

Chapter 1

STEPPING STONES

Notre Dame cathedral in old Quebec city has seen many historic events. On this sunny afternoon in June 1979 I was witnessing another. I was just inside the main doorway looking into the gloomy interior of the church, where a young man stood in front of two rows of school children, accompanied by a male teacher. The young man held a Bible in his hand and, pointing in turn to each of the 'stations of the cross' upon the walls of the cathedral, he was teaching the students about the passion of Jesus. They listened with rapt attention. Though they were all sixteen or seventeen years old, and were very familiar with Canadian culture and the history of Quebec, this teaching was new to them. As one looked closer, it could be seen that all the young men were wearing 'kippas' on their heads - a sign that they were Jewish.

I looked on in wonder and with the special thrill of a participant, as these students had come from our school in Toronto, to spend an educational weekend in historic Quebec. Toronto Hebrew Academy is a noted, orthodox Jewish school and I had been privileged to teach there for the past two years. These forty students were our Grade 11 class and my colleague, Ari Barchi, and I had been asked to lead this special field trip. None of these students knew that I had recently given my notice that I would be leaving the school at the end of this current term, to take up a new 'calling' - that of the full-time pastorate. Since that decision had been made, God had led me into some remarkable experiences and this weekend was proving to be His continued blessing.

As I viewed the magnificent, ancient walls of the cathedral, with the fourteen stations before which the faithful would kneel in prayer as they remembered the path Jesus took from Gethsemene to Calvary, my mind was taken back to the stations in my life through which God had led me. I looked back over more than twenty years and saw the truth declared by the Psalmist.

"The steps of a man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way. When he falls he shall not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand." Ps.37:23,24

I see so many stations or 'stepping stones' in my life that have led on to deeper experiences with the Lord, and, without which, I would not have the story I want to relate. Each stepping stone led on to the next, each one being a direct intervention of the Lord in my plans. It is only on looking back that I can see something of the purposes He had from the very beginning. I can now understand just why He 'closed that door', when I thought it should be open. I can now see how He has worked in other people's lives, even non believers, to fulfill His plans for me. I can now say that I know that my disappointments are often His appointments. Now, I can trust him with every part of my future for He has proved Himself in my past. I know the stepping stones are there though I cannot see them yet. If the past has set a pattern for the future, I shall not see them before experiencing them.

I have come to understand that the 'walk of faith' does not depend upon my great 'believing' but rather on my yielding when He changes the course of my life by His direct intervention. Such 'faith' has more to do with obedience than it has with believing. Obedience born out of trust. If my faith were measured in terms used by some 'faith teachers' of today, I would fail miserably. To them, faith is something I can work up, so that if I have sufficient of it, I can persuade God to do what I desire. If I am sick, it is because I do not have enough 'faith'; if I am in need, it is because I do not have enough 'faith'. Yet, when I read the scriptures they teach me that I cannot produce faith or increase it in myself. That is a sovereign work of the Lord, and He does that work as I yield to His leading and make His Word the foundation of my life. As I read the great chapter on faith in Hebrews 11, I do not see extraordinary men and women commended as heroes because they believed, but rather, I see an account of God's intervention and leading in the lives of ordinary people in order to teach us great truths and principles of Christian living. But enough theology for now ! On with the story !