

Megiddo Message



***Speak,
Lord, I'm
Listening!***

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"And He Knew It Not"

Of all the hazards that threaten the Christian life, perhaps none is greater than the hazard of not knowing. It is not that we lack a basic knowledge of the law of God; acquiring such knowledge is relatively easy. The problem lies in what we do, or fail to do, with that knowledge. We may be standing in dire peril, spiritually speaking, and not know it—if we are ignorant of ourselves as God sees us. Such ignorance is not bliss; it is tragedy.

When we come to applying the law, it is so easy to be general and so difficult to be personal. It is so easy to see how God's precepts should affect our brother, our neighbor, our business associate, or the man down the street; it is so difficult to convict ourselves. It is so easy to be aware of God's marvelous plan in general, and yet close our eyes and ears to the warnings it speaks to us.

There are several passages of Scripture which speak to us of this danger.

"Samson...said, I will go out as at former times,...and he knew not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judges 16:19-20, Septuagint). Samson did not know that the Lord had departed from him, and he paid for it dearly. But think of the implication of these words, that we may lose the divine providence in our lives and be so spiritually imperceptive that we do not know it! God has been with us "at former times." Let us keep our spiritual senses keen and sharp so that we will know He is *still* with us—or that He is not, because of our waywardness.

"Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not" (Hos. 7:9). Here is another example of a tragedy which could befall any of us unless we make an all-out effort to keep ourselves growing more and more alert. Are decline and decay threatening our spiritual well-being while we go on unaware? Have we, like Ephraim, "mixed" so much "among the people" (v. 8) that our spiri-

tual vigor has begun to wane—and we do not know it? Let us look closely; it is a warning.

"Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). The picture is of one who is apparently well and "in need of nothing" when in reality he has nothing. How can it be? we ask. How can anyone be suffering such spiritual misery and *not know it*? It is because he is "past feeling," as Paul described it. The tragedy did not strike all at once. Little by little he lost his spiritual awareness until he was utterly insensitive to his true condition.

"Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:44). Again, it is the tragedy of not knowing. The Messiah had been right among them, and they refused to recognize Him. The results were tragic. Destruction, suffering and desolation were decreed upon them.

"Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2). The warning is for us. If we do not use the opportunity while it is ours, the same sentence may one day be written of us: "Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

"They...knew not until the flood came, and took them all away" (Matt. 24:39). Tragedy again, and all because they "knew not." God sent a preacher of righteousness to inform them, but they preferred to remain ignorant—until the rain began to fall. "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be." That Day will find many in the tragic state of "not knowing" because they did not *want to know*. What of us?

There is but one way to escape this terrible tragedy, and that is to keep ourselves spiritually alert all the time, so that no area of our lives escapes our super-honest scrutiny. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts."

Better to be shocked rudely awake now than to have it said of us, "he knew it not." □

Megiddo means

"a place of troops" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon); "a place of God" (Young's Analytical Concordance). Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (II Cor. 10:4-5).

We believe ...

- in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.
- in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- in ourselves as capable of applying in our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- in the promise of God, that a new age is coming—is near—when the earth shall be filled with His glory, His people, and God's will be done here as it is now done in heaven.

Soon-coming events

The Herald and the KING

OUR PLANET will soon witness the greatest events in its history. For centuries God has been silent. But that silence will soon be broken by the arrival of Elijah the prophet, who comes to herald the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: ...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

Then shall follow the King of kings and Lord of lords, to begin His momentous work of transforming our world into the glorious and eternal Kingdom of God.

The Bible pictures all events, all men and all nations moving together toward this one God-ordained climax, when "the kingdoms of this world" will become "the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15), a kingdom in which all will enjoy the blessings of peace, equity and prosperity. When the task is complete, our earth shall be numbered among the heavenly, glorified worlds and filled with immortal inhabitants, bringing to reality the promise of our Lord in His prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

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Speak, Lord, *I'm Listening!*

If only we could hear the voice of the Lord speaking to us in the night, as did the child Samuel when he was perhaps twelve years old! We can be sure that the event was still vivid in his mind many years later. When the child heard his name, he could think only of Eli, and ran quickly to ask what the elderly priest desired. This happened twice, and then the third time Eli realized that the child was indeed hearing something—the voice of an angel. So he told him how to respond, should the call come again. He should say, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth”; or as it has been rendered in our modern language, “Speak, Lord, I’m listening!”

Samuel was listening—are we? In a world seemingly far removed from the Divine, do we stop to realize how very present, how very near may be the angel of God? If only we could hear Him speak!

But God does speak, even today. Even though openly He is silent, He is still speaking to us. How?

We cannot talk to God as we would talk to one another, nor can we expect to hear any audible words from heaven. Mystics have told of hearing “the still small voice,” but their claims have only heightened the disbelief of the skeptics. Who has not heard a similar “voice” in a dream that seemed as real as life itself?

How do we hear the voice of God today?

God Speaks Through His Word

The Bible is the “audible” voice of our living God, communicating His message to us. The Bible reveals what God wants us to know—His character, His ways of dealing with His people, His requirements, His purposes. Through it He speaks. Through the records upon its pages He speaks to us about Himself, His plan, His

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truth, His creation. Through His Word we can understand the things we see—without that Word all would be meaningless mystery. All around us is visible evidence of His handiwork, but only through His Word can we learn of the Creator.

How essential, then, that we train ourselves to listen for His voice.

As we read, hear, study, memorize and think about God's Word, His voice becomes more and more distinct, more easily discerned. It addresses us directly, today, and in our situation.

It speaks to us—if we are listening. Here is the key: not the voice, but our openness to hear. When Mary and Martha opened their home to Jesus and His disciples, they demonstrated very different approaches in listening to Christ. While Martha was obviously glad to have Jesus in her home, she did not stop to listen to Him. All her preparations were for Him, but the preparations were more important than the Visitor. Mary, on the other hand, made every effort to listen to what Jesus was saying. And of her Jesus spoke those immortal words: "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Mary was intent upon every word.

As a result, Mary heard the voice of Jesus; Martha heard the voice of her own frustration above the voice of Jesus. What made the difference? It was Mary's attitude toward the Master. To her, nothing mattered so much as the message Jesus was giving. To Martha, the preparations were more important.

How is it with us? How totally can we command our minds? Are our minds under such direct control of our wills that we are able to focus one hundred percent of our attention upon our work while we work, and one hundred percent of our attention upon our prayer when we pray? Are we able to keep externals from crowding into our times of devotion? When we read from the Word of God, does His voice drown every other disturbance, annoyance, preoccupation, pain or frustration? Can

we set aside mundane issues to hear the voice of God as we read? In other words, are we saying when we go to His Word, "Speak, Lord, I'm listening!"?

Spending time with the Word of God is no guarantee that we are hearing His voice. In the third chapter of Mark is recorded an incident where some of the teachers of the law came from Jerusalem to observe Jesus and hear what He had to say. After watching and listening to Him, they accused Jesus of being demon possessed. Their ears were closed. They were totally unable to recognize the Divine voice, even when they heard it.

Be Prepared To Listen

When we come to God's Word, we must come with hearts and minds *open*, with inner ears attuned, and a heart eager for impressions. We must realize that here is a living communication from our Creator, something we need vitally, something on which depends our very life. If we think of every Word from God as a life-or-death summons, our ears will be open.

Then we must come *seeking* to hear. Our desire to hear must dominate us, lest we go through the motions of Bible reading with our hearts closed to impressions.

Furthermore, we must realize that every area of our life needs the influence of God's thoughts, not just what we classify as "spiritual." As long as we live, everything we do must be directed by God (1 Cor. 10:31).

All of life is spiritual. God's Word must teach us how to please Him in every aspect of life. To this end His Word speaks clearly—when we open our ears to listen.

Listening Means Change

When we truly hear what God is saying to us, what we hear will likely require that we change. We may be very comfortable as we are—too comfortable. If we would benefit from listening, we must be eager to improve.

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Can we set
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Word?

We must look at ourselves and say, "Not good enough, not half good enough," realizing we can always better our best. And when we compare ourselves with the matchless standard of Christ, who can feel self-satisfied?

