

Derek Prince: Faith to Live By

Editorial note from Steve Strang: *Derek Prince had a great influence on the entire charismatic renewal and on Charisma. He was a part of the "Shepherding Movement" also called the "Discipleship Movement" which Charisma covered in the early days. During that era he was a friend to Jamie Buckingham and later to me. Prince's teaching on deliverance and on God's plan for Israel shaped our editorial paradigms. I held him in high regard and showed my respect by visiting his grave in Jerusalem.*

The following article ran in the November 1982 issue of Charisma.

We constantly face the challenge of God's uncompromising demands for faith; "the righteous man will live by faith ... whatever is not from faith is sin ... without faith it is impossible to please Him ... he who comes to God must believe..."

In the light of these diving demands we can easily see why Scripture compares faith to the most precious gold. Its value is unique. There is no substitute for it. Without it we cannot approach God, we cannot please Him, we cannot receive His life.

How, then, do we acquire faith? Is it something unpredictable and unexplainable over which we have no control? Or does the same Bible which presents God's demands for faith also show us the way to acquire it?

One of the most important discoveries I ever made in the Christian life concerns faith. Like most of the lessons that have proved of permanent value to me, I learned it the hard way—by personal experience. Out of a period of struggle and suffering, I eventually emerged with this one pearl of great

price: *I had learned how faith comes.*

Light in a Dark Valley

During my service with the British army in World War II, I lay sick with a chronic skin infection for 12 months on end in a military hospital in Egypt. Month by month I became more and more convinced that, in that hot desert climate, the doctors did not have the means to heal me. Having recently become a Christian and been baptized in the Holy Spirit, I had a real, personal relationship with God. I felt that somehow He must have the answer to my problem—but I did not know how to find it.

Over and over again I said to myself, “I know that if I had faith, God would heal me.”

But then I always added, “But I don’t have faith.” Each time I said that, I found myself in what John Bunyan calls “the slough of despond”—the dark, lonely valley of despair.

One day, however, a brilliant ray of light pierced the darkness. Propped up on my pillows in the bed, I held the King James Version of the Bible open across my knees. My eye was suddenly arrested by Romans 10:17: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” A single word gripped my attention. It was “cometh.” I laid hold of one simple fact: “Faith cometh!” If I did not have faith, I could get it!

But *how* does faith come? I read the verse again, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” I had already accepted the Bible as the Word of God. So the source of faith was right there in my hands. But what was meant by “hearing?” How could I “hear” what the Bible had to say to me?

I determined to go back to the beginning of the Bible and read it right through, book by book in order. At the same time I armed myself with a blue pencil, intending to underline in

blue every verse that dealt with the following themes: healing, health, physical strength, long life. At times the going was not easy, but I persevered. I was surprised at how often I needed to use my blue pencil.

After about two months I had reached the book of Proverbs. There I found three consecutive verses that required my blue pencil:

"My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh" (Prov. 4:20-22).

As I was underlining these words, their meaning began to open up to me. "My son...." It was my Father, God, speaking directly to me, His child. The message was very personal. God was telling me what His "words" and His "sayings" could be to me—"health to all my flesh."

How could God promise me more for my physical body than that? "Health" and "sickness" were opposites; each excluded the other. If I could have health in "all my flesh"—my whole physical body—then there would be no room for sickness in it anywhere.

I noticed that in the margin of my Bible there was an alternative translation for "health." It was "medicine." Could God's "words" and "sayings" really be "medicine" for the healing of my whole body? After much inward debate, I determined to put it to the test.

At my own request, all my medication was suspended. Then I began to take God's Word as my medicine. Since I was a hospital attendant by my military trade, I was familiar with the way people usually took their medicine—"three times daily after meals." I decided to take God's Word as my medicine that way.

When I made that decision, God spoke to my mind with words as clear as if I had heard them audibly: "When the doctor gives a person medicine, the directions for taking it are on the bottle. This is my medicine bottle, and the directions are on it. You had better read them."

Reading the verses carefully through once more, I saw that there were four "directions" for taking God's "medicine":

First direction: "attend ... " I must give undivided, concentrated attention to God's words as I read them.

Second direction: "incline thine ear ... " To incline my ear would indicate a humble, teachable attitude. I must lay aside my own prejudices and preconceptions and receive with an open mind what God was saying to me.

Third direction: "let them not depart from thine eyes ... " I must keep my eyes focused on God's words. I must not allow them to wander to statements from other, conflicting sources, such as books or articles not based on Scripture.

