JEDEDIAH'S DREAM
By Mrs. Paul E. King

(Part 1)

Jedediah Manchester sat beside Mrs. Jedediah Manchester in the second pew from the front, right side as one goes down the aisle toward the pulpit, directly inside the pew down the center aisle. Never, never would Jedediah think of moving into the center of the pew to make room for
latecomers, and never, never, never against the wall-side of the pew. Always, he sat with Mrs. Jedediah at the end of the second pew from the front, down center aisle. That had been Jedediah's pew for so long as any of the church members could remember and, always, the young people called it Jedediah Manchester's pew.

Jedediah had a two-fold purpose in choosing and using pew number two from the front, down center aisle, right side as you go down the aisle from the rear of the church. Reason number one: he could always eyeball the preacher and give him the "you-can't-preach-that-here" look, which, in more than one case and instance, intimidated and frightened the clergyman until, in time -- usually a very short time -- he would resign and be gone. And reason number two: he had a rather "healthy" bird's eye view of the monies that came in each service, since the ushers, on their return trip from taking up the offerings, always passed directly by him, sitting there as he did, as far out on the end of pew number two right side from the front along center aisle. Also, during the course of the entire sermon, be it lengthy or not so lengthy, Jedediah, straining for all he was worth as he looked through his trifocals, could pretty much see how many twenty and ten dollar bills reposed on the top of each offering plate, since said solid-oak-lined-with-red-velvet plates were always placed without exception on a solid oak table near the pulpit and, advantageously, not too far away from Jedediah Manchester's pew, second row from the front.

Jedediah sat sedately beside Mrs. Jedediah, priding himself in his accomplishments and his jobs around the church. He had attended the same church from infancy. He knew which boards squeaked when stepped upon and which shingles on the roof needed replaced, which, at the present, was all of them. A glance upward at the high ceiling revealed the unsightly water stains from the leaky roof. But, being the longest and oldest member on the board, he had held out against paying out money for a whole new roof job, insisting that he could repair the leaky shingles and save the church some money. Lots of money. And the roofing job was once again "tabled."

He smiled smugly, gloating over the weight and the power of his influence and his words. He wanted to believe they were words of wisdom, but often he caught Mrs. Jedediah Manchester with a tear on her cheek and a look of sadness in her eyes when he mentioned how very wise he was and how much money he was saving the church by using his wisdom.
A gentle soul was Mrs. Jedediah. But hadn't he had a hand in making her thus? he thought silently, recalling how she used to chide him, in love and kindness, of course, and plead with him, too, about being tight-fisted with what belongs to the Lord. But he had let her know, macho-like" that he was head of the home and what he did or did not do was none of her business. And, gentelike, she became silent, and meekly acquiesced to his wishes and desires regarding money matters.

Jedediah prided himself greatly in the fact that for nigh unto sixty plus years, he and he alone had been the church sexton. He was certain-sure that no one else could lay claim to a record of service such as his. At least no one whom he knew could. Most of the people whose names went on the church roll the same time his was put on were now sleeping in their earth beds on the hillside behind the church. And yet he, Jedediah Manchester, was still active for the kingdom. Each week he pulled the long rope that rang the church bell for every single church service and he still tolled the bell for each and every funeral held in the church, tolling the deceased one's age out, one sad, slow, deliberate toll at a time.

The longest he had ever tolled was when Mrs. Merriman passed away: 96 pulls on the bell rope had well nigh done him in. Pulling the thick, heavy rope was no easy chore any more. Of course, he wouldn't admit as much for, after all, he was the church sexton and he prided himself too much in the job.

Some of the newer church members, the "younger set," as he had called them derisively, had begged that the tolling be ended and put to rest like its long-ago members whose bodies reposed on the hillside beneath the grass and the flowers that grew there, but Jedediah Manchester would hear nothing about it, stating vehemently that it was traditional in that area for the bell to toll and tradition must never die.

"It's archaic!" young Anthony Hummel had countered.

His vehemence against was as strong as Jedediah's for. Jedediah won. The bell still tolled.

Came a day when old Brother Softman died. Three and one half years he had held the title as pastor of the church. Quite a record for the white-haired minister, and quite a record for the church, too. Jedediah tolled seventy-four sad, mournful tolls on the bell before settling down into the pew
on the second row from the front to listen to the district leader's eulogy of Clarence Softman after which time he along with Mrs. Jedediah Manchester, followed the funeral procession to the cemetery on the hillside behind the church.

The new minister who came to fill the pulpit was fiery, fearless and full of the Holy Ghost and power. If he ever noticed Jedediah Manchester in the second pew from the front, right side along center aisle, he never gave evidence of it. His messages were powerful and weighty and delivered without fear or favor. He preached against sin, not generalizing but naming sin. All sin. Every sin named in the Bible. And he preached with power.