If we close our minds to any idea of change in any area of our lives, if we think ourselves good enough as we are, we have plugged our spiritual ears, and as a result will lose the benefit of what we heard.

Training Our Inner Ears

Why does God's Word sometimes seem lifeless to us? Perhaps it is because our inner ears are tuned to the sounds around us rather than to the voice coming from above. We may need to *focus* our listening: for what are we listening when we open our Bibles?

It might be helpful to think about the possibilities. The words we read may have a special lesson, one which we can apply to our situation today. Or there may be a command we had not thought about before, which to obey will mean a drastic change in our pattern of life.

Or the words might contain a promise of a magnitude we had never before realized. Just try pondering a familiar phrase like "everlasting life" and see what vast new vistas open to the imagination, far beyond anything we have ever thought of.

Or the passage may be speaking of a deeper insight into God's purpose or plan than we had ever realized. What else could Paul have meant when he exclaimed, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33)? What was Paul "hearing" when he wrote about being able to "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of

God" (Eph. 3:18-19)? And if ever our language was exhausted, it is in these words: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:20-21). Can we imagine how much we can hear if we but train our inner ears to listen?

On the other hand, if our minds are divided, if we are preoccupied with some temporal concern, if something at our fingertips is taking more than half our attention, how can we expect the Word of God to come through to our understanding, loud and vibrant? How can we expect it to command and hold our attention if our eyes are focused on the things at hand?

Or we may be like those who listen *selectively*. We listen for what we want to hear, and nothing more. This kind of listening parallels that of the rich man in Jesus' Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. It may be some fleshly interest we do not intend to give up. If we hear something in the law of God that condemns us, we immediately close our ears, and pretend to ourselves we didn't hear. This kind of listening is not the wholehearted attention David gave to the Word of the Lord when the Lord said to him, "Seek ye my face," and David's heart replied, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (Ps. 27:8). Here was a one-to-one response, God speaking and David listening.

Or it may be we are strongly prone to old habits which stand in our way. To give them up is just about as easy as the leopard changing his spots or the Ethiopian his skin, to use a simile from Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 13:23). But as long as we have life, we *can* change *if we will*. If the voice of God comes through to our inner ear strong enough, loud enough, long enough, and we are impressed with its message, we *will* change. We will realize that it is a matter of life or death.

If we seek God with all our heart, the

promise is that we shall find Him—the principles He shares, the insights He gives, the truths He reveals (Jer. 29:13). We will not be seeking merely to collect information or ideas but will be sincerely asking God for help to become what He would have us be—more patient, more kind, more unselfish, more future-minded.

Said Jesus, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). In the same way we will recognize our Master’s voice if we have trained our inner ears to listen. We will pick up the slightest command as though it were the loudest trumpet call, and our response will be instantaneous. We will not register the sound of His voice, then mull it over in our minds and wonder what course of action we should take but like the apostle Paul we will be immediately obedient, immediately responsive to the heavenly voice. We will develop patterns and habits that will keep us alert every moment for a lesson from the Word.

When we are open to hearing God, we will approach His Book not as something old and familiar but as something ever new and wonderful, something ever ready with a fresh message for us, wonderful words of life.

There is a sense, too, in which the events of our lives may also be a communication from God, though not audible. Do we find ourselves in circumstances unexpected, and from which there seems to be no release? Perhaps God is saying, “Trust Me.” Are we hurt or disappointed that our plans have not materialized? Maybe God is teaching us that *He* is better security than anything of this world, that His promise is worth more than all the world combined.

Perhaps we need to do as the proverb says: “Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction” (Prov. 24:32). We have not fully listened to any circumstance of life until we have “considered it well,” until we have “looked upon it, and received instruction.”

Or perhaps someone criticizes us severely. This may be just the message God wants us to hear, pointing out an area of our lives that needs attention. If we close our ears to the criticism, we may be closing our ears to the voice of God. If we have trained our ears to hear God, we will welcome any voice that communicates His message, even if it be the most unlikely situation. Do we remember the time when God used an ass to rebuke a man? He does not always speak in the manner or tone that we expect.

One time David recognized the voice of Abigail as the voice of God. Abigail rode her donkey into a lonely mountain ravine and found him, and from her lips came a stern but gracious warning, along with a plea to forgive her ignorant and wicked husband Nabal. David did not interrupt, but when she finished speaking he responded, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand” (1 Sam. 25:32-33). Because David had been living in touch with God, his ears were opened to God’s voice, even when that voice was heard through a woman. David knew when it was God speaking.

However, we must be discerning. We cannot expect every circumstance, or every experience, or every message to be from God. There is always the voice of the

“stranger,” the “strange woman,” the one opposed to God and His purposes. But the closer we live to the Word of God, the more our minds will be attuned to His message, the more easily we will distinguish the right sound from all others.

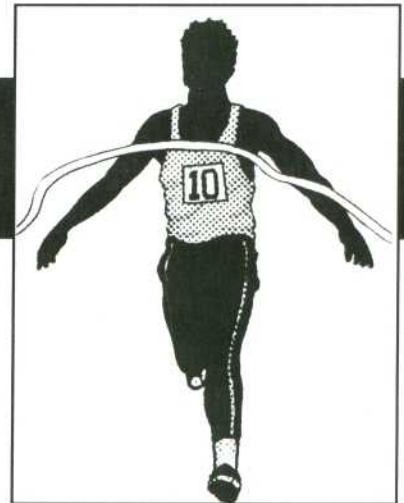
Why Listen?

God doesn’t speak just to be heard. He trains us to listen so that we can *respond* to His words, so that we can live by them, so that we can become more and more like Him. Our listening is meant to culminate in obedience. This is the nature of the shepherd-sheep relationship Jesus used. What benefit would there be in the shepherd speaking to the sheep if the sheep paid no attention? What benefit would there be if they went right on grazing, or walking, just as though he had not spoken?

Sheep are trained to recognize the shepherd’s voice—and to follow. When they follow the voice of their shepherd, they are safe, nourished and secure. The shepherd’s voice is for them the axis of existence; everything revolves around it. If they stray out of earshot or stubbornly go their own way, they can expect to die.

How like sheep we are! Let us train ourselves to listen and obey, and then we will be able to rejoice with David and say (Psalm 23): “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord”—how long? “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!”—Yes, for ever! □

RUN to WIN



*The will to win,
the confidence
that we can
and the
determination
that we will—how
great is our need
for all of these!*

A small boy was asked if he knew what a race was. "Yes," was the ready reply. "A race is where you win."

Such has been the positive determination of every successful runner in the race for life. Ask the apostle Paul what was the meaning of the Christian race to him, and more than likely he would have replied: It is a race to win!

Hear him telling the Corinthians of the zeal that kept him running at top speed: "You know that at the sports all the runners run the race, though only one wins the prize. Like them, run to win! But every athlete goes into strict training. They do it to win a fading wreath; we, a wreath that never fades. For my part, I run with a clear goal before me; I am like a boxer who does not beat the air; I bruise my own body and make it know its master, for fear that after preaching to others I should find myself rejected" (I Cor. 9:24-27, NEB).

A Prime Illustration...

Nothing could be more natural, and more effective, than Paul's comparing of our Christian effort to an athletic contest. The honors given the winners in these games were so highly coveted that nearly every ambitious young man in Greece was fired with a desire to distinguish himself in these contests.

Now we want to notice that Paul's comparison is with a *race*, and if he were among us today, he would keep reminding us of this fact. The Christian life is not a perpetual wandering in circles, nor a sliding downhill; nor a warm, leisurely summer-night's stroll. It

is a race, and a race implies urgency, speed, all-out effort. Why? Because there is so much to be won, and so short a time in which to win it. Anyone who would cherish any idea of winning must be serious about it. No indifferent competitor could entertain any hope of winning in the ancient races. And no indifferent runner will ever win in the Christian race. The halfhearted do not get far from the starting point.

