

# The Sound of Marching

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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How I would have like to have been in Egypt about 3500 years ago and been able to monitor the minds of the Israelites with some kind of spiritual electroencephalograph to measure their thinking. There was a dramatic change. The needle would have moved totally across the read-out. There was a move in their thinking from unbelief to belief with respect to the Exodus.

Prophecy had predicted that they would leave, to be sure. God had promised it, that's true. But now, in the year 1446 B. C., those prophecies and promises seemed rather distant and hollow. Yes, they remembered the story about Joseph asking that his bones be carried from Egypt to the "Promised Land," but those bones had become dry and brittle, like their faith, in the ensuing decades.

People had long talked about going to Canaan, but now it seemed like just talk and nothing more. Think about it: since Jacob had brought his family down to Goshen, they had now lived here for more than 200 years, not unlike the time period that separates us here in America from when our country was founded. It seemed like a very long time. These had been born in Egypt; their families were there; they knew nothing else, nothing of Canaan. My grandparents came to America only a hundred years ago. What do I know of Norway? Nothing. I've never been there.

Back then in Egypt, there was a rumor that something might be happening 40 years before this, when someone from Israel had been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and had been made prince, but that came to naught as he had to flee from the country for his own life. No, these people had settled into their lives in Egypt, as deplorable as they were, under the yoke of bondage. It looked like they'd be here the next generation and the next, as far as the eye could see. The needle of the spiritual electroencephalogram registered "zero" on the scale of faith. Leaving Egypt was not central in their thoughts, and appeared sparingly in their conversations.

But then someone named Moses came to town, with news about leaving Egypt and going to Canaan. Many said things like, "Yes, we've heard all about that before." And now, things got worse, not better! When this Moses talked to the king about letting the people go, he lost his temper and made the Israelite's job even harder. Now they had to make the same number of bricks for Pharaoh's building projects, but they had to gather the straw for themselves, which had been provided before.

But then, some miracles began to take place. Lot's of them. At some point, the reality began to sink in. The needle began to move on the graph. At some point the thought, "This is real" began to take hold. "We're actually leaving here. God's promise is coming true. We're going to Canaan." It would have been fascinating to be able to monitor the growth of faith into the reality of the Exodus as it progressed in the minds of the Israelites long ago, from the faithless, "We've heard all that before," to the excited, "This is happening!" At some point it came to be that that's all they wanted to talk about. It was the theme of nearly every conversation.

God is watching the needle as it measures the faith in our hearts. At some point, faith takes hold of the promise and says, "This is real. This is really going to happen just as He promised." That's what I want to happen in my mind. I want the consciousness of the reality of His coming to be predominate in my thinking. I want it to be the topic of conversation, not just when I'm standing before you speaking the Word, but when I'm in the car, just waking up in the morning or what I'm thinking about when mowing the lawn. When that reality sinks in, life changes. Choices change. Thinking changes. Behavior changes. The focus of the mind becomes the return of Jesus. The signs given by Scripture are seen in the events of the world and in the progress of the Gospel.

Pastor Matt preached his first sermon in Valley Center this week. You may not have heard of him but he was installed as pastor of the Lutheran church on Lilac Road on April 25. For weeks now we've been reading about it from the bulletin board that is in front of their church, by which we drive every time we come up the hill to Valley Center. Weeks ago we read the invitation, "Pastor Matt, accept the call!" A week or two later it was, "Pastor Matt accepts the call." Now we began to look forward to see what the bulletin board would read the next time we went by. It changed to, "Pastor Matt is packing," followed by, "Pastor Matt is moving." Then it was, "Welcome, Pastor Matt." Finally a week or two ago it said, "Pastor Matt will be installed April 25."

Each time we drove past the Lutheran Church, we would read the sign and see the progress. It reminded me of the announcement of another "coming," not of Pastor Matt, but of Jesus Christ. The signs have been put out; the bulletin board has been proclaiming the progress. Jesus is coming. But is that coming "real" to us? Do we live and think in that reality? Has faith in His soon return taken hold in our hearts?

Our study today comes from another story of conquest in the reign of King David, once more engaged in battle with the Philistines. "Now when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. And David heard of it and went down to the stronghold." II Samuel 5:17. There's a sermon in just that verse! After taking Jebus, or Jerusalem, as reported earlier in that chapter, the hostilities of the Philistines were awakened against David and they brought a large force to Rephaim, the "valley of the giants," not far from Jerusalem. At this news, David withdrew to the "stronghold" of Zion to await God's counsel. That's not a bad thing to do, when the enemy brings his army against the Christian! Go to the "Stronghold" and wait for His salvation!

“And David inquired of the LORD, saying ‘Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?’ And the LORD said to David, ‘Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand.’ So David went to Baal Perazim (“Baal is *broken*,” you might recognize the same word root in the story of the “handwriting on the wall” in Daniel 5. It’s the root for the word “Persia”) and David defeated them there; and he said, ‘The LORD has broken through my enemies before me, like a breakthrough of water.’ Therefore he called the name of that place Baal Perazim. And they left their images there, and David and his men carried them away.” II Samuel 5:19-21. The Lord fought for Israel on this occasion and won a mighty victory against the enemy, and David’s men destroyed the gods the Philistines had brought along with them. But the enemy wasn’t finished.