Jedediah Manchester squirmed and wiggled and fidgeted at the end of his pew, second row from the front. He sat on the edge of his seat and raised his hoary head as high and as straight as his neck would allow and could stretch. But try as he may, he couldn't eyeball in on this preacher with his unspoken but facially written "you-don't-preach-that-here" message.

Jedediah Manchester felt his body temperature rise. He tried again to convey his unspoken but plainly visible message, this time with a violent shaking of his head and his index finger. The preacher seemed not to notice. Or, if he did, it was plain to see that Jedediah Manchester was not about to silence his voice.

Jedediah looked at Mrs. Jedediah and he turned suddenly pale: Mrs. Jedediah's face was bathed in tears. Her lips were parted in a smile. Her shining eyes were riveted on the fearless Spirit-filled man of God and her slender hand was raised heavenward.

Jedediah Manchester felt like he was going to explode. He tugged at his shirt collar, trying to loosen it, and the button popped off in front of his eyes and landed in the palm of old Mrs. Chambers across the aisle, who gasped in fear and got to her feet then sat down quickly again, turning white as a sheet.

"You're a robber!" the preacher cried, coming from behind the pulpit, down to the altar rail and, finally, out into the center aisle. "If you aren't paying your tithes and giving offerings, you're a robber," he declared with no uncertainty. "God's Word says you are," and he gave book, chapter and verse as a basis for his statement.
Jedediah Manchester stood to his feet. He must eyeball this stormer down. How dare he preach like that!

"You know where the robber goes?" the man of God asked, looking beyond Jedediah Manchester, then giving his shoulder a gentle shove as he passed by pew number two from the front, and continued preaching. "The Bible says that all thieves and robbers and murderers and liars will burn forever in the lake of fire, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. Are you ready to meet God? Are you a thief and a robber? Where will you spend eternity?"

Jedediah Manchester took off to the church basement as soon as the final amen was said. He checked the doors to make sure they were closed and locked. Then he shut the windows and hurried upstairs, as fast as his stiff legs would carry him, to fill his sexton duties in the main part of the sanctuary.

Mrs. Jedediah waited patiently for Jedediah as he turned off the inside church lights and locked the door then hurried down the steps. The dusk till dawn mercury light outside revealed Jedediah's face. He was angry.

She knew this as well as she knew her name was Amanda Sarah, even though Jedediah refused to call her Amanda Sarah -- ever! -- insisting, rather, that she was Mrs. Jedediah. It wasn't enough that she had relinquished her last name to wear his till death do them part, but he had insisted, also, that she be called Mrs. Jedediah.

In her heart now, Amanda Sarah Manchester was rejoicing and praising God. Her long years of secret praying and weeping and gentle patience and long-suffering were about to see results. God was on the trail of Jedediah Manchester, church sexton.

Jedediah went straight to bed when he got home. Amanda Sarah steeped herself a cup of hot spearmint tea, fresh from where it grew along her garden wall. She sweetened the hot brew with wildflower honey then sat down and sipped it slowly while she munched on one of the sweet rolls she'd baked earlier in the week. Her soul was bubbling over with praise and thanksgiving.
At last, God had sent them a true shepherd; a man of God -- Spirit-filled and Spirit-led -- whom Jedediah would never be able to "eyeball down" (his prideful phrase for controlling the mealy-mouthed hirelings).

She picked up her Bible and began to read, steeping a second cup of tea. No need of her going to bed; she was too happy to sleep: revival was on the way. Hadn't she been praying for this for years! And now that it was beginning, she had no inclination to miss so much as any part of what was about to happen and to take place. Ah no, not Amanda Sarah Manchester.

She must have dozed as she read, for something horrible awakened her. What was the noise? she wondered, standing beside the table now and straining her ears to hear from whence the sound was coming.

Like a tornado sweeping through the house, she heard Jedediah storm down the stairs, bellowing like a bull gone wild. "I'm lost. Lost! My God, have mercy on me. Mrs. Jedediah, where are you? Where are you, Mrs. Jedediah? I'm a robber. A robber! God just visited me in a dream. He called me a robber. A dictator. A trouble maker. A church boss. Oh-h, I'm lost. Lost. My tithe, Mrs. Jedediah; try to figure it all up. As far back as you can remember. All of it; all the back tithe."

