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# THE MAYANS

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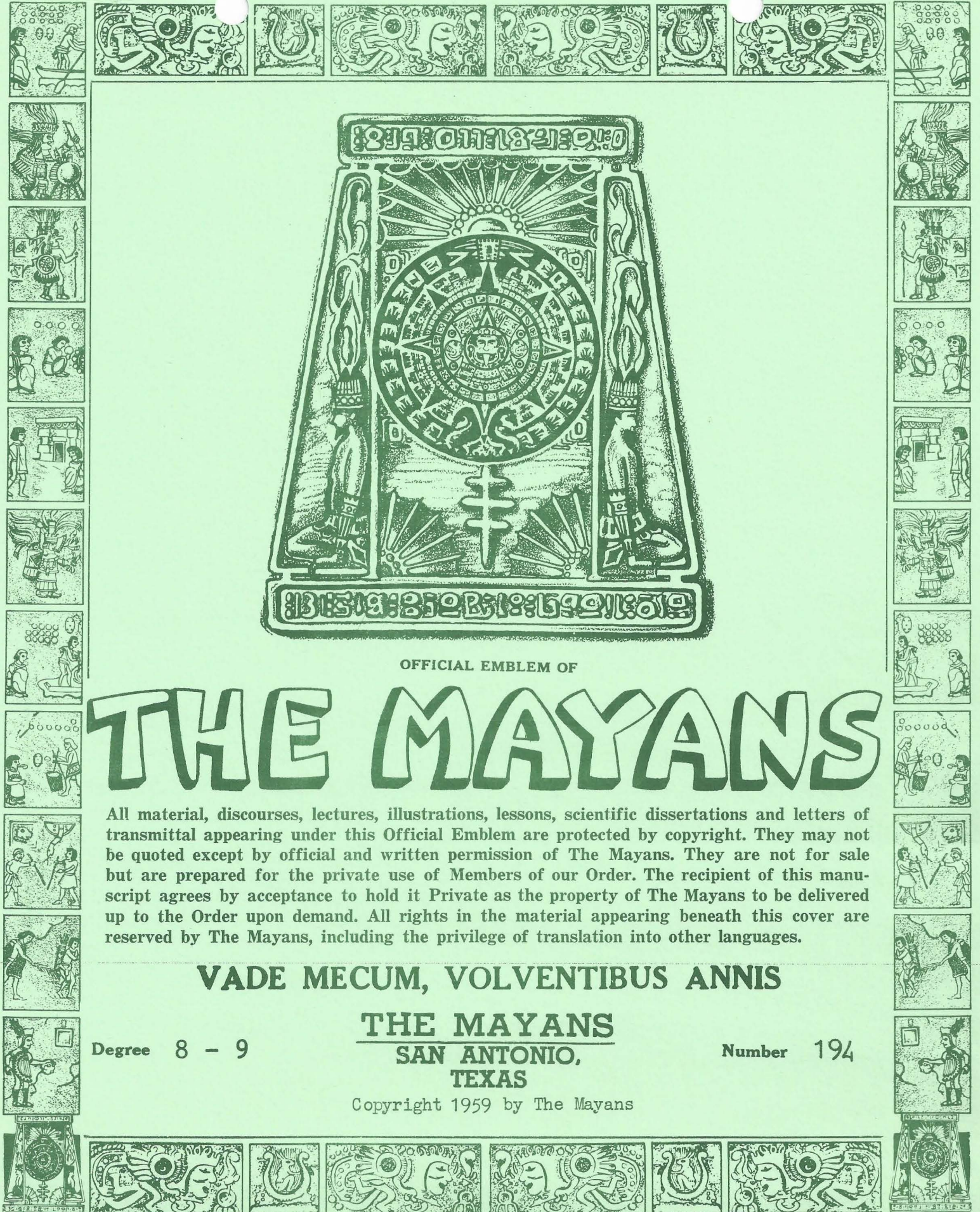
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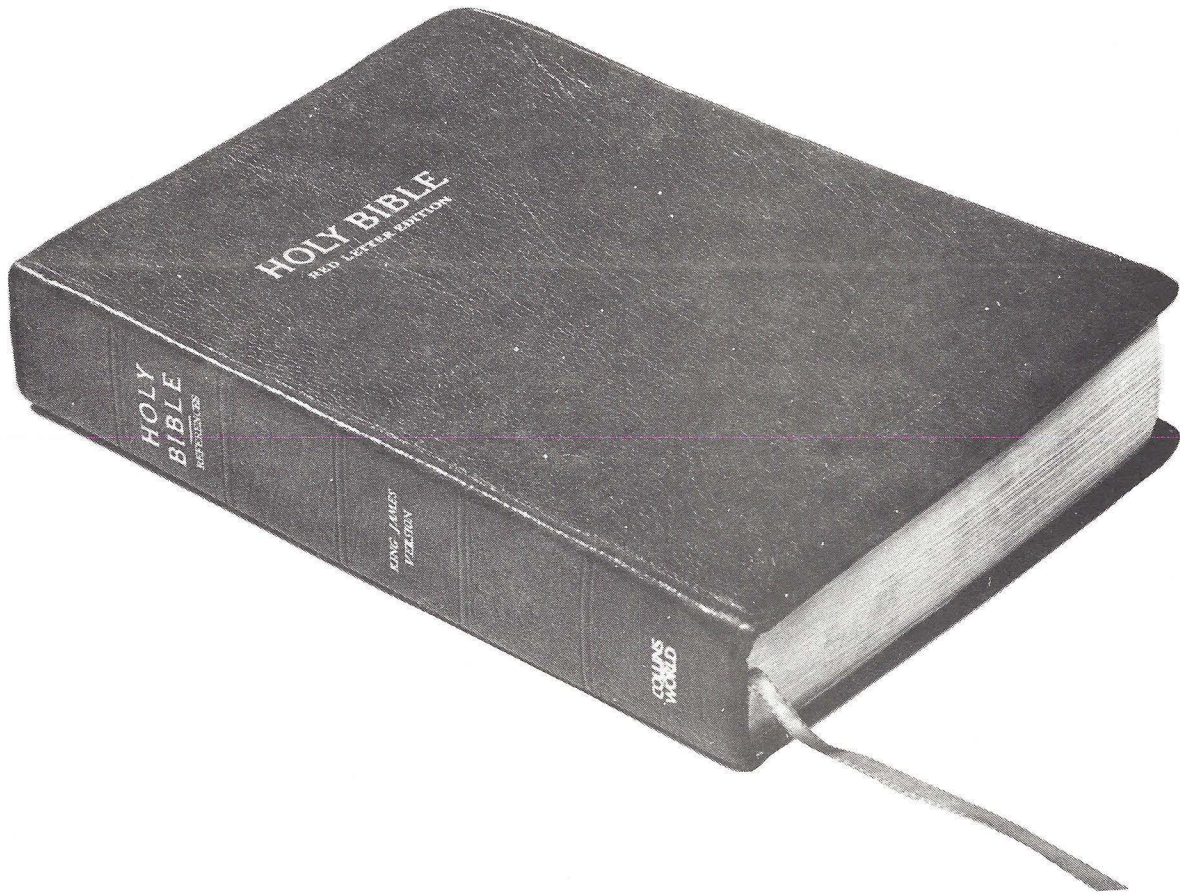
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**TEXAS**

