



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

February 2024

FROM US TO YOU

February is the month of Valentine’s Day, the traditional day that Americans celebrate love and romance. But, these days, there is so much talk of hatred in this world that there isn’t much love to be found. As we’ve mentioned many times, life is especially difficult now because Satan is running this world (Matthew 4:8-10), and he doesn’t have much time left before Jesus Christ returns as “...**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**” (Revelation 19:16 NIV). The Bible tells us “...rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Revelation 12:12 NIV). Therefore, it seems like there is trouble everywhere. Satan is trying to cause friction between friends, trouble among family members, and war among nations. However, if you are a Born Again (John 3:3) child of God who loves the Lord, keep your eyes on Jesus. As Peter found out, when you keep your focus on Christ, you can walk above the troubled waters of this world. But when you take your eyes off of Him and look down at the depth of turbulence beneath you, you will begin to drown (Matthew 14:25-32). The problems of this world will swallow you up. However, when you humbly call on the Lord to help you, He will lift you above the turbulent waters and place you on firm ground (see Matthew 7:21-25).

That’s why Peter told the church, “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast*” (1 Peter 5:6-10 NIV). Not only should we make every effort to keep away from stressful situations, but we can be encouraged by all the eschatology that is coming true lately. The more you read your Bible, the more you will see all the prophecy that is slowly unfolding during these last days before Jesus returns.

Have you noticed all the talk about strange aerial phenomena lately? There is even talk about extra terrestrial beings in the news. Don’t become alarmed. Scripture tells us that God only made two forms of intelligent life, angels and humans (Revelation 5:13.) God put all the planets and stars in the sky for us humans, His prized creation. They are for beauty as well as navigation. “*And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.’ And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give*

light on the earth” (Genesis 1:14-17 NIV). The devil is the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). As for the strange lights or UFO’s people see, the Bible says, “*The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness*” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 NIV). The “lawless one” refers to the Antichrist the Bible tells us will become powerful in the last days of this world. The Bible also calls him the beast, and he will be accompanied by the false prophet (Revelation 16:13-14, 19:20, and 20:10).

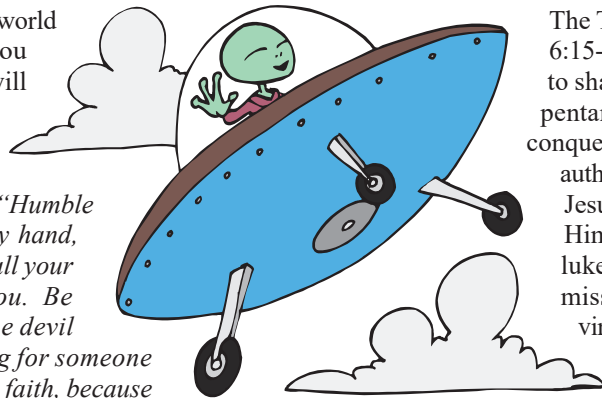
They will persecute the true church of Christ. However, those who stay true and faithful to Christ will go up in the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-57, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). For Jesus will come back in the air for His church (Acts 1:11) before the Tribulation begins.

The Tribulation will be from God (Revelation 6:15-17). It will be the Lord’s last ditch attempt to shake up this world and bring people to repentance before Jesus Christ comes back as a conquering hero, defeats the devil, and reclaims authority over the earth (Revelation 19:11-21). Jesus warned us to be faithful and remain in Him (John 15:1-8). However, backslidden, lukewarm Christians (Revelation 3:16) will miss out on the Rapture like the five foolish virgins mentioned in Matthew 25:1-11. They will have to go through the Tribulation. If they repent under the horrible conditions that will exist, they will be

saved (Revelation 7:14).

The Tribulation will last for seven years. It will be split into two sections, with the second half of it being the worst. That three and a half years will be the “Great Tribulation.” Jesus said, “*For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened*” (Matthew 24:21-22 NIV). So stick securely to the Vine of Christ (John 15:1-8), and you will be among those who will meet Christ in the air and be raptured. Have you noticed that God is shaking up the world to get the attention of people so that they will repent of their sins, turn to Christ, and escape Hell (Mark 9:43-49) and the Lake of fire (Rev. 20:12-15, 21:8). “*...He has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’*” (Hebrews 12:26-29 NIV).

