

Index of Articles:	Page
Knowing God, Pt. 2	1
Mountains of Scripture: Carmel	3
Abraham the Intercessor	5
Dried Away Souls, pt 1	7

Knowing God, pt 2

Joel Portman

We have been seeking to emphasize the importance for believers to cultivate an earnest desire in their souls to know God. We have tried to point out the importance of this effort and to clearly indicate to each one that this is God's purpose for us in salvation, even as it has always been for man since creation. Having a deep appetite and thirst for God is life-altering, even as we read of the psalmist's desire in Ps. 42:1, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, oh God."

Results of Knowing God

Every activity of one's life leaves a result in that life so exercised. No less is this true when we think of this subject. We notice that there are at least six results that will come from this knowledge. One is greater reverence in our worship. When man has light thoughts of God it will always result in a light form of worship. Two essential elements of worship are an awe for His greatness and Person and a wonder at all that He has done. It is easy to begin taking for granted all that we have and are, despite the fact these all owe solely to the work of Christ for us. But when we begin to understand the infinite, profound depths of the measureless wisdom and greatness of God to provide a perfectly righteous and sufficient salvation without compromise on His part, it begins to deepen our reverential attitude and understanding of the One who we worship. We read many expressions in the Psalms that indicate this degree of wonder and amazement in the heart of the writer. References are too many to list or consider, but a meditation

on those sacred writings will serve to impress us with the attitude of heart being expressed in them. The wonder of being able to approach into God's presence is augmented when we consider how great and glorious He is. We read in our Lord's words to the woman in John 4:23-24, that all worship must be in spirit and in truth. In that day, the Jews carried on an empty form of worship that lacked spirit, since they were only maintaining a ritualistic repetition of a Divinely-ordained form of worship but without any deep reality on their part. Paul warns of this condition in 2 Tim. 3:5! The Samaritans occupied themselves with a truthless form of worship that had been expressed in their temple, in full opposition to that of Jerusalem's temple which had been instituted by God's Word and worship should be scriptural and spiritual. The ignorant worshipers on Mars Hill (Acts 17) had erected an altar to a God they didn't know, thus lowering Him to the level of being only one god among many others. Ignorance can deprive God of the true worship that proceeds from hearts that know Him in truth.

Knowing God also produces greater stability in our lives in times of trials and difficulties. Knowing Him produces courage, enabling one to stand against evil. We read in Daniel 11:32, "And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." True confidence in God is related to many of His attributes: His immutability (changelessness) results in certainty that He is still the same in every circumstance. His goodness assures that He desires the best and bestows every blessing that we can receive. His wisdom reminds us that He knows what is best for us even as He plans a course for our lives to take. His power is greater than all other elements that may stand against us and His faithfulness makes a believer more confident that He can be trusted. It was a settled knowledge of God that enabled those mentioned in Heb. 11 to live and persevere as they did through the trials of their lives. That same knowledge of God gave strength and assurance to the apostle

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is a monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to be a help to believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

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Paul in His faithful sufferings. The same could be said of all genuine believers in God throughout the course of history. During later times of trials and opposition, such as occurred during the oppression and domination of the Roman church system, those that knew God remained steadfast and unmovable in their living testimony for Christ. That same knowledge of God will give to us the same ability in our day.

Knowing God gives boldness in testimony before unbelievers. We read of those who would do "exploits" in Dan. 11:32, but what about the early disciples when they were faced with the hostile reactions of the Jewish leaders in Acts 4:13? What was it that caused Peter to stand before the crowd in Acts 2 to fearlessly charge them with the murder of the Lord Jesus? It was the same knowledge that strengthened Abraham to persevere in his pilgrimage, separated from his homeland, moving as a stranger in the land of promise (Heb. 11:8-10), to stand before the sons of Heth at Sarah's grave and proclaim that he was a stranger among them (Gen. 23:4). Those who bore a clear, uncompromising witness before the world were those who recognized their identity with God, Who was over all things and to Whom they owed their highest allegiance. It is that same knowledge that enables God's people to stand in this day of ungodliness and denial of any accountability to God in heaven. They have confidence in the absolute authority of the message since it has been given to them from God (Matt. 28:20, Rom. 1:1-3). They have assurance that it is God's purpose to save sinners by the "foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21) and they rest assured that the Spirit intends to use that message to save souls. They also, knowing God, are sure that there will be reward for faithful service in that day when we give account to Him.

