



Ancient Paths



an ebook by
Joshua Ong

Warmest greetings in Christ.

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Under this circumstance, what is my pay?

It is the special joy I get from preaching the Good News
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You are also welcome to visit my website @ www.thejoshlink.com.

Title Page Note:

The Chinese ink brush stroke is an original work, and the red seal is my family name.

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Acknowledgements

Many prophets in the Bible are writers themselves, besides proclaiming the message of God vocally to the peoples. Sometimes the pen is sharper than the mouth as the written words are graven in ink that cannot be easily erased or forgotten.

I started writing about an article a week about 10 years ago and posted them in a website. My heart is inclined to write as the Lord prompts me through times of reading and studying the Bible, worship, prayer, interaction with Christians and pre-believers, and watching world news.

Thanks to God for His amazing grace, and also friends for their encouraging emails and words of exhortation, there are now people from about 50 nations visiting my website on a monthly basis. This ebook is the fruit of some recent articles. Thanks also to some dear friends who have asked me to compile them.

From time to time, I write and rewrite short studies based on my findings and understanding of the Bible, and also through searching and researching the works of other godly men. Many are journals in my journey with God. These thoughts are by no means the authoritative or the last word on any subject. Though I strive for truth, I will endeavour to correct any mistake when they are communicated to me.

Not everything published herein are all original or personal revelations from God. Some of them are taken from other sources or writers. However, I have edited them, and added my own thoughts and findings. As these are my working files, there will be editions and further editions. Hopefully in this way of sharing, we can be edified in our relationship and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Preface

Thus says the LORD:

"Stand by the roads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls."

Jeremiah 6:16 (RSV)

While others are seeking destiny and fortune dictated by the world, I'm returning to the roots of our Christian faith - a journey back to the garden fellowship and walking with God daily in the light of His love and glory.

What really matters to me and thrills my heart is not tall towers, buildings, fast cars, hi-tech gadgets and razzle-dazzle stuffs, but the beauty of simple things in life, friendships, true love, nature, birds, bees, flowers etc. Live simply so that others can simply live.

I earnestly hope that we will be a voice for the Lord again, proclaiming His glory and His good news, bringing light and joy to a world in darkness and despair!

I believe that righteousness will reign and win ultimately, the kingdom of God will be glorious and shining bright, wars will come to an end when the Prince of Peace comes again, and true love will last forever.

With blessings and shalom,
Joshua Ong

Chapter 1

God Sought For A Man

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall,
and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land,
that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.

Ezekiel 22:30

What does it mean to stand in the gap? The best way to answer this question is through the Biblical analogy of a wall of protection around a city. If the city wall is broken in a certain place, there is now a gap in the wall. And this gap is not good. Inside the city are the people of God. Outside are their enemies plotting to destroy them.

As a good shepherd fights to protect his sheep, a godly man must stand in the gap to watch and pray for the people in the city. He will stand in the gap till the wall is rebuilt, and the gap is properly and fully sealed.

But sometimes the spiritual conditions of the leaders in the city have deteriorated and become degrading. They don't care enough to protect God's people from being destroyed. They do not work rigorously in rebuilding the wall. And worst still, they do not vigilantly position watchmen to stand in the gap, guarding against invaders and intruders. Unguarded, the gap in the city wall is now a place of great danger.

As a matter of fact, any gap in the city wall is disturbing news to the people living inside. To calm these fearful people, their leaders will try to hide the truth. They will say, "Don't worry! There is no danger. We are at peace!"

Ezekiel 13:10-14 (NLT)

This will happen because these evil prophets
deceive My people by saying,

‘All is peaceful’ when there is no peace at all!

It’s as if the people have built a flimsy wall,
and these prophets are trying to reinforce it
by covering it with whitewash!

Tell these whitewashers that their wall will soon fall down.

A heavy rainstorm will undermine it;
great hailstones and mighty winds will knock it down.

And when the wall falls, the people will cry out,

‘What happened to your whitewash?’

Therefore, this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

I will sweep away your whitewashed wall with a storm of indignation,
with a great flood of anger, and with hailstones of fury.

I will break down your wall right to its foundation,
and when it falls, it will crush you.

Then you will know that I am the LORD.

The whitewash simply hides the gaps, and briefly touches up the flaws in the wall. The cover-up is flimsy and lousy. Hiding the gaps and covering them with whitewash may look good on the surface but it is utterly foolish and irresponsible!

People may not notice these covered gaps, and may presume that everything is alright. They may feel safe, secure and confident. However this terrible weakness of the gap exposes God's people to many unforeseen dangers. They become vulnerable to the attacks of their adversaries! Because of this gap, the city is often invaded and easily destroyed by the enemies! That’s why standing in the gap is of utmost importance to God!

Let’s take a closer look at **Ezekiel 22:23-31**. God sent Ezekiel to deliver a serious message and warning to the people of Israel.

“Son of man, give the people of Israel this message:
In the day of My indignation,
you will be like a polluted land, a land without rain.
Your princes plot conspiracies just as lions stalk their prey.
They devour innocent people, seizing treasures and extorting wealth.
They make many widows in the land.
Your priests have violated My instructions and defiled My holy things.
They make no distinction between what is holy and what is not.
And they do not teach My people the difference
between what is ceremonially clean and unclean.
They disregard My Sabbath days so that I am dishonored among them.
Your leaders are like wolves who tear apart their victims.
They actually destroy people’s lives for money!
And your prophets cover up for them
by announcing false visions and making lying predictions.
They say, ‘My message is from the Sovereign LORD,’
when the LORD hasn’t spoken a single word to them.
Even common people oppress the poor, rob the needy,
and deprive foreigners of justice.
I looked for someone
who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land.
I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall
so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one.
So now I will pour out My fury on them,
consuming them with the fire of My anger.
I will heap on their heads the full penalty for all their sins.
I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!”

The people of God will be like a polluted land, a land without rain. They become polluted because they have corrupted their way of living, and have compromised their walk with God. No more rain means no more blessings from above. Once blessed but now no longer blessed. Why? Because the leaders are scheming and plotting evil plans. They are like lions stalking their prey. They devour innocent people, seizing

treasures and extorting wealth. As a result, many men died, leaving behind many widows in the land.

The priests have also violated the instructions of the LORD and defiled His holy things. They make no distinction between what is holy and what is not. And they do not teach the people of God the difference between what is ceremonially clean and unclean. They disregard His holy Sabbath days so that the LORD is dishonored among them. People no longer have any reverence and holy fear for God!

The leaders are like wolves tearing apart their victims. They actually destroy people's lives for the love of money! And worst still, the prophets cover up for them. They did so by announcing false visions and making lying predictions. They say, 'My message is from the Sovereign LORD,' when the LORD hasn't spoken a single word to them.

Because of what the leaders, priests and prophets have done, the common people join in to oppress the poor, rob the needy, and deprive foreigners of justice. From the top down, all the people are sinning against the LORD by disobeying His laws and commandments. As they do so, they become lawless, falling out of grace. They bring disgrace to the name of the LORD! And they dishonour Him!

God looks down and witnesses all these evil things in the city. Herein is a big gap of weakness and impending disaster. Someone must stand in the gap to watch and pray, interceding and pleading for God's mercy and grace, and for His divine intervention. God Himself says, "I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one." Therefore, God will pour out His fury on them, consuming them with the fire of His anger. He will ensure that they pay the full penalty for all their sins.

The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the First Temple on the Ninth of Av (Tisha B'Av) was recorded in **2 Chronicles 36:11-21**:

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king,
and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years.
He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God,
and he refused to humble himself
when the prophet Jeremiah spoke to him directly from the LORD.
He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar,
even though he had taken an oath of loyalty in God's name.
Zedekiah was a hard and stubborn man,
refusing to turn to the LORD, the God of Israel.
Likewise, all the leaders of the priests and the people
became more and more unfaithful.
They followed all the pagan practices of the surrounding nations,
desecrating the Temple of the LORD
that had been consecrated in Jerusalem.
The LORD, the God of their ancestors,
repeatedly sent His prophets to warn them,
for He had compassion on His people and His Temple.
But the people mocked these messengers of God
and despised their words.
They scoffed at the prophets
until the LORD's anger could no longer be restrained
and nothing could be done.
So the LORD brought the king of Babylon against them.
The Babylonians killed Judah's young men,
even chasing after them into the Temple.
They had no pity on the people,
killing both young men and young women,
the old and the infirm.
God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar.
The king took home to Babylon all the articles,
large and small, used in the Temple of God,

and the treasures from both the LORD's Temple
and from the palace of the king and his officials.
Then his army burned the Temple of God,
tore down the walls of Jerusalem,
burned all the palaces,
and completely destroyed everything of value.
The few who survived were taken as exiles to Babylon,
and they became servants to the king
and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.
So the message of the LORD spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled.
The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest,
lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled,
just as the prophet had said.

Because of their presumptuous sins, the leaders, priests, prophets and people became hard and stubborn, refusing to return to God. They thought that everything was alright when it was not. All the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful. They followed all the pagan practices of the surrounding nations, mixing the holy things of God with the unholy things of the idols, desecrating the Temple of the LORD that had been consecrated in Jerusalem.

As we see the dreadful outcome for the people who blindly followed their leaders, we must not follow their wicked footsteps. They continued to live in their sins, refusing to humble themselves and seek God, and turn from their evil ways! Herein is a warning that we cannot ignore. We must discontinue doing things that are not pleasing to God!

The LORD in His great mercy and love repeatedly sent His prophets to warn them, for He had compassion on His people and His Temple. But the people continually mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD's anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.

So the LORD brought the king of Babylon against them. It was the LORD who brought the Babylonians against the Israelites. He was the One who handed His people over to their enemies and destroyed the First Temple! What good was the Holy Temple when all the priests, prophets and people no longer worshipped God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength? They had gone astray to worship other gods and idols. And the glory of the LORD had departed from the Temple.

The people of God were called by His name. The shocking and saddening truth was that they did not humble themselves and pray and seek His face and turn from their wicked ways. Nobody was standing in the gap. How then, could God hear from heaven, forgive their sins and restore their land?

God is love and He is also just. Very often God delays judgment for very long periods of time. As nothing seems to be happening, some people become presumptuous, thinking that it will never happen. But when God does judge sin, He is both relentless and thorough.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise,
as some count slackness,
but is longsuffering toward us,
not willing that any should perish
but that all should come to repentance.

Thanks be to God that His judgment is often accompanied by His mercy and compassion.

Lamentations 3:22-27

Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.

“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,

“Therefore I hope in Him!”

The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,

To the soul who seeks Him.

It is good that one should hope and wait quietly

For the salvation of the LORD.

It is good for a man to bear

The yoke in his youth.

Therefore, we will hope in the Lord. He is good to those who depend on Him, and to those who seek Him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord. And it is good for people to submit to God, trusting and obeying Him at an early age, and bearing His yoke of discipline and training.

Regarding judgment, God can make three choices:

1. He can let rebellion go on forever and never judge it. As such, all the terrible and ungodly things, distressing injustices and wickedness that are happening on earth now will continue to abound and go on without end. God does not want that, and neither does mankind.
2. God can enforce men to obey Him and control them as robots. But He is sovereign and will never do that. Love cannot be forced. If He forces men to repent and do His will rigidly, they cannot truly love Him.
3. He can withdraw Himself from those who refuse His love. He can let them have their own way for a season of time. As God is light, without Him, there will only be gross darkness. Without God, the ungodly will experience terrible torments of godlessness and wickedness. This is the only wise way to bring them back again to the journey of godliness.

Remember the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The father allowed his wayward son to go off from his presence and household.

The younger son got together all he had, and set off far, far away from his father. And there he squandered all his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he began to search for a job, and was hired to feed pigs.

However, he remained hungry. He even longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything. He then finally came to his senses. Yes, finally, he remembered his father. He finally acknowledged that he was wrong.

He then decided to quit his folly, wise up and go back to his father and say to him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." The father loved him back unconditionally. Similarly, the divine love of God never fails.

What is the breaking point of our wilful sinning against God? God may allow us to go on sinning but there will come a point in time when we are in total desperation. Game over, and it's time to quit! It is there and then we begin to realize and acknowledge our wrongdoings and sins. It is here we must make the decision to take the journey home. Yes, return back to God, seek His face, and turn away from our wicked ways!

There are many prodigal sons in the household of God today. Many of us are like the elder son. We continue to do our own things. Most Christians have a lot of things to do daily. But we are like fat hamsters in their cages running and keeping the wheels rotating. Always busy doing something but actually going nowhere.

It is so difficult to be still and wait on the Lord, to commune with Him and to hear His voice. Very few people are spending quality time with God. Almost none are standing in the gap for our younger brothers

who are lost. Very few Christians pray for their families, their churches, their communities and their nations. This God-given responsibility is often neglected. And standing in the gap is given very low priority! This is a shocking discovery but it is true in the churches across the globe.

To understand what this means to stand in the gap, let's look at the great example of Abraham (Genesis 18:16-32). Abraham interceded with God for the wicked city of Sodom. He was the most persistent intercessor recorded in the Scriptures. He kept on pleading with God, bargaining down so that God would not destroy the people. Abraham's relationship with God was true friendship. He was able to commune freely and directly with God. Face to face! God did not hide anything from Abraham what He was about to do.

However Sodom was eventually destroyed. It was not because God refused to answer Abraham's prayer and hear his intercession, but because Sodom could not produce even the minimal evidence of righteousness and repentance. Abraham dared not ask God to spare Sodom for fewer than ten righteous persons.

As history revealed, the Lord searched His own people for even one righteous person and could not find one. The prophet Jeremiah declared that God would spare Jerusalem for the sake of one! Yet not a single righteous person could be found. In **Jeremiah 5:1-3**, God exposed the sins of Judah and revealed this honest truth:

"Run up and down every street in Jerusalem," says the LORD.

"Look high and low; search throughout the city!

If you can find even one just and honest person,

I will not destroy the city.

But even when they are under oath, saying,

'As surely as the LORD lives,'

they are still telling lies!"

LORD, You are searching for honesty.

You struck your people, but they paid no attention.
You crushed them, but they refused to be corrected.
They are determined, with faces set like stone;
they have refused to repent.

Yes, only one righteous man is enough for God. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16).

Romans 5:18-19

Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone,
but Christ's one act of righteousness
brings a right relationship with God
and new life for everyone.
Because one person disobeyed God,
many became sinners.
But because one other person obeyed God,
many will be made righteous.

God needs only one righteous man! Who prepared the way of the Lord in His First Coming? John the Baptist. But who were the parents of John the Baptist?

Luke 1:5-6

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea,
a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah.
His wife was of the daughters of Aaron,
and her name was Elizabeth.
And they were both righteous before God,
walking in all the commandments
and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous and blameless in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations.

