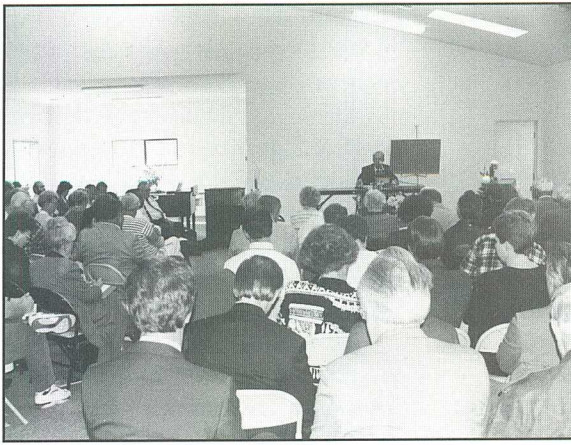
You find many illustrations of this principle in the poetic portions of Scripture. Isaiah says that in the world to come, "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox" (Is 65:25). In another place he declares, "No lion will be there" (Is 35:9). How can we understand this apparent contradiction?

When we recognize that almost all of Isaiah is written in poetry, then we remember that this language is nontechnical. Poetry evokes feeling by emphasizing ideas through pictures and symbols. Isaiah is simply stating that the new earth will not know lions as we **do now**—ravenous and fierce. There will be no ravenous beasts in the world to come. All the lions will have lost their ferocity.

To understand the literary form of the passage of Scripture we are studying is to find a key to interpreting that passage.

... REMEMBER!—The New Testament interprets the Old Testament • The Epistles interpret the Gospels • Systematic passages interpret the incidental passages •





Plain, didactic, teaching passages interpret symbolic passages • When in doubt, remember Jesus is God's last Word and final Authority.

Afternoon Amazement

Amazingly, after a full meal and sitting all day, we were still wide awake at four in the afternoon! Here was a lesson we had been waiting for! Dr. Ford would teach us how to find Christ in all the Bible.

The Man of the Book

... You know how much I appreciate the writings of that great preacher, Charles Spurgeon. Let me share with you this magnificent quotation:

"I will give the Old Testament to any wise man living and say, 'Go home and construct in your imagination an ideal character who shall exactly fit all that is herein foreshadowed.'

"Remember, he must be a prophet like unto Moses, and yet a champion like unto Joshua; He must be an Aaron and a Melchizedek and Joseph. Nay, he must not only be the lamb that was slain, the turtle dove and the priest that slew the bird, but he must be the altar, tabernacle, mercy-seat, and shewbread.

"Nay, to puzzle this wise man further, we remind him of the prophecies so apparently contradictory that one will think they could never meet in one man. Such as these, 'All men shall fall down before Him,' etc., and 'He is despised' etc. He must begin by

showing a man born of a virgin mother. He must be a man without spot or blemish, but one upon whom the Lord doth lay the iniquities of us all. He must be a glorious One, a Son of David, yet a root out of a dry ground.

"Now if the greatest intellects could set themselves to invent another key to the types and prophecies, they could not do it. These wondrous hieroglyphics must be left unexplained until one comes forward and proclaims, 'The Cross of Christ and the Son of God incarnate.' Then the whole is clear, so that he who runs may read, and the child may understand."

Devotional Use

There are many things to do on Saturday night. Very few people choose to spend their Saturday night going to school. Nevertheless, 89 eager students crowded into Alderson Hall on Saturday night, at 7:00 p.m., to hear Dr. Ford teach, "Our Devotional Use of the Bible." We wanted to see what Des had promised: that through the devotional use of the Bible we can see our personal portraits in Scripture.

... When you read the Bible devotionally, there are two pictures to look for: Christ and Us.

When Jesus came to earth, he was able to turn to passages of Scripture that were written about him particularly (Lk 4:16-21). It is also true of us in a sense that each of us can find himself or herself in the Bible.

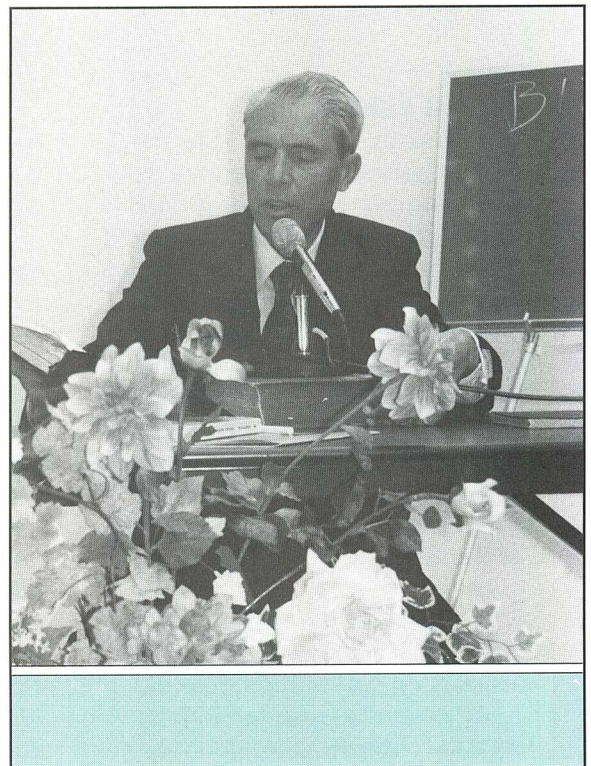
Our characters are portrayed there. The persons described in Scripture are representatives of us all. In the record of their lives we can find the actualities, or possibilities, of our own lives.