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*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

*John 20; 30 - 31*

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## SEVEN FACETS OF THE BIBLE

### REVELATION NUMBER 194

#### A BOOK OF DECISIONS

Home or a Far Country?  
An Easy Life or a Hard One?  
Wisdom or Glory?  
A Hero in Babylon

Beasts and Angels.  
The Taxgatherer's Choice  
The Sifting of the Fisherman  
Affirmation

BELOVED CENTURION:

One of the most difficult obstacles which we face in life is the feeling of uncertainty when we must make an important decision. Very often we wish that it were possible to talk our problems over with someone else. We find it impossible to make a decision and would like the benefit of the thinking of our friends and loved ones.

But there are times when we do not care to discuss our innermost thoughts with others, even though they may be members of our own family, so we hold our secret problem close inside our heart and suffer because of our inability to decide what to do.

Here again is where your Bible can be a guide in helping you make decisions. You will notice the title of this lesson which you have in your hands is A BOOK OF DECISIONS, and as you read the lesson you will see how decisions were arrived at in the wonderful days when our Bible was written.

You will also see the far-reaching effects of the decisions that were made in those times, - decisions that affected all of history and, in turn, have their effect even on you and me today.

Do not let your inability to make decisions cause you unhappiness and sometimes even illness. Turn to that greatest guide of all times and find the answer, and know what a glorious feeling it is when we have been able to make the decision. A great load is lifted from our hearts.

