

One Old Mule



By Dan Caldwell

(Chapter Twenty One)

It was cool this morning. No, it was cold this morning, almost cold enough for frost. The old gray farmer looked all about in the dim morning light but could see no frost but still, it was cold enough to see his breath blowing away in the light wind here by the river. The frost would come soon. With the frost would come the harvest of pumpkins, squash and many other things that were still in the fields. The frost would finish ripening the corn that stood tall and strong in the north mountain. The cold freezing mornings would cure the ears and freeze away the bugs that liked to live there. The shocks of fodder would turn a darker brown. The tops of the potato vine would die away and the late tomatoes would start to wilt. Summer would be gone and the leaves would begin to change their colors and begin to fall from the trees. Soon!

Mornings like these were very invigorating and the old farmer felt especially young as he went to the barn to feed the old gray mule. As he approached the barn he was greeted by his soft, staccato grunting, a greeting that the old farmer had heard for well over thirty years. Today would be a day of work for the old mule and the farmer.

“Morning ol son” said the farmer as he opened the door to the stall, “You ready for another hard day on the mountain?”

The old gray mule grunted and shook his head and the old farmer laughed. Today they would work at the icehouse! It had begun to fall down over the past few years and in fact one wall was almost completely caved in. The stones had broken from the wet and freezing of winter and would need to be replaced before the community could ever put ice there again. Harvest was still a couple weeks away and the old farmer was not one to waste time waiting so today he would begin the splitting of the stones. It should take no more than a week to do the repairs to the old icehouse. The old farmer whistled as he threw corn into the trough for the old mule. Along with the corn he also gave him a generous portion of oats and sweet feed.

“Eat hearty ol’ fellow” the old farmer said, “You’re gonna need your strength today. We’ve a lot of stones to cut and haul down.”

As the old gray farmer returned to the house he noticed again the chill in the air. The sun would be up soon and the day would begin to warm. There was much to be done over the next few weeks to prepare for the coming winter. There would be corn to mill, cane to squeeze for molasses and soon the old farmer would need to take coal from the mine for winter. The old farmer felt a surge of joy rushing through his veins and his heart beat a little faster as he remembered that this winter would be different! Matthew and his family would be here now. Their new log house was finished now and, with their return from Harlan with the two wagons, was also completely furnished. The old farmer had certainly been surprised to see his son pull up behind him with a brand new wagon that was filled with pots and pans, kettles, tools for farming, nails, more windows, some contraptions which Matthew had said was for an inside bathroom, lots of water lines and many, many other tools and necessities. Also in the wagon was some things which was kept hidden from the old farmer.

“For Christmas” Matthew had said.

In his own wagon the old farmer had stowed away some small things for his Elizabeth. A new Singer sewing machine along with lots of new fabrics and lace, a bottle of very expensive perfume along with a special box of candies lay hidden in the bottom of the wagon under the floor boards. These things he had given her right away but, he too had hidden things for Christmas!

Here in the Sandy Fork folks would go to town only once or twice a year to bring home the things that could not be grown on the farm. The old farmer made good use of this trip to Harlan. In the wagon he had stacks of sugar, coffee and flour as well as some spices and herbs for cooking.

“How are we gonna’ get the wagons down here.” the old farmer had asked when Matthew came up.

The trail down into Sandy Fork was steep and slightly tilted to one side and the wagons were very heavy.

“I have an idea” said Matthew. “Unhook the mules from the wagons.”

From the big wagon he took a new heavy duty block and tackle with thick new ropes.

“We’ll tie these off there to that hickory and let the wagons down slowly. Bring big Joe and I’ll show you.”

With the big mule, loosed now from the wagon, Matthew had turned him in the opposite direction and tied the ropes onto the gearings. As the wagon began to roll slowly down the hill the old farmer slowed it with the brakes as the big mule held it steady. “Back Joe, back up boy” Matthew said, “Easy boy, easy now”

Slowly and surely the big mule had backed and backed, letting out more and more rope as the wagons crept gently down the steep grade.

The old farmer looked proudly at his son but said nothing. Nodding at the big red mule he shook his head and said, “I never did see the likes.”

Joe was indeed a big mule and was greatly needed here in the Sandy Fork. “And it’s about time,” the old farmer said to himself as he thought about Jim, his partner of the years, “Someday. Maybe soon he’ll have to rest.”

As the old farmer stepped onto his tiny porch the door opened and Elizabeth was there.

“Come dear.” she said, “Breakfast is waiting for you. Matthew is here too, and he has some news!”

Inspirational Thoughts Into God’s Word

By Lynetta Hunter

(Is 53:12) The childhood of Jesus must have seemed like an eternity for the Hebrew people who knew He was destined to be King. Their conversations were exciting, thoughts were filled with His future strict judgment, and stories told about how a new sovereignty rule would reestablish their nation.

Prophesy of a Hebrew King became silent for many years before His birth. The long-awaited news of a child being born who was the coming King brightened not only the Palestine area but the entire world. It was a once in a lifetime event that caused anticipation for the faithful remnant, jealousy for the arrogant religious rulers, and conspicuousness to the Gentiles. However, the kingship of Jesus didn’t go quite exactly like any of them thought.

