

*Wisdom
Insight
And
Discernment*

Rashma George



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Dedicated To
My Mother Savitri Devi Chabra
(A Woman of substance)

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Prologue

*Whoever is **wise**, let him understand these things;*

*Whoever is **discerning**, let him know them; for the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them. (Hosea 14:9 ESV)*

*‘**Wise** people will understand these things, A person with **insight** will recognize them. The Lord’s ways are right.*

Righteous people live by them.

Rebellious people stumble over them. (Hosea 14:9 God’s Word Translation)

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Section I

Wisdom, Insight, Discernment.

CHAPTER 1

A SEARCH FOR WISDOM

We know God exists though we may not understand all about him. He dwells in thick darkness (Deut. 5:22; 1Kings 8:12; Ps 97:2). He reveals himself to us through his written word. *'What no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him'* (1 Cor 2:9). But we have the privilege to dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Ps 91:1). We may not know all about God but we have the understanding to know different aspects of God.

Job 23:8-9 states, *'Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. But he knows the way I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.'*

We do not fully understand God but he knows our ways. It is the glory of God to conceal things but the glory of man to find them (Proverbs 25:1).

'Surely there is a mine for silver, and place for gold that they refine. Iron is taken out from the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore. Man puts an end to darkness and searches out the farthest limit the ore in gloom and deep darkness' (Job 28:1-3).

The inquisitive mind of man is not content with the surface level or shallow discoveries but digs into the depth to uncover the hidden. Job 28: 5-6 says, *'As for the earth, out of it comes bread, but underneath it is turned up as by fire. Its stones are a place of sapphires and it as dust of gold'*

A man cuts flinty rocks and overturns mountains then his eyes see precious things. He shuts up streams and then things which are hidden he brings out (Job 28:9-11).

Man puts all effort to discover the hidden treasures of value. But things of God and wisdom of God he cannot discover. Job 28: 12 says, *'But where*

shall wisdom be found? Where is the place for understanding?’ Job himself gives the answer when he mentions that man cannot understand the worth of wisdom, the deep does not have nor the sea. One cannot purchase with gold or weigh with the price of silver one cannot value it with precious stones like onyx or sapphire, coral or crystal neither can one exchange for jewels or fine gold. The price of wisdom is above pearls (Job 8:12 - 19).

Definitely, the value of wisdom is superior to gold, silver, pearls or precious stones. But from where does wisdom come? Job questions himself and gives an answer to his question. *‘From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air... God understands the way to it, and he knows its place’ (Job 28:20, 23).*

To have wisdom one has to know God. The word of God is a reflection of God’s character, his pattern of thoughts. In his word are instructions, methods, dealings and his expectations for wise human behavior. The word of God is a blueprint enriched with wisdom of God to help one live according to God’s standards of expectations.

The reason to have wisdom is, *‘To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth’ (Proverbs 1:2-4).*

The illustrations and instructions of Proverbs teach God’s way of life:

- Avoid wrong companionship (Proverbs 1:8-16).
- Wisdom is against complacency (Proverbs 1:32).
- Wisdom guards and delivers from evil (Proverbs 2:11).
- Wisdom gives long life, riches, honor (Proverbs 3:16; 8:18).
- Wisdom has insight and good precepts (Proverbs 4:1-2).
- Wisdom protects from adulterous woman (Proverbs 5:6;7).
- Through wisdom kings reign, rulers decree, princes’ rule, nobles govern justly (Proverbs 8:15-17).

- Wisdom gives life and goods favor (Proverbs 8:35).
- Wisdom is always well prepared (Proverbs 9:1-4).
- Wise of heart receive commandments (Proverbs 10:8).
- Wisdom leads to deliverance (Proverbs 11:1-9).
- Wisdom distinguishes between righteous and wicked (Proverbs 12:5-7).
- The teaching of wisdom is a fountain of life (Proverbs 13:14-15).
- Wisdom guards one's mouth (Proverbs 13:2-3; 14:3).
- There is truthfulness with wisdom (Proverbs 14:5,25).
- Wisdom helps to discern one's way (Proverbs 14:8).
- Wisdom has humility (Proverbs 15:33; 22:4).
- Wisdom teaches correct speech (Proverbs 16:21-24; 17:7; 18:2; 20:15).
- Wisdom gives diligence (Proverbs 21:5).
- Wisdom teaches to avoid a scoffer (Proverbs 21:14,24;22:10).
- Wisdom, understanding, counsel belongs to God (Proverbs 21:30).
- Wisdom gives instructions on training children (Proverbs 22:4,6; 23:14; 29:15,17).
- Wisdom teaches to honor one's mother and father (Proverbs 23:22; 30:11,17).
- Wisdom is against slothfulness (Proverbs 6:9-11; 24:30-34; 26:15-16).
- Wisdom gives teaching on how to deal with fools (Proverbs 26:1-5).

- Wisdom teaches to choose right friends (Proverbs 22:25; 27:9-10).
- Wisdom teaches about shrewdness in business (Proverbs 27:23-27).
- Wisdom talks about justice (Proverbs 29: 4, 14, 26).
- Wisdom gives the significance of wonderful things, minute things, stately things (Proverbs 30:18-19,21-22,24-26,29-30).
- Wisdom of a wife (Proverbs 31:10-31).

Job summarizes in Job 28:28, *'And he said to man, "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding."'*

In conclusion one can say that wisdom is richly found wrapped in the word of God. When one lives according to God's instructions, avoiding what is unacceptable to God, it is living with wisdom.

CHAPTER 2

INSIGHT: PEEP INTO THE REALM OF THE SPIRIT

There is a physical realm, there is also the realm of the spirit. The perception of the physical realm is through the five sensory organs namely eyes to see, ears to hear, nose to smell, tongue to taste and skin for touch. On the other hand, one can understand the realm of the spirit by the human spirit. Man is a spirit; he has a mind and lives in a body (1 Thess 5: 23). God is a Spirit (John 4: 24) When man believes in Jesus Christ and accepts him as his Lord and Savior, his human spirit which is dead or unable to perceive God and the things of God is 'born again' to know God. The human spirit connects to God and understands the things of God. The natural human mind cannot perceive the things of God but a 'born again' person can perceive the things of God (1 Cor 2: 14).

In the Old Testament man is not 'born again' as Jesus Christ has not yet come on earth. But the prophets of God are endowed with special spiritual anointing and they can connect to the realm of the spirit.

Elisha in the Old Testament is a prophet who can see the spiritual world. 2 Kings 6:8-17 records that Elisha can perceive and understand the war strategies of the king of Syria as he plans them secretly with his soldiers. The king of Syria assumes that one of his men is a spy who gives information to Elisha. The king of Syria sends his military troops to arrest Elisha. The servant of Elisha wakes up in the morning; he is afraid to see horses and chariots around them. He says to Elisha his master, "...*Alas, my master! What shall we do?*" He (Elisha) said, "*Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them*" (2 Kings 6:16). Then Elisha prays to the Lord to open his eyes, that he may see. The Lord opens

the eyes of the servant and he sees horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha.

Elisha has the spiritual ability to understand and see in the realm of the spirit while his servant is fearful as he sees a great army in his physical surroundings. When Elisha asks the Lord to open the eyes of the servant to see the secrets of the spiritual realm, the servant gets a different perception of the situation.

Another incident of understanding the realm of the spirit is in 1 Kings 22. During the reign of King Ahab - the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat - the king of Judah team up to war with the king of Syria.

King Jehoshaphat wants to know the will of God regarding the battle. King Ahab calls his prophets to give their verdict. The prophets encourage King Ahab to go ahead with the battle that will lead him to victory. King Jehoshaphat is dubious about the predictions of the prophets of King Ahab. He inquires if another prophet can counsel them. King Ahab knows another prophet whose name is Micaiah, though he calls for this prophet, he informs the king of Judah that he does not agree with his counsels as they are discouraging.

When Micaiah comes, his counsel is contrary to the prophecies given by other prophets. *‘And he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd.” And the Lord said, “These have no master; let each return to his home in peace”’* (1 Kings 22: 17). These words given by Micaiah antagonize the words of other prophets. But Micaiah not only speaks the word but backs up the prophetic utterance by revealing the picture of what he sees in the realm of the spirit. *‘And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on the throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?’ And one said one thing and another said another, then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, ‘I will entice him’. And the Lord said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so’”’* (1 Kings 22: 19-22).

Through his insight into the realm of the spirit Micaiah can explain that his prophetic utterance is true among other prophets who just speak out of their mind.

King Ahab is furious with Micaiah because his counsel contradicts his plan for war. He orders Micaiah to be thrown in prison till his return from war. Besides Micaiah is to be given meager bread and water to live. On this Micaiah answers, *“If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me.” And he said, “Hear, all you people!”* (1 Kings 22: 28).

This is the understanding of the Old Testament prophet who can perceive by getting glimpses into the realm of the spirit world. It is the human spirit that gets insight into the realm of the spirit.

The New Testament explicitly explains about a person who is ‘born again’ as his human spirit can understand the things of God.

‘...For the Spirit (Holy Spirit) searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person (human spirit which is ‘born again’) which is in him? So also, no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God... The natural person (human mind) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.’ (1Cor 2:10-12,14).

The human spirit of the ‘born again’ person can understand the spiritual things but the natural mind of man cannot perceive such things.

A man born of the spirit can easily receive the things of God. Then his mind becomes like the mind of Christ, as he understands the thoughts, views, ideas and plans of God (2 Cor 2: 16).

CHAPTER 3

LIVING WITH WISDOM AND INSIGHT

Jesus speaks a parable in Matthew 13:44-45, Jesus says, *‘The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.’*

To others it appears he is buying a field but his motive for purchase is the hidden treasure. This is a wise and discreet decision. This is having insight.

Proverbs 4:1 says, *‘Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight.’*

Besides Proverbs 4:5 says, *‘Get wisdom, get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.’*

It is evident that wisdom and insight are two sides of the same coin.

Proverbs 9 personifies Wisdom and Folly as two women.

Proverbs 9:1-2 says, *‘Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table.’*

The woman Wisdom is industrious, she works hard. She builds her house and she hewn her seven pillars to build. She prepares the beasts, mixes the wine, sets the table before she invites her guests. The preparation is done discreetly.

