

Biblical Meditation—a Forgotten Art

In this hectic world of today, people are truly running to and fro, as the Bible says, and knowledge is increasing at a rapid pace (Dan. 12:4). Seldom do we find the time to sit back, relax, and *think* about life, about ourselves, and about what really matters. After all, there is more to life than what we see. We are called pilgrims in the Bible, and as such, we should focus, first and foremost, on the destiny of our pilgrimage.

When you decide to embark on a journey, you first consider carefully what you need in order to reach your destination. If your company transfers you to another state or country, you gather as much information as possible about your new home and you contemplate what needs to be accomplished before your departure. Even though you may be distracted at times with seemingly more important matters, you will still have your journey firmly in mind.

The same is true—even more so—with our journey through life. Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? What do we need to *do* in order to reach our final destination? When we ask ourselves these and other questions, we are engaged in the **biblical art of meditation** without perhaps even realizing it. You see, meditation means **to think about, to consider, to evaluate, with the goal of getting answers to important questions**. Biblical meditation then is *directed towards God* (cf. Psalm 7:1), His Way, what He has created and why. And only God can give us the answers to life's most perplexing questions. Let's take a closer look then at what God has to say about the importance of biblical meditation, what should be the focus of our meditation and what results we can expect when we take the time to engage in proper biblical meditation.

Proper Biblical Meditation

Biblical meditation is *meaningful*. It is not senseless repetitions of mystical phrases. It is a conscious effort to better *understand* the character of our Creator and the purpose of human life. David meditated on God and His Word and His Creation. He shared many of

his thoughts with us in the Book of Psalms. For example, we read in Psalm 8:3: "When I *consider* [think about, meditate on] Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit [care for] him?"

David meditated on the purpose of human life, while also considering the beauty and magnificence of the universe which, as he knew, had been brought into existence by the great Creator God. David understood that if God could design and form billions of galaxies and nebulae with innumerable stars and suns, and, at the same time care for us as individuals, then the creation of man *had* to have a purpose beyond mere physical temporary existence.

David also understood that meditation can be used in a wrong way. If meditation is focused on self or is nothing more than meaningless repetitions, then it is not acceptable to God. That is why David says in Psalm 104:34: "May my *meditation* be sweet to Him." He asks God, in Psalm 5:1, to consider or accept his *meditation*. He pleads with God, in Psalm 64:1, to hear his voice *in his meditation*, and he prays in Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth and the *meditation of my heart* be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord."

How can we be certain that our heart and our meditation is acceptable to God? Let's notice something about the heart of man in Proverbs 23:7: "As he *thinks in his heart*, so is he." So if our heart is evil and filled with human desires that are contrary to God's will, then the meditation of our heart will not be pleasing to God.

We need to have a good and righteous heart. David tells us in Psalm 37:30-31, that "the mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is *in his heart*; none of his steps shall slide." Now, the law of God does not automatically fill the heart of a person. So how can we become righteous and wise? God's Holy Spirit must *dwell in us* in order to fill us with Godly wisdom. But even then, we must cooperate

and let God's Word find room in our hearts. We must recognize God's Word, and we must reject ungodly ideas, principles and concepts. And here is where biblical meditation comes in.

A person who is guided by God's Holy Spirit will meditate on God and His Word. He will try to understand God's way of life and how to better apply it each day. David tells us that he diligently meditated on God's Word so that he could better comprehend the deep, and sometimes hidden, meaning associated with the scriptures. Many people read through the Bible without ever grasping the spiritual food contained therein. Part of the reason is that they don't *take the time to meditate* about what they read.

David's attitude, though, was quite different. He saw to it that his heart would be *filled* with God's Word. He tells us: "Your word I have *hidden in my heart*, that I might not sin against You." (Psalm 119:11). And: "I have *inclined my heart* to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end." (Psalm 119:112). But in order to do so, he needed to deeply think about—meditate on—the spiritual meaning of God's Word. He says in verse 15: "I will *meditate* on Your precepts, and *contemplate* Your ways."

Think (Meditate) Before You Act

David analyzed human conduct on the basis of God's Word. He wanted to understand how a particular human reaction would square with God's divine instruction. He knew, for example, that a hot temper can lead to foolish conduct. So he cautions us to *think* first, before we act, *consider* our ways based on God's law. Notice David's admonition in Psalm 4:4: "Be angry [or agitated], and do not sin. *Meditate* within your heart *on your bed*, and be still. Selah."

