

The Importance of Meditating on the Word of God Daily

and Encouragement to Read Through the Bible Each Year

I. Background and Introduction

- a. End of this year in three weeks, and start of a new year.
- b. For many months I have looked forward to teach this particular lesson in mid-December, to encourage everyone to consider this before the start of a new year. However, I believe this is a lesson that is always 'in season'.

II. The Map of the Christian Life

- a. As an engineer, I am always dealing with drawings and maps, to understand and visually explain to others where we are and where we are going.
- b. The Holy Spirit is the greatest map-maker. One of the most fascinating maps I have ever encountered is a spiritual map of the Christian life, laid out in the story of the Exodus from Egypt (in the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).
- c. This 'map', which my friend Chris Rardin refers to as "The Map" or "The Exodus Map", is alluded to in three places in the New Testament:
 - i. **Hebrews 3-4**
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**
 - iii. **Jude v.5**
- d. It is revealed in greatest detail by the apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 10**. (One relatively early Christian writer, Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses* makes some points on a few other elements of this allegory or 'map' that Paul does not mention, but which definitely seem to fit the pattern.)
- e. Elements of 'The Exodus Map'
 - i. Egypt represents the kingdom of darkness that Christians come out of
 - 1. In the kingdom of darkness we are in slavery (to sin)
 - 2. The death of the Passover Lamb (Jesus) marks the time of escape.
 - 3. We are saved by the blood of that lamb that was sacrificed for us.

4. Pharaoh, the oppressive ruler of the dark kingdom, who does NOT want to let God's people go. Who might this possibly represent? (Satan)
- ii. The pillar of cloud and fire represents the Holy Spirit, leading people out of captivity, through the water and on to the Promised Land.
- iii. The water of the Red Sea, which people must cross to escape, represents baptism.
- iv. The Promised Land, our destination, represents heaven.
- v. The desert represents (unfortunately) where we are today. It may look like a playground or a garden or amusement park to some, but the spiritual reality is that it is in fact a dry and scorpion-infested desert.
 1. The trials they faced and sins they fell into (idolatry, sexual immorality, complaining, testing God) are the very same ones that threaten to do us in today.
 2. Of all those who were 'baptized', only a few made it all the way to the Promised Land.
 - a. The gathering of the people traveling through the Wilderness is the church.
 - b. Paul says that is a warning lesson for us!
 - c. Although only two of that generation of those 'baptized' in the Red Sea made it successfully all the way to the Promised Land, we need not be discouraged. Paul reassures us that God is faithful; He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. Each of us can make it to the end!
- vi. For the rest of this lesson I want to focus on the manna, the food that sustained them in the Wilderness for 40 years.

III. Manna in the Morning

- a. After being led out of Egypt miraculously, the people complain that there is no food in the desert. God provides manna.
- b. Read **Exodus 16:9-36**.
 - i. Bread from heaven, provided by God
 - ii. The word 'manna' seems to come from the Hebrew expression for 'what is it?'

- iii. It gave them all the nourishment they needed.
 - iv. They had to gather it every single day (except no work on the Sabbath) and ate it every single day.
 - v. Each family had to gather their own, “every man according to his need”.
 - vi. They had to gather it in the morning.
 - vii. It was sweet to the taste, like something made with honey. Does this remind you of anything else that is described as being sweet like honey?
 - 1. This passage comes to mind: “How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (**Psalm 119:103**, NKJV)
 - viii. It could be prepared different ways (baked or boiled).
 - ix. This sustained them to the very end, for the entire journey of 40 years; and stopped only when they reached the Promised Land.
- c. Read **Numbers 11:1-9**
- i. After a time, people got sick and tired of manna all the time.
 - ii. They were bored; wanted variety in their diet.
 - iii. They looked back longingly on what they ate back in Egypt.
 - iv. They complained against God and against Moses.
- d. Read **Deuteronomy 8:1-3**
- i. Near the end of the 40 years, Moses explains why God provided manna. It was to teach them an important lesson.
 - ii. The lesson: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God”.
- e. Read **Matthew 4:1-4** (parallel in **Luke 4:1-4**)
- i. Jesus recalled these very words from **Deuteronomy 8:3** when Satan tempted Him, at the start of His ministry.
 - ii. When attacked by Satan, Jesus responds “it is written” and quotes Scripture.
 - iii. This is a great example for us to follow when we are being attacked with temptation. Let us follow the example of Jesus rather than that of

Adam, Eve, Cain, David, Solomon and so many others who were defeated by temptation.

- iv. When we are attacked by “the spiritual hosts of wickedness”, we must take up the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” as Paul encourages us in **Ephesians 6:17**.

IV. Meditating on the Word of God Day and Night (Read Psalm 1)

- a. Avoid the company of the ungodly
 - i. People you spend time with influence you.
 - ii. Implications for TV, movies, internet, sports, news, media, etc.
- b. Meditate on the law of the Lord day and night.
 - i. The man who does this will be like tree planted by streams of water.
 - ii. No matter what the weather or circumstances, he will always do well.