Why did Paul choose the "race" for comparison? It is parallel in several important aspects. First of all, a race is a highly selective affair. Whether you win or lose depends to a large extent upon the effort you put into it. If you were entering a literal race and had any hope of winning, you would expect to work and work *hard*! You would do everything in your power to improve your chances of winning. You would be careful to give your body the proper proportions of rest and exercise, and you would practice, practice, practice. Why so much effort? Because you realized that you were not the only qualified contestant in the race. Others were good, very good, and if you wanted to win against them you would have to *work*!

The nearer drew the day of the final race, the more intensely you would work. And when the day of the contest finally did arrive and you were at the line with the other contestants, would

not every nerve and muscle be tensed for running as you heard the words, "Ready,...set...GO!"? And as you sped down the race course, what would you be thinking about? Something you expected to be doing next week? or some little insignificant thing that had happened a month ago, or a non-sensical comment someone had made, or some little flower alongside the race course? No! your whole thought would be on running to win! It is said that professional runners learn to pace themselves. They learn to gauge their effort so accurately that they use every ounce of available strength in the course of the race. If they reach the end of the race still able to run even another yard or two, they didn't run hard enough. And of course, if they use up their strength and give out just short of the finish, they lose everything.

So winning depends to a great extent upon your ability to apportion your strength accurately over the entire course of the race, so that you force yourself to use your strength to its limit. Is not this what is asked of us as Christian runners, to use *all* our powers, concentrate *all* our effort on winning the race? Isn't this how we run to win?

There is yet another reason why a race is a meaningful comparison to our Christian effort. A race is a highly *individual* affair. The contestants are judged strictly by their own merit. There is no "getting by" on the credits of another. Winning or losing depends entirely on the individual runner himself. If you win, you show that you were well qualified, and that you put forth the necessary effort—and you *won*. If you do *not* win, what does that show? That circumstances interfered? or that some other runner broke the rules? or that "Fate" was against you? No, you can always rationalize. You can feel that you weren't given a "fair" chance, that you would have done better *if...*, that you were not

feeling up to par that day, that things were against you, that the race was not conducted properly, and so on and on. But the simple fact remains that you weren't as good as someone else or *you would have won*. Someone else was better. *It is an individual matter.*

Is not this same fact true in our Christian effort? If we win we show that we met the requirements, that we used our God-given powers, that we concentrated all our effort—and *won*!

Run to win

*With your eyes fixed on Jesus,
Following the footsteps
Of the One who's gone before us:*

Run to win,

*Lay aside each weight and hindrance;
Called to be victors
To receive the crown of life,
Run to win!*

If we fail, we have only ourselves to blame. We *could* have won—if we had tried harder.

But when all the comparisons have been made, there remains one great difference between the athletic contests and the Christian contest, which Paul did not hesitate to point out. In the athletic contest, "but one receiveth the prize." In the Christian race, *everyone who runs can win!* This means that we are not competing against one another; we are all running to win. If we put forth the necessary effort and *run*, we *each can win!* This is what the great runner Paul would have, each one a winner, each spending himself to snatch the victory; hence his earnest appeal, "So run, that ye may obtain"—every one of you! Run as though you

RUN to WIN

*We are not
foregoing the
opportunities of
this world simply
for the
satisfaction of
sacrifice.*

had to outrun everyone else to win, with the same effort, the same concentration, the same all-out determination. "So run"—and you can *all win*!

Jesus put the same thought into a different simile when He said "Strive to enter in" (Luke 13:24). "Strive"—strain every nerve—"to enter in at the narrow gate." The Christian life is not a life of ease and relaxation. It requires real, concentrated effort. The stakes are life and death. Merely to run with the runners is not enough; we must exert ourselves; we must *strive* with all that is in us. We must not be as those who "beat the air," merely make a show of fighting. We must really *run to win*!

There are a few other pointers in Paul's advice that we should note. Paul would have us prepare for a test of real endurance. Every runner knows that he will have to endure fatigue, weariness, and prolonged strain. It is part of running a race. Likewise the Christian must prepare to endure, to hold out to the end. And this race for life is no 50-yard dash; it is a marathon which calls for the utmost in endurance.

Then Paul would have us concentrate our effort. "This *one* thing I do," he was able to say. The *whole* man was dedicated. He was a runner with his eye on the *goal*; nothing else mattered. All his energies were focussed on one thing: winning.

Nor would Paul have us neglect our discipline. Not for a moment. Something must be put "under" constantly, so that something else may take priority. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." It is as if he means to say, "My body is my slave, not my master. I am using it to lift me higher, I am concentrating all my powers on the higher."

Paul would have us keep a strong hand upon ourselves. "I keep under my body," "I buffet," "I bruise," "I maul and master my body." This does not mean that he was depriving the body of necessary food and sleep, as though disabling the body would purify the heart.

No, the self-discipline which Paul practiced was a restraining and governing of himself for a higher purpose. He was keeping himself under control. Whatever external circumstances might be, the man *inside* was the man in command. He could sacrifice, give up, endure *anything, everything*, if only he could be sure of the prize to which Christ had called him.

Then last but by no means least in Paul's personal advice to us was his scrupulous avoidance of overconfidence. Paul had a keen eye to consequences. He was no conqueror who was eager to relax at the first opportunity, saying, "I have it made, I can take things easy now." No, he could not relax until he was *sure* of the prize. His glowing imagination could realize something of the glory gained by the successful athlete who was honored by the state—a statue shaped in marble by some illustrious sculptor; praise embalmed in deathless verse; a chaplet of laurel leaves, which soon faded—yet its possession was coveted and counted as a great reward. How much more, thought Paul, should the Christian be willing to do for an eternal inheritance and an everlasting crown! How much more should he, with his clear moral perceptions, his elevated spiritual aims, feel the impelling force which inspires men and women to work for a heavenly diadem, to keep on running and running and running until the prize is won.

At the same time, Paul could not forget the disgrace of failure should his effort meet with the Master's disapproval. How mortifying for one who had been the means of helping others to be himself excluded as unworthy! This fear was continually on Paul's mind: "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." It was a possibility. He who had proclaimed the rules and conditions of the contest to others, he who had done so much to help and encourage others to run, how disgraceful if he, through a lack of thorough-

ness in his own personal training, should be disqualified by the great Judge at the close of the day!

The great Day of settlement was ever present in Paul's far-seeing vision. And should it not be in ours also? Confidence, yes; enough to tell himself a thousand times a day, "I'm running to win, and I will win!" But there was always an unspoken danger that he sought to guard against. Perhaps it was a fear that familiarity with sacred truths could destroy their forcefulness to him. Or perhaps it was a fear that a continual, professional handling of the Divine might interfere with his own personal application of it. While he was busy cultivating the vineyards of others he might neglect his own.

"Human nature is weak and needs stimulating." It is true for us now, it was true for Paul. He was no born winner. He too had to run. He too had to build himself up in faith, in holiness, and humility. Every one of us has need, great need, for spiritual, inner, personal culture. The good seed of the kingdom will not grow in our hearts and bear fruit untended. This fact was vivid in Paul's mind and he sought diligently to fortify himself against it—"lest that by any means"—by any means imaginable!—"when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." It mattered not how humiliating the face of the problem; if it threatened to interfere with his own success, he was ready for battle, firm, fierce and deadly. What was the shame of repentance compared with the shame of defeat?—if it be found at the last that he who had urged great truths on others had himself inwardly disbelieved; if he who had enforced laws on others had himself transgressed; if he had spoken words to warm and burn into the hearts of others while his own heart remained cold as ice.

What was the prevention against such shame? It was self-mastery, self-control, self-discipline. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest..."

But while Paul was not overconfident, neither was he lacking in the proper measure of confidence. He had his eye on the prize, and he was set on *winning* it. Whatever. "I run to win." It was a confidence that springs from faith, and grows as it is fed. It is a solid confidence that comes from progress made, from battles actually fought—and won! It is a confidence that reasons like this: "If I won that victory, then certainly I can win this one. And if I can win this one, then I can win the next. And the next. And the next"—and so on, all the way to the top. In this way he was able to rise above the chilling, paralyzing mists of doubt and see the heavenly crown clearly before him; and so he had the strength and encouragement to continue striving, running to win!