Yes, God is still seeking for one righteous man. He is seeking for a man to stand in the gap for the sake of the land, so that He doesn't have to destroy it.

Standing in the gap means doing three things:

1. Watching out for the enemies of God coming to destroy His people
2. Warning God's people to humble themselves and repent of their sins
3. Waiting on the Lord, pleading for His mercy and grace on behalf of His people

The whole world is in this current state of turmoil, crisis and chaos today because the Church is not doing what God desires us to do. Jesus Christ has commissioned us to do an awesome job. But the Great Commission is not yet fulfilled because we have committed the Great Omission. We forget to stand in the gap for the nations. How to do His will without communing with Him daily?

The big question is still this: Are we done with all the follies of our sins? It's now game over, and it's now time to take our position and stand in the gap.

2 Chronicles 7:14

If My people who are called by My name
will humble themselves,
and pray and seek My face,
and turn from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from heaven,
and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Jesus is coming again. Another "John the Baptist" is needed to prepare the way of the Lord. God is still seeking for godly men and women to stand in the gap. They will be blameless and righteous in the sight of

God, like Zacharias and Elizabeth. They will give birth and bring forth "John the Baptist."

Will we be the ones God sought for?

Chapter 2

The Man Who Bargained With God

In Genesis 18, we read about the interesting account of Abraham bargaining with God. He was a man who could bargain with God through his prayers and intercessions. He was able to commune with God, knowing very well His heart desire and purpose.

He was the most persistent intercessor ever recorded in the Scriptures. He kept on pleading with God, bargaining down so that God would not destroy the people of Sodom. Abraham's relationship with God was true friendship. He was able to commune freely and directly with God. Face to face!

However the city of Sodom was eventually destroyed. It was not because God refused to answer Abraham's prayer and hear his intercession, but because Sodom could not produce even the minimal evidence of righteousness and repentance. Abraham did not dare to ask God to spare Sodom for fewer than ten righteous persons.

In the world today, especially in the well-developed nations, bargaining is almost non-existent. If we walk into any department stores or malls, all the prices are fixed and properly marked. As such, we don't bother to bargain down the prices. If the price tag says \$30, we will not try to bring it down to \$29.99. Not a cent less! Most youngsters nowadays do not know how to bargain because what they see in the tag is what they will pay without asking any questions.

However in most marketplaces of third world countries, bargaining is very much alive. It is an ancient tradition and a necessary skill that needs to be mastered if one desires to become a good merchant or a good buyer or shopper. If one doesn't, very often he will be

overcharged exorbitant prices, very excessive beyond reasonable doubt. If one is good at bargaining, he may only pay less than half of the asking price. He may also obtain some very good deals if he excels in this art of bargaining.

Some of us are good at bargaining with men but are we able to bargain with God? Are we bold enough to bargain with God? When bargaining with a merchant, we hold the money and he holds the merchandise. Each party has something the other party wants. And because we hold the money, we have some bargaining power. But when it comes to bargaining with God, He holds everything. God doesn't need our money. And because of this, we may not have any bargaining power or rights at all!

Who could imagine bargaining with the God who created the whole universe? How did Abraham obtain the rights to bargain with God? Without a good relationship with God, we will not be able to bargain with God. Without communing daily with God, we will not be able to communicate with Him properly. Without good communication with God, how are we able to know His desires? In any bargaining process, each party must have something the other party wants. Do we have something that God desires?

Abraham was the friend of God (James 2:23). He was a very hospitable man, willing to entertain and refresh any weary traveller journeying through the hot deserts.

In the ancient times, there were not many inns or hotels strategically located to accommodate people needing a place to rest, freshen up or have a good meal. This was the setting of the divine bargaining event in the Bible.

One day the LORD appeared again to Abraham near the oak trees of Mamre. Yes, the LORD brought along two angels and paid a strategic

visit to His close and intimate friend. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest time of the day. As he looked up, he noticed three men standing nearby. He ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground.

Abraham knew the LORD, and also the time of His glorious visitation. And he knew what to do and how to serve the LORD. He must have heard from his forefathers how Adam walked with the LORD in the garden, and how Enoch walked faithfully with God for 300 years. How these godly men had walked, talked and communed with the LORD along the journey of life! They were hospitable and had entertained God in their dwelling places or tents. Even sharing a meal together! Jesus ate with His disciples daily while He was with them, and even after His resurrection (John 21:12-15)!

“My Lord,” Abraham said, “if it pleases You, please stop over here for a while. Please rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to refresh You and wash Your feet. And since You’ve honoured Your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food for You before You continue on Your journey.”

Washing the feet of guests was customary in those ancient traditions and cultures. Only sandals were worn in desert climates, and the feet of the travellers got dirty easily. And the host would usually give their guests some cool water and clean towels to freshen up.

“All right,” the guests said. “Do as you have said.” And Abraham sprang into action immediately, and ran back to the tent and said to Sarah, “Hurry up, dear wife! Please get three large measures of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread.” After finished instructing his wife, he ran out to his herd and personally chose the best calf he had. Then he gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it.

When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served them to his guests. As they ate, Abraham waited on them, and communed with them in the cool shade of the oak tree.

Abraham was a true servant of God. He was able to serve a great meal even at last minute notice. No grumbling and no fussing! His wife and his servant willingly cooperated and worked with him. They knew that these visitors were special - very important persons. Abraham also knew where to serve the meal – a place where the visitors could rest comfortably, freshen up and have a great meal. Yes, under the shade of the great oak tree.

As they ate the sumptuous meal, the visitors asked Abraham, “Where is Sarah, your wife?”

“She’s inside the tent,” Abraham replied.

Then one of them said, “I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!” And Sarah was secretly eavesdropping and attentively listening to the whole conversation inside the tent. The proclamation of this good news was totally unexpected. It came almost like an electric shock!

Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah had long past the age of having children. She was already ninety years old. So she laughed silently to herself and said, “How could an elderly woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my husband is also so old?”

Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, ‘Can an old woman like me have a baby?’ Is anything too difficult for the LORD? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah became afraid knowing that the LORD had exposed her. She had secretly heard their conversation. So she denied, saying, "I didn't laugh." But the LORD said, "No, you did laugh." No wonder the baby was named Isaac, which meant "He laughs."

One year later, after the birth of Isaac (Genesis 21:6), Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." She did laugh even though she strongly denied doing so!

After the great meal and fellowship, the LORD and the angels got up and looked out toward Sodom. It was time for their departure. Abraham went along with them to send them on their way.

As Abraham walked a short distance with his special guests, the LORD spoke to the two angels. And He deliberately did so for Abraham to overhear their conversation. The LORD asked, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" That really got Abraham's attention!

Then the LORD reminded Abraham the covenant that He had made with him. "For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised."

God chose Abraham simply because he was faithful to teach and direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the LORD by doing what was right and just in the eyes of the LORD.

The LORD then turned to Abraham, speaking directly to him, "I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so great. I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know."

As the two angels turned and headed toward Sodom, the LORD remained with Abraham. He had something important to do. The LORD wanted to test of the heart of Abraham. This was where the bargaining began. The LORD had just revealed a big secret to him. What would Abraham do with the knowledge that God had just shown him?

Most people today will host big meetings and start to publish the secret of God out to big audiences or in their books, DVDs, CDs, videos, newsletters or websites. A lot of Christians love to run to meetings to hear the latest updates from their "apostles" and "prophets." Many people have obtained a lot of "prophetic insights" and "apostolic foresights" but they do not do anything with what they have in their minds and hands. But the way of God is not the same as the way of man. Sometimes secrets are not to be shared openly, but just to take it back to the Lord in prayer like Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39-46).

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus took Peter, James and John along to pray together with Him. He became anguished and distressed, and told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." He did not share with them what God the Father was about to do. The secret was too much for their human understanding. Their Messiah would be led away to be crucified for the sins of the world. That was beyond what their eyes could see and what their minds could conceive.

Jesus went on a little farther and bowed with His face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from Me. Nevertheless not My will but Yours be done." Then He returned to His disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with Me even for one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak!"

Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, let Your will be done." When He returned to them, He found them sleeping again. They couldn't keep their eyes open. So He went to pray a third time, saying the same things again.

That night Jesus bargained with God the Father thrice while His disciples were sleeping away. Then He came to His disciples and said, "Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look - the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let's be going. Look, My betrayer is here!"

Abraham did what Jesus did in Gethsemane. He began to bargain with the Lord. He did not go and publish the secret. He went and took it to the Lord in prayer!

Abraham came before the LORD and said, "Will You sweep away both the righteous and the wicked? Suppose You find fifty righteous people living there in the city - will You still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? Surely You wouldn't do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, You would be treating the righteous and the wicked exactly the same! Surely You wouldn't do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

And the LORD replied, "If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sakes."

Then Abraham began to wonder. What if there were not enough people to make the mark of fifty. He humbly spoke to the LORD again. "Since I have begun, let me speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes. Suppose there are only forty-five righteous people rather than fifty? Will You destroy the whole city for the lack of five?"

And the LORD said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five righteous people there."

Then Abraham pressed His request further and started bargaining again. Normally bargaining would end once agreement was reached. Nobody would allow another person to bargain again and again after they have reached an agreement on the terms and conditions. But Abraham was persistent and God was merciful!

Abraham pleaded, "Suppose there are only forty?" And the LORD replied, "I will not destroy it for the sake of the forty."

"Please don't be angry, my Lord," Abraham pleaded. "Let me speak - suppose only thirty righteous people are found?" And the LORD replied, "I will not destroy it if I find thirty."

Then Abraham said, "Since I have dared to speak to the Lord, let me continue - suppose there are only twenty?" And the LORD replied, "Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty."

Finally, Abraham said, "Lord, please don't be angry with me if I speak one more time. Suppose only ten are found?" And the LORD replied, "Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten."

When the LORD had finished His conversation with Abraham, He went on His way. And Abraham returned to his tent.

There are a few precious lessons on prayer and intercession we can learn from the bargaining of Abraham with God.

Firstly, effective prayer must be based on knowing God's desire and purpose. It is now time for us to align our will with the will of God the Father! It is not God aligning His will with ours! Prayer is not to get our

will done, but to get God's will done. Your kingdom come, and Your will be done!

Prayer must be in accordance with His will. Do we know His will? If not, how?

Secondly, God only reveals His secrets to His close friends and faithful servants. Abraham was known as the friend of God.

James 2:23

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says,
"Abraham believed God,
and it was accounted to him for righteousness."
And he was called the friend of God.

Amos 3:7-8

Surely the LORD God does nothing,
Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.
A lion has roared!
Who will not fear?
The LORD God has spoken!
Who can but prophesy?

Psalms 25:14

The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him,
And He will show them His covenant.

In **John 15:15**, Jesus told His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

Nobody will share openly his or her secrets with everybody. This principle of sharing secrets is the same in our daily living as well as in

the spiritual realm. A person will share the intimate details of his life only with his close friends who have earned his trust.

In the same way, God will only reveal His secrets to those who are trustworthy and who won't abuse their blessed privilege and friendship. And God will definitely not share His secrets to those who will sell His secrets away for profit-making through selling books, DVDs, audio and video tapes! Secrets will no longer be secrets if they are published widely to the mass audiences and multitudes!

If we truly want to know God's purpose so that we can pray accordingly to His will, we have to first learn how to live obediently in the holy fear of God. God is now training us so that we will become His friends worthy of His trust.

Thirdly, God is both loving and just. Because He is loving, He delays His judgement. But because He is just, when the time is up, He will judge.

To the people of the world, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was an unfortunate natural disaster like the terrible earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and typhoons happening around our world. If the catastrophe should happen in our days, there would be news coverage and footage around the clock, exploring and explaining from some scientific and geological perspectives about why and how the disaster occurred.

No newscasters in the TV channels would quote Genesis 18:20 in which the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous." The people of the world would not understand the eternal purposes of God. But Abraham knew that the destruction of the two cities was not natural but a divine judgment of a holy God upon a wicked people who had continually rejected Him and His warnings.

As the friend of God, Abraham could interpret correctly the events of his world because he knew the purposes of God. If we desire to have this kind of insight in the world we are living in, we need to take time to wait on Him and grow in Him, and eventually become a friend of God.

Fourthly, we are called to bless the nations but we may not be able to save all of them from the judgement of God if they reject His salvation and deliverance!

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God’s purpose is to bless all nations through Abraham. How could Abraham bless all the families of the earth? The answer is found in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, the seed of Abraham. Can Jesus save everybody? Yes. But is everybody saved? No, because everybody still has to make a decision to believe in Jesus or not. This freewill choice to follow God or not to follow Him is something which God had sovereignly designed so that man will truly love God.

John 3:16-21

For God so loved the world

that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him
should not perish but have everlasting life.
For God did not send His Son
into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world through Him might be saved.
He who believes in Him is not condemned;
but he who does not believe is condemned already,
because he has not believed
in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
And this is the condemnation,
that the light has come into the world,
and men loved darkness rather than light,
because their deeds were evil.
For everyone practicing evil hates the light
and does not come to the light,
lest his deeds should be exposed.
But he who does the truth comes to the light,
that his deeds may be clearly seen,
that they have been done in God.

Fifthly, be persistent and never give up halfway in our prayers and intercessions. When Abraham began to bargain with God, he started with the figure of 50. But as he pondered over the possibility that there might not be enough people to fill in the quota, he proceeded to bring the number down to 45, then 40, then 30, then 20 and then finally to 10. As it turned out, there was barely one righteous man in the whole city of Sodom.

Hebrews 7:25

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost
those who come to God through Him,
since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Jesus is now interceding for us. He is able, now and always, to save those who come to God through Him, because He lives forever to plead with God for them. He is now bargaining on their behalf. He is not slow to do what He has promised, as some think.

God is delaying His judgement because of the continual intercession of Christ! He is patient with all of them, because He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins. Jesus never gives up praying and interceding for them!

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise,
as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us,
not willing that any should perish
but that all should come to repentance.

Many Christians do not understand this heart desire of God. We have become very impatient and judgemental. And instead of interceding to God to delay His divine judgement, many of us just want to go to heaven quickly and enjoy paradise ourselves. We don't love others or care for their salvation and welfare! Whether they go to hell and suffer eternal damnation is of no significant value to us.

Sixthly, Abraham knew the character and attributes of God. This important knowledge drew him on into fervent prayer and intercession. We dare not command God to do what we want Him to do.

God is not a waiter waiting on us to pick what we want on the menu, and ready to take our order. In fact, we should be waiting on Him, as a waiter, ready to take His order. Abraham waited on the LORD, served Him, washed His feet and refreshed Him. He gave to the LORD the best meal. He even dined with God. When was the last time we had sweet communion with God, and fellowshiped with Him?