Fourth direction: "keep them in the midst of thine heart ... " Even when the actual words, were no longer in front of my eyes, I must keep meditating on them in my heart, thus retaining them at the very source and center of my life.

To describe all that happened in the following months would require almost a book on its own. The army transferred me from Egypt to the Sudan, a land with one of the worst climates in Africa, where temperatures went as high as 127° F. Excessive heat always aggravated my skin condition. Everything in my circumstances was inimical to my healing. Healthy men all around me were actually becoming sick.

Gradually, however, I realized that the fulfillment of God's promises does not depend on external circumstances, but solely on meeting His conditions. So I simply continued to take my "medicine" three times daily.

After each main meal I bowed my head over my open Bible and said, "Lord, You promised that these words of Yours will be medicine to all my flesh. I'm taking them as my medicine now—in the name of Jesus!"

No sudden or dramatic change took place. I experienced nothing that I could describe as a "miracle." But after I had been about three months in the Sudan, I discovered that my "medicine" had made good its claims. I was perfectly well. There was no more sickness anywhere in my body. I had actually and literally received "health to all my flesh."

Nor was this a case of "mind over matter"—some kind of temporary illusion that would quickly fade. Forty years have passed since then. With a few minor and brief exceptions, I have continued to enjoy excellent health. Looking back, I realize that, through that period of test and eventual victory, I made contact with a source of life above the natural level which is still at work in my physical body today.

Logos and Rhema

I have described in some detail the steps which led me to healing and health because they illustrate certain deep, enduring principles concerning the nature of God's Word. In the original Greek of the New Testament there are two different words which are normally translated "word." One is *logos*; the other is *rhema*. At times the two words are used interchangeably. Yet each has a distinct, special significance of its own.

The full meaning of *logos* extends beyond a word that is spoken or written. It denotes those functions which are the expression of a *mind*. The authoritative Greek lexicon of Liddell and Scott defines *logos* as "the power of the mind which is manifested in speech, *reason*."

In this sense, *logos* is the unchanging, self-existent "Word of

God.” It is God’s counsel, settled in eternity before time began, due to continue on into eternity long after time has run its course. It is of this divine *logos* that David is speaking in Psalm 119:89 when he says, “Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.” Nothing that happens on earth can ever affect or change this word that is eternal in heaven.

On the other hand, *rhema* is derived from a verb meaning to “speak,” and denotes specifically *a word that is spoken*—something that occurs in time and space.

In Romans 10:17, when Paul says that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the *word* of God,” he uses the word *rhema*, not *logos*. This agrees with the fact that he couples “word” with “hearing.” Logically, in order to be *heard*, a word must be *spoken*.

As I sat in my hospital bed with my Bible open across my knees, all I had in front of me—from the material point of view—was white sheets of paper with black marks imprinted upon them. But when I came to those words in Proverbs, chapter 4, about God’s words and sayings’ being health to all my flesh, they were no longer just black marks on white paper.

The Holy Spirit took the very words that met my need at that moment and imparted His life to them. They became a *rhema*—something I could “hear”—a living voice speaking to my heart. It was God himself, speaking directly and personally to me. As I heard His words, faith came to me through them.

This agrees with Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 3:6: “the letter kills, but *the Spirit gives life*.” Apart from the Holy Spirit, there can be no *rhema*. In the Bible, the *logos*—the total counsel of God—is made available to me.

But *logos* is too vast and too complex for me to comprehend or assimilate in its totality. *Rhema* is the way that the Holy Spirit brings a portion of *logos* down out of eternity and

relates it to time and human experience. *Rhema* is that portion of the total *logos* that applies at a certain point in time to my particular situation. Through *rhema*, *logos* is applied to my life and thus becomes specific and personal in my experience.

In this transaction between God and man by which faith comes, the initiative is with God. This leaves no room for arrogance or presumption on our part. Indeed, in Romans 3:27 Paul tells us that boasting is excluded by the law of faith. It is God who knows—better than we do—just that part of the total *logos*, which will meet our need at any given time.

By His Holy Spirit He directs us to the very words that are appropriate and then imparts life to them, so that they become a *rhema*—a living voice. At this point the response required from us is “hearing.” To the extent that we “hear,” we receive faith.

What is involved in “hearing?” It is important that we know, as precisely as possible, what is required from us. This too was included in the lesson I received there in my hospital bed. In the wisdom of God, the words that came to me from Proverbs, chapter 4, not merely met my physical need. They also provided a complete and detailed example of what it means to “hear” God’s word.