Another Runner... Peter

Let us look now at another runner, the apostle Peter. What was his means of "running to win"? His answer is brief and to the point: "*Remember! Keep your mind on it!*" Read through his Second Epistle, and notice how many times he exhorts us to *remember, keep in mind*, be stirred up to remembrance.

There is something to keep in mind, something to remember. "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be estab-

Ahead lies the goal, the reward, a prospect so great that beside it all other goals pale into nothingness.

Some are going to participate in the New World that is coming.

Some among the sons and daughters of earth shall know and partake of the Divine nature.

Some runners shall win.

Shall you? Shall I?

RUN to WIN

There is no danger of doing too much—what runner ever feared running too hard or fast?

lished in the present truth" (II Pet. 1:12). Knowing is not enough; even though we *know* and are "established in the present truth," he still feels it necessary to put us "always in remembrance of these things." "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance" (v. 13). "I keep stirring you up with reminders," he says. "I want you to have a means to call these things to memory." Something to keep calling to mind, something to keep stirred up about. There is no time for daydreaming or any moments of placid nothingness if we follow Peter's directives! Well he knew our tendency to forget, to let the keen impression slip.

Peter was approaching the end of his time with them, and he wanted to say a few words that would be the most helpful in carrying them through to a successful finish: "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (vs 14-15). I will not always be with you to keep telling you these things, he says. You must learn to recall them for yourselves. You must get your minds in a deep groove that nothing can shake them out of. You must learn to keep these things in remembrance—not away in the background but right up front where they will influence everything you do!

Nor is this all he says about what we should keep in our minds. "This second epistle, beloved," he begins again in the third chapter, "I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance"—now he is bent on stirring up even minds that can be called *pure*! And if *pure* minds need stirring, how much more those which have not yet attained that high quality of virtue!

"I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of

the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour" (II Pet 3:1-2). They were to keep in mind the words spoken long ago by the holy prophets, the words of the apostles, and the words of their Lord. Would not this be a good admonition for us also? If they needed to give such diligence to remembering, what of *us*? Ours has not been the direct contact that was theirs, but is not our task the easier, we who have the Word all written down for us to read? How much excuse shall *we* have for not *remembering*?

This was Peter's success formula: Watch what you think about. "Beware what you allow in your mind. If it is the right thing, nothing can help you more. If it is the wrong thing, how deadly!"

Peter was insisting that right thinking was the basis of right conduct. And if they kept their minds *filled* with the *right things*, there would be no room for any wrong. As some one has said, when the "devil" comes knocking on the door of such a mind, he will see immediately that there is not even standing room inside and so will go away.

Knowledge kept in remembrance is the one means of escaping spiritual disaster. As Peter said, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (v. 17). There is danger of being led away; there is danger of slipping, even when you feel secure. So, "keep these things in mind," says Peter—"and don't forget it!"

How keenly does this thought of remembering impress the aged apostle Peter, perhaps because he is still recalling vividly the night *he forgot*. Yes, Peter knew what it was to stumble; he knew the shame, the remorse, the bitter self-condemnation that follows falling. He knew, and he knew also the sure-preventive formula: *remember*! Had he only remembered that night long ago—. But he had not.

Let us take this for *our* formula for winning: Remember! Remember the prize, the glory for which we are working. If we remember that, how can we possibly be distracted? What is there in this world that can even faintly compare with the "great and precious promises" that can be ours?

We should remember also our own tendencies to wrong, the places where we are most likely to stray. If we look back seriously upon our own experiences, we can see many times where we have slipped because we were not *thinking*, because we were not *expecting* what happened, and were not prepared. At other times we have failed because we let our vision of the future lapse as we became more intent on some momentary gratification—holding onto our own position in an argument, or justifying our own conduct, or satisfying some longing of the flesh, or simply nursing our own hurt feelings. But what are any of these compared with the heavenly goal? If we always kept this in mind, how could we possibly slip into sin? If we always kept near to our hearts the glory of the blessings God has offered us, how could we possibly go our own way?

More Runners...More Advice

Let us pick up just a few thoughts from some runners who are nearer to us than Peter and Paul. What was the success formula of our founder, the Rev. L. T. Nichols? He was bent on winning. "I am *going* to be there," he said, "and I want you to be there, too." It was a matter of determination. This same spirit kept his successor, the Rev. Maud Hembree, persevering and dedicated her whole life through. "How can you be sure you are going to hold on?" someone asked her. "There is no way of actually knowing," she said, "but it is my determination"—a determination she never let go.

More recently, the late Rev. K. E. Flowerday also had a word for us about how to be sure of winning: *dead-earnest effort*. Well he knew, to quote his own words, that "the Christian life demands resoluteness, unwavering determination to carry its faith and purpose to a successful finish."

The will to win, the confidence that we *can* and the determination that we *will*—how great is our need for all of these in this last hour of the day! And should not the prize, the goal, the crown of life, be uppermost in our

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danger lies in
falling short.*

Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, we thank Thee for the blessings that continually come into our lives. We confess with shame that many times we have not been worthy of them. Thy goodness to us has been more than our iniquities deserved.

We thank Thee for our goodly mortal frame, for the many years of abundant physical strength that we have enjoyed, and that our souls are still held in the bundle of life, and for the health that is our portion. We thank Thee for the possession of a sound mind, and that we are still privileged to call Thee our Father. Help us to use all in the building of a Christian character, that we may fit ourselves for a place in Thy new world that will come into being with the return of Thy dear Son from heaven. Help us to have the faith to believe that the supreme

blessings Thou hast designed for the earth and mankind will soon begin to take shape. And once begun, that magnificent plan will never be hindered or sidetracked until every knee bends to Thee and every tongue sings Thy praise, and Thy glory fills the earth as the waters fill the sea, and Thy will is done here as in heaven above.

Wilt Thou grant to all of us a stronger faith, and a greater determination to do right. May we not procrastinate or put off until some more convenient time the task of getting down into the work in dead earnest, but now force ourselves to live above ourselves, that we may qualify as fit material for Thy heavenly Kingdom, and that Thou wilt be pleased to crown us with a life that will never end.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

RUN to WIN

minds? Whatever we may have to go through now, is it not infinitesimally small by comparison? To think of the glory, the beauty, the happiness, the pleasure, the delight that will be the continual portion of the glorified ones—we have talked about it, sung about it, read about it, dreamed about it; yet we know that we have not conceived the thousandth part of its reality. Truly, what will it be to be *there*!

Our founder kept himself stimulated by his mental excursions into the delights of that better world. Daily, hourly, probably almost momentarily, he glimpsed its glories. When not otherwise occupied, he kept his mind actively engaged, conversing with the saints, or speeding through space with the angels, or enjoying himself in their heavenly home.

"To think," he said, "of basking forever in a hundred times Eden beauty. To have a right—what a blessing! To have a right to compose a part of that happy throng that will glow with grandeur and beauty, thrilling with great swelling words of joy and gratitude, as we meet and greet and partake of the more than wonderful beatitudes upon eternity's shore! No wonder Peter styles them 'exceeding great and precious promises'!"

"Oh, how they swell the goodness of God into a fathomless ocean, yea, like space unending in every direction. To think of basking forevermore in such wonderful sunshine of bliss with more than ecstatic joy upon the ever-green plain of eternity should keep our hearts filled with con-

stant gratitude and deep settled devotion to the mighty and everlasting God; so much so that we will ever be found reverentially bowing in meek submission to His loving will. To think of the joy when each move, each turn will increase our joy and comfort upon this unending plain of eternity; as we are introduced, perhaps by a Gabriel, to new worlds on high and are permitted to view their wondrous beauty and glory and participate in their more than wonderful joys. We will indeed stand filled with joyful astonishment and be led to exclaim in the language of the Revelator, 'Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints' (Rev. 15:3)."

This is the goal upon which we have set our hearts. We are not running for naught. We are not foregoing the opportunities of this present world simply for the satisfaction it might bring us. Ahead lies a goal, a reward, a prospect so great that beside it all other goals pale into nothingness.

And it can be *ours*.

How Can We Be Sure?