Christianity today has made God to be a Santa Claus! Just name what we want and claim them in the name of the Lord! We preach revival but none of us are being revived.

The measurement of true revival is the temperature of our hearts. God looks at our hearts! Are we loving God and our neighbours the way He loves us? Is the fire of God burning zealously inside so that we are shining brightly outside? Do we have passion for the Lord, and compassion for the lost? Do we have reverence for God - a holy fear for His awesome power and holiness?

Seventhly, it wasn't an easy thing for Abraham to pray for Sodom. A few years earlier in Genesis 14, Abraham had rescued his nephew Lot along with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah after they had been taken captive by some warring kings. He even returned all their goods back to them. Abraham had met these people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He knew how ungrateful, sinful and wicked these pagans were.

Abraham could have said, "They should have learned their lessons by now! They truly deserve God's judgment!" But there was no hint of such an attitude of pride and arrogance in Abraham. He simply and humbly pleaded on behalf of these immoral sinners and sexual perverts! He stood in the gap for these ungodly people.

Similarly, it isn't easy for us to pray for the wicked people in our generation. How often we have judged them instead of praying for them! These people are responsible for their sins and the consequences of their sins. But we are responsible to pray and intercede for them!

Ezekiel 3:18

When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,'
and you give him no warning,
nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way,

to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity;
but his blood I will require at your hand.

Maybe through our intercessions, somehow somewhat someday someone would come to their senses and turn to God and repent! We too were sinners saved by grace! We once were blind but now can see! We once were lost but now are found! It is all because someone had interceded and prayed for us! Likewise, we should have compassion on other sinners by praying and interceding for them that they too may experience God's grace in Christ.

Lastly, we must intercede with the right motives through the Word of God. Abraham knew that God was going to destroy the two cities. He prayed that God would spare them for the sakes of the righteous ones. He didn't pray and intercede for a mighty revival to come upon these two cities. He prayed for true repentance and a turning away from sins.

Today, we talk so much about revivals. But the reverse seems to be happening as written in the Word.

Matthew 24:7-14

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

And there will be famines, pestilences,
and earthquakes in various places.

All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you,
and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

And then many will be offended, will betray one another,
and will hate one another.

Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

And because lawlessness will abound,
the love of many will grow cold.

But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached

in all the world as a witness to all the nations,
and then the end will come.

Now many nations are going against nations, and kingdom against kingdom. There are famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world. But all these are only the initial birth pains, with many more to come.

Whether we like it or not, we will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. We will be hated all over the world because we are the true followers of Christ. But many Christians will turn away from the Lord, and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people of God.

Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many Christians will grow cold. But the ones who endure to the end will be saved. It is only then the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come.

And who are the ones who will preach the gospel to the nations in such difficult times? Those who believe in Christ, and have overcome the world. The overcomers. Definitely not those who talk only but do not walk the talk!

Abraham bargained with God for the wicked city of Sodom. Will we bargain with God for the sinful and perverse generation we are living in? If not, can we start? How? We can begin by becoming a friend of God. Wait on Him. See what He will say to us.

One day God Himself will share with us a secret or two.

Chapter 3

A Call For Sustainability

On 31 July 2012, the world's worst blackout in recent times occurred. More than 700 million people in India were without electricity. Twenty of India's 28 states were plunged into darkness as energy shortages failed to meet growing demands.

As nations develop, their needs for electricity will increase. Their leaders must take a closer look at their infrastructural utilities and facilities, and start planning many years ahead to include new power and gas stations as they continue to build more homes, schools, highways, factories and industries. A short-sightedness in not doing so will create many problems in the future.

Not enough power supplies mean the current and future demands may not be sustainable. Homes, schools, factories, industries, public transport like electric trains, subways and airports, may face a partial or complete shutdown someday somehow.

As a nation cannot operate without the adequate supply of electricity and fuel, a Christian, church or ministry cannot run without the power of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians and churches are running on empty tanks. Many do not pray at all.

Some energy sources are good as long as there are no problems. But when disasters strike, these sources can become monstrous liabilities like the nuclear plants in Japan and Chernobyl. Their side-effects will wipe off all their past benefits causing many serious health problems in the present and future!

Likewise, what kind of power we are operating in the spiritual realm is also important. Many Christian leaders and ministries are not operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are tapping their powers from other sources including other religions and occults!

Prayer is our fuel of spiritual power to keep us burning within and shining without! Without the zeal of God in our spirits, how can we have the passion of the Lord burning inside our hearts so that we can shine brightly for the lost outside?

Below are a few quotes about prayer:

A.W. Tozer

Have you noticed how much praying for revival has been going on of late - and how little revival has resulted? I believe the problem is that we have been trying to substitute praying for obeying, and it simply will not work. To pray for revival while ignoring the plain precept laid down in scripture is to waste a lot of words and get nothing for our trouble. Prayer will become effective when we stop using it as a substitute for obedience.

Billy Sunday

If you are strangers to prayer, you are strangers to power.

Corrie Ten Boom

Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?

D.L. Moody

The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe.

David J Wolpe

Prayer is less about changing the world than it is about changing ourselves.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The richness of God's Word ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart.

Dwight L Moody

I prayed for faith, and thought that some day faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, "Now faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." I had closed my Bible, and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible, and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since.

E. Stanley Jones

Prayer is surrender - surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will. If I throw out a boathook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God.

E.M. Bounds

The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the remainder of the day.

Helga B Gross

What we usually pray to God is not that His will be done, but that He approves ours.

Hudson Taylor

He that loveth little prayeth little, he that loveth much prayeth much.

John Bunyan

In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words, than words without heart.

Leonard Ravenhill

No man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing; the people who are not praying are straying.

Leonard Ravenhill

A sinning man will stop praying. A praying man will stop sinning.

Leonard Ravenhill

A man may study because his brain is hungry for knowledge, even Bible knowledge. But he prays because his soul is hungry for God.

Martin Luther

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.

Morris Adler

Our prayers are answered not when we are given what we ask but when we are challenged to be what we can be.

Richard J. Foster

Prayer involves transformed passions. In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.

Richard J. Foster

If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer: Intercession is a way of loving others.

Robert E. Harris

If a church wants a better pastor, it can get one by praying for the one it has.

Samuel Chadwick

The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

Soren Kierkegaard

Prayer does not change God, but changes him who prays.

William Law

There is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him.

Prayer is the fuel that lights our way as we travel through the journey of darkness in our world! Without the light of Christ, we will stumble and fall! How far can we move in darkness? Without the fire of God burning inside us, how can we shine for others to see on the outside?

Interestingly and sadly so, most Christians do not pray. They will choose to do other mundane things, always wandering away from God and His presence. All sensitivity to God is gone as we become numb in spiritual matters.

Filled with lots of Christian programs and activities, we think that we are running the race that God has set for us. But in true reality, it is a crazy race and a hectic pace set by ourselves and others but not God. As the years go by, we will find and face a shattered soul deep within us. Then we begin to hunger for Jesus - to be whole again!

Some pastors and Christian leaders are desiring to start a movement. They try to redo or outdo the previous revivals. But God is already

doing a new thing! We should not be presumptuous to be eager to start another movement! We do not duplicate what others have done in the past revivals.

Haggai 2:9

‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts.

‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts.

God wants us to move where His Spirit moves. Only the Spirit can start a true spiritual movement! When the Spirit of the Lord prompts us, we will move! Unless the Spirit moves, we remain silent and be still in the Lord.

Many man-made movements generate a lot of activities and programs which in due time will degrade and fade away. Many people are interested in counting sheep but not interested in communing with the Shepherd.

Most of these man-made movements are not sustainable. Simply because those initial stirrings come and go off very quickly. And without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and without the fueling of prayer and intercession, many just die prematurely.

When a movement dies, another starts. Moving from movement to movement, always doing something but going nowhere. Like a hamster running endlessly and turning the wheel inside a cage!

And it is time to stop running here and there, and to return to the Lord. Why do trials and temptations abound? Simply because we do not take them to the Lord in prayer!

In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus shared the Parable of the Ten Virgins with His disciples. The kingdom of heaven would be like ten virgins or bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. The five who were foolish didn't take enough olive oil for their lamps, but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil.

When the coming of the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight they were roused by the shout, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!'

All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. Then the five foolish ones asked the others, 'Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.'

But the others replied, 'We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.'

But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked.

Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, 'Lord! Lord! Open the door for us!'

But he called back, 'To tell you the truth, I don't know you!'

Jesus then gave this severe warning to His disciples, "So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of My return."

The question is still this: Do we have enough oil to last till Jesus returns? Are we sustainable? Are our ministries and churches

sustainable? Whatever Christian activities and programs even our prayers and intercessions? If not, how?

As a conclusion, I would like to share a Sunday School song with all of you. So simple and yet so profound.

Give me oil in my lamp; keep it burning burning burning
Give me oil in my lamp, I pray. Hallelujah!
Give me oil in my lamp; keep it burning burning burning
Keep it burning till the break of day.

Chapter 4

The King In The Field

Moreover the profit of the land is for all;
even the king is served from the field.

Ecclesiastes 5:9

The last month of the civil Jewish calendar is the month of Elul before the New Year starts with the month of Tishrei again.

The month of Elul is a time of paradox. Why? Because it is known as the time of spiritual workdays.

The Jewish calendar distinguishes between two general classifications of days: "mundane" (chol) and "holy" (kodesh). Ordinary workdays are mundane, but the Shabbat and the feasts of the LORD are holy.

On holy days, we free ourselves from the material entanglements of life to devote ourselves to the spiritual pursuits of praise, worship, prayer, intercession and the study of the Word of God.

These holy days are enriched with spiritual attributes such as rest on Shabbat, freedom on Passover, and awe on Rosh Hashanah etc. Each holy day provides a unique experience to us as we journey with the Lord through life.

The month of Elul resembles the holy portions of the calendar. Elul is a haven in time. It is like a city of refuge where we can escape from the ravaging and devastating demands of material pursuits in life. It is a time to take stocks and audit our spiritual life and accounts – a time to assess and evaluate how we have fared in the current year that has gone by.

Elul is also a good time to prepare for the New Year (Rosh Hashanah), Ten Days of Awe, and Yom Kippur. We repent of the things we have done and failed the Lord, and also resolve what to do in the future. It is a great time to read the Word of God more, pray more, praise more, worship more, give more to the Lord and to others by doing charitable deeds.

Elul is a great opportunity to draw near to God as we renew our relationship with God – asking Him to light our way, lead us, guide us and guard us in the days ahead.

In contrast to the other holy days such as the Shabbats and the feasts of the LORD, the days of Elul are workdays. On Shabbats and the holy days, the Bible commands us to cease from doing all physically constructive work (melachah). Work is forbidden on these holy days.

However, in the month of Elul, there are no such restrictions. The divine and holy activities of Elul are conducted in the midst of our workday lives in the workplaces, fields, homes, schools, shops, factories, hospitals or offices etc.

According to a rabbi's explanation for the paradox of Elul, the month of Elul is when the king is in the field.

The king is usually in his royal palace in the capital city. If we need to see or approach the king, we need to go through the proper protocols and authorised channels in the palace bureaucracy. Approval is needed and granted through a succession of ministers and departmental heads.

We must also journey to the capital where the king is located. We must pass through many gates, corridors and passageways that will eventually lead to the throne room. Our appearance before the king must be meticulously prepared and presented. And we must adhere to

a strict and acceptable code of dress, speech and mannerism before and upon entering into the royal presence.

But this is different when the king is in the field. Sometimes, the king comes out of his royal palace to visit his people in the open fields. At such times, we can approach the king just as we are. No protocols, no pre-arrangements and no prior preparations.

The king will receive all of his people with a smiling face and a radiant countenance. Even the peasant or farmer with all their dirt and sweat can have free access to the king in a manner not easily available even to the ministers when the king is in the royal palace.

For eleven months of the year, our lives alternate between the mundane workdays and the holy days, between facing the people and the King, between the fields and His royal palace, and between the outer courts and the Holy of Holies. But in the month of Elul, the King of glory comes to the field.

What happens when the king comes to the field? When the farmer sees the king in his field, does he keep on doing his work? Does he behave as if it were just another day in the fields? Does he have the time to run home to wash and change? Can he keep the king waiting for him to get ready and look right? Of course not. The farmer must be ready to meet his king in the fields.

Likewise, we must be able to meet the King in our fields - our homes, schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods. At all times! We must be ready to receive Him wherever we live, work, rest, eat and enjoy leisure.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, His own special people,

that you may proclaim the praises of Him
who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
who once were not a people but are now the people of God,
who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

We are chosen by God. Chosen for the high calling of priestly work;
chosen to be a holy people; chosen to be His instruments to do His
work; chosen to speak out for Him and to tell others of what He has
done for us. Transforming us from nobody to somebody, from rejected
to accepted, and from a sinner to a saint.

We are a holy people, regardless of whether it is a mundane workday
or holy day! At all times, we are called to be holy as He is holy! Some of
us will utterly and totally unprepared if the King of glory will come and
knock at our doors. Will we be ashamed to open the door for Him to
enter into our homes, our workplaces and the places we are
frequenting or visiting?

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,

I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

When Jesus comes knocking at our door, will we be glad to hear His
voice and open the door immediately? Will we be ready to invite Him
to come in, and share a meal together as friends? Will we be happy to
commune with Him? Will we be able to stop all we are doing and serve
Him when He comes to us in our fields?

Elul is not a month of ordinary workdays. The very air is charged with
holiness. Everyday we live, everywhere we go, everything we do is
unto the Lord! When the King is in our field, where the King is, it is holy
ground. We are standing on holy ground! Our field is a holy ground!

God is more interested in a holy people than religious projects, activities, programs planned and made by man! It is time to stop playing church and spiritual games with God. Game over!

God is more interested that His people are a royal priesthood and a holy nation at all times than that they become holy on holy days and secular on mundane workdays!

The King is coming to our fields. Are we ready to meet Him? Face to face.

Chapter 5

Prophetic Insight Or Fengshui

Jeremiah 10:2-3 (New Living Translation)

This is what the LORD says:

"Do not act like the other nations,
who try to read their future in the stars.

Do not be afraid of their predictions,
even though other nations are terrified by them.

Their ways are futile and foolish.

They cut down a tree,
and a craftsman carves an idol."

What is fengshui?

Fengshui is a Chinese system of geomancy or divination.

The term fengshui (風水) literally means 風(feng) wind and 水(shui) water in English.

Historically, the superstitious Chinese people used fengshui to position or orientate buildings and items - often spiritual and significant structures such as tombs, temples, houses, shops, factories and business centres in an auspicious manner.

Depending on the style of fengshui being used, an auspicious site could be determined by taking reference to local features and elements such as bodies of water, stars or a compass.