Proverbs 9:3-5 says, *‘She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town. “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!” To him who lacks sense she says, “Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight.”’* Wisdom sends her young women to

invite the guests. Wisdom's preparation is in the secrecy of her home but her invitation is for the public. All is ready and set. The guests have to walk in, sit at the table and enjoy the preparations of Wisdom. Her preparations are for the simple, to impart to them her wisdom.

On the contrary, *'The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes her seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, "whoever is simple let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant"'* (Proverbs 9:13-17).

Folly makes no preparations. There is void and emptiness in her home. There is no fruit of her labor for her guests to enjoy. She has nothing to offer her guests. She is devoid of a quiet spirit and she is loud. She calls her guests to adopt dishonest methods to eat bread and drink water. She functions without preparations. Therefore, Folly has nothing to offer.

Wisdom works and prepares discreetly its hard work is unseen by others but it benefits others with life. While Folly lacks preparation and leads others to death (Proverbs 9: 11,14).

Jesus speaks a parable, *'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and wind blew and beat on the house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.'* (Matt 7:24-25)

Jesus says the wise obey the words of God. This gives them a strong foundation in life to build themselves. Every foundation in life requires deep digging in the words of God. Hence such people who dig deep can stand the storms of life.

Further Jesus says, *'And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the*

winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.' (Matt 7:26-27).

The unseen foundation of the house is important for it to stand in the storm. Without the foundation the house can collapse. To follow the words of Jesus is to build a foundation of one's life. As seen in Chapter-2, Insight: Peep Into The Realm Of The Spirit. Also, living by the word of God is living by insight. According to Jesus this is the way a wise man lives.

Understanding the words of Jesus builds a support system of a spiritual realm. It does not have the natural circumstances for its base. There are deep insights of wisdom in the word of God that give a spiritual foundation to stand firm in the storms of natural human life. Therefore, *'Deep calls to deep'* (Psalms 42:7).

Wisdom and insight are like roots of a tree that penetrate deep in the ground, they manifest their green leaves, flowers and fruit overtly for all to enjoy. But deep hidden wisdom and insight give depth of character to an outward simple lifestyle.

CHAPTER 4

DISCERNMENT

There are instructions in the Bible on speech, mannerism, integrity, attitude and behavior.

Proverbs 23:9 says, *‘Do not speak in the hearing of the fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words.’*

Again Proverbs 16: 21 says, *‘The wise of heart is called discerning and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.’*

This explains that our speech and interaction with people is vital in shaping our life.

If we review the life of Joseph, we observe he has his father’s favor but he does not have a cordial relationship with his brothers. He gives his father a bad report about his brothers. His brothers hate him but Joseph has dreams. The interpretations of his dreams give glimpses of his brother’s and parents paying him obeisance. More hate towards Joseph springs out in his brothers as they hear his dreams (Genesis 37:1-11).

Joseph’s dreams of self-exaltation create a breach between him and his brothers. The brothers harbor grudge against Joseph in their hearts. They team together and conspire against him and sell him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. The Ishmaelites take Joseph to Egypt. His brothers kill an animal, take Joseph’s coat, dip it in the blood of the animal. They show the coat with blood to their father, pretending that Joseph might have been killed by some wild animal (Genesis 37:12-33).

From the above incident we observe that Joseph does not have the wisdom to discern the hate his brothers harbor towards him. He shares the secrets of his dreams with them. His brothers disdainfully

remove him from their life; they sell him to strangers. He is taken to a foreign land.

Several years later Joseph in Egypt is made to stand before Pharaoh- The king of Egypt and he interprets Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh is pleased with Joseph and his interpretations of dreams. *'And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne I will be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of linen and put a gold chain about his neck. And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus, he set him over all the land of Egypt'* (Genesis 41:38-43).

A wise man like Pharaoh recognizes the gifts and wisdom of another wise man. Thus, Joseph receives honor and respect. Pharaoh sees in Joseph the capability of an administrator, leader and ruler. Joseph's interpretations of dreams give a glimpse of the calamity Egypt has to face in the future. The dreams are a given sign of warning for the king. Pharaoh identifies Joseph's discernment in understanding the future, perceives Joseph's wisdom in his counsel to handle the future disaster. Joseph becomes to Pharaoh an instrument in building Egypt.

On the contrary as seen earlier Joseph's foolish brothers do not understand Joseph's gifts of dreams and interpretations. They hold hate in their hearts for Joseph's dreams.

Being with the wise makes one wise. *'Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.'* (Proverbs 13:20).

For growth, success and promotion it is essential to be in the company of people who recognize our gifts and talents, such people encourage, build and exalt us.

Section II

The Presence of God.

CHAPTER 5

MOSES WITH HIS GOD

God was closely associated with people he called, chose and equipped with an assignment.

Moses was one such man with whom God spoke face to face. God and Moses spoke as friends. In the wilderness the Israelites moved for forty years and lived in tents. A special tent outside the camp was called the Tent of Meeting. God and Moses communicated with each other in the Tent of Meeting. The presence of God came in the Tent of Meeting when Moses entered the tent. Exodus 33:9 stated *'When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses.'*

Further Exodus 33:11 narrated, *'Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as man speaks to his friend.'*

The intimacy and companionship between God and Moses were evident in their conversation. Moses insisted that God revealed him his ways and methods. Besides he requested God for instructions on how to proceed through the wilderness. He wanted the presence of God to go with them. God's presence with them was a shield of protection from their enemies. God's presence with them made them a distinct nation among the surrounding heathen nations. Moses knew the dangers of the wilderness journey without the guidance of God. Further Moses requested God to show him his glory. Willingly God permitted his glory to pass by as he hid Moses in the cleft of a rock and covered him with his hand for Moses to see his back. Such personal communication with God was not uncommon for Moses.

As Moses spent much time with God and spoke with God, the glory of God rubbed on him. Moses was unaware that the skin of his face shone as he spent time in the presence of the glory of God

(Exodus 34:29). Moses covered his face with the veil to conceal the glory of God on his face (Exodus 34:33,35).

God was a friend to Moses with whom God shared his plans and secrets, *'He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel'* (Psalms 103:7).

The Israelites saw the miracles but Moses enjoyed deep communication with God. Once Moses' sister Miriam and brother Aaron spoke against Moses because he married a Cushite woman. They expressed their displeasure towards Moses. *'And they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the Lord heard it'* (Numbers 12:2).

The Lord called all three Moses, Aaron and Miriam to the Tent of Meeting. The presence of God in the form of a pillar of cloud descended on the Tent of Meeting. *'And he (God) said. "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"'* (Numbers 12:6-8).

God was angry with Miriam and Aaron. They had compared themselves with Moses who was a prophet of a different level. God spoke mouth to mouth with him while God spoke with other prophets through dreams, visions or riddles.

After the presence of God departed from the Tent of Meeting and the pillar of cloud lifted Miriam had become leprous. Aaron pleaded to Moses for her healing, Moses cried to the Lord for his sister's healing. The Lord responded to his cry and healed her (Numbers 12:10-15). God defended his servant Moses when he was accused by his brother and sister.

Leaving aside all the signs, wonders and miracles God performed through Moses, there was a special bond between God and

Moses. The secret of this relationship was confined to the Tent of Meeting where God communed with Moses. It was the outcome of the relationship that exhibited miracles before the Israelites.

A true servant of the Lord conceals his relationship with the Lord. The secrets of God are too precious. One cannot utter them before people. The words God speaks are valuable and are a treasure. Pearls should not be thrown before swine.

CHAPTER 6

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Moses built the tabernacle with the most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the Outer Court. (Exodus 26 and 27) The 'ark of the covenant' symbolized the presence of God and was placed in the Most Holy Place. No man was permitted to enter the Most Holy Place. Once a year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest sought audience with the presence of the Lord in the Most Holy Place. (Leviticus 16).

1 Samuel 4 recorded a battle between the Israelites and Philistines. Due to their lack of commitment and disobedient attitude to the laws of God, the Israelites were defeated in the battle. To restore victory the Israelites removed the 'ark of the covenant' (symbol of the presence of God) from the Most Holy Place to the battlefield. They assumed the 'ark of the covenant' in the battlefield would be God with them, this presence of God would bring them victory. But the Israelites lost the battle. The 'ark of the covenant' was captured by the enemies who were victorious over the Israelites (1 Samuel 4:1-11).

Though the Philistines had captured the 'ark of the covenant' it could not be kept in their land as its presence brought tumors on the people. In their wisdom the Philistines returned the 'ark of the covenant' to the Israelites (1 Samuel 5:6-12, 6:1-5).

When the 'ark of the covenant' returned to Israel it was placed in Kiriath-jearim in the house of Abinadab. His sons were consecrated and were charged to take care of the duties of the ark. The 'ark of the covenant' was kept in Kiriath-jearim for twenty years. It did not return to the tabernacle in the Most Holy Place.

As years passed by David was anointed the king of Israel. King David desired to have a special place for the 'ark of the covenant.'

He wanted to live in close association with the presence of the Lord. He built a tent to place the 'ark of the covenant.' He carried the ark from

Kiriath-jearim on a new cart pulled by oxen to bring it to the appointed place. The oxen stumbled on the way. Uzzah who drove the cart placed his hand on the ark and protected it from falling. In anger the Lord killed Uzzah who touched the ark. After this incident King David was fearful. The ark was not taken to its appointed place. The ark was placed in the house of Obededom. But the Lord abundantly blessed the house Obededom (1 Chr 13:14).

Eventually, King David asked the Levites to carry the ark of the covenant on their shoulders to the place he had prepared. *‘Then David summoned the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and the Levites Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab and said to them, “You are the heads of the fathers’ houses of the Levites. Consecrate yourselves, you and your brothers, so that you may bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel to the place that I have prepared for it...”’* (1 Chr 15:11-12).

David had realized the error of placing the ark on the cart that resulted in the death of Uzzah. According to the law, the Levites were to carry the ark on their shoulders (1 Chr 15: 13-15).