That knowledge will also enable us to have right priorities for our daily living. Knowing His holy character will be seen reflected in those lives. Peter exhorts, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Knowing Him incites the soul to be "followers (imitators) of God as dear children" (Eph. 5:1). Since we will give account to Him, Who knows

all things and before Whom nothing is hidden, we have incentive to order our lives to consciously live before Him of Whom it is said that *"...all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."* (Heb. 4:13). To conclude, recognizing that *"he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."* (Heb. 11:6) is what gives purpose to the life of a child of God. Those who do not exhibit this characteristic manifest a failure to know the God to whom everyone is accountable.

Along the same vein, knowing God will also preserve one from falling under the power of evil influences. We see this distinctly in Joseph's life, when facing moral temptation from Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:7-12). His response to her allurements was *"...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"* His refusal to succumb to her entreaties resulted in loss of his position, his liberty, and his reputation, but he maintained his character and clear conscience. His eye was on God's character and he feared God more than men. This is an example to us along with Daniel in the evil environment of Babylon, who refused to defile himself with the king's food (Dan. 1:8). His was a determination not to do that which he knew was contrary to the will and character of God and to maintain a pure and holy life even in that evil environment. When we think of Enoch in Gen. 5, we think of a man who walked consistently and daily with God for 300 years in a similar world condition that was soon to know God's judgment. His knowledge of God that he gained in that close relationship was what preserved him in that society. So we should learn that if we desire to live as we should in an anti-God world, we need to cultivate an intimate knowledge of God that can only be gained by knowing a personal relationship with Him.

One more result of knowing God is that we will gain a greater appreciation for God's Word even as we appreciate a letter more when we personally know the sender. We note that the writer of Ps. 119 had a deep love for God's Word in its many forms and he multiplies words to describe its value and applicability to the reader's life. Again, in Ps. 19, the psalmist compares the preciousness and value of God's Word to divine revelation in creation so that both are deeply appreciated by the person who

knows the Creator of the universe and the Author of the Word. We know that God's Word is not intended to be an end, in itself, but rather, the means by which the Person Who wrote it reveals Himself, His purposes and principles, and His will to us. And this, so that we receive it and delight in it because we know Him and desire to know Him better. It is a guide to direct our thoughts and lives to a deeper relationship with Him Who has made us and to Whom we are responsible. We need to have Moses' attitude when we read the holy scripture when on the mount he said, *"I beseech thee, show me thy glory."* (Ex. 33:18). If we did, then we would reverence this holy book and spend more time reading, studying, and meditating on its truths so that by it we might know God in a more perfect way. It is possible that a discerning mind will be able to see Christ in all the Scriptures. Our Lord used the Old Testament to reveal truths concerning Himself to the two discouraged believers on the way to Emmaus (Lk. 24:27). If we have a similar attitude, we know that He will do the same for us today.

(continued)

The Righteous Judgment of God met the Condemning Reality of our Sins in Christ on the cross.

Mountains of Scripture: Carmel

Elijah saw the Power

Allan Davidson, North Ireland

"Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel". 1 Kings 18:19

Mount Carmel is a beautiful mountain as it rises majestically from the fertile valley of Asher. Now for three years the land had been scorched by drought and famine.

In ch 17 God said to Elijah, *"go hide thyself by the brook Cherith"*. In ch 18:1 God

said, *"go shew thyself...I will send rain upon the earth"*. The lessons of these chapters are relevant to present day conditions. There is much preaching of the Gospel but little blessing in many parts. Many assemblies continue with faithful ageing saints praying for days of revival and for refreshment. They long for showers of blessing, even a cloud on the horizon *"like a man's hand"* 1 Kings 18:44.