The five elements or forces, according to the Chinese, are namely metal, earth, fire, water and wood.

Fengshui also employs the use of numerology - the study of presumed celestial, mystical or other special relationships between a count, a number or a measurement and some observed or perceived events.

Fengshui also employs the use of colours. Each colour is an expression of one of the five fengshui elements. Each colour has a meaning or connotation associated with it.

Fengshui was suppressed in China during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. But since then, it was revived and has gained popularity throughout Asia and the world. It has secretly crept into Christianity.

What does the Word of God teach us concerning fengshui?

The Bible clearly condemns all forms of occults and witchcraft including fengshui.

Witchcraft is seeking spiritual guidance, power, or information from sources apart from God.

Occult is simply the act or practice of unravelling the knowledge of the hidden – seeking spiritual reality into the dark side extending beyond human reasoning and physical sciences.

God forbids us from dabbling with the occult powers of darkness. He told us not to act like the other pagan nations, trying to read into the future by looking at the stars and other elements. We are not to be afraid of their predictions, even though the other people are terrified by them.

Their ways are futile and foolish. When they cut down a tree, their craftsman will carve it into an idol. They can make something out of anything! Even gods! Thus we must avoid all these wicked customs and practices of the pagan nations!

Deuteronomy 18:9-12

When you come into the land
which the LORD your God is giving you,
you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.

There shall not be found among you
anyone who makes his son or his daughter
pass through the fire,
or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer,
or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,
or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist,
or one who calls up the dead.

For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD,
and because of these abominations
the LORD your God drives them out from before you.

Unfortunately, many Christians have unknowingly employed some occultic ways in their worship to God by combining pagan and oriental religions with Christian beliefs. They think that they are very creative in a new move of God. But in doing so, they are totally deceived.

They naively enter into the New Age religion - believing in pantheism (everything is god or everything has something to do with God) and rejecting monotheism (there is only one God).

Many Christians can spiritualize everything they come into contact with - every item, color or number has a spiritual significance or meaning. Super religious. Behaving just like the ancient Israelites.

During their long stay in Egypt, the Hebrews fell into idolatry. Their idolatrous ways learned and acquired in Egypt were probably rooted out from them as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

When the Jews finally entered the Promised Land, they came into direct contact with the pagan religions of the Canaanites. Instead of

following the ways of God, the Israelites wandered off and worshipped the idols of those heathen nations. This was their great national sin.

God sent them off as exiles to Assyria and Babylonia for a period of 70 years for self-evaluation and reflection. That exile finally purified the Jews of all idolatrous tendencies and ways. Before that, the Jews honestly thought they were doing the right things until God proved them wrong. What feels good for us to do may not be good for us!

If the ancient religious Jews could fall into idolatry so easily, we Christians are also vulnerable to such temptations! That's why God gave us the Ten Commandments.

The first and second commandments are directed against every form of idolatry.

Exodus 20:1-6

And God spoke all these words, saying:

"I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before Me.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—

any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,

or that is in the earth beneath,

or that is in the water under the earth;

you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children

to the third and fourth generations of those

who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands,

to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Recently, I came across some new interesting practices in the Christian circles.

Kites & Boats (風箏 - 水船)

Flying a kite is perfect and good for leisure. But to determine the will of God or to make a strategic movement or a “prophetic” act by following the winds 風 and seeing where the kites will fly and land is definitely not biblical.

Going on a boat-ride and following the water 水 directions, ways and gates and unravelling the knowledge of the hidden is also not biblical.

Determining the location or position of the head or the tail or the womb or the mouth or the heart or the stomach of a city or nation is also not a prophetic insight but just some 風水 geomancy or fengshui knowledge in motion.

This year, someone even claimed to have slayed the dragon in the beginning of the year of the dragon.

Anointing Trees With Oil

Some Christians have done what the pagans are doing. They wanted to have breakthroughs and abundant fruitfulness in their lives. Thus they went to anoint some trees with holy oil from Jerusalem!

They honestly and sincerely believed that they were carrying out some "prophetic" acts. But the Word of God clearly forbids it.

1 Kings 14:23

They also set up for themselves high places,
sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill

and under every spreading tree.

Stamping Over Satan

Some Christians claim that Satan is under their feet by quoting **Romans 16:20**:

And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

There is something we must take notice in this verse. The devil is not under our feet yet. God will soon crush him under our feet. The word “shortly” means “not yet but coming soon.” Jesus is coming soon and very soon. But His Second Coming is not yet fulfilled!

Jude 8-10

In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams
these ungodly people pollute their own bodies,
reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings.
But even the archangel Michael,
when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses,
did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said,
“The Lord rebuke you!”

Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand,
and the very things they do understand by instinct—
as irrational animals do—will destroy them.

Even the archangel Michael dared not trample over the devil! And Jesus did not do so when He was tempted thrice by the devil in the wilderness! He just declared the Word of God against the devil!

Some people claim that they have divine authority from their dreams and wishful presumptions. They live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings. Because they do not understand spiritual

authority, they do whatever their instincts tell them. They claim that the Lord tells them to do this and that. But in doing so, they bring about their own destruction.

Releasing The Lion Of Judah

Some people claim that they have the power to release the Lion of Judah. First, the Lion of Judah is not a beast or an animal. He is the King of kings and the LORD of lords! Second, He is not in captivity or in prison. Thus He needs not to be set free or be released!

But we can declare and proclaim the Lion of Judah and His glorious majesty to the cities and nations!

Some claim that since the Bridegroom is the Lion of Judah, we the Bride of Christ are now lionesses. Assuming in the jungle, all the animals are lions and lionesses. There will be disastrous disorder and imbalance!

If a city or nation is completely filled with lionesses and lions, therein will be no peace and no rest 24/7. Therefore, there will be no lion in the Highway of Holiness!

Isaiah 35:8-10

A highway shall be there, and a road,
And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.
The unclean shall not pass over it,
But it shall be for others.
Whoever walks the road, although a fool,
Shall not go astray.
No lion shall be there,
Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it;
It shall not be found there.

But the redeemed shall walk there,
And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Calling Down Angels, Fires, Rains And Winds By Waving Some Banners

This is definitely a New Age movement but copied directly from the shaman priests and priestesses. A shaman is a person regarded as having access to, and influence in, the world of spirits, who typically enters a trance state during a ritual, and practices divination and healing.

Some of my friends have all sorts of colourful banners. Using them for praise and worship is perfectly beautiful and commendable. But using them to summon angels, fires, rains and winds may be a bit too presumptuous!

Who are we to summon angels to do this and that? Only God can do so. We must not think that we are God!

Wearing a dress or clothing having a lion or an eagle doesn't make us one! Wearing an angelic outfit doesn't make one to become like an angel.

Only the righteous are as bold as a lion. Wearing a dress or T-shirt or waving a banner of the Lion of Judah doesn't make one a lion.

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no one pursues,
But the righteous are bold as a lion.

Some Christians wanted to have revivals in their ministries or churches. And they did so by calling down revival fires, rains and winds. They wanted to start a movement. But this again is not right.

We cannot start a revival! It is the work of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit moves, the rest is history.

On the day of Pentecost, the 120 in the upper room didn't know what was going to happen to them, and what would happen next. They just waited and prayed as instructed by the Lord. And the Holy Spirit came down. That day, there was a mighty revival in Jerusalem. They didn't pray for a revival or wanted to start a revival. But the zeal of the Lord did it! By His Holy Spirit!

The zeal of man will always want to do the work of the Holy Spirit! We cannot advertise or declare a revival beforehand. We can only say that there was a revival after it had actually occurred!

Gold Dust, Precious Stones And Oils

While the Great Awakening was focused on evangelistic priorities, the Counterfeit Revival is focused on egocentric parties. Many Christians fell for gold dust, angel feathers and anointing oils flowing down from egocentric and attention-seeking prophets and preachers!

Today, very few Christians are interested in evangelizing and reaching the lost. They are more interested in soaking and more soaking in "glory," self-indulging, partying and enjoying themselves in whatever it feels good and great! In doing so, many have deceived themselves. Self-deception is a deadly disease in the kingdom of God now!

Instead of worshipping God, many have worshipped mankind and angels. Even John the beloved disciple of Jesus almost fell into this error in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible!

Revelation 22:8-9

Now I, John, saw and heard these things.
And when I heard and saw,
I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel
who showed me these things.
Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that.
For I am your fellow servant,
and of your brethren the prophets,
and of those who keep the words of this book.
Worship God."

If John the Apostle was vulnerable, we too can commit the same error of falling down before an angel and worshipping him. But God forbids! We are to worship God and God alone!

Downloading From Heaven

Because we are living in the internet and fast information age, some of us have used terms and words that are not biblical.

Downloading from heaven sounds good until we understand its implication and true meaning.

Can we really download from heaven at our will and desire? Unless God uploads to us, there is nothing to download.

Downloading also implies that there is a big distance between God and us. We are called to sit at the feet of Jesus, worshipping Him and communing with Him - face to face. As such, we don't need to download. We just listen attentively to what He is saying to us. Drawing near to Him as He draws near to us! No need for downloading!

Downloading also implies that we want things fast. No waiting time. Just give me what I want. There is no sweet communion and fellowship with the Lord. Like fast food, we just swallow whatever we are served within a few minutes! We do not take time to enjoy the food and its tastes. As such, we don't even give thanks to the Lord for what He has done. We have become very impatient! Just download to us. And fast! High speed!

According to the Bible, there are things we need to do before God does what He wills:

Isaiah 40:28-31

Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the LORD,

The Creator of the ends of the earth,

Neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the weak,

And to those who have no might

He increases strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

But those who wait on the LORD

Shall renew their strength;

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint.

2 Chronicles 7:14

If My people who are called by My name

will humble themselves,

and pray and seek My face,

and turn from their wicked ways,

then I will hear from heaven,
and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

We are living in very exciting times. It is time to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is seeking for true worshippers. We cannot play spiritual games with Him anymore. Game over.

2 Corinthians 5:7

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Many Christians are not walking by faith. They are walking by what they can see, feel, touch or perceive. If God does nothing, they will do something. They cannot wait on the LORD, and be still before Him! They have itching ears, and they will turn to fables and tales of their false teachers and prophets.

2 Timothy 4:2-4

Preach the word!

Be ready in season and out of season.

Convince, rebuke, exhort,
with all longsuffering and teaching.

For the time will come
when they will not endure sound doctrine,
but according to their own desires,

because they have itching ears,
they will heap up for themselves teachers;
and they will turn their ears away from the truth,
and be turned aside to fables.

Who prepared the way of the Lord in His First Coming? John the Baptist.

But who gave birth to John the Baptist?

Luke 1:5-7

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea,
a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah.
His wife was of the daughters of Aaron,
and her name was Elizabeth.
And they were both righteous before God,
walking in all the commandments
and ordinances of the Lord blameless.
But they had no child,
because Elizabeth was barren,
and they were both well advanced in years.

Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were blameless and righteous in God's eyes, faithfully walking in obedience to all of the Lord's commandments and ways. Yes, righteousness in living and faithfulness in obeying God!

In fact, Zacharias could not speak to anyone about what happened in the temple of God. He neither did nor spoke anything. No prophetic act. He was both the messenger and the message! He could not declare this or proclaim that. He was speechless! But God's promise was fulfilled through him! John the Baptist was born when the appointed time came!

Abraham was called by God. And God promised him a son Isaac. But because the waiting period was long, Sarah advised Abraham to take Hagar her Egyptian maidservant as wife. Abraham agreed. He took the matter into his own hands. Ishmael was born.

Because of this, there were continual conflicts and disorders in the family of Abraham until today! No peace until the Prince of Peace comes again! And there are also many Ishmael-types of ministries birthed in the church today! A lot of heartaches and headaches!

I am not against spiritual warfare. We are to put on the whole armor of God, and stand. Yes, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord
and in the power of His might.

Put on the whole armor of God,
that you may be able
to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we do not wrestle
against flesh and blood,
but against principalities,
against powers,
against the rulers of the darkness of this age,
against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God,
that you may be able to withstand in the evil day,
and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore,
having girded your waist with truth,
having put on the breastplate of righteousness,
and having shod your feet
with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
above all, taking the shield of faith
with which you will be able to quench
all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And take the helmet of salvation,
and the sword of the Spirit,
which is the word of God;
praying always with all prayer
and supplication in the Spirit,
being watchful to this end
with all perseverance
and supplication for all the saints—

and for me, that utterance may be given to me,
that I may open my mouth boldly
to make known the mystery of the gospel,
for which I am an ambassador in chains;
that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

James 4:6-8

But He gives more grace.

Therefore He says:

“God resists the proud,

But gives grace to the humble.”

Therefore submit to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners;

and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Until we humble ourselves and submit to God, we will not be able to resist the devil.

Until we realize that we can do nothing without God, we will always want to play a fool with the devil.

I don't have another 40 years to wander in the wilderness.

And I also do not have another 70 years to spend in exile.

Chapter 6

From Being An Instrument Of God To Becoming An Idol Of Men

In the beginning, man was created to praise God, glorify Him and worship Him forever.

But sin entered into mankind, and changed the holy worship of the Creator to the unholy idolatry of the created creatures!

Since then, we began to worship and glorify ourselves, and anything that would bring personal pleasure to our lives.

Instead of worshipping the invisible God, we now worship the visible things or persons.

Instead of walking by faith and not by sight, we walk by what we can see, feel, touch or perceive.

Even an instrument used by God initially can be turned into an idol eventually.

A good example is the bronze serpent that God instructed Moses to lift up in the wilderness in order to bring healing to those that were bitten by fiery serpents.

Numbers 21:4-9

Then they journeyed from Mount Hor
by the Way of the Red Sea,
to go around the land of Edom;
and the soul of the people
became very discouraged on the way.

And the people spoke
against God and against Moses:
“Why have you brought us up
out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?
For there is no food and no water,
and our soul loathes this worthless bread.”
So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people,
and they bit the people;
and many of the people of Israel died.
Therefore the people came to Moses,
and said, “We have sinned,
for we have spoken against the LORD and against you;
pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.”
So Moses prayed for the people.
Then the LORD said to Moses,
“Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole;
and it shall be that everyone who is bitten,
when he looks at it, shall live.”
So Moses made a bronze serpent,
and put it on a pole; and so it was,
if a serpent had bitten anyone,
when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

In their journey to the Promised Land, the people of God became weary, and murmured against God and against Moses. God sent an epidemic among them.

Then they acknowledged their sins. God was gracious and merciful. He asked Moses to make a bronze serpent. It was an instrument of God to bring healing to His people.

But soon afterwards, the Israelites turned the metallic object into an idol! They began to burn incense and worship the bronze serpent. They even gave it a name and called it Nehushtan.