King David, the priests, the Levites, gatekeepers, elders along with commanders of thousands brought the ‘ark of the covenant.’ They were accompanied by instrument players, singers and musicians. With great joy they sacrificed rams and bulls to the Lord. King David danced and worshipped with the procession that carried the ‘ark of the covenant’ (1 Chr 15-16,28).

Eventually, the ark was placed in the tent constructed by King David. The king appointed Asaph and his brothers to minister before the ‘ark of the covenant’ along with Obededom and his sixty-eight brothers (1 Chr 16:37-38). But the tabernacle of Moses was at Gibeon and the people came to offer daily sacrifices. Zadok and his brothers ministered at the tabernacle (1 Chr. 16:39).

The tabernacle of Moses was without the ‘ark of the covenant’, it symbolized the absence of God. The Most Holy place was vacant, but the people performed their religious duties at the tabernacle.

This form of worship became a way of life with the Israelites. They performed religious rituals and duties without the ark. These outward actions carried no inward commitment to the Lord.

During the period Jesus was on earth he turned the hearts of men, from outward religious acts to an inner deep bonding with the Lord. He taught, lived and prioritized the concept of being connected to the living God. It was the inner most being of man connected to God that would flow with the living waters (John 4:10).

Jesus was admonished for his teachings which appeared to contradict the laws of Moses. He healed on Sabbath (Lk 13:10-17; Lk14:1-6), he did not fast (Matt 9:14-17), he did not wash hands before eating (Matt 15:1-2). He defied many such rituals and emphasized through his teachings the relationship with God the loving Father.

Today, let us walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Let us not perform outward man-made rituals and religious duties that are not in tune with the teachings of Jesus. But let our inner man be connected to the living God which is the 'ark of the covenant' of ancient times.

CHAPTER 7

MOUNT MORIAH

The temple of God was a structure of great grandeur constructed by King Solomon at Mount Moriah (2 Chr 3:1) The meticulous architecture, the intricate craftsmanship of gold, silver and bronze, the studded precious stones were an expression of King Solomon's wisdom and wealth.

Yet, the vision of the construction of the house of God began from the era when David reigned as king. David's kingdom stretched from Beersheba to Dan. He decided to take a census of his subjects. David's commander Joab was against this idea but he submitted to King David's command. The census stated, Israel had 11,00,000 men of war and Judah had 4,70,000 valiant men. But God was displeased with David because he had taken the census (1 Chr 21:7).

God sent his seer Gad to David. *'Go and say to David, "Thus says the Lord. Three things I offer you, choose one of them that I may do it to you." So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, Choose what you will: either three years of famine, or three months of devastation by your foes while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days of the sword of the Lord, pestilence on the land, with the angle of the Lord destroying throughout all territory of Israel. Now decide what answer shall I return to him who sent me."'* (1 Chr 21:10-12).

David chose the third option, of three days of pestilence as he thought it was better to fall in the hands of the merciful God than to be destroyed by men.

So, God sent a pestilence on Israel and 70,000 men in Israel died. When David saw the destruction, he relented. The angle of the Lord with the drawn sword stood on the threshing before of Ornan the Jebusite. David and the elders wore sackcloth and repented before

the Lord and asked him to put an end to the undesirable plague (2 Chr 21:14-17).

The angle of the Lord commanded Gad to tell David to make an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, David approached Ornan. *'And David said to Ornan, "Give me the sight of the threshing floor that I may build on it an altar to the Lord - give it to me at its full price - that the plague may be averted from the people"'* (1 Chr 21:22). Ornan out of due respect for King David willingly offered oxen for burnt offering, sledges for wood and wheat for grain offering. King David told Ornan, *'No, but I will buy them for the full price, I will not take for the Lord what is yours nor offer burnt offering that cost me nothing'* (1 Chr 21:24).

David paid 600 shekels of gold by weight to purchase Ornan's property. He built the altar, offered burnt offering and peace offering. The Lord answered him by fire on the burnt offering. The angle of the Lord was commanded by the Lord to place the sword in the sheath. Thus, the plague ended (1 Chr 21:25).

Since God answered David at the threshing floor of Ornan, David chose the location for the construction of the temple of the Lord. *'Then David said, "Here shall be the house of the Lord God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel"'* (1 Chr 22:1).

The location for the house of the Lord was selected by David to an answered prayer. The threshing floor of Ornan was on Mount Moriah on which the plan for the construction of the temple was laid. The place was a symbol of David's repentance and his sacrificial offering of self with renewed commitment to God.

Now Abraham was called by God to take his only son Isaac on Mount Moriah and offer him as burnt offering. *'He (God) said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you"'* (Genesis 22: 2).

Isaac was Abraham's only son whom God had promised him when he was seventy-five years of age. Isaac was born to Abraham after several years of waiting. It was at the age of hundred Abraham became a father to Isaac. Abraham's wife Sarah gave birth to Isaac in her old age, at the age

of ninety (Genesis 21:5-7). Abraham had no hope of having another child with Sarah. In obedience to God Abraham took Isaac to Mount Moriah to offer him as burnt offering. The servants who accompanied were told that they both were going to worship the Lord (Genesis 22:5).

Abraham reached the place God had appointed. He built the altar laid the wood, bound his son and placed him on the altar to slaughter him (Genesis 22:9-10). It was then he heard the voice of the Lord call him. ‘... *“Abraham, Abraham!” and he said, “Hear I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me”*’ (Genesis 22:11-12). Then Abraham saw a ram in the bushes and offered it as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:13).

Abraham passed God’s test on Mount Moriah by his willingness to offer his only son. The act of obedience confirmed God’s promise to Abraham. God promised him offspring as abundant as stars of heaven and sand on the sea shore (Genesis 22:18).

Before God confirmed his blessings on Abraham he tested his heart. *‘The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts.’* (Proverbs 17:3).

Mount Moriah became a symbol of sacrifice. Through the course of time, it became the place for the temple of God, a dwelling place for God’s presence. It was the center to reach out to God in prayer and it had the altar for all forms of sacrificial offerings which pleased God.

The temple was built on the foundation of David’s and Abraham’s obedience and sacrifice.

Section III
Prophets with the Word and
the Spirit.

CHAPTER 8

ELIJAH: THE PROPHET WHO LIVED BY THE WORD

It was during the period in the history of Israel, when the entire nation was deeply involved in idolatry, God called Elijah. He was a prophet God trained to fulfill his purpose.

It was during the reign of King Ahab in Israel, Elijah the Tishbite received a ‘word’ from the Lord. The Lord told Elijah it would not rain, till Elijah himself pronounced the outpouring of rain (1 King 17:1).

Further, the Lord instructed Elijah to hide himself by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3). Elijah obeyed God. The ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and evening at brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:6).

This was a phase in Elijah’s life where he was isolated and hidden from human companionship. His fellowship and communion were only with God.

Besides there was drought in the nation of Israel. Elijah completely depended upon God for his bread and water. He was cut off from all human dependency. In his isolation he learned the secret of God being the source of all his needs.

Then came a shift in the scenario when due to drought the brook Cherith dried up (1 Kings 17:7). Then a ‘word’ from God directed him to Zarephath in Sidon. God told him to stay with a widow who would feed him (1 Kings 17:9). The widow herself lived with her only son in poverty. She only had a handful of flour and a jug of oil (1 Kings 17:12). But Elijah had learned to make God his source. He knew God would supply all his needs. God would take care of his provisions in the widow’s house (1 Kings 17:14). The flour and the

oil did not finish as long as Elijah stayed in the widow’s house (1 Kings 17:16).

After several days again the Lord gave a ‘word’ to Elijah, that he would send rain in Israel (1 Kings 18:1).

Elijah moved out of his hidden life. He gathered 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. He prepared two bulls and asked the prophets of Baal to sacrifice one bull on the altar. He told them to call their god. If their god answered by fire and consumed the sacrifice, then he indeed was god. The prophets of Baal called upon their god the entire day but received no answer (1 Kings 18:26-29). Elijah then repaired the altar with twelve stones according to the number of tribes of the sons of Jacob. He placed the offering of the bull on the altar; thrice he poured water on the wood and the burnt offering. The water ran down the trench he had dug around the altar. Then Elijah called on the Lord ‘... *“O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench*’ (1 Kings 18: 36-38).

God heard Elijah’s plea as he had taken instructions from God and acted on God’s ‘word’. When people saw the fire on the burnt offering they fell on their faces and said, *‘The Lord he is God; The Lord he is God.’* (1 Kings 18: 39).

Elijah had paid the price to be alone with God. He had lived only with God’s instructions. The fruit of such obedience was the miracle of fire from heaven. It was a sign for the idolatrous nation of Israel that Elijah’s God was the true living God.

Elijah manifested to the world the reality and power of the living God by his disciplined life before God. He fulfilled his mission and killed all the prophets of Baal at Brook Kishon (1 Kings 18:40).

Though the evil had been destroyed but it had not yet rained in the land. Elijah went on Mount Carmel to pray for the rain (1 Kings 18:42). He persevered in prayer as he bowed himself down on earth and put his

face between his knees, this attitude of prayer brought rain in Israel after three and a half years (1 Kings 18: 41-44).

Elijah had accomplished the purpose of God by showing the nation the sovereignty of the living God, destroying the prophets and restoring rain to the nation.

But when Elijah received a letter of threat on his life from Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab because he had killed the prophets of Baal, he was afraid and ran for his life (1 Kings 19:1-3). He felt depressed and went to Beersheba in Judah. There was no 'word' of God for him to give him future direction. His life appeared aimless and purposeless. As a prophet he was dependent on God's spoken word. Without any instructions from God he felt he was forsaken by God. He felt disconnected from the divine, supernatural God on whom he had leaned for guidance and provisions.

But God had not forgotten his prophet. God sent his angel to feed him with baked cake and a jar of water. With the food provided for him he gained strength to walk forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb. It was not the food alone that revived him but the assurance of God's presence with him (1 Kings 19:5-8). Later he came to a cave and lodged there. Then the 'word' of the Lord came to him, *'What are you doing here Elijah?'* (1 Kings 19:9). This was not the place God had sent him. Earlier, he had resided in places God had for him. There had been no instruction from the Lord to live in a cave. God called Elijah and made him stand on the mountain. There were wind, earthquake and fire but God was not in them. Then the Lord spoke to Elijah with a low whisper (1 Kings 19:11-12). This was the audible voice of the Lord that Elijah recognized. This voice was familiar to him. He went out and stood at the entrance of the cave as he wrapped his face with the cloak and God questioned him the second time *'What are you doing here Elijah?'* (1 Kings 19:13).