As God pointed out to me, the “directions” on His “medicine bottle” were fourfold: First, *attend*; second, *incline thine ear*; third, *let them not depart from thine eyes*; fourth, *keep them in the midst of thine heart*. Without at first realizing it, as I followed these four directions, I was “hearing”—and as a result, faith came.

“Hearing,” then, consists of these four elements:

- We give close, undivided attention to what God is saying to us by His Holy Spirit. By a firm decision of our will we exclude all extraneous, distracting influences.

- We incline our ear. We adopt a humble, teachable attitude toward God. We renounce our own prejudices and preconceptions and we accept what God says in its most plain and practical meaning.
- We focus our eyes on the words to which God has directed us. We do not allow our eyes to wander to statements from other sources that may conflict with what God is saying.
- Even when the words are no longer before our eyes, we continue to meditate on them in our heart. In this way we retain them continually at the center of our being, and their influence permeates every area of our lives.
- *Rhema* takes the eternal-*logos*-and injects it into time.
- *Rhema* takes the heavenly - *logos*-and brings it down to earth.
- *Rhema* takes the potential - *logos*-and makes it actual.
- *Rhema* takes the general-*logos*-and makes it specific.
- *Rhema* takes a portion of the total-*logos*-and presents it in a form that a man can assimilate.
- To each there came a *rhema*-a direct, personal word from God.
- This *rhema* expressed the ways and thoughts of God-far above anything that they would ever have conceived by their own reasoning or imagination.
- As each "heard" the *rhema*, it imparted faith to him.
- Each expressed his faith in a simple statement giving consent to what was promised: "Do as Thou has spoken," "Be it done to me according to your word."
- Faith expressed in this way made room for the power of God within the *rhema* to bring about the fulfillment of what was promised.

As God's *rhema* comes to us in this way, it is both *specific* and *personal*. Let me illustrate this from my experience in the hospital. God spoke to me at that time as an individual in a specific situation. He showed me how to receive my healing: I was to take His words as my medicine and forego all normal

medication. I obeyed, and I was healed.

However, it would have been wrong for me to assume that God would necessarily have prescribed the same remedy for someone else—or even for me at another stage of my experience. Actually, on subsequent occasions when I have needed healing, God has not always directed me in the same way. There have been times when I have gratefully accepted the help of doctors and received healing through it.

Rhema, then, comes to each of us directly and individually from God. It is appropriate to a specific time and place. It presupposes an ongoing, personal relationship with God. By each successive *rhema*, God guides us in the individual walk of faith to which He has called us. A *rhema* that is given to one believer may not be appropriate even for the same believer in another stage of his experience.

The life of continuing dependence upon God's *rhema* is clearly set forth in the words with which Jesus answered Satan's first temptation in the wilderness: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word (*rhema*) that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). The word "proceeds" is in the continuous present tense. We could say, "... every word *as it proceeds* out of the mouth of God."

Jesus here speaks of a specific word proceeding directly from God's mouth, a word energized by "the breath of His mouth," which is the Holy Spirit. This is our "daily bread"—always fresh, always "proceeding." As we live in continuing dependence upon it, it imparts to us, day by day, the faith by which alone "the righteous man will live."

We may sum up the relationship between *logos* and *rhema* in the following statements:

Rhema is like each of the broken pieces of bread with which Jesus fed the multitude; it is suited to each individual's need and capacity; often it comes to us through another's

hands.

From Heaven to Earth

In Isaiah 55:8-13 the prophet presents the relationship between *logos* and *rhema* in vivid imagery:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

“For you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

“Instead of the thornbush the cypress will come up; and instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up; and it will be a memorial to the LORD, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off (NAS).

Here we have two different planes—the heavenly and the earthly. On the heavenly plane is the divine *logos*—God’s ways and thoughts, the total counsel of God, settled forever in heaven. On the earthly level are man’s ways and thoughts, far below those of God and actually incompatible with them.

There is no way by which man can rise from his level to that of God, but there is a way by which God’s ways and thoughts can be brought down to man. Like the rain and the snow that

bring heaven's life-giving moisture down to Earth, God says, "So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth."

This is the same "word" that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 4:4, "the word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," the word by which man lives. It is a portion of the heavenly *logos* coming down to earth as *rhema*. It imparts to us that portion of God's ways and thoughts that applies to our situation and meets our need at that moment.

Received and obeyed, *rhema* brings forth in our lives the activity and the fruit that glorify God. We "go out with joy;" we are "led forth with peace." "Instead of the thornbush the cypress domes up, and instead of the nettle the myrtle comes up." The "thornbush" and the "nettle" typify our ways and our thoughts.