For about 700 hundred years from the time of Moses to the time of Hezekiah, the people worshipped the bronze serpent!

2 Kings 18:3-5

And he (King Hezekiah) did
what was right in the sight of the LORD,
according to all that his father David had done.
He removed the high places
and broke the sacred pillars,
cut down the wooden image
and broke in pieces the bronze serpent
that Moses had made;
for until those days
the children of Israel burned incense to it,
and called it Nehushtan.
He trusted in the LORD God of Israel,
so that after him was none like him
among all the kings of Judah,
nor who were before him.

King Hezekiah did what was right in the LORD's sight. He removed the high places of pagan worship, and cut down the wooden image of the Canaanite goddess Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made!

Yes, God was pleased when their idol Nehushtan was finally broken into pieces!

The truth is this - God used the bronze serpent as an instrument so that they could look unto Him, and so that He would heal them. The bronze thing did not have any healing power on its own. It was the LORD who healed His people. The focus should be upon God and not on the physical item itself.

John 3:14-15

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
that whoever believes in Him
should not perish but have eternal life.

Similarly, Jesus was lifted up in a cross, and died for the salvation of the world. But instead of worshipping the Christ who died for us, many people begin to worship the wooden cross!

All of the Christian symbols cannot replace the Christ of Christianity. Each of them has the potential to become an idol! We can wear a cross around the neck or have a cross as a decorative item in the house. But to burn incense and worship a cross is simply committing idolatry in the sight of God!

Do you know why the bodies of Moses, Elijah and Jesus were never found? Because the people of God would build a spiritual structure or monument to worship the bodies or any remains of the bodies if they were found!

Even today, many people worship the burial linen cloth or shroud that Jesus had left behind. Whether it is the same cloth or not, we will not discuss or debate here. But many religious Christians worship that ancient piece of cloth!

That's why God never gave us a true physical picture or photo of the authentic and historical Jesus. Simply because if we have one in our hands, many of us would worship His photo or picture instead of Him. God forbids!

Romans 1:20-25

For since the creation of the world
His invisible attributes are clearly seen,

being understood by the things that are made,
even His eternal power and Godhead,
so that they are without excuse,
because, although they knew God,
they did not glorify Him as God,
nor were thankful,
but became futile in their thoughts,
and their foolish hearts were darkened.
Professing to be wise, they became fools,
and changed the glory of the incorruptible God
into an image made like corruptible man—
and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.
Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness,
in the lusts of their hearts,
to dishonor their bodies among themselves,
who exchanged the truth of God for the lie,
and worshiped and served the creature
rather than the Creator,
who is blessed forever. Amen.

For ever since the world was created, we human beings have seen the earth, the skies and the stars. Through everything God had made, we can clearly see His invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature. So we have no excuse for not knowing God.

Yes, we knew the existence of God, but we wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks.

And we began to think up foolish ideas imagining what God was like. As a result, our minds became darkened and confused. Claiming to be wise and creative, we have flipped over and become stupid fools.

And instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, we made and worshipped idols that look like mere people, birds, animals, fishes or reptiles.

Many of us are worshipping not God, but the people of God! Yes, we have idolized our favorite or "anointed" apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers!

Somehow, they become more important than God in our lives. We dress like them, talk like them, walk like them, behave like them - becoming like them! Desiring to be like them, and not to be like Jesus! And many of these church leaders or idols love to be adored and idolized!

Revelation 5:5

But one of the elders said to me,
"Do not weep.
Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,
the Root of David,
has prevailed to open the scroll
and to loose its seven seals."

One of the latest trends in the church is about the Lion of Judah.

Some pastors love to roar like a lion in their church services and ministries. They think that they are from the tribe of Judah!

Interestingly, their church members follow and act like their leaders. Many congregations have become almost like dens of lions. Literally, almost all of them are roaring at their own impulse and instinct.

Joel 3:16

The LORD also will roar from Zion,
And utter His voice from Jerusalem;

The heavens and earth will shake;
But the LORD will be a shelter for His people,
And the strength of the children of Israel.

Some claim that since the Bridegroom is the Lion of Judah, we the Bride of Christ are now lionesses. Assuming in the jungle, all the animals are lions and lionesses. There will be disastrous disorder and total imbalance!

If a city or nation is completely filled with lionesses and lions, therein will be no peace and no rest 24/7.

But thanks be to God, there will be no lions and lionesses in the Highway of Holiness!

Isaiah 35:8-10

A highway shall be there, and a road,
And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.
The unclean shall not pass over it,
But it shall be for others.
Whoever walks the road, although a fool,
Shall not go astray.
No lion shall be there,
Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it;
It shall not be found there.
But the redeemed shall walk there,
And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

We worship Jesus, the Lion from the tribe of Judah. But we cannot and must not become the Lion of Judah!

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober, be vigilant;
because your adversary the devil
walks about like a roaring lion,
seeking whom he may devour.

We must not desire to roar like a lion. Let the One and Only Lion of Judah roar!

Because there is also another lion in the spiritual realm. Our adversary the devil - a roaring lion!

Thus only the True Lion of Judah can roar against our adversary! The rest of the roaring "lions" and "lionesses" may be devoured if we are not sober and vigilant. We think we are when we are not!

The problem is not the true Lion of Judah. The problem is that many of us want to become a Lion of Judah, roaring like one and imitating our leaders or idols.

God is looking for true worshippers. They will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and now is,
when the true worshipers will worship
the Father in spirit and truth;
for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.
God is Spirit,
and those who worship Him
must worship in spirit and truth.

Who may go up to the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in His holy place?

Only those whose hands and hearts are pure.

Only those who do not worship idols and never tell lies.

Psalm 24:3-4

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?

Or who may stand in His holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,

Nor sworn deceitfully.

In the last verse of his first epistle, John, the beloved Apostle of Christ, lovingly concluded by exhorting us:

1 John 5:21

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Amen.

Chapter 7

The Heresy Of Worshipping Angels

What is heresy?

A heresy is a teaching, doctrine or a practice that departs and differs from the revealed truth.

It is a belief in conflicting disagreement with established beliefs of Christianity.

Heresies are errors that arise from within believers of the Christian faith.

Like a contagious and deadly disease, it eventually spreads to other Christians and people.

Generally speaking, a disagreement among Christians does not constitute a heresy.

But a departure from the written truth of God is!

Denominations of Christianity may disagree over some minor issues.

But they agree on the main fundamentals such as the nature of God, the Person of Jesus Christ – His work, His death, His resurrection, and His Second Coming, the Holy Spirit, the Bible as the infallible Word of God, and how we receive salvation by faith - believing in Christ alone.

In this chapter, I would like to address the heresy of worshipping angels.

It has resurfaced again in many Christian churches and ministries today. One of the best ways to discuss this heresy is to revisit the Colossian believers in the times of Paul the Apostle.

The Colossians have embraced some serious false teachings that troubled and disturbed Paul so badly that he had to write an epistle to warn the believers about them.

They Had Devalued The Supremacy Of Christ

Most of the teachings found in the Epistle to the Colossians are also mentioned in the other letters of Paul.

But no other epistle or passage has such a powerful and detailed emphasis on the Supremacy of Christ as in **Colossians 1:15-20**:

He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.
For by Him all things were created
that are in heaven and that are on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or principalities or powers.
All things were created
through Him and for Him.
And He is before all things,
and in Him all things consist.
And He is the head of the body, the church,
who is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead,
that in all things
He may have the preeminence.
For it pleased the Father
that in Him all the fullness should dwell,

and by Him to reconcile
all things to Himself, by Him,
whether things on earth or things in heaven,
having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Paul wrote with great emphasis that Christ is God, and He is supreme over all things.

There is no need to worship other creatures or created beings!

The apostle gave clear warnings against deception creeping into the churches.

The Colossians had begun well in Christ, but as the years went by, some of them had drifted away from the truth.

Paul encouraged the faithful believers to stay firmly grounded in Christ, and to be holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

Colossians 1:21-23

And you, who once were alienated
and enemies in your mind by wicked works,
yet now He has reconciled
in the body of His flesh through death,
to present you holy, and blameless,
and above reproach in His sight—
if indeed you continue in the faith,
grounded and steadfast,
and are not moved away
from the hope of the gospel which you heard,
which was preached
to every creature under heaven,
of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Paul expressed his hope and prayer that the Colossians might have the full riches in knowing and understanding the mystery of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:2-3

...that their hearts may be encouraged,
being knit together in love,
and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding,
to the knowledge of the mystery of God,
both of the Father and of Christ,
in whom are hidden
all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul exhorted them not to move away to some strange teachings or gospels than the one he had taught them.

Many of them had been deceived with persuasive words, and wandered away from the truth revealed in the Word of God.

Colossians 2:4-10

Now this I say lest anyone
should deceive you with persuasive words.
For though I am absent in the flesh,
yet I am with you in spirit,
rejoicing to see your good order
and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.
As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him
and established in the faith,
as you have been taught,
abounding in it with thanksgiving.
Beware lest anyone cheat you
through philosophy and empty deceit,
according to the tradition of men,

according to the basic principles of the world,
and not according to Christ.
For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;
and you are complete in Him,
who is the head of all principality and power.

What were some of the false teachings that had taken over the hearts
and minds of the Colossian believers?

Basically, there are 3 main categories of false teachings that the
Colossian churches fell into:

1. Legalism
2. Mysticism
3. Asceticism

Legalism

Colossian 2:16-17

So let no one judge you in food or in drink,
or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,
which are a shadow of things to come,
but the substance is of Christ.

Legalism is the belief that God's acceptance and salvation is earned
conditionally through doing some religious actions and activities.

The false teachers apparently were telling the Colossians that faith in
Christ was not enough.

They must observe all the Jewish rules and regulations, the traditions
and strict observances of sabbaths and festivals, kosher standards and
customs, and even physical circumcision. Very legalistic.

They were set free by God, but yet became imprisoned or bound again by the ways and traditions of men.

The heresy teaches salvation by either "Christ plus good works" or "Christ plus church activities" or "Christ plus holy sacraments" or "Christ plus this or that."

Mysticism

Colossians 2:18-19

Let no one cheat you of your reward,
taking delight in false humility
and worship of angels,
intruding into those things
which he has not seen,
vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,
and not holding fast to the Head,
from whom all the body,
nourished and knit together
by joints and ligaments,
grows with the increase
that is from God.

The false teachers claim to have divine visions and visitations of angels and heavenly beings as the basis of their authority and anointing.

They go into great details describing what they have "seen" and "experienced" even when they had no such encounters.

Mysticism is also in other world religions such as Taoism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Some very religious mystics or hermits live in seclusion away from human societies and communities.

They spend months and years sitting under some trees or living in some caves - meditating and praying with a strong urge and desire to gain greater spiritual heights and enlightenments.

It is basically an attempt to gain access to experience and encounter spiritual beings through occultic means and methods.

Today, many Christians are impressed by others' claims of mystical experiences or inside knowledge or prophetic insights or angelic visitations.

Paul warned us, "Don't be impressed or deceived."

The truth about God and Jesus Christ has been clearly and publicly proclaimed and written in the Word of God!

Many Christians do not read their Bibles, but they are very easily distracted and fascinated by these angelic fables and tales.

There are no secret truths made available only to some elite groups or ministers.

Such false claims are mostly made by those who are very arrogant and puffed up with spiritual pride.

God does not have favorites. He gave His Son and His Holy Spirit to every person who believes.

Romans 2:11

For God does not show favoritism.

Thus, we must not allow and let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels to mislead us into some weird and unexplained journeys of mysticism.

Asceticism

Colossians 2:20-23

Therefore, if you died with Christ
from the basic principles of the world,
why, as though living in the world,
do you subject yourselves to regulations—
“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,”
which all concern things which perish with the using—
according to the commandments and doctrines of men?
These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom
in self-imposed religion,
false humility, and neglect of the body,
but are of no value
against the indulgence of the flesh.

Asceticism is a common practice in many world religions.

It is a severe self-discipline in doing some external activities in a self-effort to become super spiritual or supernatural.

Two of the common practices include extreme fasting and praying.

Because most of us lack this ability to fast and pray, we become very impressed and obsessed by those who are able to do these things!

But Paul punctured this illusion and misconception.

Such regulations indeed have an outward appearance of divine wisdom and a pretense of holiness.

But if we look beyond their self-imposed religions, their false humility and their harsh treatments of their own bodies, we will find that they are not able to conquer their own evil and fleshy desires.

Many of them do not love God and others! They do not have natural desires!

They just love themselves – desiring to reach a higher level of spiritual superiority by strict adherences of self-denial and self-imposed discipline!

They do not seek God. They seek spiritual or ecstatic experiences and encounters. The sole desire is to please and satisfy themselves - not God!

Paul exposed these practices for what they were.

They were just futile attempts in attaining true spirituality from the outside-in.

This outside-in spirituality is a big deception.

It doesn't work because it cannot change the sinful, deceitful and wicked heart deep within.

Jeremiah 17:9-10

The heart is deceitful above all things,

And desperately wicked;

Who can know it?

I, the LORD, search the heart,

I test the mind,

Even to give every man according to his ways,

According to the fruit of his doings.

Only through the inside-out work of the Holy Spirit or the Christ living in us does true spiritual growth and transformation actually take place.

We are transformed from the inside out!

Yes, when we have the light of Jesus burning inside, we will then shine for others to see on the outside!

Yes, loving God and loving our neighbours!

Thus we must not be deceived by all these false teachers of legalism, mysticism and asceticism!

One of the recent deceptions in the churches is known as the Merkabah Mysticism.

This is an ancient movement, very similar to what was happening in the Colossian churches!

“Merkabah” is the Hebrew word for God’s throne.

Merkabah mysticism is a practice where people try to obtain some kinds of spiritual visions of God on His throne that were seen by the prophets Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1) and the apostle John (Revelation).

Many Christians begin to add to those visions written in the Holy Scriptures by blending in their experiences and accounts of mystical heavenly spheres and angels.

Their supernatural stories and testimonies are great temptations for itching ears and curious hearts.

The Merkabah mystics believe that they have to prepare themselves for heavenly ascensions by extreme fastings and other ascetic duties for many days or months.

One interesting duration is the sacred period of 40 days and 40 nights.

Their hazardous spiritual journeys are filled with lots of spiritual warfare and angelic activities or interventions.

There are many levels of spiritual darkness and principalities they have to fight before reaching the throne room of God.

And they will also meet and encounter the various hierarchies of angels!

Along the way, they get to know some angels by their names.

Some even have angels to attend to them personally.

They also have obtained the appropriate passwords to get through certain gates and passages!

They claim to have all the divine passwords, knowledge and wisdom downloaded personally to them by God!