Elijah justified himself for being in the cave, he answered, *'...I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life,*

to take it away' (1 Kings 19:14). This was Elijah's state of defeat, depression and despondency without the 'word' from God.

Then God instructed Elijah with a new assignment. He told him to return to the wilderness of Damascus and told him 1) to anoint Hazael to be the king of Syria 2) to anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as the king of Israel 3) to anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat as a prophet in his place (1 Kings 19:15-16).

With the new purpose Elijah got vigor and vitality for the service of God. He came out of his depression and despondent attitude to fulfill the mission given by God.

Prophet Elijah lived by the 'word' from God. The 'word' of God was his life line; he depended on God's instructions to lead and guide him. Besides, he was encouraged by God when he was informed seven thousand prophets in Israel had not bowed to Baal or kissed his mouth (1 Kings 19:18).

'Word' from the Lord linked him back to God. This was Elijah's life of faith. As Romans 10:17 says, *'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.'*

It was the 'word' received from the Lord that bound him to God. He fulfilled his calling as a prophet in the nation of Israel that had forgotten the living God and had turned to idolatry. He fulfilled the assignment appointed to him. He did not face death; God had instructed him that he would straight be carried to heaven. God took Elijah straight from earth to heaven (2 Kings 2).

CHAPTER 9

DOUBLE PORTION OF THE SPIRIT

Elisha, the son of Shaphat was a farmer. When Elijah the prophet threw his cloak on Elisha he was ploughing in his field with twelve pair of oxen. Immediately Elisha knew he had to quit farming to follow Elijah (1 Kings 19:19).

But Elisha sought Elijah's permission to bid farewell to his parents. Elijah responded with a rough answer, '*...Go back again, for what have I done to you?*' (1 Kings 19:20).

Rebuked by Elijah, Elisha sacrificed his oxen. He burnt the yoke and boiled the flesh for the people to eat (1 Kings 19:21). Elisha understood that to follow Elijah meant no turning back. He burnt all bridges, never to return to his profession of farming or to his parents' home. He desired to follow a man who had the Spirit of God. He wanted to be with his master.

When Elisha realized that Elijah would not face death but would straight be carried to heaven, he decided to follow him closely from Gilgal, to Bethel, to Jericho to Jordan. Elisha closely followed Elijah. Even though Elijah asked him to return, Elisha insisted on following him. Elisha told Elijah '*As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.*' (2 Kings 2:2,4,6).

Eventually, Elijah asked Elisha if he had any request. Elisha responded, '*...Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me*' (2 Kings 2:9). It was a difficult request to be granted, yet Elijah promised him that if he saw him being carried to heaven then his request would be granted (2 Kings 2-10).

It was Elisha's passion, persuasiveness, determination to receive the double anointing of the Spirit of God that made him follow Elijah.

As Elijah was taken to heaven in a whirlwind of chariots of fire and fiery horses, he was separated from Elisha. In the process Elijah's cloak fell on Elisha. The cloak symbolized the impartation of Elijah's office to Elisha.

As Elisha stood on the banks of river Jordan, he struck the river with Elijah's cloak and the waters parted, Elisha walked through river Jordan (2 Kings 2-14). (This act was earlier performed by Elijah as in 2 Kings 2:8), this act was a confirmation that Elisha had the double portion of the spirit promised by Elijah.

Elisha had prepared himself to receive the double portion of the Spirit in Elijah. This process had not started by following Elijah to receive his cloak. But this act started when he burnt his oxen. He put an end to his own will and desires. It was the death of self that burnt with the oxen and produced in him the passion to become like Elijah and receive the double portion of the Spirit in Elijah. After Elisha received the double portion of the Spirit, he performed more miracles than Elijah.

2 Kings 4:8-10 narrated Elisha's visit to Shumen. In Shumen a wealthy woman invited him to her house and he shared a meal with her family. After Elisha had visited them, the woman told her husband '*...Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way*' (2 Kings 4:9). Elisha had not performed any miracles or uttered a prophetic word or preached a power packed sermon but the woman perceived he was a holy man.

It was the life of the Spirit in him that manifested in him, as all that was of self and flesh had been destroyed. The life of the Spirit in him made him a holy man in the eyes of the woman.

Likewise, people who make their decision to follow Jesus Christ put to an end to all they designed for personal gain and ambition. They make Jesus the center of their life. Like Paul they confessed. '*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*' (Gal 2:20).

Besides their life symbolized '...as dying, and behold, we live;' (2 Cor 6:9).

People who die to self; carry the sweet aroma of Christ in them (2 Cor 2:15).

Section IV

Prophets with Assignments.

This section is not the extensive, elaborate writings of the major and minor prophets. This section considers only some relevant factors of the prophets.

CHAPTER 10

ISAIAH: RENEWED – RESTORED – RECOMPENSED

Isaiah is a prophet in the kingdom of Judah. He speaks the oracles of God to the people at the time in history when idolatry is at its peak.

God speaks to his people through Isaiah telling them the futility of idols. Thus, Isaiah speaks to the people about the human idea of making and crafting images, the dumbness of idols that have no sensory organs or understanding. God's purpose is to give his people an insight into the craftsmanship of human hands that create and make their own gods whom they worship and honor.

So, God speaks through Isaiah and explains to his people that idols are made with wood which a man selects. He chooses wood that may rot and the craftsman covers it with gold (Isaiah 40:18-20).

The goldsmith crafts the idols through smoldering and nailing (Isaiah 41:7). But the idols cannot predict the future or things to come. They are metal images and delusion. They cannot answer, they can do no good or harm (Isaiah 41: 22-23,29). The craftsman who makes the idols is human. The ironsmith hammers it and the carpenter measures it with a scale, pencil and compass. It is given the shape of a human. To make idols he cuts down cedar, cypress or oak trees which he plants. The rain nourishes the trees. With the wood of the tree, he kindles fire and makes bread. With the same wood he warms himself to get heat. This wood he also uses to make his gods. He bows down before it and asks it to deliver him (Isaiah 44:9-17). What the goldsmith makes he carries on his shoulders. He makes his idols stand. It cannot move from its place nor can answer or save from trouble (Isaiah 46:6-7). Here Isaiah talks about idols made with metal, wood and gold but all these idols are futile.

God speaks through Isaiah to tell his people the inefficacy of worshipping idol.

In contrast to idols, Isaiah reveals that our God is a living God. He is merciful and his lovingkindness is eternal. He is a great, mighty God full of wisdom.

God the creator of the universe, questions man through Isaiah and asks if anyone can measure the waters, mark heavens, enclose dust of the earth or weigh mountains in a scale, measure hills in a balance or counsel God to create or give God knowledge or understanding. All the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are nothing before God (Isaiah 40; 12-16).

The Lord is the first and the last who tramples over nations and destroys them (Isaiah 41:2-4). He is God who makes dry land and wilderness into pools and springs of water. The wilderness can get trees like cedar, acacia, myrtle, olive, pine and cypress. (Isaiah 41:17-30). God repeatedly states he is God and there is none besides him (Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6; 45:6).

God reveals himself as a living powerful God. Man did not create him but he is the Creator. Who has wisdom to understand God's mysterious creation? Is there anyone or anything that one can compare with God? The comparison of the living God with idols has significance in the oracles of Isaiah.

Further Isaiah speaks of the coming of the glory of God. He talks of the benefits one receives in the presence of God.

God speaks through Isaiah *'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, to bring the good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...to grant to those who mourn in Zion- to give them a beautiful head dress **instead** of ashes, the oil of gladness **instead** of mourning, the garment of praise **instead** of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified...**Instead** of your shame there shall be a double portion;*

***instead** of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore, in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy'* (Isaiah 61:1,3,7).

This is a depiction of what people have in the presence of their Lord in contrast to their life with lifeless idols.

The oracles of Isaiah continue as he says, *'You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married'* (Isaiah 62:3-4). *'And they shall be called the Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken'* (Isaiah 62:12).

God speaks through Isaiah about renewing and restoring the nation. The nation that forsakes God and worships man-made idols destroys itself and is taken into captivity by the enemy nation. But God encourages his people with the assurance that he has not forsaken them. If they leave their idols and come to him, his glory will restore their life. They will have the recompense of spiritual beauty, joy, gladness and honor instead of ashes, mourning and faintness which are part of their life in the flesh due to their inclination to man-made idols. Besides they will have double portion of blessings for all the losses in their act of disobediences to God by bowing before idols.

Worshiping idols brings destruction but worshiping their God brings them new blessings. It is a process of restoration for the people who obey their God and make a decision to give up idolatry and follow him. Then God recompenses the losses.

The people of the land are a delight to God. He chooses his people for himself and marries them. He can never forsake his land or leave his people desolate. The people of the land are God's Beulah.

CHAPTER 11

JEREMIAH: PAIN OF A PROPHET

God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet during the period of history when Babylonians come to capture Jerusalem. He is a prophet during the reign of kings Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Jeremiah is a witness to the capture of King Zedekiah whom the Babylonians capture and carry to Babylon with them.

Jeremiah mentions that God appoints him as his prophet when he is in his mother's womb. God speaks to Jeremiah – *'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations'* (Jeremiah 1:5).

But as we turn through the pages of the book of Jeremiah, we recognize the pain of the responsibility of the prophet. Inevitably, Jeremiah exclaims- *'Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed...because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?'* (Jeremiah 20:14,17-18).

The reason for his anguish as a prophet is the word of God in his mouth. Jeremiah states, *'Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name O Lord, God of host. I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?'* (Jeremiah 15:16-18).