In 1 Kings 18:3 we are introduced to Obadiah, the man who didn't go. Obadiah; *"feared the Lord greatly"*. Yet he was a man of compromise and held high office under Ahab. The fear of man brings unbelief and destroys willingness to be used by God. In Obadiah, we learn about the **caution of expediency**.

In 1 Kings 18:5 we see the features of Ahab, the man who cared for the mules. Ahab was king; the nation was in distress, the land was filled with the high places of Ashteroth and the people worshipped Baal. This was no trouble to Ahab. His main concern was to find grass to feed the horses. Ahab was a 'greenie'. He would murder a man for a vineyard. The great hindrance of men like Ahab is still manifest among us in the **greed of materialism**.

In 1 Kings 18:19, in spite of famine and distress in the nation Jezebel, Ahab's wife, supported these evil prophets and priests. She fed eight hundred and fifty of the prophets of the groves. Balaam was the god of the crops, the god of fertility and abundance. Hence came the judgment of God in famine. Balaam was the religious system of mixture. This mixture of materialism, politics and religion cried away with the Christ of God and put Him on a cross - **conditions of apostasy**.

1 Kings 18:19, *"Gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel"*. In ch 18:21 *"Elijah said ...how long halt ye between two opinions?"* lit. 'Leap ye on two branches' like a bird hopping between two branches. The **conflict of indecision**. The scene was therefore set for a conflict between God and Baal. The sin that causes the drought must be dealt with first. If there is to be the sound of abundance on the mountain top, sin must be judged in the valley. The judgment carried out without mercy (ch 18:40) at the brook Kishon, has the full scriptural authority of Deut 13:8 *"Neither shalt thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare"*.

On the mountain there was A **choice** to be made (18:21) *"And the people answered him not a word"*. Is unbelief our problem?

The **challenge** to be faced (18:22). The odds were 450 to 1! One man with God is a majority. The **call** (18:30). *"Come near unto me"*. In NT language *"come out from among them"*. 2 Cor 6:17.

On the mountain Elijah repaired the altar. Recovery begins at the cross. Elijah set up the twelve stones; he was not prepared to tolerate the division of the Nation. Elijah offered the bullock because God must have His portion first. These are the principles of recovery and blessing.

Carmel is one of the finest mountains in the land, beautiful in aspect towards the sea and the modern Haifa. We sing about Calvary; *"no scene so grand, no spot half so dear"*. The battle appeared to be between one man and the legions of hell; *"He destroyed him that had the power of death"* (Heb. 2:14). If there is no victory on the mountain there is no hope in the land, only drought and death; *"If Christ be not risen....we are of all men most miserable"*. The fire consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the water and the dust (1 Kings 18:38). *"Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death"* Psa 22:15. The conflict continued from midday until the time of the evening sacrifice. *"About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice"* Matt 27:46.

1 Kings 18:42-43 *"Elijah went up to the top of Carmel and he cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees"* The ultimate victory is assured because the enemy has already been defeated. *"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us"* (Rom 8:37).

As the Lord's people, we must be seriously concerned about barrenness. There is a serious drought. We look for showers of blessing, droppings of mercy, even a cloud on the horizon. Some readers have prayed for years for loved ones, for increase, even for the very continuance of the little assembly. We have gone up again and again and there is nothing - 1 Kings 18:43. Do we need to deal with the sin of unbelief and compromise? Materialism we have in abundance but lack power in the Gos-

pel. Let us put our head between our knees and in repentance and dependence let us go again and again.

On the mountain Elijah heard a sound – “*sound of abundance*” (18:41); he saw a sight – “*a cloud like a man’s hand*” (18:44). “*the hand of the Lord was on Elijah*” (18:46). Let us run again, with the chariots of the Gospel that we might see the workings of the Lord’ hand in blessing.

(continued)

**Is it possible that the remark made about Nazareth, might be true of me also?
"There He did many mighty works, because of their unbelief"
(Matt. 13:58).**

Abraham, the Intercessor

Gen. 18

Larry Steers

While considering the great subject of intercession as revealed in the experience of Abraham, there is of necessity truth interspersed, and essential for our day.

