



It is the Spirit
that beareth witness,
because the Spirit is truth.

—1 John 5:6



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Bible Lens

Spirit

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from the Responsive Reading

Isaiah 40:1

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

God's call for comfort is spoken to His prophet and a group of angelic messengers. According to most scholars, the setting is a heavenly council announcing the end of the Hebrew captivity. As in many other scriptural texts, repetition conveys emphasis here. The repeating of *comfort*, along with the words "my people" and "your God," is a reassuring restatement of God's covenant with His children.

Isaiah 44:8

Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

Here "no God" is translated from the Hebrew *šûr*, meaning rock—and most translations have "there is no rock." This familiar image of God as Israel's stronghold of trust and confidence, explains one source, "is taken from the fact that a lofty rock or fastness was inaccessible by an enemy, and that those who fled there were safe."

from Section 2

5 | Daniel 3:1

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Considered the most powerful monarch of the Babylonian Empire, Nebuchadnezzar ruled from circa 604 to 562 BC. He besieged Jerusalem circa 587, and after two years of resistance, the city—including the Temple, palace, and city walls—was destroyed. Judah became a territory of the empire, and many of its inhabitants were taken captive to Babylon.

The Babylonians used a sexagesimal number system, based on the number 60. The 60- by 6-cubit image, perhaps in the shape of an obelisk, was enormous—estimated at up to 110 feet (33.5 meters) in height. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) dates it to the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, about the same time he conquered Jerusalem.

from Section 4

8 | John 3:34

He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.

Measure (Greek, *metron*) implies a specific quantity—symbolically, a limited portion. The Gospel writer depicts God's limitless endowment of the Spirit on His Son. As a commentary points out, "The Father does not bestow the Spirit upon Jesus except in its fullness, as a constant endowment."

9 | John 4:5–7

Then cometh [Jesus] to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now

An exploration of Bible citations from the *Christian Science Quarterly*® Bible Lessons

“...a lesson on which the prosperity of Christian Science largely depends.” —Mary Baker Eddy

Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

Jesus arrives at Sychar—a village believed to be about 30 miles (50 km) north of Jerusalem—at noon, the hottest part of the day. Normally, women drew water in the morning or evening, when it was cool (see example in Genesis 24:11). Researchers surmise that this woman’s reputation had made her unpopular, and that she purposely came to the well at a time when no one else would be there.

The Master’s request for a drink opens a beautiful interchange about “living water.” The woman takes the phrase in its usual signification—fresh, sweet water. Then Jesus makes clear that he refers to the life-giving knowledge of God (see John 4:10–14). This provision, says one source, symbolizes “the satisfaction of the soul’s deepest need.”

9 | John 4:23

The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

The Samaritan woman has just pointed out a major topic of contention between Samaritans and Jews: Her people’s place of worship is Mount Gerizim instead of Jerusalem (see v. 20). But the Master reorients the discussion to spiritual devotion—to worship “in spirit and in truth” rather than in a physical location.

Many centuries earlier, at the time of the completion of the Temple at Jerusalem, Solomon prayed, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (I Kings 8:27).

from Section 5

14 | Mark 2:22

No man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

“Bottles” were leather bags made from the skin of sheep or goats. New wineskins were supple, able to stretch with the pressure of fermenting juice; old skins would split or burst. With this image, Jesus shows that the good news of the kingdom could not be contained in the old approach to religious observance. “The parable of the new wine,” writes a scholar, “is a striking statement of the revolutionary character, the creative fermentation, of the new faith.”

To learn more about the *Christian Science Quarterly* Bible Lessons, go to biblelesson.com.

Resources quoted in this issue

RR: Barnes, Albert. *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Whole Bible*. New York, 1834–85. Also available at biblehub.com/commentaries.

Cit. 8: Buttrick, George Arthur, Nolan B. Harmon, et al., eds. *The Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Vol. 8, *Luke, John*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1951–57.

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"But if not ..."

By Barbara Cook Spencer

From the October 1981 issue of *The Christian Science Journal*

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego! Their adventure has always been a great source of inspiration to me. The main theme is richly seasoned with spiritual insights and glimpses of the Christ, God's eternal idea of all real being.

One day, as I was again reading the account of the three Hebrews, something arrested my attention. It was their reply to the king's remark, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" They said: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:15, 17, 18).

"But if not ..."! Suddenly I saw something fresh—a higher expression of courage that was not only inspiring but scientific. I perceived their statement to the king as one of unreserved, *unconditional* love for God.

This theme of unconditional love was carried through in what they *didn't* say as well. They didn't admit that failure to be saved from the fiery furnace would prove that God was not the omnipotent and omnipresent preserver of His children. Nothing, however tragic-seeming, could divert their pure love for God or their desire to glorify God.

The "But if not ..." approach doesn't belittle God's infinite ability to accomplish all good, does not minimize the need for visible proof of God's power, does not constitute a resignation to evil. The "But if not ..." approach helps us to establish our priorities, placing the first and highest priority on obeying and glorifying the one God, who alone should command our obedience.

Gaining a consistent conviction of Spirit's allness does require mental discipline—daily prayer, sometimes even moment-by-moment affirmations of the truth. Mortal mind, the counterfeit of real intelligence, is limited and full of the seeds of its limitation; and if accepted as real, this false mind can plant the seeds of compromise with spiritual reality in very subtle ways. We need love for God that both inspires and empowers us to instantly turn out the lie and to keep turning it out with its every presentation to thought. The Christ, which reveals all truth to humanity, meets all individual needs and quiets all doubts and fears while problems are being worked out.

The decision of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to stand with God, even if their ability to prove His protection should fail, showed a pure reverence for Truth that was in itself free of the smell of smoke, free of material trusts, even before they had to face the fiery furnace that was heated "seven times more than it was wont to be heated" (Daniel 3:19). They proved the powerlessness of evil to touch the real man and the ability of humanity to prove the power of the Christ, Truth, to preserve and heal human minds and bodies. And what they did was for all mankind and for all time.

When we, too, stand with God without reservations, we do it not for ourselves alone but for all mankind. We help others gain the courage to turn unreservedly to God in the face of any impending "fiery furnace."

To read the entire article, which has been adapted to fit this page, go to jsh.christianscience.com/but-if-not.