The word of God is a delight to Jeremiah but the word in his mouth secludes him from the company of people. He lives his life in

isolation, in close association with God, in the presence of God. Finally, he learns his healing is in obeying God and speaking his word,

because his appointment is to speak the word of God. Jeremiah 15:19 conveys *‘Therefore thus says the Lord, “If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious and not what is worthless you shall be my mouth. They shall turn to you. but you shall not turn to them”’* (Jeremiah 15:19)

This is the lesson the prophet learns when he speaks the word of God only. Yet, Jeremiah struggles with the utterance given to him he says, *‘Whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction.” for the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and division all day long. If I say, “I will not mention him (God) or speak anymore in his (God) name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones and I am weary with holding it in and I cannot’* (Jeremiah 20:8-9).

Jeremiah is conscious of the responsibility he has as he carries the word of God in his mouth. It is a time when there are false prophets who are not from God. The words they speak contradict Jeremiah’s prophetic utterances. It is a time when priests and prophets are ungodly. The false prophets prophecy in the name of Baal, commit adultery and walk in lies. They encourage the evildoers and do not repent of their wrong doing (Jeremiah 23:11,13-14).

God speaks through Jeremiah and warns the people to ignore the words of the false prophets who speak visions from their own minds. Such false prophets follow their own hearts and console people with goodwill (Jeremiah 26:16-17).

Regarding false prophets the Lord speaks to Jeremiah. *‘For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened?’* (Jeremiah 23:18).

The demarcation and difference between Jeremiah and the false prophets are that Jeremiah has an appointment from God and his

counsel is of God. While the false prophets have no commission from God. The words they speak are their own invention.

Besides there is a false prophet Hananiah who challenges Jeremiah’s prophecies which he speaks to King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 27 and 28). Under

all opposition, Jeremiah stands for the truth that God tells him to speak, for the welfare of the people.

Jeremiah's suffering crosses all bounds when he is put in stocks (Jeremiah 37:10-15). He is also thrown in a cistern (Jeremiah 38:1-6) He goes through this persecution because he speaks God's word.

It is a privilege when God chooses, calls and gives his assignment to a prophet. The prophet lives in close association with God to hear the voice of God and be God's voice. This appointment has its challenges but through it all God is with his prophet.

Jeremiah is a perfect example of a prophet who stands for the Lord in spite of great opposition. He fulfills his commission with great sincerity though he receives no acceptance from kings who rule during the period of his appointment as a prophet.

CHAPTER 12

EZEKIEL: VISION OF THE TEMPLE AND HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Ezekiel the prophet was a priest. He prophesied to the people of Judah during their exile in Babylon.

As a prophet he was shown by God the abominations committed by the people of the land. The consequences of their sinful acts had led to their captivity and the destruction of the temple of God.

At a time when the elders of Judah came and sat with Ezekiel, God gave him a vision of the temple (Ezekiel 8:1). God showed Ezekiel the abominations committed in the temple that drove the presence of God away from the sanctuary.

Ezekiel saw at the north of the altar gate, at the entrance the image of jealousy (Ezekiel 8:5). When Ezekiel came to the entrance of the court, there was a hole in the wall. He was instructed by God to dig in the wall. As he dug in the wall there was an entrance. God told Ezekiel, *'Go in and see the vile abominations that they are committing here'* (Ezekiel 8:9).

Ezekiel saw engraved on the wall loathsome beasts and creeping things along with the idols of the house of Israel. There were seventy elders along with Jaazaniah (name of an elder) with censer which had incense for worship (Ezekiel 8:7-11). Then the Lord told Ezekiel, *'...Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, "The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land"'* (Ezekiel 8:12).

Then God took Ezekiel to the entrance of the north gate of the sanctuary. There were women weeping for Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14).

The deity Tammuz was worshipped to renew the vegetation of the earth after it had wilted in the summer season.

Then the Lord led Ezekiel into the inner court of the temple, between the porch and the altar. There were twenty-five men with their backs towards the temple. Their faces were towards the east worshipping the sun (Ezekiel 8:16).

The Lord warned Ezekiel about the abominations committed by the people. He told him such acts kindled his anger against the people and he would remain silent to their cry of help (Ezekiel 8:17-18).

Soon afterwards Ezekiel saw a vision from the Lord where the glory and presence of the Lord departed from the temple. *'Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out with the wheels besides them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the Lord, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them'* (Ezekiel 10:18-19).

Since the temple of the Lord was full of wickedness and idolatry, the presence of the holy God could not remain in the temple. The presence of the Lord departed from the temple.

Later God gave Ezekiel another vision of the future of the temple the vision revealed the return of the glory of God to the temple. *'Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. And behold the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters and the earth shone with his glory... As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and behold the glory of the Lord filled the temple'* (Ezekiel 43:1-2,4-5).

It was not only the restoration of the glory of God in the sanctuary but God gave instructions regarding the Levites who were chosen for service in the temple. *'But the Levities who went far from*

me, going astray from me after the idols when Israel went astray, shall bear their punishment. They shall be ministers in my sanctuary having oversight at the gates of the temple and ministering in the temple. They shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before the people to minister to them. Because they

ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn concerning them, declares the Lord God, and they shall bear their punishment. They shall not come near to me to serve me as priest, nor come near any of my holy things and the things that are most holy, but they shall bear their shame and the abomination that they have committed (Ezekiel 44:10-13).

The Levities who had compromised with the law of God and had been involved in idolatry were not permitted by God to come near the holy things and the most holy things. They had to bear the consequences of their disobedience and unfaithfulness to God. They were given the responsibility of gatekeepers. They were to slaughter animals for burnt offerings. They were to minister to the people in the outer court.

The Levitical priests of Zadok were to come in the presence of God and minister to him (Ezekiel 43:19).

'But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, shall come near to me to minister to me. And they shall stand before me to offer me the fat and the blood, declares the Lord God. They shall enter my sanctuary and they shall approach my table, to minister to me, and they shall keep my charge' (Ezekiel 44:15-16).

God made a clear distinction between the services appointed to the Levitical priests of Zadok and other Levities. Only the Levitical priests of Zadok were permitted to enter the presence of the Lord and perform duties related to the inner sanctuary of the Lord. They were allowed to come near God and minister to him because they did not deviate from the laws of God like other Levites. They were

completely faithful to the Lord when others went astray. Thus, the Levitical priests of Zadok were privileged to enter the inner courts of the temple and perform their priestly duties.

Besides the Levitical priests of Zadok were instructed to wear linen and not wool while ministering. Wool made them sweat. Sweat symbolized their personal effort in the service. God did not want them to sweat when they served him, their service was an appointment gifted by God. Such

service is an effortless performance before God. It did not require hard work and sweat.

Therefore, God gave Ezekiel the vision of the temple and showed him the difference between holiness and profanity of priesthood.

Along with the restoration of the glory of God in the temple, a sect of holy priesthood was chosen to serve in the inner courts of the temple. The holy God required holiness, ‘...*you shall be holy for I am holy*’ (1 Peter 1:16). God gave Ezekiel insight into the abominations of the temple. Later he revealed to him the temple with his glory restored along with purity of priesthood required in the service of the temple.

CHAPTER 13

DANIEL: LOVED BY GOD

Daniel was called a man who had the spirit of gods (Daniel 4:8,9,18 and Daniel 5:11,14,16). He interpreted dreams and visions for King Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar of Babylon. Daniel remained unharmed as he was placed in the den of lions during the reign of Darius the king of Medes. He also faithfully served Cyrus the king of Persia.

Daniel received several revelations from God regarding the future of the nations of the world (Daniel 7:8;10;11 and 12).

Daniel maintained his relationship with God through much prayer and fast.

During the first year of King Darius, Daniel sat before God and prayed with fast, sackcloth and ashes. He reminded God, that God was a covenant keeping God who expressed his steadfast love for those who kept his commandments. Daniel reminded God that the Israelites, their kings, princes and fathers had committed treachery and were driven out of their nation. Only shame was the portion of the Israelites, they had not obeyed his servants the prophets. They had brought curse upon themselves. According to the law of Moses as they had sinned against God. They had not turned from their iniquities to seek the favor of God. They had no insight to the truth of God. But the Lord God was righteous, merciful and forgiving (Daniel 9:3-13).

Daniel also prayed for God's face to shine on his sanctuary which was desolate, his ear to be inclined his prayer and eyes opened to see the desolation and destruction of Jerusalem, the city called by the name of God. Daniel pleaded before God that his request was not because of the righteousness of the people, but because of God's

mercy. Daniel reminded God that the city and people were called by the name of God (Den 9:16 -19).

As Daniel prayed, the messenger of God, Gabriel stood before him and told him, ‘...*O Daniel I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out and I have come to tell you for you are **greatly loved**. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision*’ (Daniel 9:22-23).

Daniel’s prayers made him the beloved of the Lord. Besides God gave him insight and understanding to interpret visions and revelations.

During the third year of the reign of Cyrus the king of Persia, Daniel decided to mourn and fast for three weeks. He ate no delicacies, meat or wine, neither did he anoint himself (Daniel 10:2-3).

After three weeks of fasting a messenger of God was sent to him. ‘*And he said to me, “O Daniel man **greatly loved**, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you”’. Then he said to me, “Fear not Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard and I have come because of your words”’... And he said, “O man **greatly loved**, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage”’ (Dan 10:11,12,19).*

Daniel’s relationship with God had the foundation of prayer and fast. This was very precious in the sight of God. God responded to Daniel’s prayer and fast and sent Gabriel with a word of encouragement. Daniel was gifted with wisdom. He had insight and understanding of visions, dreams and revelation from God. Daniel had a unique association with God. God shared with him perceptions on things of the future. The bond of love between God and Daniel, made Daniel truly God’s beloved.

CHAPTER 14

JOEL: A CALL FOR FAST AND PRAYER

Joel, the prophet talked about the attack of locust on the nation of Judah. Locust was just a metaphor used to describe the enemy that threatened to attack the nation. Joel 1:4 mentioned, *'What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.'*

Inevitably, the attack of the enemy caused destruction in the nation. *'It has laid waste my wine and splintered my fig tree, it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white'* (Joel 1:7).

There was lack of grain, wine and oil - *'The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes'* (Joel 1:10).

The severity of lack had made the store houses empty, granaries were torn down, the seeds had shriveled. The beasts, cattle, herds groaned and suffered because there was no pasture. Due to non-availability of grain, wine and oil there was no offering for the sacrifice for the house of the Lord. The priests and ministers mourned because they could not offer the daily sacrifices to the Lord (Joel 1:9).