There is nothing to be more admired than firmness and decision of character. I like a person who knows his own mind and who is able to make decisions, who knows immediately what is to be done and does it. However, we are not all able to do that; some of us have great difficulty in making decisions. Great strength of character is shown when we are able to say "No", not only to things which we know are wrong, but also to things that are pleasant to us and profitable, but which might hinder the good we are seeking to accomplish.

We must learn to make decisions that will always be the best for us and for others, even though they may not always be to our complete liking; maybe even causing us to make what would seem to be a sacrifice. In reality, it is not a sacrifice at all, but growth and character building, thereby making us stronger, and better, for having made the decision.

Remember always that when you are at the crossroads, not knowing which way to turn, prayer is the answer. It may not come at once, but come it will if we are patient. In the life of your Instructor, it has never failed.

Let us combine our strength by repeating together the following Prayer:

PRAYER

As I come one by one to life's partings of the way, Heavenly Father, make me wise to choose the roads that will lead me always in the direction of the fulfillment of Thy will for me and for my part in the building of the years. Amen.



## A BOOK OF DECISIONS

PART I - HOME OR A FAR COUNTRY?

**D**ECISIONS are pivots on which the forces of life and history turn both for ourselves and for the groups to which we belong. Some of these forces are very great and strong. The Bible is full of decisions because life is full of them. You have your share of these moments that change everything for you and for those whose lives will be affected, even determined, by yours.

The cases we present are not many among all that might be included; but they are vital and enough to set you watching for others outside and inside the scope of your own life. Each of these is an occasion when someone stood at the fork of the road where he had to decide and choose which way he would take. This required courage, as it always does. In no case was the choice easy, but facing it in each instance lifted one more life into the ranks of the immortals.

We are now observing a man named Abram, later to be known as Abraham. He was a citizen of his birthplace, the Chaldaean city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia, a city we know to have existed because its remains have been uncovered and studied. Abram was a good man who probably had no dreams of unusual greatness.

Because he was a good man he was sensitive to spiritual impulses. At this point he was especially conscious of one - a voice, a feeling, a realization, or something he took to mean that God was speaking to him. What it said was disburbing. It was a command to leave home, friends, and property, and put himself under divine guidance to be led to an unknown country called Canaan.

There he was to become the father of a great people. This he did not understand, but it seemed to be an order. What was he to do? Some would have hesitated or refused, and God would have had to take time to raise up someone else to be that vital link in the chain of history.

The details of the journey you can read for yourself in the Ninth through the Thirty-fifth Chapters of Genesis. On that decision and journey depended all that grew out of the Age of the Patriarchs, the founding of the Hebrew people, and all that grew out of it, including the coming of Christ. It established a foothold

along the Mediterranean Coast where grew up one of the most determining of the world's civilizations.

The Greek civilization gave the world an impetus to culture, the Roman civilization a stimulus to law and government, and the Hebrew civilization an impulse to piety and faith. The latter hinged on a decision made in a man's heart one day long ago in the City of Ur.

Your decisions are likely to be the most important things in your life. Face them, make sure they are in line with the divine purpose, and then carry them valiantly through.

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## PART II - AN EASY LIFE OR A HARD ONE?

**C**ENTURIES had passed. Abraham had found Canaan and laid the foundations for the life of a people who were to outnumber the stars. When there were about seventy of them, famine had driven them into the Egyptian Land of Goshen, and four centuries had made them a vast host of slaves. Their burdens had become intolerable, and there seemed nowhere to look for help.

One of their number, Moses, had been educated at court; having killed an Egyptian to save one of his fellow Hebrews, however, he had fled to Midian and become a shepherd. The work was peaceful, the land was beautiful, and he was content.

One day in the shadow of a mountain he was watching the sheep when his attention was directed to a bush on fire, the more amazing by the fact that it was not being consumed. Drawing near to see it better, he heard a voice, as his ancestor Abraham had done. It said God had singled him out for a responsibility. He was to lead his people from bondage in Egypt back to their lost Canaan which had become occupied by pagan peoples and their civilizations.

It was a moment of decision for Moses. He thought he was to live the rest of his life in peace and freedom, but the voice declared otherwise. He protested that he was not a man with a gifted tongue such as a leader needs. The voice replied that his brother Aaron could make the speeches. He said the people would not believe him when he announced his mission, but the voice said they would when he told them from whom it came.