Their Messiah did liberate and set them free from the aggressive tyranny and unfair judgment of organized religion, but in a spiritual way. He was an Advocate and Defender to the weak and helpless groups, but the case was presented and determined before His Father, not the Pharisees, who were self-righteous and unjust. He redeemed His people from the national stigma that had oppressed them for years, but did it through a spiritual rule and reign. He was a Healer in ways no one could have ever imagined and He was a Savior who saved all people from condemnation.

Jesus took His rightful place as King, without ever stepping into an imperial chair or onto a royal platform. He did it by willingly pouring out His life to death, so the death in humanity could be made alive by and through Him.

Yards to Paradise

Apples: Grow, Eat, Celebrate Them

By Max Phelps



Apples are a most loved fruit, can be grown just about anywhere, come in thousands of varieties, and some even make attractive yard trees. Some of the earliest settlers in colonial America brought either trees or seeds of apples to the new land. Only wild crab apples existed prior to domestic apples from Europe, and the actual origin is Asia, especially the apple forests of Kazakstan. They’ve become “as American as apple pie”.

The grocery stores, thanks to commercial growers and controlled atmosphere storage, can sell fresh apples or apples 10 months to 15 months since they hung on a tree somewhere in an orchard, and many hardly notice the difference. Until they eat tree ripened fruit from a nearby orchard, or their own yard, that is! Local growers can offer dozens and even hundreds of different apples; the chain stores only have 5 to maybe a dozen varieties.

October is the official ‘apple month’, but many of the Apple Festivals in Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina are in September. Because of the infamous COVID virus, I can only come up with one apple festival that will still be taking place this year. That’s the North Carolina Apple Festival in it’s 74th year in Hendersonville, NC. It’s a 4 day event that includes LABOR DAY—September 4-7, 2020. But other festivals include Casey County, Paintsville apple festivals in Kentucky, Unicoi, Cleveland Country apple Festivals in Tennessee, and numerous area events in the state of North Carolina. (If you know of more apple festivals still on this year, let your newspaper know with a letter to the Editor.)

For small home orchards, or for yard trees, disease resistance and attractiveness of the trees may be about as important as the name of the variety. Fuji, Enterprise or King David are attractive apple trees that don’t have to be sprayed. Redfield or Odysso have pink or purple blossoms, leaves of a reddish tint, and the apples are red both inside and out. Red and Yellow Delicious everyone knows, but yellow, green, red, sour, sweet, small, large, striped, keeping, early, late are all descriptors of apples the hobbyist could decide to grow. Some make better pies, some better for eating off the tree, and some for keeping into the winter.

Old timey, or heirloom, apples offer a taste from our past. The common ‘store varieties’ are for sale anywhere apple trees are sold—rare ones you may have to search for or even graft yours yourself. Or, be a modern “Johnny Appleseed” and plant some pips and see if the result is a nice new variety, or a sour one only good for jelly, cider, or feeding to the pigs.

There are probably 8,000 as a minimum varieties that you could grow. Most roadside markets may offer 10 to 40 different ones. I encourage the reader to consider growing some of these lesser known apples, and experience the wide range in taste and appearance that apples express. Apple DNA is so complicated, you don’t often get a apple tree from planting a seed that closely resembles it’s parents.

I have been collecting and am growing over 100 cultivars of apples, so I know not everyone shares the interest I have for a lot of trees, shrubs or flowers, and not everyone desires an apple tree in the yard. If a person loves apples, it makes sense to try growing a few. I’ll give you some reasons.

Apple trees tend to grow into large trees from 15 to 30 feet tall, and can live to be over 100 years old.

But, with at least a couple dozen different root-stocks, the choice of how big your tree will be is a decision you can control. Some of the small little ones need to be staked, or they will blow or fall over once loaded with a crop of apples. Simi-dwarf can be self supporting and also smaller sized. The standard trees grow big and also old. One thing going for the full sized standards is the deer can’t reach the limbs or the fruit (although bears can).

Apples come in many shapes and sizes, some pretty, some ugly. Some sweet, some sour, some bitter. Some bloom early, some ripen early, others much later. Red, yellow, cream and white flesh. Soft and mealy, to tooth-breaking dense. Spoil in a week, or keep until spring. These things you can’t buy at the supermarket.

Most apples need another tree that blooms about the same time to cross pollinate with. A few apples are triploid and are of no help. Planting a minimum of two trees only makes sense anyhow. But, if you have only a small yard, or one large planter on the porch, you can graft or buy apple trees with several varieties on the same tree!

Variety is the spice of life we are told. May you be inspired to spice up your yard, your taste buds, and enjoy some homegrown apples. Add one you aren’t familiar with and enjoy the mystery, the experience that comes from trying something different. I know you can grow an apple tree if you want to. So have a go with America’s favorite fruit.

The author is a landscaper. Email: rockcastles@gmail.com Suggestions are always welcome.

Jackson Co. Cancer Fund Fish Dinner

This Friday, Eat In or Carry Out
September 4th 12:00 to 6:00

Gray Hawk Reformed Church Fellowship Hall
Call in advance from Mon August 31 to Thur, September 3 for delivery on Fri, September 4

Fish, Hush Puppies, Cole Slaw, French Fries, Cake & Drink

606-438-7296 or

606-493-8580 or 606-599-7291

\$8.00 per plate

All proceeds go to Jackson County Cancer Fund

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