Sometimes, we might burn with righteous indignation over the evil and wicked conduct of others. Still, though, we must be in control of our anger, lest we be tempted to react sinfully ourselves. So, David cautions us to meditate about the situation on our bed, when we have the time and the quiet surroundings to do so. Rather than raging foolishly, we are admonished to be still, considering that God is the Judge of us all

and that He will revenge. And he places the word "Selah" behind this statement, meaning "give this some thought, think about it, consider it." In effect, David tells us to *think* about the fact that we are to *think first* before we act or react.

Continuing with Psalm 119:23-24: "Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant *meditates* on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors." In the face of defamation, David *meditated on God's Statutes*. He wanted to understand what God had to say about how to behave in such a situation. And more often than not, the answer is simply, to *leave it in God's hands*. Notice David's evaluation in Psalm 9:16: "The Lord is known by the judgment He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." And how did David know that? The very next words tell us: "*Meditation. Selah.*" David *meditated* about these perplexing questions, and he is encouraging us to take the *time to do the same*, *considering what God had let him find out*.

When he found himself in a difficult situation, he turned to God's Law. Notice Psalm 119:78: "Let the proud be ashamed, for they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; but I will *meditate* on Your precepts." He left it to God, all the while thinking about God's directions in this situation. And he knew that the time would come when God *would* intervene. And *then* people would consider the terror of God (Isaiah 33:18), when His judgments would go out over all the earth. But that would be God's doing, in His time.

David understood, too, that God would be with the merciful, the humble, the blameless and the pure, while "dealing with" the devious and proud (cf. Psalm 18:25-27). We, too, must *meditate* on and comprehend this reality. The Bible is filled with admonitions to replace the *thoughts* of pride with humility (cf. Matt. 3:9; Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 8:2; 10:12; 14:37; Gal. 6:3). We must *consider* or *meditate* about our approach when we correct another person, lest we become proud and self-righteous in our own eyes (Gal. 6:1). David meditated on the statutes and precepts of God and how to apply them in difficult situations, and he encourages us to do likewise—to *think deeply* about them and to

correctly apply them. David's wisdom came from God granting his desire to deeply understand the spiritual meaning of God's Law, His Commandments and Testimonies. David prayed in Psalm 119:18: "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law."

When to Meditate

When is the best time to meditate? The Bible gives many instances of meditation in the night. For example, in Gen. 24:63 we read that Isaac, while undoubtedly waiting for the return of his father's servant who had been sent out to find a bride for him, "went out to meditate in the field *in the evening*." Others followed Isaac's example to choose a time at the end of the day, when the daily chores and activities have settled down, and the stress of the day had somewhat ceased, to reflect on important matters.

In many of David's psalms, we are introduced to his habit of meditating in the night. While he was still a shepherd out in the field and taking care of his flock, he had ample opportunity to deeply think about God's Word. Notice Psalm 63:6: "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You *in the night* watches." Notice, too, Psalm 119:148: "My eyes are awake through *the night* watches, that I may meditate on Your word."

In addition, David admonishes us to meditate during the day. We read in Psalm 119:97-99: "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my *meditation all the day*. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they [God's commandments] are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation."

Although the most productive time of meditation for David was probably in the quiet moments of early morning, late evening or at night, David was diligent to consider God's laws *throughout the day* whenever he needed guidance and direction. His attitude was so much different from that of many people today who don't believe the Bible or who misunderstand it. David did not doubt that God's Word stands (cf. Psalm 119:152) and He was convinced of the necessity to keep it. He exclaimed, "Your word is very pure. Therefore Your servant loves it." (Psalm

119:140). In fact, he emphasized in Psalm 12:6: "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." He regarded God's law as *perfect* and that they *had* to be kept. He fully realized that a person is blessed by God whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who *meditates* on God's Law *day and night*. (Psalm 1:1-2).

Meditation is Commanded

In the Psalm we just read, David echoes a *commandment* given directly by God to Joshua. We read in Joshua 1:8: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate* in it *day and night*, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it."

Yes, meditation is more than just a valuable tool for our Christian life. Just as God *com-mands* us to keep His Law, He also *com-mands* us to *meditate on His Law*. As a Christian, we must obey this command and meditate on, that is, think about, God's Word all the time. Why? So that we *can* keep it and so that we can better understand *how* to keep it. And what will be the result? The last part of Joshua 1:8 reads: "For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

Some have foolishly rejected the fact that keeping God's Word actually brings prosperity and success, even on a physical level. But here is a *promise* that it will. Those who don't agree should perhaps begin to *meditate* on the deep meaning of the words of God to His servant Joshua. The opposite is true as well. When things go wrong *continually* in our lives, then we must *stand still and meditate, contemplate, think about* why this is happening, looking for answers. And if we seek answers *from God*, God will grant them to us (cf. Haggai 1:5-7).