Amanda Sarah wanted to tell Jedediah Manchester that he'd be having quite a tidy sum to pay since he'd never paid any tithe and only given small amounts of money whenever the mood struck him. But, wise woman that she was, she remained silent, saying nothing. No need for her to "figure it all up" - - she knew. To the penny, she knew. Knew, too, how much the figure was according to Leviticus 27:31, when a man redeemed "aught of his tithes," and had to "add thereto the fifth part thereof." Yes, Jedediah would have quite a sum going into the offering plates if he ever really got through to victory and was converted. She'd kept a record of his "robbery" money from the first month of her marriage to Jedediah Manchester when she became aware of his refusal to tithe. She knew that someday and sometime the reckoning day would be at hand and she didn't want a single penny to go unpaid.

"I'm going over to the church," Jedediah bellowed. "Don't disturb me, Mrs. Jedediah. I have a score to settle with God. A big score. And then I'll have a lot of settling up to do with people. Many people. I'm lost, Mrs. Jedediah. Maybe there's still hope for me. I'm going now. Get my back tithe all figured up. . . ."
Amanda Sarah watched him go out into the dark; watched him turn the key in the church door too and go inside, not turning a single light on. Then she hurried upstairs to the cedar chest where she'd kept the record hidden in a big envelope on the bottom of the chest all the many years of their married life. On the outside of the envelope she'd inscribed an I owe You in her neat but darkly-bold calligraphy, adding Jedediah's name beneath the I OWE YOU. In parentheses she wrote, "Jedediah owes this amount of money to the Lord. He's been an non-tither."

Inside the envelope, month by month and year by year, was the full amount of unpaid tithes. Across from this amount was the addition as per the Leviticus "fifth part thereto." It was a staggering sum. But Jedediah had it. Oh yes, he did. She would soon discover the genuineness of his praying and the depth of his conversion. The sum of money would reveal the facts.

Smiling, she went downstairs and placed the envelope on the kitchen table then knelt by a chair and began to pray.

Part 2

Amanda Sarah Manchester wasn't long on her knees in prayer for her husband, Jedediah Manchester, until she felt the Spirit's gentle nudge to arise and praise and just enjoy the presence of the Lord. Immediately she obeyed. She knew that God alone could handle Jedediah Elias Manchester, and she was thankful that it was God who was dealing with him and working on him. Jedediah was such a stubborn man and so very self-righteous.

She thought back to the years of their courtship and eventual marriage and the old pain and hurt had washed over her again. They had met at the home of one of her cousins who was being married. Jedediah was her cousin's best friend. They met, Jedediah and she, and fell in love

He professed to love the Lord with all that was within him, declaring he'd been a Christian since his early boyhood years and that he'd had a perfect Sunday school attendance record since he was nine years old.

The Sunday school record of perfect attendance was, indeed, true; but what Jedediah had called being a Christian since his early boyhood years was nothing more than having his name added to the church's roster of
members: he became a member of the church when he was nine, the same church in which he was now praying and was the sexton.

Shortly after their marriage the real man was displayed and revealed and manifested. And what a painful revelation it was for her. She realized that Jedediah Elias Manchester was a hypocrite in the fullest meaning of the word. It had grieved her greatly and burdened her deeply. So deeply, in fact, that, at times, she felt like a weight was on her heart and was crushing her. And when she was sure she'd die beneath the load, the Lord always lifted it and blessed her nearly out of herself.

She had wept over her husband as well as on his shoulder, and begged him to change and get converted. He had lashed out at her verbally and told her to never speak to him again about it, adding that he was a church member in excellent standing and what he did was none of her business. He declared she was only a woman and, therefore, must say no more to him about change; that he was head of his house and he demanded respect from her.

She recalled how his cruel words had cut her. She felt much like a small, unwanted and helpless child. And, being a peacemaker, and abhorring gossip, Amanda never breathed a word to anyone about Jedediah Elias except to the Lord. The man who courted her and the man she married was like two different men. She spent much time in prayer, determined to go to Heaven in spite of Jedediah. She purposed within her heart that she would enter the Eternal City when her race on earth was finished, not somehow, but triumphantly victorious, no matter what it cost her nor how heavy and burdensome was the cross.

She went into the living room now and sat down in the rocking chair and picked up her well-worn, oft-read Bible, pulling it close to her heart. It was the most priceless and precious treasure she had. She loved it beyond any earthly thing. The words from its sacred pages had comforted, upheld and uplifted her when everything else looked dark and bleak and hopeless. Always, she found in the Book just what she needed to carry her through the day and make her more than a conqueror through Christ. There was no night so dark nor storm so fierce and tempestuous but that God had Heaven's artillery ready and waiting to be delivered through the precious and exceeding-great promises. She had proven this over and over again and again.
Amanda Sarah began to praise the Lord. In her softly-quiet way, she praised the King of kings and Lord of lords that her prayers were being answered. The devil was a liar, like always. Her prayers, every single one of them, were heard; they weren't wasted nor cast aside and forgotten by her loving Heavenly Father. Not at all! They were kept in vials. And her bitter tears of intercession were bottled up somewhere in that beautiful city, too. And she now had the feeling that after all the many long years of praying and interceding and fasting, this very night the vials of prayer and the bottled-up tears were being used as instruments to bring a lost soul to God -- namely, Jedediah Elias Manchester.