They claim that they are the “anointed” and “chosen” people of God!

Eventually they will make their way to the highest sphere or level.

There they will see God sitting on His throne – in all His fullness and glory, and also the holy angels flying here and there, saying this and that.

Many claim to receive special mandates from God, and are given supernatural power and authority to execute this prophecy or that divine plan!

Some have detailed revelations that have more visions and encounters than the whole Book of Revelation!

Some even claim to have transported from earth to heaven, and then from heaven back to earth a few times daily. Much more superior and powerful than Philip who did only once in Acts 8.

Today, we are living in a world of very religious and legalistic people, mystics, ascetics and fanatics.

They are downloading eagerly from here and there, and listening attentively and enthusiastically from this "prophet" or that "apostle."

Every day, we hear something new about some latest discoveries about spiritual truths and angelic movements.

Instead of worshipping God, many Christians have strayed away to worship angels.

Even John the beloved disciple of Jesus almost fell into this error in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible!

Revelation 22:8-9

Now I, John, saw and heard these things.

And when I heard and saw,

I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel

who showed me these things.

Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that.

For I am your fellow servant,

and of your brethren the prophets,

and of those who keep the words of this book.

Worship God."

John the Apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote the Book of Revelation. He saw all the angelic visions and encountered all the heavenly spheres. He also saw God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit!

If John was vulnerable, we too can commit the same error of falling down before an angel and worshipping him. But God forbids! We are to worship God and God alone!

Herein is a cautionary note if we continue to worship angels.

If any angel desires us to worship him, he is definitely a fallen angel!

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers,
transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

And no wonder!

For Satan himself transforms himself
into an angel of light.

Therefore it is no great thing
if his ministers also transform themselves
into ministers of righteousness,
whose end will be according to their works.

Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. He will deceive many more Christians.

His secret mission and agenda is to steal and kill and destroy.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

But I fear, lest somehow,
as the serpent deceived Eve
by his craftiness,
so your minds may be corrupted
from the simplicity that is in Christ.
For if he who comes preaches another Jesus
whom we have not preached,
or if you receive a different spirit
which you have not received,

or a different gospel
which you have not accepted—
you may well put up with it!

Just like the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, many Christians are deceived into receiving a different gospel.

Matthew 4:8-10

Again, the devil took Him up on
an exceedingly high mountain,
and showed Him
all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.
And he said to Him,
“All these things I will give You
if You will fall down and worship me.”
Then Jesus said to him,
“Away with you, Satan!
For it is written,
‘You shall worship the LORD your God,
and Him only you shall serve.’”

Jesus was tempted thrice in the wilderness by the devil.

In this temptation, the fallen angel wanted Jesus to worship him.

But Jesus did not! Worship God and serve only Him!

If the angel of light wanted to tempt Jesus, he too wants to tempt the
Bride of Christ!

If the Church is not careful, she will be deceived like Eve in the Garden
of Eden.

If the Bride of Christ is not watchful, she will fall down and worship the angel of light!

Many Christians have already done so - being deceived and now worshipping the fallen angel.

They believe that Christ alone is not good enough.

They need more. They need angelic visitations, and desire celestial exposures and experiences.

Therefore, know God! He is more than enough!

And also worship God and God alone!

Chapter 8

The Three Temptations

Matthew 4:1-2

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit
into the wilderness
to be tempted by the devil.
And when He had fasted
forty days and forty nights,
afterward He was hungry.

Luke 4:1-2

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit,
returned from the Jordan
and was led by the Spirit
into the wilderness,
being tempted for forty days
by the devil.
And in those days He ate nothing,
and afterward, when they had ended,
He was hungry.

Satan had tried to tempt Jesus thrice in the wilderness. But the Lord overcame all the three temptations of the devil.

This gives us great encouragement today. Jesus was tempted in the same manner as us, but He did not sin in the process.

When Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist, He came up immediately from the water. And behold, the heavens were opened to Him. He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Then Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Yes, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

It was the will of the Father for Jesus to be tempted by the devil.

The Father had just proclaimed that Jesus was His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased. Thus the temptation by the devil was a test of God to prove that Jesus was truly the beloved Son of God!

This was the sovereign plan of God!

After Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was hungry.

Despite His long extensive fast and great hunger, there was no weakening of His will to resist the devil.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world

or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world,

the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world—

the lust of the flesh,

the lust of the eyes,

and the pride of life—

is not of the Father but is of the world.

And the world is passing away,

and the lust of it;

but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Genesis 3:6

So when the woman saw that
 the tree was good for food,
 that it was pleasant to the eyes,
 and a tree desirable to make one wise,
 she took of its fruit and ate.
 She also gave to her husband with her,
 and he ate.

Satan employed a similar strategy in tempting Eve in the garden and Jesus in the wilderness.

These three basic tools of temptation are also used to tempt us today.

Verses	1 John 2:15-17	Genesis 3:6
Body	The lust of the flesh	good for food
Soul	The lust of the eyes	pleasant to the eyes
Spirit	The pride of life	desirable to make one wise

The Luke 4 account is written in a chronological manner, and is in the same order as in Genesis 3 and 1 John 2.

The Matthew 4 account however has a different order. The second temptation is the third, and the third temptation becomes the second.

Thus I will use the Luke 4 account here.

The Lust Of The Flesh**Luke 4:3-4**

And the devil said to Him,
 “If You are the Son of God,
 command this stone to become bread.”
 But Jesus answered him, saying,

“It is written,
‘Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word of God.’”

This first temptation started with this big if: “If You are the Son of God....”

Satan was trying to cast some doubts on the true identity and divinity of Jesus! He was trying to twist and turn what God had already declared and proclaimed concerning Jesus!

He was challenging what God had said! What an arrogant and audacious being!

Jesus had not eaten for 40 days and 40 nights.

The hungry body needed food. And bread was good for food.

Therefore Satan tempted Jesus to turn the rock into bread, fill His stomach with food, and satisfy His physical hunger.

But Jesus resisted the devil by quoting **Deuteronomy 8:3**:

So He humbled you,
allowed you to hunger,
and fed you with manna
which you did not know
nor did your fathers know,
that He might make you know that
man shall not live by bread alone;
but man lives by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

The Lust Of The Eyes

Luke 4:5-8

Then the devil,
taking Him up on a high mountain,
showed Him all the kingdoms of the world
in a moment of time.

And the devil said to Him,
“All this authority I will give You,
and their glory;
for this has been delivered to me,
and I give it to whomever I wish.
Therefore, if You will worship before me,
all will be Yours.”

And Jesus answered and said to him,
“Get behind Me, Satan!
For it is written,
‘You shall worship the LORD your God,
and Him only you shall serve.’ ”

Satan took Jesus up to a high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world.

Satan told Jesus to fall down and worship him, and he would give Jesus all these kingdoms.

This temptation was pleasant to the eyes.

It was very tempting and soulish to own all the kingdoms of the world containing all the wealth, glories and riches therein.

The human soul craved for money, wealth, recognition, power and fame.

Jesus resisted the second temptation by quoting **Deuteronomy 6:13**:

You shall fear the LORD your God
and serve Him,
and shall take oaths in His name.

The Pride Of Life

Luke 4:9-13

Then he brought Him to Jerusalem,
set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,
and said to Him,
“If You are the Son of God,
throw Yourself down from here.

For it is written:

‘He shall give His angels
charge over you,
To keep you,’ and,
‘In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

And Jesus answered and said to him,

“It has been said,
‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”

Now when the devil had ended every temptation,
he departed from Him until an opportune time.

This final temptation also started with this big if: “If You are the Son of God....”

Satan was making his last attempt to cast some more doubts on the true identity and divinity of Jesus!

Maybe this time he might succeed. But he failed again miserably.

The devil took Jesus to the top of the temple and asked Him to jump off.

This temptation was desirable to make one wise and super spiritual - to be like God.

Genesis 3:5

For God knows that in the day
you eat of it your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God,
knowing good and evil.

If Jesus did as He was told, then the angels would come to His rescue.

This would show off that He had divine and angelic help. How glorious that would be!

Even if He did fall, He would not suffer any injury as the angels would lift Him up.

This evil suggestion looked like a wise idea of stirring up spiritual pride!

But it was tempting God!

Deuteronomy 6:16

You shall not tempt the LORD your God
as you tempted Him in Massah.

Jesus was tempted just like we are tempted today, and yet He sinned not.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a High Priest
who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses,

but was in all points tempted as we are,
yet without sin.

Jesus taught us how to overcome temptations.

Jesus was in the form of a man, not God when He resisted all the temptations of the devil. He did not perform any miracle in order to defeat any of the temptations of Satan.

He did not call down any fires, winds, rains or earthquakes. He did not engage any angelic forces or armies!

However, the angels did come to minister to Jesus after the devil had left Him (Matthew 4:11). Yes, after all the three temptations!

He did not physically wrestle with the devil engaging in spiritual warfares and fighting heavenly battles!

In fact, the three temptations are not about our fighting against the devil.

They are about our fighting against the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life inside us!

The three temptations are tests for our body, soul and spirit. To see whether we have overcome the temptations, and are preserved blameless before God!

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Now may the God of peace Himself
sanctify you completely;
and may your whole spirit, soul, and body
be preserved blameless
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus used the same power and authority that God had given us - the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and powerful,
and sharper than any two-edged sword,
piercing even to the division of soul and spirit,
and of joints and marrow,
and is a discerner of the thoughts
and intents of the heart.

We have the same Word of God today. Not one verse more or one verse less!

Jesus also taught us the importance of using the Word of God correctly.

In responding to each temptation, Jesus resisted each of them by using the appropriate Word of God.

He knew the Word of God in His heart, and He knew how and when to use them.

Not only did He use the Word of God, He also used it correctly.

He was rightly dividing the Word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself
approved to God,
a worker who does not need to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,

and is profitable for doctrine,
for reproof, for correction,
for instruction in righteousness,
that the man of God may be complete,
thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Thus, when we are faced with any temptation today, we need to use the proper and suitable Word of God to overcome it.

Before we can use any Scripture correctly, we must know what the Scripture truly says.

It is very important that we use the Scriptures correctly.

Why? Because Satan knows the Word of God too.

He even used and quoted the Scriptures while tempting Jesus. But he used the Scriptures out of context. Using the Word of God out of context is a common error and practice in many churches and Christians!

Whenever we misuse the Scriptures, we are in the wrong - no matter whether we are making a good point or a bad one.

Jesus taught us after we resist Satan, he will flee from us.

After failing to tempt Jesus, Satan departed from Jesus until an opportune time (Luke 4:13).

Yes, the devil will strike again when we least expect him to do so.

Whenever there is an opportunity, he will tempt us again!

Satan has transformed himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

This fallen angel wanted Jesus to worship him. But Jesus did not!

We are called to worship God and serve only Him!

If the angel of light wanted to tempt Jesus, he too wants to tempt the Bride of Christ!

If the Church is not careful, she will be deceived like Eve in the Garden of Eden.

If the Bride of Christ is not watchful, she will fall down and worship the angel of light!

Some Christians have already done so - being deceived and now worshipping the fallen angel.

Some Christians have become very obsessed with the angel of light.

Some have even seen him in a physical form!

Many Christians have loved the things of the world, all the glories and riches.

I am not against money. But it is the love of money that has led many believers astray!

1 Timothy 6:10

For the love of money
is a root of all kinds of evil,
for which some have strayed
from the faith in their greediness,

and pierced themselves
through with many sorrows.

It is the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil.

If we love the world or the things in the world, then the love of the Father is not in us.

For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it.

But if we do the will of God, we will abide forever.

How do we resist the devil?

James 4:6-8

But He gives more grace.

Therefore He says:

“God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble.”

Therefore submit to God.

Resist the devil

and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God

and He will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands,

you sinners;

and purify your hearts,

you double-minded.

Ephesians 4:26-27

“Be angry, and do not sin”:

do not let the sun go down
on your wrath,
nor give place to the devil.

In very simple words, be humble, submit to God, draw near to Him, purify our hands and hearts, and sin not. That's how we resist the devil, and he will flee from us!

A lot of people resist the devil by fighting with him. That's not the biblical way! That's just plain arrogance and spiritual pride!

As Jesus was able to overcome every temptation by the devil, we too are able to do the same with the power of His Word!

God has given us this great promise:

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you
except such as is common to man;
but God is faithful,
who will not allow you to be tempted
beyond what you are able,
but with the temptation
will also make the way of escape,
that you may be able to bear it.

Chapter 9

To Pray Or Not To Pray

Recently, someone asked me an interesting question, “If the Bible had already stated what is going to happen, should we pray?”

To pray or not to pray when the Bible had already said so?

The best way to answer this question is by taking a look at the great example of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus already foreknew that He would die on the cross the very next day. This was foreordained by God before the foundation of the world.

Hebrews 9:26

He then would have had to suffer often
since the foundation of the world;
but now, once at the end of the ages,
He has appeared to put away sin
by the sacrifice of Himself.

Then why did Jesus pray? Did He try to change the will or the decision of the Father? Of course not.

Jesus could just simply accept the will of the Father, and not pray.

But why did Jesus pray? Because the will of the Father was to be done through Him. He was the chosen vessel.

Jesus was concerned about His own physical ability whether He was able to carry out the will of the Father, and complete the task ahead.

In Matthew 26:37-41, Jesus began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to the disciples, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Please notice the phrases of Jesus: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death," "the spirit indeed is willing" and "the flesh is weak."

Jesus was not afraid of dying on the cross, but He was concerned about the limitations of His physical body. What if He failed?

Even though He was God, He condescended and took on the form of a man! And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Even though Jesus was full of the glory of God, He had all of our human limitations. He was hungry, thirsty, and tired (Matthew 4:2; John 19:28; Matthew 8:20).

In Luke 22:43-44, an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

In accepting His role as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed for the sins of the world, Jesus suffered the great effects of fatigue, stress and strain.

He loved His people, but they wanted to crucify Him. He came in love, but they rejected Him in anger. His heart was broken. He could have suffered a heart failure. His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.

Jesus was not praying for deliverance from the death of the cross, but He was praying for the will to carry on the task!

The crucifixion process was very strenuous physically, emotionally and spiritually! It was also excruciatingly painful and unbearable. Could He endure all the sufferings, pains, betrayals and mockeries?

Even before His crucifixion, Jesus was physically weakened by the beatings, scourgings and other horrible abuses and mistreatments. His own disciples left Him. One betrayed Him, and another denied Him thrice!

He could foresee that His human strength would physically fail before He could make it all the way to Golgotha. That's why the soldiers made Simon a Cyrenian to carry the cross for Jesus for the rest of the journey up the hill (Luke 23:26).