When Moses went back to Egypt with this report he was thrusting his neck under a very heavy yoke. Read again the story in Exodus and on through Deuteronomy, and you will see for what troubles he traded the peaceful life of a shepherd. Probably he never again saw a real easy day or a wholly peaceful night.

The people were unruly and ungrateful. Troublemakers were ever present. Serious problems arose. There were long delays. Though Moses led the Tribes within sight of Canaan, he did not live to march with them into the Promised Land. But the gap was spanned. The empty place in history was filled. Abraham's people were at home again, ready to begin building the nation from which should come the Law, the prophets, the Saviour and the Gospel. All this was in the balance when a shepherd made his decision on a mountain slope long before.

Suppose God had yielded to the demurrings of Moses and left him in Midian. The plan would have been carried out anyway, but not by Moses. God would have lost the leadership of the shepherd of Midian, but Moses would have missed his place in history too. He was deciding not only whether he would do the will of God, but also the importance of his own life.

You are on holy ground when something attracts your attention to the fact that the still, small voice is speaking. You are probably faced with some important decision just then. Who knows how far-reaching its effects may be, or how vital it is to you not to shrink from the path of duty?

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### PART III - WISDOM OR GLORY?

**M**ORE centuries had passed, many of them. The day of judges had merged into the day of kings in Israel. Two reigns were already over, and a third one had begun. Among the people there was the usual wonder what the change would mean to the kingdom and themselves. Young Solomon had come to the throne. He was filled with thoughts about his responsibility and questionings as to how he would go about his duties.

Before a new ruler two roads always reach. Read the long list of kings in both Israel and Judah, and you will find the brief account of each summarized in one of two sentences, saying the monarch did either "that which was good" or "that which was evil". Solomon realized well that these two ways lay before him. Which should he take? How could he be sure?

It was in Gideon that the hour of decision came. That was a time when it was customary to look for meanings even in dreams. In a vision of the night God appeared to the young King and asked what he desired from Him.

It was a dream, but in the dream the choice seemed fateful. The King was ready. The climax of his answer and substance of his request was: "Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy so great people?"

The reply of God in the vision was memorable. He said,

"Lo, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart . . . and I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor; so that there shall not be any of the kings like unto thee all thy days."

When Solomon awoke and found it was a dream he acted on it as though it had been a physical reality, publicly declaring his covenant and purpose. Thus began a brilliant reign of great success, splendor, and influence. He made discerning judgments; wrote wise proverbs, poems, and essays; built great public works, and made a great name for his nation among the nations.

His wisdom did not always hold up well against the temptations of power and

privilege. Even God had finally to rebuke him. He overburdened his people with costly developments, overdid the splendor of his royalty, and compromised his kingdom and himself with paganism, paving the way for the division of the kingdom after his death and its final dissolution. He wrote late in life how futile and vain all his splendor had been and warned the young to remember their Creator that evil days and regretful thoughts might not come to them. But he was wise enough to leave many a mark for good on his memory and influence. At least he made the right decision, tried to follow through, and succeeded in many ways. It was that much.

You also have a throne, a crown, and an area of life over which you rule. You will leave your mark on that area forever. What it will be will depend on the choice of policy you make. If you did not ask for wisdom instead of riches, power, and glory, there is always time. Remember, however, that success can turn into failure if you do not follow through all the way. So keep faith in the ruling of the kingdom of your life.

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#### PART IV - A HERO IN BABYLON

**M**ORE centuries had passed, and the nationality of the Hebrews had been brought to an end by the failure of kings and people to live up to the high purpose for which their forefathers had been led into the Land of Promise. The invader had attacked, and generations of weak and mistaken living had led at last to a condition in which the Nation was helpless to defend itself. Land and city were deserted and ruined, and the people had been taken captive to Babylon.

Among the captives was a young man named Daniel, the last syllable of whose name showed that it had been chosen by God-fearing parents who had naturally brought him up in their faith.

Daniel was one of a group of capable-appearing young Jews King Nebuchadnezzar had asked to have set aside and trained for service in the Palace. During that three-year period of preparation they were to be given portions of the King's own rich foods and costly wines.

To a Jew this meant a moment of crisis and decision. Daniel had been accustomed to the strict diet and habits of life prescribed by the Law of Moses. In a strange land where different habits of life prevailed and a wholly different kind of situation existed, many might and probably some did, decide that it no longer made any difference, especially when the King's favor and a safe and pleasant future were at stake.

