

The Benefits of Good Reading

"The Bible is the enlightener. If men would not be carried about by every wind that blows, let them study this. It will unfold to them the future, and make them wiser than the world... The principles of the apostasy, and indeed of all false religion, are such as result from the thinking of the flesh when left to its own communings" — Elpis Israel, p. 385, 160.

Sadly, we live in an era when the pleasures and rewards which may accrue from reading the written word are almost forgotten. Competence in reading is no longer common. To many, both young and old, concentrated reading is an activity which has become practically superfluous.

It is an age of spoon-fed, instant mind-bending. Most people are unable to sustain concentrated reading habits. The strikingly attractive color images and scenes which pass rapidly before the eyes on television screens and in movie theatres have become far more attractive to most people, than the printed word. Glossy magazines with beautifully produced colored illustrations may be easily and lazily flipped through, with the "message" being read with little effort. And in this busy age with so much leisure time and so many enjoyable attractions available, the idea of sitting down with a good book does not generally have the appeal it once did.

A wise, experienced, older brother once observed: "To possess a joyous feeling of pleasure by becoming engrossed in the wonders of the printed word, is a great asset to a Christadelphian; for without our books — and, above all, the Book of Books — we are surely utterly bereft".

Examples of the Past

In earlier generations, schooling was unsophisticated and generally simple. Teachers drummed into pupils the "3 R's" — *Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithma-*

tic. Children were taught to read, learn and understand. We have fond memories from our youth, of hearing the Scriptures read aloud by older brethren who had left school at such tender ages as 12 or 13 years old. Yet their fluency and ability to convey to their listeners an intelligent comprehension of the written word was a delight to experience. For them, reading was a vital part of their daily life.

Lack of interest in reading and deficiencies in reading skills, are largely the result of faults in the education system; and, perhaps in some quarters, there has been a failure on the part of parents to encourage their children to learn to read with reasonable proficiency.

Shortcomings and inaptitude in relation to reading, provide an unfortunate and disadvantageous climate for the spiritual development of a Christadelphian.

We must read. If we have problems with reading (other than for health or age), such weaknesses must be countered. We cannot afford *not* to read — and more than that: we must be regular, consistent, ardent readers. Apart from a studious dedication to the Truth, we will find it difficult to understand the Truth properly, and hence, to develop the qualities of Godliness in our lives.

Instructions in the Word

The Scriptures make this quite clear. The Master, quoting from the circumstances of Israel's journeying in

the wilderness when Yahweh "suffered them to hunger" (apart only from the food He provided for them), taught his disciples: "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Yahweh doth man live". Through the means of His Word, Yahweh desired to test His people: to "humble... prove... and to know what was in their heart" (Deut. 8:2-3; cp. Matt. 4:4).

How may one "live" by "every word" which God has recorded, if there is a neglecting of the constant, habitual *reading* or hearing of the Word, from which is drawn necessary spiritual food? We cannot. There is no other way. Without a regular intake of the Word of Life, the "inner man" will suffer increasing spiritual malnutrition which may ultimately become fatal unless the deficiency is remedied.

Therefore Christadelphians must become readers. In his introduction to *The Bible Companion* (daily reading charts), Bro. Roberts wrote: "Salvation depends upon the assimilation of the mind to the Divine ideas, principles and affections, exhibited in the Scriptures... The infallible advice then to every man and woman anxious about their salvation is: READ THE SCRIPTURES DAILY. It is only in proportion as this is done, that success may be looked for..." A statement from the Word itself should be familiar: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth."

Give Attention to Reading

Where would the first century ecclesias have been without such inspired advice? Yet in the same epistle, Paul warned: "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (Weymouth: "will not tolerate wholesome instruction" - 2 Tim. 4:3). Consider similar instruction throughout the Word: Deut. 6:4-7; 17:19; Josh. 1:8; Psa. 1:1-2; 119:97, 105, 130; Acts 6:4; 17:10-11.

In reading the Word of God sound guidance from wise and knowledgeable brethren should be sought. The apostles

encouraged the development of such a disposition: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who toil in discourse and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17 AV/Roth.). What they say must be compared faithfully with the Word of God, to ascertain beyond doubt that their teaching is harmonious with the "wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "the doctrine which is according to Godliness". Only the spiritually careless or naive will give credence to those who are spiritually "perverse" or of a "corrupt mind", and "destitute of the Truth" (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Seeking Assistance from Others

Throughout the years, few would have found the Truth without the guidance of faithful laborers in the service of the Deity. One well-known conversational exchange in Scripture illustrates this:

"Understandest what thou readest?"