Under dire circumstances Joel called the nation for repentance and proclaimed a fast for the consecration of the nation. *'Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord'* (Joel 1:13-14).

The act of fast and prayer was God's expectation from the nation. It was an act that changed self-willed hearts to humility and disobedience to obedience towards God.

“‘Yet even now”, declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster’ (Joel 2: 12-13).

God in his mercy and love forgave the people and the disaster was averted

Fast and prayer before the Lord restored the nation. There were abundance and prosperity. *‘The Lord answered and said to his people, “Behold I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations... Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and vine give their full yield... The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.”’* (Joel 2:19,21,22,24)

As God promised he restored the years the locust had eaten. *‘I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you’* (Joel 2:25). Fast and prayer restored the nation.

Joel was a prophet during a phase of national crisis and scarcity. To change the dire circumstances of the nation, a change in the hearts of the people was essential. The hearts of the people changed as they obeyed Joel, in fast and prayer. They turned to God and repented of their unlawful acts and decided to follow God’s laws. They assembled before their Lord; he revealed to them their flaws and idolatrous hearts. They cleansed their inner lives as they rent their hearts and not their garments. Their changed hearts pleased God. Their lack turned to abundance.

Joel taught the people the right approach to God. God responded with a change in their circumstances. Their fast and prayer were an act of faith that touched God.

'And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and he rewards those who seek him.' (Heb 11:6).

God's abundance flowed when they connected to him.

CHAPTER 15

JONAH: THE ANGRY PROPHET.

Jonah the prophet of God was commissioned by God to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. This would make the people of Nineveh turn to God and escape the calamity that disobedience to God would bring upon them.

But Jonah had a mind of his own. Instead of going to Nineveh Jonah decided to go to Tarshish. Jonah went to Tarshish and ran from God's commission and the place appointed by God for him (Jonah 1:1-3).

When Jonah boarded the ship to Tarshish, God created a furious storm in the sea. The mariners in the ship were fearful. To lighten the ship, they threw the cargo in the sea. Meanwhile Jonah slept in the inner part of the ship. He was woken by the mariners and asked to pray to his gods to calm the storm (Jonah 1:4-6).

According to the old traditions the mariners cast lots to discover the cause of the storm. The lot fell on Jonah. Then Jonah confessed to the mariners that he feared God who created heaven and earth. But he had disobeyed God and was running from his presence. The storm in the sea was due to his disobedience to God (Jonah 1:7-10).

Jonah requested the mariners to throw him in the sea. When he was thrown in the sea the storm subsided (Jonah 1:12-16). The Lord appointed a fish to swallow Jonah. In the belly of the fish Jonah prayed to God and repented. He asked the Lord to forgive him (Jonah 2:1-9). The fish vomited Jonah on dry ground (Jonah 2:10).

God gave Jonah a second chance and told him to go to Nineveh. He obeyed God and went to Nineveh. He asked the people to repent, turn to God else they would be destroyed by God. The people of Nineveh listened to Jonah and turned to God. From the least to the king put on sackcloth, sat in ashes and fasted. The beast, herd and

flock too fasted. The nation called out on God Almighty and turned from their evil ways. God saw their repented hearts and relented of the disaster he had planned for the nation (Jonah 3:1-10).

Jonah's mission to the nation of Nineveh had been accomplished. But Jonah carried in his heart an anger against God because God had forgiven the people of Nineveh. Jonah knew God was merciful, would forgive people and relent from destroying the nation. This angered Jonah. His anger towards God made him bitter and he wanted to die (Jonah 4:1-3). God questioned him on his anger, *'And the Lord, said, "Do you do well to be angry?"'* (Jonah 4:4)

Jonah went and lived in the outskirts of the city. He made a booth for himself. Then God appointed a plant to shade him. Jonah was glad for the shade of the plant. Later, God sent a worm to destroy the plant. Afterwards, a scorching east wind and heat of the sun made Jonah faint.

The plant and its shade were no more there to protect him. Again, he was angry and wanted to die (Jonah 4:6-8). *'But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die"'* (Jonah 4:9).

Then God explained to Jonah, that if he pitied the plant not grown by him, that lived and perished in a night, would not God pity the people of Nineveh and save them (Jonah 4:10-11).

Deep in his heart Jonah knew God was right. He knew it was good for him to obey God but he struggled to obey him. God sent storm and fish and taught Jonah to submit to his orders. Though Jonah submitted to God his heart carried a remorse towards God. God's tender love towards his prophet explained through the growth of a plant his saving grace for Nineveh.

God loved his prophet. He disciplined him to fulfill his commission. God gave Jonah the insight for the commission that was incomprehensive to the prophet, making things plain to him. Enigmatic were God's plans and methods. Trust in God was the best option.

CHAPTER 16

HABAKKUK: WAITING FOR GOD

Habakkuk the prophet saw the condition of his nation Judah with anxious fear. He questioned God on what was God doing about the deteriorating condition of the nation, *'Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted'* (Habakkuk 1:3-4)

God answered Habakkuk that he had worked on the declined situation of Judah. He had prepared a nation (Chaldeans) to attack Judah. This was God's strategy of reproof and discipline. *'Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breath of the earth to seize dwelling not their own'* (Habakkuk 1:5-6).

Habakkuk understood God's method of judgment and reproof on his nation. He realized God was pure and holy. God tolerated no evil or remained silent when the wicked swallowed the righteous (Habakkuk 1:12-13).

Habakkuk the prophet stood as a watchman before God and waited to receive an answer from him. God answered Habakkuk and told him to write the answer- *'And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end - it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay"'* (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

Meanwhile Habakkuk was encouraged by God to live by faith in him (Habakkuk 2:4). He prayed to his God with an expression of

faith. *‘O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy’* (Habakkuk 3:2).

Habakkuk knew God was in control of all that took place on earth. God’s splendor would cover the earth and shake the nations (e.g. Cushan, Midian) along with the Chaldeans. It would scatter mountains and sink hills. His anger and indignation would affect rivers and sea, the earth would split with rivers, the mountains would writhe and waters would rage. The sun and moon would stand still. The Lord would march through the earth in fury and thresh the nations in anger. His arrows would destroy the flash of the glittering spear of the enemy. The wicked would be crushed and laid bare. This was God’s plan of deliverance for his people (Habakkuk 3:3-13).

For reproof God would bring the enemy nations to discipline his people. But God would take vengeance on the enemy nations too. As they planned to destroy God’s people, God would trample them.

When Habakkuk heard God’s answer of dealing with the nations, his body trembled, his lips quivered, his bones weakened. But he quietly waited for God’s vision of destruction to be fulfilled (Habakkuk 3:16).

Habakkuk waited on God as he considered the present situation of Judah. He contemplated. *‘Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the field yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation’* (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

Under deteriorating conditions Habakkuk’s body and legs trembled (Habakkuk 3:16). But joy resided in his heart. For he wrote, *‘God the Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like deer’s; he makes me tread on high places’* (Habakkuk 3:19).

Habakkuk had his moments of anxiety as he viewed the condition of his nation Judah. He thought God was oblivious of the

injustice and wickedness. God explained his strategy of using the Chaldeans to reprimand Judah. God gave the vision of the future and

expected the prophet to write and make it plain. But God also spoke about his vengeance on the enemy nations that he had used as instrument to judge his people.

In his distress Habakkuk questioned God. He received from God an explanation of God's plan of action. The prophet peeped into the future. This was the prophet's privilege as he understood the thoughts of God's heart. But for God to fulfilled his objective was a matter of time. The prophet's anxiety was turned to joy as he rested in the Lord and waited upon the him to bring deliverance to his nation Judah.

CHAPTER 17

HAGGAI: CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

Haggai was a prophet in Judah who encouraged the people to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed by the Babylonians who had attacked and conquered Judah. The Babylonians had captured the people and taken them to their nation. On their return to Jerusalem after captivity Haggai encouraged Zarubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest to rebuild the destroyed temple.

The Lord spoke through Haggai the prophet, *‘Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: **Consider your ways.** You have sown much and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes’* (Haggai 1:5-6).

Again, Haggai spoke to the people, *‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: **Consider your ways...** you looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away... Therefore, the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors’* (Haggai; 1:7,9-11).

The reason for the lack and destruction was that the people had given no thought to the construction of the house of God that was in ruins. The people were busy building their own paneled houses and had neglected the temple of the Lord (Haggai 1: 4,8).

Then God stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the governor and Joshua the high priest along with the people of Judah. They obeyed

the voice of the Lord and consented to build the temple of God (Haggai 1:12-14).

Haggai repeatedly encouraged the people to be strong (Haggai 2:4). Through Haggai God reminded the people about the covenant he had made

with them when he had led them out of Egypt. He also reminded the people that all the silver and gold belonged to God, which they required for the construction of the house of the Lord. He told them that God would fill the temple with his glory and the latter glory of the house would be greater than the former glory. Also, God's temple would be filled with peace (Haggai 2:5-9).

The construction of the temple started in the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month on the twenty fourth day (Haggai 1:15). Again, Haggai told the people *'Now then, **consider** from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did no turn to me, declares the Lord'* (Haggai 2:15-17).

As the temple was under construction on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Again, God spoke to the people through Haggai. *'**Consider** from this day onward, from the twenty fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, **consider**: Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you'* (Haggai 2: 18-19).

The blessings came to the nation as the people heard the voice of prophet Haggai and **consider their ways**. They realized the reason for their lack was that they had neglected the temple of God and had given importance to their own personal benefits and comfort.

When God became the Lord of their lives and the center of their livelihood, blessings poured on their grain, wine, oil, fig,

pomegranate. The rain was not withheld from the sky, neither was there drought on land and hills. Besides, they received the benefits of their labor.

God gently reminded the people through Haggai to **consider their ways**. It was through their circumstances God spoke and brought a change in the nation.

Section V

Purpose for A Nation.

CHAPTER 18

GOD BUILDS A NATION

Jesus taught his disciples to pray- *‘...Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’* (Matt 6:9-10).