In the garden, Jesus knew the will of the Father, He was willing to do it but He had to pray! He would be presumptuous if He didn't pray! He needed to commune with the Father in this hour of prayer. Just to be closer to the Father, listening to His voice.

He was praying for the physical strength and endurance necessary to make and complete the journey of the cross. He was willing to do the will of the Father with complete obedience and trust!

Jesus could have asked God for divine assistance - a miracle, a sign or a wonder. He had the power to call for more than 12 legions of angels (Matthew 26:53) to deliver Him. But He did not! If He had done so, He would not be able to fulfill the eternal divine purpose that was revealed in the Holy Scriptures (Matthew 26:54).

Through the process of praying, Jesus simply surrendered Himself completely to God, placing His total trust in His Father. He did not violate His role by relying upon divine powers or miracles as a way of escape.

Jesus knew the will of the Father, and He still prayed so that He would be able to fulfill what the Father had willed Him to do.

Some of us are like Peter. When we are told about the will of the Father, we violently object to it.

In Matthew 16:21-23, Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Peter minded the things of men, and not the things of God. He even tried to stop the people who came to arrest Jesus in the garden.

In John 18:10-11, Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”

Peter thought that his sword could stop the people from arresting Jesus. He tried to take the whole matter into his own hands. But Jesus stopped the folly of Peter. Jesus was willing to drink the cup which His Father had given Him.

In **John 12:27-28**, Jesus predicted His death on the cross:

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say?
‘Father, save Me from this hour’?
But for this purpose I came to this hour.
Father, glorify Your name.”

Jesus was praying that He would be able to endure this hour because this hour was the very purpose that He came for! He must complete the mission even though it was a mission impossible. He desired to glorify the name of the Father!

Sometimes when we read the Word of God, it is quite difficult for us to reconcile and agree with all that were written therein.

A good example is about the Day of the Lord:

Zechariah 14:1-4

1 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming,
And your spoil will be divided in your midst.
2 For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem;
The city shall be taken,
The houses rifled,
And the women ravished.
Half of the city shall go into captivity,
But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

3 Then the LORD will go forth
And fight against those nations,
As He fights in the day of battle.

4 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
From east to west,
Making a very large valley;
Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
And half of it toward the south.

We desire to see verses 3 and 4 fulfilled but we do not desire to go through the process of verses 1 and 2. We want only the victorious part but no shame and no agony.

Again, no cross, no crown. No death, no resurrection.

We must be willing to go through the valley of the shadow of death. Therein we will fear no evil. For He is with us; His rod and His staff, they comfort us.

We must pray that we are able to endure the whole journey of faith! We must be willing to lay down our lives on the altar of sacrifice. Trust and obey God for there is no other way!

What was the difference between praying and not praying after knowing the will of God?

Assuming Jesus didn't pray in the garden, would He be able to have the strength to fulfill and do the will of the Father?

Assuming Jesus knew the will of the Father, He didn't pray but just accept the plain fact that He was going to die. What would be the

difference? There was a great difference. A willing vessel and an unwilling vessel!

Many of us don't pray. Many of us do not care enough to pray. Many of us are unwilling to pray! We mind the things of the world, and not the things of the Father!

Maybe we know a little about the will of God or maybe God will do everything He willed to do even without our praying.

But herein is the big difference of praying. It is moving from knowing the will of God to doing it! Yes, we can become a vessel that God can use!

If Jesus had to pray to do the will of the Father, how much more we need to pray to do the same? Praying let Your kingdom come and Your will be done! And use us in whatever way possible. We are willing to do Your will, O Lord.

God is looking for a man to stand in the gap, and to intercede on behalf of the nations:

Ezekiel 22:30

So I sought for a man among them
who would make a wall,
and stand in the gap before Me
on behalf of the land,
that I should not destroy it;
but I found no one.

There was such a man many years ago - Abraham. He prayed and bargained with God not to destroy Sodom. But in the end, the two wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed.

Did Abraham not stand in the gap? Did God not answer the prayer of Abraham?

Yes, Abraham did stand in the gap, and God did answer Abraham's prayer but in a different way – a far better way! Beyond all our thoughts and imagination.

God sought for a man and He found one in Abraham. Abraham became a father of many nations. In him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

We are blessed by the life and deeds of Abraham. Through him, Jesus, the Son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1), was eventually born at the appointed time of God. The Saviour of the world! He came to deliver and save us from our sins!

A better solution! A better answer to the prayer of Abraham!

When we look at the things of the world and our difficulties and circumstances, God looks at the person.

We look at the cross but God looked at the Christ who was going up the cross. Was He willing? Was He able to fulfill the task? Was He strong enough to carry the burdens of the cross? Was He able to run the race that was set before Him?

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore we also,
since we are surrounded
by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us lay aside every weight,
and the sin which so easily ensnares us,
and let us run with endurance the race
that is set before us,

looking unto Jesus,
the author and finisher of our faith,
who for the joy that was set before Him
endured the cross,
despising the shame,
and has sat down
at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now, God still looks at us, and not our problems and troubled times. Are we able to run with endurance the race that is set before us? Are we willing to be a part of His divine plan and purpose? Are we willing to move one step further from knowing His will to doing His will?

When the Jews were in exile in Babylon (Psalm 137), they longed for Zion. By the rivers of Babylon, there they sat down and wept when they remembered Zion. They hung their harps upon the willows in the midst of it. They could not sing even one song of Zion. They were unable to do anything praiseworthy.

But at the same time in the same city of Babylon, there was a man praying. His name was Daniel. He sought the LORD and prayed. God was able to carry out His plan and purpose through this man, a greatly beloved of the LORD!

Concerning the nation of Israel, are we willing to stand in the gap, watching and praying for her peace and her people? Praying that they will know the will of God, and also that they will do the will of God!

To pray or not to pray?

God is still looking at you and me!

Chapter 10

The Ruth Generation

We have heard about the Moses Generation, the Joshua Generation and the Esther Generation.

But have you ever heard about the Ruth Generation? I searched the Internet and found very few new articles written on the life of Ruth. Why? Because we are living in an age where we seek glamour, fame, money, success and power. Ruth is almost the exact opposite.

What is the Ruth Generation?

Before we even discuss about Ruth, we need to know what generation we are now in. Like the sons of Issachar who understood their times, we need to know and understand the times we are living in today.

The Church entered into the Joshua Generation about AD 2000. Thus I believe we are now in the Judges Generation.

Moses >> Joshua >> Judges >> Ruth >> Samuel >> Kings

What is the Judges Generation? It is a generation where everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

Judges 17:6

In those days there was no king in Israel;
everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Judges 21:25

In those days there was no king in Israel;
everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Yes, the King is coming but He is not here yet. As there is no King in our midst, everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

What happens in the Judges Generation?

Ruth 1:1

Now it came to pass,
in the days when the judges ruled,
that there was a famine in the land.

Yes, there is a famine in the Judges Generation. What kind of famine is it?

Amos 8:11-12

“Behold, the days are coming,”
says the LORD God,
“That I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine of bread,
Nor a thirst for water,
But of hearing the words of the LORD.
They shall wander from sea to sea,
And from north to east;
They shall run to and fro,
seeking the word of the LORD,
But shall not find it.”

The Judges Generation will be a generation where everyone will do their own things. Many churches in many nations have become marketplaces where buying and selling take place.

Some pastors even charge exorbitant school fees to train and groom their members to become successful business men and women so that they can in turn bring in more money to build bigger churches and

ministries. Inside and outside the walls of the churches, all kinds of transactions take place. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

Very few churches are preaching the Word of God. Many hungry Christians run to and fro, in and out of meetings after meetings, seeking the Word of God. But they will not find it. Always hungry because they are not properly fed.

Why? It is because very few pastors and preachers are sharing the Bread of Life in their pulpits. They are sharing about how to get rich, famous, powerful, anointed and influential! They are preaching building projects, business ventures and church activities. And they are promoting show business and rock concerts.

From signs and wonders to angel feathers to gold dust to heavenly gems and stones to anointing oils - loaded with lots of "prophetic" acts and "apostolic" activities. In fact, we have become very professional prophetic actors and actresses, acting out under the "anointed" directorships of our "prophets" and "apostles," and carrying out their instructions and commands. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

But we have a terrible famine - a famine of hearing the words of God. Yes, the Judges Generation will be living in the times when God judges the Church! This is the worst displeasure of God! His heaviest judgement is a famine of hearing the words of God! His words cannot be heard in the lands.

Isaiah 47:8-10

"Therefore hear this now,
you who are given to pleasures,
Who dwell securely,
Who say in your heart,
'I am, and there is no one else besides me;

I shall not sit as a widow,
Nor shall I know the loss of children';
But these two things shall come to you
In a moment, in one day:
The loss of children, and widowhood.
They shall come upon you in their fullness
Because of the multitude of your sorceries,
For the great abundance of your enchantments.
“For you have trusted in your wickedness;
You have said, ‘No one sees me’;
Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you;
And you have said in your heart,
‘I am, and there is no one else besides me.’

In one day the people suffered these two things - the loss of children and widowhood because they trusted in their own wisdom and wickedness, indulging themselves in worldly pleasures and pagan sorceries.

But thanks be to God - the Ruth Generation is coming.

Why is the Ruth Generation important? Simply because Ruth was a simple young woman of Moab. Though she was once a widow but she eventually became the great-grandmother of King David, the man after the heart of God!

Between the times of Judges and the times of Kings, we have an awesome love story unfolded – so beautifully written and orchestrated only by the LORD God Almighty Himself. A love that triumphed over the dark hours of famine, death and widowhood. A love that transcended the logic of human wisdom and understanding. A tale of three widows.

During the time of the judges, there was a famine. An Israelite family from Bethlehem migrated to a nearby country, Moab. The man was Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion.

Then a tragedy began. Elimelech died. Naomi became a widow. The two sons married two Moabite women. Mahlon married Ruth, and Chilion married Orpah. They lived there in Moab for about 10 years.

Then the two sons of Naomi also died. Ruth and Orpah became widows.

There were now three widows in the same house filled with mourning, weeping, sorrow and pain. Imagine three widows living under the same roof, facing each other 24/7. Day and night, soaking in tears and self-pity.

Then Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She told her two daughters-in-law to return to their own mothers, and to remarry. After much persuasion, Orpah left Naomi and returned to her own people and her gods.

However, Ruth clung unto Naomi. Her famous words were recorded for us to follow suit:

Ruth 1:16-17

“Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
And your God, my God.
Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.
The LORD do so to me, and more also,

If anything but death parts you and me.”

These two widows returned to Bethlehem. One was a Jew, and the other a Gentile. Their future was full of uncertainties. But their hearts were courageous to face the unknown adventure ahead. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. Till death parts you and me!

It was the beginning of the barley harvest upon their arrival in Bethlehem. In order to support her mother-in-law and herself, Ruth went to the fields to glean.

Ruth was willing to be the tail, and not the head. She was tailing others as she picked up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who was kind enough to let her do so. She was humble. She did not quarrel or fight with the people there. She was a Moabite woman working among a Jewish community.

The harvest fields she went to belonged to a man named Boaz. Boaz was a close relative of Naomi's husband's family. He was kind to Ruth after hearing of her loyalty and faithfulness to her mother-in-law.

Boaz warned the young men working in the fields not to treat Ruth roughly. And he also asked her to help herself to the water they had drawn from the well whenever she was thirsty.

Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. “What have I done to deserve such kindness?” she asked. “I am only a foreigner.”

When Ruth returned home, she told her mother-in-law of Boaz's kindness. She continued to glean in Boaz's fields till the end of the harvest season.

As the love story continued, Naomi sent Ruth to the threshing floor at night, and told her to "uncover the feet" of the sleeping Boaz.

Ruth did accordingly but she woke Boaz up. He asked, "Who are you?"

Ruth identified herself, and then asked Boaz to spread his cloak over her. This phrase "spread your cloak" was a woman's way of asking for marriage.

Ezekiel 16:8

Later I passed by,
and when I looked at you
and saw that you were old enough for love,
I spread the corner of My garment over you
and covered your naked body.
I gave you My solemn oath
and entered into a covenant with you,
declares the Sovereign LORD,
and you became Mine.

For a man to spread his cloak over a woman showed that he had agreed to marry the woman.

In fact, Boaz was obliged by the Levirate law to marry Ruth, the widow of his relative Mahlon, so that the family line of Mahlon would be carried on.

Boaz was willing to redeem Ruth via marriage. But there was another male relative who had the first right of redemption. There were two items for redemption: the land for Naomi and the marriage for Ruth. Both must be redeemed together.

The next morning, Boaz discussed the issue with the other male relative before the town elders. This other man was unwilling to marry Ruth. Thus he relinquished his right of redemption, allowing Boaz to redeem the land, and also to marry Ruth.

Now in those days it was the custom in Israel for anyone transferring a right of redemption to remove his sandal and hand it to the other party. This publicly validated the transaction. So the other family redeemer drew off his sandal as he said to Boaz, "You buy the land."

Boaz and Ruth got married and had a son named Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse. And Jesse was the father of David. Thus Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David!

The King of kings is coming! But who will prepare the way of His Coming? Who will be humble enough to be a "widow," and to follow another "widow"? Who will be willing to leave her land, and go into another foreign land and be a foreigner?

We are not dealing with romancing Israel here. When false romance hits cold reality, many will give up along the way like Orpah. This is for true seekers who know what is in store for them. Ruth was a Moabite. The Jewish people could have despised and rejected her. Thus there is a very rough and difficult road ahead. But the rewards are worth it all.

The Ruth Generation is about Gentile believers who know and understand that they are facing a famine. They are sick and tired of playing spiritual games. They are now mourning and weeping. They are now in great sorrow and pain. Because there is a famine of hearing the words of God.

They are willing to lay down their lives and follow another widow. Yes, another older widow. Israel is an old widow, without a husband for thousands of years! But her time has come for her to shine brightly and her salvation has come! The Bridegroom is coming again!

Isaiah 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace,
And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,

Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
And her salvation as a lamp that burns.
The Gentiles shall see your righteousness,
And all kings your glory.
You shall be called by a new name,
Which the mouth of the LORD will name.
You shall also be a crown of glory
In the hand of the LORD,
And a royal diadem
In the hand of your God.
You shall no longer be termed Forsaken,
Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate;
But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah;
For the LORD delights in you,
And your land shall be married.
For as a young man marries a virgin,
So shall your sons marry you;
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So shall your God rejoice over you.

The Ruth Generation is a generation that moves from knowing the will of God to doing His will. Too much of head knowledge puffs us up, making us very arrogant, soaked and drunk in spiritual pride.

The Ruth Generation is a humble generation that is willing to be the tail first before becoming the head. Ruth was willing to pick up what others had left over so that she could eventually become the wife of the owner of the fields.

