

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Strange Marching Orders *(The Pastor's Letter March 1978)*

Dear Friends,

Undoubtedly one of the strangest sets of "Marching Orders" that an army ever received was the one delivered by the Lord to the armies of the children of Israel under the command of their leader, Joshua as they stood outside the walled city of Jericho. "Now Jericho was straitly shut up," it says in the 6th chapter of the Book of Joshua, "... none went out, and none came in." Against that impregnable fortress the Lord has his strategy all mapped out, and that strategy He conveyed to Joshua to pass on to the soldiers of the Israelite people.

They were to observe many and varied details - culminating in this: when they would have carried the Ark of the covenant of the Lord round and round the walls of that city for a whole week, then, they were to "shout with a great shout," and the Lord's assurance was that the walls of that city would then fall down flat. It was a strange strategy, and a strange set of marching orders, surely; and yet, there is hardly a more graphic illustration on the pages of the Old Testament to teach us the truth of Paul's words that "the weapons" of the Church of Christ in all her battles on the face of this earth are not "carnal" weapons, but "spiritual" weapons such as the Lord supplies and such as the Lord sends us forth with into the fray to do His bidding.

The Lord, of course, was very gracious in the giving of that strange means of victory that He gave into the hands of the Israelites that day; for, of course, the Lord is ever gracious

in this kind of thing. The very first thing that He does with Joshua is this. He gives him an assurance of the victory in that war for Canaan that now lies before that people. "And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, *I* have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." What Field Marshall wouldn't like to be able to give an assurance like that before a battle! He might endeavour to speculate on the outcome and give some measure of encouragement or hope that the outcome will be in his army's favour, but that is a different thing from what the Lord here does for Joshua and Israel. "*See*," says the Lord; that is, "dwell on what I am now telling you;" meditate on it; consider it well. And there is no greater encouragement for us to use only those "spiritual" weapons prescribed by the Lord for our good fight of faith than the ample consideration that it is they that will eventually bring the assured victory that the Lord ever speaks of.

The Lord's words to Joshua there are also to "subdue" those people of old, and to cause them to consider also that the victory is the Lord's" - hence the strange-ness of the orders here given. "See," says the Lord, "*I* have given into thine hands Jericho ..." and so, with the assurance of victory there goes the call to responsibility to employ the means that the Lord will then prescribe, for *His* is the warfare as well as the victory at the end - "The battle is the Lord's." And so, you find those Israelites of old, absolutely taking up every apparently strange detail of those strange orders given to them outside that city that was "straitly shut up" against them. They deploy the given number of priests, they take up the required positions, they use the kind of trumpets and horns that the Lord speaks about, and then, after they begin that march - round and round that city's wall, day after day after day, ever

looking with anticipation to that last and final day when they are to "shout with a great shout", for, in that way, the Lord has told them, the walls will fall down flat.

The day that we live in is one that doesn't go much on total obedience to the Lord's word. Absolute standards and definitive theology are in short supply in the churches of Christ today. The great touchstone in all these things seems to be the apparent "results" of anything that the church engages in; therefore, the means and methods employed are judged worthy of employment according to that apparent end-result. How well we ought to read the first chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah; as far as an outward success formula goes, Israel had seemingly struck it rich. The shrine at Bethel was crammed with worshippers. The sacrifices were being offered non-stop at the hands of the priests, and the coffers were full. It might seem strange that into that situation the Lord should come and speak one of the most sobering words in the prophecy of Isaiah: "Who hath required this at your hands?" The Lord required the downfall of the city of Jericho, but He required it in His way - the way that would prove His people to be the people that He required them to be.

Arthur Pink has a lovely passage in his *Gleanings in Joshua*; he visualises the churches of our day being confronted with this city of Jericho and how best to occupy it. They would hold a council of war, he says, and one would propose ladders in order to scale the walls, another would be all for digging a tunnel under the walls, while another would probably suggest at battering ram to hammer the doors to gain an entrance, as though the Lord hadn't already given His marching orders for us and to us.

The soldiers of Israel might have felt exactly the same; for how easy to baulk at such a suggestion as this - to march around the walls of a city without laying one blade of steel upon it! But they did it! That's the great thing; they did it. Those hardened campaigners of Israel's army bowed their brawny necks to what the Lord directed, and they took on a mode of warfare that probably cut their carnal courage and prowess apart. But for that, my friends, the Lord wrote down their names in His everlasting word, for, says Paul to the Hebrews, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." "By faith" they did what the Lord told them to do. And surely that is a better word than the Lord saying, "Who asked you to do this!" "Who hath required this at your hands!"