The priority in the prayer of Jesus was to bring the kingdom of heaven on earth. Again, Jesus told his disciples - *‘But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you’* (Matt 6:33). Food, daily bread, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life would be taken care of as God and his kingdom got the priority.

God always worked his plans and purposes for his kingdom on earth through the people he chose. He worked his task through them.

Genesis 12:1-2 showed that God chose Abram-*‘Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”’* God chose and called Abram to make him a great nation.

God communicated regularly with Abram and guided him to fulfill his purpose. God told Abram *‘... “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you”’* (Genesis 13:14-17).

God also spoke in Genesis 15:5- *‘And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”’*

God purposed to build a nation and he chose Abram. After Abram’s death, God continued to fulfill his purpose through his son Isaac. *‘And the*

Lord appeared to him (Isaac) the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham (Changed his name from Abram) your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake"' (Genesis 26:24).

Isaac continued to live in the land of Canaan where God had called Abraham. Isaac had two sons Esau and Jacob. God chose Jacob to fulfill his purpose. *'And he (Jacob) dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed"' (Genesis 28:12-14).*

God's purpose continued in the next generation. Jacob married two wives Leah and Rachel, besides Jacob had two concubines, Zilpah the maid of Leah and Bilhah the maid of Rachel. Jacob had twelve sons through them. Leah gave him his first-born son Reuben, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. Rachel gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin. Leah's maid Zilpah gave birth to Gad and Asher while Rachel's maid Bilhah gave birth to Dan and Naphtali. These were the twelve sons of Jacob. God had changed Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32:28). Israel's (Jacob) twelve sons formed the twelve tribes of Israel, the nation.

Jacob's twelve sons had different mothers. Due to family feud and envy among brothers Joseph the son of Jacob was sold by his

brothers to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt. God was with Joseph in Egypt. Though Joseph went through a sequence of tough situations, God was with him. As he worked for Potiphar, he was falsely accused of a charge of abuse towards Potiphar's wife. He was shunned behind bars. But in prison too God was with Joseph (Genesis 39).

Joseph had the gift of interpreting dreams. In prison Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. His gift of

interpretation of dreams brought him before Pharaoh. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams. The king of Egypt recognized Joseph's wisdom and discretion and made him the governor of Egypt. Through all this God was with Joseph (Genesis 40 and 41).

In due course of time Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy grain during seven years of famine. Joseph as the governor of Egypt revealed his identity to his brothers who had sold him to the Ishmaelites. As the governor of Egypt, Joseph persuaded his entire family to migrate from Canaan to Egypt (Genesis 43-45).

Jacob with his entire clan, herds and flock settled with Joseph in Egypt. (For more details on Joseph read Chapter-4).

Years passed. New generations were born. The family of Israel (Jacob) multiplied and grew in numbers. Different Pharaohs sat on the throne and ruled Egypt. The children of Israel were unknown to the new Pharaoh who reigned. There came a time when the children of Israel became slaves to Pharaoh (Exodus 1 and 2).

It was then when God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and reminded him that he remembered the children of Israel. *'And he (God) said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."'* (Exodus 3:6). God gave his identity and introduced himself to Moses who was oblivious of the existence of God. Years had passed by since God had communicated with the children of Israel who had been slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.

God assured Moses that he remembered his people. He would deliver them from slavery and bring them to the land he had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

With great signs and wonders performed by God through Moses, the children of Israel were delivered from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 7-12,14).

After deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the children of Israel could have easily reached the land God had promised them, but due to their lack of trust in God and unbelief they roamed in the wilderness for forty long years (Numbers and Deuteronomy). During that period of time Moses died.

Joshua took over the leadership after Moses and led the children of Israel to conquer the land God had promised them. *‘After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel... No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you”’* (Joshua 1:1-2, 5).

Eventually, God fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham. He formed a nation as the grain of sand and stars in the sky. His offspring could not be numbered. The land God promised Abraham was given to his offspring as the nation of Israel. God had his plans and purposes. What he started he finished. He was the alpha and the omega in the entire process.

When we connect to God’s purpose our life gets direction and meaning. We live the life God has for us. Our life has depth and we develop the character to live according to God. Life is not shallow seeking superfluous material blessings. God has heavenly plans, when we cooperate with him, he works his plans on earth through us.

CHAPTER 19

RAIN IN ITS SEASON

The land that God had promised the children of Israel was a land that flowed with milk and honey. The land also had grain, wine, oil and grass for livestock. But the promised land was not like Egypt, the land from which they had been rescued from slavery. Egypt was a plain irrigated by the great river Nile. It was easy to sow seeds and grow crops in Egypt. The land the Lord promised them was a land of hills and valleys. It depended on rain for irrigation (Deut. 11:9-15).

The promised land would prosper if the people obeyed the commandments of the Lord. This condition was placed by the Lord for the prosperity of Israel. *‘And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be full’* (Deut. 11:13-15).

The land God gave had no flowing river like Nile nor fertile delta for farming. Yet, the eyes of the Lord watched the land. He taught his people the discipline of obedience to his law. This obedience would pour the blessing of the “early rain” and “later rain.” The dependency on God for their livelihood and daily living kept the people connected to God and his law. Their promised land was surrounded by people who had no knowledge of the Living God but worshipped idols. Among the idolatrous the Israelites depended on their God who supplied all their needs. This categorized them as people who worshipped a divine God and not idols that were deaf and dumb. The geography of the land was structured to build in people a trust and dependency on God.

God removed their privileges and became their source. What they lacked was compensated by God’s love, kindness and grace. The land and its people were precious to God. So, God mentioned, *‘a land that the Lord*

your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year' (Deut. 11:12).

To have a deeper understanding of God people needed the presence of God that would supply water for irrigation. God had supplied them water from rock and ground during the forty years in the wilderness. All they needed was God with them in the land. They were blessed after several years of slavery, lack and humiliation. It was not just the rain in its season but the presence of God and an intimate relationship with God that would sustain them in the promised land.

Section VI

Rewards

CHAPTER 20

UNEXPECTED BLESSINGS

Creation exhibits the various seasons of nature. Sowing, flowering, fruitfulness and harvesting. Besides, there is spring, summer, rain, autumn and winter. Every act in nature has its period of time and occasion. Yet if one observes an act or appearance that does not comply with its natural season then it is definitely an act of God. It is not earthly but a performance of heaven.

An example of such blessing is in 2 Kings 4:17. We read that Elisha pays frequent visits to Shunem. There lives a wealthy woman who often invites him to her house for fellowship and a meal. Elisha gives no prophetic utterance or performs miracles in her home. Yet, the woman perceives through his conduct that he is a man of God. She expresses her views about him to her husband. She wants to appreciate the man of God by doing something for him. She says to her husband, *'Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way. Let us make a small room on the roof with walls and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there'* (2 Kings 4:9-10).

According to her plans the Shunammite woman makes a place for Elisha to stay. Her hospitality pleases Elisha. He asks his servant Gehazi if he can do anything for her. The woman has no special requests and she refuses personal favors. But Gehazi informs Elisha that the woman is childless and her husband is old (2 King 4:12-14). Elisha blesses the woman, *'And he (Elisha) said, "At this season about this time next year, you shall embrace a son"'* (2 Kings 4:16).

There is no request for a son nor any expectation. But the woman conceives and gives birth to a son, during the season of spring according to the words of Elisha (2 Kings 4:17).

This is a favor of God in her life; she gives birth to a child during her phase in life when conception is impossible. Though she does not seek a child but God grants her the blessing.

There is another incident of a priest named Zechariah who serves in God's temple during the days of Herod, the King of Judea. Elizabeth his wife is a descendant of Aaron. They both are righteous, follow God but they are not a young couple. Besides Elizabeth is barren (Luke 1:5-7).

One day when Zechariah, the priest is serving before the Lord in the temple, an angel of the Lord appears to him at the altar of incense. Obviously, Zechariah is afraid to see the sudden appearance of a heavenly being before him. But the angel speaks, *'Do not be afraid Zechariah, for your prayer have been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John'* (Luke 1:13). This information stuns Zechariah. He argues with the angel and explains the impossibility of having a child as he and his wife are old and advanced in years.

The angel replies *'... "I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time"'* (Luke 1:19-20).

Due to his unbelief Zechariah becomes temporarily mute. When he comes out of the temple, he is unable to speak. People realize he has probably seen a vision of the Lord (Luke 1:22-23).

In due course of time Zechariah's wife Elizabeth conceives in her old age, believing God has taken away her reproach of barrenness (Luke 1:24-25). When she gives birth to a son Zechariah's mouth opens. He is able to speak and he blesses the child (Luke 1:57, 64). To have a son is a blessing Zechariah and Elizabeth did not expect.

God is God. He can bless when, how and whomever he wants. The above illustrations of having a child cannot be compared with

Sarah having Isaac. The birth of Isaac was a consequence of the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis 15;17;18;21). Neither can we consider Hannah's example of giving birth to Samuel. Hannah as a

young woman requests and prays to God for a son (1 Samuel 1 and 2). Samson's mother too is a young woman and receives a promise for a son (Judges 13).

The Shunammite and Elizabeth are women who have no expectation of giving birth but God blesses them. They feel their time and season in life is over to receive such blessing but God makes everything beautiful in his time (Eccl 3:11). God's thoughts are not our thoughts neither his ways our ways. As heaven is higher than earth, his ways and thoughts are higher than human earthly patterns (Isaiah 5:8-9).

CHAPTER 21

GOD GIVEN TALENT

Hidden behind the innocence of Jael, was her prudence to discern an enemy from a friend. Being the wife of Heber, the Kenite who was a descendant of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, she definitely carried an aura of quietness (Judges 4:11,17).

When Sisera the general of King Jabin's army came to war against Barak, the Lord fought for Barak and the people of Israel (Judges 4:15). Defeated, Sisera fled for his life and landed at the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite. Sisera knew they were at peace with the Kenites.

Jael welcomed Sisera in her tent. He asked for shelter and some water to quench his thirst. She gave him milk instead of his request for water. She covered him with a rug as he rested to sleep (Judges 4:18-20).

She had recognized Sisera as an enemy. As Sisera rested, Jael being a professional at pitching tents, used her tent peg and hammer to hammer the peg in his head. As the peg sank through his head in the ground, she killed him (Judges 4:21).