What gives us the vision to picture ourselves among the immortals, freed forever from the limitations of mortality? What makes us believe that *our* hands may someday be changed to a substance superior to flesh and blood; that *our* eyes may become immortal eyes with vision beyond our fathoming; that this mind, which now wearies us with its lapses and forgets, may someday be a mind ever expanding in intelligent capability and creative thought, retaining forever the rich impressions it receives? How can we be sure it is not merely a pleasant dream?

Thank God, He has provided so much evidence that there remains not the slightest question. All these promises are certified by the Word of God and sealed with God's own seal. "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21). Who has given this promise? Who is the "I" that is speaking? It is none other than the Lord and Creator Himself. Can any surety surpass this?

The only question lies with us—will we reach the standard He has set? We know it is high, incomparably high. But don't we expect prices to be in relation to real value? Should not the greatest possible value carry the highest price? Even so, there can be no possible comparison between what we will receive and what we are asked to give. What have we done to deserve even a few years of this *present* life? How can anything we might do or give up or suffer in thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, eighty or even ninety years be sufficient to entitle us to ages upon ages upon ages of glorious, heavenly, immortal life?

Let us multiply our determination as we face the tests of the days ahead, and *run to win*. Let us grasp *every* opportunity that comes our way to think right, feel right and do right—anything that will increase the possibility of our own success. There is no danger of doing too much—what runner ever feared running too hard or fast? No, ours is not the danger of overrunning the finish line; our danger lies in falling short.

Some are going to participate in the New World that is coming. *Some* are going to be part of its glorious forever. *Some* among the sons and daughters of earth shall know and partake of the Divine nature. Some runners shall *win*.

Shall you? Shall I?

Coming On Apace

Sometimes we say
That the time seems long to us who watch and wait
For that "great Day,"
As if the time loitered and the great Day came late.

Did you ever stay
A moment, to think how the time is hasting away
And we cannot hinder a moment as it flies,
But one week dies
And another comes, straight, straight on
And is partly gone
While we are pausing to think it has begun?

Time pauses never,
The day of grace is shortening ever, at one unfaltering pace;
And the Day of decision
Is traveling onward, with steady, unswerving precision
And suddenly,
Or ever we are aware—that Day will be!

Blessed are they,
Who with good cause can say
With every rising sun,
"Amen, even so, Lord Jesus, come."



Are You Afflicted with **SPECTATOR-ITIS?**

There is an old disease of the human spirit which has received a new name: "spectator-itis." Sufferers may be unaware of their condition but the symptoms may be described as an absence of conviction, moral indecisiveness, and the belief that a well-poised vacuum is the ideal mental state. Unchecked, this malady leads to moral and spiritual paralysis.

Spectator-itis is characterized by a low temperature on burning questions, and influences individuals and groups to elevate neutrality to the dignity and sanctity of a national ideal.

That is what happened with a little nation described in the shortest book in the Old Testament, the book of Obadiah. For Spectator-itis is not a new malady. At least five hundred years before Christ an entire nation stood condemned by its neighbors because it surrendered to this malady and gloried in its shameful condition. Obadiah predicted the subsequent history of Edom.

Not only Obadiah, but that greater prophet Jeremiah foresaw Edom's doom. The fierce wrath of Israel's God poured through his scorching words. During Edom's heyday, however, Obadiah diagnosed its chief plague and weakness, and in words which still carry his scornful condemnation he cried: "In the day that thou stoodest on the other side,...even thou wast one of them" (Obad. 11).

What were the precise events spoken of? We can be certain that Jerusalem had been captured; Israel's enemies had assailed it, and the nation had fallen. In the hour of that assault, Edom did nothing; it stood as an onlooker on the other side. It was not because Edom was a distant country—it lay just across Jordan to the south. Nor was it because Edom regarded Israel as a foreign nation with whom she would have no entangling alliance. Traditionally, Edomites had

been regarded as the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. Yet in the day of Judah's direst need, when her enemies were thundering at her gates, Edom was content to be an onlooker. That is what stirred the righteous indignation of Obadiah. That a brother-nation should never have raised a finger to help their hard-pressed brothers in their need seemed to him the ultimate treason.

Edom is cursed for being a looker-on, for playing no part in the drama at its gates, for assuming an attitude of culpable neutrality. Edom surrendered to a preventable disease of the spirit: Spectator-itis.

God does punish the sin of neutrality. In the book of Judges there is the incident of Deborah and Barak and their notable victory over the Canaanites commanded by Sisera. It was a gallant and dangerous campaign. But through it all one little highland village slept in its shelter of the hills. No men were sent. They thought they would never be missed. And playing the spectator was certainly safer. But the angel of the Lord is portrayed as crying, "Curse ye Meroz,...because they came not to the help of the Lord...against the mighty" (Judges 5:23). Neutrality was punished. Meroz perished, no man even knows where it stood. Edom's site is known, but its glory long since was pushed into oblivion by the arm of heaven.

What is the cure for this indecisiveness, this weak and timid neutrality? It lies in seeing that the Christ-life can be lived to its fullest only through a full, out-and-out commitment. When the Word of God was given through Moses to the Children of Israel, the people were to answer: "All these things will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7).

The best satisfactions are reserved for those who will enter wholeheartedly into the adventures the

Christian life offers. True satisfaction can never be known by proxy. Each must experience it for himself. "O taste and see how gracious the Lord is" (a free translation of Ps. 34:8) is an urgent request. No one can meet it by delegating it to another. Each must taste for himself. God cannot be entreated by studied avoidance of obligation. Our God doesn't suffer from the malady of Spectator-itis. If there is evil in the city He *will* do somewhat. He is a God of the living, sharing with those alive to Him in all their struggles.

From the very beginning God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, that humanity rushed headlong toward the abyss of destruction. But He didn't stand on the sidelines a spectator to the tragedy like the Levite who passed by on the other side. Seeing their plight He sent His Word to heal them, making it possible for them to be delivered from their destructions (Ps. 107:20).

Jesus did not stand on the other side of human need. He had compassion on the multitude when He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. Tempted in all points as we are, He showed them how they could be healed of their diseases. On the eve of the greatest trial of His life He was concerned with the welfare of others. He bade His immediate followers, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And if we would have His victory we also must share His life. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

If truly Christians we cannot stand by as a spectator when the interests of our brother are involved. He needs our help, he needs our brotherly concern. He has the same crosses to bear as we have. His carnal nature is always ready to lead him once more into sin the same as ours. There are times when his faith would flag if not reinforced. Let us not stand on the sidelines, indifferent to his interests.

Let us not say our brother's problems are only imaginary, that he is largely to blame for his own plight, that if only he would snap out of it conditions could be different. That may not be the truth of the matter. We do not know. So let us show brotherly concern and Christian sympathy.

Today we need a commitment to that which is primary, and which embraces all the others: to Christ and His Kingdom. We cannot be neutral in our attitude toward Him. "He that is not for me is against me," said the Master. "What think ye of Christ?" is not a mere intellectual question. It is a question of the highest and best we know drawing forth our spirit in true allegiance. It is a question of what we will choose. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve," said Joshua to the children of Israel, and "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him," cried Elijah on Mt. Carmel (Josh. 24:15; 1 Kgs. 18:21). When evil seems the strongest, half a vote will not advance the cause of God's Kingdom. He wants a *full* surrender of all that we have and are.

Soon Christ is coming back to earth. Where will we stand then—with the indecisive majority which by its neutrality may be showing the white feather of cowardice; or with the determined minority, the positive forces moving toward the great goal, perfection of character?

At this very moment we are facing the obligation to live a clear-cut Christian life, to identify ourselves openly and actively with the body of Christ in these closing days of the ages. Why not stand with the saving remnant and be found ready and waiting when the Lord shall come?

Why not stand with the seven thousand moral reserves who have not bowed their knee to Baal, who are the hope of the new nation? Why not link our lives with Him who is able to bring us off a field of effort more than conquerors. □

The best satisfactions are reserved for those who will enter wholeheartedly into the adventures the Christian life offers.

The Bible and Inspiration

► *Inspiration is a means by which God communicates, authorizes, or deputizes men to speak or deliver His message.*

Having established the Divine authority of the Bible, let us move on to the basis that underlies that authority: inspiration.