"How can I, except some man should guide me?"

Yahweh will provide for the spiritual needs of good and honest hearts: "Good and upright is Yahweh; therefore will He *teach* sinners in the way. The meek will He *guide* in judgment: and the meek will He *teach His way*" (Psa. 25:6-9). And, in the providence of His mercy, God continues to provide faithful servants to assist others to understand "His way": "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). Although these words relate to the Apostolic commission, it still follows that all Christ's faithful servants have a responsibility to follow that example (1 Tim. 4:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:2, etc).

Value of Pioneer Works

For this reason, *Logos* magazine was commenced 55 years ago to provide a continuing voice for the writings of the pioneers of the Christadelphian community. And not without just cause. Amongst the vast array of non-inspired Biblical literature which has been heaped upon the world since apostolic

times, we believe that books such as *Elpis Israel*, *Eureka*, *Phanerosis*, etc., stand peerless — not merely because of the excellence of the expositions contained therein, but because they are the works of uninspired men who pioneered the revival of the Truth in the latter days. The value of these books remains unsurpassed, and *Logos* is committed to maintaining them always available.

Christadelphians must become readers — regular, thoughtful, contemplative readers of God's Word, daily.

Then, our reading priority should be the works of the pioneers. Foremost amongst these should be *Elpis Israel*. Why? Because it is the most comprehensive exposition of fundamental Bible Truth we have. We should read and re-read it. It is essential to our salvation that we remain convinced of the basic principles upon which all Divine revelation has been disclosed. These are the rudiments upon which the Brotherhood was founded. They were accepted and affirmed as "The Truth" — and we must ensure that these foundations remain inviolate; uncorrupted by the "philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men" (Col. 2:8).

How to Benefit from *Elpis Israel*

To profit from *Elpis Israel* we must first do the obvious: read the book, including the "Author's Preface". Where some sections prove difficult, we have a choice: either continue to read thoughtfully, absorbing as much as possible; or else, pause and re-read paragraphs or pages which may appear formidable. When reading the book for the first time, we recommend the former; but when re-reading for a second time or more, we suggest the latter approach.

Never give up in your attempt to understand the exposition. With Bible close at hand to consult every Scriptural reference alluded to, there remains only one word to remember: *Persevere!*

The second means whereby the book will prove beneficial, is to use it as a reference work. One of the most valuable sections of *Elpis Israel* is the Index at the end of the volume. The Index is

both alphabetical and quotational — it is possible to look up particular areas of reference, or to turn to expositions of Scriptural verses.

Using and Searching

Consider an example in relation to the alphabetical index. Perhaps we are studying the subject, "The tree of life" — a most interesting and absorbing study for any occasion! Under the word "tree" in the index you will discover that there are references to some aspect of the tree of life on pages 70, 83 and 155. In addition, there are pages wherein other aspects of the subject are considered. Upon this subject, as with so many others, *Elpis Israel* is a veritable hive of information!

But that is not the end of the matter so far as *Elpis Israel* is concerned. You can look up your Concordance and note every Scriptural reference to "the tree of life", and then turn to the Index of Quotations in *Elpis Israel* to seek the pages where those references are expounded. This usage of the book is both informative and absorbing to the searching mind.

When faced with a question upon a particular subject or passage of Scripture, use both alphabetical and Scriptural indexes in this manner. You will find it most rewarding to use your *Elpis Israel* as a reference work, to which constant appeal may be made.

The third advantage of the book as an aid to study and better understanding, is to search through the chapter headings which introduce the book, where the three-fold division of the book is given. You may, for example, wish to engage upon a study concerning the lives of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Check the chapter headings (and summaries beneath) to find that the section you require will be in Part Second, Chapters Two and Three. Simple? Well, it is certainly not difficult, and can become very exciting. And the more we pursue these methods, the easier it will become to discover the ways in which *Elpis Israel* can become a close friend, and an invaluable aid to Bible study.

— John Ullman.