Other servants of God understood, too, that Biblical or Godly meditation is absolutely necessary for a clear comprehension of God's Word, His Promises, and our ultimate destiny. The sons of Korah, who survived the destruction of their father because they had no part in his rebellion against God, tell us in Psalm 49:3: "My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the

meditation of my heart shall give understanding."

Our meditation must not be selfish and introverted, but rather it must be directed toward God and His Will. Notice what Asaph says in Psalm 77:6: "I call to remembrance my song in the night; I *meditate within my heart*, and my spirit makes diligent search."

What did his spirit search for? It searched to comprehend what God had accomplished in the past, and what He will accomplish in the future. Read verses 11-12: "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds."

David expresses the same thought in Psalm 143:5: "I remember the days of old; I *meditate on all Your works*; I muse [or ponder] on the works of Your hands." God's servants meditate on God and His Works; that is, how God deals with people and situations. And in doing so, they learn *from Him* how to become more *like Him*. We are encouraged throughout the Bible to consider, to meditate on, to think deeply about, the works of God to give us great comfort in times of need and despair.

When studying the prophecies of the Bible, we can meditate on what God *will do* in the near future. We can understand *now* what others will realize later. Note Isaiah 41:17-20: "The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together, *that they may see and know and consider and understand together*, [biblical meditation leads to Godly understanding] *that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.*"

Meditating on the works of God in the past, at the present and in the future can give us encouragement and hope in trials. Even after the people had sinned by demanding a king, Samuel told them: "I will teach you the good

and the right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for *consider* what great things He has done for you." (1 Samuel 12:23-24).

Meditate on Developing the Character of God

The more we meditate on God's word and how it applies to us in our daily living, the more we will understand that we must turn away from sin. David went through the same process of conversion, as we read in Psalm 119:59: "I *thought about* my ways, and *turned* my feet to *Your testimonies*." When David analyzed his ways on the basis of God's Word, he did not like what he saw. So he *turned*, he *repented*, he ceased going the wrong way and began to go the right way—the way of God's Laws, His Testimonies.

This is not only true for David. Any person who does wrong, but who considers his way and changes, will live with God (Ezekiel 18:27-28). Once we begin to move away from wickedness and towards righteousness, we will consider more and more what kind of character we must develop to be able to finally dwell with God and stand before Him. David, under God's inspiration, shared the results of his meditations on righteous character in two psalms in particular—Psalms 15 and 24.

Psalm 15 is introduced in the New King James Bible with, "The Character of Those Who May Dwell with the Lord." Let's read, beginning in verse 1: "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved."

David continues his contemplation in Psalm 24:3-6: "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully, he shall receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face. *Selah.*"

Selah—*think about that one!* Consider it. Meditate on it. Does this describe you? Are you seeking God's face? Do you have clean hands and a pure heart? Or do you have an idol in your life that has become more important than God? Have you made promises that you had no intention of keeping, or that were made casually, or that you felt you could ignore later by just changing your mind? If so, God will not bless you with His Righteousness, since you show through your conduct that you don't really want God's Righteousness in your life. God will only give it to you, when you *repent* and get rid of whatever separates you from Him.

In the New Testament Paul admonished Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15 to "*meditate on these things*, give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all." But what were these things on which Timothy was to meditate? The previous verses tell us: "Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity..., give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." (vv. 12-13). He was also admonished to "not neglect the gift that is in you" (v. 14), referring to God's Holy Spirit dwelling within him. In following Paul's admonition, Timothy's positive character development would become more and more evident to other brethren.

They, in turn, would consider, or meditate on, Timothy's positive example, and try to imitate him. And to do so would be right and proper. Paul admonishes all of us in Heb. 13:7 to "remember those who rule over [or lead] you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, *considering* [or meditating on] the outcome of their conduct."

The focus of our meditation, of course, must not be on those people per se, as if we are to follow them for *their* sakes - it must be on Jesus Christ, because Paul goes right on to say, "*Jesus Christ* is the same yesterday, today and forever." (v. 8). It is Christ, living in them, who enables them to live a righteous life. And,

as they follow Christ, so we are to follow them. And so it is that we are to meditate first and foremost on *Christ*. Time and time again we are told that we must do so.