“Then the Philistines went up once again and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. And when David inquired of the LORD, He said, ‘You shall not go up; circle around behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees. So it shall be, when you hear *the sound of marching* in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall advance quickly. For then the LORD will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines. And David did so, as the LORD commanded him; and he drove back the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.” II Samuel 5:22-25.

On this occasion, the king was given different instruction. Rather than a frontal assault, David was commanded to take a circuitous route and go around behind them. Then he was cautioned to wait for what might have seemed a very strange sign. When he heard “the sound of marching” in the tops of the mulberry trees, he was to advance quickly. When, according to God’s timetable, when He had orchestrated the circumstances in perfect harmony, the sign was given; the signal was sounded. The “sound of marching” was heard. David advanced, and the victory was won. It is that phrase “the sound of marching” that stirs my heart today. Listen carefully: Do you hear “the sound of marching”?

We’ve been considering the last few weeks the motif or illustration of the Christian life as warfare. It’s really more than merely a model; the Bible takes us back to the time when there was actually “war in heaven.” The scene of the battle shifted from heaven to earth and now rages in the hearts of men and women on this planet. We are advised to fight the “good fight of faith.” We are counseled to “put on the whole armor of God.” And, we can take courage and instruction from the way God fought for His people in the battles of the past. In fact, that’s why the accounts of all those battles have been recorded in Scripture. “All these things happened to them as examples and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” I Corinthians 10:11.

Does this story speak to us? David was told to listen for “the sound of marching.” Do your ears hear that sound today? Not all ears are open to the signs and signals of God. Remember that when Jesus related His parables, He invited, “He that has ears, let him hear.” Not all ears will listen. On many occasions, God spoke and some understood but others didn’t. Paul was on the road to Damascus and the Lord spoke him, but others around him heard a sound, but didn’t comprehend it. They thought it thundered. Acts 22:9. There is no record that others went found

the road called Straight, met with Ananias, were baptized and became followers of Jesus. We must assume that they continued in their lives in a similar way as before. Their ears were not open to hear the signal that God had sent.

During the last week of His life on earth, Jesus prayed, “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.’ Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to Him.’” John 12:27-29.

The Lord told David to wait until he heard the “sound of marching,” and then advance. His ears were open to that signal, and when he heard it, he went forward and victory was achieved. The Lord has been pleased to send forth the call to advance, the “sound of marching,” on numerous occasions.

I remind you that it was God’s plan that the generation that saw the signs given in Matthew 24 would indeed experience the grand climax of all things. When He said, “This generation (the generation which witnessed the signs He listed) shall not pass until all is fulfilled,” He meant exactly that. It was His intention that those who went through the Great Disappointment and then learned precious truths including the Sabbath and the ministry of Christ in the Most Holy Place, continue in the momentum which would lead directly into the Loud Cry which would announce to the world the coming of Jesus.

At the time of the Exodus, it was His intention to lead His people from Egypt directly to Canaan, after a brief stay at Sinai for instruction in righteousness. It was not His intention that they die in the wilderness. The “sound of marching” was being sent forth. But the people resisted and rebelled at the borders of Canaan, excepting Caleb and Joshua, and thus failed of the entrance that God had designed.

In the same way, God intended that the “generation” which witnessed the falling of the stars would be the generation to inherit the promise. The early Advent movement could have swelled into the final warning, had His people been faithful, and Christ would have come before this. Our spiritual forefathers stumbled in unbelief just as did Israel more than 3,000 years before.

Here’s a solemn thought to consider. When Israel rebelled at Kadesh Barnea on the borders of Canaan and favored the report of the ten spies who said, “It can’t be done;” when they reached a virtual consensus in their decision, to the point that they even ready to stone Moses, then God said with reluctance and great sadness, “Alright. I recognize your decision.” God’s recognition of their decision sealed the borders of Canaan, just as effectively as if there were a guardian angel with sword drawn as was stationed at the gate of Eden.

That generation could not later rescind their decision and expect to enter. In fact they tried, but their attempts to do so resulted in failure and defeat, as we’re told in the final verses of Numbers

14. It didn't work that way back then. They were turned back and it would be another 40 years before God's providence would bring them to the borders of Canaan again. It would be another "generation" which would be given the opportunity to enter. Resisting, rebelling against the Spirit of Christ is a serious thing!

Likewise, it was God's purpose that His people in 1844, learning the truth of "what happens when you die," the truth of the Sabbath, and the truth of Jesus' ministry in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary (in a similar way as Israel learned many things at the foot of Mt. Sinai), move directly forward and give forth the final warning to the world. The movement would blossom into the Loud Cry and culminate in the glorious coming of the Lord. Whether it was required that there be a bloody Civil War in the United States or not is doubtful. But that generation failed to grasp the opportunity. Another generation would rise and another opportunity would be offered. The delay is not due to a failure of His promises or His power, any more than it was His design that the generation that left Egypt die in the wilderness.