What do we mean by inspiration? We mean that the Bible authors were moved to write as they did by a power beyond themselves and beyond their control: the power of God.

Men have always been mystified by anything beyond themselves. Individuals showing creative talent in a field of art are called "inspired," because the artist somehow feels that his work comes from beyond himself, that it is more than just the result of his own conscious activity.

When we say the Bible is inspired, this is how many people understand it. But when we look at what the Bible is saying, we find its inspiration is far deeper than this. The Bible is inspired in a different sense from any work of art. In fact, the meaning is opposite.

The apostle Paul explained the meaning of Divine inspiration when he wrote: "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:16-17, NIV).

The word which calls for our special attention is the Greek word for

"inspiration." It is *theopneustos*, and means literally, "God-breathed." The emphasis is on the source of the words written: They are the very breath of God.

In modern usage, the term inspiration, unfortunately, suggests the act of "breathing into." The Apostle's emphasis is that God "breathed out" the thoughts which the sacred writers convey. The emphasis falls on the Divine initiative rather than on the human instrument. Scripture owes its source to what God breathed out.

The idea of the Divine message being literally "God-breathed" is parallel to the Biblical statement that the Divine message is "the Word of God." In a literal sense, the Bible consists not of the words of God but of the words of men—or rather the visible symbols of their words. The Bible is not the utterance of God in the same sense in which it is the utterance of men. *Paul* is the author of the Epistle to the Romans, *John* is the author of his epistle, *Peter* is the author of his epistles; though in a transferred sense we may describe the writing of each as part of "the Word of God." What do we mean? We mean that these men communicated to their readers the thoughts or impressions of their minds, behind which and overruling which was the mind or wisdom of

God. The words belonged to the authors; but the message communicated was from God.

When we say that the Bible is inspired, we mean that the source of the writers' knowledge, whether openly or inwardly received, was God. The writers were not projecting or teaching their own ideas or conclusions but those which they had, by one means or another, received.

How God Conveys His Message

In many and different ways (Heb. 1:1) God has through the ages revealed His knowledge to men. Often He used open revelation or demonstration to make known His message. At other times, He moved upon men as though supplying the information to their consciousness, while they were either aware or unaware. By inspiration we generally refer to the power of God overruling the mind of man, imparting knowledge or direction in a superhuman manner which the individual may or may not perceive. The individual, in turn, communicates this information to others, either as a spoken or written message.

Inspiration is a tool by which God communicates, authorizes, or deputizes men to speak or deliver His message to humankind. Thus the message belongs to the man, but the authority behind it is Divine.

The apostle Peter discussed this type of Divine communicating when he wrote, "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of men, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Pet. 1:21, NIV). "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Peter notes also that the Prophets were unable fully to understand all the implications of their writings. Why? Because the source of their utterances lay beyond themselves. "The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was

pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (I Pet. 1:10-12, NIV).

The apostle Peter, speaking of the writings of Paul, emphasized again that the source of those writings was not Paul but God. "... Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him" (II Pet. 3:15, NIV).

Paul himself stated this fact numerous times. When writing to his brethren about the significance of the Lord's Supper, he says, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you" (I Cor. 11:23). Again, referring to the gospel that he was preaching he says, "For I neither received it of men, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). Writing to the Corinthians, he says that he came declaring unto them "the testimony of God" (I Cor. 2:1). "And my speech

and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (vs. 4-5). Paul took great care to let everyone know that he was not writing his own words but the words of God, the things which God has "revealed unto us by his Spirit...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world,

God has used two basic means of communicating His message or information:

1) by open revelation/demonstration (this includes His communications through angels, visions, dreams, and all other open manifestations);

2) by inspiration (this includes all influence of God upon the written or spoken messages of His spokesmen, whether through gifts of knowledge to the mind or information imparted through the Holy Spirit).

but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which

the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (vs. 10, 12-13). Paul was doing the writing, but the teaching was not Paul's; it was God's—conveyed to Paul by inspiration.

How Inspiration Worked

The fact that God spoke directly through human writers does not, however, reduce those writers to human typewriters. Each book of the Bible gives clear evidence of the individuality of its author. The writers and editors were plainly not automatic writing machines. Luke painstakingly collected material for his two volumes and did all he could to make them accurate records (Luke 1:1-4). The Old Testament writers also exercised powers of discrimination, omitting what they regarded as irrelevant and using what was needed (I Kings 14:19; 15:7,31). Paul wrote his letters with specific objectives in view, also a specific need or condition. For example, when Paul wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians, there were major dissensions in the church body which required attention (I Corinthians 3). There was also a serious problem with immorality in the church body, against which the local leadership had not taken decisive action (I Corinthians 5). There was yet another problem: a brother in the church had taken another brother to a court of law for justice (I Cor. 6:1-3). In all these matters, Paul taught timeless principles to all members of the Church in all ages. At the same time, he was addressing a local situation—a fact which shows that Paul himself was composing the thoughts he was writing, though under the direction and influence of God.

Another indication of the authors' influence upon their writings is the

immense difference in style between writers. For example, compare a chapter in John's epistle with a chapter in Ephesians; or compare the writings of Isaiah with those of the Psalmist. The style, the tone, the composition are totally different, but the fundamental message and meaning are the same because all were written under one Divine inspiration. All were speaking for God and recording the knowledge or wisdom of God that God wanted preserved for His people.

How Does Inspiration Work?

Very simply, we do not know. We have neither experienced it nor talked with anyone who experienced it. However, from the evidence we have in the Bible, we can speculate. One simile might be drawn from the world of music. Think of God as the composer of the music, and the Bible writer as the conductor. The conductor, looking over the score, picks out particular phrases of music which he wishes to emphasize. In this way he adds his own personality to the presentation for his immediate audience. The Holy Spirit "tapes" his rendition (for us, as recorded in the Scriptures) for future audiences. His rendition is accurately the reproduction of the composer's mind, but the conductor has added his personality to it. This fact is seen especially in the four gospels. The overall theme of each is identical, but the different authors (conductors) chose to bring out dif-

ferent melodic lines, even omitting certain parts at intervals. What comes to us in the Gospels are the "tapes" known as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each production may be recognized as the work of the same Composer, but the emphases vary from tape to tape (book to book), and as we "listen" to each, the music conveys a special message to us.

Or we might borrow an example from physiology. Not all the doctors in the world know all the details of the process by which we digest food and assimilate it into the various organs of the body. Nevertheless, whether we understand the process or not we eat every day, confident that the digestive process will be done properly. In the same way the Biblical authors wrote, knowing that God was directing and that the message would be properly conveyed, even if they did not understand exactly how.

Jesus, in His final address to His disciples on the night of the Passover, told them that they would receive the Holy Spirit, which would bring "all things" to their remembrance (John 14:26). In this way Jesus recognized that the authors of

the New Testament would be inspired with correct knowledge, and that their writings could be relied upon as Divinely authored. Were the writers required to understand everything they wrote in order for their writings to be reliable? This would hardly seem reasonable. Would we require that a scientist understand every detail he observed in his studies before we would accept his observations as accurate? Surely the Prophets could not in all cases comprehend the magnitude of their prophecies, but the unknown element does not in anyway detract from the power or authority of their words. They were delivering or writing a message they received from God, the power and extent of which would be revealed over time as God chose to reveal it.

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Whether the vehicle for the Word of God was mighty like Moses, wise like Daniel, impure like Balaam, unholy like Solomon, or holy like John, or without visible form like the voice from Sinai, or like the hand that wrote on the wall in Babylon, the essential thing is that it was the Word of God that was being communicated, the very Word of God."

—Ray Posch

About BIBLE Reading...

The Bible is a serious book, the most serious in the world, and it will not submit to being used for light amusement. If you're looking for pleasant diversion or a peaceful pastime with which to while away a tired evening, the Bible is not the book for you.

The message of the Bible is strong, its tone is urgent, its claims are exacting. It makes sovereign demands upon the reader, and will hear no excuse for his failure to meet them.

The first demand of the Bible is the acknowledging of its Author and a full surrender to His sovereignty. We may admire the rich imagery of the Bible, its bold figures and impassioned flights of eloquence; we may enjoy its tender musical passage or revel in its strong homely wisdom; but we cannot grasp its fullness until we submit our lives to its authority.