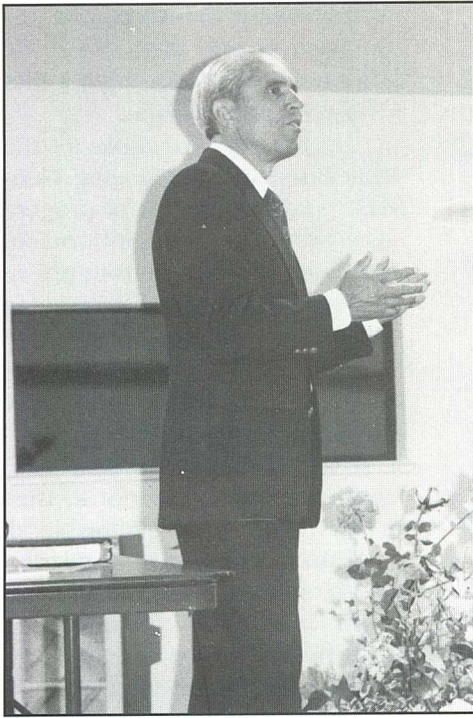
... Don't read the Scriptures with a pitchfork—as though every-

thing written is for others, and you can pitch it onto them. Read the Scriptures with a fork—what it says is for your consumption.

... The first six books of the Bible illustrate our biography. **Genesis** represents the sinful propensities with which we are born. Sin and death are here introduced to us. **Exodus** illustrates our going out, our deliverance from sin by God's mighty act through the sacrificial blood. **Leviticus** shows how redeemed people are to worship.—it is the book of the sanctuary. This book teaches us not to trust in self-worth, but only in the blood.

Numbers reflects our pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world as we seek the promised land. Up and down we go, learning to trust God during our pilgrim walk. In **Deuteronomy** we find the second telling of the law, where we learn of the absolute necessity of glad obedience to God's law now that we are redeemed and have eternal life. Though we are accepted only by the blood of Christ, we are to gratefully obey our Savior. God's ten commandments are seen to be promises when we read their introduction: "I am the Lord your





God.” **Joshua** shows that we can have victory only when we are led by the divine Captain. All our Jerichos can be overthrown, and the land of plenty will become ours if we exercise faith in God.

... The Scriptures are living oracles. They are called, “The Word of Life.” The Bible’s characters are not dead, but living. They are found in every church family, and every heart (2 Sam 12:7).

Last Day of School

Already it was the last day of school! We could hardly believe it. Soon we would be packing our books and leaving for home. Where had the time flown? Our sadness was softened by only two thoughts: there were still two classes left, and there were no exams or quizzes at the close of this school! At 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, November 8, 1992, 83 of us met for the last morning of Bible School. We listened carefully as Dr. Ford led us through a closer look at Genesis.

... Consider the seven results of the Fall. One, the ground was cursed (Gen 3:17). To rescue us, Christ became a curse for us (Gal 3:13). Two, sorrow came upon hu-

manity (Gen 3:16-19). Christ became the Man of Sorrows for us (Is 53). Three, sweat is part of the curse (Gen 3:19). Christ sweated blood in Gethsemane (Lk 22:44). Four, thorns were also part of the curse (Gen 3:18). Christ wore a crown of thorns for us (Mt 27:29). Five, humanity was separated from God and Eden (Gen 3:24). Christ cried out when God “separated” from him (Mk 15:34). Six, an unsheathed sword barred the way to the Tree of Life (Gen 3:24). That sword was sheathed in Christ’s side for us (Jn 19:34). Seven, death was the ultimate result of the curse (Gen 3:19; 4:18). Christ died for us (1 Pe 2:21-24).

The Bible’s Last Book

Now we had really come to the end of Bible School. At 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, we met for the last class of **GNU’s** first Bible School. We opened our textbook, the Bible, for one last time. We were ready for a closer look at the Bible’s last book, the **Book of Revelation**.

... many of the books of commentary on Revelation found in your local Christian bookshop are not worth the paper they are printed on. They neglect the first line of the first verse of the Book of Revelation: “The revelation of **Jesus Christ**” (Rev 1:1).

The theme of the last book of the Bible is **Jesus**. Jesus, the sacrificial Redeemer and coming King, is preeminent in every chapter. This is a book about the gospel. Even the events of the future are portrayed through the lens of the cross.

... It takes about two minutes to prove that the Bible is true. Jesus said certain things that prove its veracity. He said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mt 24:35). “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14). “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates

of Hades will not overcome it” (Mt 16:18). Revelation traces the fulfillment of these promises.

How could he have known these things, except through supernatural insight? How could he have made such claims unless he was God become human? Who else but divinity would predict that his words would never pass away?

... Another vital key to the interpretation of Revelation is the sermon from the Mount of Olives (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21). There is no topic found in the Book of Revelation that does not have its seed form in that sermon given during the last week of our Lord’s life on earth.

... It is a solemn book, this last book of the Bible. For example, the seven last plagues use the imagery of Calvary: blood, hate, darkness, the cry, “It is finished!”

By using such imagery, Revelation is solemnly reminding its readers that if they reject the atonement made by Christ on the cross, they must make their own atonement in blood and pain. It is saying, “I died for you—believe and live forever.”

... How would you finish a book such as the Bible? Revelation is a wonderful way to end the Bible! Here we see God wiping away all tears from the eyes of his people. We see the heavenly Shepherd leading his flock through green pastures, and by still waters.

We see the New Jerusalem, and the river of life, and the tree of life. We hear the glorious invitation, “If you are thirsty, come! If you want life-giving water, come and take it. It’s free!” (Rev 22:17 CEV).

Hallelujah! Amen! ❖

*[Copies of the Source Book from the first Bible School are still available for \$15.00. Write **GNU**, 11710 Education St., Auburn, CA 95602-2499. Ask for **Source Book**. The second **GNU Bible School** is May 7-9, 1993. The topic is **God with Us: Christ in all the Gospels**. Plan now to attend!]*