V. Meditating on the Word: Another Picture (Read Leviticus 11:1-12)

- a. What does this dietary restriction for the Jews have to do with us, today?
- b. Several early Christians saw this as teaching us an important lesson as well. Whether you agree with them or not (they are not writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit), please consider their viewpoint on this, regarding how we should live and who we should be associating with:
 - i. Clean animals = Ruminants (chewing the cud) like sheep and goats. They eat grass and then spend the day regurgitating and chewing on it further, are a picture of wise Christians who feed on the clean Word of God and meditate on it (work on it, chew on it to get all the nourishment out of it).
 - ii. Unclean animals = pigs and dogs, indiscriminately eating garbage and living in mud and filth.
 - iii. Consider this ‘clean vs. unclean’ animals idea in view of how these animals are used in New Testament teaching. Recall that in the New Testament people living ungodly lives as ‘pigs’ and ‘dogs’; while the righteous are referred to as ‘sheep’.
 - 1. “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” (**2 Peter 2:22**, NKJV)
 - 2. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (**John 10:27**, NKJV)

iv. Sources for early Christian writings on this subject of clean/unclean animals foreshadowing the righteous/unrighteous:

1. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 5, chapter 8; in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1. p. 534
2. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book 3 chapter 11; in ANF vol. 2, p. 289
3. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*, Book 2 chapter 15; in ANF vol. 2, pp. 362-363
 - a. Here Clement brings up the clean/unclean animals example from Moses in a discussion on **Psalm 1**.
 - b. He equates attending the theaters with “sitting in the seat of pestilences” from **Psalm 1**.
 - c. Clement makes the connection that fish without fins and scales are “bottom-feeders” who live in darkness (I think of catfish, carp, crabs and clams).

VI. Questions to Consider, Decisions to Make

- a. Are you living the life of a sheep, or of a pig or dog?
- b. Are you dumpster-diving and eating garbage, or feeding on the pure Word of God?
- c. Like the sheep and cow, after you eat the pure clean grass, are you chewing on it all day long, working it to get all the nutrients embedded in it?
- d. Like the Israelites, do you get weary and bored of the honey-tasting wafers of the Word of God, and do your taste buds crave the food of Egypt?
- e. Do you see that you need to do the work of gathering up this food every morning, that you can't just collect it once or twice a week and hope to live on that?
- f. Do you see this life as the snake and scorpion-infested desert? Are you living to make it to your hope, the Promised Land? Do you see the manna as your life-sustaining food that will keep you going and strong until you arrive at your Destination?
- g. Do you see Satan as your enemy, and the Word of God as your only sure offensive weapon, the one which you need to master and turn to in every battle?

VII. A Practical Encouragement to Close With

- a. We need the entire Bible, not just the New Testament and Psalms.
 - i. “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (**2 Timothy 3:14–17**, NKJV)
 - ii. All Scripture is inspired and profitable, that we may be thoroughly equipped.
 - iii. The Scripture that Timothy had known from childhood was the Old Testament (at the time Paul was writing, the New Testament as we know it did not even exist).
 - iv. We need to know the entire Bible, including the Old Testament Scriptures. It was written for the benefit of us, the Christians, that we may be thoroughly equipped.
 1. “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (**Romans 15:4**, NKJV; here Paul is quoting from **Psalms 69:9**)
 2. One of the reasons we focus on expository teaching of the OT is to reinforce that there are great lessons for us to dig out of the OT, if we read it and meditate on it. It is to teach us to be better readers.
- b. I encourage every Christian to decide to read through the entire Bible at least once every year.
 - i. Average of about 3 chapters/day.
 - ii. For most people, this takes about 20-30 minutes/day.
 - iii. I like to read through one book at a time, generally alternating New Testament books with Old Testament ones.
 - iv. There are many read-through-the Bible-in-a-year plans available; one that many of us use is posted on our house church website.
 - v. Just as in the famous old story, the tortoise (slow and steady) still beats the hare in the race. Remember that, and persevere!

- vi. Make a decision, adopt a plan, have others keep you accountable.
Consider finding others who want to do this as well, and start a group of two or more.
- c. Consider the legacy of James A. Harding (1848-1922), a famous preacher and teacher among the Churches of Christ in the late 19th and early 20th century. His life is an inspiration and upward call to me.
 - i. When Harding died, R.H. Boll eulogized his mentor as “one who set more people to reading the Bible than any other preacher; and he infused his own love and appreciation for the Word into those who came under his sway”. Harding encouraged daily reading of three and a third chapters of the Bible as a spiritual discipline, in order to read the entire Bible in one year. He formed Bible reading classes wherever he went as an itinerant evangelist and collected ‘Bible reading cards’ which detailed commitments and progress. He believed that “the chief duty of the teacher in the Church (is) to lead people to the daily, diligent, prayerful study of the Word” and he devoted more time and energy to that one point than to any other.
 - ii. Harding saw the goal of daily Bible reading as relational, exposing us to the mind of God in Scripture so that we can be shaped into the image of Christ. He said that since “God is the author of the Bible, we should read it that we may know him”. Harding practiced what he preached. In 1914 he said that he had read the Old Testament through sixty times, and the New Testament one hundred and thirty times.
 - 1. (Source: *Kingdom Come*, Hicks J.M. & Valentine, B., Leafwood Publishers, Abilene, TX, pp. 80-82)
- d. Challenge: Study out what has been presented in this lesson, take inventory of your spiritual life and your personal devotion to the Word of God. Prayerfully consider what has been put before you, and make some critical life decisions.