In the Lord’s service, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

By Anne Kaestner

There's a story in the Bible that has always amused me. It is regarding the Ark of the Covenant. But I'll explain that later. First some background on the Ark. In Old Testament days, it was believed to be the most sacred relic of the Israelites. It was a wooden chest, covered in pure gold, with an elaborately designed lid called the mercy seat. Since the Israelites traveled around so much, heading for their Promised Land, they had no regular temple in which to worship God. Therefore, they used the Ark of the Covenant as a sort of substitute place where God could dwell among them in Spirit form (Genesis 1:2, Exodus 31:3, 1 Samuel 10:10). Moses had set up a system of judges over Israel. Eli was a judge and a priest before the Lord. He had two sons named Phinehas and Hophni. They were also priests before the Lord. As a priest and a judge Eli held a very important position over his people, one of respect. However, God was not happy with the way Eli served Him. As a judge, Eli was supposed to lead his people in righteousness and holiness toward the Lord. Yet Eli had failed God in one very important role. He had not raised his sons to do right in the fear and respect they should have had for God. God knows ahead of time how we will all turn out. He knew that Eli and his sons would continue to fail him. Therefore, He had already made plans to replace them.

"There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah... He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none" (1 Samuel 1:1-2 NIV). Peninnah continually gloated over the fact that she had offspring and Hannah had none. "This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat" (1 Samuel 1:7 NIV). So Hannah began to pray earnestly before the Lord. When Eli saw her praying he thought she was drunk, and he berated her. "'Not so, my lord,' Hannah replied, 'I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.' Eli answered, 'Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him.' She said, 'May your servant find favor in your eyes.' Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her" (1 Samuel 1:15-19 NIV). How typical of backslidden religious leaders. Eli didn't pay attention to the sins in his own sons, but he imagined sin in Hannah when there wasn't any. God was starting a new work through Hannah and Eli didn't even have the sensitivity to realize it.

Phinehas and Hophni each had a position that they had inherited from their father, and their family line. They had the authority over the people. However, they were very poor examples of holiness. As priests, it was their job to judge the people and accept their sacrifices to the Lord. But, like many religious leaders in the days of Christ, and even today, they were hypocrites (2 Peter 2:1-22). They judged others, but they themselves were the biggest sinners of all. This had been going on for a long time. God is very patient with us, "...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9 NIV). But even God's patience has limits. Finally, Phinehas and Hophni went too far. "Now it was the practice of the priests with the people that whenever anyone offered a sacrifice and while the meat was being boiled, the servant

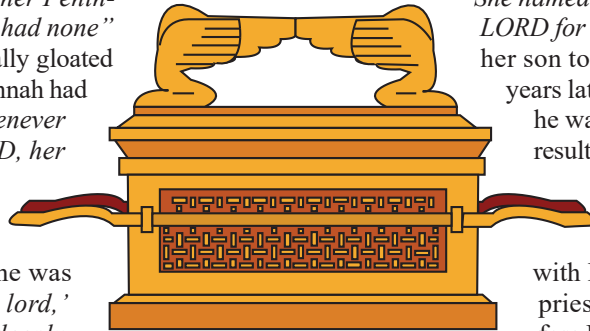
of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand. He would plunge it into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot, and the priest would take for himself whatever the fork brought up. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. But even before the fat was burned, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, 'Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.' If the man said to him, 'Let the fat be burned up first, and then take whatever you want,' the servant would then answer, 'No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force'" (1 Samuel 2:13-16 NIV). So they were demanding the best of the meat and showing contempt for the Lord sacrifice.

Eli's sons were also sinful in their relations with women. "Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. So he said to them, 'Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD'S people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?' His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD'S will to put them to death" (1 Samuel 2:22-25 NIV). Meanwhile, "...Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son.

She named him Samuel, saying, 'Because I asked the LORD for him'" (1 Samuel 1:20 NIV). Hannah gave her son to Eli to do the work of the Lord. Several years later, God revealed Himself to Samuel while he was still a child (see 1 Samuel 3:1-21). As a result, Samuel, although still young, was starting to become a great prophet in the eyes of the people.

Now the Philistines were at war with Israel. God was angry at the way that the priest, Eli, and his sons had been sinning before Him and setting such a bad example for the

people. Therefore, He chose not to fight for Israel. Therefore, as often happens, the people suffered due to the sins of their leaders. "The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, 'Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD'S covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.' So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. When the ark of the LORD'S covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, 'What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?' When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. 'A god has come into the camp,' they said. 'We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert. Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!' So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died" (1 Samuel 4:2-11 NIV). At first the



Philistines were afraid of the Israelites. From their perspective, they knew that someone great had been helping them. They had heard about how God helped Israel defeat Egypt.