Intercession may be defined as an act of prayer, crying earnestly to God on behalf others or as touching prevailing circumstances. The verb ENTUNCHANO is found in Romans 11:2 and describes the pleadings of Elijah against Israel because they “*have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life*” (Rom. 11:3).

This great work of intercession is elevated highly when the Apostle Paul reminds the Roman believers “*The Spirit itself (RV, “himself”) maketh intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered*” (Rom. 8:26). How precious also is the present work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and “*maketh intercession for us*” (Rom. 8:34). Again, as our Great High Priest, “*who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*” (Rom, 8:34). The Hebrew writer reminds us that “*he ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Heb. 7:25).

Because there is a living, exalted, Great High Priest in heaven, it is an unspeakable privilege and responsibility to intercede before the throne of grace. To enter His presence with a burden, and to lay before our God the need of saint and sinner, the gospel and the ministry of the Word of God.

The intercessor must be a worshiper. The altars in Abraham’s life clearly indicate that he was this. These altars, from the first recorded in scripture to the last, indicate an increasing depth of worship and the confidence of his faith in the living God he worshipped. The scriptures record five altars and specific times when the pilgrim bowed in worship.

Altar at Sichem (Gen. 12:6-7) - Altar of Promise

The long journey had taken him from Ur to Haran, and on into the land of promise. At Sichem, God once more promises him a seed and a land (v.7). With the word of promise from God flooding his soul, he built an altar and worshiped the Lord who had appeared unto him (v 7).

Altar near Bethel (Gen. 12:8) Altar of Purpose

Near a mountain. He had arrived on higher ground. God instructed Jacob “*Arise, go up to Bethel*” (Gen. 35:1), to higher ground. Worship is not static, the same expressions repeated week after week. Worship is a continual fresh appreciation of Christ presented to God. Could I illustrate worship with a glass of water brim full. One more drop and it overflows. Worship is a heart overflowing with Christ. One more precious meditation and there is a bursting out of worship which cannot be contained.

Worship is like a barometer. It reveals if you are continually standing on higher ground with an increasing love to Christ.

This altar was not at Bethel, but was near Bethel, the house of God. Bethel was on the West and Hai on the East. Abraham was like a young believer. There is much to learn, but he is making progress. In the spiritual realm there is no marking time, no standing still. The believer is either advancing spiritually or drifting back.

A famine came and Abraham drifted down

to Egypt, type of the world. (Gen. 12:10). A believer involved in the world can make little spiritual progress. He went to Egypt without God and he left without honor.

Altar at Bethel (13:1-3) - Altar of Restoration

"Even to Bethel" where he called on the Name of the Lord. The indication of scripture is that the altar of 12:8 was near Bethel, here he has arrived close to that altar. Now he is at Bethel. We are not specifically told that he built another altar but the two locations would indicate that.

Altar at Hebron (Gen. 13:18) - Altar of Rest

There had been strife between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham. Abram told Lot *"Let there be no strife"* (v 8). Lot was given the choice and looked upon the well watered plains. Abraham was satisfied with the second choice but received the best. He rested free from strife.

Altar on the Mountain (Gen. 22) - Altar of Resurrection

"I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen. 22:5). Lord willing we will look at this precious chapter later.

An intercessor must be a worshiper but must also be living a holy, separated life. Paul could remind Timothy *"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting"* (1 Tim. 2:8). Moses was told to remove the shoes from his feet, for he stood on holy ground in the presence of God. Israel's high priest had no foot wear as he trod the holy precincts of the tabernacle. Joshua was told, *"Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so"* (Joshua 5:15). Feet defiled by the evil world, hands contaminated by sinful activities, and a heart permeated by fleshly lusts can have no ear with heaven. God demands a holy life. The chorus sung with children should touch the life of every saint of God: Be careful little hands, and eyes and feet.

An intercessor not only must live a holy life, but must have a burden. How often prayer

is a matter of fact issue and the mentioning of an endless list of issues with no burden. A burden causes the heart to urgently cry and the eyes to weep. The soul is moved in the presence of God and with the confidence that the living God of heaven is being supplicated.