—Selected



ON MEASURING TIME

A Study of the Ancient Hebrew Calendar

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Time is an intangible substance. We cannot label it as we would a book, or count it as we would count apples. Yet if human life is to be seen in perspective, in relation to events; if it is to be chronicled for the benefit of present or future generations, time must be counted and that count preserved by a uniform and intelligible method.

Through the centuries different methods of measuring time have been attempted. Some people today wonder why the dates of sacred calendar festivals (e.g., New Year, Passover, Pentecost) vary so much from year to year when national events such as the Fourth of July always occur on the same calendar date (unless physically moved, as in recent years). The reason is the method of time measurement used by the people who established the date of the festival.

How are points in time determined and marked? The most common method is by observing a recurring natural event and establishing it as a basic time measurement unit, then subdividing that unit in an orderly manner

into smaller periods of time; in other words, a calendar. The basis of most calendars in use today is the solar year, the time required for the earth to complete one circuit of the sun.

The solar year has been the most commonly used primary basis for time counting among all civilizations and governments. Many of the ancient people—including the Hebrews—counted time in smaller units also. The Hebrews were instructed to use as their basis the length of time that the moon required to complete its cycle from new through full and back to new. They also recognized the New Year (solar) as a proper division of time. As an agricultural people, the seasons by which they planted their crops were determined by the solar year.

Today we are so accustomed to our calendar that we tend to think it has always existed and that all people everywhere follow it. But not so. Our calendar, too, developed; and in developing, it underwent many changes. Some of these changes were to correct inaccuracies in methods of mea-

suring time. Many were the direct result of advances in the science of astronomy. Other changes were the ideas of certain individuals or governments who wished to adopt their own means and measures.

Over the years, many calendar systems have been devised by various civilizations and governments to record specific points in time. In this study we will concern ourselves primarily with the Hebrew calendar, which was directed by God and practiced in some form through more than fifteen centuries of Israelite history. We shall also see our modern calendar in relation to the Hebrew.

We are especially interested in the beginning of the sacred New Year in ancient Israel; how the dates of religious festivals were determined; and what God wants us to do in remembering these sacred occasions.

Units of Time

Let us think about the units by which we measure time, and the source of those units. Some of these units of measurement are built into the created order. Oth-

ers that we use every day are purely arbitrary.

The first unit of time we want to consider is the year. A year is not an arbitrary unit. It is established by the motion of the earth and is, as mentioned above, the time that is required for the earth to complete one circuit around the sun. Almost all calendars, ancient and modern, have established the year as a basic unit of time measurement.

A second measurement of time-counting is the month. Our months today are arbitrary. We begin our months by the date on our calendar, not by any built-in natural occurrence such as the new moon. The ancient Hebrews determined the beginning of the months by the moon.

What we call day and night is a reference to time that is dictated by sunrise and sunset. But our separation of "day" and "night" and the point at which we begin a "new day" is purely arbitrary. The Hebrews started their day—and their year—at sundown. Later on, to be more precise, they started it at 6 o'clock.

We, of course, begin our day at midnight. Astronomers start their day at 12 noon to give them the entire period of darkness within one recording period. They want the records of one night's observation to be within a single "day's" record. It would be awkward to report observing a star at five minutes to midnight on one day and continue the observation the next "day."

The seasons are not arbitrary. They are determined by set laws of the universe. Spring and summer, autumn and winter all follow in natural sequence as determined by the revolution of the earth around the sun and the inclination of the earth's axis in relation to the sun.

Abib, the Sacred New Year

How did the ancient people determine the beginning of a new year or a new revolution around the sun? Primitive men, before the days of astronomy, did it by observing recurring events in nature (i.e., the trees budding, barley maturing). The Egyptians started their year at the time the Nile flooded each spring.

God gave the Israelites specific instructions as to when they should begin their new year, which we want to study.

The Bible gives us a brief background of the Jewish calendar as it was given to Moses when he was leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

The first month on that calendar was the month Abib, which according to God's direction was to be the beginning of the new year, as we read in Exodus 12:2 and 13:4. "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." Abib was to be observed as the "first month of the year."

Abib, the time God appointed for the beginning of the sacred new year, was known in Palestine as the "spring or sprouting month," "month of green ears," month of flowers, month of ripening barley, according to the climate of Egypt and Palestine in this month. It began with the new moon of April or March.

The Abib season was not to be taken lightly or overlooked by any loyal Israelites. Among the Hebrew festivities it was doubtless the most significant, and its remembrance was directly commanded. As we read in Deuteronomy 16:1, "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the Lord thy God: for in the month of Abib the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night."

A passage recorded in Psalm 81 very possibly had reference to this same primary feast day: "Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob" (vs. 3-4).

The observance of Abib was in exactly this category. It was not something that they could do or that they could refrain from doing at their caprice, for it was "a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob."

Abib marked the beginning of the year; it was important also for another reason: the annual anniversary of passover fell in the month Abib (Abib 14), "for in the month of Abib, the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night" (Deut. 16:1). In Exodus 12, the Lord is instructing Moses in the observance of the passover on the 14th of the first month. In the 23rd chapter of Exodus, 15th verse, the command is repeated: "Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread:...in the time appointed of the month Abib."

Determined by the Moon

We are particularly interested in how the Hebrews originally determined the time for beginning this sacred new year and how they counted the days and the months following.

Several passages in the Bible show that the time of the months of the Hebrew year was determined by the moon. We read in Numbers 10:10: "Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the Lord your God."

We also have ample evidence that the occurrence of the moon was a major factor in determining the beginnings of these months, particularly the first month of the year.

How did they know when the moon was new? Originally the Hebrews determined the time for the beginning of the new year moon of Abib by stationing observers on the hills to watch for the new moon. In the "Biblical Critical Interpretation of the Bible," in a discussion of the history of the Jewish calendar, we find the following:

"It is certain that...the month was dated from the time when the earliest visible appearance of the new moon was announced to the Sanhedrin. That is, if this happened on the 30th day of the current month that month was considered to have ended on the preceding 29th day and was called deficient. But if no announcement was made on the 30th day, that day was reckoned to the current month which was in this case called full and the ensuing day was at once considered to be the first of the next month."

During a large part of history—including Bible history—watchers and observers set the time. Among the Jews, the watchers would announce to the Sanhedrin, who would in turn announce the beginning of the month or the beginning of the year. In modern times this is done by calculation. Astronomers can tell within a fraction of a second when the sun crosses the line and when the moon is new.

The Use of "Months"

The Hebrew marking of Abib as the first month of the year at the time of the Exodus was not the beginning of counting time by months, for notice the reading of Exodus 12:2, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months"—they already had months, of which this was to be known as the "beginning."

In Noah's time, when the flood was receding, people were measuring time in months. Genesis 8:14 records, "And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried."

Genesis 7:11 also records the measuring of time in months: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened." They were measuring time in months, and this was approximately 2400 years before Christ.

There is yet one more detail we may discover from this bit of Genesis history: a month consisted of about 30 days. Genesis 8:3 records that at the end of an "hundred and fifty days the waters were abated." We read also that the flood began in the second month, on the seventeenth day (Gen. 7:11) and that the waters "were abated" in "the second month, the seventeenth day." This defines a period of five months, the same period described as 150 days in Genesis 8:3, showing us that the length of a month was 30 days.

In the days of King David, as recorded in I Chronicles 27:1-2, about 1060 B.C., months were used as a measurement of time. We read:

"Now the children of Israel after their number, to wit, the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, and their officers that served the king in any matter of the courses, which came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year, of every course were twenty and four thousand. Over the first course for the first month was Jashobeam the son of Zabdiel: and in his course, were twenty and four thousand...." There were 12 captains, one for each month of the year, a fact which shows that they were counting 12 months to the year.

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Who Gets the Credit?