Wise woman that she was, Amanda Sarah Manchester knew that if Jedediah Elias ever really got everything cleared up between God and himself and his fellowman, revival was sure to come.

Jedediah was afraid of the moving of the Spirit; afraid of what it would cost him if God should ever visit their church. And he had done his utmost best to make sure that no one encouraged or, even, precipitated such a move. He carried weight in the church and he let it be known that he did. He "prided" himself on everything he did. Truth of the matter was, Jedediah Elias Manchester, church sexton for sixty plus years, funeral toiler, and man who, always without exception, sat in the second pew from the front right side as one goes down the aisle toward the pulpit, directly next to the center aisle, was exceedingly proud!

But things were about to change: the Spirit was moving. At last, Jedediah Elias had met his match: the new preacher was fearlessly blunt and bold, filled with the Holy Ghost and power and neither man or devil was going to stop him or silence his message. God was on his side.

Amanda Sarah read from the Bible then folded her hands and leaned her head back against the rocker. How comfortable the old chair was! It had belonged to her mother, a gift of true and unselfish love from her husband, Amanda Sarah's father, when her parents were first married. It remained in their home until each had passed away and crossed over to their eternal and everlasting home, at which time she, Amanda Sarah, had inherited it.

The dear old chair, though having rocked miles and miles of colicky and otherwise sick babies and children, ten in all, had never been able to rock
away the myriad and countless precious memories which were associated with it and its presence: on the contrary, it had served only to rock those priceless and ever-treasured memories deep into her heart and mind and lock them securely inside with a key of pure gold, the key of which was at her disposal any time and anywhere she chose to use it.

And use it she had, and did. My, how she had used that key to "unlock" the memory-chest and take her back, back into time, when she was home with parents and brothers and sisters whose love for the Lord and for each other was an ever constant thing.

She used it especially often and most effectively when Jedediah's harshness and stubbornness became unbearable regarding giving the Lord what rightfully was His -- the tithe. Then Amanda Sarah Manchester would silently take the gold key from its hiding place inside God's specially prepared computer called brain/mind and with joy and tears she would unlock the memory chest: there she would see a slender girl of twelve years of age kneeling by her mother's knees beside the rocking chair giving her all to God in a total and complete consecration.

It was a death to self, to friends, relatives and things; a death to everything and a glorious resurrection in Christ. It was no longer I, but Christ! No longer mine, but Thine! And oh, what glorious freedom and liberty and victory had been hers from that blessed moment on! The memory key would recall that moment so long ago and let her see and know that all was still upon the altar and that she was dead, dead, dead. Yes, even to her beloved but selfish robber-husband, Jedediah Elias Manchester, who would not -- absolutely would not! -- pay tithe.

Amanda Sarah was brought suddenly out of her silent reverie by the ringing of the church bell. She got to her feet and nearly ran into the kitchen. She could see the church door better from the kitchen window. Three-thirty a.m., the hands on the mantel clock disclosed simultaneously with the melodic chimes. Amanda was beside herself with joy.

The bell rang and rang and rang. Like it was beside itself with joy. It rang. And it didn't stop.

Amanda Sarah wanted to run over, but Jedediah had said she must not bother him. So she marched back and forth across the well-worn congleum
kitchen flooring, weeping and shouting and enjoying immensely the camp-meeting-revival in her own soul. And still the bell rang. No funeral dirge or toll now. Ah, no. It was the loud, joyous clamor of victory and triumph.

One hour passed; an hour of ceaseless, jubilant, ding, dong, dinging of the once-sonorous sounding hand pulled bell, made thus so by the spirit inside the man whose hand pulled the rope.

Amanda Sarah watched as the hands of the clock signaled yet the passing of an additional half-hour and the continuation of the jubilation of the bell. That Jedediah Elias had supernatural strength she had no doubt.

And then, as if on cue, the church parking lot began filling up with cars. The minister was the first to arrive.

As if he already knew, he went shouting into the church, emerging through the doorway shortly after, shouting, "He's saved! He's saved! Jedediah Elias Manchester's saved! The robber's converted! Glory! Glory!"

People ran into the church, weeping, screaming, confessing, repenting. Revival was on!

Grabbing her shawl off the rocker, Amanda Sarah Manchester opened the door and hurried out the door toward the church. Held tightly in her hands was the big envelope. Jedediah Elias Manchester would want this, she knew. And the figures were all there; not the tithe alone but "the fifth part thereof" added on also.