A burden upon the heart for souls will pack a prayer meeting. How rare today! With such a burden the saints will cry urgently for an old fashioned series of gospel meetings. We seem to be playing on the vast ocean of potential blessing as we pray words without a pressing burden.

Abraham had a burden. He is the friend of God and is the only one so called (2 Chron. 20:7, Isa. 41:8, James 2:23). The purposes of God are revealed to the friend of God and, *"The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do"* (Gen. 18:17)? With the impending judgment of God about to fall on Sodom, and knowing the mercy and deliverance of God richly filling his own experience he cried, *"Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"* (Gen. 18:23). He knows the conditions of Sodom, its wicked moral depravity. He also knows that Lot is a righteous man, but has allowed himself to be defiled by a world which is no different today. In this ungodly scene hundreds of years later Peter reminds us *"just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked ... vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds"* (2 Pet. 2:7-8). Lot made no attempt to leave.

Brethren, this world in 2020 is a Sodom world. All of the immoral activities practiced in Sodom saturate the world we live in. The words of John are so needed to be heard and obeyed today. *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world "* (1 John 2:15). But John is not finished and he does not need volumes to describe the world. He will take us back to the garden and the temptation of Eve by Satan. John remind us that the seeds of the world were sown there. John writes *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"* (1 John 2:16). Young believer, do what Lot could have done but did not - flee the world.

Abraham drew near and stood alone in the

presence of God. While collective gatherings to pray are of inestimable value and scriptural, it is essential to spend much time alone with God. He was conscious of Divine presence. He stands like John on the deserted Isle of Patmos. When John turned to see the voice that spoke with him. Like John, Abraham is free to speak with a spirit of reverence.

Notice his confession to God. *"I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes"* (Gen 18:27). There is no room for pride in the heart of the intercessor in the Divine presence. Dust (APHOR) means clay. His thoughts go back to Gen. 3:19 when God made Adam from the dust. The mighty creator formed man from very lowly material. Dust suggests mortal humanity approaching august deity. Ashes (EPHER), a tree of beauty burned to ashes suggest humility in the presence of God. The emphasis is the Lord's greatness and our nothingness.

The intercessor carefully and reverently approaches Almighty God (El Shaddai). While Lot is not mentioned by name, he is the burden upon the heart of Abraham who knows well the faults and failings of Lot. He had wronged his uncle and been a continual burden, but the intercessor has a spirit of forgiveness.

A longing hope lay upon Abraham. While Lot had a seared conscience (1 Tim.4:2), he may have influenced a few in Sodom.

Abraham knows the holy character of God as he pleads *"That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked"* (Gen. 18:25). From 50 to 45 to 40 to 20 to 10 he prays, confident that *"the judge of all the earth"* (Gen. 18:25) will do right. As the numbers are reduced, it is not because of the failure of Abraham's faith, but his diminishing confidence in Lot's testimony among the Sodomites. They had no respect for Lot.

How essential that believers today have an irreproachable testimony in this world which is no better than sinful, wicked Sodom. There is nothing in this perishing world to help the believer.

Abraham stopped at 10, hoping that at least a few of Lot's family would listen and see something spiritually convicting in Lot's life. In one limited sense Abraham's intercession was answered. Four souls led by the hand of angels

departed from Sodom. One of those souls, perhaps a Sodomite herself, Lot's wife, looked back. That was where her heart and life was. The two daughters of Lot proved by their life out of Sodom that they may not have been righteous.

What a solemn lesson for us. To look back at life and know that I was squandered

Only one life, twill soon be past
Only what's done for Christ will last.

No child of Adam has a right to anything from God save the wages of sin. Justice, apart from grace in Christ' Cross, must allot to every sinner, hell for his wages and portion. If the sinner is to have eternal life, he must have it as a free gift from God. Alas that thousands of sinners who hear the Gospel will not have it, because they are too proud to be saved on God' terms of pure grace!

Dried Away Souls, pt 1

R. E. Surgenor

"But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Num. 11:6).