They were pagans, and so they believed in the power of idols. The pagan nations didn't know that there is only one God, the Creator of everything. They were not aware of the fact that God gave authority over this world to mankind, through Adam, and that Satan had finagled it away from Adam (see Genesis 3:1-24). It was, therefore, under the devil's control. The devil, named Satan, and one third of God's angels, had fought a war against God's authority in Heaven. They had lost the war and, consequently, were thrown out of Heaven (see Revelation 12:7-9). Moreover, God incinerated their solid bodies (Ezekiel 28:18). The fallen angels are called demons. They live in this world among us, but in another dimension. Although we can't see them, they can see us. And they influence humans to sin against God. God gave authority over this world to Adam. He was expected to run it according to the laws of God. Adam was given total control over the administration of this earth. God had placed His trust in Adam and Adam was free to do whatever he wanted to do with this world. However, when Eve sinned against God and ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6), Adam was afraid of losing her. So, he valued Eve, the gift God had given him (Genesis 2:22-23), more than God, the Giver. When Adam sinned and did Satan's will, he forfeited control of this world.

That's how Satan got control over the earth, and why society is in such bad shape. Of course, Christians know that "...God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV). Even the ancient Jews knew that God had planned to send a Redeemer (Job 19:25-27). They were the only ones who knew there is only one God. Everyone else were idol worshippers. It's one of the reasons that the Jewish nation is so special to the Lord (see Deuteronomy 32:8-12). Everyone else worshiped the demons (fallen angels) that mutinied against God with Satan, and were thrown out of Heaven with him to this earth. The demons

were, originally, given certain powers by God when they were first created as angels to serve Him. God has allowed them to keep those powers. However, the demons use those powers to convince sinful humans that they are "gods." They work on behalf of Satan to turn humans away from the true God to something else (Romans 1:17-32).

In formerly Christian nations, the idols that people worship are usually humans that the devil has helped to become great in this world. Satan controls these idols who have become "stars" of movies, music, sports, politics, religion, etc. God is more powerful than Satan and his demons. But God is law-abiding and keeps the laws that He has established, even in the control He had given to Adam over this world! Satan now has that control. Satan and his demons will eventually burn in Hell and the Lake of Fire (Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10) eternally when Jesus comes back (Revelation 19:11-21). But in the meantime, Satan and his demons want to take as many humans with them as they can influence. Even lukewarm (Revelation 3:16) Christians don't realize how strong Satan's powers of persuasion can be pertaining to the people that they idolize. So in the minds of the Philistines, the Ark of the Covenant was an idol of the Israelites. The Philistines thought that it was the source of Israel's power. Therefore, they thought that whoever owned the Ark would be blessed by the "gods" that they thought worked through it. To their minds it was like a big, powerful good luck charm.

"So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and

every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died" (1 Samuel 4:10-11 NIV). The Philistines thought for sure that the "god" that had helped Israel would now help them. The same day a Benjamite escaped from the battle and ran to report what had happened. "When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry. Eli heard the outcry and asked, 'What is the meaning of this uproar?' The man hurried over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see. He told Eli, 'I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.' Eli asked, 'What happened, my son?' The man who brought the news replied, 'Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.' When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years" (1 Samuel 4:13-18 NIV).

Eli's "...daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was

overcome by her labor pains. As she was dying, the women attending her said, 'Don't despair; you have given birth to a son.' But she did not respond or pay any attention. She named the boy Ichabod, saying, 'The glory has departed from Israel—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband.' She said, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured'" (1 Samuel 4:19-22 NIV).

The mood in Israel was gloomy. They felt that since the Ark had been captured, and they had been defeated in battle, it was as if God was siding with the Philistines against them. Little did they know what was really going on.

"After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon" (1 Samuel 5:1-2 NIV). In the minds of the Philistines, the Ark was a type of trophy. They felt it was an indication that God was no longer helping Israel and that they were superior. Placing the Ark in the temple of their god, Dagon, was meant to imply that Dagon had won the battle for them and that he was stronger than the God of Israel. However, the real God had other ideas! "When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained" (1 Samuel 5:3-4 NIV). While the Israelites were feeling that God had left them, they had no idea what God was doing to their enemies. God had killed off Eli and his sons, those who had offended Him, but He was starting a whole new work with Samuel!

In the meantime, "The LORD'S hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; He brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors. When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, 'The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because His hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god.' So they called together all the

(Continued on Page 4)



rulers of the Philistines and asked them, 'What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?' They answered, 'Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath.' So they moved the ark of the God of Israel. But after they had moved it, the LORD'S hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors" (1 Samuel 5:6-9 NIV). The Philistines were once a fierce enemy of Israel, but today they have been completely wiped out by God. So much for the strength of their god, Dagon. The Philistines, who were once so powerful, eventually fell to greater superpowers. However, Israel is still there today! After many years, when they were scattered around the world by God, He always promised them that He would return them to their own land one day (Genesis 15:18, 17:8, Joshua 1:4, and Deuteronomy 30:1-7). That happened in 1948 when Israel, once again, became a country and was recognized as such by the United States and the United Nations.