In here quietness and simplicity Jael acted with wisdom. She put to use all that was available to her. Hidden behind her comely behavior was a sharp mind that reacted to the presence of the enemy in her tent. She was talented in pitching tents in the desert and she applied her talent to get victory over the enemy.

Do we not many times get trapped in the snare of competition by comparing ourselves with others who have better opportunities and abilities than us. Do we not feel low due to lack of avenues to move forward to achieve our goals.

All that we need to fulfill our purpose is with us and in us. Besides, where we are positioned by God is the perfect place for us to use our talents.

In the desert where Jael lived, she knew how to use wisely what was given to her. Judges 5:24-27 narrated.

- *Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent dwelling women most blessed.*

- *He asked her for water and she gave him milk; she brought him curds in a noble's bowl.*

- *She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple.*

- *Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank he fell; when he sank, there he fell-dead.*

The story of Jael represented a beautiful illustration of the talent used by a humble woman as she fulfilled her purpose and played a significant but discreet role and delivered the nation of Israel.

Section VII

Church Life

CHAPTER 22

RIGHT LIVING

Christians do not live in solitude. Christian life is a community life. Christians have fellowship with people who make their commitment to follow Jesus Christ, this bond of fellowship is the church.

People who form the church are from different walks of life. The common factor among them who form the church is the salvation they receive through Jesus Christ. They have Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. All people in the church have Jesus but they have different cultures, traditions, experiences, knowledge and understanding of life. This diversity of thinking pattern and life style can create dissension and division in the church which is the body of Jesus Christ.

Paul often faces these issues in the early church specially when it comes to choice of food and eating habits.

Some people think they can eat anything while others believe in eating only vegetables. Paul advises the ones who eat everything not to despise the ones who abstain from certain kind of food. Also, he advises the ones who are selective about their food not to judge the ones who eat everything (Romans 14:2-3).

There are some people who are proud of their 'knowledge' they believe that idols are irrelevant and are not gods. But all who believe in Jesus Christ do not possess this 'knowledge' due to their former association with idols. The latter believe that food offered to idols is truly given to idols and will defile them. They avoid food which others offer to idols they do not have 'knowledge' like some have and do not understand the concept of idols. Paul advises the ones with 'knowledge' and mature understanding not to eat food in the temple of idols as it can be a stumbling block to others. This act can be a sin

against their brother who has a weak conscience (Corinthians 8:4-12).

Therefore, Paul says, ‘...*This “knowledge” puffs up but love builds up*’ (1 Cor 8:1).

Paul exhorts the church, ‘*I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By that you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil*’ (Romans 14:14-16).

Paul places his argument in a simple statement, ‘*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*’ (Romans 14:17).

Besides some people esteem some days as important. For others all days are alike. Paul teaches such people to have clarity of mind. If for some certain days are important it is to honor the Lord. No one lives or dies to themselves but for the Lord. Therefore, such people have no right to pass judgment on their brothers or despise them (Rom 14:5-10).

Life with Jesus Christ is giving up our own rights and privileges to build others. It is keeping our ‘knowledge’ to ourselves and to strengthen the weak. Christian life is walking in love and not despising others with whom we disagree. Our focus must be on things essential for spiritual growth and living right before the Lord. We must live peacefully with one another carrying the joy of the Lord in our hearts.

CHAPTER 23

THE SPIRIT FILLED CHURCH

The church of Corinth was formed of people who had formerly been idolatrous. After they believed in Jesus Christ, they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They carried the presence of the Holy Spirit and the works of the Holy Spirit were manifested through them. These works of the Holy Spirit were termed the gifts of the Holy Spirit that functioned through the church people.

In 1 Corinthians 12:8-12, Paul wrote about the various manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

These gifts were categorized as - gifts of revelation, gifts of power and gifts of utterance (This is classified in *The Spirit Himself* by Ralph M. Riggs, page 113-(Pentecostals Classics, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, MO 65802-1894)).

-*Gifts of revelation*: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge and discerning of spirits.

-*Gifts of power*: faith, miracles and healings.

-*Gifts of utterance*: prophecy, tongues and interpretation.

The Corinth church was endowed with all spiritual gifts, but the church people lacked the maturity of character required for the gifts to operate through them. Though the Holy Spirit dwelt in people yet their human spirit was not submissive to the counsel of the Holy Spirit. This led to confusion and chaos in the church. Besides, individual pride made each one consider his own gift superior to another's gift and considered the other person's gift inferior.

Paul gave a solution to the issue. He compared the church to the human body with different organs. The members of the church formed the body. While each member was compared to an organ with

different function, so was the church with different people who had different gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Paul explained, *‘If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body” that would not make it any less a part of the body’* (1 Corinthians 12:15-16).

Further Paul told, *‘If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose’* (1 Corinthians 12:17-18).

Each member in the body had a specific function. The different organs coordinated and functioned as an organism. One organ could not perform all functions. There was inter-dependency of the organs to work together to make the body function. Special care and protection were given to the weak and less honorable parts of the body.

The simple illustration that Paul gave the church helped the people in the church to respect the gifts of others. This brought unity in the church as they honored and submitted to the counsel of the Holy Spirit who operated through them.

Paul concluded the controversy and taught the church to operate their Holy Spirit given gifts with love

Paul continued *‘If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not **love**, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. And if I have prophetic power, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not **love**, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not **love**, I gain nothing’* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Yet with all the gifts of tongues, prophetic utterances, understanding of mysteries and knowledge, mountain moving faith, offering of self to be sacrificed, love was an essential factor for the

Holy Spirit to work effectively. It was compassion in the human heart that led the Holy Spirit to touch people.

Love paved the pathway for the Holy Spirit to work through the church people. Love was devoid of envy, boastfulness, arrogance, manipulation, irritability resentment. Love always carried joy, truthfulness and honestly. It endured, believed and hoped in all things. Love was eternal and never ended (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

More gifts of the Holy Spirit required more humility. It was cutting of the abrasive edges. The church - the body of Christ functioned in complete co-ordination in the works of the Holy Spirit, as the church walked in love.

CHAPTER 24

GIFTS OF UTTERANCE IN THE CHURCH

Let us understand the operation of the gifts of utterance in the church. As seen in chapter 23 the gifts of utterance are speaking in tongues, interpretation and prophecy.

Tongues:

Speaking in tongues is a controversial issue. The first occurrence of this phenomenon takes place after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. It is on the day of Pentecost as the disciples are praying in the upper room- *'And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance'* (Acts 2:4)

Speaking in tongues becomes a sign (miraculous act) for anyone who has the Holy Spirit or commonly one can say has the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Speaking in tongues is speaking to God and not to man. *'For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him but he utters mysteries in the Spirit'* (1 Corinthians 14:2).

Besides, *'The one who speaks in a tongue builds himself...'* (1 Corinthians 14:4).

Also speaking in the spirit or tongues builds faith *'But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit'* (Jude 1:20).

Paul says, *'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful'* (1 Corinthians 14:14).

The Holy Spirit helps in prayer as he knows how to intercede for a person. *'And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of*

the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God' (Romans 8:27).

Hence, speaking in tongues for a believer is for personal spiritual growth, to build and strengthen one's faith and for personal intercession.

Interpretation:

In church congregation or believers meeting, if one speaks in tongues, it has no value or significance for other believers present in the meeting.

Paul says *'Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air'* (1 Corinthians 14:6-9).

Now speaking in tongues is of value to others in church congregation or believers meeting if there is someone to interpret the spoken tongue. Paul exhorts, *'Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret'* (1 Corinthians 14:13).

This interpretation of tongues is prophecy. Interpretation is spoken in the language of the people. It is a fruitful speech. Such utterance strengthens and builds people. Through interpretation God's utterance comes to the people in a language they understand.

Paul says, *'If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God'* (1 Corinthians 14:27-28). In a church congregation or believers meeting interpretation is important to understand the utterance given in a tongue. In any gathering without interpretation speaking in a tongue is of no value to the congregation.

Prophecy:

A simple prophecy is for upbuilding, encouragement and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3). Paul exhorts the people to covet the gift of prophecy as it builds the people and the church (1 Corinthians 14:1,4,5). *'...The one*

who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up' (1 Corinthians 14:5).

Hence, one considers prophecy better than speaking in tongues because speaking in tongues in the church congregation or believers meeting is of no value if there is no interpretation.

Tongues are a sign (miraculous act) to the unbeliever, Prophecy is a sign (miraculous act) to the believer. But prophecy also reveals the inner most secrets of the unbeliever and convicts him. This makes an unbeliever know that God is among his people in the church congregation or believers meeting.

In the church only two or three can prophecy while others in the church can judge the utterance. This manner of speaking is similar to speaking in tongues along with interpretation, there is discipline and all can prophecy one by one. Through this method all who prophecy builds and encourages the church. Everyone who prophecies can control his utterance. He knows when to remain silent. The spirit of a prophet is subject to him (1 Corinthians 14:28-32).

In this way the gifts of utterance can operate in the church with discipline and order. *'For God is not a God of confusion but of peace' (1 Corinthians 14:33).*

Office of a Prophet:

The simple prophecy which is a gift of utterance is different from the prophecy given by someone who has the office of a prophet.

The office of a prophet is part of the fivefold ministry. *'And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds*

(pastors) and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The office of a prophet is a ministry and not a mere gift of utterance. A prophet in office can reveal the past, present and future, while the simple gift of prophetic utterance is to build, encourage and console the church. Any spirit filled person can have prophecy as the gift of utterance but the

office of the prophet is an appointment by God. An example of this is in Acts 21:8-12. Here, Philip the evangelist has four daughters who can prophesy. But it is Agabus the prophet in office who predicts the future about what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem.

There is no confusion between the simple prophecy which is a gift of utterance and a prophetic word given by a prophet in office.

If one applies gifts of the Holy Spirit which include the gifts of utterance in the right manner it is a blessing for the growth of believers in the church and attracts unbelievers. There is no chaos or confusion in the church. Everything can be in order according to the instructions in the word of God. The Holy Spirit definitely speaks to the church through the gifts of utterance.