

Brigham Young's 1876 Charge to Karl G. Maeser

REINHARD MAESER

In the spring of 1876, just prior to the April conference, a terrific explosion of powder occurred on Arsenal Hill near the present site of the Utah State Capitol. Several lives were lost and extensive damage was done to adjacent property, such as the breaking of window glass and crashing of roofs by the large boulders. Nearly all of the plaster was shaken from the ceiling of the Twentieth Ward schoolhouse, where Professor Maeser was teaching. Immediately he started in search of his bishop, John Sharp. He found the bishop at the president's [Brigham Young's] office and reported to him what had just happened, adding that the school would have to be dismissed until the house could be repaired.

But at this point, President Young interrupted the conversation with the remark "That is exactly right, Brother Maeser; I have another mission for you."

"Yes," said the president, "we have been considering the establishment of a Church school and are looking around for a man—the man to take charge of it. You are the man, Brother Maeser. We want you to go to Provo to organize and conduct an academy to be established in the name of the Church—a Church school."

[Brother Maeser] knew full well there would be perplexing problems to solve, difficult situations to meet, and soul-trying times to endure, when he would have to go up to his Gethsemane to seek relief. This struggle continued within him for several days. At last he decided that he must accept the appointment or, coward-like, back out. He went to President Young, whom he found in his office, busy on important matters. Addressing the president, he said, "I am about to leave for Provo, Brother Young, to start my work in the Academy. Have you any instructions to give me?"

The president looked steadily forward for a few moments, as though deep in thought, then said: "Brother Maeser, I want you to remember that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God. That is all. God bless you. Good-bye."

But what did the words of the prophet mean? Brother Maeser at first felt that he had received but a stone where he had asked for bread, but as time rolled on, he realized more and more that the very bread of life had been given him. "Teach nothing, do nothing, without the Spirit of God." Oh, how in the years that followed this holy admonition became the very guiding star of his life.

This is an excerpted adaptation from Reinhard Maeser, Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928), 76–80.