However, we're getting ahead of ourselves. I mentioned at the beginning of this article that I was always amused regarding the way things worked out with the Ark of the Covenant. "So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, 'They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people'" (1 Samuel 5:10 NIV). That's what amused me. Israel had been so upset that she had lost control of the Ark of the Covenant. They were thinking that God was siding with the Philistines. Israel thought that the Philistines were gloating over their win and things were working well for them. Little did they know that God was not rejecting Israel, He was just replacing Eli and his sons with Samuel, a new and faithful prophet. And the Ark of the Covenant wasn't helping the Philistines. God was afflicting them with it! The Philistines were moving the Ark from town to town like the proverbial hot potato. God didn't let the Philistines gain the ark in order to help them. He was just attacking them in a different way! Israel couldn't say that her army won against the Philistines. God did not need Israel's army. He was defeating the Philistines through the Ark and His own might. So Israel couldn't boast about it (see 1 Corinthians 1:29 NIV). God alone would get the glory!

"So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, 'Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people.' For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it. Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven" (1 Samuel 5:11-12 NIV). So Israel would get its Ark back, as well as a new prophet in Samuel. But that's not all. God was arranging for Israel to profit from her enemies. "The Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, 'What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place.' They answered, 'If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering to Him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why His hand has not been lifted from you.' The Philistines asked, 'What guilt offering should we send to Him?' They replied, 'Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel's god. Perhaps He will lift His hand from you and your gods and your land'" (1 Samuel 6:2-5 NIV).

This story is a lesson for all Christians. How many times has

something happened that caused you to be discouraged, and you felt that God had abandoned you? You may have wondered why things didn't work out the way you thought they would. Or perhaps you did or said something that you should not have done and concluded that God has given up on you. This is the kind of thing that Satan uses to put all kinds of thoughts in your mind. "It's too late," he and his demons will tell you. "You had your chance to be a better Christian and you screwed up. There's no point in praying about it. God's angry at you. Look, things are working out so well for your enemy. Their laughing at you! You've pulled some boners before, but this really takes the cake. It's too late now. God won't listen to you. Forget Him, just live for fun and enjoy life." Does that sound familiar? Don't believe it! It's coming from the devil! I remember one time, years ago, I was lying on the couch in my living room. Eric had to get up early. So he was already in bed. I had done or said something stupid that day, and I was really feeling like a jerk. Then suddenly a song came on the radio that made me feel so much better. I don't remember the name of the song or the artist. These days I only listen to Christian music. That must have been about thirty years ago. But I remember the words to the chorus. It was "Everybody plays the fool sometimes. There's no exception to the rule. Everybody plays the fool."

Frankly, when I first started this article I didn't know how it was going to end. God seemed to indicate that it would be about the ark of the covenant, but I didn't know what the message was supposed to be. It wasn't until I was up to the third page of my draft that the Lord revealed it to me. So He knew that there would be some people reading this article that have been feeling like God has given up on them. They have become depressed and despondent about events that have occurred in their life and felt that God had turned away from them. Things have not been working out for them lately and Satan has been spinning his web of lies and there are those who have foolishly believed him. So the Lord wants you to know that He loves you. Even if you have done something that you are ashamed about, the Lord wants you back in His precious sheep pen where you will be safe. Don't you know that Jesus loved you so much that He was not only crucified for you but was flogged (Matthew 27:26) 39 times and beaten so much in His face that the swelling made Him almost unrecognizable? Even His beard was yanked out from His face (Isaiah 50:6). And God the Father loves you so much that He let it happen in order to keep you out of Hell for all eternity (Revelation 21:8). The Lord is not giving up on you easily, so don't give up on Him! Sincerely repent of your sins, and He will pull you back up!

Some of you may have read about an event that happened to me years ago when we were living at our apartment. A street gang was planning to climb in a second floor window I had left open. I had been lying on the couch in my living room feeling stupid for something that had happened. God knew the gang was getting ready to climb in the window. It was at that time that I heard the song I mentioned. I got up from the couch, planning to close the window and go to bed. However, God put me in a type of trance (Acts 22:17) because I walked into the room and didn't realize that the leader of the gang was just about to climb in my window! I don't know what he really saw, but he looked at me and streaked in terror. He must have seen something spiritual. He told those behind him to get down, and they left quickly. I went to bed and about half hour later God awoke me, and I realize what had happened. I know for sure it wasn't a dream. A few years later we started using that room to begin this ministry.

