

## Perspective Digest

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### The World's Bible Champ: A Fantasy (Work Station One)

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W O R K S T A T I O N O N E



Roland R. Hegstad

**W**alter Mitty\* and I have something in common—We're dreamers. Just like him, I've seldom experienced a dull day. During my grade school years in Wauna, Oregon, one of my jobs was to keep a box on the porch filled with wood for the kitchen stove, a job my folks didn't have to urge me to do. Little did they know that every log cut was a battle fought; every knot chopped through, an enemy stronghold wiped out. That box was really a repository for my dreams.

In all the years I worked at the General Conference, I never chafed at a stop light. I would handicap each one, and if it turned green before I got to a certain figure I made a thousand dollars for each second under it. No wonder I could smile through interminable committees; who else there

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\* No, you won't find Walter Mitty in the *Testimonies*. Most public libraries will have his story, written by James Thurber.

## The World's Bible Champ: *A Fantasy*

had made a few thousand dollars on the way to work!

Which brings me to a fantasy that is one step closer to my theme. Having observed, in the early 1960s,

that a Brazilian Adventist housewife had won second place in a world Bible contest in Jerusalem and, a year later, that an Australian Adventist layman had won first place, I entered the next few contests against the most brilliant scholars of the Jewish and the Christian worlds. May I say, modestly, that it was no contest.

No contest indeed! The trouble with fantasies comes when they crumble in the face of reality, as mine did a few weeks ago in Australia. While talking with Graham Mitchell—who won the 1964 contest, and whom I'll be interviewing at the first International Bible Conference in Jerusalem—I suggested that he send me the questions he encountered on his way to being designated the world's Bible Champ. Not that I in-

tended the conference delegates to assume that *two* Bible Champs would be on the platform, you understand, but I did consider walking on with what the French call “*élan*,” a strut that communicates its own spirited self-assurance. Trouble is, I took time to read the questions. . . .

Alas.

Because misery loves company, I’m going to distribute a page or two of the questions to the delegates and guests. On the chance that you won’t be there, I’ll add a sampling at the end of this column. (Don’t rush; entertain your illusions to biblical scholarship while you can.)

One good thing about fantasies is that if one won’t fit, you can always try another for size. And I’ve got a real Armani pin striper ready to go. It’s that the Bible conference will

turn out to be far more than a stretching of theological muscles. Far more, in fact, than weight-lifting ponderous obscurities out of scholastic oblivion. Rather, that in this Year of the Book, delegates will determine that God will have a people of the Book. A people who, with unabashed faith, accept the challenge to permit God to show His genuine goodness through them. That’s what the first angel means when he asks us to give God “glory.”

Yes, it’s a fantasy.

But someday soon, God willing, we must awaken from our dreaming to find nothing vanished save our sleep. As John put it: “If reality were to break through, we should reflect his likeness” (1 John 3:2, Phillips). By the grace of God, that’s one beauty contest in which we can all be winners. Really!

## THE 1964 INTERNATIONAL BIBLE CONTEST: A REALITY CHECK

To reach the finals of the Third International Bible Contest in Jerusalem in September, 1964, Graham Mitchell had to survive the Australian preliminary contest (written examination), New South Wales State finals, and the Australian National finals. To begin the Jerusalem competition, the judges asked each of the 20 finalists the

same three questions:

1. Several instances in Scripture show that King Saul had a shy and humble nature. Give four.

2. *Pharaoh* is the general title given to all the kings of Egypt, and rarely are they mentioned by their proper name. Give four proper names and the context in which each is mentioned.

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3. Give six instances in which ambassadors from either friendly or hostile nations visited Jerusalem.

By the next evening, 11 of the 20 contestants were eliminated. Five more were eliminated by the end of round three. The surviving four had correctly answered 60 questions. In the final round, judges asked each of the contestants the same three questions:

1. Give the names of two prophets who prophesied to the accompaniment of musical instruments and the circumstances of the prophecies.

2. On a number of occasions, individuals were able to prevent the outbreak of civil war or fratricidal strife. Give the names of six such individuals and outline what they said or did to prevent the strife.

The third question was formulated by then president of Israel, Zalamn Shazar:

3. Cite two biblical [Old Testament] examples for each of the following six qualities of Jerusalem: as a holy city, as a royal city, as a city of

righteousness and justice, as an eternal city, as a city of the ingathering of exiles, and as a city to which all nations would be drawn.

By the way, Mitchell says the Aus-



The Bible Champ and his inspiration, Joy.

tralian finals were more difficult than those in Jerusalem. Cheers! □

*(For more on the Mitchell clan, see Gary Krause's article on page 14.)*