What a lamentable cry. It was shameful. A disgrace to the name of God. We are looking at approximately 2,500,000 people who, less than one year before, were singing praises to God for their historical deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Now we see them in a state of despair, murmuring against God who delivered them from severe bondage. Their first love and gratitude to God had evaporated, and now they are a disgruntled and unsatisfied people.

You may wonder what this ancient narrative has to do with us today. The truth of the

matter is that even though written over 4,000 years ago, it teaches things relevant for our day. Romans 15:4 tells us this. *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*

Dissecting this event spiritually, we need to understand what these ancient things represent in today’s world. Take Egypt, for example. It is a picture to us of the world, this present age, its adornment. Israel represents the Christians. The manna is a type of Christ, satisfying and sustaining His people, while the Ark is a picture of Christ dwelling with His people. The Passover pictures the Cross. The cloud of the Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit, The mixed multitude represents carnal Christians, false professing Christians, and also non-professing companions.

With this in mind consider the lesson-loaded text for our learning and benefit. *“And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days’ journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days’ journey, to search out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp. And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel. And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them. And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes. And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour*

of bdellium. And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it. Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased” (Num. 10:33–11:10).

Hobab’s Eyes

Prior to this murmuring, God graciously went before them from the mount of the Lord three days journey. Moses had asked his father-in-law, Hobab, to go before and guide them since they were in the area in which Hobab lived. He knew the surroundings. He could be their eyes. Giving this suggestion was weakness on Moses’ part. He was looking to human help and guidance instead of looking to God. However, God intervened and went before them with the ark. It seems that this is the only occasion where the ark went before the congregation. On all other journeys it was to be in the midst of them. Weakness on Moses’ part prompted this arrangement.

Thus, we see the amazing riches of God’s grace to them. Concerned about their comfort, He went before them to search out a resting place in spite of their unbecoming attitude toward Him. It seems that, at every turn, they were ready to murmur against Him and His servant Moses.

What rich, and abounding grace! In spite of their unbecoming attitude, He would find a resting place for them. It is amazing that the mighty GOD, the Creator of the heavens and earth, was going through the wilderness to look out a suitable camping ground for a people who were ready, at every turn in their path, to murmur and rebel against Him! Such patience and love can only be seen in Him who is essentially love.

What a blessed shelter was theirs in the wilderness. He spread His sheltering wing over them to protect them. They lacked nothing, for God was there.

Israel’s Complaint

Now that He has brought them to rest, what do

they do? Instead of resting, they complained. They had lost their appreciation for all that the Lord had done for them. They were unthankful. What a contrast we see in the psalmist. *"give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever"* (Ps. 107:1).

On this occasion, their poor human heart manifested itself. Its tastes and its tendencies had never changed since they left Egypt. The people thirst after the land of Egypt, and longingly look back to its fruits and its fleshpots. If they were in their right mind, they would be remembering the lash of the taskmasters, and the toil of the brick-kilns. However, nothing of those experiences were remembered, only those resources by which Egypt had ministered to the lusts of nature, fulfilling the desires of the flesh.

We can relate all this to our day. Once the believer's heart loses its freshness in the divine life, and the things of heaven become tasteless - beware! When first love declines, as it did in Ephesus (Rev. 2:4), - when the Lord Jesus ceases to fully satisfy our soul, and we no longer give Him first place in every phase of our life, and our prayers lose their luster and become burdensome, and mechanical, it is then that the eye will wander back toward the world, the heart will follow the eye, and the feet will follow the heart.

Such a downward and departing path causes spiritual amnesia. We forget the miseries we experienced in the world. We forget our toil and slavery to Satan. We forget the plagues our sins poured upon us. This is most saddening, and should lead the soul into serious self-judgment.

How distressing to see a once-vibrant soul become dry, and begin to grow weary of the way and of God's provision. How sad for the Lord to hear these words, *"But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes."* God designed the manna to be all-sufficient for their physical need. Do we experience Christ as all-sufficient to meet our every need, or is our soul dried away?

The Loss of Discernment

Souls that are dried away lose the discernment of what is right, or what is wrong. They may

engage in undesirable activities and when questioned say, "what's wrong with it?" Little realizing there's nothing right with it. Notice the language of a dried-away soul and its similarity to Israel's soul.