David and Mary, Our Examples

As we receive the *rhema* from God's mouth, these are replaced by the "cypress" and the "myrtle," which typify God's ways and thoughts.

To further illustrate the way that *rhema* comes and the result it produces, we will take two beautiful incidents from Scripture—one from the Old Testament, concerning David, and one from the New Testament, concerning the virgin Mary.

In 1 Chronicles, chapter 17, we see David established as king over Israel—victorious, prosperous, and at ease. Contrasting his own luxurious palace with the humble tabernacle that still houses the sacred ark of God's covenant, he conceives a desire to build a temple worthy of God and His covenant.

The prophet Nathan, with whom David shares his desire, at first gives him warm encouragement; but the following night God speaks to Nathan and sends him back to David with a different message, which begins, "You shall not build a house for Me ...," but closes, "Moreover, I tell you that the LORD

will build a house for you" (verses 4,10).

Here is an example of the difference between the ways and thoughts of God and of man. The highest that David in his own mind could conceive was still on the earthly plane: that he would build a house for God. The promise that came back to him from God was on the heavenly plane, far higher than David would ever have conceived: that God would build him a house.

Furthermore, David had used the word "house" in its material sense, merely as a dwelling place. But God in His promise used the word in its wider meaning of an enduring posterity—a royal line that would continue forever.

In his message, Nathan had brought to David a *rhema*—a direct, personal word from God. In response, David "went in and sat before the LORD" (verse 16). What was he doing? First of all, doubtless, he had to set aside his own plans and preconceptions. Gradually, as he was emptied of these, he began to meditate with focused attention on God's message, allowing it to penetrate to his innermost being. In this condition of inner stillness, he was able to "hear." Finally, out of "hearing," faith came—the faith needed to appropriate what God had promised him.

Still, sitting in God's presence, David replied, "And now, O Lord, let the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant and concerning his house, be established forever, and do as Thou hast spoken" (verse 23).

"The word that Thou hast spoken"—that was the *rhema*. It did not originate on the earthly plane of David's own ways and thoughts. It came down from the heavenly place, bringing God's ways and thoughts down to David. Having "heard" this *rhema* and having allowed it to produce faith within him, David appropriated its promise by a prayer that concluded with five short words: "do as Thou hast spoken."

These five words represent the most effective prayer that

anyone can pray—so simple, so logical, and yet irresistible in their outworking. Once we are truly convinced that God has said something to us, and we in turn ask Him to do what He has said, how can we doubt that He will do it? What power in heaven or earth can prevent it?

We move on from David through a thousand years of Jewish history to a humble descendant of his royal line—a peasant maiden named Mary in the city of Nazareth. To her appeared an angel with a message direct from the throne of God:

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:31-33, NAS).

When Mary questioned how this could come about, the angel explained that it would be by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, concluding with the words, “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). “Nothing” in the original Greek is literally “no word”—“no *rhema*.” The angel’s reply could equally well be translated, “No word (*rhema*) from God shall be void of power”; or more freely, “Every word (*rhema*) from God contains the power for its own fulfillment.”

The angel had brought to Mary a *rhema*—a direct, personal word from God to her. That *rhema* contained in it the power to fulfill what it promised.

The outcome depended on Mary’s response. “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord,” she replied; “be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

By these words Mary unlocked the supernatural power of God in the *rhema* and opened herself to its fulfillment in her physical body. As a result, there occurred the greatest miracle of human history: the birth of God’s eternal Son from

the womb of a virgin.

In its simplicity, Mary's response was similar to that of David. David said, "Do as Thou hast spoken." Mary said, "Be it done to me according to your word." Each of these simple replies unlocked the miracle-working power of God to fulfill the promise that had been given. In each case, the *rhema*, received by faith, contained in it the power for its own fulfillment.

Some may feel disposed to question that the miracle of the birth of Jesus depended upon the response of Mary's faith. Yet this is plainly indicated by the closing words of the salutation with which Elizabeth later greeted Mary: "And blessed is *she who believed* that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord" (Luke 1:45). The implication is clear: the fulfillment of the promise came because Mary believed. it. Without this there would have been no way for God's miracle-working power to fulfill what had been promised.

Let us see how the experiences of David and of Mary parallel each other:

God still works the same way today with His believing people. By the Holy Spirit He takes out from His eternal counsel (*logos*) a *rhema*—a specific word that fits our particular situation in time and space. As we "hear" this *rhema*, faith comes. Then as we use the faith we have thus received to appropriate the *rhema*, we discover that it contains in itself the power needed to work out its own fulfillment.