"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" — I Cor. 4:7

The whole tenor of Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthian ecclesia suggests that here was a church grown fat and complacent, well satisfied with itself. Its spiritual father, whose stature they did not and never would approach, they were more than a little inclined to treat with condescension, while they were not actually finding fault with him. Characteristically Greek in their servile reverence for worldly wisdom, their contempt for those less educated was no less offensive than Jewish racial and ceremonial snobbery. While the church of Corinth produced some great characters, the misdoings of others called forth some of the great Apostle's sternest rebukes and most telling irony, which, it would seem, had the desired effect of producing repentance.

"Who maketh thee to differ from another?" Who, indeed? Certainly not the accident of birth, for all nations before God are nothing, even less than nothing and vanity (Isa. 40:17). All contenders in the race for eternal life start from the same line—the line of nothingness; there are no exceptions. There is nothing flattering in God's estimate of the

natural man, as witness the words of the Preacher in Eccl. 3:18-19.

Certainly it is not our past record, which is nothing to boast of. We have all sinned so often and so willfully that "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22). There is a class who say, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou"; but they are the disciples of the Pharisees of all ages, not of the meek and lowly Saviour who, without sin Himself after knowing the law, received all who came to Him, His only condition being, "Go, and sin no more."

"Pray, sir, who makes you superior to others?" reads our text in another version. Certainly it is not our natural ability of which we possess so little that any glorying therein is not only sinful but childish and absurd. Compared to the great of this world in scholar-

ship, in science, in the arts or in the realms of business and finance, who and what are we? An objective appraisal of ourselves—a tremendously difficult thing, we admit—should induce a profound humility, with no trace of condescension, no illusions and delusions of what we might have been if God had not stood in the way!

A perennial problem in this and probably every age has been those individuals who use the knowledge of God to inflate their ego. Aware that the knowledge of God's Word gives them a point of superiority over their more successful neighbors, they parade that knowledge at every opportunity, often to God, forgetting that superiority is a matter of deeds, not of knowledge alone. There are certainly occasions when plain speech is necessary, and we must not be wanting in courage to speak for God; but the most effective contention for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) is the example of a changed life. Such a sermon is more powerful than a thousand victories in verbal argument.

"Who sees anything different in you?" reads still another version. Our only claim to distinc-

What hast thou
that thou didst not
receive?" Nothing.
Absolutely nothing.

tion in present or future—the past is better forgotten—comes through a knowledge of God's law of life. Praise God that He saw something different in us, a strain of honesty and sufficient stamina to do the required work, if we only will. Apart from that, we are as common as dust. Realizing these facts, instead of puffing us up, should fill us with reverent humility and a feeling that the compliment is more than we deserve, and one which we shall not find it easy to live up to. We have received the most stupendous offer ever made to mortal man, but there are "strings" attached. And the sight of these strings should keep us in our place, for the responsibilities which our covenant entails are grave. It is better never to have known the way of righteousness, the apostle Peter warns us, than, after knowing it, to turn from it (II Pet. 2:21). Having made ourselves amenable to Judgment, we are subject to the penalties of the law no less than to its benefits.

"What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Nothing. Absolutely nothing. This is true of all people in all ages. The church in Corinth, while receiving revelations by the power of the Holy Spirit, could yet do nothing of itself. All knowledge, however received, must come from a higher Source. All comes from the Head; "The head of every man is Christ,...and the head of Christ is God." Even our Master dared not speak His own words but echoed the words of the Father who sent Him.

In our day, lacking personal association with the Unseen which the Christians of that day possessed, we are doubly debtors. Others have labored, and we have entered into their labors. In these last days we are indebted not only to the great Giver of every good and perfect gift, but to the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers who have been His ministers for our enlightenment and salvation. We are especially indebted to him who exhumed the living gospel after its long burial of more than twelve centuries of the Great Apostasy.

We are also debtors to all the Eternal's instruments, both in and out of His family, who have translated and preserved the Word through the troubled centuries, and to those who have secured and maintained the liberty of conscience and worship which we enjoy. Taken all together, we owe so much to so many that there is no room for fleshly glorying.

We may lawfully glory in that we understand and know God, says Jeremiah (9:23-24), never forgetting that "to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). This glorying is not an outward show for the benefit of others, but an inner peace that comes by victory over self, a peace which passeth the under-

standing of the natural mind. And first, last and always, its chief ingredient is humility. "But God forbid that I should glory," said the Apostle (Gal. 6:14), "save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"—all pride and carnality gone. □

Obituary

George Manford Mathias

On April 17 we met today to pay our last respects to a friend and brother, George Manford Mathias.

Brother Mathias' first acquaintance with the Megiddo Church came through a next-door neighbor, Cecil Sutton, when he was living in Iowa. About the year 1930, Mrs. Sutton saw the church's *Elijah* book ad in a farm periodical, and sent for the literature. The teachings of the literature were shocking—because they did not support the standard beliefs. No literal hell? no literal devil? To a good Presbyterian, this was almost too much to consider. But Cecil Sutton was not ready to reject new thinking just because it was new, and in a short time, she had other members of the Sutton family, her neighbors (the Mathiases) and the Hendricks' all reading the new literature. Brother Mathias could readily see the difference between truth and error. He was especially impressed with the falsity of the so-called Christmas festivities, and immediately withdrew his children from all Santa Claus and Christmas celebrations.

The interested families began meeting in one of the member's homes, as they were able to arrange it, and together they enjoyed worship services, Bible studies and general group fellowship. These meetings included members of the Sutton family, the Mathias family, the Hendricks family, and Sister Trachsel, and were enjoyed by all who participated.

Brother Mathias was very committed to disseminating the word of life to his family, and at every opportunity would give a set of books to one of his children or grandchildren. During later years he and his wife regularly enjoyed listening to tape recordings of the Church services, and after the death of his wife in 1985, Brother Mathias relocated to Rochester, to be nearer to those who could look after his needs.

Brother Mathias is survived by his sister, Ruth Johnson, of Scranton, Iowa; five children, among whom are a daughter, Marie Sutton, and a son, Clifford Mathias, both of our Rochester Congregation; another daughter, Barbara Crum living in Bondurant, Iowa, who is a regular correspondent of the Church; and two other sons, Junior, of Birmingham and Roy of Russell, Iowa. He is also survived by twelve grandchildren, twenty great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

Temporal Or Spiritual?

There is no way of separating the two. If the spiritual is dominant, all becomes spiritual: How we face the temporal, how we handle our problems, how we do our work, how we govern ourselves, how we discipline ourselves—all is part of the spiritual and subject to God's judgment, for reward or punishment.

No man ever hurt his eyesight by looking on the bright side of things.

The wise man endeavors to shine in himself; the fool to outshine others.

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.

Few of us ever get dizzy from doing too many good turns.

*Sweet sacrifice of praise
That triumphs over wrong,
And sings through sorrow's vale
Hope's everlasting song
O God of comfort, may
I bless Thy love always
And raise the mists of gloom
With sacrificial praise!*

*Sweet sacrifice of praise
Sublimest voice of prayer!
Where hope's hosannas raise
As incense pure and rare;
O gracious Lord and Master,
Teach me in everything
To look beyond the clouds
And "Alleluias" sing!*



Genius is really only the power of making continuous effort. The line between failure and success is so fine that we are often on the line and we do not know it. Many a man has thrown up his hands at a time when just a little more effort, a little more patience, would have achieved success. As the tide goes clear out, so it comes clear in. Prospects sometimes may seem darkest when really they are on a turn. A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed a hopeless failure may turn to glorious success.

There is no failure except in no longer trying. There is no defeat except from within; and no really unsurmountable barrier, save our own inherent weakness of purpose.

Welcome smiles on faces sad
As the flowers of spring;
Let the tender hearts be glad
With the joy they bring.

Do not bury your mistakes; correct them.

This Is Not All

*This is not all that God can give;
Were it, we might do well to live
Just for today, enjoying all
The pleasures that so subtly call.
We might do well, were such the case,
To compromise with things more base
And revel in this little space...*

*Were this life all—but it is not!
This little need not be our lot
If we will give ourselves to God
And bow beneath His chast'ning rod!
For Christ shall soon return to earth
To bring His own the Spirit birth;
Then through the ages they shall live,
Happy in ALL that God can give.*

—Contributed