Victory comes through faith in God, being truly faithful and obedient to His Word. It does not come through human wisdom, military might or numerical superiority. Ruth forsook all her pagan ways and embraced the true God of Israel. Your people, my people. Your God, my God! Till death parts us!

This is the hour that the Church needs to identify herself with Israel, like Ruth clinging to Naomi. Replacement Theology and Anti-Semitism need to be rooted out, pulled down, destroyed and thrown down. This is the time for the Jews and Gentiles to build and plant together the kingdom of love.

Again, the foundation of all the successful national and spiritual life is built on our faithfulness and commitment to the covenant God had made with Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Just as Abraham left his own country from his family and from his father’s house, Ruth did the same. And God showed them a land flowing with milk and honey!

The Ruth Generation is willing to be a part of this Abrahamic Covenant. Not talking about it but actually doing it!

And this is not another prophetic act. The days for prophetic acting are over. Now is the time for true worshippers to worship the Father in

spirit and in truth by godly living and giving! Live the life. Living epistles! No more acting!

The Ruth Generation is not for the faint-hearted and the feeble-minded. It is for those who have heard the call of God, and are willing to make a difference for themselves and Israel.

I personally know of some dedicated and devoted Christians who have sold their homes and are moving to Israel, not knowing what is ahead. Just trusting and obeying the Lord.

I am not asking or suggesting all of us to do the same. But I am asking that we become involved in the business of the Father. His Son is coming back, and He is landing on Mount Olives, Israel.

What is our role in preparing the way of His Coming? I cannot answer that for you. Please ask Him yourself. We need to seek God. Wherever You go, I will go. Wherever You lodge, I will lodge. Your people my people. Your God my God!

A good way to begin this journey is to read our Bible, feed on the Bread of Life, praise and worship Him, pray and seek His face daily. As we do so, we will find His purpose and plan in these exciting times we are living in. Also remember to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

There is another widow. Orpah. What happened to her? Maybe she got married. Maybe she became super-rich as she worshipped the gods of glamour, mammon, prosperity, fame and power. Maybe she became a superstar in some talk shows or entertainment arenas. Maybe. But she missed the great opportunity of becoming the great grandmother of King David!

The King is coming. And we are now moving away from the Judges Generation.

When there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

But when there is a King in Israel, everyone will do what is right in His eyes!

Chapter 11

Of More Noble Character

As soon as it was night,
the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea.
On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.
Now the Bereans were of more noble character
than the Thessalonians,
for they received the message with great eagerness and
examined the Scriptures every day to see
if what Paul said was true.
Many of the Jews believed,
as did also a number of prominent
Greek women and many Greek men.
When the Jews in Thessalonica
learned that Paul was preaching
the Word of God at Berea,
they went there too,
agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

Acts 17:10-13

In our Internet age, we are daily bombarded with all kinds of threats, trojans, viruses and worms. For security protections and precautions, we have to install some good antivirus and firewall softwares. After the installations, we regularly update the softwares by downloading the latest virus threat definitions and lists. Before reading any emails or clicking any pop-up ads and websites, we also do some due diligence to scan and verify them so that our computers will not be infected or be corrupted.

In our day-to-day transactions, we have this formal warning, "Caveat emptor," which means, "let the buyer beware." This is a warning to

buyers to check for themselves things, which they intend to buy, so they cannot later hold the sellers responsible for the faulty conditions of the items purchased. The Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act 1980 extends the rights of consumers in this matter.

As we are diligent in the physical matters, we also need to be diligent in the spiritual matters. In Acts 17, we encounter a group of believers who were very diligent.

The Bereans were true seekers of God and His Word. When Paul, the authentic and authorised apostle, shared the Word of God with them, they did not just take the full dosage without checking the Holy Scriptures themselves.

Though the apostle Paul was fully endorsed by the Jerusalem Apostolic Council, they still found it necessary to examine his teachings and doctrines themselves to find out whether they were scripturally correct and true.

Paul was not disturbed or perturbed by their attitudes. In fact, Paul highly regarded them, and commended them for their excellent efforts. These Berean believers were not overly critical or suspicious. In fact, they were of more noble character than the Thessalonians.

This was attributed not due to their social and economical status. It was about the nobility of their hearts and attitudes towards the preaching of God's Word. These Bereans had love and reverence for the Holy Scriptures. Their minds were not hardened by religious traditions and customs, or doctrinal and philosophical opinions.

The Bereans were open to the expositions of the Scriptures. They had the readiness of mind to receive the teachings of Paul. They were not sleeping or dozing off when the apostle shared. They were hungry and thirsty for the pure Word of God. And their hunger and thirst were

satisfied! They did not ignore the Word. They did not try to find fault with the preacher. They did not argue with the Word of God. Their minds were also not wandering in ten thousand directions. They listened to Paul attentively, and took notes eagerly as Paul delivered the message.

They were determined to know the truth of God. They simply received the Word! When they went home, they searched the Scriptures. As diligent students of the Word, they daily searched and checked the Bible to find the truth for themselves. As a result, they found salvation in Christ. They not only confirmed the teachings of Paul, but also increased in faith, understanding, knowledge and wisdom.

These noble Bereans had set a great example for us to follow. They received the Word of God with all readiness of mind. Nothing delights a preacher more than the privilege of preaching to a people who are ready and eager to hear the teachings, and also who are willing to do some studies themselves to find out more. The Bereans wanted to seek God themselves about those issues at hand. They also had the Holy Spirit living within them as their Helper and Teacher:

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit,
Whom the Father will send in My name,
He will teach you all things,
and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

Today, we are living in the age where false teachers and prophets abound. Some of these preachers are ministering in our local churches and pulpits. There is also a great influx of their books, videos, audio tapes and CDs in our homes. Many of their materials are easily accessible in the Internet. Many of their teachings have attracted the attention of gullible followers, who are constantly chasing after new

prophetic utterances and insights, fresh views of the Scriptures and the latest powers of God.

We are truly living in the era of disposable handphones. Every day, there are new models with additional latest gadgets and features. The old are thrown away, and the new are embraced.

Jeremiah 6:16

This is what the LORD says:

"Stand at the crossroads and look;

ask for the ancient paths,

ask where the good way is, and walk in it,

and you will find rest for your souls.

But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' "

The main reason, why so many of these false teachers and prophets exist, is because many of us are not seeking the LORD ourselves. We have taken the full face value of the new teachings without searching the Holy Bible ourselves.

We only desire to hear the interesting and exciting things that others are saying about God. Basically, we are disobeying the tenth commandment, which is against covetousness (Exodus 20:17). We are coveting others' things, giftings, powers, anointings, experiences and ministries!

Many of these false teachers and prophets are teaching their own revelations, dreams and visions without any scriptural basis. The only way to know and expose them is to check them in the light of the Holy Word of God. When they are exposed, they are found to be unoriginal and very erroneous.

Jeremiah 23:16-17

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

"Do not listen to the words of the prophets
who prophesy to you.
They make you worthless;
They speak a vision of their own heart,
Not from the mouth of the LORD.
They continually say to those who despise Me,
'The LORD has said, "You shall have peace" ' ;
And to everyone who walks
according to the dictates of his own heart,
they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.' "

Some of the common characteristics of these false teachers and prophets are their tendencies towards:

- Over-dramatization
- Over-exaggeration
- Over-emotionalism
- Over-hysteria

We should be exceptionally careful with them. Some of them actually think that their teachings are irrefutable beyond any doubt. Some of them have the audacity to claim that to check or verify them is to go against the LORD Himself. They can be doctrinally dangerous, always treading on marginal issues and trivialities!

Just because we are told in the church - "Do not judge," "Touch not the Lord's anointed," "You have a critical spirit if you do not join in," etc, etc. This is the very reason why Christians are often the most gullible and easily deceived.

We need to realize that the Bible says to test the spirits and warns very strongly that the last days will be a time of seducing spirits and great deception. So if we don't step out and be vigilant, how can we become more alert to these things?

As many false prophets and teachers have based their teachings on their own self-acclaimed experiences, dreams and visions, all of these self-proclamations need to be examined and investigated. Some of their theological understanding and interpretations of the Holy Scriptures are bizarre beyond comprehension.

Some of them have caused much confusions and divisions in the Body of Christ especially when their prophecies and predictions did not come true. As a result, very often, they have also brought much reproach to the testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is therefore of great importance that we begin to study the Scriptures ourselves, and check them out. It is all right to check the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

Paul, the true apostle of God, was pleased when the Bereans checked him out whether he was actually sharing the truth. True gold is unafraid of fire. In fact, it become purer and of greater value after the tests! Such investigation into the Word of God is commendable and encouraged.

False prophets are those who falsely claim:

- to utter revelations that come from God;
- to foretell future events; and
- to have God's power to produce miracles, signs, and wonders.

In the Bible, false prophets fell into three general categories:

- those who worshipped false gods and served idols;
- those who falsely claimed to receive messages from the Lord; and
- those who wandered from the truth and ceased to be true prophets.

A recurring characteristic of the false prophets is that they often are found in the employment of supernatural powers, and that they are

always speaking positive, pleasing and flattering words to their listeners.

Our Lord Jesus had warned us about them:

Matthew 7:15-16

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

Matthew 24:11-13

Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Matthew 24:24

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

The apostle Paul also warned us against false teachers in **Galatians 1:6-12:**

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One Who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."

Paul also exhorted his beloved disciple, Timothy, to be a diligent student of the Word (**2 Timothy 2:15-16**):

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness."

Finally, there was an interesting account in **2 Chronicles 15:12-15** about seeking the LORD:

Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. Then they took an oath before the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams' horns. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around.

Wow! Whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. This was how serious the people of God were about seeking God themselves.

May we be of more noble character as the Bereans. May all of us seek the LORD ourselves and live (Amos 5:6)!

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD...(Jeremiah 29:11-14)

Chapter 12

The Conclusion Of The Sermon On The Mount

The conclusion of a sermon is usually the hardest part to prepare.

It is also the most important part of the sermon. Thus it's often easier to start a sermon than to end one.

The lawyers know that no matter how well they argue their cases, if their closing arguments do not bring forth a decisive verdict, they may eventually lose their cases.

The salesmen are well aware that no matter how good their sales presentations are, if they do not know how to close to make a sale, all their efforts will go to waste.

Similarly, a sermon basically has 3 parts:

- The **introduction** grasps the attention of the people.
- The **body** brings instruction and inspiration.
- The **conclusion** leads the people to decide what actions to take.

The Sermon on the Mount was the greatest sermon Jesus ever preached. The whole scriptural text is found in Matthew chapters 5 to 7.

There are six sections in this thought-provoking and life-transforming sermon:

1. Beatitudes – What it means to be truly blessed.
2. A Higher Law – How to have righteousness exceeding those of the scribes and Pharisees.
3. The Lord's Prayer - Instructions on prayer and right motives for fasting and giving.

4. Money - Attitudes towards money and also reasons to avoid worry.
5. Warnings - Dangers of false teachers, false prophets and hypocrisy.
6. Conclusion - The parable of the wise and foolish builders.

Jesus preached not just desiring people to hear Him only. He also desired them to do something with what they had heard. Thus He concluded with a strategic parable so that if they truly believed what He had said, they would have to do something about it. The conclusion called for a change of heart and a decision to journey towards His kingdom and righteousness.

The conclusion is a summary. But the people will get bored if the sermon is re-preached in the conclusion. To drive a preacher's message deeper home, a conclusion must pull together all the points of the whole sermon. No new arguments are presented. Just a simple decision to make.

In the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount is a parable of the wise and foolish builders.

Matthew 7:21-29

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:

27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching,

29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Amazingly before His conclusion, Jesus warned us about false prophets, false teachers, false miracle workers and lawless people. He then concluded with the word "therefore." Because of these lawless people and false prophets, He therefore gave us an excellent example of two kinds of people – those who hear the Word and do it, and those who hear the Word but do not do it.

Who are these lawless people who have prophesied in His name, cast out demons in His name, and done many wonders in His name?

Many of them are leaders, ministers, prophets and pastors in some of our churches! They do not obey the Lord and practice lawlessness! Without any law, they are lawless! Many do not seek the truth but have contracted a deadly disease called self-deception.

In the eyes of men, they may look great and wonderful. But in the sight of God, they are simply lawless. Their works will not stand the test of the Refiner's fire!

We are living in the last days where false prophets and teachers are abounding and spreading like a deadly virus inside our churches.

Matthew 24:11-12

Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

Matthew 24:24

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

Many churches in many nations are filled with false prophets and teachers today. They are speaking from lying spirits but they claim to speak for the Lord. Their message is not from the Word of God. Their message is sourced from the wisdom of the world promoting the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. They are not of the Father but are of the world. Their message is a message to lust after worldly prosperity and spiritual superiority.

We are blessed in the Lord, but we are blessed to be a blessing. God doesn't bless us to make us to become blessed only, He also makes us to be a blessing to others around us! Our message needs to be founded upon the Word of God, turning away from the world and returning to the Lord. We are called to serve others and not to lord over them!

A mere outward profession of Christianity is useless in the eyes of God. Though at times, outward appearances may deceive many people. Not everyone who confess and say "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Many profess and call themselves Christians but they are not. They do not desire to become more like Jesus, come after Him, deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Him.

What will we do after Jesus personally teaches us about what it really mean to be truly blessed; how to be the light and salt of the world; how to have righteousness exceeding those of the scribes and Pharisees; how sacred marriage is; how to go the second mile; how to love our enemies; how to be perfect as God our Father is perfect; how to please God by doing good and charitable deeds in secret; how to pray like the Lord; how to fast; how to offer to God something that will really please His heart; how to have true treasures; how to serve God

and not money; how to seek His kingdom and righteousness; how not to worry about our tomorrows; how not to judge others; and how to seek God? What will we do when Jesus personally warns us against false teachers and false prophets?

In very simple words, anyone who listens to His teachings and obeys them is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in hurricanes and stormy winds, and though the floodwaters rise and though the winds beat fiercely against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on solid and firm foundations. But anyone who hears His teachings and doesn't obey them is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the stormy rains and terrible floods come and the strong winds beat against that house, it will collapse and become crushed with great destructive forces.

Do we live our lives for what will last or for what will fade away? Are we striving for the world's praise or for Christ's "well done" one day?

I will conclude with a song I taught my children choir many years ago. One of the musicals we did in 1982 was called "Kids' Praise 2." Within was an old favorite song called "Sandyland" and the lyrics are:

Don't build your house on the sandy land,
Don't build it too near the shore.
Well, it might look kind of nice
But you'll have to build it twice,
Oh, you'll have to build your house once more.

You better build your house upon the rock,
Make a good foundation on a solid spot.
Oh, the storms may come and go,
But the peace of God you will know.

You can listen to the song @ www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2Q_6srXLfE.