Notice Heb. 3:1-2: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, *consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus Christ, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him." Heb. 7:4: "Now *consider* how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils." Heb. 12:3: "For *consider* Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls."

Meditation must be focused on the greatness of God and His Way of Life. The perplexing questions of life can be answered from God if we meditate on them with God in mind. Psalm 73 gives us such an example. The author, Asaph, had become envious of the wicked, as they seemed to live in splendor and prosperity without having to pay for their rotten conduct (vv. 1-12).

Asaph began to compare the wicked with the righteous and to reason from a carnal point of view, "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocence, for all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning." (vv. 13-14). But once he turned to God for answers, his entire outlook on life changed (vv. 15-17). Once God guided him with His counsel (v. 24), he understood how foolish his human thoughts had been. After meditating in the right way by consulting with God in His sanctuary (v. 17), he realized that God *would* bring the wicked suddenly and quickly to ruin and destruction (vv. 18-20). Biblical meditation, as focused on God, and prayer to God go hand in hand. Human meditation of and by itself, separate from God, is useless, and can even be counterproductive. In fact, if meditation is focused on the self or on anything else but God and His Word, whether in a positive or a negative way, then meditation becomes an idol, and it is carnal and even demonic. Some today repeat foreign or mystical words, called mantras, for long periods of time during their meditation exercises. They don't understand the meaning of these mantras, but they do it because they have been told that these words have some

kind of magical effects to clear their consciousness from stress.

Scientific research has, in fact, revealed that something physical *does* occur within the body during the course of this kind of meditation. But what is not commonly understood is the origin of these words or mantras. They are derived from Indian mythology and religion, designating the *names* of Indian gods. Most Indian gods, according to Indian mythology and doctrine, are both good and evil. So, without realizing it, people are calling for the appearance of one of those “Indian gods,” by repeating his name over and over again. Why are we surprised, then, that their calls may be answered? People engaging in this kind of meditation may find themselves in strange situations. Some have literally killed themselves, thinking that they were witches of the Middle Ages, or that they felt that invisible evil forces were pursuing them. Further, the current leader of one of these meditation methods, an Indian guru, claims that he can fly, walk on water, go through closed doors, etc., and he is reportedly in the process of teaching the inner circle of his disciples to do the same through this kind of meditation.

But this is *not* the kind of meditation we should engage in, nor should it serve as an example as to how to conduct our meditation. True Biblical meditation is meaningful and it is focused on God and His Principles of living. It is accompanied with prayer to God, not to anything or anyone else. As you read Psalm 42, notice in the beginning verses how *meditation and prayer* go together. Notice also in verse 9 that when David says: “I will say to God my Rock,” he has meditated first on what to pray about. In fact, since we are told that we should not make vain repetitions, it is always good to consider, to *think first*, before we speak, including when we speak to God. We are told to be swift to hear, but slow to speak, especially when we are angry (James 1:19).

Meditate to Learn the Lessons of Life

There is so much to meditate about and so many lessons we can learn if we take the time to properly meditate. For example, from God’s creation, we can consider, or meditate on, the ways of the ant, to receive wisdom (Prov. 6:6). After all, it was God who created the ant - so

He knew what He did when He created it.

Consider, or meditate on, the lilies of the field, or the ravens in the sky and *think about* Christ’s Words that God the Father clothes and feeds them, so that we don’t need to worry about physical things, as long as our priorities are right (Matt. 6:25-30).

We can also learn from the conduct and lives of other people and how sin produces bad results, and that there is punishment for sin. Hosea 7:2 tells us that “they do *not* consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness.” And Prov. 21:12 adds that “the righteous God *wisely considers* the house of the wicked, overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness.” We must not be like the wicked, being indifferent towards wrong conduct—we *must consider wickedness as for what it is, and meditate on it*.

We can and should meditate on how righteousness has its rewards. How God is True and Faithful, even in times of trials and turmoil. We should meditate on positive things, rather than dwelling on the negative. As we are told by Paul in Phil. 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—*meditate on those things*.”

We are also told to “*consider one another* in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Heb. 10:24-25). We want others to make it into the Kingdom as well, and we must consider, or meditate on, what we can do to help them. (cf. Jude 22-23).

Let’s make the right kind of biblical meditation a habit in our Christian lives. And when we do, God will reward us with knowledge and understanding that will make us wiser than all of our enemies and will, indeed, “make our way prosperous and we will have good success” (Josh 1:8), the ultimate goal, of course, being entrance into the Kingdom of God.

—Norbert Link