But not so with Daniel. He was committed to careful habits of living not only because of training and custom, but also by the personal conviction that only a sound, clean mind and body can be receptive to the promptings of the divine spirit. That was too great a value to throw away. Daniel has a lesson for those who think that what one eats, drinks, and does bears no relation to one's rightness and his relationship with God. Our body is the dwelling place of the Soul, and should be cared for accordingly.

~~Daniel, with his natural idealism and his careful training both at their best~~

in the strength of his youth saw that his future in Babylon, to say nothing of his own integrity, depended on fidelity rather than compromise. How he faced the issue and made his decision is told in these simple words, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the King's meat, nor with the wine which he drank."

However surprising it may have been, Daniel met with no disaster because of the choice he made. His decision was honored by his being given an opportunity to prove how much better fitted for usefulness he would be if allowed to cling to the simple and wholesome habits of his people.

The result was the one to be expected. His undefiled body and unclouded mind gave him a superior discernment by which he was able to interpret dreams and foresee future events. He became trusted adviser and minister to a succession of kings, and came to be known as the wisest man in Babylon. When he decided for an unpoisoned body, he also decided for an adequate instrument of the spirit.

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#### PART V - BEASTS AND ANGELS

**W**E now come to the supreme, though not the final, story of decision we have to tell. The young Man Jesus was making his way up a rugged mountain slope which was to be one of His great testing grounds. He came from the Jordan River where He had publicly dedicated Himself by baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. The sound of the heavenly voice approving Him was still fresh in his ears.

The question now was, could He meet the real test of His fitness for that approval and for the saving test ahead? The answer was now to be found. Some who make high resolves and earnest dedications are not then strong enough to follow through. He must not enter upon His public ministry unless He was sure. There were three points at any one of which a weaker man might fail. They were all to be tested now. Even He must face the Tempter of Souls.

The setting was appropriate. The record says He was among the wild beasts. That is where any man is in his hour of temptation. Perhaps so savage a surrounding might help to intimidate and weaken Him. To make Him still more vulnerable He had been without food for a long period.

There were only three test questions, but they were designed to probe the three spots where human nature is weakest and men most likely to stumble.

- \* First, hungry as He was, would He turn the stones about Him into bread and eat? In other words, would He, under stress, misuse the divine power for selfish advantage, or for the satisfaction of the desires of the flesh?
- \* Second, humble and obscure as He was at that point, would He leap from the pinnacle of the temple and alight unhurt before the curious crowd? In other words, would He publicise Himself to get a quick following by doing something to appeal to something less than the best in human beings?



- \* Third, would He bow down and worship the Evil One for the reward of the Kingdoms of the world and their glory? In other words, would He, born to be King of Kings take a short cut to a material rather than a spiritual realm, bypassing the rugged years and the frowning cross for a cheap imitation of what He was here to accomplish?

Easy to decide? Would it have been for you in the same kind of situation? He was as hungry as you would be. He knew as well as you do that a following is necessary to put a program into effect. He realized as keenly as you would how a cause can be speeded up with adequate funds. But all this would make the results superficial and unreal, so the answer in each case was No. On that thrice-made reply depended the success of His mission and the true redemption of mankind.

Then the Spirit of Temptation departed. The wild beasts slunk away, and angels who had been waiting in the background came forward and ministered to Him. The act was over. Such fearful stage settings were no longer needed. The Teacher, fully tested for the great work ahead, started back to the valley with steady step and clear eye to begin the three most powerful years of saving the lost the world has ever seen. On a decision so quietly made in that awesome wilderness one crucial day depended the hope of the world!

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#### PART VI - THE TAXGATHERER'S CHOICE

**ONE** day a man named Levi, or Matthew, was engaged in the day's work at his place of business in Capernaum, a fishing town on the Lake of Galilee. That place of business was a taxgatherer's booth, for Matthew was one of that hated group called publicans, people who were taking advantage of the graft-laden system prevailing in Roman provinces of farming out tax rights to people who were then free to collect as much of a margin for themselves as they could.

Jesus had recently moved to Capernaum from Nazareth and was living with some friends who had joined Him for the ministry He was planning to begin. Matthew had no doubt heard of Him and perhaps had formed some opinion of what He was undertaking to do. He may even have thought he would like to be helping in it instead of oppressing the people, especially the poor, with unjust taxes, if he only had the opportunity - but probably he never would.