So then, may we take the principles of conduct involved in that battle-scene that day outside those walls of Jericho. This old world against which we battle from day-to-day certainly seems so often to be "straitly shut up" against us, and how tempting it is to look for some form of battering-ram or some apparently glistening war-head in an effort to effect a breach.

By all means, let us search out those things effective to the glory of our God in all this fight, but by no means ought we to ever set aside the great over-ruling principle involved - "The weapons of our warfare *are not* carnal, but spiritual..." To fight with carnal weapons puts the church in danger of gaining the carnal spoils of what was really a carnal war that she had engaged herself in.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

The Minor Prophets



The Minor Prophets include those from Hosea to Malachi. They are so called, not because of their lesser importance, but because of the comparative smallness of their writings - the whole twelve not equalling in extent either of the first three of the greater Prophets. They are placed in their chronological order, with, perhaps, the exception of Jonah, whom some believe to be the earliest of all the prophets.

Of the twelve, three - Hosea, Amos, and Jonah - belong to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the remaining nine to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The period over which their prophecies extended was from around 810-400 B.C. the historical information concerning them is nearly all gathered from their several writings. These we will now look at.

Hosea: -

Hosea - or, Hoshea - the son of Beer, is supposed to have prophesied for a period of fifty-nine years, or from B.C. 784 to B.C. 725. This would have covered the period from the reign of Jeroboam II to the last king of Israel, and he would probably have died before the destruction of the northern kingdom.

The burden of his prophecies was the idolatrous practices of the people. Most commentators reckon him the most obscure of all the prophets, on account of the spasmodic brevity of his style. He is, however, a distinctly Messianic prophet, and is referred to by Paul as predicting the gathering in of the Gentiles. Romans chapter 9 verse 25, "As he saith also in Hosea ..."

Joel: -

Joel, the son of Pethuel, is supposed to have prophesied during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, and was contemporary with Hosea, who was prophesying in the northern kingdom of Israel. His prophecies centre around a plague of locusts which was then about to afflict the land. In the light of this, the people are called upon to weep and repent.

Joel is remarkable as having predicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and is referred to by Peter on that occasion - "... this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh..." (Acts chapter 2 verses 16 forward).

Amos: -

Amos was a native of Tekoah, a city of Judah, about six miles from Bethlehem. He was the son of a herdsman and was himself a gatherer of sycamore fruit, and not brought up in the "schools of the prophets." Though belonging to the southern kingdom of Judah, his prophecies are directed against Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II when that kingdom was enjoying an exceptional period of prosperity. He is also the messenger of judgment to the Syrians, Edomites, Moabites, and the city of Tyre. The object of his prophetic warnings was the calf-worship at Dan and Bethel, introduced by Jeroboam I, and which, in the prophet's time had begun to corrupt the people of Judah.

As the prophecy of Hosea was used by Paul, the prophecy of Amos was taken up by James at the Council of Jerusalem to

display the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church. When Paul and Peter have related their own experiences concerning the salvation the Gentiles under their ministry and without the necessity of Jewish circumcision, the apostle James then turns to the prophecy of Amos to verify what they said from the Word of God. "And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return, and build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down" (Acts chapter 15 verses 15 forward)

Obadiah: -

Obadiah the prophet is one of twelve men of that name in the Old Testament. The name means "Servant of Jehovah," and the prophecy of Obadiah forms the shortest book in the Old Testament. The burden of the words of Obadiah is the judgment that will befall Edom on account of Edom's failure to come to Israel's rescue in the days of "calamity." At Israel's "restoration" Edom and all the nations will be judged, and in this sense, the message of Obadiah is prophetic of the final judgment at the end and the final establishment of God's eternal kingdom forever.

Jonah: -

Jonah, the son of Amittai, was a native of Gathhepher and is generally held to be the first of the prophets. He is principally remarkable as being the only known prophet who was sent to a heathen nation, thereby predicting the reception of the Gentiles into the Church of Christ, and being thus the unconscious means of foreshadowing the universal mercy of God. In attempting to evade his mission, he was cast into the sea and swallowed by the great fish for three days before his

recovery. This incident is referred to by our Lord as illustrative of His own burial and resurrection.

A Plain and Precious Parable.

The following incident is related by Mrs Charles Spurgeon, who was a great sufferer for more than a quarter of a century.