"You know, variety is the spice of life. You can't be always thinking about Christ and heavenly things. Everybody needs a little recreation." Whether they realize it or not, they are saying that the Lord is not enough for the heart, thus the taking to themselves worldly things.

In such homes, more than likely, the Bible lies neglected, while worthless literature of the world is hungrily devoured. Some even possess a TV to quench their thirst for earthly things. Some go so far as to buy "lie books." Do you know what a "lie book" is? It is a fiction book, for that is what the word fiction means - "something not true, a lie." That's quite a contrast to God's Book, isn't it? The Lord said in His prayer to the Father, *"sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth"* (Jn. 17:17). God's Book strengthens, sanctifies, and supplies those who digest it. On the other hand, fiction books stumble you, and suck you dry of anything for God.

Israel hankered after the food of Egypt. The world in our day has much food of various sorts. It has worthless literature, concerts, various types of shows, exhibitions, pleasure parties, fraternities, lodges, sporting events, and races involving dogs, horses, cars, and humans. The world is fully supplied to cater to every fleshly desire that lives in the bosom of every sinner. God forbid that Christians should seek their pleasure there. Oh that we might be able to truthfully sing like William Cowper:

I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share:
Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasure there.

It was the sight of Thy dear cross
First wean'd my soul from earthly things;
And taught me to esteem as dross
The mirth of fools and pomp of kings.

In every believer dwells the old nature - the flesh, so are we not all in danger of being

dried away? The fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic surround us. We are not of the world, but we certainly are in the world. Satan makes the food savory and palatable, and constantly waves it before our eyes. In order to resist, one must be full of things spiritual. There's an old saying that, "you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink." If the horse is not thirsty, it will not be interested in drinking water since it has previously been satisfied. Christians who are full of Christ and God's food, are not hungry for what the world has to offer. They are like Jeremiah. *"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts"* (Jer. 15:16).

□

Reading, Eating, God's Word

Reading the word of God and eating it are two different things. Eating the word of God means devouring it and making it part of you. This takes purpose of heart and time. Do you have a set time in your day, when you get alone with God and let Him speak to you through His word? If not, you may be on the way to being dried up. Fifteen minutes for breakfast, 20 minutes for lunch, and 30 minutes for supper amounts to 65 minutes employed to satisfy, and fortify your physical body. What about fortifying your soul? Is it asking too much to spend at least the same amount of time with God's word? There is no excuse for not gleaning something fresh from God's word, getting something you have never noticed before, but this takes time.

Our Lord speaks of Himself as living bread, and exhorts His own to eat that bread. *"when they had heard, many of His disciples said, This is a hard saying, who can hear it? ...From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."* (Jn. 6:60-66). Feasting on Christ is another way of being preserved from drying up. The psalmist exclaimed, *"my meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD"* (Ps. 104:34).

Lord Jesus, Thou who only are
The endless source of purest joy,
O come and fill this longing heart;
May naught but Thee my thoughts employ

Teach me on Thee to fix my eye,
For none but Thee can satisfy.

Abiding With Christ

John 1:36-39 shows us a beautiful scene. *"John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour (4pm)."* What a day that must have been. Those words "abode with Him," are so catching. Imagine, a private meeting with the sustainer of the universe! But listen, you have the same privilege in your own dwelling. *"he that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him"* (Jn. 6:56). *"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"* (Jn. 14:23).

The Content Preacher

Years ago at a Bible conference in Iowa, hundreds were present. At noon, dinner was served cafeteria-style in the basement. Preachers were favored to be first in line. An old preacher, named George Gould was seen sitting off to the side with a big smile on his face and his eyes closed. He was a plain and humble man, who never thought much of himself. When he ministered at the breaking of bread, it was usually on some short and simple verse. The effect was that people often wept. Brother Gould had a close relationship with His Lord. Wondering why he wasn't in the serving line, some went over to him and asked what he was doing there. He opened his eyes and sweetly said, "I'm just letting the Lord love me." There was a man that had made his abode with the Lord Jesus.

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