Since 1844, which witnessed the fulfillment of the last prophecy based on time, every generation has seen its day of opportunity. Every generation has been given the chance to move forward into Canaan. In the cycles of God's timing and providence, every generation has seen a "surge," of momentum. Every generation has had its opportunity to hear the "sound of marching."

In the late 1880's there was another "surge," or opportunity; an invitation to advance. The message of Jesus' righteousness was given with great clarity. Final events could have been fulfilled rapidly. There was at that time before Congress the "Blair Bill," which would have led to the enforcement of Sunday as a day of worship as Revelation 13 predicts. But again the people of God resisted and were turned back.

Doubtless, during the succeeding generations, God has at times stood ready to work for His people if they turned to Him in surrender and faith. I believe that we are living now, in 2010, in such a time. I believe that right now there is a "surge," a "push" going forth to finish the work. I believe that now, the discerning ear can hear the "sound of marching." I believe that right now it is God's supreme desire to bring an end to the era of sin.

The "sound of marching" can be heard in the numerous disasters and calamities that are plaguing our earth right now. Hardly a day goes by without the news of some new deadly tragedy. Earthquakes, tornadoes, accidents on land, at sea and in the air. Civil unrest with unruly mobs demonstrating, in America as well as abroad. The ear of the sincere, God-loving Christian is bent listening for sound of His coming. We can today live in the consciousness of the reality of His coming. It will come to pass.

We hear the "sound of marching" in thrilling accounts of the advance of the Gospel, such as the recent evangelistic series held by Shawn Boonstra, speaker for "It Is Written," held in Rome. In the very capital of opposition and apostasy, Pastor Shawn was led to schedule a series of meetings for the proclamation of the truths God wants heralded today. The devil did all he could to frustrate

and harass, but God's holy angels sustained them through the meetings and His Spirit blessed them with success.

Some people said that the meetings might attract foreigners, but not nationals. Not so. The meetings were packed from the opening night with people from near and from afar who were thirsting to hear God's Word spoken. The majority of the audience was composed of Italian nationals. According to Boonstra, among those attending were "Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Jews, Pentecostals, Muslims, atheists, New Agers, agnostics, occultists, one of the top ranking UFO experts in the country and even some Catholic priests."

Pastor Shawn relates that "a physicist attended every night, traveling 100 miles each way. Throughout the meetings he would hold up a cell phone so that a group of 40+ people gathered back home could hear the messages. The meetings ended at 9:30 p.m., so he never got home before midnight."

Boonstra says, "Three friends sat together at every meeting: A Catholic, A Pentecostal and a Jehovah's Witness. They fed off each other in a positive way, encouraging one another when they confronted an issue that didn't agree with their beliefs. They all came forward when the call was made to join the church."

He continues, "Sergio, a barber, when confronted with the Sabbath truth, decided he would close his shop on Sabbath...in about a year, because he had debts to pay and Saturday was his busiest day. I asked him, 'If I paid your debt, would you close the shop?' He agreed that he would. Then I asked him, 'Does that mean you trust me more than God?' The next Sabbath his shop was closed and he was in church!" Elder Phil Jones, evangelist in our Conference, maintains that the Church has never experienced success in evangelism as is taking place right now, going back as far as Acts 2. An evangelism explosion in India. Can you hear the "sound of marching"?

Here's what I fear. If this generation, the one in which you and I live right now, resists and rebels, then God will recognize our decision as He did the decision of Israel long ago, and we will be turned back into the wilderness to wander another period of time. That will be tragic for at least three reasons: It will deprive God of bringing His children home and ending the tyranny of sin. It will deprive us of laying aside the burdens of this life and being reunited with the loved ones we've laid to rest. It will lay upon the next generation the curse of living on an earth made even more corrupt and evil than the one we see today. What will life be like if time continues to 2050?

There is an old story told about two boys. One came from the city, other from the country. One day as they were walking down the street the city boy said, "Did you hear that?" "No," replied his friend. "What was it?" It was the sound of a dime falling on concrete. Walking a few steps further, the country boy asked, "Did you hear that?" "No," answered his friend. "What was it?" It was the sound of a cricket chirping. What do you "hear" today? How can our ears be tuned so that we can "hear" what God wants us to hear, to be able to separate the "thunder" from His Voice?

There's a very simple answer to that. If I begin the day in God's Word and allow Him to tune my thoughts in heaven's direction, my mind will be open to His messages. It won't be mere "thunder;" it will be the Voice of the Spirit encouraging me on my walk, making that reality central to my life. The needle of the monitor of faith will shift ever more to the side of belief. I will live in the atmosphere of heaven. I will be able to detect the signs along the highway announcing His coming. I will be able to hear the "sound of marching."