At the close of a dark and gloomy day, I lay resting on my couch as the deeper night drew on; and though all was bright within my cosy room, some of the external darkness seemed to have entered into my soul and obscured its spiritual vision. Vainly I tried to see the hand which I knew held mine and guided my fog-enveloped feet along a steep and slippery path of suffering. In sorrow of heart, I asked, "Why does the Lord thus deal with His child? Why does He so often send sharp and bitter pain to visit me? Why does He permit lingering weakness to hinder the sweet service I long to render to His poor servants?" these fretful questions were quickly answered, and though a strange language; no interpreter was needed except the conscious whisper of my heart.

For a while silence reigned in the little room, broken only by the crackling of the oak log burning in the fireplace. Suddenly I heard a sweet, soft sound; a little clear musical note, like the tender trill of a robin beneath my window. "What can it be? Surely no bird can be singing out there at this time of the year and night." Again came the faint, plaintive notes, so sweet, so melodious, yet mysterious enough to provoke our wonder. My friend exclaimed, "it comes from the log on the fire!" the fire was letting loose the imprisoned music from the old oak's inmost heart! Perhaps he had garnered up this song in the



days when all was well with him; when birds twittered merrily on his branches, and the soft sunlight flocked his tender leaves with gold. But he had grown old since then, and hardened; ring, after ring of knotty growth had sealed up the long-forgotten melody, until the fierce tongues of the flames came to consume his callousness, and the

vehement heat of the fire wrung from him at once a song and a sacrifice. "Ah," thought I, "when the fire of affliction draws songs of praise from us, then indeed we are purified, and our God is glorified!"

Perhaps some of us are like this old oak log: cold, hard, insensible. We should give forth no melodious sounds, were it not for the fire that kindles around us, and releases notes of trust in Him, and cheerful compliance with His will. As I mused the fire burned, and my soul found sweet comfort in the parable so strangely set forth before me.

Singing in the fire! Yes, God helping us, if that is the only way to get harmony out of these hard apathetic hearts, let the furnace be heated seven times hotter than before.

John Ploughman Says ...



He who boasts of being perfect is perfect in folly. I have been a good deal up and down in the world, and I never did see either a perfect horse or a perfect man. You cannot get

white flour out of a coal sack, nor perfection out of human nature; he who looks for it had better look for sugar in the sea. Every head has a soft place in it, and every heart has its black drop. If we would always recollect that we live among men who are imperfect, we should not be in such a fever when we find out our friends' failings; what's rotten will rend, and cracked pots will leak. Blessed is he who expects nothing of poor flesh and blood for he shall never be disappointed. The best men are men at the best, and the best wax will melt.

Some people like rows - I don't envy their choice; I'd rather walk ten miles to get out of a dispute than half-a-mile to get into one. Solomon says, "Leave off strife before it be meddled with;" which is much the same as saying, "Leave off before you begin." When you see a mad dog, don't argue with him unless you are sure of your logic; better get out of his way, and if anybody calls you a coward, you need not call him a fool. Meddlers are sure to hurt their own characters: if you scrub other people's pigs, you will soon need scrubbing yourself. Other men's imperfections show us our imperfections, for one sheep is much like another. We ought to use our neighbours as looking glasses to see our own in and mend in ourselves what we see in them. I have no patience with those who poke their noses into every man's house to smell out his faults and put on magnifying glasses to discover their neighbour's flaws. What we wish to see, or think we see. Faults are always thick where love is thin.

As for our own faults, it would take a large slate to hold the account of them; but, thank God, we know where to take them, and how to get the better of them. With all our faults God loves us still if we are trusting in His Son; therefore, let us not be downhearted, but hope to live and learn, and do

some good service before we die. Though the cart creaks, it will get home with its load. There's no use in lying down and doing nothing because we cannot do everything as we should like. Faults or no faults ploughing must be done, and imperfect people must do it too, or there will be no harvest next year. Bad ploughman, as John may be, the angels won't do his work for him, and so he is off to do it himself. Go along, Violet! Gee Woa! Depper!"

(From "John Ploughman's Talk," by C. H. Spurgeon.)

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

In a previous letter, I told you the story about Solomon. Remember how the Queen of Sheba came all those miles to see him and find out more about his great wisdom? Well, in this letter, we are going to have a story about that very thing.

Solomon, when he became king, was very worried. Solomon did not really know how to rule his people wisely. He remembered that God had helped his father, King David, and so, he knew that he needed God's help too. He spent one whole day praying to God, and even when he went to bed, he was still praying for God's help.