As he proceeded with his work he heard a light step. Looking up, he saw before him the very Man he had been thinking about. Each must have recognized the other at once. There may have been other conversation, but the important sentence was one of two words, "Follow me", spoken by the Teacher simply and directly.

The rest of the happening was as tersely told, as is the way of the gospel writers. It was of an act of decision promptly and definitely made - "And he arose and followed him." Matthew might have taken time to close up his business or transfer it to someone else, but if he did the delay was short.

Think what it meant to Matthew to make a decision like that! It was not just a matter of going somewhere with someone. It meant a complete change of life and purpose, becoming part of a great world-changing adventure, and giving it his

all the rest of his days. It meant leaving the work that had been his livelihood up to that time and engaging in one that offered no promise of material gain. It meant leaving home and family and readjusting all his domestic affairs. Despite all this, his choice was decisive and definite, positive and final.

Even so, it was a happy decision for him. He had no regrets. He rejoiced over the change so much that he called in a houseful of friends, some of them publicans too, and celebrated the step he had taken with a feast. No doubt many a life was stronger, happier, and better for having met the Master there.

That decision was the most rewarding thing Matthew ever did. Because of it he grew from a brittle sectarian into a world Christian, from a mediocre materialist into a towering personality, and from a man of limited influence into an evangelist whose Gospel and life have helped the Kingdom forward for nineteen leavened and leavening centuries.

How much a simple word of invitation, given or received, can mean! How much can turn on the decision in which it results! How true it is that to this day a voice still calls into human consciousness, saying "Follow me". It comes to each of us, though most of us can do the following right where we are.

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#### PART VII - THE SIFTING OF THE FISHERMAN

**I**T was in the gray dawn of a morning, and a Prisoner, arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane during the night was being led through the courtyard to the house of the high priest in Jerusalem. He was followed by others. It was Jesus of Nazareth, and some of His disappointed, discouraged and disillusioned disciples.

The one named Peter was particularly dejected. He was a man of strong emotions, and his rugged heart had had a rough time deciding about the Master and the seeming collapse of His plans.

Not long before, at Caesarea Philippi, while others hedged and blundered about the identity of Jesus, Peter had boldly confessed his faith in Him as the Son of God, and had been told in reply to his confession that it was the beginning of the faith out of which the Church would grow.

The night before in the Garden, indignant at seeing the Master taken like a common criminal, Peter had impetuously attacked one of the arresting officers with a sword. But Jesus had rebuked him, and as he saw the One in whom he had trusted led away, he had felt that everything he had believed and worked for those three years had fallen to pieces, so he was no longer sure. If matters between him and the Master could only be as they were one day ago!

It was chilly, and he was nervous and shaky anyway, so he paused to warm his trembling hands over a fire on the stone porch of the high priest's house. A maid in the household passed by, paused and looked at Peter, and asked if he were not one of the group. His heart cowered, and he averted his face in shame who but a few hours before had so boldly claimed that he would never deny his Lord, as he

shamefacedly murmured that he was not. Asked the same question again a little later, he violently and profanely repeated his denial.

He lifted his eyes to see if the Master was in sight. The door had opened, and they were starting to lead the Prisoner in for the hearing. Jesus turned His head and looked at Peter, who caught His disappointed look as he passed through the door. The deeps of the disciple's feeling were broken up, and he wept bitterly.

As often happens with us, honest tears washed some of the clouds away, and Peter saw the meanings of things more clearly. Something in those courageous eyes had told him that the Cause was not lost but won, and that all that was happening was a part of the victory. The mysterious things he had often heard Jesus say were recalled and made clear, and the repentent one was brave again. His final decision had been made. He would waver no more, and he never did.

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When it was all over later in the day, Peter went from the foot of the cross a leader. He held the disciples together, got a successor to Judas chosen, saw that the foundations of the work were laid, and led the group through the early experiences from which the Faith grew into a great movement. Through years of work and opposition he moved bravely toward martyrdom, but the lips that once denied never ceased to acknowledge and proclaim.

The life of Peter is a strong, living influence in the world to this day, so far from his hour of tearful but firm decision in the court of the high priest's house. Repentance can lead one from his saddest mistake to his greatest strength.

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AFFIRMATION

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I have seen that the guideposts on the way of life are decisions. I choose the redeemed world life for my goal, and take the road that leads to it.

YOUR CLASS INSTRUCTOR

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