While he was sleeping, Solomon had a wonderful dream. He saw God standing near-by. God said, "I will give you what

you ask of me." Solomon at once asked God for what he felt he needed most. He said, "O Lord my God, you were with David, my father; you taught him how to follow your ways; you gave him a son to be king in his place; you have let me follow my father as king, but I don't know how to be king. I can't even count my people they are so many. Please give me *an understanding heart*. Then I will be able to rule the people, and be able to judge the good from the bad."

God was very pleased with Solomon's prayer. He said, "Because you have asked for wisdom instead of such things as riches, or power, or a long life, I will give you what you ask. No king in all the land will be as wise as you."

When Solomon woke up, he knew he had been dreaming, but Solomon also knew that God had spoken to him while he slept. From that time on, Solomon ruled his people wisely, and the people knew that God had given him great understanding.

Well, boys and girls, do you think you would have asked God for the same thing? When we pray to God, we can ask God for many things, but there are certain things that God is really pleased to hear from us. It would be good for each of us to ask God for an understanding heart, like Solomon. Then, using the means that God has given us, especially His Word the Bible, we can have a sure guide to show us all God's great promises.

Love,
Mrs Seaton.

Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 81



Verse 1. "Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob." How thankful we should be to the Lord if He has caused our lot to fall in an age or place where we can freely lift up our voices in praise to His Name. How often the Church of God has passed through "silent" periods in her earthly pilgrimage; times when she has had to worship in whispers, or where she could only sing, knowing that the vastness of some moor or mountainside would distil her psalm of praise into the ear of the Almighty Himself and away from the ears of those who sought her life. Even at this present time, there are those parts of the world where the singing of a song of Zion must not break the night air, lest the devil's handymen break-in on top of her. Like Peter in the house of the mother of John Mark, following his release from prison, how many have to "beckon with the hand to hold their peace" when they would, no doubt, love to sing out in praises to their God. How thankful, then, we should be who know no such restrictions, and how unrestricted we should learn to become in singing "aloud" unto the God of our salvation. It is not melodious niceness from the mouth that God requires, but that wholesome praise of the heart that finds vent in making "a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob."

Verse 3. "Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day." On the first day of the seventh month, when the new moon appeared from behind the clouds that had been covering it, the Feast of

Trumpets was observed in the land of Israel - "It shall be a day of the blowing of trumpets to you." The joy of the feast was a memorial of the joy of creation, and also a memorial of the giving of the Law at Sinai when the trumpet of the Lord sounded out. It also set forth the blowing of the gospel trumpet, when the church looked forth as the morning "clear as the moon" following on from the darkness of the cross of Christ. And it was a solemn pointer to that day when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and summons all men before the face of their God, some going off into damnation and some into salvation for all eternity.

Verse 5. "I hear a language that I understood not." Not that God is in any way "limited" in his understanding, but to teach us the truth that there are only certain words that He will lend His ear to. For example, the words of self-righteousness, He will in no way regard, but, "God be merciful to me a sinner" will always find a ready access.

Verse 9. "There shall no strange God be in thee ..." No alien god was to be tolerated in Israel's tents. Where false gods are, their worship is sure to follow. Man is so desperate an idolator that the image is always a strong temptation. No other God had done anything for the Jews, and therefore, they had no reason to pay homage to any other. To us, the same argument will apply. We owe all to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the world, the flesh, and the devil - none of these have been of any service to us; they are aliens, foreigners, enemies, and it is not for us to bow down before them.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Verse 10. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

consider the import of the promise: "Open thy mouth wide, *and I will fill it.*" "ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." If we open our mouths to God in prayer, he will fill them more and more with suitable petitions and argument. When we attempt to open the mouth, God will open it still wider. Thus, He dealt with Abraham when he interceded for Sodom: the longer he prayed, the more submissive and the more importunate he became. By praying, we increase our ability to pray. Open thy mouth wide then, O Christian; stretch out thy desires to the uttermost, grasp heaven and earth in thy boundless wishes, and believe there is enough in God to afford thee full satisfaction. Not only come, but come with boldness to the throne of grace: it is erected for sinners, for the chief of sinners. Come to it then, and wait at it, till you obtain mercy and find strength to help in time of need. Those who expect most from God are likely to receive the most.

Benjamin Beddome.

Verse 11. "My people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would have none of me."

Remember, sinner, that if you lose heaven (which God forbid) the Lord can wash his hands over your head, and clear himself of your blood: your damnation will be laid at your own door, for you put eternal life from you, whatever your lying lips utter to the contrary. When the jury shall sit in judgment on your murdered soul, you will be found guilty of your own damnation. No one loses God, but he that is willing to part with him.

William Gurnall